

Vancouver Lake Watershed Partnership

Steering Group Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: January 25, 2012

Steering Group Members Present:

Patty Boyden	Port of Vancouver
Brian Carlson	City of Vancouver
Kevin Gray	Clark County Environmental Services
Eric La Brant	Fruit Valley Neighborhood Association
Jean Akers	Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation (alternate for Pete Mayer)

Other Agency Members Present:

Jeff Schnabel	Clark County Environmental Services
Loretta Callahan	City of Vancouver
Dorie Sutton	City of Vancouver

Partnership Members in Attendance:

Vern Veysey

Project Management Team:

Phil Trask	PC Trask & Associates, Inc.
Eileen Stone	PC Trask & Associates, Inc.

Phil started the meeting with a review of the agenda. No topics were added to the agenda.

Project Manager Update

Partnership member Jim Meyer's resignation was discussed. The question to the Steering Group is if we wish to fill the vacant position or reduce the number of seats to 21. The original plan of the Partnership was 21 members, but in 2008 when the Steering Group filled a vacant seat they expanded the number to 22 members. Patty, Brian, and Eric thought replacing the vacant seat with another person would be best. To decide on how the seat will be filled, the project management team will contact Loretta and discuss the replacement worked in the past, and then talk with the Steering Group about how to proceed.

Matrix

Phil gave an overview of the matrix, which the Technical Group recently met to fill gaps and improve.

Jeff said he is in the midst of getting updates from the Technical Group from last week's meeting. The 'expected outcomes' and 'likelihood of success' were the focus of the meeting. The Technical Group will meet again and an updated matrix will be given to the Steering Group prior to the next full Partnership meeting.

Phil commented that there are also some lumping and splitting changes in the organization of the matrix. After the Technical Group meets again and the final revisions are made, we will have most of the technical input side of the matrix evaluation. At that time, the next input would be from the Steering Group and the Partnership.

Rob Zisette has provided good input regarding the matrix and our process. He was asked to review the matrix and methods to see if we are on track according to his experience. He mentioned that the main area we are missing is a clear problem statement: what is the most important goal?

Phil said that based on this feedback it would be good at the next meeting to work with the full Partnership on the fundamental issue the Partnership is trying to address. Right now the matrix is looking at potential techniques, but doesn't ask "what is our fundamental issue." One way to get at that could be to ask what beneficial uses the group most values and what problems most impact those uses.

The Partnership came together around blue green algae. If the lake didn't have blue green algae blooms we probably wouldn't be here. But at the end of the day is blue green algae the issue we are trying to solve? Top problems that come up are blue green algae, other contaminants (primarily bacteria), and sedimentation.

Phil mentioned there is also the matter of being clear on which is the underlying problem and which is the manifestation of the problem. Blue green algae blooms are a manifestation of a problem (among others). To what degree does a blue green algae bloom impair beneficial uses and is it at level that we want to do something?

We do not want to pit beneficial uses against each other, but some are more important to community than others. Of direct (e.g., swimming, boating) and indirect uses (e.g., birding, salmon), what are we trying to tackle?

Eric mentioned that in the community, sedimentation comes up a lot. There is a concern that the lake will be allowed to fill in and then converted to other uses.

If we focus too much on only one issue, whether it is blue green algae or sedimentation, the neglected issue will become a problem. The question of the sedimentation rate will be settled by USGS.

Vern noted that some techniques could be used together. If a small area was dredged then the material could be used for wetlands around the lake. How would that reset the sedimentation issue?

Brian mentioned that a year ago according to the Columbian, Vancouver Lake was badly clogged with silt and storm water was collecting in the lake. They characterized the issue as everything was pouring into lake from Burnt Bridge Creek and Lake River. It is likely that we will still have blue green algae no matter what we do. Our overall goals are really Clean Water Act goals.

Eric noted that there are different ways to define a problem. Is it blue green algae or that the lake is not always swimmable? Is it sedimentation or that it is not deep enough for certain uses?

