

Summary
COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING 5

Goodale Park Shelter House
120 W. Goodale Street
Columbus, OH 43215

September 30, 2014
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

The members of the Community Advisory Panel (CAP), a group convened by the City of Columbus (the City) to advise the City on the development of Blueprint Columbus, held their fifth meeting on September 30, 2014 at the Goodale Park shelter house in Columbus, Ohio. The CAP is composed of representatives from Columbus neighborhoods, businesses, environmental interests, construction and homebuilding firms, ratepayer groups, and others. The CAP is scheduled to meet quarterly over the course of the Blueprint Columbus planning phase, which will conclude in September of 2015 when the draft Blueprint Columbus plan is submitted to the Ohio EPA. More information is available at www.blueprint.columbus.gov or by emailing blueprint@columbus.gov. The next CAP meeting is scheduled for January 27th, 2015.

Meeting Objectives:

- Present a community engagement update, and findings from outreach and engagement activities completed to date
- Introduce and seek initial feedback on a proposed city ordinance
- Introduce and seek initial feedback on the affordability analysis
- Gauge collective understanding of the options available to address stormwater runoff and sewer overflows
- Identify potential topics to discuss in 2015

Welcome, Introductions, and Poll Set One

Maria Mone, facilitator from the Ohio State University John Glenn School of Public Affairs, welcomed participants and invited brief introductions from CAP members, the project team, and city representatives. She then reviewed the agenda and meeting objectives.

Eric J. Roberts, facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute, led participants through several poll questions designed to gauge the collective understanding of the options or approaches the City of Columbus has available to address issues from stormwater runoff and sewer overflows. The participants responded to the questions using electronic keypads. The first set of poll questions focused on the reason why the City of Columbus must reduce sanitary sewer overflows, the root cause of the sewer overflows, and the approaches

the City has considered to address the issues. In general, the meeting participants understood the reason the City is attempting to eliminate sewer overflows and the options available to address the issues.

Community Engagement Update and Findings

Margie Hiermer, RAMA Consulting, presented the community engagement update and findings to date. Her presentation is summarized below.

Overall, RAMA has had a high rate of engagement during the outreach process. Most people they engaged responded overwhelmingly positive or neutral when asked about Blueprint Columbus. Most local area businesses positively received the idea of Blueprint Columbus.

Public engagement activities have included passive canvassing (dropping off baseline education materials) and active canvassing (door to door engagement to reinforce education materials), road shows, and business outreach. Additionally, pre-engagement surveys were administered to discover what people think when they first hear about Blueprint. RAMA visited approximately 28,000 homes in the four representative areas to provide residents with baseline educational materials about Blueprint Columbus between September and December 2013. Active canvassing to a subset of 10,000 homes and to 291 businesses in the four representative areas was completed between May and August 2014. RAMA also launched 40 roadshow events at libraries, community centers, or in area businesses and attended 20 city-wide events such as the state fair, Earth Day festival, a Bean Dinner, Fam Jam, and Community Festival, etc.--coordinating outreach events with other community events proved wildly successful. RAMA engaged 291 businesses through active canvassing. Other educational engagement activities are ongoing with civic associations and commissions. Engagement with faith-based organizations will begin soon.

Approximately 480 people completed the pre-survey. Initial results show that approximately 50% of the respondents were renters and 50% were homeowners. Over 70% of the respondents believe the city has a sewer overflow problem. Most people—prior to being told about Blueprint Columbus—thought Blueprint Columbus was an economic development program. The second most common response was that it was a recycling program. People also thought that the primary cause of sewer overflows was trash and leaves clogging the sewers. Cracks in the pipes and old infrastructure were the second most commonly cited problem. Approximately half of the respondents said that they are not informed about Capital Improvement Projects.

Conversations from active canvassing activities provided some insight on what city residents find appealing and concerning about Blueprint Columbus. In rank order, residents who were interviewed said Blueprint Columbus is appealing because of property enhancements (36% of residents), green solutions (28%), it is a better approach (23%), neighborhood beautification (11%) and jobs (3%). They raised concerns because of cost (59%), skepticism and overall distrust of the City (21%), and the 30-year timeline to complete the program (20%).

RAMA has several engagement activities planned until the end of 2014. In September, RAMA will finish education and canvassing in four representative areas. From October and through December 2014, RAMA will drop literature in Clintonville and plan and launch a polling process in four representative areas.

Proposed Ordinance Overview

Susan Ashbrook briefed the participants on the proposed city ordinance. Highlights from her presentation included:

Addressing excess water from private property is the key to achieving the goals of Blueprint Columbus. However, since the plan requires a high degree of participation from private property owners and no mechanism currently exists to ensure participation rates, the City will propose that the City Council pass nuisance legislation to enable the City to guarantee participation levels (and thus ensure success of Blueprint Columbus). The ordinance would apply to two pieces of private property, lateral relining and stormwater redirection. Lateral relining can sometimes be completed from inside the city sewer, but access to basements may be needed and a cleanout pipe (a small pipe installed in the yard that leads to the lateral line to enable flushing) may be constructed in some yards. The city prefers to redirect stormwater from the home's roof to the street using a storm pipe, but this will be determined on a house-by-house basis. Regardless of the use of the ordinance, the City will communicate and coordinate with the homeowners to complete the necessary work.

