



River Ecology and Governance Task Force

12/06/22 | 3 pm to 4:30 pm

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting kicked off at 3 pm with participants introducing themselves in the chat. Approximately 35 members of the Task Force attended the meeting.

Task Force Goals

The group began the meeting with a refresher on the Task Force objectives and short-term goals for 2021 and 2022. The Task Force is focused on transforming the waterway system into a thriving and ecologically integrated natural asset through coordinated planning, investment and management. Ultimately, the goal is to have an inviting, productive, and living waterway system that contributes to the city's resiliency.

Project Updates and Discussion

Rivers Task Force partners provided brief updates on significant initiatives that have been advanced this year:

Bubbly Creek Restoration

Urban Rivers shared updates on the floating wetlands that were recently installed at the mouth of Bubbly Creek across from Park 571. Six islands total were installed five of which are currently planted. The Chicago Park District shared updates on the restoration at three different parks along the South Branch and Bubbly Creek. The restoration projects focus on improving ecological health, creating new natural areas and expanding existing ones, as well as working with green corps on job training programs.

Research: Bulkhead Shorelines and Biodiversity

Shedd Aquarium presented early findings on the effects of shoreline type on aquatic biodiversity. In partnership with the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources and Friends of the Chicago River the analysis compares species and fish counts gathered through seasonal intensive monitoring with the type of shoreline (bulkhead/seawall, rip rap, natural shoreline). Early analysis shows a connection between increased species abundance and richness near natural shorelines.

South Branch Parks River Edge Access Study

Chicago Dept. of Transportation (CDOT) consultant HDR shared draft slides of the ongoing South Branch Parks River Edge Access Study. The primary goal is connecting people to and between the parks and connecting those parks to communities from the Southwest. Existing parks include Canal Origins, Park 571 and the other parks near Bubbly Creek. So far, an extensive existing conditions study to look at various issues that exist has been completed and the study will encompass eight total projects. Next steps include a public meeting to be held in January for initial presentations and feedback sharing a preferences survey.

Small Group Workshop: Sustainable Development Policy (SDP) Rivers Edge Policy Updates

The Department of Planning and Development provided an overview of the SDP and highlighted some of the changes being proposed that are specifically related to Chicago's rivers. After the brief presentation, participants were divided into small groups to have a conversation about the proposals based on three discussion questions. High level takeaways are listed under each discussion question below.

Are there opportunities or ideas that we've discussed as a Task Force that are missing from this list that should be included?

- Widening the river setback to allow for trail/path and natural restoration to happen concurrently, may be worth encouraging widening at strategic locations.
- The policy should encourage linkage of sites along the river as well as inland/upstream to implement strategies that have broader systemwide value.
- How can/should monitoring or evaluation be included in the policy updates. Is there a way to ensure that actions are actually impactful, not just being completed for points at time of construction?

Are there ways to improve and refine the proposed content of the policy updates?

- There is difficulty with connecting this policy with some of the other policies/agencies that oversee the waterway, for instance duplicative of river design guidelines, does not consider Army Corps of Engineers restrictions, etc.
- Adding additional consideration to growing the river edge setback, could be considered as a percentage, based on development type, etc.
- Points should be recalculated for the most frequently taken and the least frequently taken categories to more evenly distribute how often developers select a given improvement.

How can we ensure that the spirit of these updates is followed by developers in a way that is truly beneficial to the river system? Are there resources that can be provided including additional definitions, descriptions, and examples to help direct developer implementation?

- Incentivize performance monitoring or research partnerships that require monitoring and/or evaluation.
- Additional resources could include some type of research guide that provides best practices, examples/case studies of innovative spaces and successful implementation.

2022 Look Back, 2023 Look Forward

Brief updates were provided on Task Force accomplishments in 2022 and planning for 2023.

- The System Plans Working Group of the Task Force hosted two community open house meetings on the South Branch where residents could provide input on the types of activities and uses they would like to see along their riverfronts at two particular sites: 3000 S Pitney Court and the Damen Silos. The input was focused on the Chicago River Design Guideline categories of nature, recreation, and connectivity. Information from these open houses was summarized and used as part of an intake meeting that DPD

had with a developer for the Pitney Court site.

- A virtual discussion was held to share about the projects that are ongoing in the Chicago-Calumet region and start a values discussion about community engagement and project work.
- Multiple workshops were hosted to provide input on a number of priorities that are being advanced in the City of Chicago such as the We Will Chicago Citywide Plan. Two stakeholder engagement meetings were held to provide feedback on the draft plan, one at the beginning of the year and another in the fall. The Bally's Casino proposal was reviewed twice—once informally, prior to the site being officially selected and then once as part of the development review. Comments were provided to both the developer team and the City about how the proposed development could be improved.
- The Development review Working Group received a landing page on the DPD website which includes the presentations given by development teams for each project and the response letters from the Task Force. Reviews completed during 2022 were: 3000 E 106th, Lake Shore Recycling, Costco, Bally's Casino, and the Riverwalk confluence.
- The Task Force reviewed three projects together as part of some shared learnings: around development projects and the different paths they follow to be completed. Case studies have included the Wild Mile, South Bank and Cogle.

Concepts currently being considered for Task Force planning in 2023 were also presented.

2023 Upcoming Meeting Dates + Adjourn

The proposed dates for the 2023 Task Force meetings were provided to members:

- March 14: 3 pm to 4:30 pm
- June 6: 3 pm to 4:30 pm
- September 12: 3 pm to 4:30 pm
- December 5: 3 pm to 4:30 pm

The meeting was concluded at 4:30pm