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## Stakeholder Advisory Committee Kick-Off Meeting Memory

### **Overview**

The first meeting of the Clean Rivers Healthy Communities Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) was held on Thursday, January 24, 2008 at the headquarters of the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD). Eleven committee members and fourteen MSD staff and consultants attended the two-hour meeting, which served as the public launch of the Clean Rivers Program. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Acquaint committee members with MSD, its existing sewer conditions (CSOs/SSOs) and its capital improvement efforts (CIRP);
- Explain the Clean Rivers Healthy Communities public engagement program;
- Review the roles and responsibilities of the SAC; and
- Discuss the upcoming SAC meeting schedule.

Jeff Theerman, MSD's Executive Director, opened the meeting by welcoming participants and stating the District's commitment to improve St. Louis' waterways through comprehensive sewer upgrades. He explained that combined sewer overflows (CSOs) represent one of the most pressing environmental issues in the country and that their remediation is among MSD's highest priorities. He noted that both the region's waterways and its sewer infrastructure are shared public resources that can only be protected and enhanced through meaningful partnerships among the District, its ratepayers and the community at-large. The Clean Rivers SAC serves as one such partnership and will engage community experts in business, environmental advocacy, civic action, municipal operations, research and regional planning in the District's deliberations and decision-making.

Mr. Theerman also informed meeting attendees that St. Louis has one of the oldest and largest sewer systems in the country. Its age and size has made addressing the issue of sewer overflows into local waterways a mammoth undertaking. To be successful, MSD will have to upgrade the entire sewer system over multiple decades, which will require a massive commitment of human, physical and financial resources. Such an investment will be a continuation of MSD's overflow reduction efforts. However, the new Clean Rivers program will intensify MSD's infrastructure improvement activities and more meaningfully involve the public in waterway protection.

**SAC Member Introductions**

After Mr. Theerman’s welcome, Clean Rivers’ staff and consultants introduced themselves to SAC members. Members were then instructed to state their organizational affiliations and to share their reasons for joining the SAC. They were also asked to identify their desired outcomes for the Clean Rivers program. Their responses are summarized below.

SAC Member	Reasons for Involvement	Desired Outcomes
Chris King – St. Louis University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental health is his area of professional interest and expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Compliance with federal and state regulations</li> <li>■ Selection of affordable control measures</li> <li>■ Remediation process that is manageable</li> </ul>
Chris Martin – St. Louis Regional Business Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality of life concerns</li> <li>■ Business community’s interest in major infrastructure efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Development of a thorough public engagement process</li> </ul>
Rick Haas – BJC HealthCare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sitting in for Greg Mohler</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No comment</li> </ul>
Marjorie Melton – St. Louis City Board of Public Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Municipalities are major partners in regional infrastructure projects</li> <li>■ Wants to influence program outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Selection of controls that are acceptable to the public and good for the community</li> </ul>
Kathleen Strout – Civic Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ CEOs of the region’s largest corporations are interested in infrastructure improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Upgraded sewer system</li> </ul>
Ruth Meyer – ACORN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Represents the interests of low and moderate income residents / ratepayers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A rate structure that does not unduly burden society’s most vulnerable members</li> </ul>
Lynn Oldham – ACORN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Same as for Ruth Meyer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better understanding of the region’s infrastructure needs, conditions and improvement efforts</li> </ul>
David Wilson – East West Gateway Council of Coordinating Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental planning, particularly around water quality issues, is his professional specialty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Restored urban waterways</li> </ul>
Mary Burrows – StreamTeach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cares about the safe recreational use of local waterways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Safe waterways for people to enjoy recreationally</li> </ul>
Mike Bardot – St. Louis County Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Desire for clean streams and good quality of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reduced degradation of the region’s waterways</li> </ul>

SAC Member	Reasons for Involvement	Desired Outcomes
Donald Jeffries – River Des Peres Water Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ To ensure that the River Des Peres, which is horribly degraded and has been for 100 years, gets cleaned up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Restoration of River Des Peres as a usable / user-friendly urban waterway</li> </ul>

***Clean Rivers’ Technical Program***

After learning about SAC members’ participation interests and desires, Gary Moore, MSD’s Program Manager for Project Planning, gave a 15-minute overview of Clean Rivers’ technical components. Copies of his Power Point presentation were provided to attendees, but presentation highlights included:

- A brief history and description of MSD’s collection system;
- An explanation of the combined sewer system;
- A discussion of combined sewer overflows – their causes, characteristics and water quality consequences;
- An introduction to MSD’s Capital Improvement and Replacement Program and its corresponding Long-Term Control Plan;
- A review of various short-term efforts MSD is currently undertaking to reduce CSOs;
- An exploration of possible long-term activities or best management practices (BMPs) MSD will eventually implement to reduce CSOs; and
- A listing of the decision factors MSD will use in its selection of BMPs.

In response to Mr. Moore’s presentation, SAC members offered both questions and comments. Where appropriate, Clean Rivers’ project staff and consultants provided answers and feedback. The exchanges are summarized below.

