



INSTITUTE *for* ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION
Shaping Our World Together

Strawberry Run and Taylor Run
Community and Stakeholder Engagement for
the City of Alexandria

March 21, 2022

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION (IEN)

- IEN is a nationally recognized leader with 40+ years in fostering collaborative change across a broad range of issues through multi-agency and multi-stakeholder processes as well as through community outreach and engagement.
- Our mission – *“Catalyze and facilitate the shared creation of equitable solutions for organizations, communities, and leaders through research, collaboration, and training.”*
- IEN’s framework, the principles of **Equitable Collaboration**, articulates six core principles for working with communities that are addressing complex challenges in ways that increase equity and community resilience.
 - **6 Principles of Equitable Collaboration: Trauma-Informed, Inclusive, Responsive, Truth-Seeking, Deliberative, and Adaptive**

IEN'S PROCESS

- 1. Interview 5 City staff and 10 leaders to gain an understanding of the current issues, challenges, and opportunities related to the stream health of Taylor Run and Strawberry Run.
- 2. Convene a stakeholder advisory team of 7-9 key stakeholders representing diverse interests to create an operational framework for the project, clarify goals, and lay a foundation for a successful collaboration.
- 3. Conduct stakeholder interviews to identify further issues, concerns, opportunities, informational needs, and suggestions for the collaboration. The stakeholders interviewed were recommended by City staff and/or the stakeholder advisory team.

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP

- **The Stakeholder Advisory Group** formed in February 2022, and is comprised of 7 environmental and community leaders
- Their purpose is to help ensure process effectiveness with community members and the City, advising on the planned community open houses and other administrative and logistical project duties.
- Two meetings have been held to date, and we anticipate an increase in their work as we move out of the interview phase.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

IEN conducted 14 interviews (6 city staff, 8 community stakeholders). 16 were planned but 2 were unable to occur because of scheduling conflicts.

The interviewees were selected based on input received from both city staff and stakeholder advisory group. A balance on the interviewee perspective was sought across stream health views.

- The purpose of these interviews were to:
 - Capture the diversity of stakeholder opinion on the history and status of these projects;
 - Gain an understanding of the community engagement and technical issues surrounding these projects;
 - Develop a set of recommendations for the city to consider for project completion and;
 - Develop an engagement path forward for both the communities and city in the completion of these projects

INTERVIEW SUMMARY CONTINUED

- Interviews were conducted by IEN staff and lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours depending on the extent of the interviewee responses.
- Answers reflected a considerable amount of common ground a willingness to work towards a collaborative outcome
- All interviewees understood the necessity of stream health work for the preservation of city infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and the conservation of homeowner property.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Question 1: What is your current role and how are you involved with these two streams?

- Interviewees included city staff in the Transportation and Environmental Studies Division, Parks staff and Parks Commission, city natural resource staff, homeowners adjacent to both streams, teachers and students, and community activists.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #2: Is there any specific history relating to these two streams, their uses, their role in the neighborhoods or community that you would like to share or would be important for us to understand?

- Urban streams exhibit flashiness, and large volumes of water.
- The city attempted to plan for natural channel design; the need to gain credits was a strong incentive which is now not needed.
- The reaction and need for keeping biodiversity and minimizing tree loss was strong from the community.
- Need our streams to be safe and offer recreational activity.
- A transparent community engagement process was lacking.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #3: What are your concerns – and your hopes – for the future of each of these streams? Taylor Run? Strawberry Run?

- The city should establish a real conservation approach to protect the biodiversity/enhance the stream valleys to the degree we can.
- I hope the city could have a more fluid relationship with the Community, identify shared values, and involve scientists with expertise in these streams.
- The City keeps talking about the sewer line. The City needs to tell us exactly what needs to be done to the sewer line.
- City needs to work with the community better
- Involve going down a lane-entrenched and more fluid relationship between the community-sit down and take in evidence-becomes a fight.
- City has this problem with stormwater! Source protection...A safe place for people to go! Visit all the places people go. Trees falling down, lots of dead trees...not ADA safe, steep banks and slippery trails.
- Current disconnect between the streams and the people-need an educated community and connected community. My hope is that someone or some group would adopt both creeks-more free-flowing.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #4: What kinds of information would be helpful or important for you and others to be able to participate meaningfully in creating a collaborative strategy for Taylor and Strawberry Run ?

- Close collaboration is needed. Good science not a public opinion-COA needs to value public opinion-reflecting the opinion who disapproved these projects. Couldn't get beyond the differences of opinion
- Small group of in-house people is needed. Meet over time. Independence and transparency is critical. Yes, we can move forward, and we can forgive
- The City needs to tell us what they think needs to be done. No one will stand in the way of a legitimate fix to a sanitary sewer or taking an unsafe, dead tree down

QUESTION 4 CONTINUED

- There is a need for face-to-face meetings with the City, with give and take and questions can be asked with both sides. Helpful to have third-party facilitators.
- Skeptical about the idea of a technical group, but a University partner could help to address the trust issue.
- Need for greater information sharing between departments

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #5: What are different options for the streams that you would like to be explored in moving forward? Or that you would like to learn more about?

