



**Minutes of the
Westside Creeks Restoration
Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting
October 8, 2013**

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm in the San Antonio River Authority's Boardroom, 100 East Guenther Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Elected Officials Present:

Roberto G. Rodriguez, San Antonio River Authority Board Director, District 2

Committee Members Present:

Olga Lizcano, Co-Chair
Janet Dietel, San Antonio Conservation Society
Lourdes Galvan, West SA Chamber
Abigail Kinnison, Beacon Hill NA
Al Salgado, UTSA
Eduardo Hinojosa, Los Bexarenos Genealogical Society

Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair
Patti Radle, San Antonio ISD
Abel Ramirez, San Antonio Wheelman
Gabriel Velasquez, Avenida Guadalupe
Erwin DeLuna, United San Antonio Pow Wow

Staff and Members of the Public Present:

Norm Lewis, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Conference Call)
Fred Blumberg, Arcadis
Skye Curd
Rudy R. Farias, SARA
Rosemary Geyer
Marianne Kumley, SARA
Brian Mast, SARA

Danny Allen, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Conference Call)
Russell Persyn, SARA
Linda Whitaker, SARA
Jerry Geyer, San Pedro Creek Subcommittee
Jeff Tyler, SARA
John Butchkosky
Kim Elorriaga

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1: Welcome

Co-Chair Robert Ramirez called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2: Approval of Minutes for August 13, 2013

Mr. Ramirez presented the minutes to the Committee and asked if there were any corrections. Hearing none, the minutes were approved as presented.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3: Update and Discussion on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Feasibility Study

Norm Lewis and Danny Allen with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) briefed on the Feasibility Study. The recommended plan was approved by the Corps' Headquarters in April 2013. The Agency Technical Review has been completed and certified along with the Public Review. Currently, the study is going through the Independent External Peer Review and Policy Review. Mr. Lewis said there has been a cost change for Alternative 6. The initial environmental restoration estimate was \$39 million with \$3.9 million for recreation features. Now the cost is \$62.5 million, \$56.8 for environmental restoration and \$5.7 for recreation features. The cost increase is the result of recalculating the cost based upon the Corps' updated Cost Book, additional labor for planting, watering trees, herbicides, and equipment, increased pre-engineering and design estimates, real estate costs for trail connections, bridge reinforcement, and contingency increases.

Mr. Lewis invited questions.

Mr. Ramirez asked if Option 7 could be reconsidered if funding was obtained from the SAWS settlement with the federal government. Mr. Lewis said he would have to look into it; however, at this point a lot has to do with what caused the cost to be created and not who bears the cost. He said relocation of sewer lines is a project cost. If SAWS replaced the utilities at their own expense, the feasibility study changes causing a possible reevaluation and reformulation of the study, along with a new public review period, a new Agency Technical Review, and possibly a new Policy Review. Since this would considerably delay the date of the study, Mr. Lewis was not sure the Vertical Team would approve. Mr. Lewis said it is not impossible; however there may be a lot more issues involved than just eliminating the utility relocation expense.

Gabriel Velasquez asked if the \$20 million cost increase will affect the feasibility of Option 6. Mr. Lewis answered that at this point the Fort Worth District, the Project Delivery Team and SARA still feel the cost is reasonable. The \$62.5 million falls within the cost range of \$50 and \$100 million initially reported to the Vertical Team. The Fort Worth District is prepared to explain to Headquarters that the cost increase does not change the study's results and conclusions.

Mr. Velasquez asked Mr. Lewis his opinion on the Corps considering Martinez Creek as a separate Corps project using the argument of the success of Mission Reach and the Westside Creeks projects along with the possible improvements by SAWS. Mr. Lewis said he wasn't sure that was possible. He said it would be handled like any other project where the local sponsor makes a case for national significance to the Corps.

