

Environmental Advisory Committee

FY 2020 - 2021 Q2 Mtg. Notes

12/11/2020

Virtual Meeting

Bexar County

EAC Attendees:	EAC Absent:
Wilfred Korth	Jason Katscmorak
Deepti Kharod	Stephan Lucke
Joe Baker	David Reichart
Connie Waters	
Glynis Strause	
Heather Hansen	
James Dodson	San Antonio River Authority staff attendees:
Bree Jameson	Charles Lorea
Annalisa Peace	Jennifer Crocker
Janis Bush	Karen Bishop
	Shaun Donovan
	Collen Brownlow
	Steven Schauer
	Jeanette Gonzalez
	Vikram Kapoor (Guest presenter)

1. Welcome

Wilfred Korth (WK) called the meeting order. **Deepti Kharod (DK)** started introduction, followed by committee members, guests, and San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) staff.

2. Approval of September 25, 2020 Minutes

WK calls for approval of September 25, 2020 minutes.

DK made motion to approve the minutes, **Joe Baker (JB)** seconded motion; **WK** calls for vote, minutes approved by consensus.

3. Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget Briefing – Jennifer Crocker (JC)

DK Asked question regarding the total number of wastewater treatment plants.

JC explained the River Authority owns 3 large ones and 2 smaller ones that we maintain. The biggest ones are Salitrillo, Martinez IV, and Martinez II with the smaller one being Upper Martinez. The 10-year plan is to decommission and build an intercept pipe that will take all flows to Martinez II.

DK Inquired about the pie chart in the presentation that covered the River Authority, Salitrillo, and some details of Martinez IV. Question was why it only address two plants.

JC explained that Martinez IV, Martinez II, and Upper Martinez are part of the River Authority wastewater system. There are multiple plants in a system and Salitrillo Wastewater has one plant.

Annalisa Peace (AP) asked if the Army Corp of Engineers are primarily the ones paying for the River Road Project?

JC Confirmed and noted that we are expecting the project to cost \$6 million dollars. Referred to Collen Brownlow for more information but mentioned Arin Teague as the project manager.

Collen Brownlow (CB) did not have additional details to add to River Road Project.

JC Spoke about the recent River Road project tour Arin Teague guided. She mentioned that seeing the exposed roots and all the erosion definitely needed some attention and was excited about the work being done.

DK Inquired about the work by Randolph Air Force Base since she lives in the area.

JC We're doing some pipe replacement on the base with no huge construction that would affect anyone off base. We're trying to keep the impact to the base minimal, so we've combined some projects that we planned to do in the future to keep from having the roads closed or impacting those folks that live on base. We do work well with the base personnel and just moved some funding around to combine projects so that we can be efficient with impact to mainly road closures.

4. Clean Rivers Program – Charles Lorea (CL)

AP Up in the Bulverde area, within the last 5 years, there have been several permits issued for discharging sewage effluent directly into the Cibolo or into tributaries of the Cibolo. Have you noticed any impact from that?

CL The water quality seems to remain the same. I'll have to look at some of the dischargers, but I know the National Pollutant Discharge program that monitors it is by the TCEQ. That would be more point source and most of the point source people are highly regulated, so we haven't seen different changes. We have noticed that the oxygen in that portion of the river has actually increased a little bit, so that was one of the problems with that area because of the low dissolved oxygen. TCMA remodeled the plant 10 years ago, but I will definitely make a note of that and keep an eye out on that.

5. COVID-19 Study with the San Antonio River Authority Utilities Department – Vikram Kapoor (VK)

WK Mentioned a comment in the chat regarding the presentation being available to the committee

VK said he would send to Jeanette for distribution

Jeanette Gonzalez (JG) announced that this presentation and all others would be uploaded to the website. The link to be included in the follow up email.

DK Thank you for presenting this and for sharing the link to your website. My question is: Did you say that by analyzing the sewage samples you can see the spread a little earlier than you could using clinical data?

VK Yes, you're right, that is the intention here. It is speculated that any infected individual will start showing the virus before they show the symptoms. When they start showing the virus, we can start detecting the signal in the wastewater samples. If a whole community is experiencing an increase in infection, eventually the viral load in the wastewater will increase before those people go to labs to get tested and we can catch that surge early on. Laboratories have shown that's possible and they are using this approach to catch those surges early on.

