



DRAFT

Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting July 14, 2009 – 6:00 PM

Meeting Notes

Attendees: **Members and Alternates** – Robert Ramirez, WCROC Co-Chair; Olga Lizcano, WCROC Co-Chair; Abigail Kinnison, Beacon Hill NA; Tom Lopez, SAISD; Dr. Jose Jimenez, UTSA; Ashley Hernandez, Student Representative; Santiago Garcia, Jr., Westside Development Corporation; Roberto Hinkson, San Antonio Conservation Society; George Martinez, Woodlawn Lake NA; Pam Martinez, Woodlawn Lake NA; Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Association; Rod Radle, San Antonio Alternative Housing; Diane Esquivel, Avenida Guadalupe Association; and Dr. Catherine Rainwater, Our Lady of the Lake University. **Elected Officials** – Howard Peak, Linear Creeks Advisory Board; Roberto Rodriguez, SARA Board Member. **Staff and Consultants** – Steve Graham, SARA; Rudy Farias, SARA; Gloria Rodriguez, SARA; Lydia Kelly, SA-BC Metropolitan Planning Organization; Brad Smith, EDAW/AECOM; Ed Garza, AECOM; Andy Rooke, AECOM; Rudy Rivera, RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc., and William Long, RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc. **Members of the Public** – Rick Lewis, UTSA/Architecture; Jesse H. Valdez; Alberto Passos; Officer Steven Baum; and Kamala Platt.

1.0 Welcome & Introductions

Robert Ramirez, WCROC Co-Chair, called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. He then introduced Commander Steven Baum with the San Antonio Park Police and said he would be speaking about safety later in the meeting.

2.0 Subcommittee Reports

Mr. Ramirez thanked the subcommittees for attending their meetings and for having wonderful discussions. He asked George Martinez, with Woodlawn Lake NA, to speak on behalf of the Alazán Creek Subcommittee. He said there were basically three things offered up as suggestions. He mentioned that security lighting, smart design through landscaping, and community involvement was suggested. Next, Mr. Ramirez asked Dr. Catherine Rainwater, with OLLU, to speak about the Apache Creek Subcommittee meeting. She said Robert Ramirez chaired the meeting. She mentioned that Officer Shirley, with the SAPD “SAFFE” unit, cited gangs and prostitution at the meeting as issues in the area. She said it was a very informative meeting.

Mr. Ramirez then asked Abigail Kinnison to speak on behalf of the Martínez Creek Subcommittee. She said there was a wonderful turnout for the meeting. She added that they had “SAFFE” Officer Esquivel at their meeting and he did a wonderful job informing the subcommittee about issues in their area. She said lighting was a major part of the discussion as it pertains to both safety and light pollution. She added that it was discussed that if people along the creeks are doing the right thing, then those who participate in illegal activities will hopefully go away. She said they asked the consultants to come up with a list of businesses along the creek

so they can be contacted and engaged in the process. She said there also was a request for public art to be discussed in a future meeting. Mr. Ramirez suggested that all the subcommittees discuss art and more specifically, where there are opportunities for art to be integrated with this project.

Rudy Farias, with SARA, was called upon to discuss the San Pedro Creek Subcommittee. He said that drugs, prostitution, and other illegal activities were discussed. He added that low shrubs and eliminating hiding places was discussed in order to stop illegal activity. He said a motion was made at the meeting to discuss the re-name San Pedro Creek, Arroyo de San Pedro. Mr. Farias said it was also mentioned that new developments, such as the new federal courthouse, be designed with the San Pedro Creek in mind. Fishing, water activities, public art, and maintenance were also discussed, as well as right of way, particularly in the downtown area, in regards to the railroad land that was purchased adjacent to the creek.

3.0 Presentation on Linear Creeks Advisory Board

Mr. Ramirez asked Roberto Rodriguez to introduce Former Mayor Howard Peak. Mr. Rodriguez said that Former Mayor Howard Peak was instrumental in the linear creeks project. He said that the linear creeks project has produced beautiful trails and amenities. Then, Mr. Rodriguez welcomed Mr. Peak.

