



## **Regional Open Space Strategy (ROSS) Executive Committee Meeting SUMMARY**

**Date:** Thursday September 24, 2015  
**Time:** 2:00-4:00 PM

**Location:** Puget Sound Regional Council  
Suite 500 (Board Room)  
1011 Western Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98104

### **Executive Committee Meeting Summary**

**Participants** 22 people in attendance (See Attachment A)

**Welcome** Ron Sims welcomed the group and commented on the Pope's recent speeches on the environment as well as social equity and human health. The Pope was able to weave these narratives together and people are beginning to get it. Ron said to the group that "you got this before it was popular or easy, and thank you for being so cutting edge. Thank you for being a part of this group, and this meeting today."

**Update on ROSS** Nancy Rottle introduced new staff and provided a brief summary of their current activities. Jonathan Childers and Sarah Titcomb have recently come on as full staff at ROSS. Jonathan is the lead planner on the Green-Duwamish Watershed Strategy and Sarah is advancing a strategy for resource land conservation in the Green-Y (within the Puyallup-White Watershed).

- Regional governance & finance - Ikuno has been meeting with various stakeholders, making progress on moving the work forward
- Snohomish Watershed Open Space Strategy – Janet has been making headway on a background report with key advice from Abby Hook;
- Open Space Service Web Portal – Tracy Stanton is managing Phase II of this work program with our partner, Trust for Public Lands. With a kickoff last week, our beta test version will be expanded with the mapping of additional open space services in the four-county region. The work is targeted for testing in the spring with completion in August 2016.
- Green Duwamish Watershed Strategy – Jonathan and Vera are nearing the end of the Listening Phase, which John Owen will summarize later in the agenda. ROSS involvement on Phase II of the project will be discontinued as King County has notified us that funding will not be available.

**Green Duwamish Watershed Strategy** John Owen provided a status report on the Green Duwamish Strategy. The ROSS team is just concluding Phase I, the Listening Phase, with King County. John summarized the team's travels around the watershed to listen to what the experts were saying about the state of the watershed and the communities and organizations working in it. Much of the effort during this first phase was to document all that is going on and identify the opportunities and challenges to coordinate improvements.

- The ROSS identifies five challenges or objectives for the region including climate change, biodiversity, social equity, human health, and economic development. King County has a different, but related, set of objectives for addressing air, land, and water. These were used as part of the framework for discussions during this Listening Phase.
- The Watershed Strategy is not trying to reinvent the wheel, but rather to stitch together what is already going on. There is a lot going on in this watershed, and Phase I was spent trying to sort through that and figure out where there are connections.
- The first WAG meeting to introduce the project was held in May, and their second meeting to hear the results of this first phase was held last week.
- Findings.
  - In various stretches of the watershed, there are different objectives that compete with each other, and that we need to resolve. In the Lower Green for instance, we have the needs of industries versus neighborhoods versus the environment. Within the Middle Green there is a large effort to address floods, update aquatic habitats, and recreation. And in the Upper Green we have farming and development. Farming is under pressure from development, and farming activities can adversely affect the ecology of the watershed. We believe there are ways to resolve these conflicts.
  - Climate Change is a regional challenge that was identified but locally that is in response to flooding and storm surge issues;
  - Human Health is an important issue in the Lower Duwamish, especially related to air quality and elevated rates of asthma; and water quality as it relates to subsistence fishing.
  - Social Equity – the populations in this area do not have the same access to open space and recreation as other communities. Another issue often raised was the financial difficulty of community members to engage in discussions and decisions ;
  - Economic Development – in meeting with businesses, we learned that compliance with stormwater requirements in particular is an expensive and difficult challenge for them. We should think more creatively about addressing stormwater on a watershed-wide basis, rather than site by site.
- The results from Phase I provide a great platform for the next phases of work.

Nancy re-iterated that King County is out of funding for this next phase, and told the group that ROSS is looking for help and advice moving forward. Christie True noted that King County is still very committed to have a Green-Duwamish Watershed Strategy, but the way it is resourced financially will need to change.

### ***DISCUSSION***

There was discussion about the community's sentiments, – whether there really is a need for open space from their perspective. Most of the team's communication was with the experts, we did not do a grassroots outreach. The people we engaged have a strong priority placed on open space and recreation. It is hard to gauge the broader public. Howie Frumkin wanted to make sure we have that as part of our question. If we focus too much on open spaces and ecosystems, we will not necessarily be grounded in what people in these areas need. If it's

housing and transportation, then we need to incorporate that into our agenda. Thatcher Bailey commented that perhaps there is a need to focus on housing before parks. Gentrification is happening around the country, and it seems if we enhance the environment then this brings the costs up to everyone. What would it mean to turn the equation on its head? Nancy noted that in her Copenhagen experience open spaces do not enhance property values that much. And a study by the Portland Institute recently disputed that gentrification has actually happened in major cities across the U.S. They looked at 50 cities and found that, unfortunately, poor communities had staying power and this was driven by income disparities. In any event, there was agreement that we should put community needs high.

