

Project

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Government

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——Stream Ecology and the Urban Aesthetic Roundtable Discussion——

Collins: Goals and ideals of this roundtable: What are the best opportunities for the use of the site? What are the largest of our constraints?

Caginalp: My groups are worried about swamps or wetlands with mosquitoes spreading disease. The sewage from four communities needs to be cleaned up - the creation of wetlands won't solve the whole sewage problem. The trunk lines are probably 100 years old - this is a difficult problem to solve. The wetlands would only create a dumping ground for this sewage which would be unhealthy for present or future residents.

Collins: So, some of the constraints which you see are sewage in the stream and a potential mosquito problem. Do you realize there are two wetlands which presently exist on the property?

Caginalp: Well, there is presently a small mosquito problem at the site. And there is presently a risk for small children to contract diseases. We want to reduce that risk of disease to a zero percent chance, and with the creation of wetlands at the site, that would not happen.

Sentz: The greatest source of mosquitoes in the local area is tires.

Caginalp: I am not in favor of dumping tires at the site either.

Sentz: Actually, the creation of a wetlands at the site with a diverse population of bird species would mean mosquitoes would not be a problem.

Caginalp: I've been to many areas where they made a big effort to create wetlands and the entire community has been inundated with mosquitoes. No one can enjoy being outside anymore.

Sentz: If you are ever in the swampy areas of Naples, Florida, you will notice that there is not a mosquito problem because they have a very diverse bird population.

Collins: If we are talking about mosquitoes, then they must be associated with stagnant waters. The nature of a good functioning wetland is that there is no stagnant water. Let's not get into the details of this without professionals at the table. How about some opportunities that we see along the stream in terms of ecological and aesthetic properties.

Solomon: We have a 'golden opportunity' at our hands. If the stream is not culverted, I see the opportunity to take a walk from Frick Park to the Mon in a park setting as an encouragement for residents to remain in the city. I disagree with Professor Caginalp, I enjoy and spend time in wetlands. The professor needs to clarify what he is speaking about, because there are many designations for wetlands, swamps, bogs, marshes, etc. They differ substantially. He doesn't use insect repellent at Nine Mile Run. I dream of the day when I can walk Nine Mile Run and not smell sewage. As a resident of the area, a little further away than Rosemont, I look forward to the expansion of wetlands at the site.

Several other table members agreed.

Dawley: I recently visited San Antonio, where they had restored and preserved river banks with sidewalks, shops, and old growth trees and wildlife. This breaks the typical urban, city-life stereotype and began to change my mind about what an urban landscape can be. I would move away from Pittsburgh if the green areas begin to disappear.

Remcheck: These natural green areas are a very attractive amenity or good selling point to incoming residents to the area. Right now, Nine Mile Run is agreeably not the most pristine place on the planet, but it has potential to be cleaned up. The question which remains to be answered is where the money will come from.

Mullock: Will there be concrete and roads on the site affecting the stream? Where will the houses be?

Collins: The housing project would be constructed on the slag plateaus and the slopes and stream valley would remain open space. The details are not worked out as of yet. As of now, we can count on at least 100 acres of open space at the site in the valley.

Caginalp: There will be 1,000 new homes on the plateaus and, according to the city's study distributed in March, 14,000 car trips each day.

Collins: Professor Caginalp has a packet he can distribute; You can also contact Mark Knezevich at the URA for more information at 255-6656.

Carr: I would like to see a creative setting and atmosphere at the site. I envision terracing the slopes of the slag, planting and revegetation of the slopes, trails and bridges over the stream. A different atmosphere can be created.

Collins: Opportunity for a more intimate, aesthetically pleasing atmosphere with multiple trail crossings - a focus on the pedestrian experience, instead of the transportation path.

Sjolander: The asset you have inherited has a great tree cover already in place. You do not have to worry about the time to grow and establish park trees. The path would wind around this shady area. You are not starting with a concrete causeway, like San Antonio.

Carr: The San Antonio project was centered in their downtown, so they are really two different kinds of projects, but both focus on changing the urban environment.

Sentz: Should we have bridges or a natural crossing with people getting their feet wet?

Carr: A treated wood or suspension bridge, because the treatment of the stream is not in place yet.

Collins: As we consider reclaiming our access to nature in the city, we can't just run a trail and somehow expect people to, by osmosis, understand that this is a dynamic natural system. We need to come up with an interface where it explains the flashes in the stream and provides an opportunity for people to understand the unusual, unique functioning of the area.

Sentz: I would like to see wood or stone bridges and water access points.

