

MEETING SUMMARY
Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council
March 18, 2024
10am – 12pm

Tim Jensen began the meeting at 10:07 a.m.

Attendance: Tim Jensen, Paula White, Joe Neugebauer, Naomi Lichtenstein, Rich Walkling, John Steere, Tania Pulido, Anthony Falzone, Peter Mangarella, Naama Raz-Yaseef, Ann Riley, Maria Brandl and Cinda MacKinnon (Friends of Orinda Creek), Michele Mancuso, Martha Berthelsen

1. **Earth Team** – Naomi Lichtenstein reported that they did a Wildcat creek cleanup near the Grocery Outlet in San Pablo with Richmond High School. They're planning to make this a priority for future years.

2. **CUSP report** – Ann Riley reported on a federal register item regarding the US Army Corps of Engineers. Be aware that there are three new policy documents launched by the Army Corps. One is the "Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Decision Document," dated USACE 2021. This guidance requests that the Army Corps districts consider a wider range of benefits when they do project planning including social, environmental and economic. Now most of the project planning is influenced by their "National Economic Development" analysis that favors single purpose projects. The catch is if the District Corps uses this new guidance to formulate a project, once it goes to Washington for final review, it may be rejected –or not be granted a waiver from existing rules dating to 1983. (This situation did occur recently in which a district proposal to help a DAC community by Port of Oakland was rejected once it got to Washington). A recent release in the Federal Register Feb15, 2024 'Procedures to Implement Principles, Requirements and Guidelines' Vol 89 no. 32 is a 40 page document that lays out an ambitious revision of Army Corps planning that puts greater emphasis on community preferences for projects, environment, sustainability, social needs, etc. The document acknowledges that this significant change is going to require development of new economic analysis tools and will take awhile to accomplish. A new way of working with the corps is not in the immediate future. Also an administration change could interrupt this as has happened in past situations. The Corps also has released a policy initiative; "Implementation of Environmental Justice and the Justice 40 Initiative." This directs the corps to identify disadvantaged communities (DACs) that need assistance. This is an aspirational policy announcing that the Corps will strive to commit 40% of its projects and programs to DACs. The Water Resources Development Act allows to the Corps to pick up 100% of the costs for pilots. There is no compensation for local planning costs or public involvement. Again, there is uncertainty about locally formulated proposals going through the entire Corps review process.

3. **Urban Tilth report** – Nathan Bickart provided a report via email: Urban Tilth's

Watershed Restoration Crew is busy caring for creeks all over West County! At Wildcat Creek in North Richmond, we're removing invasive blackberry and stewarding last seasons' plantings, which seem to have done well in spite of the heavy rains and some inundation. In collaboration with The Watershed Project and North Richmond CHDC, we'll be hosting an Earth Day cleanup event at Wildcat Creek on 4/20 9am- hope you can join us!

- We've also kicked off our new Water Conservation Project- installing laundry-to-landscape and rainwater catchment systems for free for residents of the Iron Triangle neighborhood.
- We've also been growing plants for installation at the Rheem Creek/Rollingwood restoration site, in partnership with TWP, RDG, American Rivers, and the City of Richmond, with installation expected sometime this Summer.
- Finally, the buildings at the North Richmond Farm are finally coming into existence! Really exciting to see this community-driven collaborative effort take a physical form on the land. Stop by and check it out!

4. San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society (SPAWNERS) report

–Martha Berthelsen reported that they work on two sites, El Sobrante Library and Wilkie Creek site. Students are learning about habitat and plants. The El Sobrante Green team will be participating in an Earth Day event at El Sobrante Library site on April 20. Homeowners asked a question: how can we maintain our property with the county not maintaining the creek? Can more frequent cleanups occur? SPAWNERS is hosting a cleanup with SOS, but it is challenging due to ongoing issues with homeless encampments. Discussed how to help private property owners remove large items such as trees from their property, Tim replied that they can suggest contractors. Martha wanted to find out from John Steere if they had any information about water quality to provide for attendees during the Earth Day event. Basic information about how to keep creeks clean, what not to put down the drain. Many people own swimming pools and may not know that they shouldn't be drained into creeks.

