



HAMILTON COUNTY
**First
Suburbs
Consortium**

Membership Meeting

March 13, 2013
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Blue Ash Fire Department North Station
10647 Kenwood Road
Blue Ash

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and introductions
 - a. New Officers
 - b. Openings on Executive Committee
 - c. Our program this evening
2. Treasurer update
3. Proposal for a Middle Mill Creek Watershed Action Plan
4. State legislative discussion with Ohio Senator Bill Seitz
5. State of the County discussion with Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune
6. Other Business
7. Adjourn

Attending

1. Chris Anderson, Forest Park
2. John Smith, Silverton
3. Dan Pillow, Addyston
4. Gerri Harbison, Montgomery
5. Kelly Harrington, Blue Ash
6. Mark Weber, Blue Ash
7. Tom Moeller, Madeira
8. Alan Zaffiro, Golf Manor
9. Jim O'Reilly, Wyoming
10. Natalie Wolf, Amberley Village
11. Steve Husemann, Silverton
12. Mark Quarry, Silverton
13. Amy Richter, Cheviot
14. Idella Thompson, Silverton
15. Kelly Harrington, Blue Ash

Andy Dobson, RPC
Jen Eismeier, Mill Creek Watershed Council of Communities
Bruce Koehler, OKI/Mill Creek Yacht Club

Todd Portune, Hamilton County Commissioner
Bill Seitz, Ohio State Senator

I. Welcome and Introductions

- Mark Weber opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance, general remarks about FSC and the organization, introducing executive committee, overview of the program we have this evening
- new Executive Committee officers
 - Mark Weber, Chair
 - John Smith, Vice-Chair
 - Jim O'Reilly, Treasurer (Jim has stated he would like to step down as Treasurer, and the Executive Committee would like to hear from anyone who is interested in this position)
- openings on executive committee
 - several years back we expanded the Executive Committee to seven members in order to bring in additional representation from across our communities
 - currently one opening, has been available for over a year now

2. Treasurer Update

- \$1,599 approximately available in cash
- \$15,000 CD at 5/3 Bank
- checks in from 12 communities

3. Middle Mill Creek Watershed Action Plan

presentation by Jen Eismeier, Executive Director Mill Creek Watershed Council of Communities

- Introduced Bruce Koehler, Chair of Mill Creek Watershed Council, and distributed short survey to everyone, very interested in feedback from members
- Presentation of history and geography of Mill Creek,
 - integral to settlement of area
 - once river valley was dense forest, filled with wildlife, and prime for development/settlement
 - speculation/settlement/development really took off with canal coming through
 - very good power source, and sewer for waste materials, at its worst wasn't even really water any longer because pollution levels were so high
- Clean Water Act (1973) greatly reduced point source pollution (Ivorydale and similar places), non-point source pollution, habitat destruction, etc. cause water quality problems today
- Water quality and habitat along the Mill Creek *is improving a lot*, projects/programs are continuing to make a difference
 - different species coming back: fish, insects, birds, other wildlife

- even in channelized areas, stream is healing itself depositing sand banks, creating habitats, etc.
- below Western Hills Viaduct the pollution in creek bed is so bad that Army Corps of Engineers ended channelization, river channel remained in a natural, wooded state
- Headwaters are in Liberty Township (Butler County)
 - northern stretches include a lot of agricultural uses along the corridor
 - The Mill Creek is often hard to see, hard to get to, and lots of times people don't know the river is there even if they are nearly on top of it
 - character of river changes dramatically: some areas are completely hardscaped, others are nearly untouched
 - Creek is a "ribbon of green" running through communities, with wildlife habitat and water amenities—an untapped resource
- Farther south, the creek reaches urbanized areas, more hardscape, more utility and sewer encroachment, pollution problems
 - Lots of development, active uses, and abandoned or vacant property strung along the waterway—tells a story, gives a view to the history of development in this region
 - urban environment actually enhances the appearance and sense of place of the stream—the "Concrete Rainbow" bridge in Reading, and other features visible only from the creek
- Recreation: even with history of pollution, people are naturally drawn to the creek and make use of it
 - people fish there, wade around, paddle, enjoy outdoors
 - much more is possible

Mill Creek Watershed Council of Communities: mission to make the communities within the watershed a better place to live, work, and play

- 5 initiatives
 - building consensus among 37 jurisdictions that share this resource (22 of these communities are also First Suburbs members)
 - project implementation and tracking water quality improvement, along with lots of other organizations, floodplain restoration (Twin Creek Preserve)
 - opportunity to know your stream through education, restoration activities, recreation, Mill Creek Yacht Club, ReCreation Celebration, and lots of other events
 - scientific research, water quality monitoring, baseline data establishment to track changes
 - and...
- **Watershed Action Planning**
 - ODNR program to plan for and provide communities the resources needed for water quality improvement

