

Anacostia Watershed Advocacy Workshop II

On June 13th, 2009 Ted Graham welcomed over 55 people, both citizens and elected officials, to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments in the District of Columbia for a half-day workshop designed to further residence of the Anacostia River watershed advocacy skills. Workshop participants learned from past experiences of public officials and organizers from the District of Columbia, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County. They then incorporated these examples with previous knowledge and worked in breakout sessions to establish jurisdictionally relevant stormwater advocacy campaigns. All those who responded to workshop evaluations indicated they found the various portions of the workshop useful.



Panels Discussion:

Jim Foster, president of Anacostia Watershed Society, introduced the panel of regional county council members and organizers. Mr. Foster said advocacy takes on different roles and its good when many people come to the table to discuss the issues, like those gathered at this workshop. The workshop is a important opportunity to strengthen local ties and empower Anacostia watershed citizens.

Councilmember Tom Dernoga (Prince George's County)

Councilmember Dernoga described in detail the County's Department of Publics Works' planning and thinking on new Stormwater related issues. He indicated that while Prince George's County lags behind in the NPDES process, draft codes already exist and citizens had a chance to push for modifications. To effectively create stronger codes, and affect any legalization at the county level, Councilmember Dernoga suggested several points to consider when forming a campaign:

- There seems to be many activists outside picking up trash, but none inside at meetings. Better laws would mean less trash to pick up, but also means "going inside to scream at politicians."
- Always try to bypass politicians and make relationships with administrators, they can be the most effective at swaying councilmember's opinions and modifying proposed laws.
- New stormwater regulations includes a date when they become effective. Developers will scramble to make sure they do not have to follow those regulations by getting all applications in before that date, that they are grandfathered in (follow the old rules). However, there is no law that requires that the grandfather clause must be implemented. Making developers follow the new rules is critical because if they are developing or redeveloping property now, the property will not be redone another 40 years or more.

Dan Smith (President of Friend of Lower Beaverdam Creek)

Mr. Smith said that he worked at the state level for several years and is disappointed they failed to require stronger legislation. Now it is time for county citizens to really pressure the counties for strong standards. By November 10th counties must propose new standards, so a strong push now is critical. To do this in Prince George's County the majority of the county council must be won over. To win them over it is important not to get stuck thinking just in the anacostia, need to look for allies and support outside the watershed.

Councilmember Tommy Wells (District of Columbia)

Councilmember Wells discussed the passing of the District of Columbia's Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009, sometimes referred to as the 'Bag Bill.' As a councilmember, Mr. Wells wanted to do something for the environment. Grocery and bottling industry had defeated bottle bill in a way where one could not bring up another bottle bill ever again. He wanted to ensure his next effort would not only win, but not put similar cloud over environmental issues. After deciding to go after plastic bags, he followed these steps:

- Background research was done looking at bills across the country (both bills that passed and did not pass), and gathered facts on trash in the Anacostia River.
- Instead of meeting with environmental community first, Mr. Wells brought in the business community, government relations with Giant had been central to defeating bottle bill. It was learned that plastic bags cost 2 cents each for stores, whereas paper bags cost 5 cents. So, they would have to fight bans on plastic bags, because they would lose profit to only use paper. It would head off this issue if paper bags were included in the ban. He went with five cent fee for all bags, paper and plastic, and would return 1 cent per bag to the business.
- Then he lined up friends and partners, and started advocating for the bill at grocery stores, senior citizen communities, and anywhere else we could.
- The bill was intentionally framed not as a bag bill but as a Anacostia cleanup bill, so the opposition would have to oppose cleaning up the river rather than the new fee.
- The opposition still tried to frame the bill as a tax on the poor. However, stores like Costco were brought in to show that they already charge for bags so they can keep food costs down. Reusable bags were also given out in financially disadvantaged neighborhoods and senior centers.
- A key element to the campaign was getting a Maryland legislator to introduce a bill simultaneously in Annapolis to dilute lobbyists' efforts.

Nancy stoner (Natural Resources Defense Council)

Ms. Stone highlighted several broad areas on effectively advocating stormwater issues.

- "Stormwater is our little secret." Stormwater is not a good subject to focus on, sounds like rain, even sounds clean. Regular people do not know what it is. When doing outreach talk about anything but stormwater. Focus on smart growth, revitalizing cities, green jobs, why they care about it and why it makes a difference in their lives.
- Remember that every local issues relates to the bigger picture. NRDC's top focus is climate. Water issues are closely tied to global warming, for example more extreme storm events, more sewer overflows, and higher infrastructure costs. The transportation is another important subject. The upcoming national transportation bill will have many ramifications locally.
- Help elected officials and agencies do their jobs. For example lend EPA political strength to enforce and

implement strong regulations. Give local councilmen the information they need, including data, photos and other visual aids.

- Be focused. If you or your group takes on too many issues, your efforts will be scattered and ineffective. Focus only on those you issues you have ability to handle.

Councilmember Marc Elrich (Montgomery County)

Councilmember Elrich described various programs and initiatives he has been working on in Montgomery County. He indicated that stormwater has been off the council's radar since MS4 approval, but even during that process much was being done administratively.

