

**City of Bellingham Habitat Master Plan
Technical Advisory Group Meeting #1
May 9, 2012
9:00 am-12:00 pm
Mayor's Board Room; City Hall**

TAG Members present: Kurt Baumgarten, Ecology; Julie Guy, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; Jim Helfield, WWU; Sue Kaun, citizen; Wendy Steffensen, RE Sources; Cathy Lehman, Bellingham City Council; James Luce, City of Bellingham Parks Department; Sue Madsen, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group; Joe Meche, North Cascades Audubon; Kim Weil, City of Bellingham Planning Department; Barry Wenger, citizen.

Members absent: John Rybzyk, WWU (class conflict)

Others present:

Project manager: Renee LaCroix, City of Bellingham Public Works Department
Consultant team: Derek Koellmann, Anchor QEA; Vikki Jackson and Analiese Burns, Northwest Ecological Services; Hilary Wilkinson and Sarah Brace, Veda Environmental

A. Purpose, goals, objectives:

Renee LaCroix provided an overview of the project, including funding sources, timeline, need and purpose and then introduced the consultant team.

Derek reviewed the project's purpose, goals and objectives. Ultimately there will be a list of 20 prioritized land use, restoration and/or protection projects or "actions". Renee noted that these will not necessarily be on the ground projects – they could include easements, land use decisions, etc.

Questions/comments from discussion:

1. Property rights – how will this be addressed in this process? *Response: This is definitely part of the process.*
2. What is the timeline for the 20 actions? *Response: No direct answer for that right now. Each action will likely have its own time frame, and some will take longer than others based on the nature of the action.*

3. Are Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) included? *Response: Yes.* It includes the entire City of Bellingham and UGA excluding the Lake Whatcom Watershed
4. There is a nesting box program with NW Cascades Audubon. Could use some funding from that program to install a nesting box trail and volunteers from NW Cascade will monitor. Is this appropriate as an action? *Response: Absolutely.*
5. What kind of public outreach will be included in this project? *Response: This is very important, and could be included as a possible action (e.g. a public outreach plan). Good point to bring up in this process – public support. The TAG will be asked to help identify a broader stakeholder group and weigh in on an associated engagement strategy.*
6. Is there someone here who can represent the development community in this process? *Response: The Technical Advisory Group was formed to provide technical/scientific input to ensure that the resulting plan has a solid scientific foundation. The development community is an important stakeholder and will be engaged as we develop and implement a stakeholder engagement strategy.*
7. Migratory corridors seem to be a missing element. Will we look at this type of information? *Response: Yes, there are clear data gaps, particularly terrestrial and avian information. We'll be reaching out to TAG members for help identifying where we have gaps.*
8. Is preservation a protection strategy? *Response: Yes.*

B. Information Review and Synthesis

Vikki provided an overview of the Information Review/Synthesis Matrix that was developed as step 1 of this project. The matrix includes references to journal articles and studies; it does not include GIS data. GIS data will be compiled separately and will be distributed to TAG members for review.

TAG members were asked to identify any gaps in the list and/or to comment on the cited information.

Summary of gaps identified include:

- Air quality information
- Terrestrial habitat information
- Historical data (that which is specifically useful to the project)
- Parks information
- Information on Silver Creek
- Flow records (to be included in GIS compilation)

- Relevant work from WWU (Arboretum; masters theses targeting any of the identified gaps, etc.)
- Information from the Pilot study (this needs to be cross-checked; it might already be included)

Questions/comments from discussion:

1. How can we get copies of the documents? *Response: They will be uploaded to an ftp site. In the long term, they will all live on the city's website.*
2. Suggestion for another column: Stormwater management opportunities. Are they addressed in the matrix? *Response: In the summary table, stormwater has been included in water quality and hydrology; it probably makes sense to identify it clearly in the matrix. Also, a separate stormwater funding mechanisms exists in the city. A stormwater management plan also exists, so we don't need to get too far down that road in this effort. But we will bring them together where possible.*
3. Will this plan address the nearshore? *Response: Yes, WRIA 1 process (a separate but related prioritization effort across all of WRIA 1 nearshore environment, including the City of Bellingham) will overlap with this project.*
4. Has any literature been eliminated yet and if so, what was the process? *Response: No, all literature that we got from Renee is included. Some of it may have been clumped. Additional data sources identified by the consultant team are also included.*
5. Looks very WRIA 1 and water focused. How do we reach outside of this area – parks, forestland, etc. Where do we look? *Response: This is an example of a gap. Renee will work with James to try to get all habitat related reports from the Parks department. The TAG will be key in helping to close the data gaps by providing any data and reports they have.*
6. Have you already looked at the scope of areas of documentation? Gap: historical data, old maps, etc. Also work that might have been done at WWU (student theses, etc.). Do you want to try and get all of these resources? How broad if the pool of literature? Could you provide us feedback to guide how we offer up literature? *Response: Funding limits how far down the path we can go. Don't want to miss important pieces, but if there's something that stands out in your experience as useful, we'd like to hear about it.*
7. Are flow record data sets from the city included? *Response: Not yet - this is only literature. A whole matrix of GIS documents and data will be coming.*
8. The Lummi Nation lands interacts with Bellingham geographically– is their work included? *Response: Yes; in the marine area, this may come into play more clearly.*

