

Workshop Meeting Notes

Proctor Creek: Community Communication Strategy Workshop November 6, 2014

Hosted by:

United States Environmental Protection Agency's Region 4 Office of Environmental Justice and Sustainability, Water Protection Division, and Brownfields program

Lead Facilitator:

Shawn Grindstaff (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7 and CPRC)

Co-Facilitators (alphabetical):

David Egetter (Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4), Erik Fyfe (Proctor Creek Coordinator), Denise Tennessee (Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4), Tami Thomas-Burton (Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4)

Location:

Kennedy Middle School (Parents as Partners Academic Center), 225 James P. Brawley Dr. NW

Introductory Message

EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and Sustainability, Water Protection Division, and Brownfields program would like to thank everyone who was able to participate in this workshop on strengthening communications in the Proctor Creek Watershed. We had a total of 54 participants and the meeting was a very valuable opportunity for residents, non-profits, academic institutions, government representatives, and other leaders to share information and engage in an important conversation on how to strengthen coordination and communication in Proctor Creek.



Background: Region 4's Office of Environmental Justice staff (*Tami Thomas-Burton*) found a need to respond to community leaders requests to have a mechanism of communication concerning projects and initiatives coming into their community. Ms. Thomas-Burton secured CPRC (*Conflict Prevention Resolution Center*) assistance through EPA HQ's Office of General Counsel and in coordination with David Harbin (R4's ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution Specialist). As a result, a proposal was written to help design and create (*in concert with the community*) a “framework” that was a collaborative process for “information exchange” concerning projects and initiatives taking place in the Proctor Creek watershed. A small planning team of EPA staff was formed and met with the R7/CPRC process facilitator Shawn Grindstaff to discuss background information and outputs for the meeting. Later in the planning process, we invited Proctor Creek Coordinator, Erik Fyfe for the purpose of sharing his list of contacts in the community and local partners to insure inclusiveness. The one day workshop was designed to help the community participants and leaders design and create a “communications framework.” for information exchange. A Doodle survey was presented to community leaders on the best day to conduct the meeting and an invitational flyer was produced. Food sponsorship for the meeting was provided by The Conservation Fund and meeting location provided by Kennedy Middle School (Parents as Partners Academic Center - PAPAC), 225 James P. Brawley Dr. NW, Atlanta, GA, 30314.

Workshop participants included representation from: American Rivers, Arthur Blank Family Foundation, Atlanta Community Food Bank/GA Food Oasis, Atlanta Regional Commission, Charitable Connections, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management, City of Atlanta Office of Planning, Clark Atlanta University, Community Improvement Association, Eco-Action Inc, Emory University HERCULES research program, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields program, EPA Office of Environmental Justice and Sustainability, EPA Office of External Affairs, EPA Water Protection Division, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Greening Youth Foundation, Help Elevate the Lord's People (HELP), Historic Westin Heights / Bankhead Neighborhood Association, Inc., Metro Atlanta Urban Watershed Institute, Mims Park / Tribunal Group LLC, Morehouse College, National Park Service, NPU-G Chair, NPU-L Chair, Park Pride, Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, The Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, United States Geological Survey, University Community Development Corp, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, and Westside Atlanta Land Trust.



Introduction to the Workshop Process

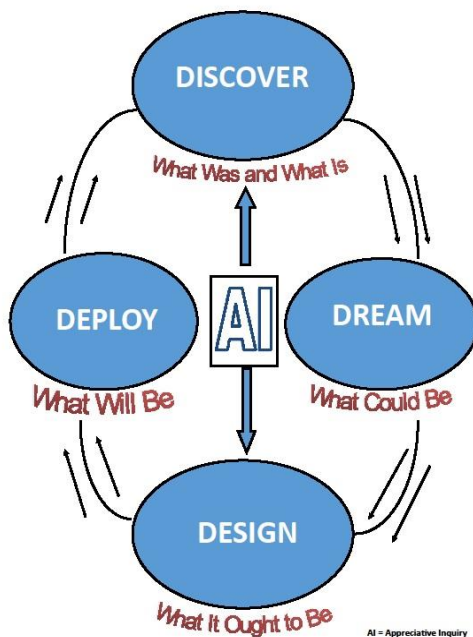
By Shawn Grindstaff, Lead Process Designer and Workshop Facilitator

