

## **Summarized Notes - Keith Creek Stakeholder Meetings, Nov. 1-2, 2021**

### **Stakeholders present:**

Einar Forsman – Rockford Chamber of Commerce  
Kerry Leigh – Natural Land Institute  
Karl Palmquist – Winnebago County (Planning & Zoning)  
Ron Priddy – RMTD  
Tim Bragg – Rockford Park District  
Jonathan Logemann – Alderman, City of Rockford  
Sean Von Bergen – Winnebago County (Highway Dept.)  
Tim Hinkens – City of Rockford (Engineering Division)  
Tim O’Keefe - Rockford Fire Dept.  
Mallory Wrenn - Winnebago County (Emergency Services)  
Bob Campbell – ZION Development  
John Groh – Rockford Area Convention and Visitor’s Bureau  
Mary McNamara Bernsten – Rockford Area Arts Council  
Cira Richardson – Great Neighborhoods, Transform Rockford  
Arne Jacobsen – Miracle Mile Neighborhood/Business Association  
AJ Teeters – Crosspoint Church  
Lois Ginter – ORCHiD Neighborhood Association  
Michael VanSistine – Mauh-Nah-Tee-See Golf Course  
Barb Chidley – City of Rockford (Neighborhood Specialist)  
Dennis Rich – Keith Creek Neighborhood Association  
Paula Olson – Miracle Mile Neighborhood/Business Association  
LuAnn Groh – Crosspoint Church  
Colin Belle – City of Rockford (Planning)

### **Project Team Members present for all or portion:**

Scott Ruhland – Lakota Group  
Kevin Clark – Lakota Group  
Michael Smith – Studio GWA  
Ashley Sarver – Studio GWA  
Gary Anderson – Studio GWA  
Eric Vieth – Strand & Associates  
Kaylin Janicke – RPC  
Gabrielle Torina – RPC

### **Existing/Previous Perceptions**

*[Participants were asked if they had any existing experience or perceptions of the Creek at the beginning of the meeting. Below are some of the responses that did not necessarily fit into the other categories below]*

Participants were surprised at extent of the creek. Goes all the way to Boone Co? Usually envision the area where the flooded properties were acquired.

Participants also reported damage to homes. Stagnant real estate. Feels very stuck. Doesn't feel like could sell his home. Would have to sell for nothing.

Used to play in the creek as a kid. Go to the church in the background. Positive memories tied to the creek.

Grew up in that area.

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### **Keith Creek Vision and Goals**

Anyone post-Boomer, looking for multiple things when locating for a job. Not just where they're going to work. And prefer alternate forms of transportation.

Greenway as an attractant to locate here.

Neighbors have a lot of hope in "one day". Very optimistic.

In other towns – rivers are acknowledged, taken care of. Markers and signage that educate. Functional aesthetic. Lighting, safety fencing. Steel fencing but reflecting history. So doesn't look hopeless, poor, neglected.

Potential. Connects so many parks and runs through so many different types of neighborhoods and corridors. Serves as connection.

"Connects the whole town!"

Etched metal. Decorative rail. Gathering places along the Creek.

Both branches of KC go right through our business district (Miracle Mile). Want to see parks connected down to river.

The recreation path can be an outlet for people to connect. The one place that brings together a diverse group is the Rock River Rec Path. Accessible for people of all backgrounds. Free and accessible. Beyond "it looks nice" but also bring people together. Healthy opportunities.

Multi-purpose recommendations needed to address multiple issues.....water quality, economic development, resiliency, emergency management, etc.

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### **Land Use, Development, and Redevelopment**

Economic development opportunities are primarily everything west of Alpine

Could alter things along Charles from Lincoln MS to 20<sup>th</sup> and look at removing some of the housing stock and use the park as an amenity to attract business. But that's quite a few more houses.

Could we bring jobs here that are not just retail

Edgewater area – benefit of enjoying. Step out of your house and see this beautiful space. Could be that here instead of creek as something you don't want to be next to.

11<sup>th</sup> St attractive to business because of 20 but need some kind of program to neutralize that cost to them.