DK In the graphs you are showing, we're not seeing when you saw the surge, we're seeing the dates in which the surge happened, right? I was expecting to see the surge in wastewater treatment would be a few days before and then the clinical data surge would lag.

VK One of the limitations for our current study is that we're doing weekly sampling and missing 6 days worth of wastewater data every week. For example on July 14, the clinical data shows that surge happened around July 4 by looking on the city's website. The 4th of July is the surge which was happening and we captured around July 14. We are speculating that if it would have happened earlier around July 12 or 13, it would have also shown a surge. Since we're sampling weekly that's the issue right here. On Thanksgiving, if you see the sample on November 10, it was really high. After that, on November 17-24, we realized a stable increase so that's what we're speculating. Obviously there are a lot of other issues, both of them are independent, and there are issues with the wastewater samples, and the complexity of the samples. Overall, we are really happy with the results and how we're analyzing that data in our lab.

DK Thank you for explaining that.

HH (in chat) What are the demographics of the Salitrillo treatment plant? How likely are the people living there will be exposed to SARS-CoV-2? Is the data being collected enough to be used during outbreaks in certain areas? Is the city or county using this data?

VK Response to first and second question, I will direct you to Amy Middleton, one of the River Authority staff members who has been helpful in working with our group and she knows a lot about the treatment plant and demographics. Once you receive the slides there are at least three zip codes that are being served by the Salitrillo treatment plant and you should be able to find the demographics really easily. That is something we are working on, how to digest this data and other types of demographics. Our hope is to cover as much of Bexar county as possible through this effort but obviously the current limitations are hurting that.

Response to third question: As of now, I'm feeling confident with the results we are seeing can be used as a predictor of outbreaks in certain areas because they are all doing really well with the clinical data.

Response to fourth question: Yes, they are using this data, but obviously they are not reporting on their dashboard. They are in internal delegation because part of this effort is funded by the City.

Steven Schauer (SS) The Salitrillo plant has about 17,000 connections. It's in the Eastern/Northeastern part of Bexar County serving suburban communities of the county. Outside the city limits of San Antonio but serving the cities of Converse, Universal City area part of Bexar county. The Salitrillo WWTP is neighbor to Judson Middle School & Judson High School campuses to give you a demographic perspective of the area that the plant serves.

AP Asked if this presentation has been made to the San Antonio Water System (SAWS).

VK Yes, SAWS is aware, and they are also working with my group to start this effort. They are a little behind in starting to monitor this effort. It took a lot of convincing, at least on my part, to start using this at treatment plants but the conversation is moving in the right direction and hoping to start in mid-January.

AP Thank you

Joe Baker (JB) Based on the results of this study. Are there any precautions for anyone using the river water for recreational purposes downstream?

VK Based on the results of this study, there are no additional concerns that we are aware of. We are also testing the effluent samples once the water discharges from the treatment plants and we are not seeing any qualitative predictions in those samples. Once the water leaves after treatment, it's fairly good.

6. **Resilient Rivers Blueprint – Karen Bishop (KB)**

Committee members agreed to bump this presentation upon Karen's request due to meeting time constraints.

7. **Review of the River Authority's Fiscal Year 2020/2021 "Clean" Goal projects and objectives – Collen Brownlow (CB)**

WK Of the 717 million gallons of water treated in 3 months, how much is being discharged into a river or creek versus being recycled?

CB Noted he would need to get the numbers from the Utilities department but said an estimate of $\frac{3}{4}$ is being discharged.

8. Open discussion by EAC regarding project and/or policy recommendations for consideration in the River Authority's Fiscal Year 2021/2022 budget and strategic plan

SS Provided an overview of this item to the committee and reminder of upcoming River Authority budget cycle to begin in January.

WK Opened the discussion to the committee members.

JB Expressed gratitude towards the River Authority for the Escondido Creek Parkway.

SS Appreciated the words and mentioned the hopes of the in person grand opening celebration at the 1-year anniversary of the park depending on COVID status at the time.

DK Read Heather's comment from the chat regarding ongoing and/or increase in support of COVID and other wastewater based studies.