There is nearly \$600M invested in EPA cleanup of the Duwamish. John pointed out that the ROSS is trying to bring open space planning into alignment with this investment so it can be a part of the conversation along with housing and transportation so we ensure coordinated improvements. Kaleen Cottingham noted that much of the funding that is distributed by the State is silo-ed because of legal imperatives. There is a lot of interest in unsilo-ing these funds to have a broader impact but that is risky. Tracy Stanton acknowledged that there are efforts under way to integrate across different government entities, which is what the Urban Waters Federal Urban Caucus in the Duwamish is about.

**Pierce  
County  
Sustainability**

Ryan Dicks, Pierce County's Sustainability Manager, gave a presentation about the many activities in the county.

First he pointed to what the County is doing to improve their own operations:

- The 70 County buildings have:
  - Reduced energy use by 23% in last 5 years;
  - Reduced natural gas by 30% since 2009;
- They have reduced fleet fuel use by 11% and moving to electric vehicles is ongoing

And their external countywide activities include:

- Conservation futures program— \$3.5 million going to conservation every year which allows them to buy 7-10 properties. 3 this year were farming properties, but others have been forest and salmon projects. A 153 acre farm was protected this year, their biggest project yet.
- Agricultural Program – there is not a lot of land for farmers in the county. For instance, the second biggest farm is 300 acres. Most of the farmers are not large enough to work with the Walmarts of the world, to stay in business they need to sell locally. To encourage this, the county has created Farm Forums. One event was like speed dating between JBLM, Whole Foods, local restaurants, hospitals and farmers, where farmers got to sit down with each for five minutes to see if they could make local connections. The County also has Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) that deliver produce to employees as another way to purchase local food. Also working with farmers markets who need support in order to survive.
- Flood Prevention - Ecology provided \$9.2 million in funds for the Puyallup area through a Floodplains by Design project. Puyallup River has major flooding issues which affect many farms and people. The County has brought the cities, tribes, government agencies, planners, non-profits, conservation district, etc. together to discuss how to better manage the floodplain. Pierce County is not unique in these efforts, but the

tribes have been involved. Of the total funds available, \$6 million goes toward usual flood work, buying properties, expanding levees. Other money goes to monitoring and saving a farm. Then \$240,000 to work with the agricultural community in the Clear Creek area. Funding from Ecology.

- Other important projects in the county include 75 community gardens and major improvements at Point Defiance Park. There is \$35 million to improve the Aquarium and boat launch area, daylight some of the stormwater systems to treat the water before it enters the sound. Also working on a trail connection project with King County.
- The County just won a national award for their “[Puget Sound Fresh](#)” app. Worked with the Cascade Coalition, and UW Tacoma to make the app that allows you to find local farms in a 12 county region, find farmers markets, the products that they have, recipes, etc.

## **Open Space Valuation**

David Batker and Mr. Matt Chadsey from Earth Economics presented their findings from the Open Space Valuation report.

David opened by summing up that 100 years ago natural capital was plentiful and built capital was not, now it is the opposite. Society also considers just one problem at a time. Have a flood? Put in a levee. Now we are trying to take an integrated approach.

He generally described the objectives of the report and some of the effects that their other valuation reports have had across the U.S to provide examples of how we might use their report:

- Open space valuations are similar to housing appraisals. There are primary studies for each open space service category that provide values. Although there are not usually enough from one geographic area, so they take studies from a range of similar locations and average. FEMA has adopted this Benefits Transfer process and HUD is in the process.
- For the ROSS study, 16 categories of open space services were selected, although they did not put a value on each based on because of a lack of peer reviewed journals to use as a basis, not all were able to be monetized. This last part is important to show that open space is a capital asset.
- A similar valuation project in New Orleans was conducted and found that the storm surge after Hurricane Katrina was reduced from 29 to 16 feet because of the existing wetlands, just think about what the original wetlands could have done? Perhaps the levees wouldn't have been breached. This study suggested making open spaces more like a utility.
- A similar report in Santa Cruz that was aimed at the business community in particular. The report helped pass the first levy for the environment in the area because it spoke to the economy. Santa Clara now has an open space authority

Matt Chadsey – walked the group through the details of the valuation process.

- The core of the Benefits Transfer process is the type of land cover. For the Puget Sound valuation, the primary studies concerning the value of services were from North America, Canada, and a few from Europe.
  - First had to identify the different land covers in the region. A lot of evergreen forests, also a lot of development.

