



MWCOG Regional Blue Green Infrastructure Community Engagement and Planning Project (RBGI CEPP)

FLOOD AWARE COMMUNITIES: BLUE-GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (BGI) WORKSHOP SERIES 3

MEETING SUMMARY: THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025

ATTENDEES (ALL VIRTUAL):

ATTENDEES (11)

- Dennis Chestnut, Member, W7RHCC
- Zandra Chestnut, Member, Resilience Hub Community Coalition
- Sadie Drescher, Member, Chesapeake Bay Trust
- Jess Eliot Myhre, Resident, Brentwood Community
- Tsakani Ngomane, Member, UDC CAUSES
- Kyrthlyn Rhoda, Grant Manager, City of Seat Pleasant
- Brenda Lee Richardson, Member, Anacostia Parks & Community Collaborative
- Luisa Robles, Local Government Representative, City of Greenbelt
- Aster Sanders, Member, Joe's Movement Emporium
- S O'Brien, Resident of Greater D.C. Area
- Stella Tarnay, Member, Capital Nature
- Joe Arrowsmith, Straughan Environmental
- Jay Sullivan, Straughan Environmental
- Erin Jones, CH Planning
- Richa Vuppuluri, CH Planning
- Kathryn Cunningham, CH Planning
- Brooke Kongmany, CH Planning
- Leila Bahrami, CH Planning
- Mikayla Purnell, CH Planning

PROJECT PARTNERS (6)

- Heidi Bonnafon, COG
- Sushanth Gupta, COG
- Kenya Troutman, DC HSEMA
- Lily Cheng, DC DOEE
- Lilantha Tennekoon, Prince George's County Department of Environment
- Dawn Hawkins-Nixon, Prince George's County Department of Environment

PROJECT TEAM (11)

- Amanda Vargo, ICF
- Jasmyn Noel, ICF
- Larry Trout, Straughan Environmental

REGIONAL BLUE-GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLANNING PROJECT- BGI WATERSHED WORKSHOP VIRTUAL SERIES 3

MEETING SUMMARY

The Series 3 Watershed Workshop for the Regional Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI) Project was held on April 10th and brought together 11 community members and community-based organization (CBO) representatives. The focus of the session was to explore strategies for reducing flood risk and strengthening environmental resilience across the Arundel Canal, Watts Branch, and Oxon Run sub watersheds. The workshop included a project overview, presentation of blue-green infrastructure concept designs, breakout discussions by watershed, and opportunities for attendees to provide input on draft concept areas and ask questions. The meeting was designed to continue fostering community-centered solutions to regional flooding challenges.

1. WELCOME & WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Heidi Bonnaffon (MWCOG) and Erin Jones (CH Planning)

Heidi opened the session by welcoming participants and introducing project partners and team members. Erin followed with a review of meeting logistics and a live poll to understand which sub watersheds participants primarily worked in (Figure 1 in Appendix). Erin provided a high-level overview of the workshop agenda, setting the tone for a collaborative discussion centered on the three focus subwatersheds.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW & PREVIOUS WORKSHOP TAKEAWAYS

Amanda Vargo (ICF)

Amanda provided a recap of the Regional BGI Project's purpose and timeline, along with key insights from the first two workshop series. She emphasized that the project is intended to define the "why, what, and how" of BGI in a way that is scalable, equity-driven, and grounded in community priorities. The BGI Project is summarized as:

- **A regional BGI community engagement and planning initiative** focused on increasing flood resilience across watersheds in D.C. and Prince George's County.
- **A collaborative approach** to flood interventions, designed to engage residents, cross-jurisdictional partners, and local organizations in identifying holistic solutions to flood risk.

3. OVERVIEW OF SUBWATERSHEDS, REGIONAL SCOPE, AND OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

Joe Arrowsmith (Straughan Environmental)

Joe provided an overview of the regional scope of blue-green infrastructure, emphasizing that water does not follow jurisdictional lines. For that reason, the planning process prioritizes the natural shape and flow of the watersheds over artificial county boundaries.

He reiterated that feedback from local communities and CBOs has played a central role in identifying priority areas for intervention. The end goal is to propose solutions that are not only effective but also viable for funding and implementation.

How Focus Areas Were Identified:

- **"Follow the Water" Approach** — Focus areas were selected based on where stormwater naturally collects, using data and mapping to guide decisions:
 - Mapped existing flood risk areas
 - Traced primary stormwater pathways

Sub watershed Focus Areas:

- **Oxon Run**– 11 identified focus areas
- **Arundel Canal**– 2 identified focus areas
- **Watts Branch**- 4 identified focus areas

(See Appendix Figure 2 – Poll Results: “Which sub watershed do you work in?”)

4. BREAKOUT ROOM

*A summary of the breakout room input and discussion points can be found as **Figure 2** in the Appendix.*

Participants were divided into breakout groups based on the sub watershed they work in: Oxon Run, Arundel Canal, or Watts Branch. Each room was facilitated by a member of the Straughan Environmental team. Within these smaller sessions, attendees reviewed the proposed focus areas and provided targeted feedback on BGI opportunities tailored to their watershed.

