

Lessons Learned

The county's experience planning and implementing the early stages of this project provides insight into both what works well and what can be improved when developing the next county greenway.

- *Tie funding requests to specific projects that are vetted by the public* in park master planning and bond planning processes. If a specific project is already approved by the public before it's funded, land acquisition can start as soon as funds are available.



- *Talk to the public.* Travis County Commissioners appointed a citizens' bond advisory committee to facilitate, with staff support, the public engagement process. The committee screened staff recommendations and then hosted two rounds of meetings in the county. The preliminary project list was presented and discussed in the first round; the recommended project list was presented and discussed in the second. The public could also comment on the bond package when it was presented to Commissioners Court for their consideration.



- *Prioritize greenway objectives.* Because greenways serve multiple purposes and because funds are finite, priorities relative to competing functions need to be set. For example, acquiring land to connect parcels along the length of the creek serves trail purposes best but acquiring floodplains that are wider than long serves water resource protection best.

- *Include costs in land acquisition funding requests* for building park facilities as well so the public can access the land soon after it's purchased.

- *Base your requests for additional operation and maintenance resources on an Activity Based Management (ABM) system.* (ABM is a discipline focusing on the management of activities within business processes as the route to continuously improve both the value received by customers and the profit earned in providing that value.)

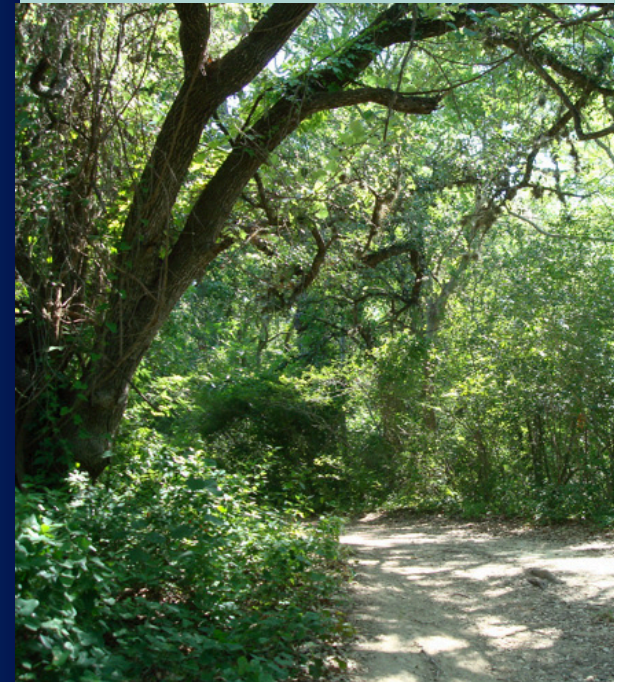
Envision Central Texas would like to sincerely thank study authors Joe Gieselman and Wendy Scaperotta of Travis County as well as members of the ECT Natural Infrastructure Committee for their invaluable assistance in producing this case study. 2011

Please Note:
The content in this brochure is summarized. To view the complete Onion Creek Greenway Case Study, please visit the Envision Central Texas website- www.envisioncentraltexas.org and click on the Quality Growth Toolbox section.

Envision Central Texas
Quality Growth Toolbox
Case Study:

Onion Creek Greenway

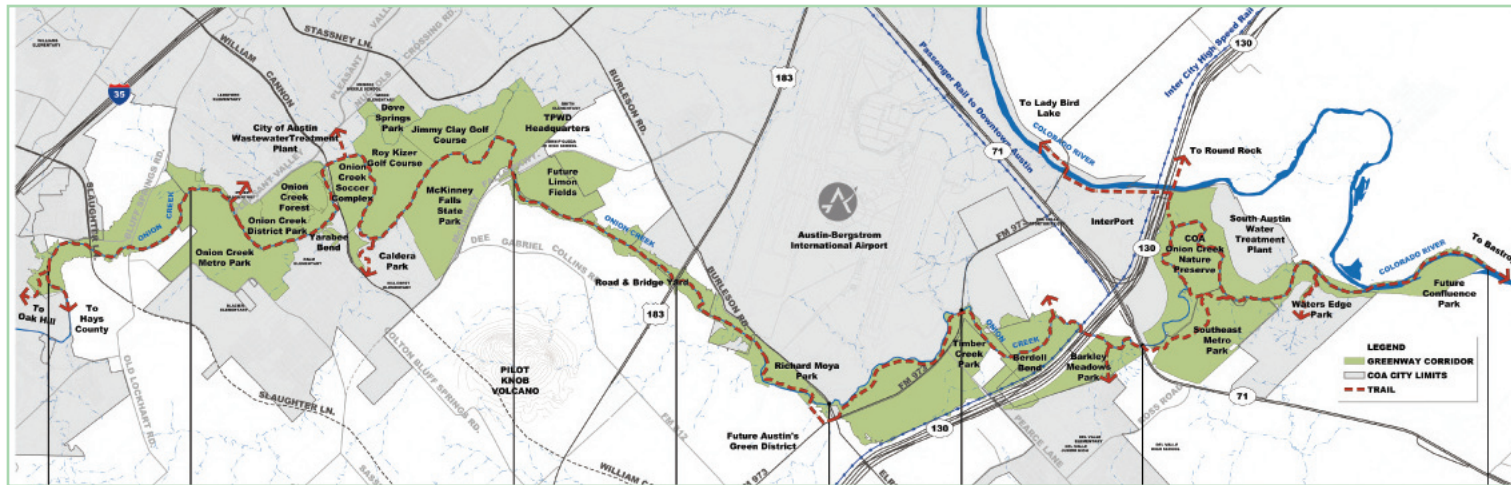
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Onion Creek Greenway



Onion Creek flows from its headwaters in Hays County to its confluence with the Colorado River east of Austin. The public-accessible greenway that is being assembled is the downstream section that extends from Slaughter Creek to the river. It crosses a landscape of high bluffs, broad floodplains, and bottomland thickets and runs through land historically used for agriculture but now fragmented into a patchwork of residential, commercial, and industrial uses alongside farms and pastures.

When completed, the greenway will be 21 miles long with a spine hike and bike trail running through parks that have both well-developed facilities and little developed natural areas. It will connect neighborhoods, schools, and commercial nodes. A strong sense of place will be fostered by preserving and interpreting

natural and cultural resources along the creek such as historic bridges and farmsteads, geologic features associated with the nearby extinct Pilot Knob volcano, and the fossilized skeleton of the Paleolithic Mosasaur found along Onion Creek.

Areas cleared for agriculture and disturbed by road construction and aggregate mining will also be restored to more natural states. Bottomland woods and grasslands will be reestablished and borrow pits for State Highway 130 construction will be incorporated into parks and used for fishing.

Planning

Travis County included the Onion Creek Greenway in the 2005 bond election and identified it as the top priority for the southeastern part of the county in its Travis County Parks and Natural Areas Master Plan. Following a successful bond election, Travis County released its vision for the corridor in its Concept Plan for the Onion Creek Greenway. Travis County's planning didn't occur in a void, and is actually part of an ongoing dialogue among a community of planners. They included the Austin-Bastrop River Corridor Partnership, the City of Austin

and The Trust for Public Land's *Greenprint for Growth* which showed the Colorado River and eastern creeks' floodplains as the of highest priority lands to be conserved.

Funding

In 2005, voters approved \$62 million in park bonds of which \$8.6 million was earmarked for the Onion Creek Greenway project to "protect and restore bottomland forest" in the creek corridor. Some ways to help ensure a similar bond passage include:

- Develop a park bond package that has appeal to a broad

constituency and present as one proposition.

- Implement a transparent selection process so voters understand priorities.
- Know your audience's interests. Say "hiking, biking and walking trails" instead of just "trails."
- Coordinate bond priorities with the system-wide parks master plan.
- Have a proven track record of implementing park projects given prior approval.

Acquisition

Travis County developed a strategy for ensuring the bond covenants were fulfilled and funds spent effectively.

- Acquire 100-year floodplains with water resource protection a top priority.
- Get ahead of the urban rent gradient. Land acquisition should occur 5-10 years ahead of urbanization
- Develop "minimal viable segments."
- Target large tracts owned by long-time land stewards.
- Establish relationships with other government stakeholders.
- Acquire land through free market transactions. Property rights are important in agricultural communities.