Eduardo Hinojosa asked if the Corps charges City of San Antonio for work and does the Corps sometimes say no because of expense. Mr. Lewis said a new feasibility study would require a 50/50 cost share agreement along with all the usual processes and approvals, and yes, the Corps sometimes says no because a project is too expensive.

Lourdes Galvan asked if the land for the trail connections was purchased which contributed to the cost change, or were right-of-ways obtained. Mr. Lewis said he thought the estimate was based on right-of-way easements but would have to get back with the answer.

Erwin DeLuna asked if the information and studies done on Martinez Creek could be utilized on a future project. Mr. Lewis said a study approved at a later date could use previously collected data and models.

Mr. Rodriguez asked if it was the Corps study that discovered the bridges were weak or deficient. Mr. Lewis replied that the bridges were not weak or deficient, however it is the experience of the Corps that excavations done near a bridge could possibly undermine the piers. A proactive measure would be adding a contingency value or including the armoring costs as part of the study. Mr. Rodriguez voiced a concern regarding the bridge built by the City over the Alazan and Apache Creeks at Laredo Street and asked if the City had coordinated with the Corps.

Mr. Hinojosa asked Mr. Lewis if Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) pays for any part of the project. Mr. Lewis answered that since this project is between the Corps and SARA, there would not be any direct funds from TPWD unless SARA is able to secure funds from them.

Mr. Velasquez asked if there was a way to include the Martinez Creek in Option 6 or 7 contingent on possible funding from SAWS instead of it being considered a new project or affecting the existing project approved by the Corps. Mr. Lewis answered that the Corps would not allow anything in the project that would be contingent on what may or may not happen. Two viable solutions would be an independent study cost shared with the Corps or a local sponsor seeking their own project.

Mr. DeLuna said he heard there was a significant amount of money set aside in the contingency for bridge reinforcement and asked how much it was projected to be. Mr. Lewis said he did not know the specific amount but would get that information for him. Originally the cost review team lowered the contingency cost by adding some bridge reinforcements.

Abigail Kinnison asked what the cost difference was between Alternative 6 and 7. Mr. Lewis answered \$15.4 million.

Ms. Kinnison had concerns about the cost increase for the project considering it was because of cost that Alternative 6 was chosen over Alternative 7. Mr. Lewis explained that the alternatives can only be compared by incremental cost analysis. Under the new cost, the last unit of habitat cost \$5,000 more when going from Alternative 6 to Alternative 7 which makes it difficult to make the case that it is economically worthwhile.

Ms. Kinnison mentioned that some of the infrastructure SAWS will be doing on Martinez would bring the estimate of Alternative 7 closer to Alternative 6. Mr. Lewis said that things do change over time before construction starts but a baseline condition has to be decided on. The assumption is that all utility relocations will have to be relocated to complete the project. If that is no longer the case, then a reevaluation of the study is required and he doesn't think there is funding or time to reevaluate the entire study and go through all of the review processes again.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4: Update and Discussion on San Pedro Creek

Russell Persyn said SARA is currently working with the County to receive guidance on the San Pedro Creek contract and tentatively scheduled for the October 15 Commissioners Court meeting.

Mr. Persyn addressed issues on Agenda Item 3. He said SARA met with SAWS to discuss the EPA consent decree. SAWS is in the process of evaluating the system over the next 4 ½ to 5 years and then scheduling the improvements over the remaining 5 years at which time they will determine if Martinez Creek is included on the schedule. At this time they are scheduling work on eminent problems identified as a current issue, however they will not make decisions on any large scale improvements until they have completed the analysis.

Ms. Kinnison asked if SAWS was doing the analysis in-house or hiring a consultant. Mr. Persyn said he thinks they have consultants programed to conduct the analysis. He mentioned that SAWS is replacing a portion of line along Apache Creek which is part of the normal maintenance. Jeff Tyler has been coordinating with them on the Elmendorf Lake Park project. Mr. Persyn said SAWS has agreed to coordinate with them on their prioritization analysis in relation to the Corps project requirements.

