

Communities of the Future Advisory Committee

Purpose:

The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise MSD on its Community of the Future vision - a vision that links wet weather improvements to community revitalization goals. The purpose is also to assist MSD to align with initiatives such as Hamilton County's Community Compass and Agenda 360: A Regional Action Plan and the upcoming City of Cincinnati's Comprehensive Plan Update. The Advisory will also play an important role in guiding the Community of the Future projects and strategically linking MSD efforts to broader community revitalization and sustainable infrastructure goals.

An integrated water management program is an evolving approach that combines stormwater planning, watershed planning, land use planning, and more generally, environmental sustainability plans. This type of planning will also ensure that we leverage every tool in working towards sustainable watershed solutions; solutions that include floodplain management, land use planning, land conservation, Brownfield revitalization, leveraged funding, economic development, watershed stewardship programs and triple bottom line benchmarks. Incorporating the triple bottom line approach will also ensure that we are addressing more than just watershed planning. The triple bottom line refers to the three basic goals of sustainability, which are social equity, environmental conservation, and economic development.

Scope and Services of the Committee:

Members' main roles will be to review information from MSD, and in return to provide counsel from their organizations' unique perspectives, in order to guide the integrated watershed management approach. The Lick Run watershed will be a primary focus for the Advisory Committee but other Community of the Future opportunities will be brought to the Advisory Committee for review and guidance. The committee will provide professional guidance to MSD, communities and stakeholders in those watersheds. The Advisory Committee will be a resource for Community of the Future work groups within the individual watersheds.

MSD will need the help of various organizations to engage the community at all levels in order to identify opportunities to maximize the benefits from Project Groundwork and build Communities of the Future. Where regional and local policy and processes exist, Project Groundwork will integrate and engage with them; the Communities of the Future Advisory Committee will be instrumental in ensuring the most important projects are achieved. The Advisory Committee will meet minimally, mostly for organizational and occasional decision points.

Background:

The Communities of the Future Advisory Committee will be an essential resource for the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSD) in its implementation of Project Groundwork—the multi-year sewer infrastructure improvement initiative designed to minimize overflows from MSD's combined sewer system (CSS). The guiding philosophy for Project

Groundwork Initiatives is that they will be truly sustainable, evaluated with “triple bottom line” metrics, maximizing the social, economic and environmental benefits to our communities.

MSD is seeking the expertise and counsel of stakeholders in our community whose missions incorporate social equity, economic development and environmental conservation. These stakeholders will comprise the Communities of the Future Advisory Committee, which will review and advise on the planning process and recommended solutions for Project Groundwork.

The Advisory Committee will help facilitate the realization of the policy recommendations from local and regional governmental bodies’ long-range community plans. Prime examples are the Cincinnati Comprehensive Plan (in-progress) at the local level and Hamilton County’s Community Compass (2004) at a more regional level. The City is rewriting the Comprehensive Plan for the first time in a generation, with a goal of completion in early 2011. Community Compass developed a vision for Hamilton County’s future that identified four major goals: 1. Assure Economic Prosperity, 2. Build Collaborative Decision Making, 3. Embrace Diversity and Equity and 4. Balance Development and the Environment.

From an even wider regional view, the recent Agenda 360: A Regional Action Plan is “a framework for tackling the tough issues facing the four counties (Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren)” in southwest Ohio. Agenda 360 has identified five imperatives for transforming the community: 1. Quality of Place, 2. Business Growth, 3. Qualified Workforce, 4. Inclusion and 5. Governmental Collaboration. On pages 4 through 7 an explanation of how these planning efforts will seamlessly mesh with Project Groundwork/Communities of the Future is presented.

It appears Project Groundwork/Communities of the Future will have the benefit of excellent timing. The long process of developing new storm water regulations has been completed and the Hamilton County Storm Water District (HCSWD) and its members are now starting to implement the new regulations. These new regulations support and enable the green infrastructure recommendations (e.g. reforestation, Low Impact Development, riparian corridors) proposed in the most recent MSD planning efforts.