Since the City Council has the authority to abate nuisances, the legislation would be based primarily on nuisance theory and supported by an engineering report that describes how excess water from private property enters the system, which causes sewer overflows and basement backups that are a threat to public health. Condition of services clauses could also be included and would stipulate that if a homeowner does not allow the city to upgrade the infrastructure causing the nuisance/problem, then the City would not be required to provide service to the homeowner.

The City attorney is currently drafting the legislation with the law firm Squire, Patton Bogg and once it is finalized, the City will propose it to the City Council during the first quarter of 2015. If the City Council passes the nuisance ordinance, they could authorize the Director of the Department of Public Utilities to take certain actions such as defining and prioritizing areas, establishing rules for how a nuisance will be abated, and authorizing employees or agents to enter onto private property to abate the nuisance.

CAP members had the following questions and comments. Responses from the City are *italicized*.

- Could the City install shut-off valves between the homes and the sewer trunk lines? *No, the City cannot do that.*
- Isn't this approach shaping the law a little? *Yes, we would enact a law to make it happen. Similar nuisance approaches have been used to claim that billboards are a blight in Northeast Ohio.*
- It takes the City all summer to cut down grass when overgrown private lawns have been declared a nuisance because there are not enough people to do the work. The city may face the same problem with the lateral lines issue.
- How would this work in cases where people have already installed rain gardens or other ways to accommodate rainwater from downspouts on their property? *The engineers report will say that water needs to be directed at least 7 feet away from the foundation of the home. If rain gardens or barrels are seven feet from the foundation, and that solution works at that home, then the rain garden or barrel will be fine.*

- Can the storm sewers handle the excess volume of water being redirected from the rooftops? *We are currently assessing how much green infrastructure we would need to handle the water that goes into the system and hope to have a more definitive answer to that at the next meeting. Our first rule is do no harm—don't create any flooding issues where they don't already exist.*
- When RAMA talked to people in the neighborhoods, did they talk about this being a nuisance? *No.*
- Can a different term than nuisance be used since this has negative connotations and people will not want their homes declared a nuisance? *We probably cannot due to legalese requirements. Also, we are not declaring any homes to be a nuisance. The nuisance is the excessive water in the sanitary sewers, which causes sewage overflows and back-ups. Fixing the homes is the way to correct the nuisance condition.*
- How much water needs to be infiltrated? How much of the problem is solved by sealing the cracks in pipes? *We are still evaluating this; but the engineers working on the task must work by the parameters of 1) flooding cannot be made worse in the yard, and 2) however much water is taken out of the sewer by eliminating cracks or by using other means must be managed without flooding yards. Most ponding in yards probably comes from roof runoff, so we anticipate this approach will likely improve draining and reduce ponding rather than make it worse.*

Affordability Analysis Update

Dax Blake, City of Columbus, briefed the participants on the affordability analysis required for the updated Wet Weather Management Plan. His presentation is summarized below.

The affordability analysis, which evaluates how much ratepayers can afford to pay for water and sewer service, is not strictly about Blueprint Columbus—in fact, it is not about any particular plan that is selected to deal with the overflow issues. Instead, it is about what the City and the ratepayers can afford taking into account all of the region's utility related expenses including water, wastewater, and stormwater costs. 'Do Nothing' is not an option. The City's goal when conducting the affordability analysis is to ensure that any schedule for improvements is as expeditious as possible while maintaining affordable rates for all customers.

The US EPA and the City each have their own approach to analyze affordability. The limited EPA approach looks at two primary factors: a residential indicator that is 2% of median household income and a financial indicator of various measures of a City's financial health. The EPA only considers wastewater costs, and analyzes burden in terms high, medium, and low. In 2005, the City followed the US EPA methodology (because they are required to follow it) and found it would be a high burden on the City and ratepayers. In conjunction with the Sewer and Water Advisory Board (SWAB) and the public, the City identified other factors such as the impact on the poorest 10% of residents, poverty levels, housing burden, and unemployment to develop a more holistic affordability analysis in 2005. Using the City's 2005 approach, the City determined a 40-year schedule would be required to complete the work at a rate that the City and ratepayers could afford. The EPA approved the 40-year plan with the condition that the City re-evaluate affordability in 2015.

The City’s approach also included the development of measures of success to track on-going affordability across the 40-year project lifecycle (see Figure 1). Four criteria were identified as major categories to assess in 2005: overall impacts, vulnerable population impacts, local economy/business health, and housing. The City’s analysis determined that the plan is affordable so long as a measure’s trigger level is not exceeded. For

2005 Measures of Success			
Category	Measure	Trigger Level	Max/Min
Overall Impacts	Maximum aggregate sewer bill increase	250%	Max
	Percent customers in Step 3 or 4 delinquency	7%	Max
Vulnerable Population Impacts	Maximum percent HHI for vulnerable population	5.50%	Max
Local Economy/Business Health	Housing starts change vs. reference area (ratio)	1	Min
	Employment change vs. reference area (ratio)	0.85	Min
Housing Impacts	Number of households mortgage eligibility impacted	23,000	Max
	Number of renters driven over housing-cost burden threshold	11,000	Max

Figure 1: Measures of Success used in the City’s 2005 Affordability Analysis.

example, if affordability increases to 5.5% or above in the Vulnerable Population Impacts category and maximum percent of household income for a vulnerable population measure, then the project is moving too quickly and the cost must be extended over a longer period of time to make it more affordable.

