

MEETING SUMMARY
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
November 5, 2009

The November 5th meeting of the Natural Resources Advisory Committee was held in the Houston-Galveston Area Council Conference Room A at 3555 Timmons Lane, Houston, Texas. The meeting began at 1:32 PM. Chairman Dennis Caputo presided.

NRAC voting members present (22):

Bill Bandiga	Brett Kolaja	Linda Shead
Kathy Burris	Carole Lamont	Brian Shmaefsky
Patrick Buzbee	Jack Miller	Mike Talbott
Glenda Callaway	Tom Northrup	Lori Traweek
Dennis Caputo	John O'Connell	Kerry Whelan
Marilyn Christian	Ellis Pickett	Pudge Willcox
Nicole Hausler	Orval Rhoads	
Jim Joyce	Ronald Schultz	

NRAC voting members not present (12):

Jeff Brennan	Leroy Dettling	Andrew Isbell
Jamie Brewster	Reed Eichelberger	Jim Kachtick
Del Canon	David Hubenak	Sarah Metzger
James Dannenbaum	Andy Icken	Adam Smith

Del Canon delegated Cathy McCoy. Delegated representatives can vote on Committee business; non delegated representatives count toward quorum but cannot vote.

Current Vacancies:

Environmental Groups (1)

NRAC advisory member (1):

Helen Drummond, Galveston Bay Estuary Program

H-GAC Staff Present (7):

Carl Masterson, Rachel Powers, Erin Livingston, Todd Running, Om Chawla, Jean Wright, Justin Bower

Others Present:

Felix Aramhula (San Antonio Water System), Kenneth Brooks (San Antonio Water System), Cynthia Brum (GBEP), Adam Conner (San Antonio Water System), Sharon Crabb (AECOM), Mike Lindsey (MCEHS), Ed Matuszak (URS), Gary Mitchell (KKC), Billy Peche (San Antonio Water System), Joseph Rippole (San Antonio Water System), Kay Willcox (Chambers County citizen)

Certify Quorum

Carl Masterson confirmed a quorum via roll call.

Approve Meeting Report

On a motion by Jim Joyce and a second by Brian Shmaefsky, the August 6, 2009, meeting notes were approved by the Committee.

Membership

Del Cannon will be finding a replacement, as he no longer has the time to serve on the Committee. Cathy McCoy will be filling in until a replacement is found. Bud Karachiwala is no longer with Harris County. Marilyn Christian will be filling in until a permanent replacement is made. Nicole Hausler will be taking the place of Aston Hinds for the remainder of his term.

Subcommittees

Nominating

The Nominating Subcommittee met on September 17, 2009, and as a result of deliberations recommended Dennis Caputo for chairman and Pat Buzbee for vice chairman. On a motion by Glenda Callaway and a second by Lori Traweek the recommendations were approved by the Committee.

The subcommittee also discussed the Environmental Group vacancy on the NRAC. Suggestions of groups to approach included Bayou Preservation Association, Houston Audubon, Houston Wilderness, Katy Prairie Conservancy and Sierra Club. Staff would like for members to think it over and make recommendations before the February meeting.

Parks & Natural Areas

The subcommittee met on October 15, 2009, and selected recommendations for PNA award winners and honorable mentions based on the scores submitted by five judges.

Recommendations were as follows:

Planning

Honorable Mention – Houston Parks and Recreation Department: Linear Forest

Winner – Sugar Land: Hike and Bike Trail Master Plan

Policy Tools

Honorable Mention – Harris County: resolution to require that all facilities meet minimum LEED requirements

Honorable Mention – Missouri City: Hunter's Glen Sprayground

Winner – Houston Parks and Recreation Department: Urban Gardening Program

On-the-ground Projects < \$500,000

Honorable Mention – Houston Parks and Recreation Department: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Tribute Planting

Winner – City of West University Place: Friends Park

On-the-ground Projects > \$500,000

Honorable Mention – Missouri City: Buffalo Run Park

Winner – Hermann Park Conservancy: Mary Gibbs and Jesse H. Jones Greenway

On a motion by Linda Shead and a second by Kathy Burris, the PNA awardees were approved for submittal to the H-GAC Board.

On January 19, 2010, immediately following the expected approval by the H-GAC Board there will be an award reception. All are welcome to attend.

Topics of the Day

Desalination

The San Antonio Water System (SAWS), as the primary water supplier for the City of San Antonio and Bear County, is beginning to explore the possibility of ocean water desalination as a source for water in the future. SAWS currently pulls water from the Edwards Aquifer, but there are many restrictions and they would like to diversify.

