



# San Antonio River Oversight Committee

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**MEETING**  
**OCTOBER 15, 2007**  
**100 E. GUENTHER**  
**5:00 P.M.**  
**SARA BOARD ROOM**

## **MEETING NOTES**

**ATTENDING: COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES-** Roberto Anguiano, Dermot Brosnan, Bob Buchanan, Nathan Campbell, Tony Cantu, Edward R. Day, Tom DeBrooke, Evangelina Flores, Joan Gaither, Bob Harris, Martha Henry, Irby Hightower, Glenn Huddleston, Mike Lance, Richard Moore, Jon Thompson **STAFF AND CONSULTANTS-** Jim Boenig, Sonny Collins, Richard Grochowski, Claude Harding, Kerim Jacaman, Addison Looney, John Mize, James Oliver, Mark Sorenson, Arturo Villarreal, Linda Ximenes and ten members of the public.

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Irby Hightower introduced Martha Henry, the new representative for the Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association.

### **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF AUGUST 20, 2007**

Changes to the minutes were to page 2, the first paragraph under "Eagleland Project Updates." The last sentence should read: "SARA has altered the controls for Gate 6 and it is now working incrementally." The minutes, as corrected, were approved by consensus.

### **UPDATE ON MISSION REACH ACTIVITIES**

Addison Looney reported that:

- The demonstration and test area for vegetation to verify the types of seeding and planting that worked best is on the east bank of the River, across from Mission County Park. There was a preconstruction meeting on October 3 and the work ended today.
- The bids on the test riffle to assure that the design would do what the Corps wants and meets the desires of the subcommittee and committee were too high and will

probably be re-bid. It will not delay the schedule. The two riffles in Phase I may end up being the test facilities instead of downstream as originally thought.

- The disposal site continues to develop. SARA is in the process of finalizing the administrative issues on the two households affected by acquisition. The final design will accommodate the 3 ½ million cubic yards of soil without negatively impacting the environment. The concept is for the site to end up as a park-like setting with tables and walking trails similar to the rest of the Mission Reach.
- SARA made a presentation on the disposal site to the City South Board of Directors and they want to have some input on the final design. They also complained about the lack of input by the public. Mr. Looney sent them a letter indicating that City South was not available for input earlier in the process and that the ROC meetings are public meetings. They will get input at the 30-60 and 90 percent design stages.
- There are still a few more acquisitions to finalize. SARA will have to go to condemnation on a few sites, especially one where the owner is recently deceased.
- The 95 percent design review was in September and the comments are being incorporated.
- The groundbreaking for the Mission Reach was held last Friday at the site for the SAWS utility relocation.

#### **UPDATE ON EAGLELAND ACTIVITIES**

Since Jeff Neathery was not in attendance, Mr. Hightower asked Ed Day or Mike Lance to report on the last meeting. Mr. Day said it was not a good meeting.

#### *Corps of Engineers Project*

- The schedule for the erosion control work that Neiman is doing with Jerdon may be slipping. It does not put anything in eminent danger of erosion, but it will be two to three weeks off schedule.. This planting is to replace vegetation that was damaged earlier and the contractor wants the Corps to assure him that this will serve in lieu of the damage done and the Corps has been slow to respond. Since the Corps has given the go-ahead, SARA will coordinate to maximize the likelihood of planting this season and not putting it off to the spring
- They will be planting wildflowers on Wednesday at west bank in front of Big Tex.
- Trees are scheduled for planting in late November or December. SARA is waiting for the revised tree planting schedule from Larry Clark,

#### *Pedestrian Path*

Richard Grochowski reported that several developments have occurred with the hike and bike trail. He explained that the City met with EPA a few months ago to address the work on the west bank in preparation for installation of the bridge. The EPA was concerned about how the contractor would access the work site. They gave the okay in March to proceed, but they are not giving clearance to access the work site in a reasonable manner. The challenge is that they need to work on the west bank by Big Tex, but cannot get to it because of the EPA restrictions. They have identified several options, but there are conditions that do not allow for the construction to occur adequately and/or incur significant costs and/or delays. One option is to cancel the bridge construction for now and stockpile the bridge until EPA gives the go-ahead on the clean-up at Big Tex. This would require the letting of a new contract at that point. EPA

has said if the bridge is constructed now, they would close it off because they do not want the public on the Big Tex site.