Challenge the city has, as well as the RAEDC – they have a greater need to create incentive package around brownfield sites. Other communities have greenfield space. That's been the tough part. And fits in with the location they want –

Areas of interest/concern for development – located by MercyHealth and south

Had there been better planning probably wouldn't have seen Dollar General or Walgreen's. Not the best thing to have built

Issue for business when you have to deal with the floodplain. Overlay zoning, amendments, or other land use considerations necessary to address long term solutions for stormwater, water quality, etc.

ZION looking to do senior housing at Nelson School site. Waiting to hear from RPC. Put in solid offer. Waiting to hear back. Probably 2 years out from applying for funding at Nelson School site because of complications of being in flood zone, but any developer is going to have that issue.

If you open up the creek at MAGNA site then you reduce the amount of parking. Then makes it difficult.

Park District had some concerns about contamination, environmental issues. Acquisition and ownership could be issue due to brownfields. Does Party A own but lease to Party B? Get brownfield dollars to do some cleanups. How much of this area is targeted by city for demolition dollars? How much priority from city on this area? How much in TIF district?

As Orth Rd continues to develop. Expand/widen Orth. Growth area for residential and industry. County is working with City on some jurisdictional transfers. Perhaps another roundabout and improvements in this area.

Loves Park and Rockford have Riverside Corridor study showing full ped and cycling accessibility at tollway. Tollway doesn't want separate structure but would entertain expanding to include.

In growth areas, if there's going to be large acres of impervious surfaces, can't we get the city to make a commitment to using permeable pavement, underground storage to help reduce the pressure on the creek. Stormwater ordinances allow it but don't mandate it. When we reviewed the

UDO – green infrastructure practices included as being allowed. Instead of just looking at band-aids, where we have opportunities to change the cause/effect.

As we do these watershed plans, maybe we have mandate in ordinances that if there's been a watershed plan here, anyone developing here has to abide by that plan. Change language in ordinance reflecting the plan and now mandate. Do an overlay. Though might hinder the type of developments that want to come in.

Regional detention and who maintains? Responsibility passes from private owners to public (City). There are benefits because it promotes the connective greenway. Philosophically different. Townships don't want the added responsibility. Cities don't want it either.

We should look at stormwater utility for funding. All this stormwater we're providing has a cost. A small or large business – it's good to have the conversation. Makes people aware of the cost.

State legislation change required to do stormwater utility?

In McHenry County, technical assistance grant from CMAP for ordinance review with fine tooth comb looking at stormwater and groundwater protection. R1PC to apply for grants that could provide this technical assistance?

Land use analysis to look at opportunities for shared parking between uses. Religious institutions that have max parking 1-2 days a week then underutilized. Some opportunities for sharing parking and management. Could be a very palatable incentive that City could offer for redevelopment.

Acquisition efforts from City – commercial structure with shared foundation. Actively looking to acquire the shopping center. FEMA says in good position. Relocation of businesses part of that. Demolition of structures. Future use = open space? No other intention than that from City.

Trestle behind Culture Shock removed in 2017/2018 but abutments are all still there.

New development – detention requirements. Need some way to control runoff. Floodplain ordinance. Build 2' above base flood. Dollar General complies. Actually better now than it was.

Re: stormwater utility – City is open to that consideration. We don't have anything specific for Keith Creek. Our stormwater ordinance not perfect by any means. Stormwater utility is something we're looking into. Haven't yet presented to administration. Long-term recommendations for KC, no way City can fund that if we don't have stormwater utility fee. On the CIP front – pretty bare on stormwater because we don't have a funding source.

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## **Parks, Open Space and Greenways**

Nearest walking area is Twin Sisters but if it could connect and create Riverwalk feel but not same level of development.

Former Nelson School site – athletic, outdoor activity to be done here. Drainage area?

Example: community on south side of Chicago they built around a golf course. Had a feel like you were in the park, tucked away in there -- Lincoln Oaks

Encourage more passive space. For employers that are near where employees can get out or see others out and about.

