

## **Middle Hill/Uptown Watershed Walk**

*October 24, 2020*

Route: Kennard Park to Martin Luther King Field

Participants: 8

Ose Akinlotan, Office of City Planning neighborhood planner for the Hill District and Hazelwood,

Brian Brown, Hill District resident

Will Dorash

Brittany McDonald, executive director, Uptown Partners

Arlene Sanderson, grant writer, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

Kate St. John, naturalist, blogger, community member

Gavin White, community projects manager, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

Marlene Williams, Uptown Partners

The group gathered in Kennard Park at the corner of Kirkpatrick and Reed Streets in the Hill District. Gavin introduced himself as the leader for the morning walk. He also introduced Ose Akinlotan as the project manager for the Hill District master plan.

Gavin told participants that the walk would provide an opportunity to think about how parks can play a dual role by helping to manage stormwater and providing green infrastructure that contributes to the ecological health of city neighborhoods.

The Hill District has had a variety of planning efforts including the Greenprint (2010), which led residents through a neighborhood visioning process using an ecological lens, and the Uptown Eco District Innovation Plan, which is ongoing.

The Parks Conservancy is organizing a series of walks through the City's watersheds, and activating communities around water issues. The goal is to bring communities into the conversation about how to better manage stormwater and to create broad-based advocacy for the use of green infrastructure as an alternative or complement to conventional grey infrastructure, which relies on digging deep tunnels to capture and convey stormwater to the rivers.

PWSA has adopted a Green First plan, and the task forces are working in partnership with PWSA to ensure that the objectives and recommendations of the Green First Plan are integrated into stormwater management projects.

Gavin said that although the M-19 watershed/sewershed has traditionally been referred to as SoHo Run, community members have expressed a preference for such terms as the "Middle Hill" or "Uptown" Watershed.

Kennard Park is at the top of the sewershed. Gavin led the group from the entrance to Kennard Park and back to the rear of the ball field, which provides an expansive view of the Monongahela River and South Side. He said the site is the top of the sewershed, and the headwaters of historic streams that run down to the river. Water now is conveyed through pipes under the street. Historically, Pittsburgh's storm sewers were combined, and Addison Terrace, a new development in the Hill District, had to connect into the combined sewer.

The Eco District Innovation Plan includes ideas about how to capture water from parking lots and roofs in the Hill District and convey the water in a way that provides community benefits.

Green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and bioswales, is engineered to absorb stormwater.

The group walked back to Kirkpatrick Street and headed down hill to the Martin Luther King Community Garden. Along the way, Gavin pointed out the invasive plants that covered the steep slopes along Kirkpatrick. He explained that the shallow roots of invasive plants do not absorb or slow the flow of water. Removing invasives and replanting slopes with native species is important to creating healthy hillsides. Gavin pointed out straw covering the lower portion of the hillside. Work is underway to remove invasives, primarily knotweed, on the steep slopes.

Ose, the city planner for the Hill District, said that the master plan for Kennard Park is being developed separately from the plan for the Hill District, but the two plans will be integrated.

Gavin shared a little history about Kennard Park, which was named for Beulah Kennard, president of the Pittsburgh Playground Association. An effort to rename the park in the 1940s in honor of a local judge met with public resistance, and the park retains its original name.

Along the edge of Kirkpatrick, participants observed a shallow brick-lined trench paralleling the street. The historic trench was designed to capture water off the street and convey it to large grate-covered drains that lead to the combined sewer under the street.

Because Kirkpatrick is such a wide street, its edges could be developed with rain gardens and plantings that would help control the flow of stormwater.

The group entered Martin Luther King Community Garden, a repurposed former ball field. The site is included in PWSA's plans to manage stormwater. PWSA plans to install underground cisterns beneath the garden to detain water.

The proposed cisterns are an example of gray infrastructure that does not provide community benefit. How can the same goals be accomplished and simultaneously benefit the community? The Greenprint plan proposed vegetated swales to capture water and convey water around the field.

A parking lot behind what was once the ball field is now used by the community gardeners, but its surface is in poor condition. A nearby two-story small brick building that is in disrepair will be torn down.

Brian said that the Hill District community is struggling with development. The Shop n' Save grocery store, the only grocery store in the Hill closed. People need access to food sources. The community planning process needs to consider how people can stay in the space where they have been living.

The neighborhood would like a smaller garden, which would free up more space for other uses.

Someone questioned the option of DPW working with Landforce, a non-profit that hires and trains people who are among those considered "hard to employ." However, hiring Landforce may present some union conflicts with City employees.

Gavin said that community advocates must insist on investment and that site maintenance needs should be considered in all project budgets.

Brittany suggested that it would be possible to add a playground and improve the availability of parking for 12 spaces. She said that PWSA lacks a communication link with Hill District residents.

Gavin said there are many opportunities to improve connectivity in the neighborhood.

Kennard is part of a network of parks in the Hill District. Planning should consider ways to convey both people and water.

The Parks Conservancy wants to bring all the watershed groups together at the end of the year to share insights and plans, as well as to hear the results of the Rand report on the Negley Run Watershed plan.