Caginalp: Are we forgetting that this stream is filled with sewage and a warning is issued by the Allegheny County Health Department for no contact in the stream? Who would want a water access point to a polluted stream? The five members of the DEP I met with downtown all agreed that the swamp or wetlands would only solve, in my impression, one or two percent of the sewage problem. They said the solution is to have the Swissvale, Edgewood, and Wilkesburg communities repair the old trunk lines. There is a \$25,000/day fine which is not being imposed and there is no initiative for these places to rebuild their

systems. Someone should pursue the legal course of action, to force the line's repair. In the meantime, people should be deterred from coming in contact with the area because it will spread the diseases. I lived in a third world country where these diseases exist.

Collins: The group is all in agreement that the sanitary sewer problems at the site need to be solved. It makes no sense to sit here at this table with an artist, stream ecologist, an engineering student, architects and landscape architects and talk about the disease issues related to water problems. I better than anyone know about the fecal coliform problems at the stream. That is not a static reality. There are days when this is a completely normal stream with fecal coliform levels within a legal range and it is perfectly fine to have people in the stream.

Caginalp: I doubt that, I really do.

Collins: Whether or not you doubt it, I have the data.

Caginalp: I bet all the water people at DEP doubt it, too.

Sentz: You are not speaking for all the people at DEP, you are speaking for yourself. Don't quote them unless they are here to quote themselves.

Caginalp: You can ask them.

Collins: After the meeting, I will take you up and show you on our chart, the fecal coliform testing that I have done over the last four months with the help of the County Health Department. I have collected the samples—it doesn't take a rocket scientist to go down there with a 500mL bottle and get it filled. I take it to the County Health Department; they send it to DEP for testing. We will discuss this later.

Solomon: His major premise was a non sequitur anyhow. In fact, it is perfectly okay to talk about what it might be like and what we might do if and when the stream is clean enough.

Caginalp: If and when it's cleaned up, yeah.

Solomon: But the discussion of one does not necessarily, in my mind, have to follow the other.

Caginalp: When you see the minutes of this meeting, you will see how this is distorted in time.

Solomon: Maybe I will and maybe I won't, but just because you say so, doesn't make it so.

Caginalp: Look at the last meeting.

Solomon: I was at the last meeting. I don't need to look at it.

Collins: We have a lady here who would like to speak.

Liberman: This parcel can be a valuable draw for people to come to this side of the city. There is also educational value in this project, which is not being pursued by the Pittsburgh Public School District. There is an environmental program within the district which is not being pushed by the district's teachers. Student programs can draw people to the city. Public relations is the key to drawing people. Governmental priorities, policy needs to be defined, less red tape, don't let government be an obstacle. I would like to create interest with a small concrete project like building a bridge or replanting a slope.

Sjolander: I suggest a new deck on the railroad bridge.

Remcheck: On the tour we saw several areas where the stream bank was eroded. We could do a project with some planting, some remediation to stop that erosion.

Paul: PR is the key because the more people that are aware of the issues, the more people who bring new ideas to the project. The more people who experience the site and understand the issues, the better. It's one thing to read about it in the papers, but when you are there, you can see the balance between the hard facts from the paper and the actual reality of nature. This is the kind of project which you need to see to appreciate. The more people see it, the more they will support it.

Liberman: Sometimes, the media won't support it, though, because they are looking for negative news. They can twist the news.

Plummer: What about forming Friends of Nine Mile Run, a group of people supporting the development of public space?

Dawley: We could make this a grassroots movement to show our friends the site—make people aware of it.

Liberman: That is difficult to do because some friends may see the site as a dump with a polluted stream, but the STUDIO is changing the way people look at the area.

Paul: As we saw on the tour today, some of the areas of the trail were difficult to get through. Maybe an objective should be to fix the trail by moving stones around, lessening erosion.

Collins: Once people get out to the site, they can experience the life at the site—there are fish in the stream, there are crayfish in the stream. We saw beavers in the stream. All of these things are an

interface between the natural world and the human world. And it's those things that encourage us to want to resolve problems of this scope. Joe, you brought up the notion of Friends of Nine Mile Run. With the city very involved in a DCNR Rivers Planning Grant, they actually need to put together a citizens watershed group. What might be the goals of an interest group like Friends of Nine Mile Run? Perhaps a bioremediation group to look at the five major stream bank problems. Are these the kind of issues that a Friends group would look at?

Plummer: Educational opportunities would be a priority.

Liberman: An environmental curriculum in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is already in place. It is now up to someone to push it through.

Sentz: You may want to contact the Pittsburgh Voyager. They need a landing site for their boat.

(People agreed, however, it would not be able to bank at Nine Mile Run due to dredging problems.)