Long stretch. Park area – 11<sup>th</sup> St to 18<sup>th</sup> St that there are so many different things that could be done. Lots of means to do education. The amphitheatre and performing arts idea at Churchill Park. Mtn bike stretch near 11<sup>th</sup> St? or bmx park where neighborhood kids can access. Partner with one of the schools?

Aldeen Park – Linda K White Center already has a center there that maybe could build off of for education.

Detention ponds would be good. But park district doesn't have funds to maintain.

My knowledge related to space at 17<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. In summers, church has vacation Bible school and would take kids in a van down to Churchill Park to play soccer. Almost a safety hazard, had to keep kids away. Cross country meets at Dahlquist, Twin Sisters. They're so close but can't get to one from the other. Difficult to park down there to go to these events. With the kids, opportunity behind the church (Crosspoint). Right now a huge open area. If not going to have the kids playing something specific, not a lot of passive use. Shelters have been used for community events. New org at our church for juvenile justice program. Want to use the space for job training with the new kids. Group is called Life Decisions. Looking to use that space to get the kids out. Renovating a house on the church property and learning skills.

Interesting to see skateboard park at Aldeen Park. These parks getting easier to connect. Make it a chain. Take a ride for a few miles of this. The parks themselves have pathways.

IGA between Park District and City for realigning creek at 10<sup>th</sup> Ave Park. Realignment requires relocating playground equipment. Park District would like to see parks connected – realignment of channels through parks.

Nelson Park – Park District did small exchange of property between PD and Joe Behr to clean up property lines. Joe Behr had wanted to pick up some land. Around 2015, Midtown and PD had been talking about greenways. Conversation about ownership, who takes care of?

From neighborhood planning process – across from Alpine Park – Alpine Hills Adventure Park. Make sure to include on maps. AHAP still have plans cycling track system. Would need to check with Tom Lind to ensure where at with these plans.

Twin Sisters – sledding no longer available at Aldeen, still allowed at Twin Sisters

Northeast Community Park out there but so intertwined with Sporstcore that doesn't feel like there's really a community park. Lacks true neighborhood park in this area.

Something developed that people could use like they used to go paint the dam. Incorporate a way for kids to interact. Public art would be great. Freestanding panels that people could paint murals upon.

The creek doesn't always have water that you could consistently kayak in so need to have activities that don't depend on that. Great potential especially in the area that is more residentially dense.

Would be great to have naturalized with all the ducks and animals and wildlife it might bring.

Winter skating would be really great. Winter sports and utilize the ponds.

At Churchill Park: No trees or anything. Doesn't feel like you're supposed to be there. Kids still play at playground area and Rock House Kids officer and use tennis courts. Ball diamond in disrepair. Could hold some big events there.

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### **Creek Access, Connectivity and Transportation**

If had one-way drive from Fairview to Alpine Park. Could offload some of the vehicle traffic at Alpine and State. With recreational space as focus (Central Park example).

RMTD extending hours on some routes to accommodate employee shift schedules. Other increased service schedules also planned. Route modifications for efficiency also in progress.

This all connects. People need to know how it connects.

The ability to create an alternative transportation corridor for those who don't have cars. Connect job centers,

Our neighborhoods, census tracts around Midtown - 40% do not have access to cars. Important aspect. How do we alleviate poverty through job access for poorest income folks?

Alpine Trail runs behind Rockford University. Now students can access downtown.

Would be a key east-west corridor for active transportation.

Theoretically easy access to groceries but is caught off many times.

Some communities have taken advantage of their proximity to the creek. Denver seems to have embraced their proximity and taken care of their creek.. I like the idea of riding bike or walk and eliminating the obstacles and intersections. Travel would be cleaner, expeditious

I'd like to see the recreation path between Morgan St and dam extended south to Keith and then come out to 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. Behr is a challenge here. Highlight the water, riverfront and especially along the river by Rockford Auto Parts. Beautiful down by Rockford Auto Parts

One of the challenges is the commercial corridor on Charles and Woodruff. Difficult to be able to walk to different places because walking across Woodruff is impossible. Visibility is bad. Dangerous. Safe places for crossing. And well lit. And people know where they are. For areas south of the creek up to Charles area for shopping – do it in a way that doesn't require being on a busy busy street. If people are going to use they need to be able to get across State, Charles and Woodruff. Not just the creek. It's from the neighborhoods that surround.