The current scope for the desalination plant is that it would provide water to users from Brazoria County down to Cameron County and those two counties inland. In June to August 2010 they

would like to issue a Request for Qualifications for a consultant to study the coastal areas included in the scope and then bring the consultant on board in November 2010. The consultant will determine the best location for an ocean water desalination plant and determine where the intake and discharge lines should be placed. Alternative energy issues and climate change will be considered when determining plant placement. It is expected the studies will take two years, although this may be extended. SAWS will be conducting workshops and advisory meetings to keep interested parties informed of the progress. Constituents will be able to decide if they want to participate in the project or not.

On December 3rd and 4th TCEQ will be hosting an invitation only conference, in South Padre, to discuss coming up with a systematic approach to ocean water desalination project requirements.

Q: Are you going to look at other locations in the U.S. that have successful desalinization projects?

A: SAWS will look at the Brownsville Plant, the Laguna Madre Plant, the Tampa Bay Plant, the planned California plants, and a very successful ocean water desalinization operation in Australia.

Comment: You should specifically look into the risk to the environment, the impacts to the environment, from an operation such as this.

Comment: I'm pleased SAWS is going out and talking to people first.

Q: Have you applied to the Water Development Board for funding for this project?

A: No. SAWS is looking at funding the project on its own through the budgetary process.

Q: Have you talked with the four or five Regional Water Planning processes that are going on under state water planning?

A: Not yet.

Comment: There might be a timing issue. This region is just firming up our water management strategies that go into the 2011 plan. If you are not in the plan even if people want to fund you they will not be able to do so.

Q: What happens to all of the salt removed?

A: That is one of the questions the consultant will answer. Our intent would probably be to dispose of it far enough out in the Gulf such that it would be able to disperse and not affect marine life.

Q: Do you have any rough concept of the scale of system you are looking at?

A: No, but we have estimated future water needs.

Q: Do you have cost estimates compared to treating surface water?

A: Not yet, but it is significant.

Options for Mitigating the Effects of Severe Storm Events

Jim Blackburn with the Severe Storm Prediction, Education, and Evacuation from Disasters (SSPEED) Center at Rice University presented a discussion of how to address the risk in our region presented by severe storms such as Hurricane Ike. SSPEED Center has developed a range of alternative futures and mitigation techniques ranging from the least structural to the most structural. These include:

- Expand wildlife refuges and work with private landowners to obtain easements and share benefits from setting and keeping land aside. Benefits include: fish and wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, flood abatement, and money for the landowners that keep this land.
- Develop Bolivar Peninsula into a national seashore for day usage. Currently 25% of the homes on Bolivar are seeking to be bought out. Setting up a process to buy properties over time is one solution.
- All flood and wind insurance is currently subsidized. How long do we want to subsidize building in areas that we know are going to flood? Give everybody an opportunity to be bought out when they flood. If they don't accept then they don't get insured in the future. This would probably clear out many of the flood prone areas and open up the bayfront to public access.
- At a minimum we need to require higher slab elevations.
- Install levees in selected areas. Protect the job bases at NASA and the Ship Channel.
- Put a levee around Galveston to protect all sides.
- Require residents on the west end of Galveston to self insure.
- Build the Ike Dike.

The discussion of options traces back to the 1970s. There is a need for an interim approach and a long-term approach. We need to discuss the social, economic, and environmental impacts of all options otherwise we won't come up with something that is sustainable, which is our biggest challenge. The SSPEED center at Rice will continue to have discussions on this topic.

Environmental Program Highlights

Westfield Estates Watershed Protection Plan (WPP)

Working with stakeholders and TCEQ, H-GAC has been developing a WPP for Westfield Estates which focuses on bacteria. Final revisions are now underway. Once complete, implementation will begin with the focus being on septic system remediation and pet-waste education to alter behaviors.

Clean Rivers Program

Eight local programs are involved in Clean Rivers monitoring. A total of 314 sites are monitored on a quarterly basis, with some sites monitored monthly. Other projects include:

- A special study with U.S. Geological Survey on the West Fork of the San Jacinto looking at total dissolved solids and total suspended solids, focusing on sand and gravel operations
- 24-hour dissolved oxygen monitoring at six sites with the City of Houston
- Habitat assessments at monitoring sites to help TCEQ determine appropriate standards. Fifty-three have been conducted, eight remain.
- Ambient monitoring, through a contract with the Environmental Institute of Houston, at 5-7 sites looking at biological activity. The sites will be selected within 1 month.
- The Bastrop Bayou WPP, bacteria being the main focus, should be complete in December, with implementation beginning soon after.
- The San Bernard WPP, with bacteria, DO, and nutrients being the focus, is just getting started. The first public meetings will be held November 10, 17, and 18.
- New data system on the H-GAC website with information on monitoring locations and results

Bacteria Implementation Group (BIG)

The BIG is looking at bacteria impairments from the Clear Creek watershed to north of Huntsville. The most recent work has included development of the first draft of the Implementation Plan and public outreach to let stakeholders not yet involved in the process know what is going on. The next meeting will be November 17, 2009.