Phil pointed out that the top priority issue could depend on the beneficial use. For example, sailing runs from November to June or July. If we want sailing year round, then depth may be an issue. If we dredge for year-round sailing, then secondarily water quality may be an issue. For swimming, water quality is the first issue. For salmon, the lake has good depth from November through July. Water quality is a cross-cutting issue that factors into all beneficial uses.

We know a range of actions that have some success, and can improve a beneficial use to some degree. It is difficult to get past beneficial uses without being very clear about the problem statement.

Kevin asked if this is the conversation we need to have for the Partnership at this time. He explained that we have many areas we need to address to get us closer to lake management decisions. With the matrix we are looking at uses and techniques. Later we will have refined cost estimates and data from USGS. We can refine the problem statement later as well.

Patty noted that the project management team is tasked with coming up with management alternatives by the end of the year, understanding that nothing comes fully off the table. There will need to be some refinement and a need to walk through matrix with group. We have several areas to look at: technical feasibility, funding, and political will. We can start to do the work of the matrix without a refined problem statement.

Kevin and Patty both agreed that we can look at what can you do and how it affects beneficial uses as a bottom up approach from the most promising actions.

Partnership meeting agenda

Jeff mentioned that for the upcoming meeting he is hearing that we do not need to push the issue of a problem statement at this juncture. We can continue the Technical Group work with the underlying expectation of improving overall usability of the lake without reducing any particular use. We want to be sure that the narrower group of techniques may help and won't hurt.

For the meeting, does the Steering Group want an exercise similar to last time in the Partnership meeting, or a presentation of what was done?

Patty said the last meeting was very good with lots of momentum. We should report on what we have done since the meeting and how the matrix looks. Doing this and getting feedback from the partners doesn't need to be a full exercise. A discussion of the matrix as it has evolved would be good.

For other agenda items: Jean mentioned she could give an update on the water trail if it will fit in the meeting timeframe. Eileen will contact Jean to see if it works best at the upcoming meeting or the next.

On the potential Ecology presentation by Randy Coats, Brian mentioned that this report needs significant clarification about what it is and what it is not. The report gives concentrations of toxins but doesn't take into account loadings. Should this be a Technical Group discussion instead of the full Partnership?

Jeff said it would be good to have Randy come discuss the report and clear up some of the ambiguity.

Brian noted that the report gives data results, and he doesn't have an issue with that. However, if it could be presented along with the input of flows from USGS it can bring more context to what the toxin concentrations mean, just as the input of nutrients to the lake is dependent on flow. Brian thinks there would be a long discussion and the first venue should be at a Technical Group meeting. Eileen will follow up with Ecology.

Phil raised the topic of the Partnership meeting date. The February 15 meeting date was based on the thought that we would need Partnership input sooner than we actually need it. However, if the discussion on beneficial uses of the lake is not ripe, the matrix discussion would just be to tell the Partnership what the Technical Group has done. Should we move the meeting to March 21 when there would be more to discuss? Brian and Eric both concurred with moving the meeting to March. Patty and Kevin were not present as they needed to leave for other meetings.

Outreach Update

As part of the outreach update, Eileen mentioned that there is a Clark County planting near the lake scheduled for February 4th. Information was sent to nearby residents. Vern voiced a concern that the effort should not be in an area where plants would need to be removed later for restoration work. Volunteer efforts should not be wasted. Jeff confirmed that the planting in an upland area and would not be in a lake restoration area. The planting effort is part of the County's Growing Green initiative to re-forest key areas.

Eileen noted that the annual report was sent out to Partnership members and people frequently involved with Partnership activities. Brian mentioned that he also sent the report electronically to city council members. Eileen will be sending to other legislators and if anyone has ideas on other individuals or groups we should send the report to please let Eileen know.

Eric recommended that a link for the annual report be put on the website. Eileen will check with Loretta on posting the link.

The meeting was adjourned.