- New road codes address stormwater issues as roads are rebuilt, however there is no money to rebuild roads so it will take a long time for codes to become effective.
- Forestry bill require no net loss of tree cover.
- Changing accepted views in county departments is difficult. Councilmember Elrich is working with department of transportation to use more pervious pavement, who were previously reluctant to install due to maintenance issues. However, new evidence of long life spans has begun to shift internal views. The county is working to require in some developments.
- More public transportation means cleaner water. Councilmember Elrich has been working on transportation issues, including 100 mile bus transport work. Additional buses do not necessarily mean increased imperviousness, Eugene, Oregon, for example put in a bus rapid transit line with no net increase in impervious surface.
- Group of councilmembers are working on a environmental bill to incentivize more LEED certification. If you want to upgrade house with solar, solar hot water, or other approved technologies, the bill would put the expense on tax bill for zero percent interest for 15 years. Next owner gets the tax bill if the property was sold before the loan was paid back.

Dolores Milmo

Ms. Dolores Milmo from the Audubon Naturalist Society spoke about past outreach efforts in Montgomery County and had several suggestions for related to outreach and stormwater issues.

- Be careful how you use words. For example some people think a watershed is a building, so try to explain all concepts simply.
- Storm drain markers are great for getting people's attention and focusing them on stormwater. Ensure markers are interesting and bright.
- Use graphics whenever possible, especially pleasant looking maps. Descriptions can establish the value of a given resource, in this case stormwater and teach its history. Go to meetings with pictures with your facts, a picture is really worth a thousand words.
- Use earned media. Earned media uses opportunities like other's workshops, op-ed articles, blogs, and public discussions to spread the word about your activities.
- Do not wait for public hearings, most decisions take place prior to the hearing, so go to committee meetings.

- Get other communities and organizations on board, you do not want to become a wedge, also win over public officials and their staff.
- Do not appeal to moral sensitivity of public officials, as money comes from developers. Look at where the money is coming from.
- Public shaming of those who want to skate on effective dates.

Breakout Session

Montgomery County

Participants in the Montgomery County breakout were asked to focus on creating stronger stormwater control standards than the state requires for both new development and redevelopment. Participants identified area, resources, and tactics central to a strong campaign.

- Many existing resources and allies were identified, including coordinating with existing watershed groups, using anacostia.net and forum, AWCAC (Anacostia Watershed Citizen's Advisory Committee), Anacostia Watershed Society, River Keepers, University of Maryland Extension office, civic associations, Potomac Conservancy, ANS, and local media.
- Financial resources, although often small, are available from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, Patagonia, REI and others. Some funding, including that from local governments, might not be available for advocacy, but could be used for outreach efforts and activities to strengthen partnerships.
- In identifying potential opponents, participants stressed that many 'opponents' could be approached so they at least stay on the sidelines or even become allies. Each group should be researched and approached before they are forced into an adversarial relationship. Such opponents may include housing advocates, developers and consultants, property rights proponents, chamber of commerce, some elected officials or unions.
- Several strategies and tactics were identified:
 - Develop relationship with media representatives, use online communications such as forums, list serves, blogs, YouTube.
 - Have formatted letters and emails available for people to print and send.
 - Recruit constituents when meeting with elected officials
 - Quantify benefits of ordinance in an easily understandable manner (use monitoring data),
 - Create pre-identified talking points, so everyone is pushing the same message.
 - Encourage documentation of environmental problems using photographs, video and maps.

District of Columbia

Participants were asked to advocate for a strong MS4 permit as the District of Columbia's permit will be renewed this year. Participants quickly realized they themselves did not have a clear understanding of the MS4 process, and "stormwater ordinances." This is a barrier to organizing people, dealing with the public, and talking with elected officials. After discussing the MS4 permitting process in detail, the group identified areas to consider for ensuring a strong MS4 Permit

- When the EPA issues a draft permit it usually goes to a few people on mailing lists and a public notice is listed in legal section of newspaper. There maybe may also be a public hearing, or opportunity for public component. However, it was felt that much of the permit would not necessarily be for public review.

- To get a message out to affect the permitting process, the group identified reasons why people should care about the River and MS4 issues. Such issues include:
 - Anacostia is one of the three most toxic waterways in the country
 - People eat fish
 - Boating, tourism, wildlife
 - Drinking water
 - Beautification
 - Community health
- Communication efforts have to reach further into the community and connect to what the residents feel are important (often meeting their basic needs). Message must be jargon free and use many visuals.
- Bring together those who understand local history and the community, to generate interest and pride. This “enhancement of self concept” will help make people care more about there local environment more.
- Find a local champion, as local heroes can quickly bring the conversation to the local level.
- Additional goals for communication:
 - Create simple cost/benefit calculations to show why stormwater issues are important.
 - Have talking points ready at all times.
 - Have a map, photos and other visuals available to assist in outreach.

Prince George’s County

In the Prince George’s County’s breakout session participants were also asked to design a campaign to affect the outcomes of the upcoming MS4 permit reauthorization. The group focus on identifying the foundation such a campaign would need.

- Focusing on the MS4 permit would help form and broaden a Prince George’s coalition, and it more sustainable. It was noted that just people in breakout session could not advocate forever so new players are essential.
- Fresh participants would need to be trained on how to effectively outreach to community members, the media and politicians. To do this a process to “train the trainer” needs to be identified.
- Volunteers should take on specific mayors, council members, and organize others. It would be best if every county council member had an organizer assigned to them.
- Participants noted numerous existing groups that may have common ground for working on such a campaign, including the Green Power Coalition. However, participants also indicated that this coalition and others had failed to bring in minority populations, faith groups or unions (this coalition began in November).
- To move forward any green agenda both diversity and interests must be included, such as green jobs, economy, people who are fishing to supplement food, and other environmental justice issues.
- Talking points are needed. Topics need to connect to everyday lives, consider the perspective of economy, any anything else that relates to quality of life. Talking points should also be translated into Spanish or other languages spoken by local populations.