

Martin Luther King, Jr. / Warren K. Branch Park Stormwater Project
Notes from Virtual Meeting with Gardener Leaders
4:00 – 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday, September 13, 2022

Attendees

- Nichelle Smith, Gardener
- Claire Matway, Grow Pittsburgh
- Meghan Simek, PWSA
- Elaine Hinrichs, PWSA
- Rachel Carroll, Michael Baker
- Erica DeLattre, Collective Efforts
- Michael Henderson, Collective Efforts

Discussion

- The group discussed signage to warn park users to not dig above the underground stormwater facility. The plan is to have 4x4 wooden posts at each corner of the facility.
 - Could make a larger sign on the 4x4 post.
 - Could include on sign or make another sign with a map of the underground facility location (using as-built drawings).
 - Could use arrows (no digging to the next post, with arrows).
 - Could cap the 4x4 posts in a high-vis way (paint caps from Home Depot a high-vis color).
 - **ACTION:** Elaine will rework the facility warning signage design.
- Nichelle: What is the size of the children's planter area?
 - Meghan: We could rework the meadow and children's area to expand the grass area around the children's planters.
 - Erica: Right now, the northern meadow border of the children's area is 7.5 feet wide.
 - Nichelle: I think the meadow strip should be narrower, then the mowed area around the children's planters should be bigger.
 - Meghan: I think 5 feet of meadow width would be a good start for revisions.
 - **ACTION:** PWSA will revise the children's area meadow border to be 5 feet wide.
- Nichelle: Could we put rocks around the edge of the meadow border of the children's area, to make it more defined, on the interior? Like edging?
 - Meghan: Yes, we can look at that.
 - Nichelle: That would also help people know the weeding line if flowers start growing into the children's mowed area.
 - Erica: Would you be interested in pavers for the border?
 - **ACTION:** PWSA will look into rock edging for the interior children's area meadow.

- Claire: What is the grass area?
 - Erica: A low-mow seed composition.
 - Claire: So, it should be a lot of clover, some violets, maybe a little low-mow grass?
 - Erica: Right now, it shouldn't grow more than 6 inches tall. It's mostly a mix of fescue, Kentucky blue grass, and clover.

- Nichelle: Concerned about the time slippage of the construction start date.
 - Meghan: We are in the permitting process now, and we have every intention to get the permits as soon as possible and get to construction in March.
 - Claire: So, is there a reason to believe that it won't get pushed back again?
 - Meghan: We are working as quick as we can to start in March. We have our permit in with the City and we plan to get our National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit in next week. Permitting is always a little unpredictable.
 - Claire: It sounds like, while there are some things that are still unpredictable, things have never gotten this stage before.
 - Meghan: Yes, the delays in the past were not at the point that we are at now.
 - Nichelle: And if the date changes, can you email us right away?
 - Meghan: If we anticipate any delays in permitting, we will notify you right away. Also, we have some ways to adjust the construction phasing to get the work done within the fence by Memorial Day if necessary.
 - Nichelle: The delays have impacted our gardening schedules.

- Nichelle: How big is the low-mow grass area between the children's area and Kirkpatrick Street?
 - Erica: From the edge of the meadow outside the children's area to the fence is almost 70 feet. From the middle tree to the beds is about 58 feet. Total 2,300 square feet.

- **ACTION:** PWSA will send over the restoration drawing with specifications to the garden leaders.

- Nichelle: How is the conversation going with the City regarding the temporary parking on the Kirkpatrick Street side?
 - Meghan: I haven't had that conversation with the City yet, but I will and get back to you.
 - **ACTION:** Meghan will talk with the City about a temporary parking area on the Kirkpatrick Street side during construction.

- Meghan: For the smaller in-ground planters, there may be some other materials for borders.
 - Erica: Currently, the proposed border material for the in-ground planters is untreated wood, while decays in time. POLYWOOD or pavers could be options.
 - Nichelle: Is POLYWOOD plastic?
 - Erica: Yes, POLYWOOD is plastic made to look like wood.
 - Claire: I'd veer away from the plastic option. I don't see why some sort of paver wouldn't work though. However, the advantage of a continuous material border is that plants can't grow through.
 - Erica: That is a good point.

