Wightman Park Stormwater Project
Virtual Community Meeting Notes
6:30 – 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 10, 2022

Attendees

The 21 meeting participants included local residents, project stakeholders, and a representative from City Council District 8.

Presentation

Elaine Hinrichs, Education and Outreach Associate at PWSA presented slides on stormwater challenges in Pittsburgh, the Phase Two Wightman Park Stormwater Project, construction progress made in 2021, and what to expect for construction in 2022. The presentation slides and a recording of this meeting are available at www.pgh2o.com/maryland-ave.

Discussion (Organized by Topic)

Potential Service Outages

- Question: Will water be turned off during any of the construction?
    - John Waida (PWSA): We are not expecting any water outages as part of this construction at the Murray and Solway intersection.

- Question: How much warning will be provided if / when electricity, water, or gas need to be turned off during construction?
    - John Waida: The gas utility already relocated their line and the utility pole was moved at Murray Avenue.
    - Nick Armstrong (Anser Advisory): We do not expect interruption to utilities during this construction unless a line is hit unexpectedly.

Stormwater Flow

- Question: The pipe outlet looks rather high - what protection is there against freezing?
    - Barton Kirk (Ethos Collaborative): Generally, storm drainage pipes are not subject to the same freezing concerns as a domestic water line that has water in it continuously. So, freezing is not an issue for those stormwater pipes at that elevation.

- Question: Is the boulder water course open for receiving the captured water already?
    - Barton Kirk: Some of you may have observed some water coming in through that cascade into Wightman Park. There is a control structure under the sidewalk before the cascade that is currently limiting the water coming into the park. Once Phase Two is completed, we will adjust that control structure so that water can begin flowing into the park more regularly.

- Question: Will there be any standing water underground? Are there any concerns about mosquitoes or odors?
    - Barton Kirk: Each of the bumpouts is designed with sand-based soil to drain down rapidly after a storm. You will see water standing in the planters during storm events, then the water should drain away within 24 hours after the storm. Generally, if water drains within 72 hours, mosquitos can't breed in it, so the planters are designed to drain before that time frame. Also, odors generally come from standing water, which is not designed to occur here.

- Question: Solway between Murray and Shady is flat - but it is still necessary to have these bumpouts? Without the bumpouts where would the water go? Is it just that the bumpouts slow the water down?
    - Barton Kirk: The function of the bumpouts is to intercept the stormwater from each block uphill of the bumpout. The majority of storms in Pittsburgh are 1.5 inches of rainfall or less, though we occasionally have more intense rainstorms. For these smaller storm events of roughly up to 1.5 inches of rainfall, these bumpouts will intercept stormwater before it reaches the street inlets that lead directly to the combined sewer. Once the bumpouts reach their full capacity, they can overflow to the combined sewer. The stormwater can come into the planter through the curb cuts, then through the planter, and to the next planter under the street in the linear trench drain, then down to the next block's planter in the gutter.

<u>Planter Bumpouts' Depths and Curbs</u>

- Question: Will the intersection bumpouts be filled with soil and planted or left as a deep pool as they are currently?
    - John Waida: The soil is currently close to the final elevation within the bumpouts and the next step is to put the plants in this spring.

- Question: So, more soil will be added to the bumpouts that have some plants in them?
    - Barton Kirk: The planters that have been constructed already, including those that have been planted with trees and shrubs, are generally at the finished soil grade. There will be additional plantings this spring so that those planters will be fully vegetated. The plantings will generally grow to between 2 and 4 feet in height once fully established and will fill out those planters.

- Question: The curbs are very low. How do you plan to protect walkers from falling in, especially at night?
    - Barton Kirk: The design of stormwater planters is somewhat new to the City of Pittsburgh, but similar planters have been built around Pittsburgh and in many other urban cities. The conventional design is to have a 4-inch curb wall called a toe kick along the sidewalk edge of the planters to give pedestrians an awareness of the drop on the other side.

- Question: What is accident rate for those planters in other cities? The 4-inch curb look like it would just make us trip.

- Barton Kirk: I don't know any reported accident rates or any reported increase in accidents related to the 4-inch toe kick. I don't know if there is data available on that or not.

- Question: Are the other cities with bumpouts like these subject to similar snowfall to Pittsburgh? I am concerned that a heavy snowfall will obscure the planter curbs.
  - Barton Kirk: Yes, similar types of green stormwater infrastructure have been installed in other northern and midwestern cities with similar snowfall. I understand the concern. One of the things that aids in the visual cues for the drop within the planter, is the plants themselves, which have not been fully planted and established yet. The visibility of the stormwater planters will become more apparent with the vegetation in place.
  - Nick Armstrong: At the intersections, we also placed reflective delineation markers.

- Question: Is the safety fence in front of the school going to be replaced with a permanent fence?
  - Rebecca Zito (PWSA): Right now, we are still evaluating whether or not we would install permanent fencing. At this point in time, the temporary fence will remain in place.

<u>Planter Bumpouts' Widths and Traffic</u>

- Question: South Negley at Solway is now very narrow - any plans to make it one way?
  - Barton Kirk: Generally, the conversion of streets from two way to one way is handled by the City's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI). We did discuss Negley Ave with them and the narrowness of that street. They consider Negley Ave, along with many streets in the city, to be a "yield street", with the idea that by permitting two-way traffic, that helps to keep traffic slow for pedestrian safety. We haven't heard indication from DOMI that they are planning Negley Ave to be one way there, but the ultimate answer would be with them.

- Comment: I do like that the bumpouts narrow the road because it slows the traffic.

