

RESTORE OUR WATERS WATERSHEDS FORUM FORUM SUMMARY



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Watersheds Forum Background and Purpose:

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) convened community organizers and leaders of watershed groups from the Fauntleroy, Longfellow, Piper's, Taylor and Thornton Creek watersheds to hear and discuss watershed issues. The Forum took place at Seattle REI - North Room, 222 Yale Avenue North on Wednesday, December 3, 2008 from 6 - 8:30pm.

Hosted by Restore Our Waters (ROW), the City of Seattle's commitment to take actions and promote partnerships that protect and improve our creeks, lakes, the Duwamish River and Puget Sound. The goals of the forum were to:

- share successes, challenges and barriers,
- foster dialogue among participants on perspectives and priorities for achieving aquatic health across the city,
- identify opportunities for partnerships and coordination, and
- identify outcomes, actions, next steps and include dialog on how to convey outcomes to a larger audience

SPU's *State of the Waters Report Vol. 1 & 2* features the five watersheds discussed during the forum. Volunteers represented Watershed Councils from Thornton, Piper's, Longfellow and Fauntleroy areas, and Friends of Taylor Creek.

Trish Rhay, SPU Director of Drainage and Wastewater, welcomed the assembled watershed representatives. She said the purpose was to share information from across the City's watersheds and take what is learned and work towards a second forum. She acknowledged that in order to be successful in watershed efforts, SPU will have to be sensitive to costs and look for projects that can provide multiple benefits. The creation of partnerships will be critical. She expressed enthusiasm for this first forum and looked forward to the interactions and input.

Facilitator Bob Wheeler, Triangle Associates, then led the forum in introductions (see attendance list at the end of this summary) and focused the participants on wall flip charts posted around the room. He asked participants to walk around the room and provide written responses to the following posted questions:

- In your opinion, what are the top priorities/focus areas of your watershed?
- What are the biggest successes of efforts made in your watershed?
- What are the biggest challenges of efforts made in your watershed?
- For your watershed efforts, who would you like to work/partner with?
- What questions do you have about your watershed or another watershed?
- Do you have any other comments?

There were poster size maps of the represented watersheds. Participants were asked to provide geographic input as appropriate and desired.

Participants spent 50 minutes responding to the flip chart questions and interacting and dialoging among themselves.

This activity was followed by an informal review and discussion of the written responses. Key themes emerging from the discussion and review of written responses are summarized below.



Key Themes

- The following emerged as priorities for improving water quality
 - Managing stormwater runoff
 - Reducing combined sewer overflows
 - Reducing fragmentation of green spaces
 - Education and public involvement
 - Research, data gathering and monitoring
 - Improving coordination between City departments, other government agencies, community-based groups and residents
 - Building Partnerships
- Managing Stormwater Runoff – Many comments included the significant impact that stormwater and combined sewer overflows have on all Seattle watersheds. Participants wanted more information on the impacts of stormwater and how these issues can be addressed. Pollution and stormwater flows are major problems facing the health of the creeks.
- Data – Participants reiterated a need for more watershed data that includes all aspects of water quality as well as biological species and habitat indicators. It was stated that more information is needed on flows and quantities of both streamflow as well as groundwater. Participants agreed that this data would be most useful if located on one common website that included resources for property owners and neighbors. The site could include volunteer opportunities, education materials, and restoration techniques such as reducing impervious surfaces and minimizing stormwater runoff and pollutants.
- Water Quality – Participants frequently brought up water quality issues related to flooding, sewer overflows, and stormwater runoff. Water quality problems also fueled discussions of polluted beaches, water toxin levels, unhealthy fish habitats, and appropriate education and signage. Concern was also expressed about the impacts of property development on water quality.
- Citizen Education, Information, and Multimedia Campaigns – Participants strongly urged SPU to focus on watershed education and to work on citizen awareness. It was repeatedly noted that many watershed residents are unaware of their impacts on their local creek and the greater Puget Sound. Information should focus on how citizens can lessen the impacts of runoff from their homes. One recommendation mentioned several times was for SPU to provide signage for the different watersheds so that the public's awareness is heightened. A need to educate the media so that they can cover watershed issues properly was also mentioned. Participants felt that current public perceptions of water quality and watershed health are not accurate or very thorough.
- Upgrading Techniques – Discussion occurred related to looking for and making new techniques and “best management practices” for improving watersheds available and accessible to watershed groups.
- Partnerships – Participants expressed a desire to see SPU streamline its watershed efforts with other City and State departments specifically, the Seattle Departments of Planning and Development, Transportation, Parks, Office of Sustainability and Environment, and the Washington State Department of Transportation. These agencies impact the watersheds



and their involvement in partnerships could greatly assist making improvements. Several participants felt that the City should speak with one voice on watershed issues. They desire to see these departments partner with other organizations, specifically, People for Puget Sound, Earth Corps, local watershed groups, businesses, and Seattle schools. Other programs/organizations that were identified as potential partners were Adopt-a-Creek, Adopt-a-Storm Drain, drainage contractors, Fleet Management, Lakes Alliance, and Seattle Works. There were comments encouraging cooperation among the various watersheds. Many participants hoped for a comprehensive watershed plan as a result of collaboration with the above groups.

