

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE



King County



Meeting #1: August 14, 2013

--Meeting Report--

SAC Members Present:

Mike Arntzen, OneRedmond
 Paul Bucich, City of Bellevue
 Paul Fendt, At-Large
 Jeff Fletcher (for Jim Mackey), At-Large
 Jonathan Frodge, Save Lake Sammamish
 Christa Heller, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
 Michael Hobbs, Friends of Marymoor Park
 Heather Khan, Washington State Department of Ecology
 Charles Ifft, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Peter Marshall, Eastside Audubon
 Dwight Martin, Sammamish Home Owners
 Nancy Meyers, At-Large
 Martin Nizlek, Washington Sensible Shorelines Association
 Gilbert Pauley, At-Large
 Jennie Proby (for Anne Corley), Sammamish Rowing Association
 John Spangler, City of Redmond
 Joe Thumma, JB Instant Lawn
 Jim Trockle, Serve Our Dog Areas
 Bill Way, At-Large
 Susan Wilkins, At-Large
 Jason Wilkinson, WRIA 8 Salmon Recovery Council

Project Team Staff and Consultants

Roger Dane, City of Redmond
 Craig Garric, King County (Project Manager)
 Kate Akyuz, King County (Ecologist)
 Margaret Norton-Arnold, Committee Facilitator
 Fala Frazier, Committee Administrator

Observers:

Nora Robinson, Park Manager, Marymoor
 Scott Scheffeld, Sensible Shorelines Association
 Christine Jensen, staff for King County Councilmember Lambert
 Dave Garland, Washington State Dept of Ecology
 Reed Brockway, Sammamish Home Owners
 Brian Ward, City of Bellevue

Introductions

This was the first meeting of the Willowmoor Stakeholder Advisory Committee, which will meet seven times between 2013-2014 to provide recommendations to King County regarding the Willowmoor Floodplain Restoration Project. The meeting began with introductions from all committee members, who also described

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

their interest in serving on the committee. The committee is made up of diverse interests and perspectives, including property owners, natural resource specialists, environmentalists, recreational enthusiasts and supporters of Marymoor Park.

Introduction to the Project

Craig Garric and Kate Akyuz serve as the project managers for King County. They introduced themselves and talked about the overall effort. The Willowmoor project has three primary goals:

1. Ensure the Transition Zone's (TZ) capability to provide necessary lake level control, flow conveyance and downstream flood control.
2. Enhance habitat conditions in the river channel, associated tributaries and adjacent wetlands for ESA-listed Chinook, steelhead, and other species.
3. Reduce costs, complexity, and ecological impacts of channel maintenance.

The stakeholder committee has been formed to assist with the first phase of the project, which includes data collection and a technical analysis, the identification of design criteria, the development of design alternatives, and the selection of a "preferred alternative" that will then be moved forward for final design and permitting.

Kate described the ongoing maintenance occurring in the area right now, which includes sediment removal and hydroseeding on approximately one acre of riverbank. The goal for sediment removal is to improve conditions for flood control on the lake. As mitigation for the sediment removal, King County is also removing an invasive aquatic weed, Brazilian elodea. This is in a pilot phase right now, but the hope is that continued grant funding can be acquired to control this weed. Kate noted: *If we do see positive hydraulic and water quality effects from the weed removal, it will give us the motivation to go after grants from a flood control and water quality perspective. If we don't see these effects it will be difficult to get grant money.*

Craig noted that the development of alternatives will be an iterative process, and will begin even as the technical analysis is also underway. The technical analysis will provide insights on possible design criteria, these will lead to potential alternatives, and those alternatives will be evaluated back against the technical analysis and criteria.

The design alternatives will be developed in a manner that meets the project goals and also adheres to permitting and other constraints. Each alternative will include a comprehensive description, information on the level of work necessary to implement the alternative, cost estimates, conceptual level design drawings, scaled plan views, cross sections and channel sections.

Examples of design criteria could include a desired flow rate in the river, e.g. 15 cubic feet per second (cfs), and water temperature, which should not exceed 19 C between the weir and Bear Creek. Design constraints include existing architectural structures and the parkway.

Craig further reiterated that King County has not yet identified any design alternatives. Past data and alternatives (2003) will be reviewed, but the County is starting fresh with new data, criteria, and potential alternatives. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee will be involved in all of the work associated with this phase of the project.