Mr. Ramirez asked for any questions concerning San Pedro Creek.

Jerry Geyer mentioned that the maps in the newspaper regarding Alternative 6 within the VIA Street Car Project did not include the modifications. He said the VIA website had the current modifications. He said there will be a lot more changes in the future including how the Northwest Quadrant Economic Impact Study impacts San Pedro Creek. He asked Mr. Persyn the status of the study. Mr. Persyn said he didn't know, however they have received economic study commissioned by SARA, and will possibly have a final report at the next meeting.

Mr. Velasquez asked what was stopping SAWS from accepting the Martinez Creek condition as eminent since it is a quality of life issue. Mr. Persyn answered that in order to do the channel work; the lines running parallel to Martinez Creek would need to be buried deeper. Even if this gets on SAWS' priority list, they may use a more cost effective measure such as relining the existing lines. If they deem the system too old, then they would work with them to bury the lines so this project would not have to.

Mr. Velasquez asked how the creek is impacted by the law suit and consent decree regarding leaking sewer lines. He also asked if it was SARA's responsibility to provide a recommendation regarding future water quality and future SAWS planning.

Mr. Persyn answered that he believes the SARA Board takes the position on the stream standard being of contact recreation standards. However, at some locations like the Westside Creeks those standards are exceeded mostly due to E. coli bacteria. SAWS is identifying and addressing issues that are occurring now. SARA met with SAWS last week and they are going to see if there are any eminent problems in the Martinez Creek area that have been identified. If there are, they will recommend adjustments be made even in the short term so water quality can improve. He mentioned the Implementation Plan whereby the State has initiated a process to achieve contact recreation standard on an area covering the upper San Antonio River Basin extending down to Northern Wilson County. SARA, SAWS and various City and agricultural entities make up the stakeholders involved in this process. When they originally did the watershed protection plan for upper San Antonio, the zoo was identified as a major source of E. coli bacteria. An Ultra Violet System has been designed and will go on line soon to address the E. coli bacteria.

Mr. Ramirez requested a note be added to the record regarding how the topic of polluted water is continually brought up at meetings. He said he hopes they can work with SAWS and the County in their flood control and purification efforts.

Mr. Persyn said they discussed with SAWS the public's concern about water quality. SAWS has provided contact information to report locations and issues.

Mr. Ramirez mentioned that Item 7 will follow Item 5. Ms. Olga Lizcano introduced Item 5.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5: Update and Discussion on Elmendorf Lake Park and Westside Creeks Hike and Bike Trails

Jeff Tyler provided a brief update on Elmendorf Lake Park and the Westside Creeks Hike and Bike Trails project. The project is currently in the design phase and treated as three independent efforts: Elmendorf Lake Park; Apache and San Pedro; and Martinez and Alazan. Tomorrow is the 70% design phase public meeting regarding Apache and San Pedro Creek. The consultant team is hoping to get the plans to 95% for Alazan and Martinez in December and Apache and San Pedro Creek in February. Also the Trails Project is being funded now. SARA has been coordinating construction time with the SAWS line replacement project on Apache Creek which is a critical component of the project. He encouraged the Committee to look at the updates on the website and give him feedback.

Ms. Kinnison asked if the Westside Creeks logo could be included in the trail signage. Mr. Tyler said he would request that.

Mr. Ramirez asked if the issue had been settled regarding the property with the restaurant. Mr. Tyler said they are negotiating the purchase of the property. The plan is to use the property as a stormwater Best Management Practice (BMP) and possibly incorporate public art into the parcel. He also mentioned another vacant piece of private property being purchased near Woodlawn Lake to be used for a trail node adjacent to the casting pond.

Ms. Galvan said at the meeting she heard some property owners want to sell and asked if they have approached SARA. Mr. Tyler said he didn't know if there was any additional feedback other than what was already received at the public meetings. At the second workshop, a couple of property owners said they were willing to sell their property. However, property can only be purchased outside of the park limits if there is a plan for it.