Regional Flood Management Council

The Flood Management Handbook was presented at the Texas Flood Management Association Fall conference. The presentation was well attended and the handbook was well received. The RFMC is now working to select their next project. Interest in legal issues in floodplain management is strong.

Roundtable Discussion

Pat Buzbee – Montgomery County just settled into a new facility.

Lori Traweek – Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority is updating their website which hasn't been done in 12 years.

Pudge Wilcox – Chambers County is still recovering from Hurricane Ike. The recovery is going as well as can be expected.

Ellis Pickett – Frank Jordan just announced he will be running for Liberty County judge.

Brett Kolaja – Missouri City is currently expanding their regional wastewater treatment plant and a consultant is finishing the design for the surface water treatment plant. The city has partnered

with the utility districts on stormwater pollution prevention measures and there is now a fee included in the water bill to pay for the costs of implementation of the program.

Marilyn Christian – Harris County has a lawsuit against MCC Recycling and US Oil Recovery for dumping waste into Vince Bayou and for air pollution issues. All sampling efforts are showing lots of pollution. Also, water systems are now required to have a generator so that, the next time we have a situation like Hurricane Ike, water won't go down.

Jim Joyce – Professional organizations are still struggling with the same issues of operator certification, engineer training, networking and just trying to stay on top of the new regulations.

Nicole Hausler – At the end of September, Alec Dreyer was named as the new executive director for the Port of Houston Authority. He came from Horizon Wind Energy and so far the process of getting to know each other has been very positive.

Mike Talbott – The Bayou Preservation Association will be having a symposium November 13, 2009, titled “Stormwater, The Underfunded Asset.”

Dennis Caputo – Dennis requested that thoughts, observations, and suggestions regarding what the NRAC should do in the next year be directed to Carl or Dennis.

Carl – Several organizations and agencies are working together to put on a coastal resilience forum at the end of May or beginning of June. A program committee has been assembled and will be working to set up speakers.

Kerry Whelan – There is a lot of chaos in industry right now.

Glenda Callaway – On January 16, 2010, there will be a water conference that will focus on water supply and conservation. The Basin and Bay stakeholder group met yesterday as part of the state environmental flows planning that is going on. Recommended flows from the expert science team should be presented December 1, 2009, and will be posted on the TCEQ website. The Region H planning group met, with discussion primarily focusing on water management strategies for meeting water shortages over the next 50 years. They will be doing public hearings and one will likely be in the Houston area. Bike around the Bay was a great success with over 500 riders.

Kathy Burris – Colorado County is still in a drought, although now it is considered only moderate. In the past month they have caught up 11 inches, bringing the total for the year so far to 24 inches. Last year they only had 23 inches.

Jack Miller – The Houston Council of Engineering Companies has been staying very busy monitoring regulatory agencies and the issues that affect their industry. They have been very involved in promoting a program for dedicated street and drainage funding for the City of Houston.

Orval Rhoads – Waller County had a public meeting yesterday to kickoff the development of the county master drainage plan. Local communities, surrounding counties, flood control agencies, H-GAC staff, and state and federal agencies attended.

Tom Northrup – Knudsen just expanded their environmental group. Most of their work is with wetlands, endangered species, and the oil and gas industry.

Linda Shead – Texas Coastal Partners is in the process of signing a coastal management grant to follow-up on the Chambers County Greenprint. They will be picking items from the action plan to begin implementation. The Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) and Houston Advanced Research Center are working on a grant to start monitoring water quality on Double Bayou in Chambers County. A Watershed Protection Plan may be done in the near future. The Coastal Impact Assistance Program has been trying to get funding from the Mineral Management Service (MMS). Previously, MMS ruled non-profits and academic institutions ineligible to receive funding. The issue was revisited and they can now receive funding.

John O’Connell – On November 6, 2009, Bay City-Matagorda United will have their next meeting to continue work on their strategic plan, focusing on sustainable development for the future.

Helen Drummond – GBEP received a Coastal America award for their restoration efforts at North Deer Island. It will be presented on December 2, 2009, at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. GBEP has projects ongoing related to habitat restoration and water quality planning.

Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Thursday, February 4, 2010, at 1:30 PM.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.