- Question: There is typically no parking at intersections to allow cars to turn more easily. The bumpouts narrow the lanes significantly at the intersection. I understand this makes is shorter for pedestrians to cross, but it makes navigating for cars much more difficult. Is it necessary that they be at the intersections? Is it necessary that they narrow the intersection so much?
  - Barton Kirk: There are very few opportunities for managing stormwater in the street right-of-way. When we were engaged in the design for this project in this neighborhood, we went through a number of scenarios looking at where the opportunities were and trying to minimize the impact on parking. This kind of design has gained popularity in other cities and is being pursued here because that space at the intersection corners is already a no parking zone and it also helps to increase pedestrian safety at those intersections. Yes, it does make moving vehicles through more difficult and that is something we have discussed with DOMI. DOMI's general position is that slowing down cars through the intersection improves pedestrian safety, and that is their highest priority. From a safety perspective, that is considered a plus more than a negative, though it can be more frustrating for drivers. Yes, the bumpouts could be narrower, but the standard that the City of Pittsburgh has adopted for bumpouts is that they are about 6 feet wide, just less than the width of a parking lane.

Some of these bumpouts for this project are narrower than that 6-foot width because of the constraints of the area.

- Question: Regarding the narrowing of intersections, I am also concerned about safety at the Wightman and Solway intersection. When turning off Solway right onto Wightman, now have to make a wide turn. Was there any consideration of speed bumps or stop signs at that intersection?
    - Barton Kirk: The turning radius for the Wightman and Solway intersection was reviewed and approved by DOMI. If you have a concern about the speed of vehicles coming either direction on Wightman Street, I'd recommend reaching out to DOMI, which can be done through 311. Addressing the speed of vehicles on Wightman Street was not part of this project.
    - Emilie Yonan (Council District 8): We have been talking with DOMI about concerns at this intersection. I can follow up with Deborah Moss as well as DOMI to continue the conversation.

- Comment: About the right-hand turn from Solway to Wightman, the issue is that you have to turn into the incoming traffic lane coming from Wilkins. You can't see them and they can't see you until you are already in their lane.
    - Barton Kirk: I understand the concern there. Like Negley, Wightman is a "yield" street. There isn't sufficient width for two full lanes of traffic. While the bumpout has not necessarily improved the condition for drivers turning onto Wightman, it is a condition that existed prior to the construction of the bumpout. The bumpout there was reviewed. Hopefully there are opportunities to make Wightman itself safer for that intersection.

- Question: For the bumpouts at Murray and Solway, are they going to be similarly wide? My concern is that navigating these turns is more difficult with the bumpout, rather than when no parking there.
    - Barton Kirk: Murray Avenue is wider than Negley and Wightman. The bumpouts will not be larger than 6 feet wide, so they would not extend further than the parking lane width. The bumpouts at Murray will not have quite the same impact on drivers as at Negley and Wightman because Murray has sufficient width for two lanes of traffic.

<u>Trees</u>

- Question: Why were trees removed on the north side of Solway Street between Shady Avenue and Murray Avenue? I am concerned about the loss of stormwater management there after about 10 trees were removed.
    - Nick Armstrong: I wasn't aware of those tree removals. That area is not within our limits of work for this project.
    - Barton Kirk: At the time of design, we weren't aware that those trees were being removed. Trees do a tremendous amount to manage stormwater, particularly during small storms, while designed stormwaters help manage more water during larger storms. Protecting those large trees is important and was a consideration in this design. The loss of those trees will not necessarily have a major impact on the performance or effectiveness of this stormwater system, but we want to continue to protect the tree canopy wherever we can.

    - Emilie Yonan: With further tree questions, you can also reach out to our office at district8@pittsburghpa.gov.
    - Comment: Residents can also reach out to the City Forester.
    - Comment: Arborists from Forestry Department had told us that most of the trees would not be cut down, and then the people who actually did the work said they were told to cut all the trees down. That is one of the reasons why I am concerned about tree removals.

- Question: I have concerns about the quality of some of the newly planted street trees along Solway. They already have split trunks. Who provided and planted the trees and are they warranted?
    - John Waida: Our contractor hired a professional landscaper. The trees are warranted, I believe for 2 years. This is the first I'm hearing of this issue and we will look into it.

<u>Maintenance</u>

- Question: Debris has always been a part of stormwater runoff. Where will this be collected in the images you've shown and how will that be cleaned up as it builds up?
    - John Waida: PWSA has a maintenance contractor that will be taking care of and cleaning all our green stormwater infrastructure projects in the city.

- Question: What about clogging of the drains or pipes?
    - John Waida: That would be handled by the green stormwater infrastructure maintenance contractor. Also, there are structures in place on the surface of the planters to catch debris before it enters the pipes.

- Question: What plans are there for cleaning up litter that has found its way to the bumpouts?
    - John Waida: Cleaning up litter in the bumpouts is part of our maintenance contract.

- Question: How often will maintenance contractor look at each planter? Once a month? once a week? every 2-3 days?
    - John Waida: I will check on how often our maintenance contractor visits sites.
    - **UPDATE:** After construction of the Wightman Park Phase Two project is complete, the first year of maintenance will be the responsibility of the construction contractor. The schedule for PWSA's maintenance contractor after that first year is still to be determined. Based on similar projects, PWSA's maintenance contractor will likely visit the Phase Two street planters approximately once a month for regular maintenance, with additional maintenance as needed. If you see areas in need of maintenance, please contact PWSA or 311.

- Question: Who is the maintenance contractor and who do we contact if a concern arises? 311?
    - John Waida: We can provide the maintenance contractor name and their schedule. If there is something urgent, contact 311 and that report will get right to us.
    - Elaine Hinrichs (PWSA): You can also contact PWSA's 24/7 Dispatch to report issues.
    - **UPDATE:** Our current green stormwater infrastructure maintenance contractor is Landforce.