Also, several federal programs support the timing of Project Groundwork. With passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the appropriation of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program Phase 2 (NSP2) were approved for \$24,068,968 for the City and County and the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant ((EECBG) Formula Program, Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati were approved \$4,841,600 and \$3,520,600 respectively for their applications for the Formula Grant. Several other initiatives are underway and it is imperative that we work jointly to identify potential funding strategies to maximize the social, environmental and economic benefits of Project Groundwork.

Project Groundwork and the Cincinnati Comprehensive Plan

MSD’s Project Groundwork is the largest public works investment in the region’s history. It is truly the community of MSD ratepayers that are making this investment, so it is only right that the community should get as much benefit as possible out of it. While the final results are governed by the Federal Clean Water Act and other regulations, the community should be intimately involved in determining the path to achieving the required results.

As part of helping to determine that path, Project Groundwork must integrate with other expressions of the community's vision for its own future. One of the most important expressions of the community's vision will be the Cincinnati Comprehensive Plan, now in progress. Since the adoption of its first Comprehensive Plan in 1925 (incidentally, also the nation's first Council-adopted Comprehensive Plan), the City has undertaken this process about once a generation, in 1948, 1980, and now in 2009 & 2010. Project Groundwork is predicted to last about a generation, 20-30 years, as well.

Even though the Cincinnati Comprehensive Plan is still very much a work in progress, a broad outline of its process is available. According to the Plan's website, www.plan-cincinnati.org, the Plan will:

- Define the City's biggest assets and challenges
- Make recommendations about the type and character of development appropriate in different parts of the City
- Recommend and prioritize policies, key projects, and resources and determine implementation partners
- Provide guidance to the City in developing and directing future capital budgets
- Will serve as the basis for zoning recommendations throughout the City

From this very broad outline, it is obvious that planning for Project Groundwork should mesh with the Comprehensive Plan. As a huge investment in one of the most essential supporting infrastructures of the region, Project Groundwork will be one of the major determinants of the direction, shape, and rate of the region's development.

The broad policy goals that will inform the development of objectives and recommendations in both the Comprehensive Plan and the planning for Project Groundwork are:

- Recognizing that wastewater treatment is one of the region's most significant users of energy, promote the most energy-efficient techniques and standards at every step, from the treatment plant all the way back to building and site design and use.
- Develop incentives for site, building, and renovation design that have the lowest possible impact on the storm, sanitary, and legacy combined sewer systems
- Prioritize investment in existing infrastructure before new extensions - "fix it first"
- Create real, transparent partnership with the community - who after all are also the ratepayers - in Clean Water Act-driven investments
- Work with the community to find all the ways that Clean Water Act-driven investments can become truly community investment - in the environment and in social and economic development - "triple bottom line"

- Coordinate with developers and other infrastructure providers to ensure the greatest possible leverage for infrastructure investments

Specific objectives will develop with the Comprehensive Plan process, as well as with its implementation and the implementation of Project Groundwork.

Project Groundwork and the Hamilton County’s Community Compass

Another community vision for the future that Project Groundwork must integrate with is Hamilton County’s Community Compass (2004) <http://www.communitycompass.org/v2/about.asp>. It is clear that the four goals for Community Compass: 1. Assure Economic Prosperity, 2. Build Collaborative Decision Making, 3. Embrace Diversity and Equity and 4. Balance Development and the Environment closely align with Project Groundworks’ “triple bottom line” metrics, maximizing the social, economic and environmental benefits to our communities.

