RILEY PURGATORY BLUFF CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT

Ecosystem Health Action Plan

Summary of TAP Workshop 3

TAP Workshop 2 was held at the RPBCWD office on June 20, 2023. The purpose of the workshop was to identify potential solutions to gaps ecosystem protection and improvement.

Participants were asked, "What should be done to address ecosystem improvement within the Watershed District?" in four general areas. Results follow.

Policies and Regulations

- Conduct a code review of impervious surface requirements. When were they last updated? Talk with stakeholders.
    - Review the purpose of the code; are we solving for a nuisance or being proactive? Review fire code from other parts of the country. Can smaller fire trucks be purchased? This may include requiring more sprinklers, so a large fire truck is not required.
    - Revise codes that require less impervious surface.
    - Incentivize impervious surface reduction by being flexible with things such as density and setbacks. Consider impervious surface transfers.
- Provide a volume credit for restoring or preserving habitat (reducing lawn). In Chaska an easement is created.
- Require heat island mitigation. Identify heat islands on regional maps.
- Regulate irrigation use.
- Require a percentage of native plantings as part of required green space.
- Establish stricter project design standards within rules.
- Establish soil regeneration requirements (tilling and topsoiling).
- Better define steep slopes. Regulate for more protection.
- Cities can establish more stringent shoreline regulations than the DNR stipulates.
- Need better enforcement tools (e. g. weed ordinance, compliance ordinance, stop and desist?).
    - Conservation easements are often not enforced or backed up.
    - Potentially release easement info to the public.
- Work with DNR to get more weeds listed as noxious.
- Relax policies for weed tolerance. For example, Bloomington sets standards for weed tolerances in playing fields.
- Develop a bluff Creek overlay district for additional protection.
- Require licensure for chloride applicators.
- Consider a pesticide ordinance such as developed in CO. Establish a minimum education requirement.

Planning

- Make ecosystems approach part of all plans developed.
- Develop climate mitigation and adaptation plans.
- Develop an approach/system where District and City staff can explore frameworks, ideas, and alternatives for development design with developers.
- Develop overlay districts:
    - Based on the preservation or restorability of natural areas
    - Based on heat islands
    - Could be used to incentivize developers
    - Opportunity funds could be budgeted for potential projects
- Identify key ecosystem corridors and develop overlay districts to guide habitat improvement.
- Develop a program for impervious surface trading to negotiate for more green space in development projects.
- Consider referenda for voters to approve land purchase.
- Develop long-term natural areas management plans.
- Develop public-private partnerships.
- Establish a path for ecological land trusts for development projects.
- Set regional ecological health goals.
- Create commissions (sustainability, environment, etc.) if they don't already exist.

Education & Outreach

- Educate policy makers:
    - Take policymakers (e. g. watershed district board members and city councils) on tours for hands-on exposure of ecological degradation and ecological enhancement projects.
    - Provide workshops and work sessions.
    - Show how development can co-exist with green space/ecosystem components.
- Provide realtor CEU classes and other information they can share with their clients. Help them show that nature within developments is an asset.
    - Distribute a welcome packet of natural resources education for new homebuyers
    - Teach about easements (drainage/utility, conservation, and scenic)
- Teach developers and builders about practices such as bioretention, soil regeneration, and wetland mitigation.
- Organize more volunteer events that get people outside in nature to learn and have hands-on experience.
- Utilize existing events such as Neighborhood Night Out to educate.
- Train children/teens (e. g. Minneapolis Green team) and adults (e. g. volunteers) on natural resource management – possibly paid training.
- Develop new citizen science programs (e. g. CAMP, WHEP)
    - Utilize them if they exist.
- Provide a native landscaping annual tour.

- Show cost savings of natural resources as opposed to the standard lawn practices.
- Provide hands-on maintenance workshops for cost share recipients and others.
- Teach about the protection, restoration, and management of public lands (parks, ROW, other public spaces).
- Teach property owners about bluffs/steep slopes.

Projects

Funding

- Require developers to fund/develop ecological quality improvements beyond current stormwater management requirements.
- Work with partners (public and private) to fund functional improvements that also meet their environmental/social goals.
- District could fund and implement demonstration projects.

Compliance

- Provide at the time of property sale, compliance checks for natural resources easements, wetland boundaries, cultural resources, etc. (like Minneapolis televising sewer pipes).
- Provide early design coordination with developers and builders to get better compliance with existing rules.

Design

- Identify ecological corridors prior to project design to establish ecological goals.
- Identify heat islands on regional maps and incentivize mitigation.
- Prior to design identify natural assets within a project area and designate their protection.
- Incentivize developers for ecological improvements.
- Developers to implement certification programs such as LEED, Sites, and Envision.

Maintenance

- Establish long-term maintenance funding while a project is being approved.
- Develop clear, stepwise maintenance plans.