



Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting January 12, 2010 – 6:00 PM

Meeting Notes

Attendees:

Members and Alternates – Robert Ramirez (WCROC Co-Chair), Olga Lizcano (WCROC Co-Chair), Abigail Kinnison (Beacon Hill N.A.), George Martínez (Woodlawn Lake N.A.), Joanne Walsh (Downtown Residents Association), Ashley Hernandez (Student Representative), Rod Radle (San Antonio Alternative Housing), Jude Valdez (UTSA), Dr. Catherine Rainwater (Our Lady of the Lake University), Abel Ramirez (San Antonio Wheelmen), Thomas Lopez (SAISD), Santiago Garcia, Jr. (Westside Development Corp.).

Elected Officials – Roberto Rodriguez (SARA Board Member).

Staff and Consultants – Suzanne Scott (SARA), Jim Boenig (SARA), Nefi Garza (SARA), Daniel Aguilar (SARA), Rudy Farias (SARA), Gloria Rodriguez (SARA), Margarita Hernandez (COSA Public Works), Brandon Ross (COSA Parks & Recreation), Ed Garza (AECOM), Andy Rooke (AECOM), Rudy Rivera (RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc.), William Long (RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc.).

Members of the Public – Rebecca Flores, Bud Abbott, Narcisso Cano, Rosemary Geyer (Casa Navarro), Jerry Geyer (Casa Navarro), Jesse Valdez, Jose Gonzalez (Urban Collaborative), Cappy Dryden (Sustainable Environmental Laboratories).

I. Welcome & Introductions

Olga Lizcano (WCROC Co-Chair) called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. Robert Ramirez (WCROC Co-Chair) added that he wanted to recognize Suzanne Scott, General Manager of the San Antonio River Authority.

II. Approval of the Meeting Minutes (Dec. 2009)

Mr. Ramirez stated that the next item was the approval of the December 2009 meeting minutes. He asked if there were any comments or corrections to the minutes. Roberto Rodriguez (SARA Board Member) pointed out that on page 6 of 8, the word “future” needs to be taken out since the federal judge is already appointed to the seat and that his name is Xavier Rodriguez. Mr. Ramirez said that on page 6 of 8, it should say February 2010 instead of 2009 in reference to the next public workshop. Abigail Kinnison (Beacon Hill N.A.) had sent in some corrections prior to the meeting and asked William Long (RJRA) to include them in the minutes. She asked that Angela Hartsell be added to the list of attendees in the minutes. Ms. Kinnison added that on the second paragraph on page 5, she thinks she said “the report would include shovel ready projects for each creek that could be extracted and funding sought.” Also, on the second paragraph on page 7 she said it might be helpful to identify which judge we are referring to. She said it seems like they are referring to the federal judge, but that people might think it is in reference

to Judge Wolff. Other items were to add an action item regarding making all bridges for both bicycle and pedestrian use, not just pedestrian, and to take another field trip out to the creeks.

III. Public Workshop #3 Update

Next, Ms. Lizcano asked Ed Garza (AECOM) to discuss workshop #3. Mr. Garza started by saying that the final public workshop is confirmed for Saturday, February 27, 2010. He said the workshop would start at 9:00 a.m. and end at 2:00 p.m., with a presentation at 10:00 a.m. that will present the overall vision plan for the Westside Creeks. He added that in the presentation they will discuss each of the four creeks individually and then a summary of the report. Mr. Garza said that all the evaluations from the consulting team will lead up to the creation of the overall vision plan and will be part of the presentation. He said most importantly there will be a discussion of the next steps.