There was significant concern expressed by Committee members since the whole conflict seemed unwarranted, given that there has not been any indication of a problem with the asbestos in this area in the preliminary site assessment. The City is willing to put in its own base material to assure there is no dust during construction, but the EPA is still reluctant.

After much discussion, it was agreed that the ROC Co-chairs would write a letter to the Mayor, City Council, Congressional Delegation and others as appropriate, to move the discussion from one among City and EPA staff to policy makers as well as emphasize the delays with this project and the cost increases associated with the delays. This was a project that was conceived of in 1992 and funded in 1998 and has been delayed again and again. The suggestion was made to notify the Committee of Six as well.

The bridge is scheduled for delivery in November and will be stockpiled until needed.

If the bridge is not constructed, it will mean a failure of the project since the north-south connection of the trails would not be realized. Committee members were adamant about the need for this much-delayed connection.

Concerns with the delays included increased costs, but also the fact that as construction is delayed, other problems present themselves. The suggestion was made to meet with the new City Council members and to send a copy of the letter to the organizations represented on the ROC so they could also send letters.

#### *Pedestrian Phase*

The City is still awaiting the Corps 404 permit. Once the permit is received, the environmental document can be finalized and approved. That approval should take about a month.

Concern was expressed again for the delays and the related cost increases since the original funding in 1998. There is an inflation factor included in the cost estimate and the Deputy City Manager has included that into the funding.

Mr. Grochowski went on to say that the Public Works Department has been reorganized and the Capital Improvements Management Department has been formed. Mission Trails Package 4A, which connects Mission Trails to Eagleland, is part of that reorganization and he inherited it about two weeks ago. The package has gone out to bid and is funded by the 2003 bond package. The intention is to complete it by the end of this year, so it has been aggressively pursued. It is going to City Council for the construction ordinance on November 1 and they anticipate breaking ground the end of November.

The Mission Trails plans were shown to the Mission Reach Subcommittee, which saw it for the first time. The railroad bridge canopy has not been coordinated with the Mission Reach canopy and the handrail for about 150 feet was also a concern. The railing is not desired—it should be designed so that there is no railing, so the City will get their

designer to look at it and should know by the end of the month what they can do about the railing. He added that the canopy may take longer. The Carter-Burgess design is being reviewed now by the railroad. There is a concern that the railroad will use their proprietary design for other canopies.

The suggestion was made to take the design approved by the Mission Reach Subcommittee, although they do not really like the design, and not use one that the subcommittee has not even seen. One of the ROC members stated that the subcommittee has been asking for years to see the design, but the Public Works Department was reluctant to let them give any input into the design.

When asked if the handrails were a safety issue, Mr. Grochowski replied that it had to do with the drop-off to the River. The subcommittee's suggestion was to make the edge of the wall five feet away from the edge of the trail, but the design has the trail two feet away from the River's edge. The concern with the handrail is that where they already exist, they only collect trash. It was pointed out that there are no handrails on the River Walk and the City was being inconsistent in requiring a handrail. The comment was made that except for the entrance to the Eagleland segment, where the City accepted input from the public, everything else is wrong in the design.

Mr. Hightower suggested that the Mayor and City Council be informed that the ROC would like a more standardized approach to the protection of pedestrians at the train trestle.

#### **UPDATE ON MUSEUM REACH ACTIVITIES**

Tony Cantu reported that the subcommittee had received an update on the Urban Segment and Park Segment. Larry Clark presented different alignments and funding possibilities for the Park Segment trail and that many different groups had been represented for the discussion of the hike and bike trail alignment. Mr. Cantu read the subcommittee's recommendation on the alignment:

The Museum Reach Subcommittee accepted the new alignment through the golf course and on Ave A to Mulberry as the preferred alignment with the following conditions:

Where the path crosses the golf course there need to be screening devices, using mesh and vegetation, to enhance safety. There will be no additional paths within the Avenue A area, only in the exiting ROW and it will be designed to separate pedestrians and bikes, with vehicular traffic controlled so that only certain users can get beyond the gate. From Broadway to St. Mary's St. on Mulberry, the path needs to be addressed in a way that is safe for pedestrian and cyclists. The path should insure that wildlife habitat on Ave A be strictly maintained and protected.