The process used in the November 6, 2014 Proctor Creek Workshop was a hybrid model of appreciative inquiry and more traditional methods of facilitation to ensure a productive one day meeting for all involved.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) was the heart and soul of the Proctor Creek event. AI, simply put, is an approach to development and change that focuses on the root causes of success as opposed to the root causes of failure. The theory and methodology behind this concept has its contemporary roots in academic research dating back to the early 1980s. It has since become a widely used and highly successful method of engaging and producing transformative change in many different backdrops and venues, from communities to business organizations, governments, religious institutions, academia, and non-governmental organizations. The approach can stand in stark contrast to the traditional problem-solving methods that are still prevalent in many circles. The “4 Ds” approach is an alternative roadmap to change and transformation from the well known “plan, do, check, act” paradigm for “fixing” and “managing” problems. AI comes from the perspective of what works well vs. what went wrong when building the future.



The Four Ds of appreciative inquiry were done in rapid succession over the one day meeting. Normally, events of this kind would be best accomplished over three or four days for a complex watershed like Proctor Creek. However, given the tremendous sacrifice of time and resources by the participants to devote time for the event, our design team created a hybrid approach that could cover the first three Ds and touch on the fourth D before adjournment. The fourth D, called Deploy (or Destiny), is an iterative, dynamic process that can be visited in future meetings and initiatives created by innovation teams created at this event. In other words, our November 6th Workshop was not the end of the AI journey, but the beginning.



The Four Ds are illustrated below. The Discovery, Dream, Design, and Deploy (also called Destiny) phases all highlight the best of what was, what is, and what will be over time. Great moments, joys, memories, and key successes all mark the process and help create platforms for transformative change through teaming, action plans, and enhanced communications. These powerful foundations of thought are well suited for the complex, long-term nature of strong watershed communication strategies.

The hard working participants and those they represent used this event to “reframe” and “huddle up” for action and coordination to help Proctor Creek. We appreciate and applaud the 54 participants in this endeavor and invite them to utilize the positive core produced at this event to achieve future successes for Proctor Creek and the communities within its drainage area in northwest Atlanta.

Purpose and Primary Action Items from the Workshop

The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate an initial conversation on strengthening communication and collaboration around efforts in the Proctor Creek Watershed of northwest Atlanta. The meeting was a great opportunity for representatives from different organizations and agencies to come together and explore a path forward, strengthening communication and collaboration in the watershed. The EPA Process Design Team realized that the appreciative inquiry approach is only the beginning of a new collective journey and that, at this event everyone may not be able to attend. In fact, the group was highly encouraged to add people to the mailing lists and future meeting invitations who should be involved in ongoing dialogue and coordination. The nature of an AI process is not in a classic “stand alone meeting” but rather a transformative gathering that unleashes events and actions that create a bold, new future.

The meeting allowed an opportunity to share stories of positive experiences and dreams of future successes in the watershed, and to lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration. Many shared priorities were identified during the workshop in addition to two preliminary action steps towards strengthening communication and collaboration in Proctor Creek.

- 1. Strengthen the capacity of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council to be the platform for resident engagement in Proctor Creek. Communicate the formalization of the Proctor Creek Stewardship's structure to help other organizations feel confident that it is truly representative of the resident voice in Proctor Creek.**
- 2. Establish a steering committee or watershed partnership among organizations working to strengthen the environmental quality and quality of life of residents in the watershed. This partnership will include representatives from nonprofit and grassroots organizations (including leadership from the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council), universities, government, and others. Formation of this partnership will strengthen communication about activities and opportunities and foster collaboration towards realization of a shared vision in the watershed. The partnership will also help identify resources for the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council and watershed residents to build capacity and conduct community engagement.**

These two tasks are separate and distinct, yet they complement one another and lay the groundwork for stronger communication and collaboration in Proctor Creek. Participants agreed that the specific details of these action items will be determined collaboratively through ongoing conversation.



Workshop Notes and Participant Responses

The notes taken at the Workshop were brainstormed by participants and recorded by the facilitators to capture key thoughts and further areas for exploration. For purposes of appreciative inquiry, the compendium of notes below capture the best of the past to present (Discovery), the perfect future and what could be (Dream), actualizing what Proctor Creek's future could be designed to be (Design), and creating actions and strategies that will be (Deploy).

The notes are grouped into categories under each "D", and are otherwise left in the words of the participants as they were recorded. The information is non-attributable to any participant but is left for the good of the entire group to ponder in follow-up dialogue and actions.