Much of this overlap will be addressed in the WRIA 1 prioritization effort. (Note: both Lummi and Nooksack tribes were invited to participate in the TAG; both are participating in the WRIA 1 nearshore prioritization effort)

9. Another data gap – air quality. NW Air Quality agency. Response: *Yes, this needs to be included.*
10. Data gap – Christmas Bird Count information. Where does this information live relative to this project? Response: *Audubon has this data back several decades. We do have the city's data. Under this project, we need to take data that hasn't been translated to GIS, so that it can be useful at a parcel scale. That's one of our tasks. Some older data is not likely available digitally – not likely to be easily incorporated into GIS. We'll need input on what data needs to be included. We will provide database of GIS sources so you can help us make sure we've included the important sources.*
11. Add the following category: list of GIS data that we have. Response: *This is in progress. We'll share this with the TAG to make sure we're including everything we need.*
12. Is it our role to filter or apply criteria for reports we include? Is this a living process or a cut-off? Need to be ready to defend from criticism from others. Response: *We have one week to get input – information could always be added in the future. Need to stay on budget. Stick with the summary document as a guide for what we include (geographic reach, topic, etc.) But also be sure to include any critical categories we may have missed. Next step: need to come up with parameters around what's included in literature.*
13. City database – will this be included in the City's IQ / Environmental data set? Within city limits or watershed-wide? Response: *Yes, this will be incorporated. Have come up with buffers on different reports – looking at how to connect up-stream or adjacent parcel issues (e.g. buffer placement relevant to parcels).*
14. Have you looked at what information the city has on Silver Creek? The city has monitored Silver Creek's water quality there (missing an x in the Silver Creek column in the matrix). Response: *Acknowledged.*
15. Has WWU done its own surveys/habitat assessments? Response: *We have two Huxley professors on the TAG; will ask them to connect us with any necessary information (student research that might address gaps, etc.)*
16. Will this include state data such as the 303(d) list? Response: *Yes.*
17. Bellingham Bay has been included but estuaries have not – reason? Response: *Trying to figure out how to draw the line. Anything that touches the estuary should be counted.*

18. Benchmarks – are we striving for pre-settlement habitat goals. Do we have reference sites? What are we striving for? If this doesn't exist, this might be a document worth creating. *Response: Closest thing is the Nahkeeta Northwest work.*
19. Would like a map illustrating where streams/creeks are day-lighted and underground. Overarching goal: daylight them all! *Response: We have a separate culvert project underway – fish passage prioritization. We can crosswalk from this study into this one.*

C. Looking ahead

Derek provided an overview of one of the primary topics at our next meeting: habitat prioritization. In the big picture, we want to come up with a process for identifying 20 projects or “actions”. Prior to the next meeting, you will receive a limiting factors analysis. It will provide information on where we seeing stressors, data that's missing, etc. We will be asking for initial feedback on prioritization of different restoration projects.

Start thinking of creative partnership, funding opportunities, etc. Have some things we can pre-sell so we can bring initiatives on the table and hopefully get them funded and implemented.

D. Next Steps and Follow- up

- The next meeting is June 14 from 9 until noon. Probably at the Mayor's Board room, but this is still TBD. Stay tuned.
- The consultant team will follow up with meeting notes and a link to the ftp site where documents and other materials can be accessed. This will take about a week to pull together.
- The consultant team will also distribute a list of TAG members, including affiliations and e-mail addresses (provided everyone is comfortable with the information being distributed)
- An e-mail request specifying exactly what format to submit additional comments on the matrix will be sent out shortly. The due date for final comments on the matrix is close of business on Friday, May 18. This e-mail will include a bulleted list of “sideboards” for the literature matrix, to keep it as targeted and within scope as possible.