5. The Watershed Project (The Watershed Project) report

– Naama reported that the state of the Estuary conference was canceled, and The Watershed Project met with EPA grant to discuss the grant awarded by the EPA for improvements to the Wildcat Creek watershed. They discussed an intention to focus on interventions for homelessness. EPA also announced the awarding of the grant focusing on environmental justice to update the action plan for Wildcat Creek. TWP is forming a Wildcat Creek stewardship group. Paula added that in addition to the Wildcat Creek restoration event TWP will be providing information about a habitat garden that will be installed at the Shields-Reid center. Naama added that there have already been several community engagement events about the plans. There will also be a bioretention feature. Interpretive sign designs will be on display for the community to express preferences. The NRWC project has nearly concluded to replace trees along FJW and plant additional trees in front yards. The Urban Nature loop trail, which is part of the NRWC project is available to view via an app that Naama put in the chat and is also here:
<https://pocketsights.com/tours/tour/Richmond-North-Richmond-Urban-Nature-Loop-811>

<https://thewatershedproject.org/north-richmond-urban-nature-loop/>

6. **Bird Alliance (GGBA) report** –Cathy Bleier was not available to provide a report.
7. **Community Based Ecological Solutions in Rheem Watershed (City of Richmond) report**– Rich Walking reported that there has been quite a lot of flooding this year due to some intense storms. Paula commented that community members still have a lot of questions and it would be helpful to have all stakeholders meet with the community to answer some of their basic questions. Tim added that providing info to the community is useful, Rich added that there are more complaints now that have been building up for twenty-five years, now that the community has someone listening to them.
8. **East Bay Regional Parks District (East Bay Regional Park District)** – Scott Stoller was not available to provide a report.
9. **Presentation: North Richmond Collaborative Shoreline Adaptation** -- Naama Raz-Yaseef, The Watershed Project and Joe Neugebauer, West County Wastewater

Q&A: Rich Walking: Did project designers reach out to BCDC? Naama: Yes, currently at 65% for Phase I, 30% for Phase II. Riley: Boat launch area—is there an opportunity for residents to access the shoreline. Naama: Residents expressed interest in fishing and boating opportunities. Chevron owns land, and they are difficult to work with, and didn't participate in the initial phase. They're not actively or transparently involved with the working group. Design team had to create two sets of designs, one with Chevron and one without. Without Chevron, the designs are more costly and less efficient. Groundwater intrusion due to sea level rise is a big concern, and Chevron is a big landowner with polluted soil that, if inundated, will provide an additional environmental hazard for the community. Riley wondered if Chevron could be invited to a WCSP council meeting. Tim doesn't have a contact with anyone at Chevron currently, but if someone does have a contact Tim will reach out. Joe doesn't have a current contact. Via chat, Michele inquired about an environmental compliance contact that could be engaged? Tania commented that Supvr John Gioia has reached out numerous times, and their position is that their lawyer doesn't want to be involved in the design due to liability concerns. Tania offered to send SKEO's powerpoint presentation for inclusion in the minutes, because they have the Chevron refinery on their agenda for the work to study environmental burdens in North Richmond (cumulative assessment). John Steere mentioned that Chevron had been engaged in environmental hazards discussion recently at Hunter's Point after avoiding the issue for 25 years. Joe mentioned that he'd met with Britt from BCDC along with other regulatory agencies about the project and the regulatory community is supportive of the project; it will be helpful to have Supervisor's support also as the project moves forward. Also have a NOAA grant to finish the design. Will be coordinating with the Army Corps to look into implementation funding.

10. **West County Wastewater (WCW) report** – Joe Neugebauer reported that the director, Andrew, met with officials in Washington and had some productive conversations and

they are generally supportive of the North Richmond Living Levee plan. Regarding the treatment plant--no news is good news—doing pretty well during the winter with no adverse incidents from rain. Huge benefit from new infrastructure improvements. April 27 hosting a cleanup at Wildcat Canyon in Alvarado Park, 9am.

- 11. City of San Pablo report** – Itzel Gomez was not available to provide a report.
- 12. City of Richmond report** – Jeff Barich reported that the Rheem Creek project is still on hold; hoping to get into the creek to complete the project by May 1, pending CDFW permission.
- 13. Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD) report** – Chris Lim was not available to provide a report.
- 14. Contra Costa County Watershed Program report** –John Steere reported that the North Richmond Watershed Connections (NRWC project) is wrapping up after 5 years, showcasing its multiple benefits of urban greening, green infrastructure, and placemaking to the North Richmond Community. The “North Richmond Green Streets Corridor” project will serve as a next phase for expansion of the NRWC into San Pablo and Richmond and providing connections to the Bay Trail at two staging areas which has been in the works for about four years. He noted that Transportation Engineering will be taking the lead on the proposed Green Streets improvements connecting residents to San Pablo Creek and San Pablo Bay. Also coordinating with Joe Neugebauer on providing both access to the living levee and improving the Bay Trail along the shoreline near the Dotson Marsh and its connection to Fred Jackson Way along Goodrick. Greenbelt Alliance is hosting an Earth Day (April 20) panel discussion at the North Richmond Farm with Urban Tilth, John Gioia’s office and other stakeholders. John mentioned in response to a question from Cinda MacKinnon that they are working on a Bay Point improvement plan. Tim may report on this during the next meeting.
- 15. San Francisco Estuary Partnership (SFEP) report**—Liz Juvera thanked everyone for their understanding in light of the cancellation of the State of the Estuary conference, which will be rescheduled, likely mid-May. They want to make sure people’s work is recognized as soon as possible. There was a glitch with the Henry J. Kaiser venue switch, but likely to return to the Scottish Rite facility that is familiar and works fairly well. Joe added that they’re happy to be sponsors and will work with SFEP to hold the conference at the rescheduled date. About 750 people had signed up. Hoping that most people will still be able to attend. Good news on the horizon—the next tranche of SFBRA funding will include \$1.85 million for the living levee project. This will be going to the board in early May. Wildcat Creek watershed-wide improvement (WCIF) plan will be starting in the next couple of months.
- 16. Flood Control report** – Tim Jensen reported that they’re involved with the living levee project grant. At the last meeting there was a question about the Vale Road stream gauge. Tim was surprised to learn that it is not on county property, it’s attached to the

