City of Fitchburg
MVP Project Meeting Notes

Includes notes from:
Municipal Kick-off Meeting
Community Meeting 1
Community Meeting 2 Notes

Fitchburg Municipal Kick-off Meeting - December, 8th, 2023 - 11am

Attendees: Nicholas Erickson, Sam Squailia, Courtney Lamoureux, Alexander Vera, Myles Phillips-Wilcox, Ryan Killeen, Ralph Baker, Bob Pine

NRWA Staff: Sara Singh, Will Collier, Jennifer Keegan, Paulina Torres.

NBS Site Discussion:

Current and Past NBS Projects:

Nicholas started the discussion detailing current and past MVP projects in the City, and additional projects through other funding sources.

- Baker Brook project currently ongoing
- NBS to Combined Sewage Overflows in West Main St ongoing, under construction currently.
- Project in middle-east Main St to identify NBS + a plan for construction
- Nick mentioned a need for more focus on east + south Main St, and offered to send maps of the area.

Other projects mentioned:

- Past John Fitch Highway NBS proposal was moved to a location North of John Fitch.
  - Concerns of John Fitch Highway flooding, it was suggested that focusing on NBS upstream could help alleviate flood potential.

- McTaggarts Dam was partially removed in the past but could use restoration in pond area, and invasive species management.

  Ryan mentioned a walking path that exists in the area connecting McTaggarts pond to soccer fields(Moran Field?), Phillips Brook, and a historic playground(Phillips Playground?).

- Cold Brook Ecological Restoration is currently in design and permitting for removal. Pursuing funding for determining stream channels.

Needs for NBS in new/other sites:

Sam brought up the need for a solution to flooding in the River St. intersection under railroad tracks.

- Unsure of how the flooding culminates, perhaps Wallace Rd?
- A roundabout exists in the intersection, and would be a good use of NBS like rain gardens within the roundabout planting area. This could also aid in traffic direction.

- Within this area exists a potential for pavement removal as there is an excess of pavement area. Courtney added that this could aid with traffic issues such as frequent collisions with a yield sign in that area.

Re-Greening the Gateways Project
- Attempts to replace dead trees, planting native species in parks such as: Coolidge, Park hill, and Goodrich
- Interest in adding to this current MVP project NBS sites.

Phillips St. park area flooding
- Waterflow from Phillips brook is not making it to the existing catch basin and culvert, causing flooding issues and safety concerns.
- Floods cover the basketball court, and frequently damage playground equipment.
- How can we apply NBS to this site?

Ralph discussed runoff contamination at Fallulah Brook
- Road salt runoff from Wallace Civic Center parking lot and concerns about ice rink paint contamination from zamboni waste practices.
- NBS to aid in contamination filtration would be beneficial here.

Buried Streams in various locations
- Ralph mentions concerns of potential flooding in these areas.
    - Gateway park,
    - Sand brook on Electric ave. which had already seen a large sinkhole in July storms. Nicholas mentions that the brook goes underground at Park hill and passes by an old conduit in need of assessment and repair, making it a liability to the City.

Ralph adds that on the other side of flood is drought, that we could use NBS in Fitchburg that aid in both drought and flood years.
- NBS that promote infiltration upstream allows for both more aquifer storage, and flood mitigation.

Ryan shares wildlife issues along Development Rd. towards Westminster, adding that excess of impermeable pavement in this industrial area is of concern in connection with beaver issues.
-NBS to remove pavement, beaver deceivers.

Sam shares concerns over flooding in Westminster St
- September's storm brought property damage, sinkholes, park floods.
- Concern over a water main
- Suggests that this project could help create a climate vision plan.

<u>EJ Communities:</u>

Jennifer shares with attendees the current EPA EJ grant awarded to NRWA to start in January
- 3 year grant which will aid efforts in Fitchburg to plan and implement green infrastructure in EJ communities.
- This new grant can have congruence with current MVP project(s).
    - Nick shares that having a ‘wishlist’ of NBS sites and plans out of this MVP project would be beneficial for implementation in future grants, perhaps including this EPA EJ grant.

Sam brings up the need for access to green space in EJ community schools

- Longsjo Middle school students lack easy access to green space, long distance walks to nearest green spaces.
    - City is already working to acquire properties within this area for NBS
    - Potential to replace pavement in this area.
- Memorial Middle school students' access to green space becomes difficult given safety concerns on Pratt Rd.
    - Making a NBS path to a nearby park (Park hill?) could ease this access while providing green space to the surrounding neighborhood.

Community Outreach:

Paulina asks attendees what efforts have been made in Fitchburg in regards to community outreach that would be beneficial to note for this project.

- Nick notes struggles with public participation in previous MVP efforts, both at in-person and remote attempts.
    - Creative ideas proposed such as art programs at schools, video sessions, tabling at large events.
    - Steve Adams (of fitchburg?) convened a meeting in which childcare and food were provided, gathering a larger audience. Sam noted that childcare and food are great strategies for involving the public, especially for making gatherings accessible to EJ communities.
- Sam shares that people participate more when they understand that their input is valuable. She suggests that NueVue does this well, mentioning Francisco Ramos as a key person in the organization.
- Sam suggests that communicating with residents on Hobson St. who experienced flooding damage in September floods might be apt to involvement.

