

Still Creek Stakeholders' Meeting Summary

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Greenbelt Park

Greenbelt, MD 20770

Meeting attendees:

Fred Gasper

Michele Touchet

Steve Ayers

Tekla Cook

Shobha Duncan

Bill Duncan

Alan Turnbull

Terri Hruby (City of Greenbelt)

Janis Oppelt

Jeannette Grotke

Evelyn Hirrel

John Ausema

Tom Crone

Marc Imlay

Dave Frederick

Jean Snyder

Dan Smith (Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek/AWCAC)

David Dunmire (Eyes of Paint Branch)

John Galli (Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments)

Kate Levendosky (Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments)

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. John Galli (COG) welcomed the meeting attendees and asked all present to introduce themselves.

II. Background – Purpose of the Group

Mr. Galli provided the group with some background on the Still Creek subwatershed and the Anacostia River watershed. Still Creek is a tributary of the Northeast Branch of the Anacostia River. While it only encompasses a small area (roughly four square miles), the Still Creek subwatershed is very important in the restoration of the Anacostia watershed. The presence of Greenbelt Park as the subwatershed's centerpiece has helped to keep over half of the subwatershed forested, however the stream system in the park is greatly affected by the influx of stormwater from the surrounding area, much of which lacks stormwater management controls. Mr. Galli said that the subwatershed contains

tremendous natural resources and is relatively healthy, but to live up to its high potential, it needs an organized group of citizens who are interested in its long-term health.

III. Forming a Group

Mr. Galli introduced Mr. Dan Smith and Mr. David Dunmire, representatives of other “Friends of” groups in the Anacostia watershed.

Mr. Dan Smith, a founding member of the Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek (FLB) and the current chair of the Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee, told the group about his experiences starting a subwatershed group a year and a half ago. Mr. Smith described the Lower Beaverdam Creek subwatershed, saying that it differs significantly from Still Creek, as Lower Beaverdam Creek drains a relatively large area and is one of the most polluted subwatersheds in the Anacostia. The strategy of the Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek has been to focus on one discrete area in the watershed by getting residents involved in restoring a small park. The group worked on putting a trail through the park and removing invasive plants in the area. Mr. Smith emphasized that it is critical to get residents out to experience and connect with the watershed. The Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek is currently not a 501(c)3 non-profit (though plans to become one in the future) and currently functions as a project of Cheverly United Methodist Church.

Mr. David Dunmire, a founding member of the Eyes of Paint Branch (EOPB), shared with the group some of his experiences starting and running a subwatershed organization. He said that the EOPB views the creation of subwatershed groups as part of its mission and offered to provide guidance and support to the Still Creek group. The EOPB started in 1994 and incorporated early on, in order to obtain grants to put out newsletters and other publications. Since their first grant of about \$5,000, EOPB has received a grant of about \$10,000 annually with only one proposal ever turned down. Early on, the EOPB worked to develop a group identity, conducting events in the watershed (tree plantings, etc.) to which they invited politicians. This gave the EOPB a level of credibility that was very useful once the group took a position on an issue. Advocacy work has been a large part of the EOPB’s activities since the beginning of the group, as the planned Inter-County Connector will go through the heart of the trout spawning area of Paint Branch. Mr. Dunmire said that EOPB has worked with all levels of government and has gotten a good response from all levels. He said that it is not hard to get a group up and running and offered to provide the group with the EOPB bylaws as a guide. Mr. Dunmire can be reached at ddunmire@eopb.org.

IV. Group Mission and Organization

Mr. Galli began a discussion about the mission and organization of the new group. Mr. Galli said that the handout with the mission statements of other Anacostia subwatershed groups is meant to provide food for thought. He passed around a chart for the meeting attendees to indicate their interests.

A discussion followed, during which the following opinions were expressed.

Mission Statement

- Mr. Bill Duncan said that he feels that a shorter mission statement is generally more effective than a longer one.
- Mr. Alan Turbull suggested that the group should wait to see what the interests of the members are before deciding on a group mission. The chart with the interests of the group members will be posted on the group listserv.
- The group decided to review the handout with mission statements of some of the other subwatershed groups of the Anacostia and continue the discussion of the mission statement at the next meeting. A discussion of what the group should be named will also be held at the next meeting.

