

Watershed Center History 2006-2011

This report has been prepared as an addendum to the Watershed Center “Project History and Work Plan” completed in late 2005. While that document divided the project into several subject areas and work components, this paper will simply be a running dialogue on the project as it proceeded from the concept design and design development phases through the revised building plan and site work accomplished since that time. This report will of necessity be abbreviated, as there is an urgency to complete it before the end of 2011, when the Executive Director of the Watershed Committee, and the de facto “project manager” of the Watershed Center Project for several years prior to the hiring of a professional manager, will retire from service.

At this point in time (October 2011), construction of the main education building at the Center is essentially complete. Because some of the indoor air measurements detected elevated levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds), the building has gone through a “flushing” process to remove the existing indoor air and bring fresh outside air, of a certain temperature and humidity, into the building. Work is proceeding on the “living wall” at the west end of the outside restroom structure, and this fall a segment of hard-surfaced trail, “grasspave” fire access lane, bus parking, refurbished drive, native landscaping and rain garden plantings have been completed or are in progress. Recently completed are the permeable paver and pervious concrete portions of the parking lot and the paver sidewalk and rain garden bridge at the entrance to the building.

Work Continues.....2006

By January of 2006, the project architects, BNIM of Kansas City, had submitted revised schematic design drawings to the Watershed Committee Board. The Capital Campaign Steering Committee, consisting of about twenty-five community leaders, recommended to the Board that a public relations firm be hired to help get the message out about the need for a Watershed Center and why people should financially contribute to its development. The Springfield advertising/public relations firm of Nally Inc. was hired to conduct a media campaign in conjunction with the capital campaign.

Meanwhile, the Watershed Committee was examining options for getting city water run to the site. City Utilities had a main in the area, but it terminated about a half mile east of the site. The WCO would be asked to cover \$25,000 of the cost of extending the water main to the site, and adjacent landowners would also need to “sign on” to make the project financially feasible. In the early spring of 2006, the Springfield-Greene County Park Board gave the Watershed Committee permission to develop the “Onsite Wastewater Training Center” on park-owned land at the north end of the Wilkie property, formerly privately owned, which contained a large horse barn and house. This would eventually become the “Valley Water Mill Equestrian Center,” a unit of Springfield-Greene County Parks Department. On a two acre tract on the north end of this property, the Watershed Committee would use grant funding and donated equipment to develop the

Onsite Wastewater Training Center, where several kinds of advanced onsite wastewater systems would be installed partially in-ground for demonstration and education purposes.

In April, the concrete floor for the Lakeside Learning Station, the pavilion on the east shore of the Valley Water Mill Reservoir, was poured. An OTCC (Ozark Technical Community College) construction class began work on the Springside Learning Station, to be built using recycled plastic lumber. The architect (BNIM) began working with the Parks Department on a design for the Outdoor Initiatives/Maintenance Building to be located on the Valley Water Mill site just east of the main education building. This would be a south-facing, bermed in structure, very energy efficient, with a vegetated “green” roof. The WCO would utilize grant funding to cost-share on the project, paying for the green roof component of the building.

In June, the WCO received the results of several focus group meetings sponsored by Nally. As expected, there were a variety of opinions expressed on the most important or critical water issues, what people were most concerned about, and how the Watershed Center might address these issues and concerns. At this point in time, pledges toward completion of the main education building had reached nearly \$650,000 and construction on the Lakeside Learning Station was nearly complete.

The Parks Department opened bids for the Parks Outdoor Initiative/Maintenance building in July 2006. The WCO would help with construction with the green roof, which would cost about \$178,000. The pervious concrete demonstration parking lot at the Lakeside Station was completed, using equipment designed and built by Carson-Mitchell (including a large roller for “smoothing” the pervious concrete, which out of the truck had the consistency of cookie dough). In the fall of 2006, the WCO board reassessed the progress of the capital campaign, and decided that a fall-back plan was needed in the event the financial goal could not be reached. The WCO hired Robert Hood of Professional Project Management to manage the construction program at the Watershed Center. Up until this time, the Executive Director of the Watershed Committee had served as a de facto project manager.