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Members asked questions and provided comments:

Q: What is the geographic extent of the project, and does it meet the legal constraints of Flood Control District funds?

A: The entire Sammamish River from Lake Sammamish to Lake Washington is a flood control facility, including the Transition Zone (TZ). As local sponsor for construction of this project, the County accepted responsibility for the operations and maintenance of this facility through legal agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The Willowmoor project study area extends from the section of the Sammamish River from the Lake outlet downstream to the lower end of the TZ, as well as County Parks property southwest of the river. The Transition Zone itself serves as the hydraulic control for the river; it controls how much of the river flows into the lake. Although the USACE built the project originally, it is the County's job to make certain that the weir and the TZ are maintained in such a way to provide flood control protection. While the geographic area of the TZ is relatively small, the project obviously has impacts that extend far beyond that area. This project does fall within the bounds of Flood Control District funding.

Q: The original agreement was written in 1963, and doesn't that specify "adequate" levels of flood control? Is that a term/definition we will discuss as a committee?

A: The original USACE General Design Memo and corresponding Operations and Maintenance Memo both state TZ design criteria of 1,500-cfs capacity without exceeding lake elevation of 29.0. The County has agreed to maintain the facility according to existing maintenance manual standards modified by agreements made with the USACE in the 1990's. Those standards were written in 1964, before all of the salmon, water quality, and other issues we are wrestling with today. So a great deal has changed since that time. Changes to those standards, modifications to the weir, or changes in the width of the channel will require Congressional authorization. It usually takes about one year to get that level of approval.

Q: Is the weir currently being operated in accordance with the maintenance manual? And is that a public document?

A: The manual is a public document, but in the 1990's and early 2000's interim maintenance agreements were written between the USACE and the County. Those interim agreements are not in the maintenance manual, and are meant to be in effect only until this new Willowmoor project is constructed.

Q: Are the interim standards being adhered to?

A: King County is currently maintaining the Transition Zone by mowing more frequently than required in the interim agreements in response to concerns about increasing lake levels. We are evaluating and monitoring all of our maintenance practices. We have already seen improvements in lake levels with the additional mowing now taking place, for example.

Q: Is there good documentation on existing water levels, the maintenance costs per year, levels of overall compliance, and the productivity of fish regardless of whether or not we are in compliance with the standards?

A: We have several flow and temperature gauges in the lake, the Transition Zone and downstream and regularly measure the stage/discharge relationship between the lake and the river. Maintenance costs are accounted for in our County financial software and could be summarized if needed.

High water temperatures are problematic for fish as they can cause migration avoidance behavior or even pre-spawn mortality. The river is Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) listed, and regularly exceeds temperature levels and has too low of dissolved oxygen levels that are ideal for fish. We have seen migrating fish killed because the river is too hot. This area is a high priority project for the Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 8, and fits into the ESA recovery plan for Chinook. It is important for fish migrating upstream and for the juveniles migrating out to the ocean.

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Q: But in spite of the fish kills, if, in the end, we still have high numbers of fish – is that okay?

A: That is one of the questions we are trying to answer during this first phase of data collection.

Comment: It will be interesting to see the database at the end of this process. I hope it shows that the costs of maintenance will go down and flooding will be better controlled. If not, this effort is just lip service and will demonstrate that the weir and Transition Zone should be maintained just as they should have been all along.

Comment: There are two types of Chinook in this area; hatchery fish and native fish. The returns of hatchery fish from Issaquah Creek are exceeding current goals. The native run is a different story. However, the fish are getting comingled; hatchery fish become “native” fish after several years. Fish aren’t going to spawn in this area no matter what we do; this is an area of movement and migration for them, not spawning habitat.

Comment: The WRIA 8 is concerned about the recovery of native fish stocks, so even if hatchery fish are doing fine, the WRIA 8 plan, which King County, Redmond and Bellevue have all signed, motivates us to improve conditions for wild fish.

Charter and Schedule

Margaret reviewed the Committee Charter and schedule of meetings with the group. Members determined that any questions posed between meetings would be submitted to Margaret, who will work with Craig and Kate to get answers; this set of questions-and-answers will then be distributed to all members.

A project website has been set up, and the County will establish a Sharepoint site for committee members. All relevant documents will be posted on the site. Margaret will also be in frequent touch with committee members via email.

In addition to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, four public meetings will be scheduled for the Willowmoor project.