city's bridge and Flood Control District (FCD) doesn't have funding to deal with. The FCD will pursue a grant to relocate the gauge and get it back up and running. Riley asked about using an electronic instrument, and if volunteers could help install it. Tim will ask Mark Boucher about that possibility. Peter is interested in measuring the stage (water depth) mostly. The rating curves haven't been reviewed since USGS removed support from the project. These should be re-established. Anthony Falzone commented that during the lower flows it's not too difficult, but harder to measure during the higher flows. Tim suggested a subcommittee meeting be convened with Anthony, Riley, Peter, and Mark Boucher to discuss this. FCD is working with Urban Tilth on a contract to have Watershed Stewards look at vegetation, sediment and trash to advise on the best places to conduct their work.

17. Wildcat Creek Fish Passage Subcommittee report (Trout Unlimited) – Peter Mangarella mentioned that the fish ladder project includes redesign of the sediment basin and some upstream redesign work in addition to reconstructing the fish ladder. 70% design was submitted, comments were provided by the Army Corps. Overall the comments were supportive and FlowWest is addressing the issues raised in the comments. Anthony added that they're working on 90% plans, getting ready to submit to CEQA. Implementation funding has been approved so once the 100% design plans have been improved, the project can move forward. IRWM funding will also be available, might be possible to add additional scope to this project (monitoring). Beginning discussions with regulators to address permitting requirements. The district environmental program has also consulted with Confederated Villages of Lisjan. New implementation date is Fall 2024. Have also been working on HOBO logger monitoring of temperatures and dissolved oxygen (DO) in Wildcat Creek in partnership with TWP. 3 year study, if you're interested in getting more information, contact Peter. Riley asked what had been heard regarding the dam removal from EBRPD. Peter said there has been no movement on this for two years. Riley heard that the EB director is not in favor of the dam removal. Suggested getting groups together to advocate. Peter doesn't have a contact with the director, but Riley does. Rich confirmed that the current board doesn't support the recommendation supported by the WCSP council, and that because it's an election year, the project is not on the agenda. Sierra Club is now supportive of the plan, they could be helpful allies. Riley will reach out to Norman LaForge from Sierra Club. Peter suggested involving the Park foundation as well.

18. California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife-- Sabrina Dunn was not available to provide a report.

19. New Items / Other Roundtable Reports— Tania reported that there is a multiple agency group meeting in North Richmond, and have been meeting intermittently for the past 10 years. They recently did a community walk to hear from residents about their concerns. Many community based organizations are surprised by the conditions and are interested in getting involved with solutions. Evaluating capacity for groups to help. Focused on improving conditions around Verde school, and even though multiple groups are already working on the creek, there is no long-term solution on

the horizon. There had been a suggestion to create a subcommittee attached to this council. Perhaps there is a need to meet more frequently. The main concern is the increase of homeless activity in the creek, there is more trash including hazardous waste. Tim mentioned that TWP had received a grant to convene a Friends of Wildcat Creek group. Naama mentioned that this group will be working on the entire watershed, and that there need to be multiple groups. The lower Wildcat Creek group will be a community advisory group, but the goal of the group is to advise, not solve these issues—their purpose is to create an action plan, not clean up the creek. TWP is not yet in contract, and is not yet allowed to work with the community. Contra Costa County is represented on the task force meeting with Tania, others who want to be involved get in touch with Tania. Current enforcement activities are not adequate to address the problem. There is a safety concern with involving volunteers in cleanups due to the homeless population there.

20. Discussed options for a site walk during the May meeting. John Steere proposed a segment of the North Richmond Urban Nature Loop, as part of the North Richmond Watershed Connections. Usually the site walk will last an hour and a half.

Tim Jensen adjourned the meeting at 12:07 pm

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, May 14, 10 am-noon, likely at the San Pablo community Center. Lunch, then site visit, exact location to be determined.