Plummer: Concerning the design of the greenway, there could be a focus on teaching about the changing urban ecology in Pittsburgh.

Carr: The construction of a boardwalk down to the river would be nice—easier access to watch the stream. I may not walk the trail again because it is so difficult and awkward.

Solomon: People do go down to the stream, but not all the way down. There, you would run into some pollution problems. Other recreation uses at the site are prevalent, such as cycling, bird-watching, hiking—these uses need to be accentuated. You can take a walk all the way down to Duck Hollow without getting into the stream.

Kostallos: A social studies curriculum on policy and biochemistry could be a part of the educational opportunities at the site. Chatham has a couple of on-going projects using the Nine Mile Run site as a laboratory for their students. The educational opportunities are beginning.

Remcheck: It seems like half of the people at the table are experts. How was this workshop promoted? Did you do a mass mailing, or just a mailing to the 14th ward and what percentage showed up?

Collins: A pretty small percentage showed up, out of a 550-person mailing. We also postered the neighborhoods in the perimeter of the project. We are, quite honestly disappointed in the turn-out today.

Remcheck: Advertising these events is of great importance, because attendance is critical. The more people who are here, the more people to learn and act as volunteers, such as the Friends proposal. I promote educational opportunities and realize it is a very difficult task. There is a core audience who is interested in environmental issues—it is just a matter of getting the word out. The summer is a tough time of year to draw a large audience. The PR needs a strategy. This was a great workshop. It deserves better attendance because the issues discussed have a direct impact on these neighborhoods.

Blaustein: Ann Riley said that demonstration projects spark people's imaginations. There is only a small constituency which this project effects (small geographic area), because it is not a Frick or Schenley, which has been used for a long period of time. We need to, through the demonstration project, show the community that we are doing something, not just talking about issues. The formation of the Friends of Nine Mile Run would be a beginning to something tangible.

Sjolander: Is the web promoting the workshops?

Collins: Yes, all the background documents which are sent out to the mailing list are available on the web. On the weekends, people stop by the trailer and tell us they caught our site on the web.

Mullock: If an interest group was formed, what area would it cover, all of the stream's run, the entire watershed, or just the part around the slag dump?

Collins: The entire creek's run from the culvert would be covered.

Mullock: When you say you saw beavers and fish, what part of the stream are you referring to?

Collins: The places we have seen a lot of these things is right below the trailer. The oxygen levels in the stream at that point are good enough to potentially support a trout population. However, variations in water temperature, stormwater and flooding have a significant negative effect on life. Every time the stream floods, the smaller stream organisms are swept away. These storm flow events scour things out of the bottom of the stream.

Sentz: Temperature does decrease the amount of oxygen in the stream. Additionally, when you do have sewage pollution in the stream, associated bacteria

use the oxygen in the stream and reduces the total amount of sewage. Even if you have a pristine stream, the stream will probably be too warm ever to support a trout population for very long. There are other warm water species which may be able to inhabit the area.

Collins: Bass are being caught just upstream from the mouth of NMR. They may be better suited if the variations in flow could be resolved.

Sentz: We need to work through people in the good news portion of the media. Since we are working with a small vicinity, we need to reach beyond this area to create interest. Maybe everyone could bring one friend to the meetings next time.

Caginalp: A lot of people have heard about these meetings, but are staying away because they are completely dominated by people who are going to make money on the project.

Sentz: You seem to be able to speak for other people so often with great authority. Did these people tell you that's why they are not coming? Did these people give you an affidavit to speak?

Caginalp: As a matter of fact, I do have some affidavits.

Blaustein: Who at this meeting is going to make money?

Caginalp: In many of these meetings I have been to, there is always a developer's presence or interest in the discussions.

Blaustein: Those are different process meetings.

Solomon: Anybody here going to make any money on this? Raise your hand if you're going to make a buck. Looks like nobody.

Caginalp: Does Tim Collins have a financial interest in gaining grants to continue research?

Blaustein: No, there is no financial interest.

Collins: I am working 60-hour weeks. I have some funding through the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry to do what I'm doing.

Caginalp: Exactly. And if things turn out a certain way, you make money. And if they turn out another way, you don't.

Collins: That's not true.

Sentz: He makes money regardless of which way it turns out. He is involved in the process.

Collins: Professor Caginalp, do you...I'm not even going to get into this. The bottom line is we have many volunteers. Everybody that's here...

Caginalp: I know you have volunteers...

Collins: Professor Caginalp...

Carr: This defeats the purpose of accomplishing anything of value. I don't think arguing over money issues serves...