- Taylor Run could really benefit from some small fixes, like cleaning up and removing old concrete. “It’s Alexandria’s gem, but it’s rough cut.” If you come in from the high school side, that’s the most degraded part of the stream. There are lots of steps that could be taken upstream to mitigate the impact in Taylor Run. Adding trees, removing concrete, reducing mowing like at the Holmes Run Trail, retrofitting the stormwater retention ponds, increasing bioswales, and other water retention strategies.
- A multi-pronged intervention process to encourage upstream thinking and help TES and RCPA to work better together, like a Task Force working together across the City including climate change. There is a need for in-stream work to protect the sewer lines, make them more attractive, and reduce erosion.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #6: How might we best engage the different communities and stakeholders for each stream?

- Frequent communication and transparency are important for finding common ground.
- Field trips, listening sessions, open house with experts, workshops with maps. Having the presentations so that the explanations can be made for people who aren't aware of issues. Not just one field trip to check a box. We need to make repeated efforts to engage a community.
- The High School uses this space as a lab. It would be important to connect with those teachers to learn about its value to them. There is a need to engage the youth voice in city government. There are streams behind every school. Programs like Adopt a Stream would help them to know their watershed and provide opportunities to go the see the stream with an expert.
- The Civic Associations play a prominent role in the City and should be engaged
- EPC-spirit of inclusion and transparency-give a presentation about all the special things about Taylor Run-higher ground rules must apply-need standards to work by-can EPC be an arbiter on the facts

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #7: What would success look like to you? In terms of the streams? For the communities? For equity and inclusivity?

- There has already been a success. The City has now come up with the plan to meet its Chesapeake Bay obligation without Taylor and Strawberry Run. They're the first jurisdiction to change their plans, while others are proceeding with theirs with the default (inaccurate) numbers. To the City's credit, they paused after the data started coming in.
- Making it as accessible and inviting to everyone as possible. There are real co-benefits if you restore streams AND make them accessible to people.
- Increasing habitat, making sure it's in the best condition that we can keep it in, increasing riparian buffers, maintaining trails for the public to use, habitat and connectivity to the wildlife so that they can use these parks and streams.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #8: What else might be important for us to know in order for us to design a successful collaborative, equitable, and inclusive decision-making process for Alexandria?

- We need to fix the “process”-higher level discussion of all the options-evidence-based, rigorous, and scientific, where the default is minimum intervention. The public should have the opportunity to comment on the new plans, and there needs to be a face-to-face opportunity to work it through with everyone in the room.
- There are going to be some people on both sides of this who are very entrenched. Reaching and engaging everyone else would be important to come to a consensus.
- Connect back up again with the schools-build community trust!
- Civic associations (CA) could be a practical way for the city to get ideas across. Engaging the CA from the start is a no brainer-schools as well, different way to engage. Also younger people.
- Lot of distrust of the city government due to all the transportation projects. People are very jaded.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES CONTINUED

Question #9: Who else would you suggest we talk to?

- A few specific names were provided based on their knowledge or advocacy around this issue. Of the names provided, about half were already included in the interviewee list.
- Several interviewees encouraged connecting with the teachers, schools, and student groups, specifically the three high school teachers who use Taylor Run frequently, and the student groups with a connection to service who could be engaged to assist with clean up, maintenance, photography, and other associated tasks. The Civic Associations were broadly acknowledged as being important in this conversation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Form a technical advisory group (TAG) for the restoration efforts on Taylor and Strawberry Run. This group is temporary and will assist the City to accomplish the restoration efforts in a collaborative manner.

- This TAG will begin with identifying a principle-based approach for the work-principles may include the following: safety, conserve biodiversity and unique habitats, process, and decision-making transparency, utilize a holistic approach, protect gray infrastructure, and trust science
- Meetings will be face to face
- One member should be from academia
- Following consensus on a principle-based approach, an alternative design will be presented addressing the agreed to principles
- Two workshops will be held to receive additional community input, one prior to a consensus path forward and one after the design has been agreed to

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #2: Conduct a formal community engagement process for project identification, project awareness and management and ongoing project communication

Recommendation #3: Formalize/Improve the inter-city departmental project engagement process

Recommendation #4: Develop a city-wide "Adopt-a-Stream" program to facilitate community engagement and stewardship of the city's natural resources

- Utilize the existing not for profit community groups such as 4-Mile Run, civic associations, and local schools with embedded organizations such as the Buddie Ford Center at Ramsey Elementary School