

# Summary and update from Mary Bridgers' Park Wetland Workshop Held January 17, 2007

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Thank you to everyone who attended the Jan. 17 workshop held at New Hanover High School. Approximately 22 community members attended the workshop. They heard an overview about the problems of stormwater runoff in the Burnt Mill Creek watershed

from Jennifer Butler, City of Wilmington. Christy Perrin from NC State University then outlined an ongoing project that is being conducted by a team of partners to work on improving the health of Burnt Mill Creek.

The project, funded by an EPA water quality improvement grant and cost sharing that is provided by the City of Wilmington, NC State University, and UNC-Wilmington, has 3 objectives: 1) reduce stormwater runoff pollution by installing Best Management Practice (BMP) throughout the watershed; 2) engage neighborhoods in outreach activities to help install BMPs; and 3) monitor the effect of these activities on Burnt Mill Creek. The project funds must be spent by October 2007.

The project team has proposed one of the BMPs, a stormwater wetland, for an area within Mary Bridgers' Park. Jason Wright, the project engineer from the NCSU Dept. of Biological and Agricultural Engineering, presented a draft concept plan of the proposed wetland. The wetland is intended to capture and treat stormwater runoff from a 5.5 acre large area around Grace Street. It would treat runoff from a 1-1.5 inch storm, a common storm event. The size of the wetland will need to be .25 of an acre to treat the runoff. Storms larger than this would be routed through the wetland into Burnt Mill Creek.

The wetland would function by containing a blend of pools and channels and a variety of plants. Various biological processes occur to reduce pollution. The variety of wetland depths and vegetation allow for diversity of plants and wildlife. Creating wildlife habitat will attract fish, amphibians, and birds that feed on mosquitoes, and improve nature-viewing activities in the park. Joseph Abatte, Cape Fear River Watch, gave a presentation showing examples of plants that may grow well in a wetland.

Participants were asked to provide feedback on what they liked and what could be improved.

## Questions from neighbors & Answers from NCSU Dept. BAE

Q: Will construction reduce ground level?

A: Yes, it will involve some excavation.

Q: Will surface water around the area move into the wetland?

A: Some will.

Q: How will you maintain pedestrian access through the area?

A: This design has ~15 feet between the wetland edge and the end of city property, so people could walk there (it is also drier there than near the creek). A foot bridge is also a possibility.

Q: How will water get into the wetland?

A: From the existing stormwater pipe.

Q: Will tide affect wetland?

A: That's possible, we should consider it in design.

Q: Are you looking to dredge Burnt Mill Creek?

A: No, regulations do not allow dredging.

Q: Who will maintain a wetland?

A: The City of Wilmington Stormwater Services has staff devoted to BMP maintenance.

Q: Have you seen water quality improvement in BMC from these projects?

A: It's too soon to see water quality improvements in the creek— we've installed a handful of projects in the last year or so. It will take many retro-fitted BMPs, and improved stormwater management as land redevelops to see in-stream improvements.

To get a better understanding of how well they remove pollutants, we are currently monitoring the impacts of some of these BMPs on the drainage areas that they treat. As we learn more, we will be better able to construct BMPs to most effectively improve water quality in Burnt Mill Creek. (editor's note— the team would like to monitor the wetland at Mary Bridgers' park)

Q: Does it have to look like it's proposed?

A: Not exactly...there are elements of the wetland that could change.

#### Comments and suggestions:

- Area retains a lot of water.
- Trees have been lost in storms here.
- Neighbors use area as park– concerned that wetland would break up park.
- Can there be a landscaping approach to improve the aesthetics (plants, bridges)?
- The park is an amenity. Wetland should allow pedestrian passage.
- This area is used– people fish, walk, cycle, play softball, soccer, frisbee, golf
- Wallace Park's wetland plants aren't thriving, and the Kerr Ave wetland is extremely unattractive
- Neighbors should be trained to maintain the wetland
- Why not use moisture beneficially?
- The creek is the defining element in the park– can that be highlighted in the design somehow– a linear aspect? Can it parallel the creek?
- Add a landscape architect to your team.
- Can't design this in this type of meeting
- It's a mistake to do something so intrusive extensive without comprehensive planning for the park and project
- The City needs to be involved to address the plan for the park.
- This will divide the park-stopping the connectivity of neighbors
- I always thought a community group would come together at some point at this park
- What are the pros/cons, what are trade offs?
- We need a pet waste station at this park
- Show us a mature wetland
- Please provide a list of native plants for our yards

To determine if the project team should move forward with planning, Christy asked the group if they were, for the most part, comfortable with the idea of a wetland in Mary Bridgers' Park. Most were comfortable, although more work remains to be done to address major concerns that were raised. A second community meeting will be scheduled and the team will work to respond to and address these concerns.

*Pictured at right: Volunteers plant a wetland at Stonestrow Condominiums, off of College Street*

#### Follow up from meeting:

Major concerns heard include questions about: how this project impacts plans or potential plans for the park and recreational activities; the impact on the aesthetics of the park area (with the suggestion to involve a landscape architect to address this issue); and the desire to maximize the community and environmental benefits of this project (with the suggestions to involve neighbors in building and maintaining this and other projects, and to install a pet waste station).

Since the meeting, City of Wilmington and NCSU project team members have further investigated the site, spoken with neighbors and discussed the issues. Several meeting participants have called to offer their support for the project. A local design firm, *B + O :design studio*, offered to provide feedback on designs for the wetland.

Two new designs have been developed with an attempt to address the concerns from the community while maintaining the functionality of the wetland. These designs will be presented at a follow-up community meeting for additional feedback. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the merits and drawbacks of each design, and ask questions of City of Wilmington, NCSU, and *B+O: design studio* staff. We would also like to explore ways to involve neighbors in the project.

#### The meeting is scheduled for:

**Wednesday, March 14, 2007**

**6:30-8:30 p.m.**

**At New Hanover High School on Market St., in the media room/library**