Interests

- Mr. Steve Ayers, a teacher at the Friends Community School, said that he is interested in having students at the school participate in watershed events.
- Mr. Fred Gasper reported that in the past, his community group has organized cleanup events and plantings of water lilies in a local pond for Earth Day. He said that he would like to continue doing those events, but also start to coordinate on a larger scale. He offered to help with outreach to the Lanham Boys Club and Holy Trinity Church.
- Ms. Evelyn Hirrel suggested that the group should involve Boy Scouts and help them organize projects in the watershed.
- Mr. Fred Gasper said that he is interested in taking photos of the watershed. Mr. Galli replied that photos are very useful in documenting conditions in the watershed and educating people about the watershed.

Invasive Plants

- Mr. Tom Crone provided some information about the invasive plant removal program in Greenbelt Park. He said that the turnout to the work sessions (1st Saturday of every month at 11am) varies, but that at the last event on a rainy, cold day, about 12 people showed up to remove non-native invasive plants. Mr. Crone reported that about 90% of the plants in Greenbelt Park are native, which is very unusual in this area and very nice. He noted that the spread of Japanese stiltgrass is a big problem and that currently there are several 5-6 acre patches of stiltgrass, mostly along the creek. This can impact the health of the stream, as Japanese stiltgrass has a very poor root system that is ineffective at holding soil and preventing erosion along the stream. Mr. Crone said that he hopes that the Park will spray these patches of Japanese stiltgrass to prevent them from spreading.
- Ranger Kevin Barry said that the invasive plant management program was started 3-4 years ago by a University of Maryland student and that Mr. Crone has done a great job keeping the program going. Ranger Barry said that the park doesn't have the resources to really tackle invasive plant removal and that without the program the park would be overrun by invasives by now.
- Mr. Galli asked whether Mr. Crone has done any mapping of invasive plants in the park. Mr. Crone replied that he did map some patches of Japanese stiltgrass last summer to help the park identify the areas where spraying would be helpful.

Water Quality

- Mr. Fred Gasper said that he is interested in testing the water in the pond at the Greenbelt Lake Village.
- Mr. Galli said that there are various ways to monitor water quality. Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Audubon Naturalist Society have programs to train people how to use the bugs and other macroinvertebrates living in a stream to monitor the health of a stream. Mr. Galli said that some of the other “Friends of” groups have members certified by these programs.
- Mr. John Ausema asked about the source of the data that was presented in the PowerPoint presentation at the Still Creek Watershed Education Workshop in January. Mr. Galli replied that the data presented was a composite of surveys performed by the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, Prince George’s County, and COG. He said that most jurisdictions survey streams about once every five years. There are some exceptions, but most jurisdictions don’t have funding for more frequent monitoring. Mr. Galli said that volunteers can step in and help to fill the void, but that county natural resources staff often view volunteer groups skeptically. In order to have their data used, volunteer groups need a strong quality control program and should send participating volunteers to training programs.
- Mr. Ausema asked whether Greenbelt Park is conducting any stream monitoring. He said that he participated in a class for the “Bridging the Watershed” program, which allows students to visit national parks and collect data on water quality, alien invasive plant species, and trash. Mr. Ausema said that they did some monitoring in the park and asked whether data from this program is available. Ranger Kevin Barry replied that he will check on this and get back to the group.

V. Communication and Networking

Mr. Galli reported that a listserv for the group has been established and that the meeting attendees can use it to communicate between meetings. A complete discussion of the coordination of group communication and networking (including the establishment of a group Web site) was delayed until the next meeting, due to a lack of time.

VI. Next Steps

The following is a summary of the points raised during the discussion of the group’s next steps.

- Mr. Alan Turnbull suggested that the group members should initially try to educate themselves about the watershed, including its problems and assets. He pointed out that the group doesn’t even know the names of all of the tributaries.
- Ms. Jean Snyder asked whether there is anything that amateurs could do to make a difference. Mr. Galli said that the group could certainly make a difference by helping to remove non-native invasive species from the watershed and suggested that the group start by working to understand the watershed.

- Ranger Barry said that he can lead a walk along the creek and suggested that the group could also participate in a cleanup. Ranger Barry emphasized that a cleanup is not just about picking up trash. He said that a watershed cleanup event could be used as an education tool to help introduce people to the watershed and communicate why restoring it is important.
- The group agreed to meet for a stream walk on March 4th at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Turnbull said that he would work with Ranger Barry to plan the logistics of the event and would notify the group of where to meet.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at about 9:20 p.m. The next meeting was planned for March 15th from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Greenbelt Park in the Ranger Station Classroom.