

Regional Greenspace Project
Advisory Committee Kick-Off Meeting
February 28, 2006
Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Those Attending:

Kay Argo- RPCGB
Mary Jo Bragan- EPA Region 4
Neil burns- EPA Region 4
Michael Fleenor- Jeffco Health Dept.
Bill Foisy- RPCGB
Jason Fondren-RPCGB
Dan Grogan- MACTEC Engineering
Wendy Jackson- Black Warrior Cahaba Rivers Land Trust
Paul Kennedy-CAWACO
Greg Lein- Alabama Dept of Conservation & Natural Resources
Tom Maxwell-RPCGB
Deborah McGill- Jeffco Industrial and Economic Development Authority
Paul Freeman-Nature Conservancy of Alabama
Lee Sentell- Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel
Elizabeth Sims- Region 2020
Nick Tew- Geological Survey of Alabama
Camilla Warren- EPA Region 4
Bob Wilkerson-RPCGB
Larry Watts-RPCGB
Kerry Blind-ECOS Environmental Design
Shannon Kettering- ECOS Environmental Design

Presentations:

Shannon Kettering- ASLA, AICP- Vice President ECOS Environmental Design Inc- served as facilitator for the meeting and opened with introductions and an overview of the process.

Bob Wilkerson provided a PowerPoint overview of the project including a review:

- Geographical Context
- Project Goal Statement
- Best Practices and Model Examples:
 - *Rivers To Ridges*
 - *The Economic Value of Open Space*
 - *The Economic Benefits of Open Parks and Open Space*
 - *Open Space for Tomorrow: A Capital District Sprawl & Open Space Action Strategy*
 - *The Florida Panhandle Initiative*

- *1000 Friends of Florida: Building Better Communities*
- *The Value of Agricultural Lands and Open Space in the Red Hills Region of Southwest Georgia and North Florida*
- *The St. Joe Company: New Development Concepts for Rural Lands*

A PDF of the presentation is available on the project webpage at <http://www.rpcgb.org/>

Shannon Kettering presented a PowerPoint overview of the award winning Chattahoochee Hill Country development near downtown Atlanta. The project managed by ECOS has become a Land Use model for successfully achieving balance between greenspace and development.

Process tools implemented during interaction with the community:

1. *CHC Alliance Group* – brought in experts, consultants, transportation, water, nature conservancy, charettes.
2. Get the word out: postcards, public facilitation, and marketing
3. Illustrate the possibilities – educational sessions
4. Be creative when explaining land use tools/options
5. Engage the community with every aspect of the process.

Bob Wilkerson provided an overview of the Project Framework including:

- Guiding Principles
- Phase I - Data Inventory
- Phase I -Deliverables
- Long-Term Phasing Plan- Draft

Group Discussion and Input:

Shannon Kettering facilitated a roundtable discussion soliciting feedback, thoughts and suggestion from the advisory committee as a means for guiding key aspects of the project through phase I.

[Note: The committee will have opportunity to provide additional input during two work sessions scheduled to occur during March and April prior to conclusion of Phase I in May.]

The Following comments were provided:

Initiative Strengths:

Wendy Jackson: Stated that the recognition of economic factors is a positive: governments have to understand the economics of open space; natural resource protection has to be coupled with a rational economic development program. The region has begun to value greenspace.

Nick Tew: Public involvement is important at every step of the process; Where does the public plug in and how?

Bob Wilkerson: Responded that phase II is all about engaging the public and gaining input. The purpose of phase I is to ensure we have the right components and information from the advisory group before we step out for the public

Kerry Blind (ECOS): added that the project team needed to form a core steering committee to keep the project from getting off focus. The broader community should be brought in after key stakeholder groups are on board allowing the core steering committee groups to help guide the process.

Bill Foisy: Noted that there is a draft public involvement plan available for review and edit which could facilitate the public outreach phase.

Elizabeth Sims: Stated that Region2020 is excited given the multi-county interests in this project. Region2020 will work on the public involvement plan; will dovetail with (anticipated) grant funding. Region 2020 has heard that there is significant interest in this type of activity ... a different type of development... we have examples of development done without planning and the reaction of communities to that form of growth. She noted that strength of the partnership is the opportunity to participate with the public engagement process. Another point is that rural counties are interested in discussing what they know they don't want to become.

Paul Kennedy: Stated that it's good to know this is a multi-county project overlapping CAWACO's 5-county region. Paul liked the concept of the project's attempt to provide a collective, methodical, well thought out approach. Hopefully this project will help answer some "big picture" questions and concerns being heard throughout the region.

