



**Westside Creeks Restoration
Oversight Committee (WCROC) Meeting
San Antonio River Authority
Online Meeting
Rescheduled from February 16, 2021 to
March 2, 2021, 6:00 pm**

Committee Members Present

Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair
Skye Curd, Co-Chair
Erwin De Luna, United SA Pow Wow Inc.
Hillary Lilly, SAISD
Jerry Lockey, Beacon Hill NA
Juan O'Campo, St. Mary's University

Charles Oisten, Woodlawn Lake NA
Anne Parrish, Bexar Audubon Society
Kamala Platt, Ph.D., Texas Tejano.com
Abel Ramirez, San Antonio Wheelmen
Albert Salgado, UTSA
Gabriel Velasquez, Avenida Guadalupe

Staff and Public Present

Reuben Bazan, River Authority
Carrie Brown, River Authority
Christine Clayton, River Authority
Richard De La Cruz, River Authority
Meera Keshav, River Authority

Brian Mast, River Authority
Monica Trevino-Ortega, River Authority
Daniel Leal, City of San Antonio
Laura Calderón, Ximenes & Assoc., Inc.

I. Welcome

Co-Chair Robert Ramirez called the meeting of the San Antonio River Authority to order. He welcomed Meera Keshav, the WCROC's new liaison to the River Authority. He complimented Ms. Keshav on the work she's done since assuming her new role. Co-Chair Skye Curd thanked meeting attendees for participating.

II. Roll Call

Ms. Keshav called the WCROC roll. Committee members who were present are listed above. A quorum was reached during the meeting.

III. Citizens to be Heard

Ms. Keshav called for Citizens to be Heard. She said the three-minute time limit to speak was flexible but asked everyone to be respectful of time. There were no citizens to be heard.

IV. Calendar Items

Mr. Ramirez reviewed several calendar items. He said the committee would review the San Pedro Creek events later in the agenda. Ms. Keshav noted the upcoming WCROC meeting. Calendar items included:

- Yoga on the Creek with Mobile Om: Every Monday in February, SPC Facebook page
- Creekside Chats, February 24, 2021, 12 p.m., SPC Facebook page
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting: March 11, 2021, 9 a.m., GoToMeeting
- Fit & Flow, March 13, 2021, 9 a.m., SPC Facebook page
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting: April 8, 2021, 9 a.m., GoToMeeting
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting: May 13, 2021, 9 a.m., GoToMeeting
- Planets in the Park, February 25-28, 2021, Virtual event, at SARiverAuthority.com

- Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee Meeting: May 18, 2021, 6 p.m.

V. Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 19, 2020, August 18, 2020, and November 17, 2020

With a quorum present, Mr. Ramirez asked the committee for corrections or revisions to each set of minutes. No corrections or revisions were raised. He then asked for objections to approval and none were raised. The minutes for May 19, 2020, August 18, 2020, and November 17, 2020 were approved.

VI. Status Report on Westside Creeks Improvements Projects –Reuben Bazan & Richard De La Cruz, River Authority

Ms. Keshav introduced Reuben Bazan and Richard De La Cruz for updates on the Westside Creeks Linear Trails Project.

Mr. Bazan reviewed the Apache Creek Trail project status, which begins at Elmendorf Lake and ends at Cassiano Park. The project is a joint-bid contract between COSA and SAWS. The River Authority will manage the trails and park amenities. In December 2020, the contractor failed an inspection, and is now repairing the identified items. The project is estimated to be completed in June 2021.

Mr. Bazan presented the status of the Zarzamora Creek Trail project. The project limits begin at Alderete Park and conclude east of General McMullen, where a bridge will connect the trail on the creek's northern side to an existing trail on the creek's southern side. Once complete, the trail will provide access from Alderete Park to the San Antonio River, via Zarzamora and Apache creeks. Landscaping is on hold due to the theft of planted seeding. Substantial completion is expected in April 2021.

