Westside Creeks Restoration
Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting
San Antonio River Authority
100 E. Guenther
Tuesday, December 20, 2016
Notes

Committee Members Present
Olga Lizcano, Co-Chair
Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair
Abigail Rodriguez, Beacon Hill NA
Theodore Ozuna, Donaldson Terrace NA
Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Assn.
Abel Ramirez, San Antonio Wheelman
Kamala Platt, TexasTejano.com
Skye Curd, West San Antonio Chamber

Staff and Public Present
Patrice Melancon, SARA
Jeff Tyler, SARA
Therese Kenner, SARA
Bridget Hinze, SARA
Veronica Robinson, SARA
Sonia Jimenez, Ximenes & Assoc.
Edward Burkley, City of San Antonio
Jennifer Lopez Garza, City of San Antonio
Jennifer Wilson, USGS
Doug Schnoebelen, USGS
Patricia Carvajal, USGS

I. Welcome

Olga Lizcano and Robert Ramirez, Committee Co-Chairs, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and service on the committee.

II. Calendar Items

Mrs. Lizcano announced the following:

- San Pedro Creek Subcommittee Meeting – January 12, 2017 at 8:30 a.m. at 100 E. Guenther, Boardroom;
- Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee Quarterly Meeting – March 21, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. at 100 E. Guenther, Boardroom; and
- Elmendorf Lake Park Grand Opening – January 21, 2017 at 10:30 a.m. at Elmendorf Lake Park, 3700 W Commerce Street.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting notes from June 21, 2016 and October 18, 2016 were presented but not approved. A quorum was not present for approval.

IV. Presentation on Westside Creeks Sediment Study

Doug Schnoebelen with the local office of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) opened the presentation. He stated that USGS is involved with the River Authority and the Westside Creeks study to provide good science, answer questions, and is not a regulatory agency. Jennifer Wilson, USGS Hydrologist, explained that USGS has worked on many of these studies in the past. These types of studies are proactive approached to water quality.

Ms. Wilson went on by providing background information. The area that was studied includes segments of Martinez, Alazan, Apache, and San Pedro Creeks. These creeks flow through a historic area that has been urbanized for a long time and has potential for contaminants. She further explained that certain contaminants are known to sorb to sediments and such contaminants were the focus of the study. The contaminants are the most toxic and persistent in the environment; they do not degrade and available for uptake by aquatic organisms. This study will provide a baseline for the Westside creeks before they are disturbed by restoration efforts.

This study is a one-time look, a snapshot, at what is in the sediments. The study process involves collection of sediment and water samples. Ten (10) sites were used for collection: two on each creek in the restoration area, one further upstream and another further downstream before the confluence of the creeks and the furthest one downstream after San Pedro Creek's confluence with the San Antonio River. The samples were analyzed for trace elements like lead, zinc, arsenic, and chromium as well as pesticides, flame retardants, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Water samples at each site were tested for fish toxicity using fat head minnows.

The toxicity concentrations were compared to sediment quality guidelines, a non-enforceable benchmark. If the concentrations are below the threshold effect concentrations (TEC) then there are no adverse effects. If the concentrations are above the probable effect concentration (PEC), then toxins are adverse to aquatic biota (animal and plant life). If the concentration lands between the TEC and the PEC, then there is no adverse effect.

Most of the samples tested below the TEC. However, there were four (4) samples with trace element concentrations above the TEC showing lead in San Pedro Creek upstream and midstream sites. The contamination sources were not explored but the location of the increase is now known and the River Authority or USGS could go back and investigate further. The results for pesticides show four, Chlordane, DDD, DDT, and DDE, were well above the PEC. Flame retardants were also present in several samples with Apache Creek upstream having the largest concentrations compared to the other sites. In terms of PCB's, the results were low compared to the TEC. Finally, PAH's were higher than the PEC for samples from the Apache Creek upstream and San Pedro Creek upstream sites. The PAH samples provide a bit more information than the others and the pattern shown on the results are similar, but not conclusive, to contaminations from parking lot seal coat toxics.

Ms. Wilson concluded her portion of the presentation by stating that in summary, compared to other watersheds in the Bexar County area, the concentrations produced similar results. The report is available online and the complete data set can be downloaded. A print version will be available within the next couple of weeks. Fact sheets will produced in English and Spanish and will be available for download. There will also be a four-page summary made available.

Thereafter, Patricia Carvajal explained what the study taught the team. Specifically, there is a need to take a closer look at the elevated levels of metals by collecting additional sediment and fish tissue samples and monitoring the sites.