- Legacy Planning – A need to create opportunities and to foster involvement in watersheds that spans generation gaps, and the creation of more public ownership, was discussed. Participants noted they observed a tendency for younger citizens to not be as involved in watershed efforts. Concerns were expressed that there are no succession plans or programs to create continuing groups and efforts as volunteers retire. One thought was to create mentoring opportunities. Importantly, there is a need to encourage and foster volunteers to participate in watershed efforts and then to acknowledge such efforts. Participants felt that as funding from governments becomes harder to obtain, local efforts provide an opportunity for folks to work on a watershed near their home. Until education is widespread and more citizens are proactive within their watershed, it will be important for volunteers to continue to feel valued, useful and not challenged by bureaucracy.
- Successes – Throughout the watersheds, success was characterized by, watershed education, SPU and neighborhood group creek restoration efforts, and proactive improvements in signage and notifications of chemical use. Specific successful restoration improvements (via culvert replacements, trail developments, etc.) were recognized throughout Piper’s, Longfellow and Thornton Creek watersheds.
- Existing SPU Efforts – SPU received praise for listening and responding to the needs of the assembled watershed groups and for the current education and restoration efforts.
- Watershed Specific Recommendations
 - Piper’s Creek watershed requested collaboration with Broadview organizations (Broadview Community Council and Broadview Taskforce on Sewage and Stormwater) as well as the Carkeek Watershed Community Action Project, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Homewaters Project, the Sierra Club, and Suquamish tribe.
 - The Thornton Creek watershed requested partnership efforts with the Farm & Wilderness Program, Green Seattle Partnership, Seatran, and the Thornton Creek Alliance.
 - Longfellow Creek Watershed requested more efforts focused on local schools; Denny Middle School, Chief Sealth High School, Seattle University, Seattle Pacific University, and the King Conservation District as well as developers, city planners and permitting agencies.

Participants wrote down numerous additional questions for SPU. Topics included watersheds toxin levels, species retention, and best management practices. Other questions requested clarity as to watershed functions, boundaries, including organizations, past City restoration efforts and studies, and future opportunities under ROW.

During the facilitated discussion of the flipchart responses, additional comments were recorded and deliberated. Key topics that emerged from the conversation included the possibility of a City salvage program for native plants, focusing the current political energy on watershed outreach, continuing to use watershed residents and neighbors as local experts, and more discussion of the need for a comprehensive watershed plan that covers all City departments and codes.

Next Steps

When SPU staff asked about a future forum meeting, one with a broadened audience that includes businesses owners, developers, and permitting agencies, participants urged SPU to develop a definitive format and specific goals for the meeting. Participants also recommended SPU consider using a panel made up of representatives of each watershed to address the broader audience. Providing plenty of email notice and a presentation on the *State of Our Waters Report* were also suggested.

SPU was complimented for doing a good job of working with watershed groups and for providing opportunities for input on specific actions such as updates to the drainage code. The next forum meeting may be similar in design. Suggestions for possible themes included:

- education,
- identifying “success,”
- input on specific actions,
- low impact development,
- opportunities for enhancing and un-complicating volunteerism,
- methods of runoff control,
- planting, and
- planning how different City departments, businesses, and local groups could work together.

Closing Remarks

Nancy Ahern, SPU Deputy Director, thanked all the participants for the comments provided and the lively discussions, mentioning that SPU plans on absorbing and processing the outcomes from this forum as well as the suggestions for next time. She then shared three important points before closing the meeting.

- SPU, watershed groups, and the public absolutely need to work together. There is no way the City, a watershed council, or any other entity can most effectively work to restore and protect our watersheds alone.
- From the City’s perspective there are, unfortunately, limited resources to allocate to the issues that were raised this evening. This may not improve over the next couple years.
- SPU is striving to make good choices based on science and community input. If good decisions are made we can incrementally make progress toward improving the health of our watersheds and Puget Sound.

For a complete list of the responses, please contact:

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Seattle Public Utilities Staff:

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 Chris May – PhD Urban Watersheds, Drainage & Wastewater
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 Susan Harper – Outreach Coordinator, Restore Our Waters

Watershed Coordinators:

Beth Miller – Pipers Creek
 Sheryl Shapiro – Longfellow Creek
 Cheryl Eastburg – Friends of Taylor Creek
 Holly McCracken – Thornton Creek
 Kathy Minsch – Fauntleroy Creek

Triangle Associates:

Robert Wheeler, Facilitator
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