

OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting May 10th 2011 meeting

Attending: Jason Allers, Gene Cilento, Therese Driscoll, Bart Feinberg, Joe Hucko, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Sarah McIlvain, Bill Morse, Aaron McKeon, *Merike* Treier (co-chair) Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

Sandra: In light of the Corey Driscoll conversation, Sandra looked into the situation in Redlands, CA. They use citizens in their police department. Citizens supplementing beyond Neighborhood Watch. Now they are going to be using citizens in their code enforcement department. They develop a training manual, get a class together, and do simple investigations. Investigations: weedy front yards; illegally parked vehicles, illegal signs. It sounds as though Syracuse couldn't look at that until update of DPW department occurs.

Presentation by Emanuel Carter, Vice President of Syracuse Parks Conservancy

A few words about conservancy, only legally a conservancy since this last summer.

Have been meeting for a few years trying to define goals of organization.

Mission: To help the Parks Department and the parks associations to do various improvements and maintenance of parks; solicit and distribute money with fewer legal restrictions than the Parks Dept. has to work with.

- 1) Better maintenance was the primary goal.

In a broader sense, we are beginning to think about what the parks can collectively be in terms of neighborhood aesthetics, identity, activities, and ecological performance. I had some students this past winter looking at parks in SW quadrant of city, trying to identify the major components of the parks: Historic resources, vegetation, equipment, paths, stairways, so that we can profile the kinds of categories of giving needed.

It is hard to say "help us with parks" (too general); we want to be able, in the next few years, to say help us with historic stairways, or help us with new recreation equipment or to maintain biodiversity of parks. In the next three or four semesters I will try get a small team to put park profiles together throughout the city.

Another aim: Using parks for more major activities. As far as major activities, a lot of cultural calendar takes place on Clinton Square. One thing we are talking about is to have at least one park in each quadrant host some of those events. One of the ways we let people know that the city is a great place to be is to have events in our neighborhoods, at Thornden Park, Sunnycrest, Onondaga Lake Park etc. so that people can come and get to know that place and neighborhood around them.

It helps us to show off the whole city and I think that that matters. We are probably in a stage looking at small things we can do and large things we can do, haven't settled these yet.

Small things:

Parks Pledge program, involves elementary school children. Curriculum introduces parks as a valuable landscape to kids as a group. The research shows that if parks are introduced at that level, tend to take better care over the long haul. The subtext, we would like the conservancy's work to be one more thing that might make the school district the district of choice. Enrichment programs change the way district is perceived.

Reception from Parks Department?

Reception from Parks Dept, now better than it was. The last, commissioner not sure he needed a conservancy nipping at his heels. This commissioner is more interested; hopefully will see us an ally rather than as carping critic.

Question: Is anyone taking a look at parks in relation to the neighborhoods they serve? We have great parks geared to the wrong age groups (for neighborhood.) Looking at if basketball courts and softball fields are where that age group is and sitting parks are where that age group is?

Parks can change. No one looking at that right now, that isn't anything that is being looked at right now, my department might look at that but probably not before a full year goes by.

Question: Tree Commission: restart one? Is there any group that deals with street trees?

No. Nothing like that going on within the conservancy.

The city does have an urban forestry master plan and Steve Harris working toward objectives of that plan.

As the case with so many other elements, there isn't an integration of that issue with the rest of the planning and development and design issues in the community. If we began to see parks and urban forest in the broader sense, as part of the signature of the community, we would then develop a master plan. We need the urban forest to be part of the master plan tied to capital budgeting; we would then systematically get the urban forest. If we have a master plan tied to capital budgeting, we would get the benefits associated with that, which are considerable. Those ecosystem services serve neighborhoods.

Ecosystem Services: Urban Forest cleans air, soil and water, detains storm water that fouls watershed. Biodiversity fostered, increases habitat. Reduces heating and cooling costs between 5 and 10 percent per year; reduces erosion problems. It has health benefits: clean air, real reduction in asthma and respiratory diseases, also is good for collective psychology, reduces blood pressure.

TERM: Forest Bathing: benefits of taking a walk in the woods, tied to physical health.

It is good to have urban forestry plan that is tied to a parks plan that is tied to a city plan that is tied to the capital budget that can systematically that can make the city a better place to be. A master plan is also tied to increase in property values. This information can be found in the document "Parks and Economic Development," APA document.