Mr. Peak thanked Mr. Rodriguez and the oversight committee for inviting him to speak. He said he wanted to talk about two creeks and two rivers. He said the two creeks that are the responsibility of the linear creeks board are Leon Creek and Salado Creek. He added that the San Antonio River and the Medina River are the two rivers. Mr. Peak said his efforts started when he was a representative for District 9. He mentioned that there was a bond issue presented to voters and each of the council members received \$500,000 for parks. He said he focused on what is now known as Walker Creek Park. He said he made a deal with a Precinct 3 County Commissioner to donate the property and he would use \$400,000 to make improvements with bond money. Mr. Peak said the park has been expanded since then and he looks forward to the park being extended. He mentioned that he spent the last \$100,000 of bond money buying a property along Lawrence Creek, which is a sub-creek of Salado Creek that goes near McAlister Park. He said it was constantly attracting developers that wanted to build various things on the property. He added that it stands ready to be developed at some point. He said he hopes that it will one day tie into McAlister Park.

Mr. Peak then stated that this is how he started thinking of creeks as park opportunities. He said the most obvious area to focus on was the San Antonio River. He added that there were lots of homeless camps and crime. He said he wanted to extend trail like improvements down to Mission Espada. Mr. Peak mentioned that in his first term as Mayor of San Antonio he made a partnership between the City, SARA and the parks department. He said the waterways have created ideal opportunities to take them from neglected areas and convert them into useful parts of our communities. Mr. Peak said that as he continued to focus on creek opportunities, they were not really making a lot of progress. He said while Mayor, he was able to allocate sales tax to fund the linear parks project. Mr. Peak restated that the linear parks project focuses on the Leon Creek and Salado Creek. He said that the US Army Corps of Engineers built storm drains without regard for the natural areas that they sought to protect. He mentioned that the Salado Creek has a lot of vegetation and is a great natural area. He said the plan is to create a network of hike and bike trails that will inevitably be all around San Antonio. He pointed out that Salado Creek ties into the San Antonio River near IH 37. He mentioned that Leon Creek ties into the Medina River, which flows into the San Antonio River.

Mr. Peak then said that the rivers and creeks would have hike and bike trails that will run along side the waterways. He mentioned that ultimately there will be a hike and bike system that will cross the city mostly,

North to South. He said what needs to be created in addition to the discussion of the creeks, there needs to be East to West bike lanes created to connect to the linear creeks trail system. He added that this will allow people to traverse the creek and the city, without the need for a vehicle. Mr. Peak said that they are about a year or so from the funding source running out. He said the first two propositions were approved by the voters and Mr. Peak commends them for voting on it. He added that they asked the voters to trust them in the first two votes since no construction had started, but this time there are examples for the voters to see before the next vote for funding. He said the priorities for the future are to finish work on Salado Creek, finish work on the Medina River, and to look at connecting tributaries to the main creeks

Mr. Peak said he looks forward to working with the Westside Creeks Restoration Project. He mentioned that money raised by the sales tax increase might be able to be used for the Westside Creeks after the linear creeks project is completed. He added that people love the trails that have been created and they have been used often. He said he agreed with the comment that when good people are in the area doing good things, then the illegal activity will decrease. He mentioned that many of the parks in San Antonio are along the creeks. Mr. Peak said that the trails will run into the parks and give people the opportunity to travel the city without their cars. He added that the linear parks program has addressed a number of needs in San Antonio. He mentioned that it has created a transportation opportunity that did not exist before. He then opened up the floor for questions.

Mr. Martinez asked him how he got the public involved early. Mr. Peak said they contacted the area neighborhood associations. He added that in every neighborhood there are now creek trails running through it and they embraced the idea of the creek improvements. He said part of the program allocates funding for police officers to be on the trails where they did not patrol before. He mentioned that going out to organized groups where possible, helped in getting public support for the project.

Joanne Walsh, with Downtown Residents Association asked where did the funding for the police come from. Mr. Peak said that they were paid for through the sales tax funds. Olga Lizcano, WCROC Co-Chair asked when the linear creeks project was expected to be completed. Mr. Peak said he is not able to give a specific date, but added that there is still work to do and some properties to be purchased. He said it would be at least six more years before completion. Ms. Walsh then asked if most of the trails were in or out of the flood plains. Mr. Peak said they are almost all in the flood plains. He said that high flood areas were avoided as much as possible. He added that each was designed so that the investment would not be ruined by flood waters.