#### *Schedule Update*

Mark Sorenson went on to report on the Museum Reach construction in the Urban Segment:

- The construction of the Museum Reach Park Segment should still be finished in mid-May 2009.
- Clearing and grubbing has been done up to Camden.
- De-watering is ongoing from the Hugman Dam to Jones Ave. The contractor is currently working on the section from Jones to Camden.
- Soil nailing is complete from Hugman to Brooklyn and continues on the west bank just north of the staging area.
- The bulkheads from Lexington to McCullough are completed.
- They completed the water feature mock-up just south of the George Geis property. It was reviewed and asked to resubmit the revised design.
- The Lorna Jordan grotto project is being discussed with Carlos Cortez and he will have something conceptual in the next 30 to 45 days.
- The Museum of Art is planning construction and would like to coordinate with our schedule.
- Mr. Sorenson has been giving hard hat tours to those interested and he took the river barge vendor on a tour to look at locations for ticket booths.
- Mr. Sorenson showed the photos of the construction available on the website that are updated regularly. It shows the progress being made on the Museum Reach construction. To keep track of the progress of the construction, the website is [sanantonioriver.org](http://sanantonioriver.org) and click on the Museum Reach button.
- The whole channel that is currently being improved will be habitat for the fish. Fish lunkers and other elements are for the protection of the fish.

Mr. Cantu highlighted the work done by the subcommittee and remarked that it has a lot to be proud of.

*Report on the Park Segment Public Meeting*

Mr. Hightower requested permission from the ROC members to allow the public to speak before the end of the meeting. There were no objections.

He went on to say that the Park Segment alignment has come up now to be able to get funding from the Visitors Tax, which will be voted on in May 2008. There is a subcommittee working on it and he hoped that they and this committee would make the same decision about the recommendation regarding how the revenues should be spent on the River improvements. He explained that he wanted to be sure to revisit the alignment with the entire ROC to see what they want. Several years ago, the ROC recommended an alignment in the Master Plan that went under US 281, east to Ave. E then to Ave. B alongside the Catalpa-Pershing ditch and connected to Brackenridge Park at the Witte Museum. He commented that since there is no money now for the Catalpa-Pershing renovations, this new alignment through the golf course and up Ave A to Mulberry was the best alignment. He thanked the subcommittee for considering it and deciding to make that recommendation.

Linda Ximenes reviewed the results of the public meeting regarding the Park Segment trail alignment held on October 8, 2007 at the Witte Museum. She explained that the report reflected items that were mentioned in at least two small group reports and that they were in descending order of importance as indicated by the number of groups that

included the item in their list of desired elements of a trail. Items that were mentioned two or more times were:

- Signage that would let people know how to get to the different attractions in the park and along the trails and where to go along the paths as well as interpretation of the locations of interest.
- Amenities like drinking fountains, benches, etc. Lighting was mentioned as desirable for some and not for others. Other groups said that in certain places they did not want amenities, but would prefer for people to just move through on the trail.
- Preserve the natural environment and make it a natural experience as much as possible. Did not want to create additional erosion of the River and no encroachment on the River. Especially concerned about disturbing the natural habitat, especially for the birds.
- Native vegetation should be protected where it exists, and re-introduced where it does not.
- Safety conditions should be increased with more City Police, Park Police and perhaps a bike patrol. A safe crossing at Mulberry was desired.
- Access to the trails by hikers and bikers together was a divided issue. Some wanted them together, and others wanted them to be on separate trails. The main concern was about speeding bikes, so the trail could have curves to slow the bikes down.
- Separate the birders and the hikers.
- Make sure there is handicapped accessibility.
- Control of trash and graffiti.
- Limited access to motorized vehicles through bollards and other mechanisms.
- Designated parking areas.

The preference for the Option 3 to go up Ave A to Mulberry going through the golf course got the most first preference designation. Option 2, on Avenue B got a pretty good spread, though not as many first preferences as Option 3. Option 1 along Craig Avenue got the least number of designated preferences.