Ms. Curd asked about the theft of the seeding. Mr. Bazan said the contractor was responsible for covering the theft. He said COSA would assume ownership after substantial completion, so after that point, any theft or vandalism would come from the city's budget.

Mr. De Luna inquired about vandalism at the site. Mr. Bazan said graffiti had occurred, but was easily removed due to an effective anti-graffiti coating.

Mr. De La Cruz updated the WCROC on the Alazan Creek Trail project. The project begins at Lombrano Street and ends at the Apache Creek confluence. The project is 2.9 miles, and includes five street and two trail connections. He described the various construction activities underway along the trail. The project's expected completion date is summer 2021.

Mr. De La Cruz reviewed the Martinez Creek Trail project. The trail is 1.45 miles and includes a hike and bike trail. It has eight street connections and will tie into two existing trails. The project had been on hold due to a SAWS sanitary sewer pipe replacement project that was recently completed. The trail project will commence once the City authorizes the River Authority to bid it.

Ms. Curd asked if there had been any issues with pipes breaking during the freeze. Mr. De La Cruz said these types of pipes are not under pressure, and there is minimal chance a sanitary sewer pipe will freeze. He added the River Authority had not heard from SAWS regarding pipe breakages due to the freeze.

WCROC member Jerry Lockey asked if the River Authority could now complete the rest of the trail. Mr. De La Cruz said once COSA gives the River Authority the authorization to bid the project, the River Authority can proceed.

Mr. Lockey said he was aware of proposed federal legislation intended to reconnect communities split by highways in the 60s and 70s. His neighborhood has discussed connecting the Beacon Hill neighborhood by I-10 to Martinez Creek, which runs along I-10. He told staff he would provide this information since there may be some opportunities for Martinez Creek.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Mr. Ramirez said the committee has been working on the creeks for 13 years. The committee started with three projects – the restoration of Elmendorf Lake, the linear creek hike-and-bike trails, and the restoration of the creek banks and beds. This year is a symbolic year since the River Authority will complete three hike-and-bike trails at the Alazan, Apache and Zarzamora creeks. He concluded by thanking staff and committee members.

See the related presentation, Linear Creek Trailways, for additional details.

VII. Update on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Fiscal Year 2021 Work Plan – Brian Mast, River Authority

Mr. Mast reviewed the outcome of the USACE FY 2021 Work Plan. Mr. Mast said once the River Authority secured \$61 million from USACE to reimburse Bexar County for funding the Mission Reach project, the Westside Creeks became the River Authority's priority for USACE FY 2021 funding.

Mr. Mast said the River Authority worked closely with the House and Senate legislative delegations to achieve support. The River Authority was able to have language added to a document accompanying the appropriations bill. The language specified available funds for restoration projects which address eco-systems damaged by past flood control projects. He said this language describes the Westside Creeks project. The language was retained and the bill became law in December 2020. Normally, the USACE would have 60 days to create a work plan after the bill is enacted. On January 18, 2021 the previous administration published the FY 2021 Work Plan, prior to the 60-day deadline given to the USACE. The FY 2021 Work Plan did not include funding for the Westside Creeks.

The River Authority has continued to work with the delegation, in particular with U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar. The River Authority has drafted a bi-cameral letter for the delegation to send to the Asst. Secretary for Civil Works asking to reprogram USACE funds to include the Westside Creeks.

WCROC member Gabriel Velasquez said he supported the hard work the River Authority staff has done on the Westside Creeks. Mr. Mast said the Westside Creeks have received support on the federal legislative agendas of COSA, Bexar County, and the major chambers of commerce. He said it is the community's top request to the USACE for 2021 and 2022.

Mr. Mast said the House has reinstated earmarks for public entity projects, like the Westside Creeks, so the River Authority will be able to specify the creeks in their 2022 appropriations requests, due in April 2021. Mr. Mast referred to Mr. Lockey's earlier comments about potential funding to reconnect communities and said the River Authority is exploring all opportunities.