Mr. Garza mentioned that public comment is welcome and will be solicited at the public workshop, although no major changes will be made at this point. He said the meeting will be at the VIA Boardroom located at 1021 San Pedro Avenue and that the presentation will be followed by an open house. Mr. Ramirez asked how much time is allotted for the presentation. Mr. Garza said that it will be about an hour and a half presentation. George Martinez (Woodlawn Lake N.A.) asked how many presentations there would be. Mr. Garza said it would just be one presentation followed by an open house. Ms. Lizcano asked if there would be a cost estimate in the presentation. Mr. Garza said that the cost information will be in the report. He encouraged everyone to get the word out about the workshop to all their neighbors and constituents. Mr. Ramirez asked if the media will be getting a media release prior to the event. Mr. Garza said there would be a press release. Then he added that there could be a press conference as well, although nothing has been discussed regarding putting one together. Ms. Kinnison asked that there be an extra push to let city council members know about the event. Mr. Garza said that it would be possible and other officials will be contacted as well. He added that the last two stakeholder presentations would be to the Mayor and the County Judge to make sure they have an update as well. Jude Valdez (UTSA) asked if there would be any posters or pamphlets to pass out. Mr. Garza said that some had been developed. Gloria Rodriguez (SARA) announced that she had some postcards advertising the next public workshop and would pass them out at the end of the meeting.

IV. Elmendorf Lake Water Quality Improvements

Next, Ms. Lizcano asked Daniel Aguilar (SARA) to discuss the Elmendorf Lake water quality improvements. Mr. Aguilar thanked Ms. Lizcano and introduced himself as an associate engineer with the San Antonio River Authority. He started by defining dredging as excavating the bottom of a lake and removing the excess sediment from the bottom. He went on to say that it had been 35 years since this was last done in Elmendorf Lake. Mr. Aguilar said that dredging is used to get rid of trash, debris, and natural sediment build-up. He said that the San Antonio River Authority's role in Elmendorf Lake is to assist Bexar County by serving as the contracting agent and project manager.

Mr. Aguilar said that some of the Elmendorf Lake issues are poor water quality, high bacteria counts, odor concerns, and excess sediment. Then he said one of the benefits to dredging is the improved water quality. He added that dredging would make the lake deeper, which would give the fish more oxygen and restore some of the aquatic life that has not been able to live in the current conditions. He said the limits of the dredging are from 19th Street, where the dam is located, to West Commerce Street.

Then Mr. Aguilar discussed the preliminary bathymetry, which he said is the term used to describe the topography of the lake. He said the survey crew found out that the bottom of the lake had a sediment accumulation of 4-ft to 6-ft deep. Ms. Kinnison asked how much they are going to take out. Mr. Aguilar said that biologists will determine how much sediment is removed. Dr. Rainwater asked about the work that was done when the dam was fixed 15 years ago. Nefi Garza (SARA) introduced himself and added that they only dredged in the vicinity of the dam, not the entire lake. He then used graphics to show that the sediment level has increased since 1974. Mr. N. Garza said that the graphics are very telling. He explained the colors showed that the lake was deeper after the dredging in 1974 and pointed out where the sediment has accumulated the most.

Mr. Aguilar then discussed the possible methods of dredging. He discussed the pros and cons of dredging the lake by draining the water and excavating. He said that draining the lake for dredging has the greatest environmental impact, but is the least expensive option. Mr. Aguilar added that dredging allows for the removal of large debris from the lake bottom. He said another benefit is the chance to inspect the lake bottom before and after dredging. Mr. Aguilar said the cons of draining the water includes the environmental impact, damaged shorelines from trucks, weather issues possibly stalling the project, and the undetermined amount of time until the lake is restored after the dredging is completed.

Mr. Aguilar said the second method of dredging the lake is a mechanical excavation from barges. He said the pros include not needing to drain the lake, some stability to remove large debris from lake bottom, and the excavator can move easily along the lake. Mr. Aguilar said the cons are that this requires several pieces of heavy equipment, an excavator on land will damage shorelines, the excavator has to be towed into place, and there is no visual inspection of the lake before and after dredging.

Mr. Aguilar said the third method is a portable hydraulic dredging. He said the pros were that draining the lake is not necessary, low environmental impact, and a small boat is the only machine to be seen on the lake. He said the cons were that there is no ability to remove large debris from lake bottom and no visual inspection of lake bottom before and after dredging.

Then Mr. Aguilar discussed the Labyrinth Weir Dam. He stated that the existing Labyrinth Dam was constructed in 1993 and it contributes to sediment build-up. There are also reports of live and dead fish remaining on the departure slab after storm events. He said the consultant would give alternatives to modifying the dam, which may include bottom release gates and a modification of the departure slab to allow for fish passage.