Early in 2007, Jeanette Unsell was appointed to co-chair the capital campaign steering committee along with Mark McNay. Both were former board members of the WCO, and Ms. Unsell had served on the Board of Public Utilities. Mr. Bullard and Ms. Unsell met with the capital campaign consultant, DataFund, to discuss the progress and future of the campaign. Construction of the Springside Learning Station was completed by the spring of 2007 and the Parks Outdoor Initiatives/Maintenance building was well along by then, with the green roof ready for installation. The WCO was notified that \$250,000 in funding would be received through Greene County toward completion of the Watershed Center. This funding would be derived from the county portion of the Springfield-Greene County Parks and Waterways Sales Tax.

In April, the WCO signed a contract with Butler-Rosenbury and Partners of Springfield to take the Watershed Center building project from the concept plan phase through design development and construction drawings. That month, the main drive to the Watershed

Center building site was completed using pervious concrete. A portion of the funding for this work was obtained through an existing 319 grant project. Two monitoring wells were completed near the Lakeside Learning Station, one into the upper, shallow aquifer at about 160 feet, the other in the deeper Ozark Aquifer at about 600 feet. Cuttings from the well drilling were saved for possible use in an educational exhibit. The drilling process was videotaped, as were the inside of the boreholes using a special down-hole camera. The video and collected materials can be used in the future to develop groundwater education materials.

Mr. McNay reported to the WCO board in May on the progress of fund-raising efforts. Nally presented to the Board the results of the several focus meeting groups. The WCO Board discussed the idea of a public relations campaign using TV, print and radio. Soon, the WCO received word from the Missouri Department of Economic Development that donors to the project would receive Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credits, which, it was felt, would accelerate the rate of giving. In spite of this, and despite several sustained “pitches” to potentially large donors, no large private donors had stepped up by the fall of 2007.

Because of this, Mr. Bullard met with the architect and board in January 2008 to discuss a “plan B” for completing at least a portion of the main education building and site work as originally designed. The Board developed a plan for approaching the “big water users” (CU water) as potential donors. Also, the WCO developed a marketing plan with City Utilities, whereby the Watershed Center Project would be featured on “bus wraps” as well as on park benches. The WCO also visited with CU officials about a potential check-off program, where CU customers could donate an amount toward the Watershed Center on their monthly utility bills. By March, the WCO had completed a short promotional video for the Watershed Center.

In the spring of 2008, Mr. Bullard began a concentrated series of project presentations, visiting local and regional groups and organizations about the importance of water and the need for a watershed education center. Presentations included those to the North Side Betterment Association, Rotary Clubs and the Missouri Clean Water Commission. In May, the Onsite Wastewater Training Center at the Parks Equestrian Center was officially opened, and a well-attended outdoor educational event was held there in June. The WCO Board began discussing fund-raising events for the Watershed Center in some detail, including the possibility of a large event at the Gullioz Theater.

By the summer of 2008, the trail from the parking lot at the Lakeside Learning Station to the dam had been completed, using a recycled plastic boardwalk. A steel walking bridge over the dam spillway was also constructed. This would be named the Kelly-Stokes Bridge in honor of family members connected with the C.W. Titus Foundation, which had donated to the project. Two fishing piers, also constructed out of recycled plastic “lumber” but covered with metal roofs, had been started but work was delayed due to rain. Funding for the boardwalk and fishing piers was derived through a grant from the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, along with funding from the Missouri Department of Conservation through a Community Assistance Grant.

Also in the summer of 2008, the architect, Butler-Rosenbury and Partners, submitted a revised building design, which was subsequently reviewed and approved by the board. With a sluggish economy and other factors, donations to the campaign had slowed considerably. The WCO elected to let the fund-raising consultant go, since money was still being paid for fund-raising office expenses, while new donations had slowed to a trickle. The WCO board decided to begin moving forward with the project in phases, beginning with the initial site work. Ongoing discussions were held with the architect regarding the idea of downsizing the building floor plan. Meanwhile, the concrete forms to support the fishing piers had been poured.

In July, engineering work began at the building pad location. The location of the pad was shifted somewhat to save large sycamore trees on the south and east and to stay off of the sewer easement. Bids packages were prepared for the initial site grading and pad compaction work, including temporary parking and the establishment of vegetation. Bids for site work were opened in September. Three qualifying bids were received, and the work went to Kennedy ESS as the lowest qualified bidder.