Mr. Ramirez referred to a recent article written by Henry Cisneros' company which listed hundreds of projects needing funding from the infrastructure bill that will be considered by Congress. The Westside Creeks Restoration was listed at \$50M to \$100M. Mr. Mast said the remaining part of project is projected to cost \$100M, which includes engineering design and construction. He said the figure has likely increased over time since the feasibility study is dated. He added once the Westside Creeks project is in the appropriations bill, Congress must appropriate the funds.

Ms. Curd asked if the loss of fish due to the freeze might attract funding. She also asked if the USACE prioritized any species found in the Westside Creeks that could provide a funding advantage. Mr. Mast said most of the expired fish were non-native. Regarding birds, Mr. Mast said the Mission Reach project has generated three years of data. The data show 206 avian species, some considered endangered by state and federal agencies, made use of the eco-system restoration project. Based on this data and the support the project gives to avian species on the Central Flyway Migration Corridor, the River Authority has discussed applying the Mission Reach strategies to the Westside Creeks with the USACE. He added the economic development opportunities growing along the creeks have been noted by legislators.

WCROC member Hillary Lilly asked if any funds were available in the stimulus bills. Mr. Mast responded that under the original CARES Act and subsequent bills, eco-system restoration projects have not been included.

WCROC member Dr. Kamala Platt asked if a letter could be drafted for publication to raise awareness of the eco-system's significance. Mr. Mast agreed it was a great opportunity to advance the quality of life in this part of the community and for the whole city.

Mr. Velasquez said the creek restoration was possible because Roberto Rodriguez fought and worked to bring change to the creeks. He commended the River Authority for their efforts. He said it is an investment that will benefit the world, from Central America to Canada, so the community should remember the advocates who did the initial work.

VIII. Status Report on San Pedro Creek Culture Park and Communications – Christine Clayton & Monica Trevino-Ortega, the River Authority

Ms. Clayton said progress had occurred on Phase 1.2 construction. She mentioned most of the Houston Street bridge is finished. Although it will be fully complete in April, closure will likely be extended due to the archaeological site (see below). Once the River Authority has approval for construction, they will need access to the site via Houston Street. She added the Spanish Governor's wall on Calder Alley is complete.

Ms. Clayton said the River Authority had uncovered a series of foundations that included the St. James African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the original Soap Works Factory, and the old Alamo Icehouse and Beer Brewery. Currently, the project is in the USACE's public comment period, which expires March 8, 2021. Several design options for addressing the foundations are presented for public feedback. She encouraged committee members to provide their input. Phase 1.2 is scheduled for substantial completion in Spring 2022.

Ms. Clayton said construction for Phase 1.3, from Nueva St. to Cesar Chavez Blvd., and Phase 2, from Guadalupe Street to the railroad bridge, started last year and has progressed. Most of the work has focused on utilities, excavation, and erecting retaining walls. Ms. Clayton said Phase 1.3 and Phase 2 will reach substantial completion by February 2023.

Ms. Clayton said in 2020, Bexar County approved the final two segments of San Pedro Creek, which represent Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the project. These two segments provide continuity to the trail, from the tunnel inlet to the confluence with Alazan Creek beneath I-35.

Ms. Clayton said Phase 3 is in the early design stages. The design will reflect a natural look similar to the Mission Reach.

There will be less hardscape, and elements of creek restoration will be incorporated. The River Authority has received positive feedback from USACE on their design concepts and the use of creek restoration elements.

Ms. Clayton showed the preliminary design for Phase 4, although much remains to be defined. The River Authority is currently reaching out to stakeholders and property owners for design feedback on both phases. She explained Phase 3 focuses on restoration and developing a natural feel for the trails; Phase 4 focuses on the surface trail, where the creek goes underground via a series of culverts. Ms. Clayton reviewed ongoing outreach activities to partners like the federal courthouse, the UTSA Downtown campus expansion, and other entities.

In reference to Phase 1.2 and the discovery of the foundations, Mr. Velasquez asked if the River Authority had explored incorporating the historic or archaeological elements of the site into the design. He asked if the River Authority had the jurisdiction to specify how the foundations will be treated, regardless of the USACE decision.

