

Environmental Green Infrastructure Focus Group Meeting

September 13, 2006 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Auditorium, Brookside Gardens, Wheaton Regional Park

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Presentation on Green Infrastructure (20 minutes)
3. Discussion Questions (~ 40 minutes)
 1. What types of environmental features and what specific environmental features are of Countywide Significance?
 2. Do you have any suggestions for what general principles should be considered in setting minimum green corridor widths and node sizes, and maximum gaps? (In other words, what should the size criteria be based on?)
 3. What do you see as the highest priorities for natural area protection?
 - a. In rural areas
 - b. In urban areas
 4. What are some of the opportunities and constraints in developing a green infrastructure plan with respect to preserving and connecting natural areas?
4. Breakout Groups (~30 minutes)
 - a) Additional Discussion Questions
5. Wrap-up (15 minutes)

Desired Outcome of the Meeting:

- Participants understand the plan goals, process, and general concepts.
- Park and Planning staff understand the green infrastructure-related issues and concerns of the environmental community, as well as opportunities and constraints.
- A follow-up process that allows continuing input and coordination as needed/desired.

ADDITIONAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you have any suggestions for green infrastructure implementation tools?
2. Do you have any suggestions for incentives for preserving green infrastructure?
3. Should any areas that cannot be connected to a larger network be included? If so, what kind?
4. Do you have any suggestions for ways to enhance the overall effectiveness of green infrastructure or natural area preservation plans?

Any feedback you can provide on the above issues would be appreciated. If you would like to take more time to consider these questions, please feel free to do so and send your responses to:

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Environmental Focus Group 09-13-2006

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Milton Kaufmann, Montgomery Village Outreach Volunteer; John Parrish, Maryland Native Plant Society; Daniel Landry, Pepco Staff Forester; Aleen Starkweather, League of Women Voters; Fred Winkler, TORCH; Jim Fary, Sierra Club; Susie Eig, LOS/CCV; Moshe Briel, WOCA; Susanne Lee, WMCCA; Anne Ambler, Sierra Club; Kathleen Michels, Upper Sligo Citizens Association & Friends of Sligo Creek; Rob Gibbs, MNCPPC - Parks

Questions and Comments

- Does the reduction in forest from 45% to 28% from 1973 to 2000 shown in the presentation include urban trees? *(No, it includes natural forest areas.)*
- Why is urban tree cover not included? *(The Plan is considering natural forest (and other) ecosystems. However, potential connections with urban areas will be considered.)*
- Does green infrastructure mean forest only? *(No. It includes a variety of natural ecosystems including wetlands, meadows, and scrub/shrub.)*
- Does a road fragment a forest? *(To a degree, yes. However, some species can still cross the gap, e.g. birds, so there is still some degree of connectivity—although far from ideal.)*
- Are all of our natural lands being managed for forest? *(No. Some areas are managed for other habitat types including open meadow and scrub/shrub.)*
- Are funds still available through Program Open Space (POS)? *(Yes, but the amount can vary greatly from year to year, depending on State allocations.)*
- A green infrastructure plan should have been done 10-15 years ago.
- Will the Green Infrastructure Plan be the controlling document for other plans and policies? *(The Plan will amend the General Plan and all master, sector, and functional master plans. It will guide the recommendations made in other plans, and provide an environmental foundation for future master plan revisions.)*
- Are piped streams mapped? *(We know where many are, but not all are mapped. When area and sector master plans are updated, piped streams are considered for possible daylighting, especially in areas of potential redevelopment.)*
- Have any streams that were piped been daylighted? *(If any have been, it has been infrequent. However, recommendations were made in the recent revision of the Shady Grove Sector Plan to daylight a portion of one stream near the Transfer Station and another near the County Service Park, if these areas are redeveloped. In the future, any new green space created through the daylighting of streams (e.g. as part of a redevelopment plan) can be added to the Green Infrastructure Plan.)*

- Are TMDLs driving this? *(In part, yes. Improving water quality and avoiding the need for TMDLs as much as possible are important GI Plan considerations.)*
- Can DPW&T do things contrary to GI Plan recommendations, after the Plan is approved? *(Possibly. The Plan will be a concept plan, providing goals to work towards and a guide for making better decisions, not an additional regulatory layer.)*
- How much land must be acquired for this network? *(This is not clear yet. Acquisition is one of a number of possible implementation mechanisms. The amount of land to be acquired through purchase or dedication will be determined over time as the Plan is implemented.)*
- Should the green infrastructure network have trails? *(Some areas will have trails in accordance with the County Trails Plan. For new green infrastructure we will coordinate with our trails planners.)*
- How did the State develop 1000-foot minimum corridor width and 250 acres for minimum hub area for its green infrastructure map? *(The State used these criteria to map green infrastructure on a state scale. We will need smaller minimum size criteria (more inclusive) to map green infrastructure on a county scale.)*