As dirt work continued, along with the mulching of removed trees for later use on trails, the WCO staff continued seeking additional funds for completing the project as designed. Mr. Bullard continued making contacts with and presentations to prospective donors, often with the assistance of members of the board or capital campaign steering committee. By October, there was about \$945,000 that still needed to be raised to complete a slightly downsized building plan with 8,300 square feet. In that month, the WCO signed an MOU with Drury University concerning the use of the Watershed Center for educational purposes. In November, the WCO received a \$50,000 grant from the Environmental Improvement and Energy Resources Authority (EIERA) to drill the wells for the geothermal heating and cooling system for the building.

In February 2009, Mr. Hood presented the WCO board with options for reducing costs, including phasing the construction, building a shell, and reducing the square footage of the building. Mr. Hood provided details on these options at the board meeting in March. Also in March, the walking trail on the site was extended from the west end of the spillway bridge to the culvert on Farm Road 102, where a concrete slab had been poured to provide for foot traffic under the bridge. McDaniel Excavating provided excavating and trail grading for this work, and Towe Construction provided labor. Mr. Keener presented the WCO board with suggested draft usage fees for the completed building and site.

In April, the WCO applied for stimulus funding for energy demonstrations. After discussions with Missouri DNR, it came to light that these funds would only be available as a partial grant, with 50% of the funding extended only as a loan. The WCO elected not to pursue this route. In June, Butler-Rosenbury presented a new plan for the building, based on the recommendations from the Board following Mr. Hood's presentation options in March. The new layout provided for the "office" wing only to be built, with the number of offices reduced from the original plan and the bulk of the building space to

be devoted to a large meeting room containing about 1,500 square feet. This room would be large enough to accommodate about 125 people. Mr. Rosenbury made a presentation to the board, at which he stressed that none of the original goals of the project would be forfeited by moving to this new plan.

In July, the Board along with its sponsors attended a retreat at the new Boathouse built by the Parks Department at Lake Springfield. At this retreat, the board discussed the organization's upcoming 25th anniversary, along with the design changes to the Watershed Center building and potential sources of financing. With the reduction in offices at the Watershed Center, there was some concern about where WCO staff would be housed. City Utilities stated that the WCO could continue to use the downtown facility for offices for the foreseeable future. This would entail splitting the staff between two locations, but the board felt that this would still be a viable option.

The WCO began meeting with City Utilities and Community Foundation of the Ozarks personnel about financing options. Since the Watershed Center would be built on publicly-owned land, concerns were raised about how to secure a loan from a private entity. After getting the green light from the WCO board, Butler-Rosenbury began working on construction drawings for the reduced scope building and associated site work. C. W. Titus Foundation made another donation, bringing their total contributions up to \$255,000, which was deemed sufficient for the naming opportunity for the education building. Mr. Bullard asked city recycling staff to work on a "green meeting policy" for use in the new facility, when completed.

The bid package for the reduced scale education building and demonstration parking lot was put together in September and a public bid opening was held in October. Carson-Mitchell Inc. was the lowest qualified bidder, coming in at just over \$1 million. Although the bid spread was not large, all the bids were higher than expected, given the market for construction at the time (the market was depressed). The WCO board and steering committee discussed factors that might have led to higher bids, including some local concern and cost uncertainties about the "green" features of the building.

By the end of November, Robert Hood and the contractor had completed a value engineering process, whereby some components of the project were modified or deleted in order to bring the project within budget (the WCO had about \$850,000 available at that time). This process included deleting the living wall, indoor wood flooring, radiant floor heating system, outdoor restrooms, grasspave feature for fire access and pervious parking areas. The intent of the WCO was to continue searching for sources of funding, including grants or new donors, so that these features could be added back into the project in the not too distant future. Mr. Bullard submitted a request for grant funding to Waste District O, and this \$50,000 grant was subsequently approved, allowing for the addition of cabinets and recycled carpeting and other features made of recycled materials back into the meeting room.

At the same time, the WCO worked with CU on modifications of the lease agreement that would allow the project to proceed to secure financing. Meetings were held with several

banks in early 2010, but security for a private loan was a primary stumbling block. Carson-Mitchell was able to hold the bid open while these issues were being discussed. Finally, the WCO was able to work out an arrangement with a private bank in conjunction with the Ozarks Regional Community Development Corporation, for a loan of up to \$325,000 total. The ORCDC would serve as a Second on the note, providing up to \$175,000 after the loan from the private bank was exhausted.