Ms. Galvan asked what the proposed bridge would be used for and if they had a Memorandum of Understanding from Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) to use the parking lot to go onto the island. Mr. Tyler said at this time the bridge is only going to serve as a connection to the public trail system.

Ms. Galvan asked if the OLLU fence will remain by the existing trails. Mr. Tyler said it will remain. They are considering installing a type of card access gate for the students to be able to come to the park.

Mr. Hinojosa asked if it has been decided to put in a swimming pool. Mr. Tyler said that a new pool will be put in since the existing pool is cracked.

There was discussion concerning the Methadone Clinic by the park which Ms. Galvan said was for sale. They talked about purchasing the property possibly for extra parking or a maintenance facility. Mr. Tyler said they are limited to what they can do with the park money. They were able to purchase the parcel with the restaurant because it was in the flood plain.

Mr. Velasquez reiterated that where Buena Vista and Commerce Streets meet, the streets need to be heavily textured to slow down traffic. Mr. Tyler said they are investigating different ways to assure that the crossing is safe.

Ms. Lizcano asked about the number of parking spaces in the park. Mr. Tyler said he would have to get back with her on an answer. Ms. Lizcano expressed a desire to purchase more property to increase the parking area. Mr. Tyler said they currently have the minimum number of spaces necessary, however they are designing the park so they can accommodate as many, if not more cars than today. Mr. Tyler also mentioned how SARA is promoting the improvement of water quality which includes minimal pavement.

Mr. Velasquez suggested parking on the street which would also help slow traffic. Mr. Tyler said he didn't think it was feasible because a lane would have to be eliminated since the streets are very narrow. Ms. Galvan suggested asking the City Council person about the City purchasing the property for parking.

Patti Radle asked if there is an open entrance to the park at Cesar Chavez at the east end of the Park because there is an elementary school located there and it would be great if the students had access. Mr. Tyler responded the park can be accessed from Cesar Chavez.

Ms. Kinnison was in agreement with SARA about their water quality standpoint concerning not paving. She suggested encouraging people to ride bikes and walk. Also there is an excellent transit system access to the park.

Mr. Velasquez mentioned that some people can't afford bicycles and also people need to be able to bring barbeque supplies. He said parking spaces can be increased by redesigning the street, which will also help to slow down traffic. Mr. Tyler said he would convey these ideas to the City and their stakeholders. Also, they have met with OLLU about using their parking lot through a special card access gate.

Mr. Tyler mentioned March 14 is the 95% submittal. He also showed some renderings. There is a public meeting on October 9 at Mission Verde for Apache and San Pedro Creek Hike and Bike Trail portion.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6: Citizens to be Heard

Skye Curd requested that all the materials used for this project be products made in America. She requested that the Elmendorf Lake sign stay up because at 24th and Commerce Streets there is a huge sign for Our Lady of the Lake which leads people to believe that this is their property. Also, by not building the bridge that connects to the OLLU side of the lake, the project would be able to purchase the methadone clinic. She suggested working with the restaurant owner to possibly move it aside, work with city leaders to waive permit cost, inspection fees, etc.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7: Recognition of Mr. Roberto G. Rodriguez, SARA Board Director, District 2 and Westside Creeks Visionary.

Mr. Ramirez, Ms. Lizcano, and Ms. Radle recognized Mr. Rodriguez in appreciation of all his work by presenting him with a plaque. Mr. Velasquez made a motion that the committee vote for Mr. Rodriguez as chair emeritus so his leadership, knowledge and vision can be retained. Mr. Ramirez agreed but said first it needs to be approved by the SARA board.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8: Next Meeting – Tuesday, December 10, 2013

Ms. Lizcano announced the next meeting will be Tuesday, December 10, 2013, at 6:00 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9: Adjourn

Since there were no other comments or statements, the meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.