



Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting October 13, 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; Santiago Garcia, Jr., Westside Development Corporation; George Martínez, Woodlawn Lake NA; Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Association; Lourdes Galvan, West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce; Theodore Ozuna, Donaldson Terrace N.A.; Jose Jimenez, UTSA; Jude Valdez, UTSA; Abel Ramirez, San Antonio Wheelmen; and Dr. Catherine Rainwater, Our Lady of the Lake University. **Elected Officials** – Roberto Rodriguez, SARA Board Member. **Staff and Consultants** – Rudy Farias, SARA; Gloria Rodriguez, SARA; Ed Garza, AECOM; Jeremy Hanzlik, AECOM; Rudy Rivera, RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc., and William Long, RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc. **Members of the Public** – Irby Hightower, Co-Chair San Antonio River Improvements Project Oversight Committee; Xavier Gonzalez; Tracey Thomas; and Narcisso Cano.

1.0 Welcome & Introductions

Robert Ramirez, WCROC Co-Chair, called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. He introduced his co-chair, Olga Lizcano, who thanked everyone for their support and added that the project has come a long way. She said they have met with various organizations and they are all in favor of the project.

2.0 Approval of the Meeting Minutes (September 2009)

Ms. Lizcano then asked everyone to review the minutes from September 2009. She asked if anyone would motion for the approval of the minutes. Mr. Ramirez motioned that the minutes be approved and Abigail Kinnison, Beacon Hill N.A., seconded the motion. Motion passed by consensus.

3.0 Similarity of Westside Creeks to the San Antonio River Improvements Project

Mr. Ramirez then introduced Irby Hightower, Co-Chair San Antonio River Improvements Project Oversight Committee. Mr. Ramirez added that Mr. Hightower Co-Chairs with Lila Cockrell. Mr. Hightower started by discussing the proposal process for the San Antonio River Improvements Project and the search for a consultant team. He then discussed the phases of the project, stating that each phase needed different firms to ensure a great result. He mentioned that the negotiating process was a very difficult part of the project. Mr. Hightower said the Mission Reach is a federal project and the Museum Reach is a local project. He added that the project managers were very tuned in to the needs and desires of the community. He said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers makes all the final decisions and that working with them was a very linear, step-by-step, process. He added that the San Antonio River Authority was in negotiations to become the project manager.

Mr. Hightower said the first phase of the Museum Reach opened in May 2009. He said the next phase, called the Mission Reach, will hopefully be completed in 2011. He mentioned the other phases are still in the bidding process and that the southern portions are more difficult because of the added ecosystem restoration portion of the project. He said native plants are not as resilient as the non-native plants that have been brought to the area, which is what makes restoration a difficult process. Mr. Hightower said everything that will be planted is coming from local farms and using native seeds. He added that the San Antonio River Foundation has been a very active partner. He said they have been raising money for the entire improvements project.

Mr. Ramirez said that the San Antonio River Improvements Project set the template for other organizations to follow in restoration projects. He thanked Mr. Hightower for his comments and for coming to speak with the committee. Roberto Rodriguez, SARA Board Member, also thanked Mr. Hightower and added that everyone is excited about the San Antonio River Improvements Project.

Ms. Kinnison asked if his project had the ability to be completed without the use of the federal government and would they rather have raised the funds locally. Mr. Hightower said that if the project could have been done locally, then it would have been a much smoother and quicker process. Santiago Garcia, Westside Development Corporation, asked how much of the project affected neighborhoods and local communities. Mr. Hightower said that part of the master plan was to look at economic development impacts. He said the design guidelines that came out of the process helped the community understand the project even better than the city hoped they would. He added that the one piece of the project that is still missing is a general overview plan that encompasses everything put together.

George Martínez, Woodlawn Lake N.A., asked that other than keeping it local are there any other cost saving benefits Mr. Hightower can share. Mr. Hightower said that the quicker the process can be completed, the better. Mr. Garcia asked if an economic impact analysis had been done. Mr. Hightower said a rudimentary analysis was done by the project team.

4.0 October Public Workshop #2

Ms. Lizcano then asked Ed Garza, AECOM, to speak about the findings from the September Work Sessions. Mr. Garza started by saying he wanted to highlight the September Work Sessions. He thanked everyone for their participation, especially those who came to more than one meeting. In his PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Garza pointed out pictures from inside the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Theatre, where the week-long series of work sessions was held. He mentioned that each subcommittee and the Oversight Committee were able to meet and discuss their specific catalyst sites. Mr. Garza briefly discussed Alazán Creek, pointing out on a slide the location of the catalyst sites. He said there were a lot of great comments and discussions, including an informative story from Mr. Rodriguez about the Battle of the Alazán. Mr. Garza said the catalyst sites were areas along each creek that might be opportunities to start restoration.

