

Anacostia Watershed Advocacy Workshop



Forty-two people participated in the Anacostia Advocacy workshop at the Greenbelt Community Center on March 7th, 2009 . The workshop, sponsored by the Anacostia Watershed Citizen's Advisory Committee (AWCAC), brought together local and regional advocacy experts in order to educate Anacostia River subwatershed groups on more effectively advocating watershed issues. Mr. Andy Fellows (AWCAC, other) welcomed participants and requested participants share what campaigns would be good to focus on as an Anacostia community. A sample of ideas generated can be seen below.

- Prince George's County stormwater education and homeowner assistance
- Issues related to the proposed soccer stadium.
- New walking trails throughout watershed
- Putting a county stormwater ordinances in place
- Would like to see upper northeast branch group
- Stormdrain stenciling
- Stopping additional ICC construction
- Sewage overflow issues.
- Trash free river.
- Smart growth development
- Maintain existing green space in BARC.
- Bottle bill, or plastic bag bill.
- Engaging homeowners to be better stream stewards
- Impervious surfaces, pursuing a green street initiative.
- Green jobs
- Toxics issues

Brief History

of Advocacy in The Anacostia Watershed

Jim Connelly, Executive Director of the Anacostia Watershed Society, reviewed the history of Advocacy in the watershed. By including specific examples of lawsuits, outreach efforts, and other advocacy tools Mr. Connelly was able to paint a picture of how the Anacostia has improved, and a positive paradigm shift has occurred of the view of the river.



Panel 1 Advocacy Through The Lens of Past Battles

The first panel examine previous campaign and gave advocacy advice from hindsight. Presenters gave many details related to each scenario, then highlighted important tactics they learned.

Ms. Zelda Bell

Citizens to Conserve and Restore Indian Creek

Issue: Development near Greenbelt Metro

- Try to keep relationship positive, and not be adversarial all the time.
- Realize the campaign will be difficult and time consuming (EIS, Traffic projections, and understanding models are all difficult).
- Keep your eyes open for allies, and enemies.
- Develop relationships with everyone you can (officials, business owners, landowners, etc).
- Strong leadership is critical, especially at the beginning



Imani Kazana

Issues: Liquid Gas Plant construction in Neighborhood

- Understand who your allies are and why
- Keep the issue alive in peoples minds using any means possible.
- Think creatively (e.g., can the local fires department , or homeland security issues be used in your favor).
- Finances are important. Understand where its coming from and where its going.
- Understand Community Benefits Agreements (www.communitybenefits.org)

Dennis Chestnut

Watts Branch Community Alliance

Issue: Green Development

- Always be strategic and pay attention how you deal with each stakeholder.
- Make sure you get a seat at the table.
- Treat everyone with respect, developers are not monsters.
- Get help implementing Community Benefits Agreements
- Educate the local community throughout the entire process.

Advocacy Through Litigation

Chris Nidel (Nidel Law) and Jamie Gibbs Pleune (Institute for Public Representation) briefly spoke and answer questions about using litigation as an advocacy tool. The groups generated several key points on this issue:

- Understand the difference between litigation cases after the fact and before something happens.
- Litigation is costly, even if you have a lawyer working pro-bono (court fees, expert testimony, etc).
- Litigation takes a long time, so not good for cleaning up a problem quickly.
- Lawyers are only as good as the laws that exist, so advocating for strong laws is a must.



Federal State and Local Opportunities and Advice

Bill Matuszeski (Former Environmental Protection Agency)

Understanding Federal Agencies

- Army Corps of Engineers: Always remember you are dealing with a military structure. However, personnel changes all the time (e.g., local “boss” in Baltimore changes every 2 years). This agency will defer as much as possible to the EPA and Fish and Wildlife, but they usually have the ultimate authority on water issues.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The EPA is centralized at the regional level. Philadelphia is the regional center. Divisions do not communicate well with each other, which can be used to your advantage. Finally, remember that the head of EPA is a politically appointed position.
- Fish and Wildlife Service: FWS has a diffuse structure. While they do engage the public, they are often slow at getting things in writing to other agencies. Most likely group to back you up.
- Park Service: Military structure with high staff stability, so good to keep in touch with them. They will always strongly defend their turf.
- Department of Transportation: Almost always defers to state DOTs.



Dana Minerva (Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee)

Local Stormwater Issues

- Once you're fighting a project you are too late, and means that the laws/ordinances are too weak.
- Stormwater lawsuits are undependable, little legal backing.
- The public process works against you, its too late by the time your allowed to take part
- Political staff education level and experiences depicts their decisions
- Citizens cannot be everywhere all the time which is why strong laws are key



David Dunmire (Eyes of Paint Branch)

Local Strategy

- Strategy is crucial to any effective campaign.
- Under Stand the “process” of decision making surrounding your campaign issue, because success will be limited if you do not follow the process. Mr. Dunmire has seen campaigns fall apart because participants did not know what was being decided upon at what point.
- Find as many allies as possible.

Diane Cameron (Stormwater Partners),

State issues

- Strategy is critical for advocacy at all levels and especially important with maintaining cohesion within a coalition. Vary your message as needed, but keep the same basic message.
- Know who you are talking with, their opinions and their pressure points.
- Remember that many agencies are under funded and understaffed. For example Maryland Department of Environment should have more funding and more accountability.