Discovery

Participants were asked to focus on positive memories of the watershed and the communities and people who shaped it in their lives. They were to reflect on the following questions:

Questions of Discovery - Reflections on the following:

1. What got you involved in Proctor Creek activities?
2. High Points – moments of happiness, accomplishments, greatness
3. What enabled your success?
4. History, Family, Church, Groups, Mentors, Friends, Anything Positive on Proctor Creek Communities

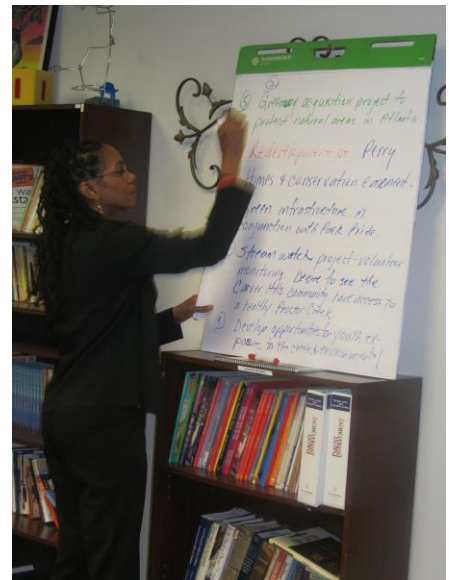
Responses:

Memories and Positive Experiences

- Roots/childhood in community
- Tendency towards Nature – hikes, love for walking and exploration, gardening, food systems
- Indirect involvement from downstream community - The creek is serene and beautiful. Enjoy walking along the creek.
- Happy memories of swimming and playing in the creek. 45-year history in the area.
- Memories of fishing and swimming in the creek
- Relocated to the area because of the beauty of the creek
- Swimming and fishing in past, interest in recreating that experience
- Baptisms
- History of the region -> Historic recognition

Successes and Initiatives that Spurred Involvement

- The Federal designation -> Urban Waters Federal Partnership
- EPA and Partner engagement
- Work related to the Atlanta sewer overhaul, consent decree
- AUC Eco-district: Sustainability work, Galvanize and educate, Be a good neighbor
- Proctor Creek North Avenue (PNA) Vision involvement
- Community visioning for greenspace (PNA) – Opportunities to purchase land for parks, reclaiming land for greenspace
- Green infrastructure planning process in conjunction with Park Pride
- NPU-G citizen involvement in clean-ups and discussions
- Through involvement in greenway acquisition project to protect natural areas in Atlanta
- Through stream watch project – volunteer water monitoring (Neighborhood Water Watch)
- Through several opportunities: church outreach, organization work, Trust for Public Land, desire for beautification/trails and community good



- The redevelopment of Perry homes and conservation easement
- Westside Atlanta Land Trust – housing opportunities, environmental component, gardens and green infrastructure
- Atlanta Youth Corps: youth opportunities in parks and civic work, environmental education, community led
- Neighborhood Water Watch – 20 year collaborative: water quality monitoring, collective effort
- Lindsay St Park initiative – youth involvement / community owned
- Nature center and education program was established
- Outreach by Tony Torrence
- Because of high expectations of community leaders whose passion is contagious (e.g. Dr. Yomi Noibi and Tony Torrence)
- Community has had long term commitment to restoration
- Community diligence sets the stage for shared passion
- Cleaning up tires with local assistance
- Reaching out to city to get information about programs
- Relocated to area to become more involved

Other Reasons that Spurred Involvement and Hopes

- Revitalization opportunity
- Opportunity for people near creek to take ownership of homes and restoring them
- Opportunity for community engagement
- Desire to develop opportunities for youth exposure to the creek and environmental education
- Desire to address challenges within community
- Hope for Proctor Creek Stewardship Council
- Desire to see the Carver Hills community have access to a healthy creek
- Desire to see creek return to a natural, beautiful asset
- Vision of future potential of the creek
- Hope for restoration of the creek

Dream

Participants were asked to brainstorm big dreams for the watershed and to think without boundaries about their hopes for the watershed and its communities. The session was about unlocking imagination and not letting past challenges or hindering thoughts unleash what creativity lies within each individual and organization in the watershed.

