

**Westside Creeks Restoration**

**Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting**

**San Antonio River Authority**

**100 E. Guenther**

**Tuesday, December 8, 2015**

**Notes**

**Committee Members Present**

Olga Lizcano, Co-Chair

Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair

Gabriel Velasquez, Avenida Guadalupe

Abigail Rodriguez, Beacon Hill NA

Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Assoc.

Cary Guffey, Our Lady of the Lake

Stella de la Garza, SA Conservation Society

Abel Ramirez, San Antonio Wheelman

Evelynn Mitchell, St. Mary’s University

Kamala Platt, TexasTejano.com

Albert Salgado, UTSA

Erwin DeLuna, United SA Pow Wow Inc.

Karen Weehler, Woodlawn Lake NA

**Staff and Public Present**

Lourdes Galvan, SARA Board Member

Rudy Farias, SARA

Kerry Averyt, SARA

Sonia Jimenez, Ximenes & Assoc.

Bridget Hinze, SARA

Anita Fernandez, OCI Group

Jose A Vidal, OCI Group

Perla Alarcon, SAMHD

1. **Welcome**

Mr. Ramirez opened the meeting and Mrs. Lizcano thanked everyone for attending. The committee members, staff, consultants, and the public introduced themselves. Cary Guffey, Our Lady of the Lake University, was asked about classes being held at Elmendorf Lake Park and replied bacteria levels are currently being measured annually as well as tracking the turtle population. As far as he knows, these measurements will continue and there may be additional studies conducted once the park improvements are complete.

1. **Calendar Items**

Mr. Ramirez announced a community meeting for the Martinez Creek residents residing on Magnolia and Mistletoe Streets. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 10, 2016 at 6 p.m. at the Woodlawn Community Center. He then reminded the committee of the standing meetings listed below.

* San Pedro Creek Subcommittee Meeting – January 14, 2016 at 8:30 a.m. at 100 E. Guenther, Boardroom
* Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee Meeting – February 9, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. at 100 E. Guenther, Boardroom

1. **Approval of Meeting Minutes for October 13, 2015**

Erwin DeLuna made a motion to approve the notes and Abigail Rodriguez seconded. It was suggested that another bullet be added to page 4, last bullet under agenda item IV. The bullet should read, “the area between 24th Street and Commerce (not the intersection) along the University property is landscaped and easy to access.” With this addition, there were no objections and the minutes were approved.

1. **Status Report on Westside Creeks Improvements Projects**

*Westside Creeks Linear Creekway Trails*

Rudy Farias, San Antonio River Authority, reported on the hike and bike trails. The Apache and San Pedro trails are slated for completion in April 2016. The trail will run from Zarzamora to the confluence with the San Antonio River. Mr. Farias showed progress photos and reminded the committee that regular updates can be found on westsidecreeks.com.

The question was raised regarding coordination with the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) and the possibility for a direct connection to the trail from their property. Mr. Farias replied there was not a direct connection but SAHA could tie into the trail, at their expense, if a direct connection was desired. There was another question about the area by the concrete sidewalk not having grass and the possibility of putting rocks to clean the stormwater. Mr. Farias indicated that sod will be planted on both sides of the trail. A couple of committee members suggested the area looks great for pollinators and asked if there was any opportunity for input. Kerry Averyt, San Antonio River Authority, informed the committee that native seed mix is used on slopes and pollinators are atypical because the City scrapes the slopes annually.

Mr. Farias reminded the committee that SARA is working with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the ecosystem restoration and the plantings will be part of the process. The next phase of the USACE effort will be the design but federal funds need to be identified. Local entities will contribute 35 percent with the federal government funding 65 percent. A committee member suggested there be an advisory committee of experts to determine the plantings and the possibility of using pollinators. Another committee member suggested getting community input for shade. Mr. Farias let the committee know that the Mission Reach ecosystem restoration will serve as a model for the restoration of the Westside Creeks channel work and the committee suggestions will be noted for the future effort.

With regard to the Alazan and Martinez Creek trails, the estimated completion has been extended to April 2016. Both trails are about a half-mile long.

Additional design work is needed for the Alazan trail area at Mistletoe and Magnolia. Mr. Farias showed the progress photos. A committee member suggested designing for a rain garden since the trail will be graded to drain. The Alazan trail will terminate across from SAHA’s Lincoln Courts at Lombrano. Mr. Farias stated that in order to take the trail through the Lincoln Courts area, there would need to be coordination with SAHA. Funding for future trail extensions would be funded by the City’s recently passed proposition for linear creekway trails development.

