

Portland Friends of Green Streets

Focus Group Meeting Notes - 4/21/08

Portland State University - College of Urban and Public Affairs – Room 310

Attendees:

Stephen Shackman – Portland BES, Community Watershed Stewardship Program
Ivy Dunlap – Portland BES, Sustainable Stormwater Management
Reuben Deuming
Chris Karlin
Jim Labbe

Portland State:

Maya Hooper
Kim White
Bridger Wineman

Ivy Dunlap (BES) would like draft versions of Friends of Green Streets (FrOGS) messaging so that it can be coordinated with the city.

FrOGS will meet with Ivy to look over site feasibility documents she is working on and other resources from her office.

Attendees were asked for feedback on FrOGS' plan for holding a community meeting and inviting individuals who have contacted city bureaus requesting bioswale installation. These Portland citizens do not know each other yet, so the first step is to introduce everybody and go from there. PSU students would like this to be a completely community-owned process which we will only help facilitate.

Reuben Deuming is interested in the process of green street installation and has experience advocating for sidewalk narrowing. It may be possible to coordinate swale installation with other construction projects.

Stephen Shackman explains some criteria used for siting green streets:

- Affect on Combined Sewage Overflow
- Basement back up- most important
- Redevelopment
- Water quality

Jim Labbe points out some criteria for bioswale site selection might include equitable access to green spaces. The city might consider building a green infrastructure network that connects areas together. The Regional Equity Atlas is a good resource to include for site selection.

Jim Labbe notes that a regional partnership may be helpful and Gresham might be a good target area.

Stephen Shackman estimates simple bioswales cost \$10,000-\$20,000.

The capacity of the community group is uncertain. Some avenues the group could readily pursue are site selection and maintenance, while currently the actual construction of bioswales in the public right-of-way can only be undertaken by permitted contractors.

Stephen Shackman notes there is a concern from the city about releasing people to build green streets. This group could help build a case to the city that citizens could help build and bring order to the process. FrOGS could give structure to the process while giving the city a group that may maintain bioswales.

Attendees are asked if the approach of having a large community meeting makes sense.

Meeting with large group would bring in a lot of people with different interests. Some of them will be very interested while others may not follow through with the project.

The community's objective should be made clear. FrOGS will HELP with the process side of things but likely not the actual construction of bioswales requested by residents.

For a larger meeting to be productive a short summary of the parameters would be needed to let people know the process of bioswale installation.

Concerns and questions concerning a community meeting:

Is it a good use of time?

A critical question is: what is open for discussion and community input?

Some basic information should be laid out so that everyone attending the meeting is on the same page and the group's potential is made clearer. This will help clear up basic questions and let the group form and get to work.

What capacity do we need to build to implement green streets?

It may help to distinguish between people who will help grow the group from those who only want a bioswale on their street; a distinction between broader advocacy and personal interest. There is some danger in this segregation, though, as a personal interest might lead to a broader interest in installing green streets throughout the city.

Stephen Shackman likens FrOGS' potential to that of stream-side restoration; a community group with the assets to properly engage the energy of those in the community through the correct bureaucratic channels.

There is a question about an overall city plan for green street installation. Perhaps GIS mapping is in order to see how many the city could actually build. What is the limiting factor in additional swale construction? Shackman says City of Portland would like to see many more.

Suggestions for the FrOGS' community meeting and future outreach:

Reuben Deuming suggests FrOGS look to the City's published sidewalk repair manual as a template for a potential volunteer construction element.

FrOGS could start out as something like City Repair Project and grow from there. FrOGS might start by utilizing volunteers for maintenance and outreach while building capacity to take on more of the site selection and construction process, to the extent possible.

Chris Karlin suggests alternative media might be used to engage a wider range of people, enhance accessibility and retain a certain amount of control and focus. Some alternatives are a radio call in show, an internet forum, and a conference call.

Jim Labbe suggests FrOGS should check into KBOO Urban Green. A radio show could inform people and get them interested in stormwater.

The Audubon Society might potentially take this project under its wing as a fiscal agent. Jim Labbe offered to talk to the organization on FrOGS' behalf.

Education is an important part of this initiative. Simple ideas to give people a perspective on the importance of bioswales should be presented. Chris Karlin suggests FrOGS create an educational poster along with other educational tools about bioswales and stormwater.

Kim White suggests the community meeting, or a subsequent group meeting might take the form of an open house which will allow people to gather all the information they want. This will allow people to meet each other and compile resources. Agencies could be invited as well so that a coordinated effort can be made.

Possible angles of approach to gain community involvement:

Hot buttons can be used to get people's attention: increasing sewer bills will get people interested. For others it is the environment, fish, water quality, etc.

Green Streets mean more of a community process to lower the price. Sweat Equity might help add to the available Stormwater Stewardship grants to make swale installation more feasible. Involving citizens through the whole process will give people ownership of the site and should form a natural extension of the project.