



**Westside Creeks Restoration
Oversight Committee Meeting
San Antonio River Authority
100 E. Guenther
August 20, 2019
6:00 pm**

Committee Members Present

Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair
Skye Curd, Co-Chair
Matthew Purdy, Beacon Hill NA
Anne Parrish, Bexar Audubon Society
Joanne Walsh, Downtown Residents Assn
Briana Salas, Our Lady of the Lake University
Stella Tenorio-de la Garza, The Conservation Society
of San Antonio

Abel Ramirez, SA Wheelman
Juan Ocampo, St Mary's University
Kamala Platt, TexasTejano.com
Albert Salgado, University of Texas San Antonio
Veronica Lopez, West SA Chamber of Commerce
Charles Oisten, Woodlawn Lake NA

Staff and Public Present

Lourdes Galvan, SA River Authority Board Member
Suzanne Scott, SA River Authority
Richard de la Cruz, SA River Authority
Kerry Averyt, SA River Authority
Hillary Lilly, SA River Authority
Carrie Brown, SA River Authority
Daniel Leal, City of San Antonio
Sonia Jimenez, Ximenes & Associates
Alberto Del Rio

Charles Bartlett, Linear Creekway Parks Advisory
Board
Tomas Guadiano
Sumita T Jonak
Art Luna
Elvira Leal
Elaine Ayala, San Antonio Express-News
Emily Eaton
Nicolas Rivard, DHNA

I. Welcome

Skye Curd, Co-Chair, opened the meeting and asked the committee and others attending to introduce themselves. Robert Ramirez, Co-chair recognized Elaine Ayala of the *Express-News* and Emily Eaton who wrote an article on the Elmendorf Lake pool. He expressed thanks to the newspaper for their coverage of the issues and activities related to the Westside Creeks.

Mr. Ramirez acknowledged Dr. Cary Guffy, a committee member who passed away, with a moment of silence. Dr. Briana Salas, Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at Our Lady of the Lake, will be serving in Dr. Guffy's place. Dr. Salas is a marine biologist by training. She and her colleagues are working on developing a degree in sustainability. She added they do a lot of study about water quality.

II. Citizens to be Heard

There were no citizens to be heard.

III. Calendar Items

Ms. Curd reviewed the calendar items.

- San Pedro Creek Subcommittee meeting, September 12, 2019, 9:00 a.m., 100 E. Guenther St. San Antonio, TX 78204
- Celebrate San Antonio Fashion Week, San Pedro Creek Culture Park, October 3, 2019
- San Pedro Creek Subcommittee meeting, October 10, 2019, 9:00 a.m., 100 E. Guenther St. San Antonio, TX 78204
- San Pedro Creek Subcommittee meeting, November 14, 2019, 9:00 a.m., 100 E. Guenther St. San Antonio, TX 78204
- Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee meeting, November 19, 2019, 6:00 p.m., 100 E. Guenther St., San Antonio, TX 78204

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes, May 21, 2019

Ms. Curd asked for any corrections to the meeting minutes. The meeting minutes were approved with the following corrections:

- P4, 5th paragraph and P5, 6th paragraph: the correct name of the organization Amelia Valdez was representing is the Historic Westside Neighborhood Association. Mr. Ramirez added that the neighborhood association is bounded on the east by IH 35, Zarzamora Street on the west, Commerce St. on the north and Laredo Street on the south.
- P3, middle of the page, last sentence: Kamala Platt asked that it refer to “cattle egrets” instead of “birds.” At the top of the paragraph also, it should refer specifically to cattle egrets.
- P3, should read, “ ... relocation of the rookery, only if necessary.”
- Charles Oisten’s name was misspelled.

V. Elmendorf Lake Bird Mitigation Update, Skye Crud, WCROC

Ms. Curd explained that she had attended a meeting with other members of the community to discuss options for the bird mitigation at Elmendorf Lake. Mr. Ramirez provided background on the situation: in February, the news that the birds on the island at Elmendorf Lake – cormorants, white egrets, herons, as well as cattle egrets – were being affected and two weeks before the birds were supposed to be removed eggs were discovered, so the action was postponed until the hatchlings were mature enough to be moved, probably mid-September. The birds will be removed and the plan is to keep them away. Mr. Ramirez’s question at the time was “Why was the community not involved?” Now, five months later, July 8, there was a meeting of about 30 “selected stakeholders” who represented various groups. Each group had one representative who was allowed to speak for the group. Ms. Curd was the designated representative for the WCROC.

Ms. Curd reported there was a survey that 20 people responded to and they presented nine different suggestions. Attendees at the indicated a willingness to cooperate with the military. The organizers indicated they would advise those in attendance about how they would proceed, but Ms. Curd said she had not heard anything from them yet.