- Holistic approach to the problem: what do communities want out of water quality improvement? out of their unique water resources? What do we want out of the Mill Creek?
- Master-planning for investment in urban rivers, and tying into community redevelopment, economic development, quality-of-life improvements
- Mill Creek watershed is divided into upper, lower, and middle
- Watershed Action Plan completed for upper Mill Creek, one is underway for lower Mill Creek, middle is where we need to work now
- First Suburbs Consortium and the Mill Creek
 - neighborhood connections
 - alternative bike/pedestrian transportation routes along Mill Creek Trail system
 - recreation opportunities
 - improving/fixing hydrology (physical aspects of the creek and surroundings, floodplains, meanders, etc.)
 - quality of life improvements
 - economic benefits from increasing property values, reduced flooding
 - competitive advantage to attracting business, population, investment
 - most FSC communities have the Mill Creek in common—even if it is not apparent
- Water quality considerations are the core of a watershed action plan, and it is necessary to bring quality up to get investment in other projects and activities like paddling, parks, trails, habitat restoration, etc.
- Many examples across the country demonstrate how investment in water resources pay off many times over in the long run

Questions and Comments

Chris Anderson: has seen people fishing in communities along MC corridor, people who live near the creek do use it

Steve Husemann: how does this tie in with MSD projects to deal with CSO's, consent decree, etc. MSD is really doing a lot to improve the situation but it takes a long time

Surveys, dot-priority exercise, Jen will collect all this and report back to FSC

4. Senator Bill Seitz

Sen. Seitz discussed various state legislative updates.

- Senate took truck weight limits out of transportation bill
- Governor's proposed budget does not further reduce Local Government Fund, but doesn't restore it either
 - Sen. Seitz will pursue recalibrating the formula for allocating what is left of the LGF

- Municipalities will get a larger share, counties will get less, his reasoning being that Counties never received estate tax revenue and were not impacted by its repeal as municipalities were
- will also deal with casino and "racino" revenue
- Statewide, lower than expected casino revenue, which does not come as a surprise

House Bill 5

- municipal income tax issues are 100% in the House, Senate hasn't seen or introduced a bill, or even begun discussions of this issue
 - when and if it ever gets to Senate, Seitz wants to "smooth the edges", make any changes a gradual transition
 - Emphatic that there is not a plan for centralized collection of municipal income taxes

Medicaid Expansion under Obamacare

- very leery of federal promises to fund expansion,
- everybody wants it, except state legislature because of funding concerns will Congress really make good on continued funding of programs? will states be able to back out of deal if it goes badly?

Other Kasich administration tax proposals

- reduce sales tax, small business tax, income tax rates,
- to pay for all this: increase severance tax on oil and gas companies (good idea)
- expanding the number of goods and services subject to sales tax (bad idea)
 - loads of goods and services that have never been subject to sales tax would be included
- people riled up over this, most of these non-sales tax services are portable and would put every Ohio provider at a competitive disadvantage
 - providers would simply relocate—Cincinnati would see businesses disappear across the river into Northern Kentucky
 - would cost P&G hundreds of millions every year (to look at just one company)
- going to be a lot of pressure to deal with sales tax proposal, question as to whether Kasich administration thoroughly considered the ramifications

5. Commissioner Todd Portune

(moved ahead of Sen. Seitz)

- not really doing a "state of the county"
- very glad to have Jen Eismeier working with the Mill Creek Council
- has been on Mill Creek paddle trips, newscast anchors of event were astonished that video was taken on the Mill Creek because the natural beauty made it appear to be a rural area

Issues the County is Facing

- local governments are charged with getting things done, have to work together

- new BoC legislative agenda is unanimously supported—Commissioners working together
- reporting on new United Way study has several promising trends to report in our area:
 - housing, education, total job counts, other statistics related to economic activity
 - negative indicators: net migration, early childhood readiness, infant mortality rate (bellwether indicator of general public health), and general financial difficulties
- cuts and reductions to County personnel and budgets have been dramatic, but have been able to maintain acceptable levels of services
 - 1,700 FTE's reduced in last four years
- Priority Policies for 2013
 - maintain strong financial management
 - adopt responsible tax policies
 - maintain physical infrastructure County is responsible for
 - eliminate barriers to economic development
- Tax Levy Review Committee
 - will be looking at the whole system we have now, if it makes sense, and if there are some potential economies of scale possible by combining levies
 - can services be provided more efficiently through combining funding and encouraging collaboration among providers
- Shared Services: continued work with Center for Local Government to follow on summit work last year
- MSD work plan: massive costs coming our way that we have to try and manage so ratepayers are protected from huge rate increases
- maximize the benefits from infrastructure investments

6. Other Business

- No one had additional business to discuss, and the meeting adjourned.