Mr. Aguilar then discussed the schedule, which he said depends on the type of permit obtained. He discussed the difference in time if a 404 permit or a nationwide permit is obtained. Mr. Aguilar said that with a 404 permit, the lake dredging could go out for bid in mid April 2011. He added that with a nationwide permit, the lake dredging could go out for bid in mid November 2010. He said that the dredging will be completed in approximately 12 months from the start date.

Santiago Garcia, Jr. (Westside Development Corp.) asked if SARA works with other agencies when they are sampling. Mr. N. Garza said they will work with the City, County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Mr. Garcia asked who has the authority to say the area is clean. Mr. N. Garza said that it would be TCEQ that will come to that determination.

Mr. Valdez asked if the \$3 million set aside will be enough to do the project with any of the options. Mr. N. Garza said that it will be enough. Dr. Rainwater said she has heard of this money before and asked if any of it will be used for the park. Mr. N. Garza said the improvements to the park and banks of the lake will require separate additional funds. He added that the amount of additional funds will not be known until further testing is done.

Ms. Scott asked them to differentiate between the different types of permits. Mr. Aguilar then discussed the national permit process, which he said mainly differs from the 404 in that the time in which the project can be started will be quicker. He said in conclusion that SARA will hold meetings with the public, the Westside Creeks Oversight Committee, and the Apache Creek Subcommittee. He added that dredging will take approximately one year and odor issues will increase during this time.

Mr. Garcia asked what the impact of the creek was from Commerce to General Mc Mullen. Mr. N. Garza said that it will be minimal since there will be a coffer dam created to protect the work area. Mr. Ramirez said that although this project is out of the Westside Creeks scope, they are reaching out to us for input and our assistance may be needed even after the final public workshop.

Mr. Martínez asked if the entire lake would be drained if the dam is worked on. Mr. N. Garza said that it depends on what the recommended modifications are that come forward. Mr. Ramirez asked if any organisms would be harmed. Dr. Rainwater said that there really is nothing substantial living in the sediment at the bottom of the lake. She added that there are some around the edges, but that the bottom has mostly dead organic material.

Thomas Lopez (SAISD) said he was a student at OLLU when they dredged the lake in the 1970's. He added that he remembered watching the dredging, but did not smell anything. Mr. Aguilar said at that time they took some sediment to Rosedale Park, which would have reduced the smell. Mr. Ramirez asked if there were any lessons learned from the dredging of Woodlawn Lake. Mr. N. Garza said that they are contacting local and state agencies to get some of their knowledge transferred.

Ms. Kinnison asked if there was a reason for this project or if it was just a maintenance project. Mr. N. Garza said it was categorized as maintenance due to the permit process. Ms. Scott added that there are water quality concerns as well. Mr. Rodriguez said he lives a few blocks away from the lake. He added that the fish flop over the dam and end up making the area smell. He said another problem is that the water is stagnant. Mr. N. Garza said further discussions will include ways to improve the stagnant water issues. Mr. Ramirez thanked them for their presentation and invited everyone to attend the Apache Creek subcommittee meetings to discuss this area further.

V. Report Status Update

Mr. Ramirez then asked Andy Rooke (AECOM) to give an update on the report. He discussed the executive summary and went over the outline. Then he explained that the focus of the report is a combination of factors. Mr. Rooke said that economic development and impacts to the community were the biggest issues brought up in the past workshops, with these issues tending to focus above the banks of the creeks. He added that the acquisition of funding was going to be a critical component of this project, and one of the likely Federal funding partners is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Mr. Rooke said that he and SARA

staff visited with representatives from the Corps, and their primary interest would be in the restoration of a more “natural” stream function, or improvements below the banks.

Mr. Rooke then discussed that fluvial geomorphology will need to be discussed in the report, which will describe how processes like erosion and sedimentation can shape the creeks over time. He said a natural stream works that way, as the streams try to find a balance. The report will present information that can be used in later phases of the project to design streams that will be more natural, but will not require extensive maintenance. He said that the report will be available for use by the community and other entities in the future. Mr. Rooke added that this information is being compiled now, and that more detailed information would be available in upcoming meetings.

Ms. Lizcano asked at what point the report would be presented to City Council. Mr. Rooke said the council is invited to the meetings. Mr. Garza said that there will be a presentation made to the mayor and council once the report is done.