He then discussed Apache Creek near Our Lady of the Lake University. He mentioned that they looked at the lake and park improvements as a catalyst site. He added that they examined existing land to support the project, as well as possible new designs. Then he used a new map in his presentation to show the “produce market” section catalyst site on Apache Creek along S. Laredo Street and Navidad Street. He discussed the existing make-up of the area and used a rendering to show what the area could look like.

Mr. Garza then discussed Martínez Creek and the first catalyst site, near Fredericksburg Road. He said that this catalyst site already had land purchased after the 1998 flood and is full of opportunities. He mentioned that one of the concepts was reshaping the creek, but the final recommendation left the creek shape in the more natural form and attempted to utilize areas on both sides. Then he discussed the first catalyst site of San Pedro Creek and said that it was proposed by the subcommittee members. He said it was the site of the future Federal Courthouse. He mentioned that the discussions revolved around creating a new image for San Pedro Creek. Then he discussed the second catalyst site on San Pedro Creek, near the San Antonio River. He said that there are already many improvements happening in that area, but that the creek improvements will make it even better. Then he discussed the third catalyst site, where the creek intersects under Interstate Highway 35. He said that there is potential for a recreational, residential and mixed-use project.

Mr. Garza then discussed the October Workshop #2. He explained that it will be held at El Progreso on Saturday, October 24, 2009 and will be comprised of two identical sessions to accommodate the community. He mentioned that there would be a morning and afternoon session. He said there will be a presentation of the process, vision development, catalyst sites discussions, and concept alternatives. Mr. Garza then discussed the outreach and said the meeting will be advertised in the neighborhood press. He said flyers will be distributed throughout the community. He added that postcards and door hangers will be sent to property owners within 500 feet of the creeks. Mr. Garza then asked Gloria Rodriguez, SARA, to add to the outreach discussion. She said that two advertisements were placed in La Prensa newspaper. She added that the postcards will be ready tomorrow and will also be sent out tomorrow. She said they decided to print more postcards instead of using a “robo-dialing” system. She stated that if anyone is interested in receiving postcards to pass out, she would deliver them.

Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Association, asked if the schools would let us pass out flyers to the students. Mr. Garza said that Mr. Lopez, with SAISD, volunteered to assist in the SAISD neighborhood schools. Lourdes Galvan, West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, asked how many people were notified by the postcards sent out to those within 500 feet of the creeks. Ms. Rodriguez said that a little over 2000 postcards were sent out to people and businesses within 500 feet of the creeks. She then asked Dr. Rainwater, Our Lady of the Lake (OLLU) to speak about her efforts at the university. Dr. Rainwater said that there is a lot of interest by the students to get involved in the process. She mentioned that she requested an E-news article to be placed in the student paper and it appeared yesterday.

Ms. Galvan suggested contacting the neighborhood associations and said they have websites that can allow for easy contact to improve outreach. Mr. Ramirez mentioned that getting the architecture departments involved at schools would be a good thing. Ms. Kinnison said that tomorrow night is Bike Night and she could pass out flyers if she could obtain some. Ms. Rodriguez said she would get her some postcards.

5.0 Discussion Item – SA Alternative Housing Project Loan

Mr. Ramirez asked Rudy Farias, SARA, to give a presentation on the San Antonio Alternative Housing Project and proposed financial assistance. Mr. Farias started his PowerPoint presentation by pointing on a map where the San Antonio Alternative Housing Corporation (SAAHC) project is located. He used photos to show the terrain and ecosystem of the area. He said that the section of Apache Creek next to the project is like an urban oasis that has been able to grow, while being untouched. Mr. Farias pointed out a picture of a turtle laying eggs in the brush alongside the creek. He added that SAAHC has money to move forward with the improvements due to the project being part of the tax increment reinvestment zone number two project plan. He then went through a series of photos to explain where the park development would take place and how the ecosystem will

benefit. He mentioned that the SAAHC needs \$300,000 to complete their project and that SARA is looking into providing financial assistance, which would be paid back. He then discussed some of the safety details, like bridges and fences, which would protect the new areas. He added that there would be benches, trash cans, signage, and workout stations. Mr. Farias said the Apache Creek Subcommittee recommended that SARA act on moving forward with the financial assistance to SAAHC. He said he is looking for a recommendation from the Oversight Committee to present to the SARA Board of Directors.

Mr. Ramirez asked if there was a motion to support the financial assistance request in the amount of \$300,000 to SAAHA. Ms. Galvan motioned that the Oversight Committee support the financial assistance request. Dr. Rainwater seconded the motion and added that the Apache Creek Subcommittee was eager to support the SAAHC project. She mentioned that she has discussed this issue with the President of OLLU and he is also in support. Ms. Walsh asked if this project will work with the visions shared during the September Work Sessions. Mr. Farias said the trails along the SAAHC project would not be as wide as what has been proposed for the Westside Creeks Restoration Project.