Ms. Clayton said San Pedro Creek was a USACE project many years ago, so the River Authority must seek their approval for any modifications. The River Authority does not have authority to decide what will happen to the foundations. Instead, the River Authority has focused on community outreach, so the public can help the USACE make an informed decision. Regardless of the USACE decision, the River Authority will have programming, art and other elements that incorporate and celebrate the history of the site.

Mr. Velasquez said for the WCROC record, the River Authority is demonstrating responsible and ethical decision-making processes on how they have handled this project. Mr. Velasquez asked about work requiring the closure of Guadalupe Street from I-35 to Flores Street. Ms. Clayton said there is work being done on the bridge, and an operations & maintenance facility for San Pedro Creek is being constructed near Guadalupe Street. Ms. Clayton said work will continue in that area through the end of 2023.

Ms. Monica Trevino-Ortega presented information on the River Authority's public outreach efforts for the archaeological site of the St. James AME Church. Ms. Trevino-Ortega facilitates the SPC Citizens Advisory Sub-committee and manages community outreach for the SPC Culture Park (SPCCP). She reviewed SPCCP community engagement efforts prior to the archaeological discovery. After the discovery, at the direction of Bexar County leadership, the River Authority facilitated an AME Church Focus Group. The group's contributions were vital and provided additional resources and feedback on the archaeological site.

Ms. Trevino-Ortega outlined the various public outreach strategies the River Authority implemented for the public notice period. The River Authority's goal was to inform the public, so they could confidently provide feedback on the options for the archaeological site. She reminded members the deadline to provide feedback on the site to the USACE is March 8, 2021.

Ms. Curd commented the website directions for providing input to the USACE were difficult to find. Ms. Trevino-Ortega said the information was on a special website, accessed through SPCCulturePark.com. She provided directions to the special website and said she would look into making it more visible.

WCROC member Ms. Anne Parrish said original plans included arena-like seating, and inquired what had been decided. Ms. Trevino-Ortega said a decision on the design had not been made.

The USACE's public comment period is the opportunity for the community to identify which option is most feasible and reflective of community priorities.

In varying degrees, several options incorporate the foundations with the entertainment plaza, so the public can voice which option they prefer. All of the input is received by the USACE and used to determine the best design solution.

Mr. Velasquez expressed concern that the USACE makes the final decision. Ms. Parrish asked if the River Authority had received any community feedback. Ms. Trevino-Ortega said the SPC Citizens Sub-committee is drafting a letter to the USACE regarding the option they support. Other stakeholders have contacted the River Authority and are drafting comments to the USACE. Ms. Parrish suggested WCROC submit a letter.

Mr. Velasquez asked if the five options had been professionally designed and vetted by the River Authority, as opposed to being designed by a committee. Ms. Clayton said the River Authority team had developed the designs now being presented to the public for comment.

Mr. De Luna asked if the designs had been vetted by the SPC Citizens Sub-committee and the USACE. If so, then regardless of the option chosen, the vetting will be complete. Ms. Trevino-Ortega said the sub-committee did not choose the five designs. The designs were options to incorporate the foundations in varying degrees, as requested by the USACE, who has reviewed the designs. The website addresses the considerations for each option, like whether an option impedes flood control, which would be contrary to the purpose of the SPC project.

Dr. Platt asked how persons whose ancestors participated in the AME Church were contacted about the project and comment period. She expressed concern that the grassroots community would not be aware of the comment opportunity. Ms. Trevino-Ortega said the focus group included many AME Church elders and current church leaders. The San Antonio African-American Community Archive and Museum was also involved.

Mr. Velasquez said he was impressed with the River Authority's outreach efforts on this project, given the involvement of Bexar County Commissioner Calvert and the AME Church.

