

Meeting Summary

**Notes from Environmental Workgroup Meeting
Thursday, January 31, 2013
Austin Community College - Pinnacle Campus**

Meeting Summary:

The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that the project team understands the concerns and ideas the community has regarding water quality, flood plains, trees and vegetation, historical, cultural and other environmental issues.

The project team provided a brief overview of the project, the environmental study process, known environmental constraints and Green Mobility Challenge ideas.

Topic 1: Trees and Vegetation.

The participants were sitting around tables and were asked the following questions on trees and vegetation:

Questions:

1. Is there any information regarding trees and vegetation the project team should know about before we begin designing alternatives for this project?
2. If trees need to be removed for the project, what would the community like to see happen for mitigation?

Aerial maps were provided for the participants to draw on and the comments below were captured from discussions.

Table 1

- Need to conduct a tree survey that considers, type, location, age and size of trees along the project corridor.
- If new trees are to be established as part of the project, use native trees. Also work to reuse (or relocate) existing trees.
- Many trees are located in the corridor, but some of the most significant are located at US 290 and William Cannon.
- To establish new ground vegetation, use native grasses, not Bermuda grass.
- Consider how to best visually depict the corridor improvement options as they relate to trees, vegetation and landscaping.
- Consider using GIS.

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

- Have an arborist involved in the project to help protect trees and to offer advice regarding trees.
- Install vegetation along Williamson Creek.
- Trees are very important in/to Oak Hill. It is not called “Oakless Hill.”
- Determine the age of the Grandmother Oak.
- Plan carefully. Fewer disturbances mean the need for less restoration.
- Projects that have done a good job in regards to protecting trees/vegetation include:
 - AMD – “Maintained the natural look.”
 - Apartment complex near Convict Hill and US 290.
- Consider the use of Texas Mountain Laurel: Good tree, pretty and low water.
- TxDOT plantings along IH-35: Good type of plants and location.
- Texas Ash is another native tree to consider.
- Consult with John Dromgoole on tree and vegetation issues.
- Encourage the establishment of a greenbelt and preserve. More green space along Williamson Creek.

Table 2

- Tree mitigation – keep as many as you can.
- Preserving historical oaks that define the community—white and Monterey Oaks.
- Irrigation for trees they need a water supply to establish the trees.
- Trees along Williamson Creek.
- Older trees survive better.
- Transplanting and care.
- Live oaks and native pecans -- native trees are better.
- Research nurseries.
- 24 inches and up try to save.
- Tree study on alternatives.
- Williamson Creek should remain natural -- trees help.
- As many trees as possible.
- Wild, irrigated mixture of trees.
- Be cautious of oak wilt.
- Trees in park.
- Natural overall look and feel= not a prissy design.
- Like groupings at Loop 1 and US 290.
- Need to save the trees on SH 71 near Jack Allens
- Do 3 to 1 tree replacement
- Show the tree survey at the next meeting
- Save the trees on the north side of US 290 at William Cannon

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

- Save the Taco Bell tree

Topic 2: Water Quality & Recharge Zone

The participants were sitting around tables and were asked the following questions on water quality and the recharge zone:

Questions:

1. What ideas do you have pertaining to water quality for the project?
2. Are there any local flooding concerns along the project we need to be aware of?

The same aerial maps were provided for the participants to draw on and the comments below were captured from discussions.

Table 1

- Minimize any increase in impervious cover (smallest footprint).
- Regional detention facilities are good, and you might need more.
- Avoid channelization as much as possible.
- Very important that the Oak Hill Parkway study meets City of Austin aquifer protection standards.
- Consider use of wet ponds and vegetation bio treatment.
- Haul in Blackland Prairie clay.
- Make sure water protection devices are pleasing to look at. Don't make them ugly.
- Conduct more research on pavement types that protect/enhance water quality.
- Consider Hazardous Materials Traps and where they could/should be located.
- Consider offsite water quality ponds and locations. Space around Freescale?
- Consider secondary impacts.
- Important to consider 6-month detention vs. two year storm.
- Restore creek to its historical location

Table 2

- Flooding around Joe Tanner Ln.
- Drainage in Oak Park subdivision.
- Flooding off Scenic Brook Drive.
- Look at Scenic Brook Neighborhood.
- Look at the debris- in creek.
- Biofiltration.

