

Environmental Justice Meets Urban Waters

Westerly Creek

# Westerly Creek Denver, CO



# The Objective



Transform a visually blighted and unsafe reach of Westerly Creek into a vital and usable neighborhood amenity.

# Partners and Collaborators

- Trust for Public Lands
- City & County of Denver
- Urban Drainage & Flood Control District
- Earth Force
- Westerly Connect
- USEPA
- SRA International
- Wenk & Associates
- Vision Land Consultants

# The EPA Team

The Region 8 Urban Waters Team, the Environmental Justice Program, the Brownfields Program and the Office of Environmental Justice joined forces to create a plan to revitalize this section of the Creek.

# The Creek

Westerly Creek is located in Denver, CO. For much of its reach, the creek runs underground. However, it resurfaces for a stretch of several hundred yards in a community housing many of the refugees residing in the Denver area.



# The Setting

- Westerly Creek is located on the East side of Denver, Colorado and is surrounded by high-rise housing managed by Hope Communities, Mercy House and the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless to serve immigrant and refugee populations in Denver.
- It is estimated that more than forty languages are spoken by the area's residents.

# The Community

- Numerous Brownfield Sites
- Low household incomes (25% below poverty)
- High Unemployment (16%)
- Low Property Values
- Cultural diversity – more than 40 languages spoken



# The Process

- Project partners convened a series of community meetings to discuss the stream restoration design.
- Using community input and employing green infrastructure design, the project team came up with three preliminary design concepts that were then melded into one.



# COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING



Community members were asked to vote on the various design elements using sticky dots.

Some proposed design elements were rejected by the community

## Even the kids got into the act

The children's input was included. We asked them to vote on design elements and they put their dots along side those of their family members.



# FINAL DESIGN APPROVED

The final design  
concept was  
presented to and  
approved by the  
community



# The Financing

- The initial \$50,000 for this project came from EPA's Brownfields Revitalization funds (\$30,000) and the Office of Environmental Justice (\$20,000). This initial investment in the site plan led to the following commitment:
  - \$500,000 from the City and County of Denver
  - \$500,000 from a Natural Resources Damage Claim Grant (These monies derived from a settlement at the Lowry Landfill Superfund Site).

# The Final Design



## LEGEND

- ① RETAINING WALL
- ② MAIN WETLAND
- ③ ASPHALT PATH
- ④ PICKNIC GROVE
- ⑤ SLOPED RAMP - GARDEN ACCESS
- ⑥ STEPPING STONE CREEK CROSSING
- ⑦ STONE CREEK EDGE
- ⑧ NATIVE GRASS SEEDS
- ⑨ PLAY LAWN
- ⑩ DECK OVERBLOOK
- ⑪ WALKWAY

# A Neighbor Speaks



“We left my country because people were dying-killing each other. Today, all of this around us makes me so, so happy.” -Neema Irakiza, resident, formerly from Burundi

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