

MEETING SUMMARY
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
November 4, 2010

The August 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 approximately 1:30 PM. Vice-Chairman Patrick Buzbee presided.

NRAC voting members present (25):

Bob Allen	Jim Kachtick	Brian Schmaefsky
Kathy Burris	Carole Lamont	Mike Talbott
Patrick Buzbee	Sarah Metzger	Lori Traweek
Glenda Callaway	Jack Miller	Kerry Whelan
Cathy McCoy (phone)	Tom Northrup	Pudge Wilcox
Ron Drachenberg	John O'Connell	David Hubenak
Nicole Hausler	Ellis Pickett	James Dannenbaum
Andrew Isbell	Ronald Schultz	
Jim Joyce	Linda Shead	

NRAC voting members not present (9):

Bill Bandiga (resigned)	Leroy Dettling	Orval Rhoads
Jeff Brennan	Reed Eichelberger	
Jamie Brewster	Andy Icken	
Dennis Caputo	Brett Kolaja	

Marilyn Christian delegated Bob Allen. 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 (0)

H-GAC Staff Present (9):

Carl Masterson, Jeff Taebel, Rachel Powers, Justin Bower, Bill Hoffman, Amy Boyers, Meredith Dang, Kristi Corse, Todd Running

Others Present:

Kay Willcox (citizen, Chambers County); Michael Lindsey (Montgomery County); Trent Martin (Harris County); Bill Hopkins (Memorial Super Neighborhood); H.A. Tony Williams (TCEQ Region 12); Linda Vasse (TCEQ).

Welcome and Introductions

Dennis Caputo welcomed those present and initiated self-introductions.

Certify Quorum

Carl confirmed a quorum.

Approve Meeting Report

On a motion from an guy in corner next to justing and a second from Ellis, the August meeting notes were approved. Same motioned for amendment to correct punctuation.

On page 5, punctuation is missing.

Membership

Carl introduced new members in attendance. Carl introduced the topic of term limits and elections of new officers. Prposed revisions to Aritcle V of the by-laws were distributed.

?????

Subcommittees

Parks & Natural Areas

Linda let folks know that the awards program received a record 25 applications, representing local governments and non-profits. Five judges, representing past winners and... The scores presented by the judges were used by the subcommittee to recommend winners, honorable mentions, and certificate of recognition.

Four categories:

- 1) Planning
 - a. Ida Gay
- 2) Policy Tools
 - a. Hermann Park Conservancy & Houston Parks Board (tie)
- 3) Small projects
 - a. Buffalo Bayou Paddle Trail
- 4) Large projects

a. Sylvan Beach Shoreline

Reception in January.

On a motion from Glenda and a second from Glenn Laird,

Dennis stated: I'm encourage that this continues to grow year after year, reaching out to the community, and encouraging action. As our region grows, space will become a more valuable commodity, and parks and open space will be even more important.

The motion passed unanimously.

Linda thanked H-GAC for support.

Topics of the Day

Jim Blackburn of Rice and Speedd...

An Ecological Services Financial Strategy for the Houston Region.

Look at 24-county "Houston Wilderness Area" –ten ecological types.

Wanted to find value of the ecosystems region. If we can quantify the value for open space, then perhaps we might be able to justify \$\$ to purchase land.

Robert constanza may 1997. Blackburn's book used costanza's measures to value Galveston bay at 5 billion.

But what would we pay for? Flood damage reduction—wetland protection, since wetlands help 1996-2007 floodplain comparison in White Oak Bayou. 1996-2004 for region. The floodplains have grown. Example of KPC in avoided downstream damage. Floodplain buyouts. White oak and greens bayou examples. Some of these neighborhoods will flood over and over again—are being bought out.

Hurricane Ike—areas that were inundated. Mc?? Wilderness preserve still running off two days later. Preservation may be key to sustainable coastlines. What about a National recreation Area?

Clean Water—Lake Houston is a major source of drinking water for the city of Houston and the region—what about other pollutants and residuals into the water form WWTF. Wetland filtration may be a way to treat.