The issue of safety and lighting was raised. Mr. Farias explained that the trails will be open from dawn to dusk with a possible exception for Apache Creek trails since it has existing lighting. Several committee members urged coordination with the City, SAHA, and SARA to form agreements on access and safety before the trail improvements are complete. Mr. Farias further explained that markers will be installed to identify the trail location in emergency situations. A committee member, who is a member of the COSA Linear Creeks Board, also suggested using trail stewards and volunteers who carry first aid and bike repair kits. Citizen input was also encouraged to determine areas of concern and garner support for more lighting and safety features. CPS Energy was mentioned as a possibility of doing a pilot in some of the areas that need lighting the most.

*Elmendorf Lake Park*

Mr. Farias continued with a progress report on the Elmendorf Lake Park construction. The swimming pool was demolished and a larger aquatic area is being recommended as part of the COSA 2017 Bond. Conduits will be installed as part of this project to allow for a new pool at a later date. The larger aquatic area may have a competitive lap pool and it will built by Shore Avenue and 19th Street. The location of the existing pool will be converted into green open space. SARA Board Member Lourdes Galvan explained that the community approved the plan for a new pool and is bothered that the decision was made not to include it. She suggested the committee members meet with Councilwoman Gonzales. Several of the committee members agreed with Ms. Galvan. Mr. Farias will meet with Parks and Recreation to get a status update on the bond process. Mr. Ramirez suggested this is an issue of transparency. Committee members agreed and noted this area is lacking in aquatic facilities.

Mr. Farias continued with the update. The existing playground will be replaced with a new one now that additional funding has been identified. He showed the progress photos of the pedestrian bridges, fishing pier, and trails. Completion is scheduled for June 2016.

Gabriel Velasquez made a motion to study safety measures along Alazan Creek. Karen Weehler seconded. Co-Chair Mr. Ramirez revised the motion slightly and stated, *this committee recommends that the San Antonio River Authority conduct a pilot study through consultation with neighborhood organizations to assess options for safety measures in Lincoln Courts dark areas along the Alazan Creek.* Discussion included looking at best practices in other areas and expanding the study to include all the creeks. Clarification was made regarding the expected outcome of such a study. The desired outcome would be a feasible solution that determines partnerships with a road map to serve as a template for other similar scenarios. Mr. Farias suggested having the City present their approach noting that trail safety is an ongoing conversation. The committee suggested the motion be expanded to include all the participants (SARA, community, City, CPS Energy, Police, Parks, etc.), have best practices encouraged and used at other sites, as well as completing the pilot before February 2016. The motion was amended to include the following: …*consultation with various affected communities including SAHA Lincoln Courts, City of San Antonio, and others to assess options for safety measures in Lincoln Courts dark areas along the Alazan Creek with best practices encouraged.* Mr. Ramirez stated this effort could yield something that can be applied to this location and perhaps others. The motion passed with 10 in favor, one opposed, and two abstaining.

Abigail Rodriguez made a motion to *Direct San Antonio River Authority staff to update and report to this committee, at the February 2016 meeting, any discussions with the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) and other large property owners with direct adjacency along the creeks for improved access to the trails.* Kamala Platt seconded. A committee member suggested this motion is not necessary since impacts to these properties have already been considered. Ms. Rodriguez expressed concern that access will be requested after the contractor’s work is complete. She would like for SAHA to be given the opportunity to take advantage while the contractors are still working. Mr. Farias discussed coordination efforts with SAHA, the Boys and Girls Club, and KIPP Academy. Co-Chair Mrs. Lizcano asked if large property owners have already been contacted. Another committee member suggested having something in writing if these property owners said they do not want access. It was also suggested that “encourage stakeholder involvement” get added to the motion. The amendment was not accepted and a vote on the original motion was taken. The motion passed with all in favor and none opposed.

Co-Chair Mr. Ramirez made a subsequent motion to *draft a letter to* *express in our [WCROC] strongest terms disappointment at the lack of transparency and deletions to the changes in the design of the Elmendorf Lake Park and request a meeting with Councilwoman Gonzales to reinstate the water area including the pool at the earliest possible time.* Evelynn Mitchell seconded. Mr. Ramirez went on to state concerns about dredging and other items that are not happening but the swimming pool is a major item. He feels this committee was left in the dark and the community will be disappointed. Further, if the pool is financed with 2017 Bond money, it could be 2022 before it is complete. Another committee member supported Mr. Ramirez’s statements and added this was a long-term planning process with a lot of community involvement over the years. Mr. Farias stated that City staff looked at the cost and decided it was too expensive. In consultation with the councilwoman’s office, it was agreed and suggested funding for a new pool be included in the 2017 Bond. [Since this meeting, Mr. Farias learned the swimming pool is estimated to cost one million dollars.] Mr. Ramirez suggested the letter will have much more content and that it be sent to more people who are involved than just City Council. A couple of committee members expressed their disbelief that it was shown in the final plans and now it is gone as well as the amount of money spent to end up with less park amenities than before the improvements. A vote was taken. The motion passed with all in favor and none opposed.