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

- No water prisons -- (detention ponds with fences) look like ponds/park – Oak Hill library.
- Design ponds more aesthetically pleasing.
- Looks natural.
- Look at splitting high-speed lanes and frontage road.
- Like Green Mobility Challenge design.
- Creative and cool.
- Coordinate with trail plan.
- Red line (on map) equals trail.
- Safe trail crossings.
- Big swales look at SH 45 ideas in Green Mobility Challenge.
- There is a Cave near 290 and William Cannon near the cemetery.
- Creek restoration buffer from trails.
- Place westbound lanes north of Williamson Creek.
- Williamson Creek should have a trail next to it.

Topic 3: Community Impacts, Noise & Air Quality, Cultural Resources

The project team provided a brief overview of types of potential impacts to the human environment – development, relocation/displacements, community cohesion, environmental justice, etc. They provided information on the following:

- How and when a noise study will be completed and how the community will participate;
- How air quality is considered for this study;
- What are aesthetics / visual impacts;
- The meaning of indirect and cumulative impacts;
- What are cultural resources;

The participants were sitting around tables and were asked the following questions on community impacts.

Questions:

1. Is there any information regarding community impacts the project team should know about before we begin designing alternatives for this project?
2. What community features or landmarks are important to you?
3. Are you aware of any cultural or historic resources or sites that we need to know about?

The same aerial maps were provided for the participants to draw on and the comments below were captured from discussions.

Table 1

Noise

- There are/will be noise impacts near FM 1826.
- Conduct a noise study.
- Consider new pavement types that are quieter than traditional pavement.

Cultural Resources

- Three buildings, including house, next door to Austin Pizza Garden (consider what will have the least impact: a 290 bridge over William Cannon or a William Cannon Bridge over 290.)
- Old stone wall near Williamson Creek (east of Williamson Creek).
- Convict Hill quarry.
- Old Oak Hill cemetery.
- Old racetrack in the area.
- Native American issues.
- Original alignment of Circle Drive.

Air

- Consider greenhouse gas emissions from increased traffic (more lanes will induce more traffic).
- Consider time of day pollution.
- Make sure the environmental study looks at the carbon footprint.
- Air quality goes down and traffic speeds go up.
- Light Pollution is a problem. Do not increase it.

General Access

- Preserve existing access.
- Cut-through neighborhood traffic is a problem.
- Do not increase or create a barrier effect. Consider a parkway section and lowering the roadway west of the "Y."
- Need better access to ACC.
- There is no pedestrian access. It is needed.
- Bike lanes are needed. Consider them along the roadway and as separate paths.

Other

- Consider the impacts of construction on air, water and traffic.
- Congestion is more than just a morning and afternoon problem.
- Consider environmental justice issues related to toll lanes.

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

- Trees are an important part of the Oak Hill culture.
- Improve the Williamson Creek greenbelt

Table 2

- Oak Hill elementary is historic
- Possible cemetery near the old Oak Hill elementary School..
- Possible hazardous material near the Oak Hill elementary school.
- Remnants of a horse arena/racetrack and associated stables in the northeast quadrant of US 290 and William Cannon
- Intersection noise at Loop 1 and 290.
- Roadway elevation by cliff/noise.
- Sound wall affects trees.
- 5 Light/incorporate green space.
- Freescale/concerns with vibration.
- Frontage road.
- Minimize light/want to see stars.
- Raised highway concerns about air quality.
- Is there a planned rail line going through the middle of US 290 all the way to Dripping Springs?
- Concerned over vibrations from the roadway.
- Noise
 - Look at constructing William Cannon over US 290 to keep noise levels lower.

