

Watershed Health and Environment (WH/E) PEG Discussion Topics and Schedule

June 27, 2012

Ecosystem Services (discussion scheduled for July 6, 2012)

Ecosystem services are the public and private benefits provided by natural resources and green infrastructure (e.g. recreation, flood mitigation or stormwater management). These benefits serve to protect human health and safety, meet regional, state and federal regulations, and to support the local economy. A policy basis is needed to support public investments in maintaining and improving natural resources and green infrastructure as consistent with the City's responsibilities.

The PEG will discuss how the Comprehensive Plan can recognize the value of ecosystem services especially as they relate to land use, transportation and infrastructure.

Connection with other PEGS: Infrastructure Equity, Networks, Economic Development, Neighborhood Centers, Residential Development and Compatibility

Habitat Corridors (discussion scheduled for July 31, 2012)

Currently, the Comprehensive Plan and land use practice focus on protecting the most significant natural resources in the city. Lower-quality resources—including degraded or isolated patches of natural resources—are a lower priority for protection or enhancement. Yet, natural resources such as streams, wetlands and wildlife habitats function better when they are connected and are well cared for (much like other infrastructure such as streets and sewer pipes).

The Comprehensive Plan update could set policies that recognize the benefits of reconnecting natural resources—habitat for wildlife and for people—and provide direction for establishing habitat corridors and networks within the urban setting. The growth concept map could show where corridors would be most beneficial. And, the Comprehensive Plan projects list could identify priority City investments to help reconnect natural resources.

The PEG could provide valuable guidance on:

- Principles to set priorities for reconnecting habitats/natural resources;
- The potential types and character these connections could take within developed areas and industrial areas;
- A concept map that shows a long-term aspiration for reconnected habitats/natural resources.

Connection with other PEGS: Networks, Economic Development, Infrastructure Equity, Residential Development and Compatibility.

Environmental Justice (discussion scheduled for July 31, 2012)

Environmental justice means equal protection from environmental and health hazards, and meaningful public participation in decisions that affect the environment in which people live, learn, work and play. Policies developed with a lack of attention to environmental justice can result in inequitable distributions of burdens such as poor air or water quality, and inequitable distributions of benefits such as access to nature. Communities particularly vulnerable to such inequities include minority, low-income and tribal communities, and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes.

The PEG will discuss the concept of environmental justice and how the Comprehensive Plan could best address the issue.

Connection with other PEGS: Community Involvement, Infrastructure Equity, Networks, Economic Development, Neighborhood Centers, Residential Development and Compatibility.

Design with Nature (discussion scheduled for August 23, 2012)

The environmental goals and policies in Portland's Comprehensive Plan currently focus on protecting significant natural resources in the city. While protecting and improving natural resources is critical, this will not be sufficient to meet City goals for healthy watersheds and a high quality environment. It will also be necessary to weave nature and natural functions into Portland's built environment (buildings, sites and streets) to improve and maintain healthy watersheds, protect homes and businesses from drainage and other problems, and to reduce or avoid costly upgrades to infrastructure such as piped sewer systems.

The PEG will be asked to consider a draft set of Comprehensive Plan policies addressing the built environment. These policies are presented in the draft policy framework under the heading "Design with Nature", coined from the title of Ian McHarg's renowned 1969 planning publication. The PEG will discuss policies to encourage low-impact development, habitat-friendly development, and green infrastructure, manage stormwater, address impervious surfaces, and efficient use of land.

Connection with other PEGS: Economic Development, Networks, Neighborhood Centers, Infrastructure Equity, Residential Development

Natural Hazards (discussion scheduled for August 23, 2012)

For purposes of discussions with the PEG, natural hazards are events emanating from atmospheric, climatic, hydrologic, geologic or other earth processes that can negatively affect life safety, property and/or natural systems. The impacts of natural hazards can be exacerbated by human development or activity (e.g., irrigating on steep slopes). Many events that are considered natural hazards such as flooding and wildfire are also necessary and beneficial components of natural ecological processes, but have negative impacts due to the proximity of human development to hazard prone areas.

The City's existing Comprehensive Plan policies do not reflect the direction provided in recent plans such as the adopted Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2010) and the Portland Watershed Management Plan (2006). Further, existing policies do not reflect lessons learned from events such as the Willamette bluff fire of 2001, or City programs to purchase frequently flooded property from willing sellers. Future policies should take into consideration emerging studies and maps that

address potential hazard risks, including those associated major earthquakes, and the potential impacts of climate change.

The Comprehensive Plan offers an opportunity to examine the relationship between land use practices and the risks of landslides, flooding and other natural hazards. Decisions about where to focus growth and how to design buildings, streets and other infrastructure can influence public safety and the long-term value private and public investments. To that end, the PEG will be asked to help shape policies to reduce hazard risks while increasing overall community resiliency, and to discuss the implications of establishing broader and potentially stronger policies directing development away from hazard prone areas.

Connection with other PEGS: Networks, Infrastructure Equity, Residential Development and Compatibility, Neighborhood Centers.

Growth Scenarios (discussion scheduled for October 2012)

One of the tasks required for the update of the Comprehensive Plan is the development and analysis of growth scenarios. The growth scenarios will present alternative hypothetical allocations of housing and jobs to meet forecasted residential and employment needs identified in the background reports to the Comprehensive Plan. Each of the scenarios will be analyzed for their respective pros and cons given the broad array of City goals and policies.

The PEG will discuss and provide feedback on the draft growth scenarios, associated analyses, and potential policies that will guide the location of future growth.

Connections with other PEGS: Infrastructure Equity, Networks, Economic Development, Neighborhood Centers, Residential Development and Compatibility

Cumulative Impacts (discussion scheduled for November 2012)

Generally, the impacts from one development project on an urban watershed are hard to perceive. Rather, the condition of urban watersheds reflect a gradual transformation of the landscape resulting from countless individual public and private developments that take place over long periods of time. This is certainly true for Portland. In addition, Portland's watersheds extend beyond city boundaries so watershed conditions within the city also reflect the impacts of activities occurring in other jurisdictions.

Currently the natural functions of Portland's watersheds are degraded. In some areas stormwater infrastructure capacity is insufficient to handle the incremental impacts of new development—this causes further harm. The current comprehensive plan does not specifically call for consideration of cumulative impacts in producing City plans and review of development projects. Including such policies could be helpful, but it is important to consider how and to what activities such policies should be applied, at which scale(s), and toward what ends. Given that Portland is a maturing city, it is also important to consider policies to encourage redevelopment that will, over time, improve watershed conditions and environmental health. The PEG will be asked to consider issues and potential policy approaches to address cumulative impacts in the future.

Connection with other PEGS: Economic Development, Networks, Infrastructure Equity