Mr. Ramirez reported there was a follow-up email from General Ayala, the City of San Antonio's representative, saying the suggestions were not viable.

Dr. Platt added that she had been present as a representative of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. The facilitator was from Austin and the information she had was not correct.

Mr. Ramirez pointed out that Amelia Valdez of the Historic Westside Neighborhood Association was present and commented on the cultural and community aspect of the birds as being important to the neighborhood. Mr. Ramirez added that everyone is concerned about the safety issue and cleaning up the island, but there must be a middle ground that allows for Bird Island to continue as an important element to the community and still maintain safety for the airplanes.

There was a lengthy discussion about the birds that included the following:

- The concern about the cattle egrets is their food source is at the landfill five miles south of the lake, close to Lackland Air Force Base. The water birds prefer the frogs, fish and insects, which is why they are close to the lake. The cattle egrets go to the rookery for protection.
- The landfill is an attraction because there are a lot of bugs and waste food. The US Department of Agriculture is working with the landfill owners to clean up the landfill and maintain it properly.
- Although the complaint about the use of chemicals at the lake was made to the City, there was no resolution. Chemicals are still being sprayed to control where the birds defecate.
- The Air Force seems to think that Elmendorf Lake is the only source of the cattle egrets, but Dr. Platt emphasized that only about one quarter of the cattle egrets around the airfield come from the lake. Consequently, community members believe this is an attack on the park.
- Bexar County Audubon Society has requested a study to determine exactly which birds are causing the problem, but they were told there was not enough time and no money for a study. There has been no effort to determine scientifically where the birds originate.
- There have been no serious bird strikes in the last ten years in this area. There have been deaths or serious injuries from strikes with Canadian geese or vultures in other parts of the country.
- There is technology that can be used to detect bird flocks from 10 miles away and alert the pilots so they can avoid the area or not take off or land until they have passed.
- A citizen scientist project might be one way to get the information needed to truly determine the reality of the situation.
- The military seems to be more interested in not stalling their operations than tracking the birds.
- It is important to keep the community involved and informed.
- Ms. Curd informed the group of a recent letter sent to veterans by Retired General Ayala, the Military Liaison for the City. The letter had a number of incorrect statements

and seems to have been intended to drive a wedge between the community and the military.

- There will be an effort by the Texas Audubon Society to move the cattle egret nests to Mitchell Lake, wiring them in place, as was done to move a rookery in San Francisco. Texas Parks and Wildlife is involved in the effort. This is possible if the proper paperwork is in place.
- This solution does not consider the community and it will not be possible to control where the birds fly. They could just start going to the Covel Gardens landfill.
- Those in attendance were urged to stay informed and to contact Council Member Shirley Gonzalez and other governmental officials to express their concerns for the lack of community involvement, the use of chemicals on the lake and the implications of what is being done.

Briefing on Apache Creek Public Art Piece – Mr. Ramirez reported that Natalie Manning could not attend tonight, but nothing has changed since the last meeting. There will be a community meeting, but the date and time are not set yet. Hillary Lilly will send information on the meeting once it is available.

Status Report on Westside Creeks Improvements Projects – Richard de la Cruz and Reuben Salazar, San Antonio River Authority (SARA)

Elmendorf Lake Park Swimming Pool- Reuben Salazar, SARA

The grand opening on June 15 was well received. On July 2 substantial completion was achieved, meaning it was safe to use the facility although there were still some punch list items outstanding. When it closes after Labor Day weekend, final repairs will be done. Ms. Curd commented on the beautiful design and noted the special needs accommodations. She heard so much good feedback and complimented SARA and the City for the project. Mr. Ramirez added that it was a great design.

Westside Creeks Linear Trails Project

Mr. Salazar continued the presentation referring to the map of the creek improvements. (Please see attached presentation for more information.) His comments included the following:

- The trails on the map were complete except at the location of the SAWS work on Apache Creek from Cassiano Park to Elmendorf Lake Park amenities to replace the sewer line.
- The contractor is significantly behind schedule on that section, having completed only 350 feet of the 5,000 feet of concrete trail. That segment should be completed by December 2020. Apache Creek will have all the amenities the other segments have as well as lighting upgrades. The lighting upgrades cannot be done until the trail is completed.

Zarzamora Creek Trail- Richard de la Cruz, SARA

Mr. de la Cruz announced that bids were received on May 17 and the recommendation was presented for approval at the June board meeting. The contractor selected was RCO Construction, the same one who built the pool. SARA received the Performance and Payment

Bonds today, so they will submit the Notice to Proceed. The next phase is submittals for construction and then they will be into the mobilization phase.