Caginalp: I'm trying to give you a reason why 550 people got mailings and only, you know, four or five people...

Solomon: But, you've given us the reason, and I don't think anyone here agrees with you. I certainly don't. I'll speak for myself.

Caginalp: It still doesn't answer why there are very few people here.

Mullock: Are as many people (citizens) here as you wanted to be here? Would you like to see more people attend?

Caginalp: Yes.

Mullock: My son is up in the East End Co-op. I read over the information 15 times, trying to understand, and my husband said it was just educated babble. Why don't they say they want to clean the stream out—I really didn't know what it meant.

Remcheck: If you only did 500 mailings and got 25 people, that's a pretty good turn-out. The last mailing I did, we sent out 5,000 mailings and got about five back. Simplify the language.

Collins: These are really good comments. We need further outreach. Kathy Stadterman is taking the lead on publicizing on the Allegheny Front in order to rally people to attend these discussions.

Plummer: This turn-out is good. The people who were here spoke their mind and asked questions. This workshop is intensive and gives an interesting picture of what the opportunities are at the site. Quality information is good; getting people to the table to share ideas is the best approach.

Solomon: Why don't we get the Eagles to do the opening for us next time? Ha, ha! By what standards have we all decided that there aren't enough people here? I've been participating in volunteer activities for a long time, and a meeting this size looks good to me. I don't know what standard says this is a small meeting. Who says this isn't enough people?

Liberman: I went on the first walks of the site. These workshops are a tribute to the dedication of those people who held the vision and took action, like the STUDIO.

Collins: We will take all these criticisms and attempt to improve. More diverse voices at the table.

Remcheck: At what point is the project moving along presently? Is this going to be continual process of public input? What effect will this process have on the final decision?

Blaustein: There are two parallel tracks of public involvement. One that concerns itself with the development. There were a series of public meetings in the spring and those meetings will start up again in the fall when we go through the process of changing the zoning for the site. That involves a very intense public process. But that will concern itself with the grading and the master plan for the development of housing. You can't separate the two, but right now, they are going along parallel tracks. The STUDIO has organized a series of four workshops in the summer to talk about the open space and the issues associated with that. The plans for the housing will be finalized in the next six to nine months and that's when the plan will be adopted and construction will begin. And so, there will not be continued public debate about that. The debate and the work on the open space will go on for a long time because the issues there are much more complicated. The city is the one who is developing the site. It will take us another year or more to figure out how we are going to solve the environmental problems associated with the stream and then what the best way to develop the open space is. There are a lot of alternatives out there, not just for greening what is here, but how much should we green, what should be the configuration of this open space. So, now we are doing the assessment to determine the real numbers and real values. Then we'll go about, in January, determining what kind of open space we need, what are people looking for, what are the qualities they want, what do they want to use this space for, and how are we going to build it. Unless there is enormous opposition during the public process, we have to assume that the houses will be built. If the houses are not built, I don't know that the city will go ahead and build a park here. How could we financially do that? It is not financially feasible for us to do that. We can barely maintain the acreage we have in public parks now. So, they are inextricably linked. What the confirmation of all that ends up being is how many houses, where the lines are, how one flows into another, is still being debated and will be for the next several months.

Sentz: Additionally, before there is any development on the site, there must be a zone change. There are a series of hearings on many levels as this occurs.

Blaustein: There is a series of state permits which must be obtained to meet the criterion they have in place to address

the environmental problems on the site. Everything needs to be in order before anything can happen.

Caginalp: Three separate groups have hired lawyers to block the development with injunctions, so the process won't be easy.

Lieberman: There will be a Turnpike Commission meeting to discuss the Mon-Fayette Toll Road on Monday, July 21 at St. Steven's School in Hazelwood at 7:30 pm.

Paul: In the Civil Engineering Department at Carnegie Mellon, each year the entire senior class spends a semester doing all the planning and labor to build a small park or beautify something on campus. Learning at the site is already occurring. We now need to learn from the site. CMU students could incorporate this as part of their curriculum.

Mullock: Does Friends of Nine Mile Run exist?

Collins: No, but as of this meeting, yes, we thought of it—it exists!

Mullock: What about adding in Friends of Nine Mile Run and Frick Park?

Collins: One thing we kicked around at the beginning stages was calling the project Nine Mile Run - Frick Watershed Project. That would include the upstream communities of Wilksburg, Swissvale, Edgewood, and Pittsburgh.

Mullock: Forbes Bridge has wildlife as it empties underneath past Swissvale School. I saw a rat snake and birds on a little path.

Remcheck: There are grants for tree planting through the State Forestry division for projects that Friends of Nine Mile Run might want to take on.