1. **Update on San Pedro Creek Improvements Project**

Kerry Averyt, San Antonio River Authority, provided the project update. He began with the changes to the project scope in Phase 1, value engineering, and Phase 2 design. The landscape architect, Mario Schjetnan with Grupo de Diseño Urbano, came in mid-October for meetings, design collaboration with the team, and technical review. Two design charrettes were held and the revised design was presented to Bexar County Commissioners Court earlier today. The new design was approved.

The revised design is inspired by the history of San Pedro Springs. Inspiration was drawn from rain, wetlands, stones, springs, and the Blue Hole that supplies water to San Antonio River. The concept was refined to include interactive elements such as shallow pools for wading, seeing the action of water, and reflection. There will be some sort of artwork at the Tree of Life. Cypress trees are an important component and Mr. Schjetnan used the *Ahuehute* – wise old tree by the water – as a metaphor. The new design offers tile artwork and benches to sit and enjoy the linear park. For the inlet structure, some type of old-world craft (metal art) will be utilized for screening it. There will be a *mantiel* (spring) at the center of the Tree of Life with artwork. The water will flow into a reflection pool at Santa Rosa Street with floating trees and bench seating. There will be approximately forty cypress trees in the plaza. The images presented were for concept only and colors have not yet been decided. Mr. Averyt went on to explain that shallow pools (6”) will be incorporated to let people access the water and they will be seen from cars on the street.

The area from Santa Rosa to Martin Street will allow for more access to the water as well as seating. Bio filter swales will be installed to filter stormwater. From Martin Street to Travis, the Salinas Street pedestrian bridge will be demolished and replaced with a deck overlook. The overlook will have steps to get closer to the creek with a park area. The segment from Travis to Commerce will include the first impoundment just north of Travis Street. The impoundment will feed an acequia on the west bank that goes under Travis and creates a cascade down into the creek. This area will also include the revised amphitheater concept that will seat about 150. There will be a high bank paseo and a low bank paseo in this area. The area near Penner’s, where Dollar General is currently located, will be transformed into a floating island with water features and a path that will continue at creek level. Oak trees may be transplanted from the existing Frost Bank Building in this area. Commerce Street to Nueva is not as significant a change as the other segments. This area will have a new pedestrian bridge near the Spanish Governor’s Palace and the design team is exploring the idea of opening the wall at Culver Alley. The area near the future Federal courthouse location, in the segment from Nueva to Graham, will incorporate a decorative stone bottom. The same concept will continue from Graham to Cesar Chavez Boulevard. At Guadalupe Street, an arts plaza is being proposed and the area at Camp Street will be more focused on flood control with less architectural design and amenities. From the control gate, just north of S. Alamo Street, to the railroad bridge, this area will have only flood control components as part of this effort. The final segment, Phase 3, from the railroad bridge to the confluence will be funded at a later time.

Mr. Averyt concluded by saying the feedback from stakeholders and the community was the driving force behind the revisions and the revised design has received positive responses thus far. The question of bike lanes and signage to connect to the Westside Creeks was raised and Mr. Averyt replied that crosswalks are on the street level but bike lanes have not yet been considered. There will an opportunity to cross the creek at least at every street intersection with signage for handicap access. Ms. Lizcano asked if the amphitheater will be free and Mr. Averyt suggested that it could be but it is unknown at this time and the River Authority will not be part of the decision.

A couple of committee members expressed their gratitude for inclusion of cypress trees, landscaping, and shade. One member requested information on the specific type of cypress tree species being considered. This information will be provided at the next committee meeting. Mr. Averyt did elaborate on the irrigation being diverted from the San Antonio River to increase flow of the San Pedro Creek from 3,000 to 5,000 gallons per minute to as much as 450,000 gallons per minute.

Mr. Ramirez commented that the emphasis is now interaction with lots of accessibility and likes that the banks blend in and the concept is much more open. He also reported that the San Pedro Creek Subcommittee and property owners accepted it and liked it much more than the previous design.

Dr. Platt asked how the new plans will work with nature and expressed concern that planting only one type of tree could create an issue if there was an epidemic. Mr. Averyt assured the committee that other species will be planted but there will be a bigger concentration of cypress.Another committee member expressed that parking continues to be a concern for accessibility from people who do not live downtown. Finally, a member suggested that Mr. Schjetnan be recruited to work on the other Westside Creeks.

1. **Citizens to be Heard**

None.

1. **Miscellaneous Items**

Mr. Farias informed the committee that on Guadalupe Street, near the Avenida Guadalupe Association, a Westside Creeks holiday decoration has been installed on a light pole.

Gabriel Velasquez noted the discussion about Roberto Rodriguez being memorialized needs to be considered at a future meeting.

1. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:46 p.m.