Phase 1 of the project is a one-mile-long 10-foot wide trail from 29th Street, which includes a bridge, to Memorial Street. Phase 2 takes the trail to Alderete park. There are eight street connections, the bridge at 29th Street and a trailhead at the end of San Ignacio at the Zarzamora Creek on City property.

The City of San Antonio's trail signage guidelines will be used to indicate the trails, street names at intersections, safety markers for emergencies, mile markers and other wayfinding assistance.

Alazan Creek Trail

Mr. de la Cruz reported that this trail is 2.9 miles long with a 10-foot wide trail from Lombrano Street to the confluence with Apache Creek. There are three base bid connections at Lombrano, Poplar and Guadalupe Streets and four alternate street connections at Arbor Place, Colorado, Sabinas and Martin Streets. The trail connects to the existing trail at Woodlawn Lake on the north and Apache Creek to the south.

Martinez Creek Trail

The bidding for the 1.45 miles of 10-foot wide trail is on hold due to the sanitary sewer replacement project SAWS has under construction for this same area. The construction for the SAWS project started in January 2019 and is scheduled for completion in June 2021. This trail connects to the existing trail at Cincinnati on the north and Alazan Creek at Farias Park to the south.

Tree Reforestation Project –Reuben Salazar, SARA

The Westside Creeks are trapezoidal channels intended to convey flood waters and have no trees. On Apache Creek, the City has started planting trees from Cassiano Park to Brazos Street. The second phase will be at Brazos Street to the San Pedro Creek confluence and Alazan, close to Laredo Street and I 35. Due to low water crossing, the trail is very low since the upper slope belongs to TxDOT (Texas Department of Transportation). They had difficulty there getting the vegetation established during the construction phase. From the confluence to Alazan, there should not be a problem, but further downstream it will be difficult. Trees can slow the water down and floods will wash way immature trees. Alazan and Zarzamora are getting trees and an irrigation system, but the trail and the trees are on the high side of the bank. Apache Creek has a lot of mature oak trees, but beyond Cassiano Park, trees are now being planted. About 3,000 trees have been planted so far along Apache Creek around Amistad Park.

In the last three months the City has been looking at the lack of trees and the plan now is to look at the completed hike and bike trails and incorporate tree planting on all new construction, using funds from the Tree Mitigation Fund.

New approaches are being used by the City that incorporate Best Management Practices (BMP), low impact development systems and new thinking about the value of natural creeks.

Status Report on San Pedro Creek Culture Park and Communications – Kerry Averyt and Monica Treviño-Ortega, SARA

Phase 1.1

The work on the trash screen at the inlet pump station had to be postponed until late 2019 because the water needs to be completely turned off to install it, making it necessary to wait until it is cooler to keep the algae from increasing during the time the water is low. The floating islands to help battle algae have been installed in the *manatial* area.

The concrete tile with the Michael Menchaca patterns is becoming delaminated and falling off. They will replace the tile on the *manatial* at the time of the pump replacement. The rest of the benches will be retrofitted using a ceramic tile that will be able to handle the high temperatures better, while still maintaining the designs.

Phase 1.2

Construction is moving quickly. All three blocks have concrete pours happening now and you can begin to see what the future shape will look like. On the Houston to Commerce Street block they are working on the waterwall construction.

In July 2019, they discovered an underground conflict with the utilities that required the complete closing of the vehicular lanes on Commerce Street between September and October. Demolition of the Dolorosa Street Bridge has started and traffic will be reduced to one lane until April 2020, in time for Fiesta. Dolorosa Street will be used for Fiesta since the Commerce Street bond project will be under construction.

The City is studying the feasibility of adding bike lanes on Commerce from St. Mary's to Santa Rosa as part of the bond project and there will be more delays to that project. SARA is working closely with them to avoid any demolition of new San Pedro Creek work or conflicts with our project.

He referred to pictures in the presentation, pointing out the waterwall close to the Continental Building, and the observation and grassy areas. A pedestrian bridge will connect that area to the central area. He showed the area behind the Spanish Governor's Palace where there will be murals, and the "sculpture garden" along Nueva Street on the west bank. UTSA will be developing on both sides of the creek in this area, so they have been coordinating with them.

Artifacts were found in the area near Dolorosa Street and at Calder Alley, possibly necessitating an additional dig with an archeologist. No human remains were found. All artifacts go to UTSA. Mr. Averyt agreed to get information about notification of groups with ancestry to the location of the artifacts had been notified on the discoveries. He will report back to the committee on it.

It was noted that scooters are a big factor in the decision to add bike lanes. Any time you see someone on a bicycle, it means there is one less car on the road.

Phase 1.3 and Phase 2

SARA was given direction in December by Commissioner's Court to simplify the design and go

more natural. They presented the new designs and renderings to the Court on June 18. The design was approved by the Court along with funding for the completion of the design and construction.