Mr. Ramirez asked if there was a website about the trails. Mr. Peak referred everyone to the City of San Antonio website and said there is a link to the linear creeks project. Mr. Ramirez then thanked him for his presentation. Mr. Peak then thanked the committee for inviting him and for the interest in the linear creeks project.

4.0 Patrolling Linear Creeks and Hike/Bike Trails

Ms. Lizcano introduced Commander Steven Baum with the San Antonio Park Police. Commander Baum started his presentation by passing out some handouts and spoke about the linear creeks project. He said that there was a lot of input from the community about the safety side of the project. He asked the committee to refer to the handout he provided. He said they were fortunate that substations have been converted from buildings that were on land purchased for the linear creeks project.

He mentioned that the parks are broken into segments. Commander Baum said the goal is to have a park police officer patrolling every five miles during the hours of operation. He went over the pages that showed the breakdown of Salado Creek. He explained how the breakdown allowed for officers to have more control over the areas. He said that normal patrols travel the areas and officers on All-Terrain Vehicles patrol the creekways.

Commander Baum continued by saying that all of the parks are in the flood plains because developers could not use that land. He said that neighborhoods associations resisted the creation of trails because they thought it would create avenues that would bring criminals to their backyards. He added that there are no lights on the trails except for the trail heads, to avoid light pollution. He said there was a marking system created for the trails. He mentioned that it was developed so people could describe where they were in the event they needed help. He said since EMS cannot go into the creeks, the parks police work with them to help in emergency situations. He explained that the trailers that the All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV's) are brought in on can be hooked up to the ATV's in order to transport people to the ambulance as needed.

Commander Baum said the biggest problem originally was illegal dumping. He said there are leash laws for animals and specific times that the trails are open. He mentioned that the parks are open from sunrise to sunset. He said the ownership of the trails by the area residents is tremendous. He added that he cannot say when the last robbery, rape, or murder happened along the trails. He agreed with Mayor Peak when he said the more you increase legal activities, the less likely illegal activities will occur. He said that the new structure at Tobin Park has not been vandalized at all since it was built over 9 months ago. Commander Baum said those who used to dump illegally are no longer doing so even without cameras and sophisticated tracking systems. He added that this is a rural area for the most part and does not mean the same success will happen elsewhere. He said that it is a lot of work to be successful, but it can be done with partnerships between the city and its citizens.

Commander Baum then opened the floor for questions. Mr. Rodriguez asked if he had experienced any incidents of destruction of property. Commander Baum said that in the beginning, there were incidents of graffiti. He added that they were successful in catching those who were responsible and since then, there has not really been a problem. He said some people have shot paintballs in and around the areas, but there have not been any serious problems since the beginning phase.

Ms. Kinnison asked what the highest population density segment is along the linear creeks. Commander Baum said the area around Salado Creek North would probably be the highest population density. He added that there are a lot of apartments along Bitters Road near Salado Creek. He mentioned his concern with a high density area would be with the high turnover rate of occupants. He said it would be difficult to get people to take ownership of their areas. He said he thinks that will be the biggest challenge for this project. Ms. Kinnison said that is probably another reason to engage the housing authority. Santiago Garcia, Jr. with the Westside Development Corporation, asked Commander Baum to be more specific. Commander Baum explained that people can report suspicious or illegal activity. He added that some people confront individuals and tell them not to destroy property. He said if criminals know that people are watching the area, then they will not frequent those areas as much.

Ms. Walsh asked how often they encounter people at sunset. Commander Baum said trail heads have a light shining on the ordinance rules of the park. He said that at night there are very few encounters of people in the area. Mr. Ramirez asked if there are any areas in his district that would be good models for the Westside Creeks. Commander Baum said that most of the parks are either low light parks or no light parks. He added that all but two parks have curfews. He said that Woodlawn Lake Park would probably be the best example, but

a lot of the lighting comes from the roads next to it. Mr. Ramirez then thanked Commander Baum for his presentation.

5.0 Achieving Safety through Design – Best Practices

Ms. Lizcano then announced Brad Smath, with EDAW. Mr. Smith opened up his PowerPoint presentation and passed out a handout to all the committee members. He started by explaining why natural surveillance mattered. He then showed slides of natural surveillance and pointed out shadow areas in a picture of an alley. He pointed out that there were no people in the image and that it created a negative setting. Mr. Smith then showed an example of a positive setting that had lights and people walking around. He then showed more examples of both positive and negative natural surveillance.