Responses:

The Creek, Natural Environment, and Greenspace

- Clean creek
- Cleaned and restored creek
- Creek taken off GA's 303(d) List of Impaired/TMDL Waters due to newly pristine status
- Rainwater/spring-fed daylighted stream running from the Gulch and the AUC to Chattahoochee
- Natural habitat restored
- Biodiversity with animals and birds returning
- Swimmable/livable/playable
- Fish/Swim/Interact once again with the creek
- Children able to play in the creek
- Concrete channel is an "opportunity" for restoration
- Trail and connectivity
- Connecting trails along to the Chattahoochee with river access
- Trees & playgrounds
- Parks in communities

- Environmental parity/equity across entire City

Collaboration and Community Engagement

- True federal and government collaboration
- Work together -> City & community
- Multiple stakeholder engagement
- Facilitator/Voice
- PCSC to be a unified voice for residents
- Culture of empowerment and improvements
- Meetings/Discussions of all new growth (i.e. Falcons Stadium and Gulch)
- Community collective – Public Policy Support -> input
- Historical acknowledgement of perspectives of citizens
- Community-led revitalization
- Community is a full and respected partner in revitalization
- Community is a full and respected partner in any development
- \$50 million/3 year budget to fund community engagement strategy
- See action (seeing things done) instead of just talking
- To see action



Development

- Economic development that respects the bones and historic entities of community
- Humble beginnings preserving traditions
- Community that facilitates development / community-driven
- Watershed Transformation: sustainable plans from NPUs, comprehensive, historic residents able to stay in place, affordable housing, smart relocation (where needed)
- Set of Purpose Build Communities (ex. East Lake)
- ECO-District designation for all “5” NPUs - Entire watershed as ECO District
- Historic residents able to remain in neighborhoods and partake in the new assets and opportunities that arise
- Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King restored via MLK. With connectivity to downtown.
- Restore Dr. Abernathy’s Church and old Paschals on MLK
- Public art heritage and visitor center
- No exposed power lines (put underground)
- Access to healthcare

Housing

- All structures (buildings) restored with historic preservation
- New commercial and residential buildings certified LEED Platinum
- Safest flood resistant, restored properties – All properties
- AUC receives multi-billion \$ grant from HUD for: mixed use housing development from Northside Dr to I-285
- Housing options – occupied housing and people living there are engaged in community
- No more abandoned property issues or code enforcement issues
- Improve/remove the dilapidated housing near Lindsay Street Park
- Relocate residents w/i the community to higher elevations

Employment

- Full employment
- Creation of green jobs
- Green job creation
- Solar panels installed by community members
- Job Training -> Economic sustainability
- Jobs for community members (who have had issues that hinder employment) – make lives whole
- Decrease unemployment/joblessness rate so they can be part of the process/community
- “Intra-community infrastructure installation and maintenance”
- No homelessness (x2)

Green Infrastructure and Stormwater

- Green infrastructure as an empowerment tool for the community (it is also economically viable)
- Green infrastructure (especially in headwaters)
- No concrete/using permeable material
- Stormwater runoff captured, turned into energy, and sold
- Capture stormwater runoff, turn into energy, money back to the community

Transportation

- Accessible public transportation
- Accessible via transit and streetcar
- One regional transit system, connected to high speed rail that is senior-friendly
- Transportation to food and other necessities
- Pedestrian overpass on Northside drive – traffic calming, tree'd medians, mass transit
- Protected bike lanes, free bike rental, and seeds
- Electric vehicle rental and plug-ins
- Electric cars for all
- Main streets widened



Food Systems

- Access to food/grocery/farms
- Edible landscape
- Housing for agriculture initiatives
- Farmers Markets throughout
- No-till gardening

Education

- Good Schools
- Environmental education in schools
- Proctor Creek becomes an urban lab for AUC, Emory as a teaching tool for students
- Education regarding water quality as well as quantity
- Youth education (STEM) – AUC involvement, community acknowledgement for work

Recycling, Composting, Etc.

- Water conservation and reuse
- Compost and recycle bins on every corner
- No litter in storm drains
- Composting toilets
- Composting in every household
- Close landfills and remove aluminum cans (harvest useable materials)
- Goats used to manage kudzu
- Goats to tackle kudzu issues

Other Overall Dreams

- Proctor Creek becomes a destination place in Atlanta

- Vibrant / Desirable place to be with people lining up to live here
- Destination for businesses, recreation
- Better quality of life for all in community

Design (part I)

The “Design” stage of the workshop focused on translating some of the overall Dreams into more specific actionable propositions for action. The participants were asked to map out this translation with the goal of actualizing a dream and designing elements to achieve it via coordination and communication amongst the group.