Other alignment options that were suggested were noted on the report that was handed out. About 60 people turned out for the meeting representing birders, bikers, golfers and the neighborhood residents as well as other concerned citizens.

The letter from the golf course contractor will be included in the minutes.

#### *Discussion and Decision on Qualities of Trails in the Park Segment*

Mr. Hightower indicated that based on the letter, the realigned holes will not allow for the new alignment that would go up Ave A. Consequently, he stated that he wanted to talk about what the trail should accomplish and the qualities it should have. He opened the topic up to the public at that point.

- Greg Lisciandro showed PowerPoint slides that included photos of resident birds in the Avenue A area, many of which are Texas specialty birds as well as migrant birds and rare birds. He spoke to the value of the habitat as an attraction for the birds and the impact of clearing out the vegetation, pointing out the importance of old growth trees as special habitat for the birds. He added that a pedestrian path was preferred to

a bike path and explained that the holes in the banks are necessary habitat for the other wildlife, including butterflies and fish. He showed a map of Avenue A, indicating that it would be changed remarkably by high volume, fast traffic. He was also concerned about pollution and trash as a result of the additional people there. He expressed concern about the combination of high-speed bikes and pedestrians.

Mr. Hightower pointed out that nowhere on any plan was there any intention to take out the under story; what there is in the plan is to take out invasive species and replace it with native species. He pointed out also that it would be bikes and pedestrians. Mr. Lisciandro commented that his preference would be to not have high-speed bikes and put the benches and other amenities in another location. The intention is to not disturb the banks.

Bob Harris commented that he really appreciated the presentation and pointed out that it is a marvelous place where he has birded and golfed himself. He did not want high-speed bikes and was concerned about the disturbance by maintenance vehicles. There are things he would like to get cleaned up and proposed that it be a protected area and be designated as a conservation easement. Regardless of what is done, he emphasized that there is a need to get serious about preservation of this space. He added that the committee needs to look at mitigation of the damage to the habitat done by the Museum Reach construction and this would be a place to begin. He challenged this group to take on making this area a protected area. He emphasized the possibilities of providing incentives for the preservation of this area and focusing on eco-tourism.

- Mike Scully, schoolteacher and long-time birder, made the point that there is not a lot of awareness on the part of the decision-makers of the importance of this location. He cited data from 2001 indicating that there are 68 million birders and 1 million come to Texas contributing \$230 million to the area. Frederich Park, Mitchell Lake and Avenue A are the three places you want to visit in San Antonio. There are several species that go to Avenue A and do not go to Brackenridge Park because of the additional traffic at the park. Even with controls, this would be a major connection for visitors and others. For pedestrians, it will be a shortcut from the university to Broadway. He expressed concern about people getting off the path. He added that he had walked the Catalpa-Pershing and across the golf course, pointing out that it is three miles to downtown and 15 miles to Mission Espada. He emphasized that the committee look carefully at Avenue A before we tamper with it.
- Reid Meyers acknowledged that he was the author of the letter from the Municipal Golf Association.
- Lillie Engles, Past President of the Texas Ornithological Association. She emphasized that this is a very special area. She believes that any increase in traffic will be detrimental. Hikers talk as the walk and if the path is smooth, then you'll get roller bladders. She agreed that it should be made a conservation area and emphasized the beauty of the place.
- Milton Guess asked to have his hospitality hat on and explained that the hospitality industry has been pushing the Venue Tax and think public will give \$125 million for the River; \$40 million for the Park Segment and \$85 million for the Mission Reach. He stated that he did not believe a chance like this would come about for another 20-25 years. The necessary information needs to be presented to the Commissioners

Court by December. They have been working on the plans and have gotten funding for other areas. He expressed concern about getting bogged down and would like to see a compromise about how to get from downtown to Brackenridge Park that makes everyone happy. He pointed out that the path would probably not be able to follow the River.

Mr. Hightower recognized Mr. Guess's work to get the tax issue on the table. Bob Buchanan pointed out that there was an original decision to go along Ave B along the Catalpa-Pershing and cross Mulberry. These funds would go a long way to enhance this area.

- Mike Lance commented that the decision was made to go down Catalpa-Pershing a long time ago for compelling reasons. The fact that the Catalpa-Pershing ditch is ugly is no reason to change the route.

