Municipalities and Large Civic Organizations Green Infrastructure Focus Group Meeting

October 11, 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 natural features do you see as important within or near your community?

   2. What values, benefits, amenities, or problems associated with natural areas and connections between natural areas do you see as most important for your community or area?

   3. What opportunities and constraints are there in enhancing green infrastructure with respect to the needs and concerns in your community or area?

  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 municipalities and communities, 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 incentives for preserving green infrastructure?

2. Do you have any suggestions for green infrastructure implementation tools (including changes to codes or regulations)?

3. Do you have any suggestions for what types of areas should be included in the green infrastructure network?

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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Municipalities and Large Civic Organizations Focus Group
10/11/06

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Don McNellis, WMCCA; Richard Wright, UCAB; Erica Shingara, City of Gaithersburg; Barbara Foresti, WO MP CAC; Paula Jean Halberg, GCCA; Aleen Starkweather, LWVMC; Dale Tibbetts; Geoffrey Biddle, Bethesda

Questions and Comments

- Green infrastructure element criteria
    - What is optimal for biodiversity?
    - What are minimum requirements?
    - Should be based on science—Look at the published literature
- Will urban green spaces be considered in this plan? *(The GI Plan will deal primarily with natural ecosystem areas. However, we will be looking at potential connections between urban areas and natural areas.)*
- Does the State have green infrastructure recommendations? *(The State has mapped green infrastructure for the entire State. We will take the State's map into account, but we will be using more inclusive criteria for Montgomery County's green infrastructure network.)*
- How will green infrastructure recommendations relate to area and sector master plans? *(The GI Plan will amend the General Plan and all master plans. Future master plan revisions will be guided by the recommendations of the GI Plan.)*
- ICC – how much of the remaining forest will be lost? If they don't build it, what might happen to the land? *(If the ICC is not built, existing parkland that has been sold to the State Highway Administration for the ICC right-of-way can be purchased for the MNCPPC park system.)*
- Water quality – what causes the poor quality in some areas? *(Water quality is influenced by various factors. In certain areas poor water quality may be due to local stream erosion. In certain agricultural areas there may be excess nutrients or sediment in the runoff. In urban areas there may be excess nutrients, metals, and toxic substances in the runoff from roads, lawns, and commercial areas.)*
- Is it possible to continue to develop and not lose more forest? *(Not under the current system of laws that allows some portion of forest to be removed on private land outside of stream buffers. However, although development will continue under the General Plan, resulting in additional forest loss, we hope to reduce forest loss and encourage replanting in forest gaps through implementation of the Green Infrastructure Plan.)*
- Area we going to continue to be developer driven, or are we going to develop guidelines they must follow? *(The General Plan, not developers, is what drives planning and development in Montgomery County. Economic and demographic forces also drive development. Developers already comply with stormwater and*

environmental regulations and guidelines. The GI Plan will be conceptual in nature and will not add a new regulatory layer. It will, however, provide green infrastructure goals to work towards in the future, maximize the environmental benefits of current regulations and guidelines, and provide mechanisms and incentives to further enhance, restore, and protect green infrastructure.)

- How will this plan be effective in the development review process? *(When a plan comes in it can be compared with the Green Infrastructure Plan to see if there are areas on site that could be given priority for preservation or connection.)*
- Funding? How do you pay for and balance with other competing priorities in the County and compare to other needs? *(This is a perennial issue, not only with regard to green infrastructure, but also with many pressing needs in the County.)*
- Is there a requirement for soil testing before applying fertilizer? *(Not for private homeowners, but lawn care companies are required to test soil.)*
- How will differences of opinion between the focus groups be handled? *(We will take the input from all the focus groups into consideration in developing the Plan. When the public forums are held, we can discuss how to handle issues where groups disagree. In the end we must use best professional judgment in preparing a draft plan, while considering the many, various, and sometimes competing needs involved. Then the Planning Board and County Council will hold hearings and decide on any issues that are still of concern to the various interests.)*
- How will the Green Infrastructure Plan relate to plans that have already been adopted? *(The GI Plan will amend the General Plan, and all master plans. It will provide an environmental foundation for future master plan revisions, and guide their recommendations.)*

What is most important?

