

Heth's Run Watershed Task Force

Meeting #1

Wednesday March 18, 2020



Facilitator:

Susan Rademacher - PPC Parks Curator - srademacher@pittsburghparks.org

Attending:

Tom Batroney – AKRF

Michael Cmar – Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium

Erin Copeland – PPC Senior Restoration Ecologist

Christopher Corbett – City of Pittsburgh, Neighborhood Planner

Beth Dutton – PWSA

Elijah Hughes – Evolve EA

Matt Diersen – MACC Secretary, Morningside resident

Grant Ervin – City of Pittsburgh, Chief Resilience Officer

Jim Ferlo – Ex-State Senator, Highland Park resident

Magda Gangwar – Deb Gross' Office

Megan Guy – Pittsburgh Water Collaboratory

Bob Haney – Morningside resident

Elaine Hinrichs – PWSA

Ryan Quinn – PWSA Greg Scott – CDM Smith (formerly Buchart Horn)

Ryan Smith – MACC President, Morningside resident

John Stephen – Negley Run Watershed Task Force

Jaime Szoszorek – Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium

Gavin White – PPC Community Projects Manager

Follow-up Actions

- Magda to follow up with Councilwoman Gross about the Heth's Run Valley project.
 - Are there documents that can be shared with the Task Force?
 - What are the next steps in the design process, and when might they continue?
 - Grant to inquire at City as well.
- Has anyone mapped specific areas where there are runoff/flooding problems? PWSA/DPW (Department of Public Works) receive calls about these issues. Please continue to share. This will also be a good group to review the data that Grant Ervin, Tom Batroney, and others have pulled together.
- Erin to check in with Hedin Environmental about Abandoned Mine Drainage (AMD) on the hillside by Sunnyside Elementary in Stanton Heights.
- Begin thinking about potential capital projects for inclusion in the City's budget process.
- Fill out the water survey.
- Invite other water-interested community members.
- Let us know if you are interested in the next Negley Run Watershed Task Force Meeting – April 30th.

Notes

- Jim expressed concerns about current ability to get traditional community input and requested that we communicate to those who might not be able to participate in digital meetings. Parks Conservancy will follow up and asks that attendees reach out to any other water-interested community members.

- Elijah said that NRWTF is very effective at giving involved professionals and community members the opportunity to be well-informed.

Presentation

Susan gave an overview of the One Water concept, local partners, and priority Pittsburgh watersheds.

- John and Ryan emphasized the value of recognizing that water crosses our political/departmental boundaries, and the need to work collaboratively.
- The Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) designation "0-27" indicates the 27th overflow outlet along the Ohio River. (They are numbered sequentially from the Point).
- John described the microshed concept, and Ryan explained how PWSA is using it to develop capital projects and tie into improvements outside PWSA's scope. The concept is valuable because it's at a sufficient scope for PWSA involvement while remaining at a neighborhood scale.

Comments and Discussion

MAINTENANCE -- Jim expressed concern about Department of Public Works and Penn State Center's absence from the meeting, given their involvement in the bioswales on Negley Run Blvd. Participants in general want to ensure projects are well maintained. Erin reported a recent meeting on site with Tara Pinnix (and Tom Paulin (DPW), and David Himes (Penn State Center) to address maintenance issues. Greg mentioned that DPW is often responding to public concerns, which may not be aware of the value of these new living systems and request mowing. Signage could help resolve these issues.

HETH'S RUN (VALLEY) CONCEPT -- There was some confusion about the difference between this group and the group that met to advance conceptual designs for the Heth's Run Valley (Zoo parking lot). Participants were eager to see that work restarted. Susan explained that the Heth's Run design project continued under DPW with WRT but work was suspended short of completing the design concept. The City has funding to complete the design concept but, for reasons that haven't been clearly stated, this work hasn't yet been authorized. The Heth's Run Watershed Task Force could become advocates for resuming the project.

- Jim mentioned he had understood that Councilwoman Gross would be the gatekeeper/ facilitator of this process, and asked if Magda could check in with her on that. In addition, PPC will inquire about what documents are available for review with this group.
- Tom identified the Heth's Run Bridge as one unique thing that makes this watershed special, as it offers a potential path to the river for water and people. Susan and Jim confirmed that the bridge was designed with an arch in anticipation of this opportunity.

UPPER WATERSHED – The group discussed the distinction between project in Highland Park's Heth's valley and activation throughout the watershed. Many projects beyond the Heth's Run valley will be needed to solve the shed's overall problems. These projects should be:

- Networked (connected by conveyance, ensuring full separation and coordinated retention);
- Selected to maximize impact; and
- Coordinated with what neighborhoods want to see.

Negley Run Watershed Task Force, for example, has been participating in the Negley Run valley work, but also thinking further ahead about how Green Stormwater Infrastructure applies to the shed as a whole. These Watershed Task Forces are helping to start that conversation now and can be leveraged into collective advocacy as they mature.

MAPPING PROBLEM AREAS -- The City and PWSA are both collecting data about problem areas. Grant and team have collected and are mapping common citizen complaints including basement backups. Tom and Jim have also been mapping. As everyone refines their data, the Task Force would be a good group to review it. Tom said that this data should be part of the decision-making process. **HETH'S ALLEY** – The group reviewed Heth's Alley as an opportunity, which Elijah noted was included in the list of potential projects in the *Green First Plan* but may not have risen through the ranks. Beth noted a challenge: because it's not directly linked to a larger conveyance or GI effort, there's no known funding source for that type of project.

STORMWATER FEE -- PWSA is evaluating a stormwater fee, likely to be in place by January 2022, and hopes that those fees could be applied to these projects. This work will need community support, and we'll stay up to date with PWSA's timeline for this process.

LOW VOLUME ROADS -- PWSA is also trying to work with the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure, but DOMI has similar resource challenges, especially for such collaborative projects. They have looked at the low-volume road funding application, a water quality program administered by the Allegheny County Conservation District. Beth mentioned that unless they have a champion (state/fed), these funds can be hard to access.

CAPITAL BUDGET PROCESS -- Grant recommended coordinating capital projects with the City's annual capital budget cycle, which he and John have been pursuing in the Negley Run Watershed.

OTHER FUNDING NEEDS – There are many. Beyond capital projects, attendees mentioned the need to support dedicated project management staff, operations , and maintenance.