In 2012, the City reconfirmed they would submit a new affordability analysis by September 15, 2015. The analysis will look at the

traditional grey infrastructure plan and the Blueprint approach. The City anticipates working the SWAB and the CAP to revisit the measures of success and to work with the surrounding suburbs to capture their costs in the analysis. A draft affordability analysis will be completed in December and presented to the CAP for feedback/input in January.

CAP members had the following questions and comments. Responses from the City are *italicized*.

- If you do a mass infrastructure project, you have to do it all at once, right? *No, the tunnel would be done in phases over time.*
- The increase in sewage and water bills would go up by 3% next year and supposedly go down in 2020 to 2%? *Rates are set every year by City Council. We have projections for the next few years that show rates increasing overall by 3 to 5% per year. Again, this is subject to change and approval by City Council.*
- Will this impact people that rent houses where the landlord is in charge of the water bill? *Whether or how quickly a landlord passes rate increases along to renters via increased rental rates is not something we can control. We do consider rental homes to be households, so this population is included in our analysis of impacts.*
- Are you building into the measures of success changes in population demographics such as an aging population and trying to keep them in their homes? *We anticipate seeing an increase in single, fixed-income seniors trying to stay in their homes in the next 5-6 years. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission’ Insight 2050 has a lot of data about predicted housing stock changes and changes in living arrangements that the City may wish to consider. Thank you for the comment, we will discuss including this factor in our analysis.*

- The affordability numbers have changed drastically between 2005 and now, and the EPA's 2% of median household income almost seems indefensible as a threshold. *We agree that the 2% is not a good metric, though that is the regulatory requirement.*
- The water bill includes water coming into and going out of the home? *The water going out of the house is not measured separately; sewer usage is billed on the amount of water being used in the house..*

Poll Set Two

Mr. Roberts led the group through a second series of poll questions to understand CAP members' current thinking about Blueprint Columbus and to identify future CAP agenda topics. Their responses and commentary about the questions are summarized below.

- When asked which of the benefits of Blueprint Columbus, in addition to water quality improvement, was most important to CAP members, approximately 50% of the respondents said more environmentally friendly: rain gardens, pocket habitats, and managing water where it is; neighborhood beautification and development (29%), and money invested in local companies to complete the work rather than funding large, outside firms to do the work (21%). During discussion after answering the question, some participants noted that all of the answer options are important. A participant also noted that not all answer options are applicable to both green infrastructure and a grey infrastructure approaches.
- Sewer rates were the most concerning to respondents (57%), followed by the time horizon for completion (28%), and city employees working on private property (7%) and other concerns (7%). Participants commented that the time horizon for the project is too long or doesn't seem real given how long it will take to complete.
- Respondents thought the greatest obstacle to implementation of Blueprint Columbus would be public acceptance (53%), cost (20%), and technical issues (2%). When elaborating on their answers for question seven, participants reinforced the notion that residents will object to homes being declared a nuisance. Another participant noted that public acceptance greatly depends on the initial work the city completes—if the City takes great care to minimize intrusion and inconvenience to the homeowner and can leave the homeowners' yards and living areas as they were before the city arrived or nicer, then the public will accept the approach; but if the initial work is too much of an inconvenience and requires the homeowner to clean up after the City, then public acceptance will be low.
- Based on what respondents knew as of the meeting, they said the approach that seems the most responsive to the problem would be the four alternatives solutions that have been proposed (lining laterals, redirecting rainwater, installing sump pumps, and green infrastructure) (80%); a combination of the aforementioned and traditional solutions such as tunnels (13%), and undecided (7%).

- This question had several sub questions to identify whether or not more time should be spent discussing the components of Blueprint Columbus in 2015. For the most part, respondents indicated they are comfortable with the components. A few respondents requested more information about the voluntary sump pump, rainwater redirection, and lateral lining components. In particular, a participant suggested the City clarify how the agreement on sump pump installation and maintenance will work between the homeowner and the city since some sump pumps break-down quickly. Ms. Ashbrook noted that the City anticipates purchasing the first sump-pump, but homeowners would be required to replace the sump pump if it breaks.
- Respondents indicated they would like more information on the cost of Blueprint Columbus, as well as the modeling component and the implementation plan for year one.
- Respondents indicated they would like more information about the ongoing cost of treatment if using the 2005 Wet Weather Management plan approach and how this cost would compare to the ongoing treatment cost associated with Blueprint Columbus and the use of green infrastructure. A respondent also requested more information about the differences in environmental costs and benefits between the 2005 plan and the Blueprint Columbus approach. Similarly, participants requested a comparison of the impact on jobs between the approaches.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 pm.