

Four Mile Run Watershed Task Force Meeting Notes

April 7, 2021

- Attendees
 - Gavin White, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC)
 - Beth Dutton, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA)
 - Elaine Hinrichs, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA)
 - Rebecca Zito, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA)
 - Annie Quinn
 - Mary Shaw
 - Kate St. John
 - Tom Wolper
 - Tiffany Faulton
 - Roy Weil
 - Megan
 - Chris Zurawsky
 - Brian Jensen
 - Heather Dodson
 - Curt Conrad
 - Sonya Tilghman
 - Tom Batrone
- Beth Dutton (PWSA) presented about the PWSA Stormwater Program
 - Tiffany: When will the Second Ave. lane closure begin?
 - Rebecca: We'll get that information to you. I am not sure of the date for when that will begin. We will be getting more specific construction schedules and traffic schedules soon to share with the public.
 - **UPDATE: As of March 30, 2021, the M-29 outfall construction is expected from late May to late October. A daily lane closure at Second Avenue will follow PennDOT restrictions, and limited detours are planned for nights and weekends.**
 - Gavin: Do you have any additional details to share about the Wightman Park Phase Two project?
 - Rebecca: Yes, construction just started this week on Phase Two of the Wightman Park stormwater project. The second phase will construct stormwater planters and channels to direct stormwater to the underground storage that was constructed in the park during Phase One. Phase Two improvements of the bumpouts will also include pedestrian safety improvements and traffic calming features.
- Beth: There was a question at the March 30 Four Mile Run Project Update meeting about what residents in the upper watershed could do to help reduce stormwater flowing to the Run. Maybe we can discuss those ideas here now.
- Rebecca: Annie, are there things that you've seen that work and would suggest bringing to the table as a community member?
 - Annie: I think more PWSA coordination with park updates would be beneficial. The Magee Field is a hollowed bowl of a community park in Greenfield. At previous PWSA

presentations, there were projects mentioned up the watershed around Magee Field. Some ideas for Magee Field would be preserving the trees that are already there, adding stormwater storage under the field, maybe installing raised garden beds on the concrete bleachers. There is only so much that can be done on the skinny city lots that most homeowners have in Pittsburgh, so I definitely recommend looking at improvements in the public space. I would love to see communities that are high-risk for flooding have roads paved with porous asphalt.

- Rebecca: Thank you for sharing your insights. The Master Planning process will be a great opportunity for community members to provide additional insight and input.
- Tom Wolper: What does a healthy urban watershed look like? I think having a vision of what that looks like will help us get there.
 - Annie: I don't know if a healthy urban watershed exists. Even the watersheds that have had the most work done, like in Philadelphia, they've addressed only stormwater overflows to the river and other types of stormwater pollution are still an issue.
 - Beth: I am more of an optimist. Everyone has a role. In our Pittsburgh area, we are limited with our tree canopy, but trees are the stormwater soldiers for us. Street trees are constrained by tight spaces, so planting a tree on your property as a homeowner is helpful. Try to reduce lawn chemicals on your lawns and gardens. If you have dirt and debris in your gutter or on your sidewalk, sweep and clear it away. Clean up after your pet and consider bringing a bag to pick up trash when you go for a walk.
 - Megan: Allegheny CleanWays has a fantastic program called grate keepers to adopt a drain in your neighborhood to keep clear of litter and debris.
 - Elaine: Additional stormwater tips can be found at www.pgh2o.com/reduce-stormwater-pollution.
- Kate: In Nine Mile Run watershed, they distribute or sell rain barrels. If the roof drains could go to Magee Field or somewhere else instead of the underground sewers, that would be helpful.
 - Beth: That is a great idea. Runoff from roofs is relatively clean water. If we can redirect roof runoff to stormwater planters in public spaces or the right-of-way, we can reduce stormwater entering the overburdened sewers.
 - Kate: The houses nearby don't have a lot of yard so we don't have space to release the stormwater there with rain gardens.
 - Beth: Also, when you direct water underground close to houses, there is potential to migrate into foundations. When we work on such projects, we are making careful engineering plans to avoid stormwater from the project impacting the neighboring buildings.
- Brian: Is Clean Water Act mandate for "fishable and swimmable" water part of the answer to what a healthy urban watershed would look like?
 - Gavin: Yes to Brian! I think we need to aim for that high bar, at least to set the vision. I want to safely swim in the Mon!
 - Brian: Gavin - Yes, thanks for the affirmation. Aiming high seems to me to be the right approach.
- Gavin: There are a lot of avenues and scales that this group could go down together to get the watershed to "fishable and swimmable".