WK Concurred with Heather's comment. Talked about the southern basin community not having access to these studies and how this information would be helpful.

DK Agreed and expressed her appreciation of the River Authority staying on the forefront of new technology available and using a scientific research approach. DK and WK briefly discussed COVID testing accessibility in the Southern Basin.

WK would like to reinforce the funding of CRP at Canoe Trail Goliad which has played a vital part in the county and the quality of the river as it runs through the county as well as the promotion of recreational activities along the river.

SS Noted WK's request and HH's comment in the chat about continued support of HHW's in the southern basin. SS discussed the results of the most recent HHW in Goliad which took place on December 6. This was the biggest HHW event and resulted in max capacity of tires on the trailer and 180 lbs of pharmaceuticals products with almost 180 participants.

SS read Glynis Strause's (**GS**) comment in the chat regarding Conoco Phillips trash collection and large amounts of tires being collected. SS noted we would coordinate with GS before the next Karnes HHW.

GS I am the coordinator for the Live Oak, Dewitt, and Karnes counties and if we could take these tires to a recycling place, it would be advantageous for everybody.

SS Agreed and let her know we would coordinate with her separately.

DK Complimented the website saying it has grown over the years she has been on the committee and it has become a rich source for information. Appreciated the technical data being presented in a very user-friendly way for the lay person. She is in support of this continued effort.

SS Thanked DK for the support and followed up on the Basin Report Card media activities that have occurred since its launch.

SS Promoted discussion with the committee for ideas; no discussion.

SS Introduced an idea to the committee to gauge their reaction on a trash initiative in 2021 based on the Basin Report Card grade. Initiative would fall under the Be River Proud campaign to create a visceral, emotional movement in the community about trash. Once people are hooked on the idea of “clean land equals” clean water, then the plan would be to reintroduce the complicated subjects like bacteria, nutrients, and pollutants that are harder to understand by the general public. SS asked committee for initial thoughts about the idea.

WK agreed with the idea and stated he is always shocked with what’s left behind at the Canoe Trail landings.

AP agreed that she liked the idea and asked if there would be groups like volunteers that pick up along the highway to accommodate people’s scheduling.

SS responded that there would be multiple way to engage if this initiative was pursued including increasing the River Warriors volunteer group and engaging in apps like Iliterati.com (litter data collection app) to encourage community wide competition. Data from this may lead to future corporate partnerships in support of our initiatives.

AP That sounds really excellent!

SS read comments from chat (DK, HH, CW, JB) that were all in support of the trash campaign idea. SS next steps include bringing ideas to the March meeting and using the EAC as a focus group.

DK Added the idea to use universities and colleges in the area to get involved.

SS Agreed and discussed various ways for them to participate.

KB provided an idea of simplifying the Sustainability/LID message to when rain becomes a pollution source to generate the same passion and outreach since stormwater runoff is the number one threat and characteristic of our basin.

SS explained the idea of the trash campaign as a two step process: to get people hooked on the idea of what they can see then use it as a vehicle to further explain the complicated themes that aren't seen like bacteria, etc.

KB Agreed it is a half-step because one can see the sedimentation coming off an unprotected construction site and the sheen of oil and greases coming off roadways so there are ways to show the visible evidence of stormwater pollution as well.

AP To build on what Karen said about the efforts that have been done on stormwater and green infrastructure. She explained the heightened awareness has brought more requests for community rain gardens, which is a program that is no longer offered. She stated she is in support of the trash effort but hopes other efforts won't be diminished.

SS Discussed the current communication and tools around sustainability wouldn't be replaced but instead the trash campaign would be used as a different vehicle to bring awareness by targeting an emotional response and connection.

WK closed discussion and asked committee to send in any other recommendations to SS, DK, JG or himself.

9. Future meeting dates and items for future consideration

WK suggested March 12 for the next meeting.

CL reminded committee of March CRP Steering Committee Meeting.

SS clarified the March meeting will serve two purposes.

WK confirmed March 12 meeting and discussed topics: CRP Presentation, SS's trash campaign, and KB's Resilient Rivers Blueprint presentation.

DK suggested an update on COVID study.

SS will look at running list with Jeanette to add any pending topics to the meeting.

WK Adjourned meeting at 11:50 am