- Claire: Good untreated lumber can last a solid 5-7 years. This wood border would be non-structural.
- Nichelle: I don't like pavers as the garden border, since they are hard to kneel against.
- Meghan: When were the wood planters at MLK field installed?
- Claire: I believe they were installed in 2014.
- Meghan: So that would be about 8 years ago, and they are starting to fall apart. I don't think custom-milled lumber will be an option for us, unless your carpenter can reach out to the prime contractor that is chosen through bid to offer his services. He may also have advice.
- Claire: I can talk to him. He may have advice about this sort of thing. There's a possibility that having the bed sizes shift by 1 or 2 feet in either direction would make it easier to buy bulk lumber.
- Meghan: Even if he can specify an alternative material other than custom milled lumber. I can go out to the Manchester garden you mentioned in your email to take photos of the borders are constructed and pinned down.
- Claire: For lumber delineation that is for the bed shape rather than a raised bed, we might be able to do more like a frame-kit situation with very low lumber and with a corner post attachment.
- Meghan: Like the kits you can buy?
- Claire: Yes. There are levels to everything. We could look at different lumber dimensions. Anything below 4 inches is going to get lost in the path and vegetation. It is a balance between lowering the lumber cost and making sure the lumber is large enough.
- Erica: With those frame kits, I believe they have steel corners that work with common lumber dimensions, so that the lumber can be replaced as it rots over time.
- Claire: With common lumber dimensions, that would be handy.
- Nichelle: What are common lumber dimensions?
- Claire: 2x4s or 4x4s are common lumber dimensions. The 4x6s we used at the Manchester garden were uncommon.
- Nichelle: I don't want the plot sizes to shrink anymore.
- Claire: Does PWSA have a sense of budget for this?
- Meghan: I don't have a budget off-hand. This was an unexpected cost, so we don't have a budget for it yet. If the total cost is less than \$10,000 for supplies and labor, I can probably justify it.
- Claire: Supplies and labor and delivery (before install) for 780 linear feet of the custom edging came out to about \$3,000. I installed with a few coworkers in about 4-5 hours total. I spent less than \$1,000 on re-bar and got it cut. My rough estimate is \$8,000. It is very simple install that could be done by volunteers.
- Meghan: A volunteer event installation may be an option.
- Claire: I calculated out the linear footage for this project.
- Meghan: I can look into that, to see if we can provide the materials as part of the construction contract then have a volunteer event for the assembly.
- Nichelle: Would like to see visuals for these options. Claire, could you get photos of the lumber at the Manchester garden?

- Claire: I will take photos of the Manchester garden when I am out there soon, and I will check in with Ed (the carpenter). Could you finalize your budget window for this part of the project, and then we could finalize the plan for this next month?
- Meghan: Yes, that works.
- **ACTION:** PWSA will finalize the budget for in-ground bed borders.

- Claire: Are there any other material or specification topics that we should discuss? Like soil remediation?
 - Meghan: For the planter beds, what do we have for specifications for soil, Erica?
 - Erica: It is called a top compost/topsoil mix.
 - Claire: The 4x4 or the 4x20 planter beds?
 - Erica: Both.
 - Claire: I shared the soil mix in a previous spec from last year. We get a 60% topsoil / 40% compost mix from AgriCycle, which highly recommend.
 - Claire: Will there be heavy equipment or heavy foot traffic?
 - Erica: Yes, they will be driving over that.
 - Claire: I think I recommended this in the specs sheet from a while ago, but that area will need tilled before the planters are installed. I'd recommend renting a BCS tiller or similar heavy-duty walk-behind tiller to till out the entire area designed to be vegetable growing area, instead of a tractor. Should be someone with agricultural experience who would know when it is time to start applying compost and soil. For the in-ground beds, recommend tilling then adding 3-4 inches of the topsoil/compost mix, then adding another inch or two of just compost (also available from AgriCycle), then heavily mulching with leaf mulch or straw mulch. Those are my recommendations, and I can consult with my coworkers for advice too.
 - Nichelle: Is there we can do about weed suppression? I understand why the area will need tilled, but I'm concerned that the deep seeds will be brought up
 - Claire: That is a good concern. I think if there is at least 5 inches of new soil on top of the tilled soil, then the seeds won't make it up to the sun.
 - Meghan: Would the aboveground planters have the same soil mix, with the topsoil and compost?
 - Claire: Yes, but because they are basically containers, the top foot of soil added into those beds should be mixed with a specific mix of perlite, sustainable peat moss substitute (we get pit moss), and claysand to help it not compact in the container. I can share specifics for the mixing process for that.
 - Erica: If you have a percentage too for that mix, that would be helpful.

- Claire: For the meadow install, I'm curious about the specs. Are you planning to work with landscapers who are experienced in that?
 - Meghan: Rachel and Erica were working out a spec for the development of the meadow.
 - Erica: The topsoil, then those areas would be tarped for about 2 months after the topsoil placement, then they would remove the tarps and immediately seed the meadow and leave it. The meadow should not be mowed at all until at least 8 inches.

The seed mix is from Ernst and is a butterfly and hummingbird garden mix. It can get to a height of about 6.5 feet.

- Claire: I have the Ernst seed catalog. Nichelle, I bet we'd love to geek out together about this catalog. Also, notable that the back part of where the meadow is going to be is very marshy, there are cattails right now. So, it might benefit from a type of wetland seed mix back there.
- Meghan: We will clearing out the drainage channel as part of this project, which may improve the marshy-ness.
- Erica: On top of where the tanks are, where the meadow is going, water is not expected to hold in that area. But it may still be marshy between the meadow and the drainage channel.

- Nichelle: Was there anything else to talk about today?
 - Elaine: Was it the trees we are planning to plant?
 - Meghan: We are planning to plant Red Buds and Magnolias. They are on the City Street Tree list.
 - Nichelle: Will you take care of them so they don't die?
 - Meghan: Our contractor will maintain them for a year, and after that it will be the City's responsibility.

- Meghan: When would you like to meet next? Next month?
 - Nichelle: Could you come to our next gardeners meeting on Wednesday, October 5 and join for the second half of the meeting at 6:30 PM?
 - Meghan: Yes, we can do that.
 - **ACTION:** Elaine and Meghan will attend the second half of the gardeners meeting on Wednesday, October 5.