Ms. Curd asked about the specific archaeological findings and their significance. Ms. Clayton said the findings were building foundations and she provided a brief history of the site. One of the more significant items is the carved AME Church cornerstone. The AME Church and the Soap Works foundations are being recommended for listing in the National Historic Register and for designation as a State Antiquities Landmark, while the icehouse and brewery foundations are too degraded for recommendation.

Mr. Ramirez commended staff for their work and encouraged committee members to provide their feedback on the project designs before March 8, 2021.

See the related presentation, San Pedro Creek Culture Park, for further details.

IX. Update on Public Art for San Pedro Creek Culture Park (SPCCP) - Carrie Brown, River Authority

Ms. Brown provided updates on the permanent public art projects in Phase 1.2. Artist Adam Frank's *Stream*, is located on the creek between Houston and Commerce streets, across from Texas Public Radio headquarters (in the Alameda Theater building). The art piece is comprised of a working microphone which will interact in real-time with a lighted 250-foot waterwall whenever visitors create noise.

The River Authority conducted a waterwall mockup to refine the operation of the art piece. She said the River Authority is contacting nearby businesses to discuss coordinating their exterior lighting with the artwork's lighting.

Ms. Brown said a Request for Qualifications, seeking a team of professional artists, has been drafted for the Five Panel Mural in Phase 1.2. It is estimated the team of artists will be under contract by May 2021.

As part of Phase 1.1, the River Authority will fund up to four temporary works of art with budgets up to \$2,500. Phase 1.1 is located in the open part of the SPCCP. The art pieces will be installed throughout the park during the year.

Ms. Brown reviewed the SPCCP calendar items shown on the meeting agenda, and added World Water Day (scavenger hunt with SA River Foundation) on March 20-21, 2021, and Get Creative on April 24, 2021. She said events are now being streamed live on YouTube in addition to other social media platforms.

She concluded by recognizing and welcoming the River Authority's first Public Art Intern Ms. Taylor Galvan.

See the related presentation, San Pedro Creek Culture Park, for more details.

X. Miscellaneous Items

Mr. Ramirez referenced Mike Kiolbassa's presentation at the WCROC's November 18, 2020 meeting regarding the chemical spill and its effects on the creeks and wildlife. He said discussion is needed on the fine being assessed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. (TPWD) and the disposition of the fine. He said the River Authority will oversee the meeting between the TPWD and Kiolbassa Smoked Meats. He has asked that the WCROC, as community representatives, have a voice in the meeting. Mr. Ramirez said, in addition to the fine, Mr. Kiolbassa expressed interest in working with educational programs, the Westside Creeks, and community groups. He asked if the River Authority had considered convening these entities along with Kiolbassa to see what can be done.

Mr. Mast said at this stage the fines are undetermined. Kiolbassa staff has reached out to the River Authority, but the recent freeze stalled the conversation. The River Authority expects Kiolbassa will go beyond what is assessed by the state agencies, as they have indicated. Mr. Ramirez said the issue should remain a priority and not get lost.

Mr. Velasquez said he wants the community to know Kiolbassa reached out and provided sausage wraps to several senior housing developments during the winter freeze. He said whatever the state finds, the focus for restitution should be the creeks, since that is where the problem occurred. Mr. Ramirez said he was glad to hear of their involvement. Mr. Mast added that working remotely has slowed the pace, but following up on the spill incident has not been overlooked.

On a different topic, Mr. Velasquez said Roberto Rodriguez was the catalyst behind the restoration of the Westside Creeks, and recommended the creeks be renamed in honor of Mr. Rodriguez. Mr. Ramirez asked staff to add this recommendation to the next WCROC meeting agenda and asked Mr. Velasquez to research what actions the River Authority Board can take in this regard.

Ms. Curd requested committee presentations be emailed prior to the meetings. She also inquired whether committee meetings could be held more frequently, since committee momentum is lost due to the lengthy time between meetings. Mr. Mast said the first opportunity for more frequent meetings will occur when design funds are received. At that time, the River Authority will need WCROC and community input on the USACE design. Mr. Mast added it has been difficult to achieve a quorum and he wanted to respect the members' time.

XI. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.