- Brian: For as long as I've been around, it seemed like if you live in the city, you are going to have dirty air, water, streets. I don't think we have to accept that though. We could daylight streams that are currently in sewers underground, and have fish in the streams and safe places for kids to wade in.
 - Tom Batrone: In Munich, Germany they have clean rivers with beaches where people swim. I wrote a blog post about it: <https://pghflood.home.blog/2019/10/15/munchen-disneyland-of-water/>. I think extending Allegheny River's pristine cleanness down to Pittsburgh would be the ideal.
- Mary: We have been litter patrol stewards for our block for a while, and we patrolled other blocks as well occasionally. But a year ago I decided that it was too risky to handle litter like candy wrappers and plastic bottles that other people had slobbered on -- let alone cigarette butts and used masks. Even with gloves and a grabber tools, it's not possible to collect litter without touching it. So, how do we balance the urgency of COVID protection with the urgency of litter pickup
 - Tiffany: I think the risk of COVID from contact with objects is considered lower risk that it was at the beginning of the pandemic, but no one should do anything that they aren't comfortable with.
- Gavin: Is there anything that individuals within this group would like to focus on? I think education for other residents who aren't familiar with watersheds was one of the priorities mentioned during a previous watershed walk.
- Beth: What would be better ways for PWSA to connect with residents for public outreach? We do a lot of outreach, but we often connect with people who are already interested, and we really want to talk to people that we haven't reached before.
 - Tom Wolper: The main contact that most people for PWSA is their water bill, which makes things difficult. PWSA could find interest groups like gardeners, or people that fish in the river, and tailor specific messages for them.
 - Megan: Finding ways to make people feel good about positive change. Storm water issues can be super daunting and many can feel helpless. Finding what is important to folks in the neighborhoods and communicating ways to make people feel like they can make a difference somehow.
- Annie: At my previous job as a watershed manager at Jacob's Creek, I dealt with similar challenges with outreach. My advice is to go where the people are. Our Little League in Greenfield is a good example. I will caution that there is a lot of misinformation and miscommunication about PWSA, especially on the neighborhood app Nextdoor. There is an undercurrent of mistrust from historical and current management of PWSA.
 - Rebecca: The mistrust is an unfortunate circumstance that we are in right now. We are working to improve that. We send press releases about projects and issue a monthly newsletter to help share that information transparently and build that trust. It will take quite a bit of time to demonstrate clear results and communicate that with the community.
 - Chris: Re: NextDoor. I've opted out except for receiving a once a week email round-up. Here's a good explanation of what's wrong with NextDoor and similar community news sites - https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/pennsylvania-town-facebook-group-fills-local-news-void-rcna577?fbclid=IwAR0_0UwkDykmKruPGupV86mVj-XeuWylP10I27QM-b3amnQwl74R947a3tU

- Mary: I periodically correct misinformation on NextDoor, quoting facts and providing links to accurate information. Mostly this does not seem to change the discussion very much, but I continued to do it because (a) it may be deterring people from adding more disinformation and (b) it puts facts in front of people who are just lurking, who may be more persuadable
- Brian: I also see misinformation on NextDoor. Rebecca, I wonder if there is a way to create a “Friends of PWSA” on NextDoor to explain the truth when things are posted that are clearly wrong. Also, I think that Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and other schools would be a good place to disseminate information.
 - Rebecca: The Friends of PWSA sounds like a great idea. We are working to reach PPS to bring our curriculum to the schools. Elaine is the Education and Outreach Associate at PWSA and is creating videos and building partnerships with schools.
- Annie: Prior to the shutdown, Allegheny College Creek Connections was doing creek sampling with students at Greenfield Elementary. I think having the kids at Greenfield Elementary who are sampling with Allegheny Creek Connections connect with Elaine would be great. Also, we could have the kids present their results to this watershed group.
 - Megan: They do fantastic work Annie! They’re offering loaner Kits for teachers right now! There are also so many groups working with children in after school programs: Venture Outdoors, Scouts, Girl Scouts. I used to work with Girl Scouts and they have specific water badges. Venture Outdoors also works in PPS and offers great environmental education in schools and bringing kids to the river to kayak.
 - Annie: I know a girl scout leader for the Magee Rec center! Let me know if we have a program to share with them! It’s my cookie hook up!
 - Rebecca: That is a great idea, Annie. I think the idea of starting at one school to pilot would be good.
 - Gavin: I think the idea of piloting is great. The task forces themselves came out of a pilot effort in Negley Run watershed. We expanded them because they were successful.
- Chris: The signage around the Bridle Trail project was fantastic, BTW. We need more of that on the ground (sidewalk, street, etc.) information sharing. Social media and emails only go so far.
 - Elaine: The signage we installed for the Bridle Trail and Overlook Drive projects were temporary construction signs, which we try to install temporarily at all of our stormwater construction projects to educate people who are just passing by. We are also planning to design permanent signage for our stormwater projects to be installed after the projects are constructed.
- Chris: When PWSA was doing its work on the Bridle Trail I suggested that they help organize a trash pick-up in the area of the work. That would be a good way to educate people and get some cleaning done.
 - Rebecca: We were thinking of doing trash pick-up when the projects were completed, but the pick-up idea got delayed by COVID last year. We would definitely be interested in doing a trash pick-up when it is safe again.
 - Chris: Let me know when you are ready!
 - Gavin: Next quarter, we are planning a watershed meeting together. Perhaps we could also do a trash pick with the watershed groups.
- Annie: Hazelwood Green is releasing a riverfront plan tonight at a meeting at 6 PM.

- Gavin: I think an idea of what the riverfront could look like would be the fishable/swimmable concept we were talking about earlier.