Green Infrastructure Principles

- Relationship of development and protection and restoration of ecosystems includes:
 - Utilities
 - Easements
 - Low impact development
 - Rain gardens
- Include green principles in the Twinbrook sector plan and those that follow it.
- Size criteria for green infrastructure elements
 - 600 yard corridor width – considered optimal in some studies, but not a minimum
 - Consider narrower corridors if 600 yards is not possible
 - Criteria should be variable based on location in the County
 - Down-county/up-county
 - Developed/undeveloped
 - Criteria should be science-based, do a literature review, minimum functionality is important in setting minimum size criteria
 - How wide should corridors be for water quality, air quality?
 - Connectivity and hub size are important for biodiversity
 - Connectivity is important for seed dispersal
 - Look at other states and jurisdictions to see what they have done, e.g. NJ
 - There are many studies on habitat size requirements for forest interior birds—depending on species diversity, population health, and species sensitivity
 - 6000 acres to 25 acres
 - Depends on the species you seek to maintain

- Indicator species could be used to set green infrastructure goals

Priorities for Natural Resource Protection

- Forests that can support songbirds are important.
- Natural gaps in forest cover, such as meadows and scrub/shrub, are important to provide different habitats for different species.
- Riparian Buffer Habitat
 - Critical to Chesapeake Bay water quality
- POS, LOS – funds are important
 - Get whole picture
 - Prioritizing should come after getting the bigger picture into perspective
- Wetlands are an important component of green infrastructure
- Green Infrastructure is important in both rural and urban areas—however, the issues, needs, and strategies are different.
- Riparian buffer restoration is the most efficient way to improve water quality.

Opportunities, Needs, and Constraints

- M-NCPPC and other County agencies need to coordinate better to get things implemented.
- Centers and Boulevards should include green urbanism principles.
- Look at ways to consider utility ROWs in the Plan. Some are already maintained through selective herbicides as meadows or scrub/shrub, and have habitat value. Some could be converted to this type of management.
- Meet with Pepco to discuss their utility corridors
- Need to close gaps between greenways – e.g. Potomac to Patuxent--via Seneca Creek
 - Plan should address different restoration/protection options
 - Conservation easements
 - Acquisition
- There is an urgent need to offset development pressure
- Development Review
 - The green infrastructure plan should have ‘teeth’ in the development process.
 - European examples may be useful
 - Look at legal issues
- Link areas where stormwater can infiltrate
- Inventory Flora and Fauna
 - Compare historical to existing
 - Habitat provided for key species can be an umbrella for other species
 - Master Plans should look at natural resources more closely

- We should try to maintain existing species, and bring back those we've lost as much as possible.
 - Look at area/habitat requirements of different species
 - Look at less common species to target which types of habitat are scarcest
- Opportunities and constraints
 - Highways should incorporate underpasses/overpasses to allow connections for wildlife
 - Pedestrian overpasses are often provided, wildlife overpasses seem to be a hard sell
 - The Park system is a valuable asset. The Green Infrastructure Plan should build on that legacy for future generations.
 - Corridors should be enhanced wherever possible.
- ICC – currently seems to have insufficient passages for animals – we should not miss this opportunity
- Some species have very low to no tolerance for human presence – we have a few areas for those (species management plans)
 - Which species are common, sensitive, rare, extirpated?
- Highly developed areas have opportunities for green infrastructure enhancement
 - Find incentives
 - Golf courses have potential
- Maryland 5-year breeding bird atlas
 - An opportunity to use the data
 - Find high quality natural areas with a variety of species – find out why they are there—use that information for enhancement and management
- If a natural area cannot be connected with others it can still be a significant green infrastructure resource
 - Significant isolated natural areas should be considered
 - Case by case review, prioritize
 - Future connectivity may be possible in some cases
 - Think creatively about connections (homeowners can plant – Noah's Garden concept of connections. Opportunities also exist in commercial areas.)
- Global warming is partially due to loss of natural areas – we can't afford to lose more green infrastructure.
- MAGIC is trying to develop statewide and national corridors. Look at tie-ins with their efforts.
- Non-native and invasive species
 - Larger forest interiors have fewer invasive species.
 - Manage for invasives to support wildlife.
 - Recognize that there will be a cost for eradication, restoration.
- Urban development should have green space amenities.
 - Urban green space should contribute to water and air quality.
 - Better use of fertilizers and other chemicals is needed.
 - More can be done to improve air and water quality, e.g. green roofs, etc.

- Current deer management is woefully insufficient. Deer will compromise the Green Infrastructure Plan and ruin our existing parks if not adequately managed.
 - The deer problem requires a much more aggressive program. Adequate deer management is critical for the success of natural area protection, enhancement, and maintenance.