

## Environmental Advisory Committee

FY 2019 – 2020 Q2 Mtg. Notes

12/6/2019

Empresario Restaurant

Goliad County

### **EAC Attendees:**

Wilfred Korth – Co-Chair

Joedy Yglesias – Co-Chair

Joe Baker

Ginger Coleman

Deepti Kharod

Annalisa Peace

Richard Reed

Glynis Strause

Connie Waters

### **EAC Absent:**

Janis Bush

James Dodson

Jason Katcmorak

David Reichert

### **San Antonio River Authority Staff Attendees:**

Charles Lorea

Steven Schauer

Tracey Tafoya

**Wilfred Korth (WK) and Joedy Yglesias (JY)** called the meeting to order and each person in attendance introduced themselves.

**Steven Schauer (SS)** introduced the agenda. There will be a Clean Rivers Program (CRP) update provided by Charles Lorea, but the majority of the agenda for the December EAC meeting is focused on soliciting feedback and recommendations from the EAC to be considered in the strategic planning and budgeting process for the River Authority's upcoming Fiscal Year (FY21) discussions, which will start in January and conclude with a board vote in June. FY21 begins on July 1, 2020 and ends on June 30, 2021.

**Charles Lorea (CL)** provided the CRP update. CRP Upper and Lower San Antonio River Characterization Report provides constituents an idea of what's happening. A draft of the report will be forwarded to the River Authority's communications department, then to the EAC in the coming weeks. Historical reports are also available on the website.

**(JY)** inquired about the type of water quality stations being utilized.

**(CL)** The job box being used is close to 600-700 lbs.

**(JY)** Master Naturalists would may want to coordinate team of volunteer water samplers, so we would like to learn more about the best types of sampling kits to use.

**(SS)** The River Authority is also looking into refreshing Watershed Wise Warrior volunteer program to be able to do something similar under the leadership of Minna Paul. There should be other most cost-effective kits available for that type of use. (River Authority staff will provide a presentation about the agency's volunteer program at the March 2020 EAC meeting held in Karnes County.)

**(CL)** Lab team would like to give presentation about our TCEQ accredited lab at an upcoming meeting (River Authority staff will provide a presentation about the lab and give a lab tour at the June 2020 EAC meeting held at the River Authority office in Bexar County).

**(JY)** Who would present from that team? We are on the lookout for presenters for the Mater Naturalist program too.

**(SS)** Staff will follow-up with Joedy to provide a lab contact for a future Master Naturalist presentation.

**Ginger Coleman (GC)** wanted to learn more about what kinds of landowners the River Authority typically works with when working through access needs for water sampling, since she has a wet weather creek on her property.

**(CL)** The website shows general area and map of stations.

**(SS)** offered to send the link of station maps along with link to bacteria levels.

Link to River Authority's CRP page: <https://www.sara-tx.org/services/environmental-sciences/clean-rivers-program>

Link to River Authority's data page where the agency's Water Quality Viewer and Bacteria Dashboard (and other data sources) can be found: <https://www.sara-tx.org/maps-data>

**Glynis Strause (GS)** wanted to know more about what to expect at the January 8, 2020 meeting that will be held at the ConocoPhillips Eagle Ford Office in Kenedy, Texas.

**(SS) (CL)** That is an update on Lower San Antonio implementation plan.

**(SS)** Discussion regarding the CRP updated ended and SS moved discussion to seek EAC recommendations for the Fiscal Year 21 planning process. Several documents were provided for reference as a review of the River Authority's Fiscal Year 2019/2020 Agency Goals and Objectives, including:

- Strategic Plan – It is likely the front page (goals) of the document will not change, enhancements/edits on the back page (actions/tactics) may be updated through the annual strategical planning/budget process.
- Goals, Objectives and Actions (detailed) – with specific highlighted items for EAC's reference
- FY21 Project Expenditure Summary – dated 11/26/2019
- Goal Update Summaries
  - Advance Science and Engineering
  - Enable Policy, Projects and Actions
  - Enhance Community Appreciation and Recreation
- The Rivard Report news article: "San Antonio River Authority Votes Against Pursuing New Tax," by Brendan Gibbons

- “San Antonio River Authority Sinks Bid for Property Tax Boost,” by Brian Chasnoff

**(GS)** How does Chapter 49 tax decision [made by River Authority board on November 20] affect these plans [referencing strategic plans] and the EAC role of making recommendations for the Fiscal Year 21 budget?