Possible to span the creek? Like a pedestrian scale bridge with something interesting to see and look out. For kids out and about in the summer, there are few destination spots that are intended for kids.

Could be used as part of bicycle commuter facility. A lot of pedestrians and on bikes around Midtown. And could be more. A safer commute.

Many live in Fair Haven and need to bus. Pick up people with disabilities through Fish-abled Foundation so we've been trying to incorporate more accessibility into the church building. Getting down to Dahlquist is really difficult even though so close. If you're a wheelchair user have to go all the way around to get to the shelter. If want to use Dahlquist, park at church and walk across. No north/south path cutting through the park. Senior building full of people who can't access the park immediately adjacent. Many people get their groceries delivered at Valley View. No connection to Schnucks which is not that far away. Transportation opportunity via scooter/cart could be near Valley View. Motorized scooter to get to groceries.

Charles St a very important corridor into the city that is underutilized.

A lot of calls for service from Fire Dept for those who drive off ledges in area near Churchill's Park. A lot of old bridges.

Access to creek is hard for Fire Dept. unless there is there is greenspace to do rescues.

Emergency management – possible need for law enforcement to shift how they patrol if they think people are going to be move differently along the area. Increase lighting.

Just because it's paved over doesn't mean it can't be undone. People don't realize there's a creek.

NYC – using creek as the playground. Playing with rocks in the bed. 7-8 years ago the City got rid of all the scrub along Morsay. Can get so overgrown in that area. No one even knows there's a creek there.

Where the houses came down already have a head start on the greenway.

Increased access opportunities in the eastern sections, greenway opportunities, connections to nature. More passive opportunities to environmental assets possible here.

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### **Storm Drainage, Infrastructure, Flood Improvements**

If flooding issues are persistent, then attracting businesses a challenge.

Are there locations to daylight creek, and convert impervious to pervious surface areas.

Incredible amount of erosion damage at Schnucks.

An issue – 2/3 of property (former Nelson School site) is within the floodplain. Have to raise up the land to build on. Then need to do flood mitigation near the creek to offset their development. Probably 2 years out from applying for funding because of complications of being in flood zone. But any developer is going to have that issue.

Discussion of scrap yards and locations

Bridge at Seminary St. recently redone

Slope walls along Keith are in poor condition.

Hydrology need to be addressed. What is the capacity? RES Study addressing?

County doesn't have many structures along the corridor but Township does. We can provide info. County houses all the records for the townships and communities.

Concerned about the flooding. Mitigation is a top concern. Biggest frustration from neighbors is the time it takes, and they don't want to see flooding happen again.

MercyHealth SportsCore 2 – regional draw there. Haven't heard of any concerns out there regarding flooding. But the underpass from one side of Sportscore to other muddy, flooded.

We know we can respond with the majority of the Fire Dept. at Schnucks during the 4x/year rain events. Same location for Public Works. Monitoring it.

Water get as high as Charles St? Yes. Becomes a river. Box Culvert under Charles at full capacity it starts acting as an impediment to flow.

City-wide drainage studies. 4 areas. CoR has stormwater master plan they will share. But not related to Keith Creek.

Fehr Graham working on hydraulic study on behalf of City. From 9<sup>th</sup> St east to Dahlquist Park.



Emergency Management - the more accessible you can make it, the easier our job is. Strand cited previous experience. Side slopes at Bee Branch pretty gentle. Everything steps down toward the creek. Incorporated high water level warning alarms that might inundate the trails. Columns placed throughout the creek with life safety hooks so emergency response can tie onto if someone were to get in. Not much planning for trying to get vehicles down to the creek area for emergency response. Tall retaining walls throughout and bridges. Buffer of 50-70' of sidewalk and the creek then don't need railings. At Lick Run, if greater than 3' drop off retaining wall, rule of thumb to put railing.

Straighten out the creek at Twin Sisters? City says seems doable, but would need to talk to the park district. Straightening out would increase the velocity.