Questions

1. Are separate sewer overflow points simply places where stormwater pipes drain into local creeks, streams and rivers?

**Answer:** No. Separate sewer overflows are due to a condition known as inflow and infiltration where stormwater enters portions of the separate sewer system, which is designed to handle wastewater only. This inflow and infiltration of water into the wastewater system can occur through weakened joints that connect sections of sewer pipe and have deteriorated over time. Water can also enter the wastewater system through cracks in the sewer pipe itself that develop with standard usage and age. Additionally, rainwater can enter the wastewater system when downspouts and drains meant to handle stormwater runoff from private property are connected to the wastewater portion of the public sewer system. When too much rainwater enters a wastewater only sewer, the capacity of the system can easily be exceeded and basement backups may occur. In the past, to

help alleviate these and other capacity issues, overflow points were constructed as part of the separate sewer system to act as relief valves during moderate to heavy storms.

2. How will the cost of fixing CSOs impact sewer rates and what role will the Rate Commission play?

**Answer:** MSD is still in the planning phase of its sewer improvement efforts and has not yet developed recommendations for action, so staff does not know the total cost of the program at this time. The costs are expected to be in the billions of dollars, which will be expended over multiple decades. How these costs will be born has not been determined, but potential funding sources could include utility rates, taxes, and state and federal grants/loan programs.

The Rate Commission sets rates based upon the District's anticipated needs in the near future, which covers the three to five year period it is about to enter. The Clean Rivers program has a longer event horizon and will span several decades. As MSD's planning continues, it will identify and schedule specific improvement projects under the program. Those that will need financing from rate increases will be presented to the Rate Commission once they fall within its three to five year window.

#### Comments

- When discussing the costs of remediation, it is important that you also describe for the public the social benefits of having cleaner water.
- More and more municipalities are considering the development of green infrastructures to aid in their stormwater management efforts. MSD should investigate the value of constructed wetlands.
- In older municipalities where many single-family homes are being replaced with multi-family units, the increased density is placing a strain on the existing infrastructure, which is already operating under capacity constraints. In the combined sewer system, MSD should consider requiring underground storage that will contain stormwater runoff in all new developments. This will help to decrease the volume of stormwater in the system.
- To make it easy for the public to understand, the Clean Rivers program should focus on the handling of both stormwater and wastewater. This will help MSD simplify its message.

#### ***Clean Rivers' Public Engagement Program***

The discussion of Clean Rivers' technical elements was followed by a 20-minute presentation from Rebeccah Bennett, one of two public engagement consultants working for the program. Copies of her presentation were also distributed to attendees. Focal points included:

- A review of Clean Rivers' public engagement goal, objectives and guiding philosophy; and
- A detailed description of the program's approach to stakeholder, community and media relations. This approach was explained in terms of the program's target

audiences, desired engagement outcomes, and audience connection tactics / strategies.

During and after Ms. Bennett's presentation, SAC members shared their community engagement insights and ideas, which are captured below.

### Comments

- Many times the public believes that government agencies' outreach efforts are cursory and that important decisions are being made without real consideration of citizens' interests. For MSD's effort to be different, it must ensure meaningful public participation that clearly incorporates the public's input into its decision-making. Otherwise, the District will likely face stiff resistance to the financing and implementation of its sewer improvement projects from a public that has been isolated from the planning process and is unwilling to bear the cost of system upgrades.
- In order to generate heightened community interest in the Clean Rivers program, MSD should explain to the public what it can do to help protect the region's waterways. More importantly, the District must provide people with the supports and incentives that will make positive environmental behavior change easier and more attractive.
- MSD should undertake symbolic action that responds to community needs as a means of attracting the public's attention and building trust in its stewardship. An example of such action could include the cleaning of storm/sewer drains in underserved neighborhoods.
- It is important for MSD to partner with the International Institute to involve the immigrant community in its activities.

### ***SAC Outreach Assistance***

SAC members were invited to continue their civic involvement discussion with Jessica Perkins, the other Clean Rivers' public engagement consultant. She asked members to provide a list of other individuals or organizations that should be included in the engagement process. SAC members responded with the following possible additions:

For SAC membership:

- Great Rivers Greenway District;
- Federation of Block Captains – Norman Seay;
- SLACO;
- Grace Hill;
- St. Louis Community College or University of MO – St. Louis;
- Stream Team; and
- TrailNet.

For outreach and engagement:

- International Institute;
- Religious or faith-based institutions; and

- Public schools.

***Next Steps***

The next SAC meeting will be held on Thursday, April 24, 2008 from 1:00 pm until 3:30 pm. Members will be taken on a guided tour of MSD's combined sewer system where they will see several outfalls that may discharge into local waterways during moderate to heavy rain events. This will enable them to experience the sewer overflow issue within its actual environmental and social context. Members should dress comfortably for this trip, wearing clothes that they will not mind getting soiled and shoes that provide some traction. More details will be provided closer to the meeting date.

## **Appendix – SAC Kick-Off Meeting Attendees**

### ***SAC Members***

- Chris King
- Chris Martin
- Rick Haas (representing Greg Mohler)
- Marjorie Melton
- Kathleen Strout
- Ruth Meyer
- Lynn Oldham
- David Wilson
- Mary Burrows
- Mike Bardot
- Donald Jeffries

### ***Clean Rivers Project Team Members***

- Jon Bergenthal
- Rebeccah Bennett
- Jim Derby
- Jim Gilliam
- Randy Hayman
- Brian Hoelscher
- Debbie Johnson
- Lance LeComb
- John Lodderhose
- Gary Moore
- Jessica Perkins
- Jon Sprague
- Jeff Theerman
- Rich Unverferth