The goal of these discussions was to refine concept designs through localized input and to elevate community perspectives in the decision-making process. Mural boards were used by the facilitators to share detail maps for respective Subwatershed and facilitate spatial feedback

5. REPORT BACK

Each breakout room facilitators shared the key takeaways from the attendees in their room.

Highlights:

Arundel Canal:

- No residents from the draft concept priority area were present, but neighboring CBOs participated
- **Community Engagement & Partnerships**- highlighted the success of green initiatives linked to outreach through green teams, tree programs, town halls, and faith-based organizations.
- **Strategic & Feasible Planning**- highlighted the Importance of identifying emergency flood routes and designing interventions to redirect water.

Watts Branch:

- No local residents, but neighboring representatives shared insights
- Emphasis on building momentum from Marvin Gaye Park stream restoration
- Advocated preserving critical ecosystems
- Concerns raised about water contamination (e.g., E. coli), and source tracking

Oxon Run:

- Highlighted the need to understand downstream impacts
- Suggested piloting educational efforts (e.g., field trips) for local residents
- Cautioned against planting trees that could grow large and fall on homes
- Raised questions about community preparedness, climate resilience, and long-term funding

5. Q&A SESSION

Erin Jones (CHPlanning)

Attendee Questions & Responses

- **Will this session be posted publicly?**
Yes — it will be available on the COG website.
- **Are we coordinating with the restoration project between Capitol Heights Metro and Largo Town Center?**
Yes — the team is identifying existing and concurrent efforts to align and collaborate.
- **Is D.C. beginning to develop a 2050 comprehensive land zoning plan?**
Yes — that planning process is now underway.
- **How is data being prepared to support CBOs and community leaders with grant applications?**
A robust dataset is being built specifically for that purpose.
- **Will wildlife data be included as a co-benefit in the study?**
Incorporating wildlife information has been identified as a valuable co-benefit.

7. CLOSING REMARKS & NEXT STEPS

Heidi Bonnaffon, MWCOC

- Expressed appreciation to all participants and partners
- Shared next steps and upcoming events
- Encouraged participants to complete the evaluation survey (*QR code or link provided*)
- Provided information for staying connected (*email list, website*)

See appendix on page 5

APPENDIX – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Figure 1: Overview of the 3 Subwatersheds: Oxon Run, Arundel Canal, and Watts Branch

Poll:

1a) Which sub watershed do you do work in?

1b) Which jurisdiction do you work in?

1c) Which town or neighborhood do you live in? (Multiple choice)

Figure 1a: Overview of the 3 Subwatersheds: Oxon Run, Arundel Canal, and Watts Branch: Poll: Which subwatershed do you do work in? (12/12 participants answered)	Percentage:
Arundel Canal	(2/12) 17%
Watts Branch	(2/12) 17%
Oxon Run	(1/12) 8%
All	(3/12) 25%
Outside of the 3 Watersheds	(5/12) 42%

Figure 1b: Overview of the 3 Subwatersheds: Which Jurisdiction do you work in? (11/12 participants answered)	Percentage:
DC	(5/11) 45%
Prince George's County	(5/11) 45%
Both	(1/11) 9%

Figure 1c: Which town or neighborhood do you live in? (8/12 participants answered)	Percentage:
Hillbrook	(1/8) 11%
Mt. Rainier	(1/8) 11%
Brentwood	(1/8) 11%
Upper Marlboro	(1/8) 11%
Silver Spring	(1/8) 11%
Washington, D.C. Oxon Run area	(1/8) 11%
"G"	(1/8) 11%
Shaw	(1/8) 11%

Figure 2: Breakout Room Detailed Discussions

Arundel Canal Breakout Room

Facilitators: Joe Arrowsmith (Lead), & Kathryn

Notetaker: Mikayla

- **Sub watershed Overview**
 - Covers portions of DC and Prince George's County
 - Focus Area 1 begins in PG County and drains into the Anacostia.
 - Focus Area 2 includes Brentwood and Mount Rainier—frequent flooding zones.
 - Reducing DC runoff could relieve downstream flooding in Brentwood.
- **Community Ideas & Observations**
 - Participant 1: Roads funnel water into flood-prone areas—need infrastructure that redistributes flow.
 - Park-based solutions (e.g., retrofitting amphitheaters) suggested as flood storage options.
 - Participant 2: Active in regional tree planting; emphasized green space as flood mitigation.
 - Participant 3: Severe flooding impacts; successful outreach includes green teams, tree programs, and town halls.
 - Highlighted canopy mapping tools and the role of faith-based partners in engagement and funding.
- **Restoration Opportunities:** Streams, wetlands, and floodplains in the sub watershed need restoration to enhance flood resilience.
- **Planning & Implementation**
 - Suggested strategy: identify emergency flood routes and design interventions to redirect or distribute water.
 - Participants reviewed cost and complexity visuals to gauge feasibility of implementation options.