- In conducting this study, they found that proximity is important. Open space near urban areas is more valuable – more opportunity for flood suppression more value for more people.
- Taking the overall acreage for each land cover, and the three proximities (riparian, urban, agriculture) a table was created with a range of economic value for each service within each land cover. Sometimes a service does not have a value, not because it isn't important, but because there are no peer reviewed studies.
- The total economic value for open space services in the Puget Sound ranges from **\$11 to \$25 billion per year** and this is a conservative estimate because not every service could be valued.
- The next step is to look at **total asset value** over time through discount rates. A 3.5 discount rate yields a value of **\$328 billion to \$824 billion over 100 years**. At a zero discount rate (implying that the value of clean water today is the same value 100 years from now) the total value ranges between \$1 to 2.5 trillion.
- Some of the most valuable services are aesthetic, play, disaster mitigation, and waste (and nutrients). Some of the most valuable land covers are evergreen forest, woody wetlands, beaches, and saltwater.

David wrapped up by challenging us:

- How do we take those valuable services and land covers and connect them to funding mechanisms? Perhaps those receiving the benefit (of rebuilding wetlands and achieving greater flood protection for instance) can pay more through property taxes for example. Similar to utility costs. There are a lot of options for where to access, and how you spread that burden – but make sure it is not regressive.
- He recommended that we educate policy makers, include ecosystem values in land use and capital planning and analysis, create a governance and financing entity for central Puget Sound open space.

**DISCUSSION:**

Sean Watts asked just how do we get payment for ecosystem services? Is that being worked on as part of the ROSS? Nancy responded that this is all part of the story that needs to be told. The first step is to make people realize the value of open space services. We all need to help educate. Dave noted that we need to make the connection to real income in order to bring about change, pointing out that the Tacoma Parks report has spurred that revelation in that community. Ron was very interested in the Santa Clara model and will follow up with David. Ken Konigsmark said he's been thinking about how to use this study since we announced its release at the last meeting. He has shared it with others which has prompted conversations to 1) possibly support future bond initiatives; 2) demonstrate how it could be used to provide evidence to the public where their tax dollars go; and 3) have a conversation with Jim Ellis who has indicated that perhaps we need to shift from acquiring new to protecting what we've already successfully conserved as the pressures to un-do what we've done are becoming very real; and 4) help reset the way we approach taxes, and property taxes. Weyerhaeuser used to own hundreds of thousands of acres. They were regulated to leave stream buffers without

compensation and eventually sold their land. There is a similar situation with the critical area ordinances – rural property owners were told they needed to leave 60% of their lands open, but they aren't getting any tax reliefs. Perhaps we should shift that burden to urban owners (few pennies) and give it back to rural owners to compensate. Logical, but may be difficult to make happen. David noted that it's a great idea and has been done, like in Costa Rica. There it was forestry vs cattle and the government gave money to rural land owners so they wouldn't convert their land to cattle grazing. As a result, a reforestation success. Further, Brazil has small urban fees to reward rural owners who manage with better riparian techniques.

**Future  
Meetings, &  
Close**

We have lots of food for thought and action. The next meeting will likely be in late November. Ron adjourned the meeting at 4:10, although there were lots of conversations extending way past 4:30.



## Regional Open Space Strategy (ROSS) Executive Committee Meeting SUMMARY

**Date:** Thursday September 24, 2015  
**Time:** 2:00-4:00 PM

**Location:** Puget Sound Regional Council  
Suite 500 (Board Room)  
1011 Western Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98104

### Attachment A – Attendance (Alphabetical order by last name)

- Thatcher Bailey – Executive Director Seattle Parks Foundation
- David Batker – Earth Economics
- Laurie Benson – Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Matt Chadsey – Earth Economics
- Jonathan Childers – Regional Open Space Strategy (ROSS) Staff
- Kaleen Cottingham – Director, WA Recreation & Conservation Office
- Ryan Dicks – Sustainability Manager, Pierce County Office of Sustainability
- Heidi Eisenhour – Pacific Northwest Regional Director American Farmland Trust
- Howie Frumkin – Dean, University of Washington (UW) School of Public Health
- Ken Konigsmark – Rural Resident & Conservation Specialist
- Paul Kundtz – Washington Director Trust for Public Land (TPL)
- Janet Lee – ROSS Staff
- Ikuno Masterson – ROSS Staff
- John Owen – Makers / ROSS Staff
- Nancy Rottle – Director, Green Futures Research & Design Lab
- Ron Sims (Chair) – Leadership Council, Puget Sound Partnership
- Tracy Stanton – Consultant
- Steven Starlund – Kitsap County Parks
- Stephanie Stroud – National Park Service
- Sarah Titcomb – ROSS Staff
- Christie True – King County
- Sean Watts – Seattle Parks Foundation