- o Using native plants
- o Controlling what is replanted
- o Work with centers and boulevards
  - Plan for more green space
  - Better coordination to produce better and more livable urban areas
- o Connectivity of natural areas is key
- o Connectivity between existing natural resources and urban/suburban areas is important
- o Green areas add value and many benefits
- o People value forests, streams, and meadows – people like to get close to nature and appreciate paths that provide connectivity to it.
- o In terms of green infrastructure, urban and rural areas are both important.
- o Headwaters seem to make the most difference--once streams get down-county it may be too late to do much to improve water quality. It seems best to give priority to protecting headwater areas.
- o Having places to watch birds, butterflies and other animals is important

Opportunities, Needs, and Constraints

- Incorporate more green into development plans

- Forest has been steadily decreasing in the County. This trend will continue unless something is done. New plans and programs are needed to stop and reverse this decrease.
- It would be helpful for organizations to have a map that shows their areas – especially a map that would show gaps in green infrastructure.
- The GI Plan should consider the overall context with adjoining jurisdictions.
- The Plan should consider Legacy Open Space (LOS), and the Agricultural Reserve.
- The master plan process is too slow. Condense the process. Get critical areas mapped now – include in development plans now. This should have greater weight in development & plan considerations.
- Urban green space is being lost faster now through infill and redevelopment—this is a concern.
  - MNCPPC should review the infill/redevelopment process to enhance urban green space.
- There is a lot of potential to infill trees in sprawl areas.
- MD Native Plant Society is doing an inventory. We need to ensure that developers use native plants for required plantings.

- Green infrastructure should be a part of Center & Boulevards
- Use of native Maryland plants should be written into requirement for developers
- Legislative needs
  - Development standards to promote more green space
  - Focus on stewardship
- There is a need for more public education. Developers will build what the customer wants.
- MNCPPC must recommend what is best for the County.
- Gaps need to be identified.
- Lessons already learned need to be integrated.
- Animal and plant habitat requirements need to be understood.
- Need overlays that show native species and habitats
- Development standards need to be changed to preserve connectivity
- Environmental needs affect not just the people in this room – it's bigger than us
- ICC corridor – the most obvious green space to preserve
- Maybe we need urban TDRs to preserve green space.
- Farmers are interested in preserving water quality in the agricultural reserve – they depend on good local surface and groundwater quality.
- Perhaps recommendations can be made to purchase riparian lands or provide incentives to landowners to plant riparian forest—especially in areas where development is occurring.
- Priorities should be set to optimize money and resources spent.
- Priorities on making connections, even in urban areas connections could be developed.
- Connections of existing green areas can build a network faster.
- Wheaton – green space occurs in small pieces: an acre here and there – don't want to see them developed.
- In urban areas the challenge is protecting small green spaces that often don't connect.
- There is a need to make urban green space as healthy as possible.

- How do you keep people from selling forested lands – maybe establish criteria they need to consider before they sell.
- Even on private property DPWT/permitting services allows additional paving – more parking pads, concrete walls around properties
- We need to be able to enforce green infrastructure enhancement and protection.
- County agencies need better communication and coordination.
- Need to institute an impervious surface limit. Some areas have one, but are not enforced, fines for violating are too low
- Create a legacy Conservation Trust—that can acquire natural land
- Silver Spring so developed – small green spaces are valuable – few natural areas are left and they do not connect.

- Problems – deer eat garden and landscape plants. The deer population is out of control.
- Education – we need to educate homeowners, etc. about green stewardship.
- Connecting natural areas might help deer move around more and possible worsen the deer situation unless better management is provided.
- Lyme disease is a deer-related problem—we need to control the deer population better.
- Link to terrorism – green infrastructure could provide places for people to hide during an attack.
- Increased access to stream valleys could result in increased crime in the parks.
- There seems to be a lack of means to convince developers to change the way sites are developed.
- We may need a bigger carrot to provide incentives for developers to do greener site design more – perhaps allow more density.
- There are increases in land uses in the County, such as managed grassed areas, that have practices that contribute too much fertilization & chemical applications – there seems to be over-kill in many areas.
- Public education and better oversight of landscaping firms could reduce over fertilization of lawns.
- Pesticide free zones could be created in new communities.
- The planning process should work to reduce misunderstandings between developers and environmentalists.
- Support for plan will be better with the involvement of diverse groups, developers, environmentalist, civic organizations, etc.
- Revise the Zoning Code to support green infrastructure!
- Innovative practices, especially that use infiltration, can help with water quality.