Olga said that at some point we need to educate the City Council on what we are trying to do for the city and our community. She said that if they are invited to the meetings and do not come then they must not understand the objectives of the project. Mr. Garza said that the County Judge and Mayor will be briefed. Rudy Farias (SARA) added that the project team is working on getting an audience with Commissioners Court. He said once the report is done they will then take it to them. Mr. Farias mentioned that they also have briefed the SARA Board by way of the SARA Communications Committee.

Mr. Ramirez said that he wanted to congratulate the subcommittees for getting all the information up to the Oversight Committee. He said that the meat of the report is coming from them. He wanted to point out that there are only two more subcommittee meetings. Mr. Rooke said the meetings that are scheduled in February are designed to ensure that the right information will be presented in the workshop. Then he said there would not be any meetings in March because it will be a working month for the consultants. He said in April there would be a full set of meetings.

VI. Subcommittee Reports

Mr. Ramirez then asked if there was anything to report from the subcommittees. He started with Alazán Creek and asked Mr. Martínez if he had anything to report. Mr. Martinez said he did not have anything to report but wanted more information available on the webpage, such as maps and diagrams of the creeks. Mr. Ramirez commended Gloria Rodriguez and her staff for keeping the webpage updated. He also thanked RJ RIVERA Associates for creating the website.

Mr. Ramirez then asked Dr. Rainwater if there were any items to report from the Apache Creek Subcommittee. She said there was nothing to report at this time. Mr. Ramirez then asked Ms. Kinnison if there was anything to report from the Martínez Creek Subcommittee. She replied that she had nothing to report.

Mr. Ramirez then asked Narcisso Cano if there was anything to report from the San Pedro Subcommittee. Mr. Cano said that Jerry Geyer (Casa Navarro) has a few words on the creek. Mr. Geyer said that diagrams need to be made available for public distribution. He said a diagram started a dialogue with Bexar County. He added that the dialogue ended up with some areas being set aside for future restoration. Mr. Ramirez

said that Mr. Geyer has met with Bexar County and the Alameda Group. He added that that he appreciates his efforts and enthusiasm.

Mr. Ramirez then asked if any of the subcommittees would like to meet, but since none needed to meet, he moved on to the next agenda item.

VII. Miscellaneous Items

Mr. Ramirez wanted everyone to know that the first Thursday of the month is now the San Pedro Subcommittee meeting date. He also asked that updates to the website continue and again thanked SARA staff for doing a great job.

Rod Radle asked to see the bathymetry diagrams from Mr. Aguilar's presentation. He asked if there was any evaluation of sediment levels up stream. Mr. Farias said that it was under consideration and added that there has not been any detailed analysis. Mr. Radle asked if they can do a couple of cross sections of dredging further upstream. Mr. Farias said he would bring it up in future discussions with Mr. N. Garza. Mr. Ramirez asked how long it would take to replenish the water level of the dredged area. Mr. Farias said he would need to find out and report back.

Mr. Rodriguez said that there is a possible date of February 17 for the public meeting to discuss the dredging of Elmendorf Lake. He said the neighborhood is very excited about the project and invited all those in attendance to come out and enjoy the lake. Mr. Rodriguez also thanked everyone for their continued attendance. Ms. Rodriguez then distributed postcards advertising the public meeting on February 27, 2010.

Mr. Geyer said that the Stream Team presentations are very important and could help the project. He said the Stream Team was put together to combine the knowledge of successful areas in the United States. He said that there is a link on the front page of the SARA website for everyone to review.
www.sara-tx.org

VIII. Next Meeting

Mr. Ramirez said the next Oversight Committee meeting would be February 9, 2010.

IX. Adjourn

With no further items to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

Action Items

- Update the previous meeting minutes with changes mentioned by the Oversight Committee.
- SARA staff needs to discuss the media release and possible press conference.
- Mr. Farias said he would determine the amount of time it will take to refill the lake after dredging.
- Ms. Kinnison asked that an extra push be made to let the City Council know about the public workshop.
- Mr. Geyer requested that any and all diagrams be made available for public distribution.

Attachments

- Sign-in Sheets
- Presentation
- Handouts from Presentations

Distribution

- WCROC
- SARA Staff
- Consultant Team