Watts Branch Breakout Room

Facilitators: Jay Sullivan (Lead), Amanda Vargo

Notetaker: Jasmyn Noel

- **Community Context & BGI Awareness**
 - Participants varied in experience with Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI), but all expressed interest in collaborative solutions.
 - Upstream actions (in MD) have direct downstream effects in DC—underscoring the need for cross-jurisdictional coordination.
 - Gray infrastructure dominates older developments; BGI fills important gaps by managing stormwater closer to where it falls.
- **Concept Area 1: Chamber Ave & Capitol Heights Blvd-** Densely urban and flood-prone area, targeted for green street conversion and bioretention features.
 - Limited space is a constraint; solutions need to be low-maintenance.
 - Participants flagged concerns about turf fields, long-term upkeep, and ownership responsibilities.
 - Suggestions included nature-based solutions, community maintenance jobs, and joint DC–MD workshops.
- **Concept Area 2: Former Country Club Site:** Site includes breached pond, ballfields, and open space—ideal for stream restoration and tree planting.

- Opportunities to widen channels, slow flow, and daylight streams.
- Participants emphasized evaluating forest health and wildlife (e.g., beavers).
- Lessons from Langdon Park and assisted natural regeneration were raised.
- **Concept Area 3: Residential Drainage Area** - Located near a housing development where all runoff flows into a pond.
 - Potential for parking lot adjustments and biophilic plantings.
 - Emphasis on micro-scale connectivity and enhancing community aesthetics.
- **Reflections & Community Actions**
 - Marvin Gaye Park cited as a successful stream restoration example along Watts Branch.
 - Call for continued collaboration between DC and Prince George's County stakeholders.
 - Participants were encouraged to review the final report, attend upcoming flood workshops, and stay engaged through local cleanup events.

Oxon Run Breakout Room

Facilitators: Larry Trout (Lead)

Notetaker: Erin J./ Leila B.

Discussion Themes & Key Takeaways

- Flood Mitigation & Concept Areas
- The focus area is in the northeast portion of the watershed, outside of the District, but improvements here can provide downstream flood mitigation benefits for DC communities.
- Benefits may not extend as far as National Harbor but could significantly help neighborhoods downstream.
- Three concept areas were proposed—all outside DC—but designed to reduce stormwater discharge and improve outcomes in the District.
- Larger-scale projects like urban green spaces and blue-green streets (rain gardens, bioretention, permeable pavements, underground storage) were emphasized for their effectiveness.

Tree Planting & Vegetation

- Tree planting in Prince George's County is a known strategy, but its flood mitigation benefits depend on location, volume, and integration with other methods like soil decompaction.
- Concerns from community members include:
 - Trees falling on homes.
 - Maintenance responsibility.
 - Lack of community input in tree selection.
- Suggested solutions:
 - Use smaller or medium-height species.
 - Focus planting in public medians and sidewalks, with proper planning.
- Communicate the co-benefits of tree planting, including heat reduction, improved air quality, and aesthetics.

Permeable Pavement

- Mixed opinions from community members:
- Traditional black permeable asphalt is considered unattractive by some.
- Permeable concrete, available in lighter shades, better matches sidewalks and is more acceptable.
- Concerns about texture and aesthetics were voiced, including mismatches with existing sidewalk materials.
- Importance of aligning GI features with community design preferences.

Community Engagement & Education

- Jargon is a barrier. Terms like “stream daylighting” and “storm drain outfall retrofits” are confusing without context.
- Residents need simple, relatable language:
“What is it, why does it matter, how does it help me, who pays for it, and who maintains it?”
- Demonstration projects were strongly supported to help residents visualize benefits.
- Suggestion to use plain-language signage and outreach tools at pilot project sites.

Communication & Notifications

- Social media is useful but not preferred by all; email alerts and community meetings are valued.
- Residents asked for better real-time alerts (e.g., Waze, variable message signs) and ongoing education around projects.
- Highlighted need for accessible, proactive communication strategies that reach older adults and less tech-savvy residents.

Maintenance & Stewardship

- A recurring question: “Who is responsible for building and maintaining this?”
- Long-term sustainability must be considered from the start—projects should not be abandoned post-construction.
- Interest in green jobs programs that empower community-based maintenance and create employment opportunities.
- Residents noted infrequent street sweeping and clogged storm drains as signs of systemic neglect.

Public Health & Environmental Justice

- Climate change-related flooding is already happening—residents don’t feel prepared.
- Poor drainage, urban heat, and environmental stress contribute to public health issues (e.g., asthma, blood pressure, mental health).
- GI solutions must be framed in terms of health benefits, safety, and equity—particularly for historically disinvested communities.
- Community buy-in hinges on whether people feel heard, safe, and able to influence the outcome.

No responses on the Post-Evaluation Workshop Survey