**(SS)** Suggested EAC members read the provided news articles if they would like a summary of the November 20 board meeting. Essentially, the board action of November 20 does not impact today’s discussion or the EAC role of providing recommendations for the next fiscal year. The existing River Authority statutory tax is still in place and EAC recommendations are welcomed regarding existing and/or new projects that can utilize the existing statutory tax. Even if the River Authority board moved forward on November 20 with the Chapter 49 tax discussions, it wouldn’t have had an immediate impact because we’re still talking about current budget and projects funded by the existing statutory tax. If you have questions or comments on the Chapter 49 topic, I can answer questions, and Joedy and Annalisa may have thoughts to add since they both attended the November 20 board meeting and provided public comments. For those of you who provided me your personal opinion about the Chapter 49 tax prior to the November 20 board meeting, your comments were provided directly to the board members from the county you represent, and Joedy, in his comments, provided a summary of the EAC for/against/neutral sentiment about the tax issue.

**(GS)** What is the projection on what the River authority will collect on the current tax? Will there be increase because of new appraisals?

**(SS)** Appraisal values are generally trending upward, therefore if the board determines to leave the current statutory tax unchanged, the amount collected will likely increase based on the increasing appraisals. The River Authority sets its annual budget based on appraisal estimates received from the Appraisal Offices of each county. Because our fiscal year starts in July, the budget voted on by the board in June is based upon appraisal estimates as we do not receive the final appraisal amounts until the end of July. The board takes this into consideration when holding the annual vote on the tax rate which occurs in September.

**(GS)** I would like to understand more about Chapter 49 and the kind of opportunities it could fund.

**Annalisa Peace (AP)** Suzanne Scott’s early presentations of the Chapter 49 tax included a lot more info on what could be done potentially with the new tax.

**(JY)** At the November 20 board meeting, some board members were on fence and needed more information, a couple opposed it altogether for sure, others needed clarity about the discussion and were willing to possibly talk more about it next year.

**Deepti Kharod (DK)** I appreciate level of effort of transparency with which the River Authority operates; It really is remarkable that they share this kind of data and ensure the public can access it.

**(AP)** The River Authority is always good with money and not padding funds.

**(JY)** Can we re-start the discussion since we’re in the budget season? Who is opposed to continuing Chapter 49 discussion in new fiscal year?

**(DK)** In favor because we need transparency and more public discussion about the topic.

**(GC)** Not in favor until I know more about what we're talking about. Will the River Authority have line of sight and authority on new capital projects?

**(SS)** With our current statutory tax and with the potential Chapter 49 tax, the River Authority's elected board members have the final say on how the money is spent through our annual budget process.

**(GC)** What is the connection of this tax with transportation issues in San Antonio?

**(SS)** From the perspective of the River Authority staff, this issue is about watershed protection and not directly connected to transportation issues in San Antonio. It is anticipated that 1 million new residents will be coming to this region over the next 20 years, and we were seeking to start a conversation about the potential consequences that may accompany that growth and what should the role of the River Authority be in helping to protect water quality and mitigate flooding concerns. While there is good that will come from this growth, if we aren't taking actions now to prepare for the populations of tomorrow, there can also be major consequences. I recognize there is confusion in the community about this issue and other community leaders may have voiced different opinions, which added to the confusion.

**(AP)** It's confusing how some media outlets covered this and it should be clearly decoupled from the transportation issue. Our groups [GEAA members] liked both the existing [San Antonio sales tax used for aquifer protection and linear trails] and the River Authority's proposed new tax, but it needs clarity – it really needs a visioning process.

**(GS)** Has the River Authority's current tax reached its cap? Are you able to raise the current tax to cover what you hoped to do with the new chapter 49 tax?

**(SS)** The River Authority's statutory tax is capped at two cents per one-hundred-dollar valuation and it has not reached its cap yet. The current tax is set at \$0.0185 per \$100 valuation. However, we cannot use that statutory tax as we would be able to use the Chapter 49 tax. The distinction is that our current statutory tax cannot be used on capital projects while the Chapter 49 tax can.