Carbon Sequestration. Probably not cap and trade, but sequestration is still an issue. 30-37 dollars/ton w/ cap and trade. Maybe \$15 now, without. Saltwater marsh in California carbon farming may earn more that some rice farmers right now. These are vialble long-term economic opportunities for urban conservation.

Now focusing on economic economic activities implicit in ecosystems.

Roksan

The Greater Houston Bayou Greenway Initiative. Many groups have been active for year, but there is a lot of support right now.

23-area region—focus is more central.

Arthur C. Comey's plan from 1912—it's an old idea. Proposed park system for Houston—focusing along bayous. The urban area is MUCH larger now.

Groups thought that a scope and then a cost would make it tangible. Vision is for connected greenspace at least 50' along major waterways. With intensive GIS analysis, looking at land acquisition plus anchor park acquisition for retention/detention/water quality improvements. (Mason Park example)

Approximate cost for ten bayous for land acquisition \$490 million—300 m continuous trails, 5000 acres of green space. 10-15 year time frame.490 can also buy 12 miles of grand parkway, 8 miles of I-10, 1 reliant stadium.

Connects with Houston Wilderness's larger Sam Houston Trail.

They are now quantifying the benefits. Study done by end of year?

Funding sources?

Example of Brays Bayou. Piggybacks onto HCFCD Project Brays. Quite a bit has been done along here. Builds a quilt property by property to make open space. Build a trail when you can.

Jennifer Lorenz

New Name

Staff of three

38 conservation easement 8500 acres in nine counties. Covers northern Houston region (GBF, Houston Audubon, and Katie Prairie all land trusts.) Most are wetland mitigation.

Bannana Bend example. Do baseline inventory. Largest river birch in region is in BB. Annual surveys are a defining feature of a land trust.

What is a land trust: not a bank. Preserve land through acquisitions—conservation or purchase in fee.

Unusual in that we do easements with gov't agencies such as Montgomery County, city, MUD.

Difference between a deed restriction and a conservation easement. CE is

The Land Trust Alliance now certifies land trusts. LLT is working to get accreditation, which is a new program.

Education program—No Child Left Inside. Average 7.5 hours in front of screen each day across nation. Do water quality testing (pH, temperature, DO, etc.).

Challenge threats to properties: tallow, feral hogs, “quadrawheelis destructis” Four wheel damage. Eversole condemned 4-wheel park. Sand and Gravel issues—spring creek, San Jacinto River.

Wetland preservation preferred over wetland creation. Bahr Woods—try to connect properties strategically.

Only in-lieu-fee program in state, focusing on Spring Creek. Normally 2 ft. On Spring Creek and Cypress Creek, natural surface trails are preferred because of soil characteristics.

Talked about HUC codes for Lake Houston Watershed Watershed Protection Project. 30% of the watershed floodplain are now sand and gravel. There is “zero” regulation of sand and gravel operations. Often fly by night, and mine unpredictably and effect downstream water treatment plants.

Questions

Annual survey are a minimum requirement.

For sand and gravel legislation, requesting 50 foot buffer and a required permit.

What are the water quality violations? TSS?

Turbidity. New York City doesn't need water treatment systems because of land conservation. Yet CoH has had to shut down LH plant because of too much runoff. Jim added that these are financial issues that may allow for use of Safe Drinking Water Act funds. Wetlands treatment may help remove

Previous proposed legislation has included site restoration at mining systems. Working on that now?

No. We're trying for what we can get. We may then go back and reconsider additional items in the future. It is so much less expensive to preserve now rather than fix later.

On Bufalo Bayou, the gap?

Privately owned land—very high-priced property, make it almost impossible for reasonably-priced acquisition.

About 50' buffer—is the small buffer a ‘taking’ issue?

Yes. We just need *some* forested buffer.

Suspended solids isn't just problematic because of water treatment, but also impacts bacteria levels, which are a problem in our region.

Could these be designated as industrial sector under stormwater requirements?

Good question. Some of them ignore 404 permits from the Corp of Engineers.

Are sand and gravel companies opposed?

Not the good actors. Some are fly-by-night operators that are the problems. (No longer say “mom-and-pop”). We are the only state that doesn't require any permits. Jim added that 402 issues (stormwater) is problematic...there is no effective regulatory framework beyond nuisance regulations.