Education, School Involvement.:

Ralph highlights the educational component to attendees, Paulina further defines the goal of holistic climate change education and NBS education in 3rd grade classes throughout the city.

Sam suggests that planning for NBS sites to be at schools could combine both education and NBS implementation.

- She mentioned Jr. Park ranger named James, gets children involved in environmental education through the management of plants in parks.

Fitchburg Community Meeting 1

Fitchburg Senior Center February 8, 2024 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Focus Group 1

Rail Line connections, rail trail parallel to river
Riverfront Park
Greenway corridor **River St => Crocker Field**
Park Hill Plaza - Cleghorn
Twin City Kmart Plaza
John Fitch Plaza
Park Hill Plaza
We like the pocket forest idea for expanding parks/playgrounds into abandoned lots

Cleghorn - vulnerable & needy population….street trees needed for cooling this EJ area….flood prevention and remediation.

Green Acres - another economically vulnerable area

Airport Rd - industrial but a lot of unused open space….potential for solar panels vs. Oak Hill.

Oak Hill is being considered for a solar farm but it should be conserved instead - why not put the solar farm near the airport and not cut down trees here?

John Fitch Highway - frequent major flooding, was this the location of historical filled-in wetlands?

Meadowbrook => lacking green space

Focus Group 2

Upstream of JHF, **Greene's Pond**… are those dams needed anymore? Flooding problems happen upstream.

Saima Park - dam has been emptied - beavers have clogged it up

Reduce impervious cover by 50% => 1 inch drop in flood elevations down below. In city-owned areas => reduce road widths and parking lots. (Nick said this is not feasible)
Disconnect impervious areas from waterways
Dams aren't really of any value – restore and widen the wetlands

Parking lot by **Wallace Civic Center** needs biotreatment swale or similar; address zamboni waste that's getting dumped next to the parking lot.

Hobson Street culvert
Wachusett Street, above Splash Park: the box culvert collapsed during September flood
Daylight the stream!

Daylight other covered streams too:
Punch Brook, Sand Brook, Birch Brook, Shea Brook (protect from development) and the unnamed brook

Parkhill Park improvements would alleviate urban heat island effects

Starting with areas that are already positive vs. the most in need of intervention
Prioritize open space that's not public?

Ask/require folks to be more active with their tree planting program in areas where they are removing trees.
More attention to trees around children's playground areas.

<u>Focus Group 3</u>

Public swimming areas are rarely open because 1) the state pool lacks staff 2) contamination 3) turbidity

Runoff near Ingrid's property…water pours down the steps, the driveway is totally washed out….upland wetlands….increasing flood events.

John Fitch Highway & downtown go completely underwater

Saima Park

Arnhow Farm - beavers made a beautiful pond by the wetlands….diverse species of birds started living in the area. Then – someone BLEW UP THE BEAVER DAM!! Illegal.

John Fitch Plaza => make more permeable
Littering problem

Park by Providence & Cliff Street – the lower section has super-saturated, wet soil. Asphalt wasteland nearby. Acquire the parcel, convert to a park or pocket forest

Fitchburg has honey locust, silver maple, and Norway maple trees….the DCR forester mentioned that it would be better to have less of those species and more of these:

Tulip trees
Kentucky coffee
Yellowwood
More hardy natives
Osage orange (Wichita cultivar)
Flowering dogwood

(Prioritize native species but also assist in tree migration of more southern species, given that New England's climate is going to look different by 2050)

Fitchburg State University has made some landscaping mistakes, which were noticed by the professional gardener at our focus group. Their nascent food waste program send everything to a pig farmer….it would be better if they set up a compost site on campus to aid their landscaping. Also: Leaf mulch > bark mulch

PFAS in Westminster side of Fitchburg (probably paper mill or compost residuals)
Where there is <u>not</u> a wastewater plant

Mentions of glyphosate from pesticides, phosphorus from fertilizers, and algae blooms.

Need more requirements for solar developers to proactively manage water/runoff.

Focus Group 4

Areas that could benefit from NBS:

Local schools are too hot, need additional shade
Landscaping at schools

New Crocker School
Longsjo - no green space

Flooding - water and flooding impacts @ **Heywood St => Water St**
& near **Marconi Club**
John Fitch Highway - the water ices over in winter & restricts residents' movement
Shen St floods
Alpine & Williams

Timber Cutting on **Shea St** – need city to push back on developments that will make flooding worse

Air quality concerns relating to forest fire risk because after recent storms, there are many downed trees that could end up being kindle for a large fire. Reduce the downed trees!

There's also the risk that the fire department cannot access these areas if/when they ignite.

Invasive species provide habitat for mice & ticks => reduce invasives

Biodiversity - how to preserve animals pieces
Conflict between installing solar farms and maintaining land for wildlife and other NBS
Corridors for wildlife

Urban gardening

Focus Group 5

Housing stock for renters: housing should be retrofitted + more trees downtown
Flooding issues on roads going downhill
Waste sewage overflows into the **river area behind CVS on Main Street** => could be turned into a park area
Use abandoned properties to plant trees
Expand **Riverfront Park** by removing the parking lot

Greening the Gateway Cities => ability to plant trees downtown
Desire for public gardens, repurposing empty parking lots

Leverage existing programs, like NewVue Environmental Stewards

In the September storm, **downtown roadways & potholes** saw a lot of the flood impacts….