**(GS)** Can you change the cap on the current statutory tax?

**(SS)** It would take legislative action to change the cap. Additionally, I believe, even if the Legislature increased the statutory tax cap, our board would still have to call an election and voters would have to approve the new cap. And if all that happened, we still wouldn't be able to do capital projects, which is what really sets the Chapter 49 tax apart from our existing statutory tax.

**(GC)** Was the new Chapter 49 recommendation unlimited? One part of the proposal that concerned me was the reference to the expected growth in population – are we saying we're paying to mitigate that problem that seems to fall outside of the River Authority's scope.

**(SS)** The Chapter 49 tax in the Texas Water Code is written that it could be set without a limit or with a limit. River Authority staff was exploring what a two-and-half cent tax cap per one-hundred-dollar valuation would generate in revenue and what the annual average impact to the average homeowner would be. We intended to discuss ideas with the community about how the tax revenue could be utilized within areas of responsibility of the River Authority to help manage the watershed impacts expected to come with the population growth as opposed to react to problems associated with it later. While we were suggesting certain ideas, citizen input would help refine the projects as we believe citizens should have input into how tax revenue is spent and which capital projects would be prioritized.

For example, maybe citizens in Goliad would prefer the additional tax revenue be used to support fixing their wastewater lines because their local wastewater fees are not enough to cover that expense while citizens in Wilson County may have different funding needs or priorities.

**(WK)** The city of Goliad does need that help with fixing its wastewater infrastructure.

**(SS)** As a reminder, the River Authority's budget is not segregated by county. So, as we do now with the revenue collected for the statutory tax, the potential Chapter 49 tax revenue would look at regional solutions. Per board direction from the November 20 board meeting, this public outreach will not move forward at this time.

**(JY)** Provided a motion for an EAC recommendation supporting a community education project in Fiscal Year 21 related to the Chapter 49 tax. He mentioned again that he attended the November 20 board meeting and referenced his motion being in line with a motion made that day which was about this very same issue being discussed by the EAC – the need for more community outreach. The motion as partially described in the Rivard Report article that was handed out to the EAC members at the beginning of the meeting and was referenced at this point of the EAC discussion. He pointed out that several of the River Authority board members who voted to end the Chapter 49 discussion on November 20 also expressed their interest and willingness to support this type of public outreach to be considered in the next fiscal year budgeting process.

**(SS)** Asked for clarity in JY's motion, are you making a motion identical to the one that was made on November 20 except for making your EAC motion specific to starting this public outreach in Fiscal Year 21?

**(JY)** Yes

**(GS)** Seconded

**(JY)** With a motion and a second, the vote was called. Vote was unanimous in favor by all nine EAC members in attendance. *(Additional Note: GC contacted SS on Monday, December 9 and requested her vote to be changed to "against" – so the final tally for the motion below is recorded as eight "for," one "against," and four "absent/no vote." Motion passes and will be provided to River Authority staff during internal strategic planning and budgeting meetings for Fiscal Year 21 and will be provided to the board Communications Committee on February 12, 2020.)*

**Motion:** "The Environmental Advisory Committee recommends that the San Antonio River Authority Board of Directors authorize staff to initiate a community education program in Fiscal Year 21 to solicit input from the public throughout the basin regarding the potential need for and use of funds that could be generated from a Chapter 49 tax."

**(SS)** continued with discussions about the first River Authority Strategic Goal: Advance Science and Engineering. Regarding developing and updating existing water quality models, there's been a hold on some of Dr. Thomas' water quality modeling work. Discussions have shifted to how modeling and data can inform where LID/BMP features are installed in the future to help us better target the use of available/future resources.

**(AP)** Having access to the River Authority Master Plans is enormously valuable.

**Connie Waters (CW)** It is likely that different features/functionality can be made available, so it is worthwhile exploring which ones can be turned off or on easily enough to make it appropriate for external use.

**(SS)** The Watershed Master Plan Viewer is available on the River Authority website (<https://www.sara-tx.org/maps-data>) The River Authority works with other governments to make sure appropriate data is made public. The River Authority also actively participates in CoSA's Smart City initiative, so we can continue to be a part of the discussion where developments on data sharing opportunities occur.

