



Woods Run Watershed Walk

October 5, 2020

Route: Westhall Street and Three Rivers Heritage Trail to Woods Run bordering Riverview Park

Marti Battistone – Department City Planning
Tassi Bisers – PA Interfaith Impact Network
Anna Brewer – Brightwood Civic Group, Friends of Riverview Park (FORP)
Alex Carrera – Brighton Heights Citizens Federation
Erin Copeland – Pgh Parks Conservancy
Beth Dutton – Pgh Water Sewer Authority
Stephanie Joy Everett – Department City Planning

Ana Flores– Pgh Water Sewer Authority
Matt Gatto – Brightwood Civic Group
Joseph Glassbrenner - Brighton Heights Citizens Federation
Mark Masterson – Northside Leadership Corporation, FORP
Arlene Sanderson – Pgh Parks Conservancy
Erin Tobin– Pgh Parks Conservancy

10 participants, including representatives from PWSA and City Planning

Erin Copeland, senior restoration ecologist at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, led the walk. She was joined in explaining plans related to the watershed by Stephanie Joy Everett and Marti Battistone of the Department of City Planning, and Beth Dutton and Ana Flores of PWSA.

Erin introduced the purpose of the tour as way to enable community members to visit several sites that have been discussed in meetings of the Woods Run Watershed Task Force and to hear from the Parks Conservancy, PWSA, and the City about long-range plans for stormwater management and neighborhood investment. She explained that the Parks Conservancy is working to expand community engagement in watershed planning in watersheds across the city, using the Negley Run Watershed Task Force as a model.

The group gathered on Westhall St near the historic Western State Penitentiary, built in 1826 and closed in 2017. The group briefly reviewed efforts to find a buyer for the 21-acre site and its current status. The land sits in a 100-year floodplain, which complicates future development. Any construction must raise usable space 10 to 15 feet above the current ground level. This has discouraged interest in the site. Mark Masterson of the North Side Community Development Fund mentioned that the City has expressed interest in using the site as an environmental services location. Neighborhood residents do not favor this use. A design workshop inviting public input was convened when the prison closed, but there may be an opportunity to organize another community visioning event.

Beth Dutton from PWSA gave a brief summary of PWSA's proposed stormwater fee. She explained that the fee would more fairly allocate some of the costs of stormwater management to property owners that significantly contribute to run-off, such as large commercial parking lots that currently may pay nothing. PWSA is now operating under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission, and if all goes according to plan, in January 2022 city residents will begin to see a separate stormwater fee in their bill from PWSA. Revenue generated from the fee will help to fund, for example, green infrastructure projects and maintenance and stormwater infrastructure replacement.

ALCOSAN, which is immediately to the north of the former prison, has considered constructing a biodigester for sludge on the site. City planning applied for a grant for a feasibility study for the biodigester, by the proposal was not funded.

The first stop was along Lecky St. in the Marshall Shadeland neighborhood. Members of the group discussed the prevalence of vacant lots and tax delinquent properties in the area and how they might be repurposed to play a role in stormwater management and develop a green connector from Riverview Park to the river. They could serve as sites for stormwater detention/retention.

In addition, the open green space might serve the community for pop-up events, art projects, etc.

Mark Masterson summarized the impact of ALCOSAN's decision to proceed with the construction of a tunnel under the Ohio River and to step back on green infrastructure. For example, the St. John's project planned in Woods Run is now on hold. Mark is an advocate for more direct communication with ALCOSAN's leadership for watershed investment.

Ana from PWSA said that the Authority's focus is shifting to how to manage more localized issues in neighborhoods, such as flooding and basement backups, which will benefit residents.

Erin added that the impact of climate change is pushing cities to combine tunnels and green infrastructure to create adequate capacity for stormwater management. She mentioned the RAND study of Negley Run and the conclusion that multiple approaches and policies are required to address these issues.