In March, the line of credit at the private bank was secured. The WCO attorney reviewed the construction contract, and pledge assignment letters were secured from City Utilities (for their \$250,000 total donation to the project) as security for the loan. A notice to proceed was issued to Carson-Mitchell, with the idea of constructing a temporary parking lot until additional funds could be secured. One company agreed to donate a quantity of paver stones to the project for parking bays and the entrance sidewalk. In June, the WCO sponsored a groundbreaking ceremony immediately following the organization's regular monthly meeting, held at the Lakeside Learning Station at the Watershed Center.

In July, City Utilities set up a time-lapse camera overlooking the construction area of the education building and parking lot. The idea of a separate site management committee was discussed by the board, but the decision was made to bring management issues to the "committee of the whole" for now. By August, a few new donations and grant extensions had materialized, including an extension of the WQIP grant through the Environmental Resources Coalition, and the board and staff discussed what components could be added back into the project. Ideas for donor recognition were also discussed at several board meetings.

The fall of 2010 brought some relief to the issue of concerns about operational funding for the Watershed Center. The Springfield-Greene County Park Board agreed to offset some of the operating expenses for the building, primarily the monthly utilities. The WCO would remain responsible for operation and maintenance of the building, but Parks agreed to help with maintaining the outside landscaping and demonstration features on the site. The WCO worked to develop a site management plan for the facility. Parks drafted an operating MOU in December that covered joint operations with the Watershed Committee at the Watershed Center. This provided for over \$14,000 in annual operating expense reimbursement by Parks, but the WCO would need to establish a fund for major repairs.

The MOU with Parks was finalized in January 2011, in which the WCO agreed to invoice Parks quarterly for reimbursable operating expenses. The WCO would be responsible for installing the security system for the building, but Parks would pay the monthly security system fees. The WCO continued to seek additional funding to add components back into the project, which had been "value engineered" out earlier because of budget shortfalls. In April, the WCO received an \$85,000 grant through the Recreational Trails Grant Program, which would allow work to begin or continue on the trailhead parking lot and paved section of trail on the east side of the park.

In June, the Board of Public Utilities decided to take the WCO up on its offer to name the Lakeside Learning Station after G. Duane Galloway, long-time CU employee who had helped secure the first federal funding for the Watershed Center project. In July, the contractor completed the education building and the WCO held a ribbon-cutting event later that month in the new building. About 140 people attended this event. As the attendees sat facing the large windows on the south side of the building, overlooking the wetland and forest vegetation, two cardinals put on a show, bright flecks of red flitting amongst the green foliage. Several people commented that “it couldn’t have been staged better.” This reinforced the idea of leaving the natural surroundings intact near the building.

At this point (October 2011), the site work is being finished. The trail along the east side of the reservoir has been graded, filled, and is ready for paving. The pervious concrete and pervious paver portions of the demonstration parking lot have been installed. The bus parking area (to accommodate four buses) has been poured alongside the main drive. Contractors have installed the “grass pave” access lane for fire trucks (which is one of the last components before a certificate of occupancy can be issued). The living wall, a screening, shade and watering structure to support vegetation, is under construction. The “outdoor education area” south of the restrooms has been seeded and mulched, and new grass is coming up. In front of the building, the rain garden has been mulched and some of the native plants have been installed.

Project Summary:

The road to the Watershed Center has been very long and often bumpy. The project took several precipitous twists and turns, not the least of which being the idea of developing the Watershed Center on adjacent property. As we now near completion of this first major phase (this will always be a work in progress), and contemplate the daily operation and use of the Center, it is worthwhile to occasionally consider the long hours and struggles that went into making the project a reality. That is the purpose of this project history—to remind ourselves of how we did it, when necessary. Perhaps more importantly, this story may to help others who are going down their own path toward creating an education or demonstration facility. In any case, we look forward to the time when the Watershed Center at Valley Water Mill Park is operating at its full potential, making new generations of Ozarkers aware of the critical nature of clean water—how truly critical it is to our health, prosperity and our quality of life.