



## **HETH'S RUN WATERSHED COMMUNITY LEADERS MEETING**

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Virtual Meeting

Gavin White, Facilitator, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy  
Susan Rademacher, Recorder, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

*Attended by:*

Yasmeen Ariff-Sayed, MACC  
Kaitlyn Brennan, MACC  
David Hance, PPCDC  
Bob Haney, MACC  
Stephanie Walsh, HPCC President  
Monica Watt, HPCC

After introductions, Gavin W. described the Parks Conservancy's role in helping to support watersheds throughout the city, with a special focus on priority sewersheds identified in PWSA's Green First Plan. One reason to do this can be seen in the success of the Negley Run Watershed Task Force (NRWTF), which grew out of the grassroots "Living Waters of Larimer." The Task Force meets quarterly with professional agency staff at the table. NRWTF has provided an opportunity for lots of people – residents to professionals to agency officials -- to stay in touch across the entire watershed to understand needs, plans, and projects. It has developed plans that are informing decision makers.

Tonight's leadership meeting focuses on a watershed that is next door to Negley Run -- Heth's Run -- to set the dialogue on the right track and to plan for the future. Watershed Task Forces are a way to provide voice to community. How this one will develop is up to its members; the Parks Conservancy wants it to become whatever is most valuable to its leaders. The Task Forces will meet directly with community members in their watersheds.

A question was raised about the status of the Heth's Run project in Highland Park. Susan R. clarified that the Watershed Task Force is an advocacy initiative looking at the entire for the whole watershed, whereas the Heth's Run project is a design and capital improvements project that addresses access, stormwater, and recreation in a specific area of Highland Park. The Department of Public Works will continue to lead the Heth's Run design project, with support from the Parks Conservancy, but it is unknown when the City will resume this project.

On the other hand, the Heth's Run Watershed Task Force will look at the entire watershed, which ranges from Penn Avenue to Stanton Heights. As an example, Susan R. reported on a conversation with the Environmental Charter School principal about her interest in developing curricula and activities around "Little Heth's Run," which could connect the school to Highland Park. Similar to "Little Negley Run Was Here," this collaborative program would encourage people to explore the history, topography and drainages of the watershed/sewershed, to understand where the system isn't working, and to posit solutions incorporating green infrastructure, traffic calming, and parkland. It can build upon Project 15206

(Penn State Center) and PWSA's prior engineering studies to develop localized improvements with multiple benefits. These efforts can then lead toward project proposals that solve specific neighborhood problems.

**Q: How can this group help advance the Heth's Run design project?**

Kate B. offered to focus on how the group can develop advocacy for projects like this. Bob H. will be happy to talk with Kaitlin about the history of the project. Bob H. and David H. were two community people originally involved with the project, starting with the new arched bridge that restored access to the river. Bob H. recalled that phase two was going to put more zoo parking in the upper portion of the valley, with a soccer field in the lower part. He added that when the zoo stopped charging for parking, they added that cost onto the ticket price. He also pointed out that there are no ballfields in Highland Park and the Morningside fields are overbooked. In addition, the Morningside community opposed enlarging the Butler Street intersection and zoo entrance to accommodate 16 peak attendance days/year; it also opposed removing the gas station.

Monica W. pointed out that this has been going on for many years. The City determined it needed more rectangular fields, and Heth's was perfect place for a soccer field with its own parking in the lower valley with a walkway under the bridge. She added that the zoo parking lot has to change, no matter what.

David H. agreed, saying you don't build the church for Easter Sunday. The zoo wanted 1500 more spaces, which wasn't realistic. The City and Parks Conservancy put forward a parking garage scheme that would have provided a new entrance to the admission gates, but the zoo wasn't interested. The problem with the parking garage is that you'd have to pay for parking. It was all a good idea, but the zoo said no. It's time to start talking to the zoo again and to find common ground.

But the Heth's Run design project is also about making it a park again, creating walking paths through the canopy, improving Heth's Park, etc. This is an important opportunity to place the Heth's Run project within the context of the watershed.

Suggested steps:

- Provide a final report on what was accomplished in the Heth's Run design project.
- Get the gang back together to see whether we might talk with the zoo unofficially.
- Involve Rebecca Kiernan (City Planning – Sustainability and Resilience Division).
- Kate B. will talk with Deb Gross about the request in advance and will update the group afterwards.
- Monica W. offered to email all government decision makers (except the Mayor) with a request on behalf of the Task Force to get the project moving again. Will ask for their commitments in writing. There was good momentum and we were getting close to a plan. If we don't keep the fight up, we'll never get it.

**Q. Are there specific neighborhood problems that need to be addressed?**

The Task Force can be an effective platform for bringing attention to specific problems, and for working creatively to help solve them. A great deal of data has already been collected and analyzed for this watershed, which will be reviewed by the Heth's Run Watershed Task Force (HRWTF). Knowledge gaps will be identified and explored by Task Force members, who will serve as the community's vanguard in learning how their watershed works. Equipped with this knowledge, the HRWTF can become a valued partner in watershed improvements.

**Q. How to get a quick overview of current projects?**

- The Parks Conservancy had intended to host a summit for all the task forces this summer, but due to C19 we will be offering a virtual One Water experience in June. A series of live presentations will give various agencies an opportunity to present current projects and respond to questions.
- Gavin W. will invite Andrea K. to present the Heth's Plan to the Community Leaders.
- We will continue to discuss PWSA's plan for Morningside GSI.

Gavin W. closed the meeting, outlining next steps. The Parks Conservancy hopes to reconvene the Task Force and do a neighborhood walk later this summer. If this group wants to have additional meetings, let us know. You are steering the ship and we're just here to help.

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