Kerry Blind: Commented that visioning plans vary throughout the region because they have different resources and are different from each other. One of the project objectives will be to develop ways to dovetail the various visions.

Camilla Warren: added that the project goals are broad enough to reach various segments of the community, including the economic segment. She also complemented the elements of inter-connectivity suggested through various guiding principles.

Deborah McGill: Also likes the element of connectivity. She expressed concern for the fragmented messages that circulate throughout the region: She raised a concern that often the public becomes confused about the various initiatives; people too often do not know where they should be involved. She stated that this initiative can connect various segments and viewpoints stating that: We can show them how it all connects. Deborah also recommended we develop a title or name identify for the initiative citing *Rivers to Ridges* as a great example; this would help the public to connect with the project contributing to awareness and buy-in.

Larry Watts: Complementing the project team been patient and methodical with the process; this should be a "win-win" if we remain patient and refrain from pushing an agenda one way or the other. Larry also expressed appreciation that a member of the governor's cabinet was in attendance.

Initiative Obstacles

Shannon Kettering shifted the conversation by asking the committee to provide input relative to obstacles and concerns:

Paul Kennedy: Noted that we must be sensitive to the issue of property rights and public condemnation of property as an emotional issue, all across the nation.

Wendy: Added that an appropriate public relations approach is an important issue; must remain focused on the economics of open space; landowners should be informed of the economic viability of open space.

Deborah McGill: Provided an observation that there is so much land that cannot be developed along steep ridges where it is logical to preserve greenspace. She suggested we have an opportunity to find the right balance between development and preservation. She further commented that we are out of industrial expansion space because most of the suitable (slope) sites are already developed.

Kerry: Agreed with Deborah stating, that this supports the value and importance of why the TDR strategy is so important.

Mary Jo Bragan: Cautioned that the project should not go into a community with a pre-prescribed notion and telling them what they should do. Also, she cautioned that we should be careful trying to sell TDR's using the CHC model when the Chattahoochee Hill Country TDR bank is not yet fully developed.

Wendy Jackson: Pointed out that we have a strong constituency of hunters and fishers; we need to recognize those interests; Lands set aside for hunting and fishing constitute viable open space use. The birding community is also a key stakeholder group that needs to be included in this process.

Bob Wilkerson: Pointed out that we should clarify our terminology before engaging the public; open space, greenspace, etc., have different meanings, so we need to define the terminology in the Phase I document.

Wendy Jackson: Need to let communities define their greenspace; for example, each community in five mile creek example had different ideas of what greenspace means to them

Lee Sentell: Recommended a change of terminology from *eco-tourism* to *nature-based tourism* stating that it has a broader appeal.

Tom: Noted that *nature based tourism* is inclusive of the hunting and fishing interests.

Greg Lein: Raised the point that in certain areas, people are ready for their own land acquisition programs. Examples include: Jefferson, Shelby, and Baldwin Counties. The point was made that in working toward achieving project goals, some will be through outright purchase/land acquisition as well as conservation easements.

Paul Kennedy: Suggested that the Land Trust might interface such acquisitions.

Wendy Jackson: Replied that the Land Trust would be happy to help. She noted that the Land Trust spent \$30MM on Jeffco and have leveraged \$27MM to a total of \$57MM and stated that the public is receptive to open space protection. Don't know if they would pay taxes for this program. The Land Trust is willing to work in partnership to formulate a regional greenspace acquisition strategy.

Paul Kennedy: Stated that one County within the region has plans for approaching land acquisition through alternative funding

Wendy Jackson: Noted that The black Warrior Cahaba Rivers Land Trust has changed its name to: as The Fresh Water Land Trust

Nick Tew: Identified a major obstacle: there will be a lot of holes in the various data layers. What is the plan to fill these holes?

Shannon Kettering: Replied that we may not know until we get into the communities and determine what is available and what additional information is needed.

Nick: Expressed concern that some of the indicated data needs do not exist; especially at the 1:24000 scale.

Shannon: Responded that in all likelihood, additional project funding will need to be identified to provide for obtaining the needed these data. We want the data to be good. This also speaks to the need for patience

Paul Kennedy: Noted that the Community Foundation grant application deadline is near. Asked if letters of support are needed.

Elizabeth: Responded that support letters are not needed for this grant application, will be more critical with future grant applications, and we should go ahead and begin lining-up those sources of support.

Shannon Kettering: Closed the comment and discussion session due to time.

Bob Wilkerson: Thanked all for attending and ECOS for facilitating. He presented a timeline of short-term next steps and adjourned the meeting.