Part of original grant to FEMA to purchase junk yard at 9<sup>th</sup> St & 7<sup>th</sup> Ave to demolish but wasn't awarded.

All the buildings that developed east of Keith Creek neighborhood, just makes it run right to us. Doesn't take much to hit top level of the creek. It has been better recently. Bridge repairs, dam repairs.

The water is not draining into the storm drains. It's coming back up from storm drains. 2" rainfall that happened in June that made this happen. Happened so quickly.

In the 1960s, straightened the creek and now it goes much faster. Paved over everything.

#1 priority is to reduce flooding and future flooding. The other pieces are important but #1 is flooding. Naturalize the channelized sections. Going to help with the water quality area. Need to focus on those collection points. Schnuck's and Magna as problematic areas but what can you do?

Behr - isn't that a problem?

Railroad bridge west of Seminary that acts as a blockage.

At Mauh Nah Tee See - In the past 30 years, I don't see flooding as worse than it used to be. Creek is beautiful asset to our course. Wonderful wildlife. Audobon certified golf course. When it floods, closes down the course, creates a mess. Economic part of it for us. Less flooding today than 20 years ago. Some rip rap done. Maybe not as bad because of improvements to the dam? Not sure.

Aldeen Park is flooded more than it used to be. But better there than in the neighborhood.

Devastation of the loss of that many homes. Dominant theme.

Are there other materials that can be used besides just concrete to do wall repairs?

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## **Partnerships, Collaboration, and Implementation**

Transportation is always an issue especially for the larger employers. They need multiple ways for them to get to from work. Top issue. Company in Stockton IL that buses folks from Rockford

Healthcare systems need transportation.

City going through comprehensive plan update.

ZION once thought about doing some along 7<sup>th</sup> St. for artist housing. A lot of existing building stock well set up for artist housing. RAAC agreed.

Schools' involvement, Rockford University, Severson, Burpee. They all do research. Filter energy to provide additional research, funding. Creek as research facility. Patriot's Gateway as good spot for creek-side facility.

Partner with schools. Geothermal that dips into the creek. Could use as education. Teach the history of the creek – what we did well and what we didn't. (Big Marsh example in Chicago)

Testor Building at Buckbee as observation point or ecological center. County Trustee owns that building.

Rockford Area Arts Council and local artist partnership opportunity. Use art as a way to welcome people in. In Seattle, they have beautiful guided frames done by local welders. At Morton Arboretum, they have a simple circle that drew attention, an aesthetic indicating that "This is sacred space". Bring moments that are reflective along with the various uses.

Art invites you in – lets you know you can go. Trash cans decorated. Purpose and intentionality. The whiteness of the parks. Need a welcoming message at each one. Needs to be incorporated into a welcoming aspect. Different artistic elements can be incorporated that reflect the diversity of the neighborhoods of Rockford. Traveling farmer's market featuring different types of produce.

Art in Plein Air idea for partnership with neighborhood, Natural Land Institute, RAAC. Nancie King Mertz – internationally known watercolor painter. Chicago native. Just moved here. May be able to assist/lead.

Long term maintenance. Ownership – who's mowing the grass? Who's plowing?

Winter maintenance a concern. Who takes care of it? Rather have tall grass than ice. Radiant heat, solar paths? If we're going to spend a lot of money.

Natural Land Institute - we have adopted this creek. And looking at how we can incorporate environmental justice. Access to open space that doubles as flood plain and flood storage. Not just about throwing a few native plants in there. Goes a little broader than that. We may have opportunities through grants to purchase land and pair with bike trail access.

FEMA – hazard mitigation grant funding. Funding supports acquisition and demolition.

Have you explored the BRIC grant? Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities. Passes through IEMA. Shifting requirements for their grant apps. "We want big glamorous projects that will change communities". The amount of money for the BRIC grants has increased substantially. State is looking for some glamorous projects. Like that you can tie back to environmental, data showing decrease in emergency response times.

Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful and Miracle Mile do a cleanup every spring to clean up the creek by Morsay and now getting harder to get after because of all the scrubby trees and now can't even see the creek.