What I would like to impress is that these things can be addressed as a series of small gestures, but if you want to get development benefits it must part of master plan; because long-term investors don't respond to little gestures by volunteers. They respond to long term plan by municipality.

Investors want the long term guarantee. If the study can help the city and county to understand that they will be better off.

Q: Who makes up board members of conservancy?

Most are local professionals that have nothing specific to do with parks. We are starting to get serious about how do you find money, so Barbara Humphrey, who does that for Upstate, is involved. We are interested in neighborhoods, ultimately different structure, will ultimately need a director who is paid.

What have been your models?

On the front end a lot of energy in research looking at City of Buffalo Parks System and Central Park's Conservancy, and Prospect Parks Conservancy. There is a lot of information; our difficulty is that we are looking at well established organizations that have professional full-time staffs. We are still in very early stages of moving things along. One of reasons I have been able to get colleagues at ESF to provide help; youthful energy mentored by expertise, until can get staff.

How do you deal with municipality that doesn't seem to embrace what would seem to be a tool to enhance operation?

Parks Commissioner's point of view must be that he wouldn't want to devote time to us until we prove we can bring something to table other than discussion. We can play a role in raising consciousness, and awareness is a requirement, he is giving us as much attention as we warrant. To get more attention, we need to give more ideas, money, people, who can get work done for him. He will need people with full-time daytime commitment. I said to him "What do you thing about idea of grad students researching the top ten Parks Depts. in US and how do they do business?" He focused immediately and sharply after that. He would love to have that information. Right now his budget is the first one cut. People think it is just trees and grass. If he can go to Council and say these are the 5 characteristics of the best Parks Departments nationally and with X amount of money I can attack 2 of those. Then he has something he can use. Now, looking for more money is for minimum maintenance and swimming and playground programs. He needs a broader agenda if he wants more money.

Who do you see as natural partners in community that you will need to get on board to be successful?

Neighborhood by Neighborhood, we need the parks associations and any other neighborhood not-for-profit, organizations. We need more voices that are about the broader issue of neighborhoods. We need to show extension of parks out into neighborhoods. We need parks dept. to be a central factor. If I can deliver to Commissioner what I offered by this time next year, he will be interested. But that requires a certain amount of fundraising as well.

Have opinions about neighborhood beautification efforts? How should city relate to them, foster them, control the design of them, etc.?

Certainly nice if DPW, Parks Dept, they might together go neighborhood by neighborhood look at the opportunities, things that can be for short term beautification projects (Meadowbrook for instance.)

They might compile something, example, they identify 30 spaces per quadrant that might be a good starting point. It would be nice if those departments could say "Here are the spaces you could do some planting or put public art."

There are a lot of little gestures and if these organizations can map out where they can go, there is no shortage or energy and talent. It can flourish. It is a very distinctive gesture. You can do that citywide.

These steps are voluntary and temporary. The next level would be "What are the properties we are going to gather that might permanently go to woodlands, parks and gardens? We might want to gather that by municipal requirement, with municipal money and intent but the other is a good first step.

Comment: From municipal standpoint, the conservancy will hopefully lend creativity; think about what the master plan is going to look like. Does the Conservancy have any intent to help structure that plan, where do you see city parks in 15 or 20 years? Must develop giving campaigns or we will only be one more group offering advice. We have to offer action and advice.

People who are part of conservancy, many through individual efforts or groups, are also talking about the value of strengthening the parks. It's a slow process.

Urban Aesthetics: Last Winter Honeywell and Parsons (and cohorts) were taking a beating about clean up along Onondaga Lake, particularly about putting waste into existing waste beds in Geddes and Camillus. They asked "Why are we getting beat up like this?" I said, population doesn't know how to judge what you are doing; think of something else you might do, e.g. tell public what you are doing in terms of wetland, reforestation, salt marshes, planting of meadows, all those things the average person thinks *is* Central New York. In August announced that they are now are going to do something like that.

If you go to an Ottawa, Ithaca, or Burlington, one of things that we like about them is that they reflect the host ecosystem, forested cities. Our parks can contribute to that aesthetic. Our parks and city streets can support that image. That would pay off if that were something that becomes Syracuse's signature.

Adopt an Interchange Program Follow-up: Sandra spoke to Linda Woodrow at SCVB about what happened in 2002, Adopt an Interchange program that fell apart due to red tape.

