

**Thomas and McPherson Green Infrastructure Project
Community Meeting
February 19, 2019
Discussion Notes**

Introductions and Welcome

- Rebecca Zito, of Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA), welcomed the group, reviewed the meeting's agenda, and introduced Anna Flores, the Project Manager, along with the Wade Trim Consultant Team.

Project Overview and Goals

- Ana Flores stated that the City has significant stormwater challenges. The stormwater infrastructure was built over a hundred years ago, at a time when the City's population was smaller, and communities had more green space and less impervious surfaces. In addition, today, rainfall is not even throughout the year and quick, severe storms dump more rainwater than can be accommodated in the stormwater system.
- Ana presented the concept of combined sewer systems and explained the impact on water quality and flooding. She explained the changes being implemented locally to address the impacts, including the passing of the Allegheny County Stormwater Ordinance, Act 167, the creation of a Stormwater Division at PWSA, and the development of PWSA's Green First Plan.
- Ana explained that the Green First Plan is designed to keep rainwater out of the system by focusing on the watersheds that contribute the most to the system. The Plan identified six priority watersheds, one of which, A42, contains the Thomas and McPherson project.
- Ana described the concept of green stormwater infrastructure and showed examples throughout the City.
- Dave Anthony, of Wade Trim, presented the project goals. He explained that the Thomas/McPherson sub-basin encompasses just under 64 acres. The project goal is to manage six to twelve acres within that in order to capture 1.5 inches of runoff. That amount of runoff characterizes between 90% and 98% of the typical annual rain events.
- Dave explained that the interventions will occur in the public right of way. He identified the roadway typologies within the project area as boulevards, frontage/connector streets, residential side streets, and green alleys/ways.

Preliminary Design Findings

- Dave Anthony explained that, within the roadway typologies, there are three different typologies that could be applied by use of permeable pavement, bioretention, or underground storage.

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- Boulevards:
 - Utilize the median space. While keeping the boulevard trees, the intervention would provide new inlets, along with existing inlets, to divert stormwater into aggregate storage at the end of the median to capture the water and slowly release it.
 - Extend the boulevards by installing a median with trees and aggregate storage beneath the planting soils for the trees.
- Frontage/Connectors:
 - Create underground storage by using inlets and catch basins to gather water and divert it into storage under the parking lane of both sides of the road. This alternative does not change the appearance of the road.
 - Add permeable paving in the parking lane. This alternative creates a subtle change in the pavement, drawing attention to a narrower traffic lane, and possibly resulting in traffic calming.
 - Add bioretention swales. This alternative extends the landscaping element into the parking lane, capturing the runoff at the surface. The bioswales would utilize plant materials resistant to urban conditions and could provide aesthetic value. This alternative would require potentially eliminating parking or being placed in areas where parking is restricted, such as at intersections.
- Residential Side Streets:
 - Because of the limited right of way, the only intervention that will work in this road typology is permeable paving in the parking lane. The change in pavement could also provide some traffic calming.
- Green Alleys/Ways:
 - Install permeable pavers in the center, allowing water to percolate into underground storage, and repave the alley after installation of storage.

Project Schedule

- Dave Anthony presented an overview of the construction schedule. He noted that there will be two more design review meetings, in July and September of 2019. He noted that the construction phase is estimated to take place between February and October of 2020. In February of 2020, prior to the start of construction, there will be community meeting to focus specifically on construction issues.

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Questions and Answers

A group discussion followed the presentation. After that discussion, meeting participants visited stations staffed by members of the design team. The following questions and answers represent issues raised both in the group discussion and at the stations.

Boulevard Design

- The North Point Breeze community participated in the “Bridging the Busway” project. One of the issues raised by the community was the hope that the boulevard islands could be extended further into the community.
- Residents were enthusiastic about the prospect of traffic calming on several streets in the project area.

Alleys

- Residents expressed their displeasure with the condition of the alleys in the project area. They asked whether all of the alleys would be addressed. Dave answered that the project budget will determine how many of the alleys can be addressed with the green infrastructure intervention, though the project team is aware that all of the alleys are in need of repaving. He reiterated that the sub-basin consists of just under 64 acres and the project goal is to manage six to twelve acres.

