

For Immediate Release

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Developers, nonprofits, agency staff gather to discuss water-wise growth in the Hill Country

Wimberley, TX - More than 90 nonprofit staff, developers, engineers, architects, and government officials came together in Wimberley on Wednesday to discuss the future of water-resilient development in an increasingly water-constrained region of the Texas Hill Country.

The event took place at Onera, a particularly unique hotel development outside of the community of Wimberley. The project development was led by Ben Wolff and JB Chisum, and went to great lengths to reduce impervious cover, maintain native landscapes and the plant community onsite, incorporate sustainable design practices including green roofs, and recycle grey water.

“We first and foremost wanted to do right by our neighbors,” said Ben Wolff, the owner and operator of Onera. “We thought hard about protecting viewsheds, the plants and soil on the site, and the water before we moved a single rock.”

The event was organized by a coalition of nonprofits that included the Hill Country Alliance, the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, Comal Conservation, and the Headwaters at the Comal. “The development community has an outsized impact on – and therefore responsibility to protect—the future of the Hill Country as we know it,” said Marisa Bruno, Water Program Manager with the Hill Country Alliance. “It is so inspiring to see the overwhelming response from that community to learn more about our water challenges and opportunities and to engage in meaningful conversation about how we can grow in ways that protect all that we love most about the Hill Country.”

Dr. Robert Mace, Executive Director at The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University, delivered the keynote address of the day, titled “The Future of Water in the Hill Country.” Dr. Mace’s presentation highlighted the increasingly dramatic water challenges we face as a region, as many rivers in the Hill Country face their worst drought conditions on record.

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“The Hill Country is critically important - to rural towns and ranches, to big cities like Austin, New Braunfels and San Antonio, to downstream coastal communities and to all the species that depend on the water resources in our region and beyond,” explained Mace.

The new statewide water plan, as drafted, shows a significant increase in water demand projections in the Hill Country over the 2022 water plan. Meeting this demand will require creative thinking about new water supply opportunities, including rainwater harvesting and other technologies that can be used in new developments.

In subsequent presentations, Robin Gary, One Water Coordinator at New Braunfels Utilities, and Justin Kathan, Founder of the Sanctuary Development in Dripping Springs, each spoke about projects underway in the Hill Country that prove we can grow in ways that conserve and even enhance water resources.

As a planning and implementation tool, One Water is actively being incorporated in public sector projects to protect water quality, extend water supplies, and enhance quality of life in New Braunfels. Sanctuary - a new development just east of Dripping Springs - plans to build a subdivision entirely reliant on rainwater for water supply. Homesites are also being designed to reuse greywater at each home and capture and utilize air conditioning condensate.

“Sharing information and lessons learned about innovative, water-wise projects helps everyone get better at designing, building, and maintaining them,” said Gary.

The day closed with breakout groups and discussion about the barriers developers face when it comes to building water-wise developments and the opportunities to remedy some of those barriers.

“It is clear more of these conversations are needed to bridge the gap between environmentalists and the development community. Hopefully this is just the first of many,” expressed Banks Chisum, founder of JB Chisum Construction and one of the hosts of the event.

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More than 90 attendees participated in the 2025 Developers Workshop at Onera in Wimberley, Texas.



Ben Wolff and JB Chisum welcome attendees to the February workshop, hosted at Onera in Wimberley, Texas.

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Workshop attendees discussed barriers and opportunities for water-wise development in breakout groups, while overlooking scenic Hill Country vistas.



Attendees got to tour Onera's unique site design which features low impervious cover, native landscaping, and recycled grey water.