Cost of treating water—we pay 4x more that we should be if it weren't for the pollution upstream, saw in presentation. Looking ahead 15 years, what are projections for treatment costs in 15 to 20 years in the future—and could that be weighed against acquisition costs now?

There is little information right now, especially for emerging contaminants such as pharmaceuticals and endocrine disruptors. EPA will be testing the drinking water—both in the streams and being delivered. JL pointed out that City is now rerouting water for Lake Houston.

JB thinks these things are

Waterworks museum is now open—it's fab.

Dennis asked speakers to stay.. thanked them for their presentations.

Staff Presentations

Gina Mitteco—Regional Bikeway plan

Only serve eight county area.

Quick snapshot of programs. Centers, districts, network, ??

Livable Centers Program—encourages mixed use, ?? to encourage reduced driving miles. More pedestrian friendly. How can we encourage these sorts of places within the region.

Districts—where can we replace miles with bike-ped projects. Several completed projects, two more coming up.

RBN—Where the trails are right now, where they are planned, and fill in where additional items are needed.

Best practices—Bicycling for connections for how to Bike.

Q: As an occasional rider, there are few areas to lock bikes. Anything being done?

A: Yes. Livable Centers recommend bike racks. Also in Special Districts. Maybe for Flea Markets in particular. Bike Racks are an eligible Semac funding item. City of Houston is looking at parking requirements right now and are considering bike. CoH got grant where they are looking at a bike rental program—only one kiosk right now—but also putting together system.

(Is that Jeff going the wrong way?)

Rachel

Q: Looking at Viruses? Working with medical centers research?

A: Will look into it.

The first presentation topic of the day was the **EcoLogical tool**.

Pat Buzbee introduced the speakers: *Ms. Meredith Dang and Ms. Amy Boyers of H-GAC*

Ms. Dang indicated they were showing a new version of the EcoLogical project, as a follow up to a presentation at the February meeting. She presented background information on the project, a GIS/spatially-based geographic information tool on land use for transportation developmental decision-making. They also presented their new brochures for the project.

The overall goal is a Regional decision support tool—GIS-based, using quantitative and qualitative metrics (extent and nature of ecotypes, etc), and reflecting local priorities. It will help guide transportation decisions based on upcoming population growth, with a spatial tool to balance mobility with ecological resources.

The project involved many local partners, and included Grant funding from FHA, GBEP, and others.

Ms. Dang answered several questions from the Committee. Mr. Dannenbaum asked whether the project had received input from HCFCD, and what point in the input process the project was at. Ms. Dang answered that HCFCD was a partner, and that TPWD was also consulted. This process is iterative and will be improved based on feedback from stakeholders as it goes forward. Mr. Dannenbaum followed up with a question regarding integration with the statewide rail planning process. Jeff Taebel indicated that TxDOT has asked H-GAC to be on the planning committee. Ms. Dang indicated that new data will be able to be integrated into the GIS layer.

Ms. Boyers provided a demonstration of the tool, which can be accessed at <http://www.eco-logical.com>. There are video tutorials on the webpage, along with written instructions. Amy demonstrated many of the functions and interface, including an explanation of the ecotype layer, defining queries, and the manner in which metrics are calculated.

The Committee asked a variety of questions regarding how the scoring system was set up, and on related issues. Committee members raised concerns as to whether this would delay projects. Ms. Boyers answered that it could potentially, but may also reduce delays during NEPA evaluations. It was suggested that groundwater recharge areas be incorporated into the system in the future. Ms. Boyers also indicated that information on parks would be incorporated soon, and that the data for the tool could be streamed to GIS from the website for GIS users. The addition of information will be handled by staff on an ad hoc basis. The ultimate arbiter may be the Policy committee or the H-GAC Board. Ms. Boyers indicated that they would like to also include information from other resources and agencies.

Mr. Taebel pointed out that the application got the second place award at the international ESRI competition. Linda Shead pointed out that there were some limitations to the current iteration of the tool, including a 100 acre minimum size limit.

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Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Thursday, February 3, 2010, at 1:30 PM. Carl Masterson recognized Kerry Whelan for his service, upon his retirement.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 PM.