

Minutes from the meeting of the Steering Committee (SC) of the Baldwin County Watershed Coalition

Friday, October 23, 2009

In attendance: (SC Members) Larry Chason, Cathy Barnette, Marian Macpherson, Leslie Lassitter, Joe Bullock, Commissioner “Skip” Gruber, Robert James, Mayor Fred Small

(BCWC Subcommittee members): Ashley Campbell, Walter Ernest, Jim Horner, Mike Shelton, Julie Batchelor, Casi Callaway, Kara Lankford

(MBNEP): Roberta Swann, Tom Herder, Sara Shields, Brenda Lowther

(Public): Randall Hackworth, Robert Gross, Edward Carroll Sr.

Agenda #1: Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Marian Macpherson at 9:10 a.m.

Agenda #2: Public Presentation

Marion Macpherson introduced Roberta Swann. Members of the BCWC introduced themselves. Ms. Swann presented a power point presentation (see attached.)

Questions/Comments:

Bob James asked for comments on the rate structure and wondered what is reasonable. Casi Callaway responded that initial rates can't be "too low," because of the difficulties involved in subsequently raising rates. She felt that the rate should be around three dollars per month (an amount that seems small but is still beneficial. Jim Horner agreed with Ms. Callaway, since the survey results show that people are not willing to pay. Ms. Swann provided a quick overview of the phone survey conducted by the education committee. The results of that survey indicated that: 1) 90.6% of those surveyed wanted to reduce flooding problems and protect the quality of our drinking water, fishing and swimming areas; 2) 80.7% knew that storm water that runs off our yards, roads, and properties carries pollution and mud that impacts the quality of our drinking water, fishing, and beaches; 36.8% were willing to pay 20¢ per day as a storm water management fee for the purpose of protecting the quality of drinking water, protecting fishing and swimming areas and protecting property from flooding; and 23.7% would like more information about protecting the quality of drinking water, property, and fishing and swimming areas from the impacts of storm water.

Edward Carroll, Sr. wondered whether if this passes, will everyone have to pay or is there an “opt out?” Ashley Campbell responded that if it passes, everyone will participate. Mayor Small commented that if the referendum passes and all participate, but it is underfunded, it will fail. He feels that it is important that the effort must be funded well from the beginning.

Ms. Callaway wondered whether the technical committee looked into the first two years' costs? Ms. Swann responded that the technical and education subcommittees are working now to develop an action plan with associated costs that will be prioritized into a list of projects. Leslie Lassitter reported that “we are going to the county and municipalities to see what projects are needed.” Ms. Callaway offered that a

demonstration project may be an effective way to show where the money will go and might provide a good marketing strategy before the vote.

Mr. Horner asked if we have mailed any information to the towns? Ms. Lassiter responded negatively and clarified that we are meeting with each town personally and that this should be complete by November.

Bob James wondered if the vote fails, can the municipalities support this? Commissioner Gruber responded that the cities could vote to change ordinances, but asked “what about the water that runs through the cities to other parts of the county? Could we come up with a small project to show value?”

Larry Chason asked who would be responsible for telling the public where the money is spent? Ms. Swann responded that that has yet to be decided. Ms. Callaway suggested that there could be public meetings and possibly a yearly report.

Mr. James asked, “Why did “Pay as You Go” fail?” Commissioner Gruber responded that people don’t want more taxes. Cathy Barnette reported that the Education Subcommittee looked at that. They found that 1) not enough people identified with the program before the vote, and 2) people do not want more taxes. Commissioner Gruber added, “We went to the public, they didn’t respond. The public is anti-tax.”

Ashley Campbell reported that the City of Daphne is working on a retrofit with ADEM and wondered whether the coalition could apply for a grant and take the lead on this project? Bob James commented that “We aren’t legal yet.” Roberta Swann hoped that the Education Subcommittee could highlight what is going on with stormwater management through newspaper coverage.

Julie Batchelor asked, since the public corporation structure only calls for a director and an assistant, is there enough staff to make the public feel secure? Ms. Swann responded that the director could act as the project manager and contract out work. Councilwoman Barnette added that we want to stay lean on staff so people don’t see it as bureaucracy. Ms. Callaway offered that the organization structure should pick groups who represent constituents, pick organizations, not individuals, and have a diversity of representation for good balance and to keep at the forefront.

Ed Carroll, Sr. expressed that people do not want to spend money, so demonstrating need is key to passage. South Baldwin Transportation Coalition couldn’t pass their initiative and the cost was only \$0.10 per person. Jim Horner reported that Fairhope got the public behind an initiative by clearly defining the value in advance. Ed Carroll Sr. agreed that if people know what is happening and why it will be better to pass the legislation, they will get behind it. This is needed, but the economy is bad for this right now.

With no other business, Ms. Macpherson adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.