Desired Outcomes

Members described their “desired outcomes” for the Willowmoor project – that is, what they’d like to make sure the project is able to accomplish once it is built.

- Lakefront property owners noted the importance of protecting their docks, boats, and yards from flooding. One member noted that she had installed an extensive area of native vegetation and fish-friendly habitat along the lake, and does not want to see this ruined because of high water levels.
- A project that maximizes our approach to properly functioning conditions as defined in the WRIA 8 Chinook recovery plan that all jurisdictions in the area have signed off on. Chinook recovery does not have to be mutually exclusive with flood control. The way in which we rank and prioritize the design criteria will be important.
- What do we mean by flood control on the lake? We have been fortunate to not have 50-100 year storms in the past several years, but what is the level to which we should be designing this facility?
- Are we designing for salmon recovery or for Chinook recovery? There is a distinction between native and hatchery fish, and we need to understand that difference.
- Environmental damage usually seems to happen at the extremes. How can we quantify that? We need to define those limits.
- It would be great to see this area navigable for boats again. We also need to protect existing structures and uses, for example, the rowing club facilities.

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Reestablish habitat equilibrium; establish a baseline against which to measure. For example, the osprey are disturbed right now by the work going on. Current maintenance is destroying bird habitat in the willows. We should do what we can to enhance the natural habitat for birds, beavers, and other mammals.
- There is a 7-foot drop in water elevation that is currently being wasted. We should determine how to squeeze every possible drop out of that area to create fish habitat. Cold water is important; vegetation can help to maintain those cooler temperatures.
- The goal for park users is to maintain this area as a pretty and peaceful place. It would be good if bulldozers weren't there every year mucking it up. It would be good to stop cutting down trees and mowing for flood control. Let the vegetation grow naturally, but maintain necessary water flow.
- We need to look carefully at the hydrology of the water coming into the lake. We can't just blame Transition Zone maintenance for river flow. It is more complex than that; there are impacts of paving, development. We need to look at the entire system more holistically.
- The Transition Zone needs to be maintained to at least the level it was designed to when it was first built.
- This is a quiet, underutilized corner of the park. I'd love to see it opened up more for people, but also kept in a naturalistic state. It should serve as habitat for mammals, and improvements should be made in the areas where the side streams come into the Sammamish River. I'd love to see beaver ponds and meadows, more trees, improved bird habitat. And, I'd like to do all of this with a look to the future, and an opportunity to maintain lake levels at 29 feet.
- When people walk up and down the river, the ugliest part is the Transition Zone. Otherwise it is a beautiful walk. Environmental enhancements and aesthetic improvements are very important.
- The system has sustained hydraulic damage in this area. Natural systems are fairly intolerant of built systems, and putting a completely natural system in place would have limited success. The transition zone exists because we don't want variability in water elevations. The ideal system would be reasonably functional, tolerant of variability, aesthetically pleasing, and helpful to the migration of fish. But we shouldn't spend a lot of effort to design this as a natural system, which would have limited success and would be very difficult and costly to maintain.
- From the City of Bellevue's perspective, we want cost effectiveness. We have heard from lakeshore property owners, and have also signed WRIA 8. We are striving for something in the middle; this cannot be a completely natural system.
- We need to build more aquatic complexity into the system, including large wood to provide pools and enhancement of the small tributaries for juveniles.
- A complex habitat will slow velocity down and that's a problem. But, it's probably a nice goal to look at to see what can be done.
- The City of Redmond wants to make sure that downtown Redmond does not get flooded. The final preferred alternative has to be one that can be permitted. Also, we want to be able to call this stretch of the river a "river" and not a "slough."

Public Comment

One individual commented during this time: We should consider today's technology in tackling this issue. For example, if we know that the lake is at 22.5 feet, and the forecasts are predicting a severe storm, we should use the available technology to lower the lake ahead of time in order to accommodate more rainfall. It's important that we monitor water quality and the fish carefully, so we understand the best way to spend money. We need to thoroughly understand what has and hasn't worked.

WILLOWMOOR FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Next Meeting

King County's hydrologic consultant team will attend the next stakeholder advisory committee meeting to provide information on the analysis and technical results emerging. Project design criteria will also be discussed among the committee; Kate and Craig will send out some examples of these prior to the next meeting to spark good ideas and discussion among members.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 25, from 4:00-7:00 p.m. We will try to hold all meetings at the Redmond Schoolhouse Community Center.