Companies were encouraged to adopt an interchange: For \$3000 paid to Convention and Visitors Bureau for pass-through to the appropriate municipality or subcontractor, a sign with company's name was installed at the interchange They expected that there would be increased maintenance or beautification. Hard to get it going because all interchanges covered under different subcontracts. There were private, county, and city sub-contracts. Woodrow had to figure that out and the groups were

supposed to get a portion of the money for cleanup. It was so cumbersome to figure out who controlled it and then they got into union issues. The expectations weren't clear and the program fizzled out.

Gene Cilento: Interstate Litter

Back in 2002, there were contracts to clean up city interchanges. Contracts called for mowing two or three times, litter pickup four times a year, street sweeping two or three times a year. Don't know if it was effective. Don't know if there were complaints. Due to budget issues, cleanup contract cancelled. 2007-2008 last contract for clean-up. As a result, we see trash piled in interchanges at 690 West, along 690 and 81, out of downtown. Gene is looking into some other ways to address the litter problem:

1. Using inmate labor. Done in Rochester, Buffalo. Why it is not being done here, I have to look into. If DOT could provide lane closures. Means paying people overtime. Providing protection of traffic. Also told there was some legal question.
2. Expanded use of Adopt A Highway. Probably not allowed in center of city; don't want people in potential danger. If you look at map of where the Adopt a Highway is, it is not a continuous line. Possible Public Education: If through public education or announcement, we could fill in those sections with church groups, businesses; so our maintenance crews can concentrate on downtown areas.
3. Providing more public information to prevent littering.
4. Additional enforcement. Having enforcers add additional thing onto their plate, tough.

Will look into these possibilities over next few months.

Comments and Questions:

Is inmate labor available? State (used at fair grounds); County (used at county parks); City (Community Courts)

Litter clean up that is contracted must be with litter company; they must provide their own protection from traffic. So they need company that can handle work zone set-up.

Is it possible that state could provide equipment that outside contractor could use? Not likely.

Litter prevention: If an area is messy, people feel they can throw litter as opposed to if it is landscaped. Use Landscaping to send signal this is not a place to throw trash. Establish a simple planting system.

At I-81 meeting, it came up "what do you do about litter?" South, Charleston, they have more community pride. Don't see much trash.

Trash blowing off trucks. OCCRA requires covering of trucks or billed \$15 per truck.

What other kind of enforcement opportunities out there?

On interchange, where does state ownership cease and city start ownership?

If commenced at city side, restrictions for clean up might be different.

Litter Bill board campaign: Remember back in late 1950s big cleanup Philadelphia campaign. City went from being trashed everywhere to being really clean.

Would awards given out for beautification of specific areas work?

The Conservancy isn't thinking about it right now; think it is workable to mount it. It might be better if across the board, not limited to parks, just give an annual design award; best implemented if you do it across a range of categories, streetscapes, gardens, improvements to parks. It could be an interesting campaign to mount; greater value in consciousness-raising than in accumulation of actual spaces at first.

Cigarette Butts; Need clean up campaign, gentle but firm. Bus Stops: after first melt five months of cigarette butts, terrible. Going after people directly won't work but campaign: "you would never drop your wrapper on the ground, why would you drop your butt on the ground?" The absence of butts would literally change the experience of taking the bus.

Weeping Indian of the '70s had an effect on consciousness.

Is litter part of your storm water management campaign? Regulations/Supposed to control litter because it is going in lake.

Complete Streets: 300 Block of Water Street, where they will be doing work this summer, putting more grasses and plantings meant to absorb runoff, meant to trap litter, so not going into the sewer system.

Outline Draft:

Under gateways: Political division if we say "City." Instead say entryways to "Syracuse." The topic of where gateways actually are can be politically charged. Also, we are kind of without boundaries.

One of our recommendations from early on, to get city to recognize that these topics are an important part of city life. Need budget information.

We need to record what is being done. We can get from neighborhood associations/organizations; can list what these are and who is involved. Put this research under explore existing programs, partners and projects.

We talked about Connective Corridor; Near West Side Initiative. Talked about Public Art. Historic District Preservation.

Ben Lockwood email, idea of beautification/gateway point person, looking at from a single perspective. (Case study of this type of coordination in a Florida City.)

Get Study Committee members to submit recommendations for next meeting.