Fitchburg Community Meeting 2 (Zoom)
February 15, 2024 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Attendees: Richard Paradise, Carolyn Sellars, James Bunnell, Mark Christian, Mary Ellan Christian, Jen(Last name unlisted), Daniel Welsh, Evan Halstead, Mary Jo Bohart, Chelsey Patriss, Evelina Paulino, Gina Vilayphone, Dann Wuoti, Telephone Attendee, Rosalie Ena, Ingrid Wheeler, Abbie Webb, Telephone user, Tracey Sarefield, Francisco Ramos. Tom Groves, Paulina Torres, Ralph Baker, Adrienne Lennon, Ryan Hennrikus, Jennifer Keegan, Sara Singh,

Site Priority Discussions:

Site 2: Cleghorn neighborhood

- Tree canopy lost in private parcels.
- Parkhill Park is a good location to start planting trees.
- Standing water at the brook which runs through the park.
- Parks and Rec is working to plant trees with DCR help.
- Sizer school used to be located in the area, runoff comes down the cleghorn road. Are there opportunities to educate folks here to incentivize rain barrels or other modes of water infiltration.
- Tree cover and access to green spaces are a great way to improve mental health.

Site 3: John Fitch Highway

- Coolidge Park trail is often muddy and experiences flooding.
- Stone trails that cause safety concerns, are their opportunities to redirect water from these walkways elsewhere?
- Parks and Rec working to plant canopy trees.
- Is there consideration to plant both male and female trees? Would open up an opportunity to have fruits, helping with food insecurity concerns.

Site 6: Civic Center, Baker Brook, Coolidge Park

- (See above notes on Coolidge park)
- Runoff issues from this parking lot and others into the brook.
- Erosion experienced in the brook.
- How can we create an opportunity for infiltration in this area?

Site 7: Green Acres

- City-owned public housing project.
- Field and old community garden that could use some restoration.
- Opportunities to plant trees in the area, installing rain gardens, rain barrels, useful opportunities to provide education for surrounding neighborhoods.
- Useful playing field in the property.
- How can we get residents from green acres to engage in these decisions? Generating and prioritizing.
- After School program that used to meet in the village, useful area to feel for engagement.

- Resident engagement coordinator (info from Chelsey Patriss) Ann Dumezil adumezil@fitchburgha.org and Marci Haneisan mhaneisen@fitchburgha.org

Site 9: Putts pond
- Area used for FSU ecological classes
- Beavers and other wildlife.
- Invasive plant management, old dams with no purpose.

Site 10: Greenes Pond
- High wildlife value.
- Sizer school used to use the pond for environmental science work, previous trail around the pond.
- Currently a trail exists on only the east side of the pond.
- Heavy rains experienced at the base of greenes pond where it crosses rt 31.

Site 12: Parkhill and Sand Brook
- Along the upper part of Parkhill exists a short trail that runs right along Sand Brook, and needs restoration to garner public interest. Invasive species removal and arborist work would need to be done.
- Cleghorn neighborhood association or MOC has a youth group that would make a great opportunity for engagement.
- Channelized /straight and narrow brook, very impacted by human interference. Would help with flooding issues downstream. Expanding past pools to include native plants and restore the pools.
- Opportunity to both restore while making it accessible to the neighborhood.
- Small tree plantings in the north park, 3rd most popular park in the city, behind Coolidge and Coggshall parks. Mosquitos – need lemongrass type plants here.

Green St/Mama Fitz Park:
- Small park in a very large neighborhood, with new playground equipment to go up soon, as well as restoring the basketball field.
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- Empty plot on FSU land (S. North Street) affordable housing potential to go up in this plot.
- Keeping in mind that unhoused folks use many of these smaller parks, expressions to be mindful about this in the planning process.
- Tree plantings in this area, perhaps in a different area?
- FSU Foundation parcels potential for permeable pavement?

Site 11: Fairmont/ Depot Street
- Median area can be an opportunity for traffic island NbS. Rain Garden? Runoff coming off of Depot Rd.

Oak Hill Rd:
- Impact from trucks into Notown reservoir.
- Target of opportunity in city parcels adjacent to Oak Hill country club. Perhaps there is opportunity for permanent protection of these parcels.
- Are there any opportunities for water infiltration?

Site 17: McKay Elementary School
- Falulah brook behind school, no access for students to the brook. Would make a nice nature trail.

Site 20: Beekman St. Park

- Opportunity to restore culvert on Hobson St.
- Trees planted in the park through greening the gateways program.
- Birch brook running underground in the area, flooding concerns.

Longsjo Middle School:

- Adding green areas around the school,, maybe on the left side of the granite stairs. Pocket forest at the S.East Corner of the street.
- Students use Lowe park, playground, bocce courts, garden area, other work being done for increasing green space.