Phase 2 starts at Guadalupe Street and used to go to Alamo Street, but now goes to the Union Pacific bridge. There will only be one *paseo* along the east bank, so it is much simpler now. The culverts there may remain covered and use that as a green space where the old railroad spur was.

Some of the trees in Phase 1.3 and in Phase 2 are in the 100-year floodplain, so they have to take these into account as they model the hydrology in this area. The overall redesign results in removing 30 acres from the floodplain.

SARA has put a barricade at the low paseo under Travis Street when it flooded before, and the high paseo is designed to be above the floodwaters, so if it goes underwater, there will not be a place to walk.

Partner Coordination

Mr. Averyt reported the following on the partner coordination:

- The construction for the administration building for the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) has started.
- The Alameda Theater is in design and will be getting into construction toward the end of the year.
- Texas Public Radio (TPR) construction coordination is ongoing and they are anticipating beginning to use the building in January 2020 and opening in May.
- UTSA is coordinating Low Impact Design (LID) elements and are discussing removing the retaining wall on the east bank between Dolorosa and Nueva and sloping it back instead. This will result in a cost savings for the San Pedro Creek project.
- Commerce Street – the City is studying the feasibility of including bike lanes.
- GSA – holding ongoing design and construction coordination meetings and met today to discuss LID features.
- The Executive Committee for the project will be meeting again on September 13, 2019.

Mr. Ramirez asked if the Camaron Street project was completed now. Mr. Averyt responded that it is still in design and construction will begin late this year. That project runs along Phase 1.1 only; from Houston Street to Kingsbury over to Flores Street.

SPC Public Art- Carrie Brown, SARA

Ms. Brown presented several events related to the San Pedro Creek project. (Please see the attached presentation for more information.)

Phase 1.2 Water Wall is one of two signature art works in this phase. It will be an interactive work of art for one of the most animated sections of the culture park, between Houston and Commerce Streets. The artwork will use light, motion and possibly sound.

The selection of the artist will be made by the Selection Panel and approved by the Commissioner's Court.

The artists for the Tricentennial Project approved by the Commissioner's Court in June are Bridge Projects, a local group of artists, and they are currently finalizing the structural drawings. Fabrication will begin this fall and the project is expected to be completed by fall 2020. The historically based project will represent the history of the springs will go earlier than the 300 years but it is not clear how it will be configured. Ms. Brown will report back to the committee.

Miscellaneous Items

Ms. Jimenez asked about the handout labeled "Linear Creeks Brazos Pocket Park Public Art Opportunity." Mr. Ramirez explained that there was no report this evening on that item (VI on the agenda) because nothing has been done. A meeting will be scheduled and announced.

Ms. Curd asked if The WCROC could change their meeting schedule to every-other month to have shorter, more frequent meetings be able to address situations as they come up and to keep the momentum going. Ms. Curd moved to change to the previous schedule and Charles Oisten seconded the motion.

The discussion that ensued included the following points:

- The viability of the committee was questioned since many items are brought to them after the fact. More needs to be discussed than just the schedule.
- The co-chairs get briefed occasionally and the do meet a few weeks before the meeting to discuss the agenda. If the committee is only going to receive briefings, that could be done via email.
- The transparency implemented in the conduct of the meetings make this an important committee. Although important issues have been discussed, the group is no longer being consulted and is not functioning as an oversight committee.
- Mr. Ramirez and Ms. Parrish will be meeting with Mayor Nirenberg regarding the chemicals and the issues with the birds and how the military is moving forward without regard to the community.
- Mr. Ramirez suggested discussing this issue more thoroughly since it needs to be considered by the SARA board.
- Parks and Recreation wants to be sure that park goers have a good experience and the vultures are not eating out of the trash cans and the other birds are not pooping on the tables. They are going to do what they need to do to address the bird problems and are not particularly interested in what this committee thinks.

The vote was taken on the motion to schedule the WCROC meetings every other month. There were nine (9) in favor and two (2) opposed, with one (1) abstention. Mr. Ramirez reminded the group that this does not mean this will happen since SARA needs to consider staffing and budget before they can make the change. Mr. Ramirez will talk with Ms. Lilly about the change after the meeting

Regarding the issue of the water hyacinth that has invaded the lake, Parks and Recreation has boats picking it up as much as possible. It is an invasive species and there is a lot of it in the lake. It is brought in by the birds who love to eat the seeds. They have to cover what they collect with compost mulch to keep the birds from eating it. Dr. Platt noted it was an issue at a previous meeting and someone was supposed to report back about it. SARA is concerned about it being in the lake and are anxious about it getting into Woodlawn Lake. The City has been working on it in Elmendorf Lake, from 24th to Commerce. They have gotten sort of to the first fountain. It appears to have gotten past them. They are working on it.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.