

River des Peres Watershed Coalition Planning Forum

February 26, 2008; 6:00-8:30 pm

University City Community Center at Heman Park

Meeting Summary:

Danelle Haake, interim chair of the River des Peres Watershed Coalition, welcomed the 50 or so attendees at the first in a series of planning forums. Of the attendees, roughly half were new to the Coalition. After going through several logistical matters, Ms. Haake introduced Donald Jeffries.

Mr. Jeffries is a former chair of the Coalition and provided insights on the history of the Coalition:

- The Coalition was founded in 2002 by Shelley Welsch, then the Executive Director of The Green Center.
- The Coalition was developed as a special project of The Green Center (a non-profit organization) and still functions in this capacity. The bylaws of the Coalition were set up to allow a smooth transition into its own non-profit entity if that is the course of action set by the group.
- Funding for the Coalition thus far has come in the form of a Team St. Louis grant, funding from a fellowship grant, and a very generous donation made by the River Kids at New City School who ran a fabulous benefit dinner for the Coalition in 2007.
- Since 2002, annual Clean-Up events have been held in Brentwood, Maplewood, Pagedale, University City, and Webster Groves.
- In the Spring of 2006, the Coalition created a demonstration site along Deer Creek at Deer Creek Park in Maplewood. We worked to remove trash and debris, constructed a walkway to the stream, removed invasive species, and planted native trees and shrubs. We continue to monitor and maintain the site.
- In April of 2007, several members of the Coalition attended the River Rally, an event sponsored by the River Network in order to bring together watershed groups similar to our own to provide guidance on watershed management, leadership, organization, fundraising, and volunteer coordination.
- In the fall of 2007, the active membership of the Coalition decided that the time had come to reassess the needs of the River des Peres and the Coalition, to revise the structure of the Coalition, and rejuvenate the organization with new members.

Following Mr. Jeffries' short history, Ms. Haake presented the mission and goals of the Coalition:

Mission:

The River des Peres Watershed Coalition aims to improve, protect, and maintain the River des Peres and its watershed as a vital natural and cultural resource in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

Goals:

1. *Restore the natural functions of the river and its tributaries to support fish and wildlife.*
2. *Reduce nonpoint source and point sources of pollution contributing to the degradation of the River des Peres.*
3. *Raise public awareness about urban river restoration.*
4. *Improve the aesthetics of the River des Peres.*
5. *Implement public policy changes to protect the River des Peres.*

Ms. Haake then described a few of the assets of the River des Peres Watershed Coalition:

- The St. Louis County Health Department has earned a Watershed Improvement Grant for the River des Peres, Grand Glaize Creek, and Fox Creek from the State of Missouri. They need our input and our help to meet the goals of their grant and we could use the financial and logistical assistance that they can provide.
- A member of the faculty at Washington University is utilizing the River des Peres as a focus for her class. The students in the class do projects that benefit the river and the community.
- The River Kids and other members and partners bring vitality to the organization.
- We have a Coalition with a history of successful events and the potential to continue these events.

Following these remarks, Ms. Haake introduced the facilitator for the evening, Mark Van Patten. Mr. Van Patten began with an ice-breaker so that new and old members of the Coalition would begin to get to know each other better and feel more comfortable sharing ideas later in the meeting. At the conclusion of the ice-breaker, bags of Stream Team coffee were awarded to two participants.

Mr. Van Patten then laid out a 'meeting agreement':

1. Turn off cell phones.
2. Raise your hand to speak (exceptions for 'point of clarification' or 'point of process').
3. Do not interrupt others.
4. Stay on-topic and on task.
5. Be as concise as possible.
6. Be on time. Meetings start promptly at 6pm. If you are late, you'll miss something!

Then Mr. Van Patten began a discussion of the ‘critical issues’ in the River des Peres and its watershed. This began as a brainstorming session with the following suggestions from the group:

- Water quality
- Public perception (lost cause)
- Familiarity
- Governmental lack of interest
- Habitat quality
- Ugliness
- Industrial pollution
- Sewage / CSO
- Nonpoint source pollution
- Flash flooding
- Odor
- Bank erosion
- Hydrology / runoff / stormwater
- Automobile and road runoff (nonpoint)
- Litter / trash
- Lack of sustained flow
- Watershed aesthetics
- Municipal laws, mandates, and ordinances
- Stormwater fee structures
- Green infrastructure
- Impervious surfaces in the watershed
- Business lack of interest / involvement
- Concrete channel
- Public awareness
- Invasive species
- Floodplain development

Then we grouped and condensed items from the brainstormed list to come up with the summary list below. Once the list was developed, each participant was given three dots to put next to the major headings that are of greatest concern. The dots were then counted (results are listed in parenthesis next to each heading).

1. Water Quality (25)
 - Point source pollution (industrial and sewage / CSO)
 - Nonpoint source pollution
 - Odor
 - Litter / trash
 - Stream classification
2. Aesthetics (7)
 - Negative perception by public, government, and business
 - Lack of awareness
 - Lack of interest
3. Habitat Quality (7)
 - Bank erosion
 - Impervious channel
 - Invasive species
4. Hydrology (26)
 - Impervious surfaces (watershed and channel)
 - Flash flooding
 - Lack of sustained flow
 - Stormwater runoff
 - MSD issues
5. Floodplain Development (1)
 - Particularly Deer Creek, Gravois Creek
6. Policy (19)
 - Regulations (govt., business, public)
 - Accountability
7. Education (26)
 - Public awareness/perception
 - Advocacy

Based on the counts, it is apparent that Hydrology, Education, and Water Quality are critical issues categories that are very important to the group, although the other four critical issues are still issues that matter.

At this point, we were all assigned homework:

Consider the above list of critical issues and determine how the River des Peres Watershed Coalition can address each of these areas of concern. How can we increase public awareness and get people involved? How can we rally people in the St. Louis community behind these issues? How can we address these concerns? Provide precise ideas (not just ‘work with MSD’ or ‘talk to teachers’) – come up with solutions – real viable solutions to make a difference. Write down your ideas and bring them to the next meeting so that we can begin to formulate our plans.

Attendance Prize Drawing and Adjournment

Congratulations to our five attendees who are now the proud owners of their very own River des Peres Watershed Coalition t-shirts.

The following events were announced:

- Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, March 25**, 2008 at 6 pm at the Heman Park Community Center.
- We will have a River des Peres Clean-Up event on **Saturday, March 29**, 2008 from 9am to 1pm at Mona Terrace in University City. We need your assistance to remove the litter and honeysuckle that has accumulated at this site!