**(SS)** discussed River Authority's second Strategic Goal: Enable Policy, Project and Action. The River Authority has continued incentivize investments via Watershed Wise Rebate and other programs.

**(WK)** It's important to do outreach for new projects like the gas station in Goliad.

**(SS)** Yes, that was a missed opportunity for that gas station project to potentially be built using LID to help better manage its stormwater runoff. We're trying to make sure community leaders are aware of the rebate program.

**(WK)** Are you in touch with the Goliad Economic Development Committee?

**(SS)** We have recently met Willie Nelson. I'll make sure staff follows up with him to make sure he knows about the rebate program.

**(CW)** There's also City drainage work on Fannin St. that could have used SARA's assistance.

**(SS)** River Authority staff will follow up with city of Goliad about the work on Fannin Street. (SS has already directed staff to contact the Goliad City Engineer to help.) The River Authority also continues to implement Best Management Practices including supporting Brooks to incorporate stormwater plans best practices. Habitat and structural restoration projects continue, including Panther Springs, which is just getting started on meandering bend but it is progressing. The River Road project continues, and we just hosted another public meeting this week that Richard also attended.

**Richard Reed (RR)** There was good turnout at this week's River Road meeting. River Road neighbors thought it the same project as eight years, but Aarin was able to clarify it wasn't.

**(SS)** The USACE is involved in many projects. Brackenridge Park Cultural Landscape Report is near completion and will be made public soon. A link to the report will be sent to EAC. On biological restoration, the aquatic biology team is moving forward swiftly on the mussel propagation project.

**(AP)** Where are mussels propagating?

**(SS)** We are working with TPWD hatchery in San Marcos, with support from USFWS, since they have a controlled environment where spawning can be induced with the appropriate host fish, which would in turn yield the juvenile mussels needed for reintroduction into the Mission Reach.

**(GS)** asked about the spawning process and **(CL)** provided a brief explanation.

**(SS)** Regarding identification for physical BMPS focused on load reduction, the Broadway Underpass project did not materialize. For installation and maintenance of physical resources, the River Authority's determination of the effectiveness of the Bandalong Liter Trap initially proved more effective at catching

thatch. The litter socks are working well, but still do at times catch thatch as well. The Olmos Creek installation was a challenge because it is proving to be difficult to find the appropriate location.

**(GS)** Does the River Authority offer internships? Which departments have internships available?

**(RR)** Nearly half of students at Trinity are Environmental Policy majors.

**(SS)** Offered to send information on internship programs at the River Authority.

**(GS)** What is the timing of Escondido Creek Parkway Project?

**(SS)** Aug/Sept of 2020 is the current target for opening but it depends on construction progress and weather cooperation. A new project website is being developed and will likely be ready in February.

**(JY)** Is the Feral Hog project complete?

**(SS)** Yes, the Feral Hog project is completed. In the past, funds for a kill effort were provided which didn't prove very beneficial given the reproduction rate of the hogs. The River Authority then coordinated with the Ag Extension to make pens available, but we still haven't found an effective tool to mitigate the problem.

**(CW)** Suggest we offer a community assistance program. She knows of a cell service that could be impactful but the monthly fee for the application is cost prohibitive. She made a request to Alicia.

**(SS)** Offered to follow up with Alicia regarding the feral hog community assistance idea.

**(WK)** Suggests to also keep educating landowners especially during hunting season. May be helpful to also get EAC a briefing on the HCP for whooping cranes.

**(WK)** As meeting was coming to an end with no additional questions or comments from EAC members, WK provided a reminder about the SA Bay Partnership Annual Conference in Victoria is scheduled for Jan 22-23 and the Christmas in Goliad event is this weekend.

**(SS)** All EAC feedback and recommendations are welcomed and valued. If there are additional thoughts or questions, the EAC is always welcome to contact me.

**(WK and JY)** Meeting was adjourned. GC and DK toured Goliad with SARA staff and WK following the EAC meeting. Stops and points of interest identified included Goliad Paddling Trail access points, Branch River Park, Angel of Goliad Trail, Goliad State Park & Historic Site, Presidio/La Bahia, El Camino Real de Los Tejas visitor center, General Zaragoza Birthplace, and Fannin Memorial.