



21st Street Watershed Walk

October 1, 2020

Route: Three Rivers Heritage Trail at 21st Street to South Side Park

13 participants, including representatives from south side neighborhoods, PWSA, City Planning, and WPC
Jeff Bergman – Western PA Conservancy
Amy Camp – resident
Erin Copeland – Parks Conservancy
Anthony Kobak – Department of City Planning
Sonya Kohnen – resident and South Side Community Council

Jeff Neubauer – resident and FOSSP
Gia Quin – Environmental Planning and Design
Kathy Radeck – resident
Arlene Sanderson – Parks Conservancy
Meghan Simek – PWSA
Kitty Vagley – resident and FOSSP
Madeline Weiss – Pittsburgh United
Rebecca Zito – PWSA

Erin Copeland, senior restoration ecologist at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, led the walk. She introduced the walk as an on-the-ground follow-up to previous meetings and presentations on South Side Park and proposed 21st Street development focused on green infrastructure and stormwater management. Erin explained that watershed task forces modeled after the Negley Run Task Force have been organized and are convening in roundtable discussions to inform and support the interests of community groups in each of the City's watersheds.

The evening event was the culmination of a year of discussions during which participants shared information about the stormwater code, urban green infrastructure, and the stormwater utility.

A topic of special interest to the group was the possibility of dividing the existing sewer (M16) to include a new pipe that would exclusively carry stormwater from the South Side slopes to the river. This would help to eliminate the current flooding near the entrance to South Side Park at Josephine Street and reduce the amount of water entering the sewer by 8 to 9 million gallons.

The route for the walk began at the River's edge and the M16 sewer outlet to the River. The group proceeded to a stop at the 180 Real Estate townhouse development. The developer has expressed interest in introducing additional greening into the design of the projects.

Moving on to 21st Street, Jeff Berman of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy described the organization's investment of considerable effort and time in envisioning, design, and fundraising to transform 21st street into a complete green street. He reviewed the history and goals of the project. Planning dates to 2013 when a modest plan for tree planting evolved into a design competition for a much larger project. The design concept was established and an engineering analysis completed. The design work is now being integrated with the work of PWSA and DOMI with the hope the project might become a reality.

The 21st project, which is estimated to cost approximately \$7 million (\$3.8 million has been raised to date), would convey stormwater overflow from the park down 21st Street through a series of green infrastructure installations. Gia Qin, director of urban design at Environmental Planning and Design (EPD) explained these installations would include: rain gardens, bioswales, underground retention, etc., and would result in a reduction in stormwater overflow into the river of about 4 million gallons each year. EPD is providing consulting services to the 21st Street project.

The project is being coordinated with the implementation of the 2018 master plan for South Side Park and in partnership with PWSA. Meghan Simek of PWSA explained that the park is at the top of a drainage shed. Historically a natural channel ran down through the park to the river along what is now 21st Street. PWSA wants to restore some of that natural storm channel to include underground retention, step pools, a meandering above ground channel, and permeable paving. This channel through the park would then connect with WPC's 21st Street project. In combination the projects would reduce stormwater overflow by 7 million gallons/year. Other goals for the park include re-establishing the tree canopy in the Jurassic valley.

Anthony Kobak, of Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning, invited four participants to contribute ideas about a plan for Pittsburgh's future through the City's recently launched Forging Pittsburgh web portal. <https://forgingpgh.org/>

The final stop on the tour was at the 18th street railroad trestle to discuss deterioration of the trestle embankment and the tremendous amount of water and sediment that floods onto the road. Often it travels down 18th St and the neighbors join to clean it up.

In summary, those in the group thought that working in partnership on these projects is a good idea. Also, that the work that is being planned and designed now are great efforts to keep working on, namely – PWSA and DPW's GI project in the park, WPC and the city / PWSA's work on 21st St., Jurassic Valley ecological restoration, and there was interest in the dedicated rain/stormwater pipe to the Monongahela River from this watershed.