

RIVER ECOLOGY & GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE

THIRD MEETING OF THE FULL TASK FORCE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2019

12 – 2 PM

11TH FLOOR, ROOM 1103

CHICAGO CITY HALL

121 N. LA SALLE STREET

MEETING NOTES

(Margin number correspond to the agenda) (* = agenda item for next Task Force meeting)

- 1, 2a. Steve Koch welcomed everyone and asked folks to introduce themselves.
- 2b. Rachel Elman, Director of Operations for the Mayor's Office expressed that Mayor Lightfoot was interested in and supportive of the efforts of the River Ecology & Governance Task Force.
- 2c. Kathy Dickhut revisited the overarching goals and focus of the Task Force and working groups based on the Executive Order and the diagram of the river prism: public lands along the river, 30-foot setback, and portions of the river that are not in the navigation channel.
3. Col. Reisinger from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) provided an overview of its Planning Assistance to States (PAS) program, and its efforts with DPD to develop a Scope of Work for a Chicago Rivers Restoration Framework Plan (CRRFP)*.
 - The Framework Plan will include recommendations to identify what we know and what is missing from our knowledge of conditions along the river, and help to secure funding for future work for things like restoration, sediment testing, and other projects related to river ecology.
 - USACE and DPD expect a draft Scope of Work to be shared with the Science & Design working group and larger Task Force for comment sometime in July, and finalized in August.
 - Discussed opportunities to have USACE participate in the review of near-term projects that are bubbling up along the river; USACE to engage through Science & Design working group to provide this support and offer best practices and advice to projects. The CRRP will evaluate existing river widths and identify areas where min width is exceeded, to allow for potential future opportunity for enhancement.
 - There is an opportunity for the other 3 governmental agencies identified in the Executive Order to formally engage in the Scope of Work.
- 4c. Ron Burke and Jim Merrell from Active Transportation Alliance provided an update on the mission and direction of the River Trails working group and discussed the various efforts underway to complete connections along the North Branch of the Chicago River, address connectivity along the Main and South Branches, and engage community and identify ways to connect existing trails in the Lake Calumet and Calumet Rivers area. Gaps identified include*:
 - Gompers to River Park trail gap – CDOT currently evaluating.
 - 312 River Run (Belmont to Lathrop)
 - Lathrop to LY gap

- South Br. (Riverwalk to Ping Tom Park)
- Calumet – improve access to Big Marsh and other OS areas and trails (Trailblazers group)
- Evaluating extension of trail across Lake Calumet.
- 130 west towards Major Taylor Tr.
- Pullman to Riverdale
- Burnham Greenway gap (IDNR working to fill a 2 mi gap)
- Torrence Ave – connect Marsh to broader network.
- Beaubien Woods / Altgeld Gardens / MPC evaluating infrastructure basics in very isolated area

4a. Rev. Randall Blakey walked through the mission and role of the Community Connections working group and unveiled the model for community engagement that was discussed at the last working group meeting that offers a lens through which engagement along the river can be evaluated. The model includes defining community, identifying leadership in the process – who will move things forward – highlighting successes and reflecting on what could be done better to engage. MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita provided information on two studies that her office is involved that could potentially impact improvements along the river edge:

- A land audit of “un-leasable” MWRD land (e.g., small lots, odd dimensions, etc.) that can be leased out to community-based organizations for stewardship and natural improvements.
- An audit to look at opportunities for “productive landscapes” on MWRD land where urban agriculture could be implemented.
- Both audits are expected to be completed by September.*

4b. Margaret Frisbie and Cathy Geraghty updated the Task Force on the mission and work of the Stewardship & Volunteers group:

- Friends of the Chicago River has done outreach to community organizations to gauge their interest in including their river volunteer opportunities on a common platform; the general consensus is that there is interest, but orgs do not have the capacity to help maintain a dynamic resource.
- A technical subcommittee* will be convened to discuss coordination of the mapping exercises several organizations are engaged in, including Friends of the Chicago River, Metropolitan Planning Council, DPD and the Nature Conservancy. DPD ([Todd Wyatt](#)) will maintain a list of volunteer activities while the website to serve as a repository is under construction.
- Stewardship & Volunteers sees an opportunity in more fully engaging with Community Connections on engagement and outreach efforts*.
- The working group received a presentation on the open space impact fee (OSIF) application and vetting process, and suggest that it be a future agenda item for discussion*.

4d. Commissioner Debra Shore provided an update of the work of the Science & Design working group, including an overview of its mission and goals. Data to include health impact on animals and humans. S&D committee can offer “design review” for upcoming projects along the river.

Nelson Chueng from DPD updated the Task Force on the coordination efforts with Amtrak (Derrick James) on their plans to rebuild a seawall along a half-mile stretch of their property on the South Branch of the Chicago River, directly adjacent to the site of The 78 future development.*

Melissa Buenger from the Chicago Department of Public Health talked about the public health scoping pathways exercise* they facilitated with the Science & Design working group on June 21 and offered the same opportunity to other working groups to begin the conversation on how public health intersects with the work of each of the groups. It was discussed that instead of isolating the public health conversation into a separate working group, that it needs to be incorporated into each of the working groups in a meaningful way. DPH will share a draft model with all working groups when it becomes available.

5. Other business:
 - MWRD has officially hired a research assistant who will assist in the collection and organization of river-related science resources; two City of Chicago mayoral fellows will be assisting with mapping and cataloging communities working along the river system.
 - The next meeting of the full Task Force will occur at the Wild Mile in September.
 - Nolan Zaroff will be developing a 1-year standing schedule of Task Force and working group meetings so that folks can plan around future meetings.
 - Josh Ellis announced that MPC will be suspending its Great Rivers Implementation Committee and encouraging members of that committee to begin participating fully in the River Ecology & Governance Task Force, if they are not already doing so.

6. John Quail and Adam Flickinger of Friends of the Chicago River presented an overview of their Public Land Assessment Tool. They anticipate the tool being available on the FOCR website sometime this fall.

7. Adjourn