Aarin Teague with the River Authority explained further that the initial step helps hone whatever future action is taken to address pollutants and also helps in the design of future projects. On a broad level, these results help determine which best management practices (BMPs) will be most effective. Additional efforts may include construction remediation to remove the source (such as lead) and storm water BMPs being installed to treat the runoff so pollutants will not enter the waterway. Phytoremediation would be another alternative for remediation. This method uses specially designed practices with plants that remove pollutants from the stream. The last two methods Ms. Teague mentioned were source controls and outreach. Source controls include methods that restrict/reduce hazardous materials and other waste from entering the waterway at the source. Outreach may include trash pick up or other events to educate the public on how to prevent additional pollutants from entering area waterways. Ms. Teague concluded by stating this study is the initial step to gain understanding of what pollutants currently exist in the Westside Creeks.

Questions

All questions were answered by one of the above presenters unless otherwise noted. Answers are shown in italics.

- Why is a Fathead minnow used as the specimen for testing mortality rates? *Scientifically, this minnow is like a canary in a coalmine. It is bred for this particular test and very sensitive. It is not naturally present in these creeks but is a good indicator of contamination. This test is merely an initial step and not reflective of a human toxicity level.*
- Will more studies be done moving forward? Based on your experience, with other studies, what were the outcomes? *It is difficult to characterize because each waterway is different. Moving forward, we are trying to determine what practices to utilize to mitigate the contaminants in the waterways.*
- Did this effort include testing the water chemistry? *Yes and some field measurements such as temperature. Basic water analysis was conducted and compared to water chemistry results with no correlation.*
- Is there an effort to include the City or to test the soil to come up with a conclusive result? *There will be a sediment, water quality, and fish tissue study as follow-up. The research team will take an in-depth look and conduct solid scientific analysis. The effort is internal to the River Authority and is financed through the agency's budget process. City involvement has yet to be determined.*
- What about soil testing? *It has not been discussed but a potential interesting addition. The results of any further efforts will be shared with this group.*
- Was the Bexar County sediment study similar before the San Antonio River projects were completed and compared before and after BMPs were installed? *The precursor to the Westside Creeks study was a county-wide effort conducted from 2007 to 2009 with another conducted even earlier. Generally, these types of studies are conducted at large intervals to get an idea of what is occurring over*

time. However, those studies did not have any follow-up and they were not specific to the San Antonio River or other creeks.

This presentation will be given to the River Authority Board tomorrow.

V. Status Report on San Pedro Creek Improvements Project

Mr. Ramirez, Co-chair, presented the status report. He began by stating the San Pedro Creek Committee meets every second Thursday of every month. It is a fast moving project and changes daily. Mr. Ramirez reminded the committee the construction approach is construction manager at risk (CMAR). The construction schedule currently is set for completion of the project from the inlet (by Fox Tech) to Houston Street to be significantly complete by May 5, 2018.The CMAR is currently looking at the possibility of completion up to Cesar Chavez Boulevard and what cost savings may be realized.

Houston Street at the creek is closed and will remain closed until March 2017. It will be closed again sometime thereafter for bridge demolition. Additional closures will include Laredo Street and Commerce will close in summer 2017 for approximately a 3-4 month period. VIA Transit is aware and involved to ensure bus routes are properly detoured.

Mr. Ramirez continued with an update on the interpretive plan. The Plan is the part of the project that tells the story of the creek. There are seven segments: 1) Native American origins and the first settlement of San Antonio; 2) restoring harmony between people and nature; 3) the emphasis is on family, community, and crossroads (Salinas family (TX war of independence), Martin, Frost family); 4) Centro de Bexar – the center of the city is the most historic –Texas Declaration of Independence, the cathedral, and the Spanish Governor's House; 5) accord, harmony, and peace for the civic and social struggles of Mexican Americans and others; 6) represents the roots of business and enterprise and will commemorate the history of industry and business; 7) laborers who worked in pecan groves, the stockyards, and produce row. Bridget Hinze with the River Authority stated the plan will be finalized over the next several months and will be presented to this committee, if desired.

Mr. Ramirez went on to inform the group that the elements of the interpretive plan will include state historical markers and other styles of signs to be used along the creek. The signs will be part of the architectural design. It will also include tiles and bench work as well as wayfinding signage.

In addition to the interpretive plan, public art will be used to convey the creek's story. There will be permanent and temporary public art installations, guided tours, printed materials, IT platforms (apps), and public gatherings such as festivals and events. The goals of the public art effort include commemorating and memorializing the arts and culture of the creek and its inhabitants. The artwork, like the signage, will be integrated into the overall creek design. Currently, the River Authority is working on the organizational structure of the public art program. A solicitation has been published to select a managing

curator and is open to anyone. The River Foundation will be the fiscal agent for the program and a steering committee will be comprised of Bexar County, City of San Antonio, River Foundation, and the Arts and Culture Alliance.

In closing, Mr. Ramirez encouraged committee members to stay informed by attending San Pedro Creek meetings or visiting the website. Ms. Hinze also let everyone know that weekly construction updates will be developed and distributed.