The “Design” conversation began with translating some of the brainstormed dreams into more specific project focuses.



Suggestions for action that arose from design mapping process:

- Additional facilitated collective efforts, fostering collaboration
- Establish an ongoing way to share updates about watershed activities
- Learn from existing examples, success stories of other communities, compile knowledge
- Monitoring the creek and utilize data to improve strategically
- Fact finding / data collection

- Develop a comprehensive plan for the whole watershed
- Build towards live/work/play communities – can frame as "Healthy Communities"
- Land Acquisition/Ownership
- Community land trust model
- Housing renewal
- Focus on Historic aspects/Heritage
- Demonstration projects - Green infrastructure
- Implement proposals in the PNA Green Infrastructure Vision
- Workforce development
- Urban agriculture, edible landscape, community gardens, and farmers markets
- Educational signage along creek and within community
- Involve young people connected to the creek
- Establish learning centers
- Education programs for residents
- Incorporate environmental curricula at schools in the watershed
- Establish a stormwater/rainwater utility
- Increase connectivity to the city
- Environmental Justice component

The conversation also included brainstorming some of the key relationships that might help make those dreams a reality.

Categories of key relationships identified:

- Foundations
- Various levels of Government (City of Atlanta, Fulton County, State of GA, Federal)
- Utilities
- Local and national nonprofits
- Grassroots organizations
- Neighborhood associations and NPUs
- Schools and universities
- The groups represented within the room and many who were unable to attend the workshop

Participants also brainstormed the "flows" or things exchanged between organizations working within the watershed.

Flows between organizations, groups, individuals:

- Resources: Human, Material, Financial, etc.
- Data
- Perspective/Local Knowledge
- Stories
- Volunteer Time
- Funding
- Culture



Design (part II)

A common thread throughout the workshop was a desire for stronger collaboration among groups, and individuals involved in efforts within the watershed. Participants mentioned a desire for: an 'organized collaborative effort,' an 'ongoing way to share updates,' a 'collective effort,' a way to 'coordinate and work together,' 'resource sharing,' and identifying 'similar goals, objectives, and priorities.' Participants also expressed strong interest in: 'authentic community engagement,' 'meeting residents where they are,' and 'coordination in the best interest of community and creek.' To explore the topic of stronger collaboration, one of the facilitators briefly presented models of collaboration and partnerships among groups in other watersheds including examples from the Bronx River, the LA River, and the Anacostia River.

Discussion followed about whether organizations and individuals within the room would like to pursue formation of a similar partnership in the Proctor Creek Watershed. The following points were raised during the discussion:

- A desire for a structured partnership among groups and efforts in the watershed
- A concern as to whether a structured partnership of organizations would conflict with existing efforts of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council
- A recognition of the importance of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council as a forum for resident engagement in the watershed
- A feeling that in addition to the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, there is a need to create a partnership in which organizations and government representatives not included in the Stewardship Council can engage
- A suggestion that the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council could be the "community voice for Proctor Creek"
- A desire to create an accountability structure so organizations and government entities can more effectively engage with the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council and community and better understand community priorities
- A suggestion that that the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council could explore becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to help demonstrate the group's accountability to other watershed residents
- A suggestion that organizations in the watershed might use an online communications tool developed by Charitable Connections to facilitate communications
- A proposal for creating a partnership that includes the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council as the resident voice for Proctor Creek in addition to other non-profit, for-profit, and governmental partners. During the discussion, this partnership was alternately referred to as a "steering committee," a "watershed partnership," and a "partnership network."
- A suggestion to draft a "communications strategy" based on the discussion and overall workshop



Deploy

During the "Deploy" stage of the workshop, the following preliminary communication action items were drafted to carry the conversation forward:

- 1. Strengthen the capacity of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council to be the platform for resident engagement in Proctor Creek. Communicate the formalization of the Proctor Creek Stewardship's structure to help other organizations feel confident that it is truly representative of the resident voice in Proctor Creek.**
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Draft concept of Watershed Partnership/Steering Committee and the role of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council as representative of the “Community voice in Proctor Creek.”



Conclusion

The Workshop ended with a unanimous commitment to further dialogue by all participants and the process was evaluated collectively by the group as positive, unexpectedly productive, and an encouraging sign for a new era of coordination, communication, and collaborative action. The participants appreciated the effort and were eager to follow up with their respective leaders and constituencies to spur further dialogue and build on the action items.