Permeable Pavers

- Residents would like to see more detail on the permeable pavers.
- Residents asked whether permeable pavers are like patio pavers and whether weeds would grow through them. Dave answered that the pavers have basically the same character as regular pavers but there are small voids in the pavers that are filled with aggregate that holds them in place and allows water to flow through.
- Residents asked about the transition from paver to asphalt. Dave answered that there would be a concrete ribbon between the asphalt and the permeable pavers. When asked whether cyclists would be impacted by that change in materials, Dave answered that they would not have problems with the material transition.
- Residents asked what happens to the pavers when the rest of the street has to be repaved. The concrete band that sits between the pavers and the asphalt would act as an edge for the repaving.
- Residents asked whether pavers would be placed on the boulevards. The design team responded that no pavers are envisioned since underground storage is being proposed for the boulevards.

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- Residents asked whether the permeable pavers will be only at parking spaces or will continue across curb cuts for driveways. Dave responded that, at this time, the pavers are only envisioned for parking areas.
- During the station break-out sessions, residents voiced support for making the permeable pavement continuous (not stopping at driveways).
- Residents expressed concerns regarding freezing of permeable pavers causing cracks and potholes.
- Residents asked about the ability of permeable pavers to withstand pressure from normal traffic and whether or not they would break from the weight of vehicles.

Bioswales

- During the station discussions, some residents expressed their opposition to the idea of the bioswales. However, a few residents were favorable about the bioswales.
- Residents asked if bioswales would potentially become breeding grounds for mosquitos.
- Residents were concerned that roadway salt during the winter may kill vegetation planted in bioswales.

Utilities

- Residents want to make sure that conflicts with utilities will be minimized. The project team will be gathering utility data which may, or may not, ultimately influence the final design.
- Residents asked what would happen if utility work was needed following the installation of pavers. Any utility working on the street will be required to replace the pavers that were in place before.

Maintenance

- When residents asked whether one alternative would be better for the long term relative to maintenance, Dave Anthony responded that they would all need monitoring. For example, permeable pavers would be maintained with periodic vacuuming and sweeping. In addition, inlets would be placed at strategic locations so that there would be stormwater control even if there's a problem with permeable pavers.
- Residents asked who would maintain the bioswales so that they don't become tall weed beds and concern over the impact of road salt. Dave Anthony answered that the best plantings for bioswales are woody shrubs that are hardier and require less maintenance.
- In answer to community concerns about maintenance, PWSA is building a maintenance crew. Plans now are expected to have a project life of 20-25 years, after which they'll be reevaluated regarding their effectiveness.

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Existing Road Conditions

- Residents on Murtland Street stated that there are sink holes in the road. Dave Anthony responded that no intervention is proposed on Murtland at this time. Furthermore, PWSA is coordinating with the City's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI).

Construction

- Residents asked about the size of the construction site. The design team answered that there is no answer to that question yet but reiterated that by the July 2019 public meeting, the team should be able to share how the contractor will be staging construction. More construction details will be shared in the preconstruction public meeting in February of 2020.
- Residents of Point Breeze Court asked what the construction impact would be on access to their homes. Dave Anthony responded that the entrance to Point Breeze Court would need a very small intervention because of the existing drainage pattern.
- A resident stated that his assumption that no part of the project involves separating sewers. Dave confirmed that assumption.
- Residents expressed concern over the potential loss of parking in the project area.

Community Participation

- A resident asked how community input is being gathered. Ana Flores answered that there will be a website for this project. The flyer and powerpoint presentation will be posted. The flyer lists contact information for Ana Flores and Rebecca Zito. Community members were invited to contact them directly with comments and concerns. In addition, project outreach is being done on social media and Ana will be attending various community meetings in March.
- Councilwoman Erika Strassburger offered to help identify block clubs and other neighborhood organizations for outreach.
- Residents did not want to speak for their neighbors and vote on the design solutions. They were concerned that the votes they cast during the meeting would dictate the final alternatives that would be selected. In the future, the word "voting" should be avoided. Residents should be asked for feedback or similar language that does not sound final or imply decision-making.
- Residents had differing opinions regarding who should select which alternatives in which locations. Some residents viewed the selection of alternative preferences as a community decision, while others expressed the opinion that they should be the deciding vote when determining the interventions in front of their individual property.

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Station Preferences

- The dotting exercise resulted in the following “scores” for each of the interventions:
 - Bioswales – 0 dots
 - Underground storage – 6 dots
 - Permeable pavers – 6 dots