A few of the Objectives identified in Community Compass for the four goals are presented here:

1. Assure Economic Prosperity
 - Develop a globally competitive and diversified economy that: is cutting edge of emerging technologies, supports emerging industries, encourages entrepreneurial activities and maintains and strengthens existing business and industry.
 - Attract and retain businesses and industries that provide good paying jobs for a diverse spectrum of County residents.
 - Increase emphasis on and support for university research that leads to new business development
2. Build Collaborative Decision-Making
 - Create the necessary structure and relationships for effective and efficient coordination of countywide governance, that works proactively and cooperatively across political and school district boundaries with elected, appointed, community leaders and all citizens.
 - Develop a system of collaborative governmental decision-making that enables a countywide development framework, producing well-planned, controlled growth that balances investments in downtowns, neighborhoods and communities with preservation of open space, natural areas, and that address obstacles to achieving such growth.
 - Encourage and facilitate public input, throughout the planning decision-making process, which leads to improved public decision-making and improved public involvement, with buy-in from all sectors of the County including citizens.
3. Embrace Diversity and Equity
 - Encourage and maintain clean, safe, inclusive, accessible communities that foster open communication.
 - Welcome diversity in our institutions and in all levels of government (legislative, judicial and executive/administrative)
 - Promote regional solutions to regional issues such as affordable housing, social services, public transportation and mobility.

4. Balance Development and the Environment

- Preserve, restore and manage natural resources so as to enhance the unique character of the County.
- Plan and manage growth by seeking regional cooperation, fostering neighborhood-focused development, encouraging revitalization of existing neighborhoods and preserving open space, while incorporating citizen input in the decision-making process.
- Strengthen investment, particularly reinvestment, in order to balance development in downtown, suburbs and rural areas, using existing infrastructure to reduce costs.
- Plan and maintain a comprehensive infrastructure system, that is coordinated with development, constructed with consideration of the impact of the built and natural environments and supports neighborhood centers.

Project Groundwork and Agenda 360

And finally, Project Groundwork must integrate with Agenda 360: A Regional Action Plan for the four counties of Southwest Ohio: Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren. A more detailed description of the six imperatives identified for transforming the regional community are presented below:

1. **Quality of Place:** We must create strong, attractive and functional places in which to live, work, journey and play.
2. **Business Growth:** We must use our strengths as a region to retain, attract and create businesses and jobs.
3. **Qualified Workforce:** We must provide our young people and our workers with the skills necessary to get good jobs now and in the future.
4. **Transportation:** We must expand our options for moving and freight across the region.
5. **Inclusion:** We must work to create a welcoming community in which all people are embraced and their differences are the foundation for the community's successes.
6. **Government collaboration:** We must help the region's many cities, counties and townships work together toward our common goals.

Clearly, Agenda 360's imperatives resonate closely with Project Groundworks' "triple bottom line" metrics. It is important to note that the Agenda 360 Imperative for Quality of Place includes aspects of arts and culture, desirable neighborhoods, thriving businesses, but also, the preservation of the natural environment. This is clearly addressed on Agenda 360 webpage for Quality of Place (see below):

Protecting and improving the environment encompasses everything from a straightforward effort to plant more trees to complex concepts such as guiding city planning and establishing zoning codes that support environmentally sound construction and operation of buildings.

While most communities are figuring out how they can be more "green," our region has some compelling reasons to work to become a national leader in environmental sustainability. Basic needs such as air and water quality have a profound effect on public health, and the availability of green places for recreation are prime attractions to young people choosing a place to pursue their careers.

Conclusion

While from one view it is simply MSD's response to Clean Water Act findings, Project Groundwork is also the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in this region. Due to its huge scope and the great impact it will have on the overall community, the Project necessitates a turn of emphasis – from the usual extending infrastructure into undeveloped areas to more of a “fix it right this time” approach, focusing back into the region's historic core. This investment must also happen in a way that maximizes the returns – “triple bottom-line” environmental, social, and economic – to the community.

In order to find all the opportunities to maximize the benefits from Project Groundwork, MSD will engage the community at all levels. Where regional and local policy documents and processes exist, Project Groundwork will integrate and engage with them. The Advisory Committee will help MSD realize and reflect not only those policy goals and processes, but also the desires and needs of the whole region.