Table 3 (added New Table when additional participant from Circle Neighborhood Alliance came to meeting)

- Homes in Circle Drive and Thomas Springs road were built in the '40s and '50s. The terminus of the study area should be further west along US 290, toward Dripping Springs. The roads along this section will not reduce traffic to an acceptable level – do not diminish traffic.
- Are convicts buried at Convict Hill?
- At the intersection of Old Bee Caves Road and Williamson Creek, there is a midden. It sticks out.

Action Items:

1. Bruce Melton would like to see information TxDOT has found regarding when Williamson Creek was moved in the 1920's.

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

2. Bruce Melton requested information regarding quiet pavement (Project team has provided that information – Feb. 4, 2013).
- 3.

Comments Received Via E-mail Regarding the Workshop

David Richardson: During the Oak Hill Neighborhood Planning effort I became aware of environmental threats created by businesses along Williamson Creek between William Cannon and Patton Ranch Road. That stretch has a gas service station, oil change business and a retail pool chemical outlet. The oil change business had (has?) barrels of used oil filters and other business waste 30 feet from the creek. (I have photos if needed). If (when) a flood occurs, that waste would be swept away creating an environmental hazard. I brought this to the attention of the City who was unable to do anything about this as apparently it did not break any codes even while it didn't make any sense. Similar threats are created by the other businesses. I have NO problem with these businesses being in Oak Hill. I welcome them. But their location in the flood plain presents an ongoing environmental threat.

The Planning process and the Fix290 effort of 2007(?) brought to light a community interest in repurposing the land along Williamson Creek for a community park / hike and bike trail effort lead in part by neighbor Rick Perkins. Freescale disallows trail use because of liability issues despite laws on the books. (Power Companies are currently exploring opportunities at the legislature to avoid liability in rights of way. Liability issues would no longer be present if the CTRMA / TxDOT owned the land.

TxDOT currently owns land on the south side of 290 between William Cannon and the Creek towards McCarty Lane. A better use of land in this area providing retail opportunities next to the new hotel would be to swap TxDOT land to the aforementioned business / land owners as an incentive to vacate their premises in lieu of condemnation. Saves money (?) and would be functionally preferable from a community perspective and environmentally preferable as well as those properties south of 290 are out of the flood plain.

The same concerns affect commercial property on the south side of 290 west of William Cannon, used car, motorcycle trike store. These are businesses that create environmental and design constraints on this highway project. This project is an opportunity to relocate these businesses to more appropriate locations in Oak Hill (if the City of Austin would not stand in the way).

While impervious cover issues are relevant for any project in this area, it should be noted that the greatest threat to Barton Springs is ongoing population growth and sprawl in the BSZ, not the little bit of impervious cover generated by relocation of businesses. Let's keep environmental issues in relative perspective. The community benefits of new parks & trails and environmental benefits (when the City of Austin is unable or unwilling to address these issues) are good outcomes created by this project moving forward.

Meeting Summary, cont.
Meeting Date: February 5, 2013

Lastly, this project is intrinsically conflicted with preservation of the Edwards Aquifer and Barton Springs by reducing commute times for BSZ residents. 101,000 new homes are projected to be built in the BSZ in the next 50 years. (CAMPO) That projection is unlikely to change unless new efforts to significantly increase funding of open space are made in the BSZ restricting future development and growth to a smaller footprint. Currently, for every acre the City and HCC sequesters about 3.3 acres of undeveloped land in the BSZ is converted to sprawl with about 22% impervious cover. Building into any future toll charges the funding of open space could mitigate those indirect environmental impacts of this project.

I can't express strongly enough that while a project of this magnitude creates significant environmental threats; it also offers opportunities to resolve existing and ongoing environmental threats. It will address traffic congestion and improve local mobility. Once this project starts construction, it would resolve uncertainty impacting local redevelopment of commercial properties and rebuild businesses that TxDOT condemned some ten years ago. There are great opportunities here. Please take advantage of every one of them to rebuild and improve our community and preserve open space and the environment.