He then discussed natural access controls and showed pictures of examples of those controls. He said that although fences do work, some natural access controls can be more subtle. Mr. Smith then discussed Territorial Reinforcement. He then showed examples of Territorial Reinforcement through pictures. Mr. Smith then discussed the Territorial Reinforcement Principles. He then showed images to explain how maintenance could be used to secure an area. He said that broken windows are a sign that a location might not be secure and invites illegal activity to occur eventually. Mr. Smith then discussed lighting and landscaping. He showed pictures of both good and bad lighting design. He mentioned that lighting is very important in all the creek areas. He then discussed the list he provided of websites and resources that relate to crime prevention.

Mr. Ramirez then asked Mr. Smith to give an overview of what will be expected in the September work sessions. Mr. Smith then brought up a slide about catalyst sites and referred everyone to the handout that was given to them that had the same slide on it. He mentioned that the September work sessions will be August 31, 2009 through September 4, 2009. He said that he will be back with other designers to discuss the catalyst sites and ask for specific suggestions on what to do. He explained that it is a great opportunity for the public to suggest amenities and give their input on the design of each segment. He said they will be meeting with the subcommittees at various times throughout the week to make sure that everyone is on board with the direction the project is headed in.

He then announced that the location would be the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Theatre. He said that the subcommittee comments will be included with the discussions in the days following those meetings. He encouraged everyone who can to come by and give their input.

6.0 Miscellaneous Items

Ms. Lizcano asked if there were any miscellaneous items to report. Rod Radle, with San Antonio Alternative Housing, said that at the end of this month, his project should have the preliminary designs. He mentioned that he wants to meet with the committee to get their input and then send the information to the design team before he comes back. He said he wants to keep the discussion going in order to continue to tie the two projects together. Mr. Ramirez asked Mr. Farias to setup the meeting and asked William Long, with RJ RIVERA ASOCIATES, to let everyone know when it would be. Mr. Radle invited everyone to attend and said it was not a closed meeting. Ms. Walsh asked that ADA accessibility be discussed in regards to the Westside Creeks project. Mr. Smith said that it would be considered where possible. Kamala Platt added that areas that currently have ADA accessibility.

Steven Graham, with SARA, then discussed a meeting with Mayor Castro, Commissioner Elizondo, SARA, Public Works, OLLU, VIA at OLLU. He said they discussed the OLLU master plan to show their vision for what could happen in the future. He added that there were some ideas of reconfiguring 24th street, which passes through OLLU. He mentioned that there was a tour of the property after the meeting. He said there was a vision of trails that could be connected to Apache Creek. He explained that a technical analysis was done that included de-silting of the lake, aeration of the water, buffer zones, egret populations, and the labyrinth weir. He said the commissioner wants to move quickly to do some sort of improvements to the lake itself. Mr. Graham said that Mayor Castro asked for a master plan that would work towards long term changes. He said that there is an opportunity to coordinate efforts between the OLLU master plan and the Westside Creeks Restoration Project. He added that there will be another meeting, but he wanted to brief the committee about the project.

Mr. Rodriguez asked if there was any mention of the dock that was funded by Councilwoman Radle. Mr. Graham said that it was discussed and it was part of the bond initiative. He added that it is in such an early phase that would easily be developed in conjunction with the Westside Creek project. Mr. Garcia said that he used to work in Councilwoman Radle's office. He mentioned that she was very interested in the de-silting and impacts that doing so would have on the lake. Mr. Graham said that they were aware of her concerns and have taken steps to do environmental studies of the lake. Mr. Rodriguez said he wanted to be sure that they knew that area citizens are very against the removal of the egrets from the lake. Mr. Graham said he was aware of that and it would be considered as the design moved forward. He said that some de-silting may be needed, but that the islands could be preserved. Ms. Platt asked what discussions were held regarding the egret population. Mr. Graham said he was not at the meeting, but that the egrets and other wildlife are being considered as the project progresses.

7.0 Public Comments

There were no public comments made.

8.0 Adjourn

Ms. Lizcano said that since there were no further comments, the meeting was adjourned.

Action Items

- SAAH Meeting

Attachments

- Sign-in Sheets
- Workshop Presentation
- Handouts from Presentations

Distribution

- WCROC
- SARA Staff
- Consultant Team