VI. Status Report on Westside Creeks Improvements Projects

Westside Creeks Linear Creekway Trails

Jeff Tyler, Project Manager with the River Authority, presented the report. He began by presenting a Westside Creek trails map. He informed the group that the River Authority has signed an agreement with the City of San Antonio to manage the design and construction of the newly funded trail segments (shown in red). This effort will connect to and extend the trails that were completed in 2016 on each of the four westside creeks.

Mr. Tyler went on to explain that there is funding opportunity for enhancements through an Alamo Area MPO grant. The selection is slated for June 2017. If the grant is awarded, it will fund enhancements on Alazan and Martinez Creeks and support the new construction effort. The grant will not add any effort since Federal permitting is already required.

The new design effort will take approximately a year and a half before construction begins. Public outreach will be similar to previous efforts with two public meetings for each trail. The first meeting will be during the initial schematic design and the second one will be near the finish of design. It will be three years before the new segments are constructed and complete.

Elmendorf Lake Park

Mr. Tyler continued with an update on the status of the park improvements. The grand opening is set for January 21, 2017 at 10:30 a.m. Mr. Tyler showed photos of the park and let the group know the contractor and River Authority are going through the punch list. He showed photos and reminded the group of the various BMP's and water features. There are nine bio-retention areas with features that clean stormwater as it seeps into the ground or enters the stormwater system and there are 18 diffusers to improve overall water quality.

The park has floating piers, interpretive signage, a new playground area, a splash pad, exercise stations stations and shade structures. There are also eight overlooks and nodes to get close to the water as well as picnic and gathering areas. Oscar Alvarado, local artist, is finishing up the tile work at Lake Plaza. Finally, the improvements also include bank repairs and restoration similar to Woodlawn Lake.

Restoration Update

Brian Mast with the River Authority provided an update on the funding for the channel restoration effort. He reminded the group that in 2011 the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) selected the Westside Creeks for the agency's new planning paradigm. That effort was completed within three years and under budget. The results of that effort were forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in September 2014 for potential funding of the actual restoration. Mr. Mast went on to explain that the congressional earmark ban has the report languishing. The River Authority has been working with the federal delegation to request monthly meetings with the USACE Assistant Secretary of the Army (ASA) and the OMB. The River Authority also requested that the federal delegation contact the OMB director directly.

Additionally, the River Authority nominated the Westside Creeks restoration project for the Administration's celebration of World Water Day. In July 2016, the OMB senior examiner and the USACE team visited with the River Authority to discuss the Mission Reach and the Westside Creeks restoration projects. The River Authority also developed a memo to show the economic return on investment for the completed Mission Reach with hopes to use this information to influence the process but it is a non-factor for funding purposes. The ASA discusses it every month at the OMB meetings.

Currently, the River Authority and Bexar County are now receiving reimbursement from the federal government, which is being reinvested in Confluence Park and San Pedro Creek. If the OMB allocates the full $60.2 million request, the funding will be used for the Westside Creek restoration. Mr. Mast stated it is a good step forward to tie the projects together to encourage the OMB. He also stated that the newly elected administration may be more receptive to the economic impact, that previously was a non-factor, and the local chambers have agreed to support the effort where they can. The local chamber's SA to DC trip is scheduled for February 13-16, 2017 and the restoration effort is on the agenda. Mr. Mast praised the local delegation, members include Senators Cornyn and Cuellar as well as Representatives Smith, Castro, and Doggett, for promoting and advocating for the project.

Procedurally, Mr. Mast explained, that when an energy and appropriations bill is passed, the USACE develops a work plan and OMB approves the plan and approves the funding. He also mentioned the River Authority met with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials to explain the projects potential impact on adjacent public housing in terms of the health, safety, and recreation, and the potential for a natural living classroom but it had no impact on the OMB. In closing, Mr. Mast stated that current federal funding is through April 28, 2017. The next opportunity for congressional funding is with an energy and water appropriations bill. However, the OMB decision could occur at anytime and it could be positive or negative. This committee will be kept apprised of any developments.

VII. Reflections

Mr. Ramirez provided a brief look back of the past eight years. He mentioned the committee has seen periods of progress and periods of lulls. The creek trails are mostly complete with more trails coming. The Elmendorf Lake Park grand opening will be next month and now San Pedro Creek is front and center. He is pleased with the progress and the committee should be proud of the accomplishments. Mr. Ramirez informed the committee that meetings will be held quarterly, starting in March 2017, and encouraged the committee to keep up with the San Pedro Creek and linear trails through electronic sources and to share the information with the community. Ms. Lizcano thanked the committee members and the River Authority staff for the support and suggested that everyone keep pushing for the restoration effort.

VIII. Miscellaneous Items

Jeff Tyler announced that Patrice Melancon, P.E., CFM replaced Dr. Russell Persyn as the River Authority's Watershed Engineering Manager.

IX. Citizens to be Heard

None.

X. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 p.m.