Ms. Kinnison asked who would be maintaining the SAAHC project. Mr. Farias said that the city would take care of maintenance. Ms. Kinnison said that she would suggest that a written agreement be made that explains when maintenance would occur. Santiago Garcia, Westside Development Corporation, said he agreed with Ms. Kinnison. Ms. Galvan said the project would eventually belong to the city, but asked what investment the city would have. Mr. Farias said that the City would take care of the maintenance and upkeep of the project area, which is already being considered a park.

Dr. Jimenez, UTSA, asked how many bridges would be created. Mr. Farias said that there would be a total of six bridges that cross the drainage ways. Mr. Rodriguez said the bridges that are proposed are similar to those at Brackenridge Park. George Martínez, Woodlawn Lake N.A., asked if there is any parking in the area. Mr. Farias said there would be on-street parking. Ted Ozuna, Donaldson Terrace N.A., said that dead-end streets could be used as parking. Mr. Ramirez added that there are some abandoned lots that might be able to be used for parking in the future. Ms. Kinnison asked what the length of the trail was. Mr. Farias said it is 0.8 miles long. Ms. Kinnison then asked if bicycles would be allowed. Mr. Farias said he was not sure. Ms. Kinnison asked him to check on whether bicycles would be allowed. Mr. Farias then said he would look into the bicycle issue.

Mr. Garcia asked if the Westside Creeks project could enhance this SAAHC project. Mr. Farias said that the design team thinks that enhancements could occur with the Westside Creeks Restoration Project. Mr. Garcia added that it would be a good complement for Rosedale Park. Mr. Ramirez asked what the level of security would be. Mr. Farias said with a substation so close to this section, the police would be available, but he could not comment definitively as to what security would be available at this point. Mr. Ramirez suggested the use of panic buttons to alert the police substation. Mr. Martínez asked if lighting would be installed. Mr. Farias said that there would be lighting along the trails. Ms. Kinnison asked who would be paying the electric bill for the lights. Mr. Farias said he was not sure who would be paying for the electricity, but that he would look into it.

Ms. Kinnison proposed an amendment that the City of San Antonio develop a maintenance agreement describing who is doing what on the trail, and with what frequency. Ms. Walsh seconded the motion. Ms. Galvan said that it should be discussed with the Parks and Recreation department. Mr. Ramirez wanted the record to show that the amendment carried unanimously and without opposition. Ms. Kinnison said she used to work for the city and added that without anything in writing, the responsibility may get passed from one entity

to another. She also motioned that “robo-calls” not be used in advertising the October Workshop. Ms. Walsh seconded the motion and the motion carried without opposition. Ms. Lizcano said that the maintenance amendment should include maintenance as needed due to unforeseen events, such as flooding.

6.0 Miscellaneous Items

Ms. Kinnison asked where the graphics were for the third catalyst site on Martínez Creek. Mr. Garza said he would look into getting that slide for future meetings. Ms. Kinnison suggested that street names be added to the maps at the public workshop as well.

Mr. Rodriguez said that Dr. Flores, St. Mary’s University, regretted not being able to make it, but said he would be at the Saturday workshop. Mr. Ramirez introduced Lourdes Galvan, who walked in late, as the new committee member representing the West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Kinnison held up a map that showed the inner-city streetcar plan from VIA. She wanted to make the committee and consultant team aware that the plan is in progress. She added that the plan is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Ms. Lizcano said they approached the linear creeks advisory board and asked them for their support. She added that they were asked to extend the 1/8 sales tax increase benefiting the linear creeks to include the Westside Creeks Restoration Project. Mr. Rodriguez said the board voted to include the creeks in the funding cycle process. He said the city council has the final approval. He added that the SAAHA project will be a great model of what the Westside Creeks will be when completed. Mr. Ramirez said the board did not vote to fund the Westside Creeks in name, but rather they did so in general to include the Westside Creeks Restoration Project. Mr. Rodriguez said that the voters have asked for this project to move forward as soon as possible.

Ms. Walsh said she met with the aide to Congressman Ciro Rodriguez and they suggested briefing the Congressman as soon as possible. She said that he may be able to obtain funds through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Ms. Lizcano said she wanted to point out that the linear creeks project will not have lighting.

7.0 Next Meeting

Mr. Ramirez announced that the next Oversight Committee meeting will be held on November 10, 2009. He then asked if the phone calls would continue to remind the committee members of each meeting. Mr. Farias said that SARA will make the phone calls in the future.

8.0 Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned.

Action Items

- Ms. Kinnison asked who would be paying the electric bill for the lights. Mr. Farias said that he would look into it.
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Attachments

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

Distribution

- WCROC
- SARA Staff
- Consultant Team