Mr. Hightower summarized the discussion, as he understood it and others commented as well:

- **There is consensus that Ave A should be protected and everything should be done to keep it that way and information should be sought about its designation as a bird sanctuary.**
- **Cut down vehicular traffic on Ave. A.** Through bike traffic should not be encouraged. Ave A should be a dead end with a turnaround.
- Want Avenue A to be available to the public and the City as it is.
- Mr. Guess suggested that some of the funds could be made available to improve the habitat as part of the Park Segment funding.
- Mr. Reid said the Golf Course Association would cooperate with limiting the amount of traffic going back there. Only golf maintenance vehicles would have access once the golf course management is changed. He added that the course will be closed for about a year. Maybe put a gate with bollards to limit access.
- Parking on the edges of the banks of the river is also a problem.
- Pedestrians going through the golf course should be done in ways that are designed for the safety of the golfers and the pedestrians. Parameters should be established.
- Mr. Harris was asked to create a list of improvements that would be needed for a wildlife sanctuary that would cost money.

The next steps are to come up with a budget for the desired items for the River improvements to submit to the committee Howard Peak is chairing. Mr. Hightower said that Mrs. Cockrell suggested creating a budget that could accomplish any of the possible alignments and understand that some of it may be changed along the way. Howard is pushing forward and

Nate Campbell pointed out that it seems that regardless of the alignment, it would be good to see what the new alignment of the golf course is to avoid having a chain link fence along the route. Reid said just got the new plan and pointed out that it will not be possible to go across the golf course. He added that he is in discussions with Mr. Peak and the possibility of going onto the golf course property is okay with them, and there preference is for Ave B as part of the alignment. They will go either way that is decided by the ROC.

Mr. Guess suggested going down Ave B to Mulberry to the middle of the park and use Visitors Funds to enhance that.

Other important elements that should not get lost in the discussion about the alignment are to get a path under US 281, a pedestrian path along Mulberry from Broadway to Red Oak and safe crossings north-south across Mulberry.

Recommendations to the County Committee agreed upon by consensus are:

- **Avenue A looked at as a sanctuary—costs for doing that**
- **Pedestrian crossing at Mulberry at the bridge**
- **Path under 281 needs to be**
- **Pedestrian connection along Mulberry from Broadway to Red Oak**
- **No bicycle through fare on Avenue A**

#### **UPDATE ON FEDERAL FUNDING**

Suzanne Scott reported that the project got approval from ASA and OMB to accelerate the local funds, so can use the money appropriated now for construction. Can move forward with Phase I. Visitors Tax is not necessary for Phase 1.

Not sure about appropriations decisions now. They have not been finalized. Whatever comes out from that will be credited to the local funds.

Moving forward to the Committee of Six on November 16 with the 100 percent cost estimates and then City and County will need to let Corps know money is available to go for bid.

Approval for the project funding will be sought in November according to the following schedule:

- November 19-ROC-final costs and funding for Phase I
- November 28- SARA Board
- November 29- City Council
- December 4- Commissioners Court

#### **UPDATE ON VISITORS TAX STATUS**

Ms. Scott handed out a copy of the joint committee recommendation of the Eagleland and Mission Reach subcommittees for the betterments/enhancements on the Mission Reach.

#### **SAN ANTONIO RIVER FOUNDATION (SARF) UPDATE**

Sonny Collins reported that the foundation will meet on Wednesday with the new group to start Phase 2 of the fund-raising campaign. Will take people on bus tours of Mission and Museum Reaches. They will also have a walking tour of the Museum Reach to prioritize items from the Public Art Master Plan. These will be presented to the ROC for their concurrence once the list is finalized. Some of the items, the grotto and the Roy Smith Street Bridge have significant time pressures since they are already in the works.

He added that the SARF board approved to fund up to \$400,00 or 50 percent of the cost of 2.4 acres at Confluence Park. Richard Perez is negotiating with CPS Energy to gift the 2.4 acres to SARA or to significantly reduce the price. Mr. Hightower emphasized the importance of this parcel of land to the enhancements of the Mission Reach.

Mr. Hightower also commented on the importance of keeping the pressure on OMB to support the decision on the acceleration of the local funds.

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no additional comments from the public.