Welcome and Introductions:

Chuck Harrison opened the meeting and called the meeting to order. He asked the committee whether there were any comments or revisions to the April 9th meeting minutes. There were no comments so the minutes were accepted.

Review of Process

David Yamashita reminded people about the meeting schedule. There will be an open house on May 21st at Whitaker Ponds. The purpose of the open house is to present information about the existing conditions of Whitaker Ponds and present ideas/options for the environmental center. The second public meeting, scheduled for July 9th, will present ideas on the other major issues.

There also was a question whether the committee wanted to reschedule the PSC meeting on 31 May. There were no objections so the meeting date will stand. Susan Barthel referred to past discussions regarding the desired ecological condition of the site and asked when this topic would be discussed in detail. David responded that it is on a future agenda and that Mark Wilson will be advising. Susan passed out historical photos of the site.

Relationship of Whitaker Ponds to the Broader Community

As requested at the first meeting, David brought and reviewed a map of northeast Portland that provided a larger context for Whitaker Ponds and illustrated the following points:

- With the exception of a few homes, most residential sites are south of Columbia Blvd.
- Fernhill Park – 24 acres. Very close to Whitaker Ponds with playground equipment, restroom, tennis courts, ball fields, and track.
- Sacajawea Park is about 1.5 acres, has an off-leash area in this park, but has no other amenities.
- Cully property – this landfill site is located about 1 mile from Whitaker Ponds. David is researching the status of the landfill and when park construction could begin. There is no conclusion yet, but initial research looks promising.
- Alberta Park – over 16 acres. Another developed park located over a mile from Whitaker.
Kerry Hampton made the point (and others agreed) that Fernhill is a developed park with amenities for active recreation that is very close to Whitaker Ponds and more conveniently located near residential areas. Therefore, Whitaker can be more specialized site. David responded that Whitaker has always been identified as a habitat park. What is unique among natural area sites in the city is the environmental center. Susan Barthel mentioned that there are conditions of purchase from the Greenspaces Bond Measure.

Kerry Hampton asked what can be carried over from prior recommendations. David responded that the previous master plan left a lot of unanswered questions about the environmental center. It recommended an environmental education center but does not define its size, scope, or use. The Master Plan update builds upon the basic premise that Whitaker Ponds is a nature park. Unless the committee believes otherwise, that premise is not being revisited.

Erwin Bergman commented that “low-density” recreational use should not be excluded. He defined this as being accessible to neighbors who want to walk trails, sit on benches, picnic, etc. David and Mike noted these uses are compatible with a nature park.

Mike Houck referenced the Parks 2020 Vision Plan and wanted to ensure that Whitaker Ponds responded to the park deficiencies identified in that plan. David noted that the scoping document that committee members received includes references to that plan.

Environmental Center

The bulk of the meeting was spent on discussing how to address the previous Master Plan’s recommendation for an environmental center at the site. As a starting point, he reviewed some points to consider: (1) the Environmental Education Center is recommended in the old master plan but there is no specific direction beyond that point; and (2) since that time, PP&R has acquired the Bunn property, which opens up more options for a facility.

Size and Scope of an Environmental Center

David described a concept sketch he had prepared of an ideal teaching facility, based on a tour of East Bay Regional Park District facilities. It includes office space, three classrooms, a multi-purpose room, greenhouses, propagation area, outdoor shelter, courtyard, covered deck, lawn area and parking.

To assist in the discussion, David developed a set of concept diagrams that illustrate a variety of options:

A. Keep as it is today – office and classroom.
B. Same size but in a new structure
C. Slight expansion to a larger classroom and an outdoor teaching space.
D. Moderate expansion to include everything in “C” plus a multi-purpose room.
E. Larger expansion to include “D” plus a second classroom and a courtyard.
F. Larger expansion with a nursery and propagation area.

A comment was made that a nursery/propagation area is an allowed use of the environmental zoning since the plants will be native and replanted on site. Some questions focused on the classroom elements of the center. David described some examples of some facilities that he’d seen are designed. At some centers, the facility staff teaches classes as opposed to having the visiting classroom teacher run the class. One benefit is that the classroom’s equipment does not have to be stored because the rooms are specialized and furnished for environmental education.
Demand for an environmental center

Some committee members asked for more information on the current use and the demand for an environmental center before they could envision a facility or discuss its design. Other committee members offered their perspectives and responses to the question. Main points in the discussion are as follows:

- BES currently funds two environmental educators for Whitaker Ponds.
- CSWC serves about 4,200 students a year.
- PPR does little, leaving most of the programming up to BES & CSWC.
- existing EE Centers in Portland region are all on the westside – Audubon, Tualatin Nature Park, Tryon Creek, and Jackson Bottom, all of which are not convenient for outer east Portland schools.
- Smith & Bybee Lakes – Metro has not pursued the proposal to put an EE center there.
- space should be designed to be flexible.
- need to define who will be served in order to determine how much FTE is needed to operate and where those funds will come from. Concern about declining enrollment in Portland Public Schools. How will this affect the demand for EE?
- everyone seemed to agree that there needs to be a feasibility study and that the decision on size and scope needs to be based on more information.

Chuck Sams shared his experience of building two EE Centers on the east coast. One was 2,500 SF and is still functioning well. The other was 7,500 SF and it is trying to sublet space. He noted also that he had attended meeting with Charles Jordan (previous PPR Directory) where CJ stated that there is a need in Portland for EE centers to serve both kids and adults.

Operation of the Environmental Center

The question of who would build and operate the facility was discussed. Main points in this discussion are as follows:

- PPR would not operate the facility, but could be involved in funding for capital improvements and some maintenance.
- CSWC wants to continue to have an office at Whitaker Ponds and can contribute to operation of the facility. They have four staff now and may go up to six.

Funding

The issue of how the center might be built and who/how it would be maintained also generated considerable discussion. Main points are of the discussion are as follows:

- the “easy” part is getting the center built. Funding O&M is more difficult and will have to be studied in more detail. According to Chuck, CSWC will have some involvement but it’s unclear what this will be.
- Susan can not see any expansion of BES’s involvement with current budget cuts.
- there needs to be an endowment fund set up that will contribute to the operations and maintenance of the facility.
- Chuck noted that an operating organization can do 70-80% and the agency 20-30%. There needs to be an endowment for the 20-30%. CSWC can manage the fund. Now, CSWC pays the utilities and Parks/BES pays maintenance.
- Chuck estimated that for a $3 million facility, it will need $180,000 to $240,000 a year to operate (3 FTE), which he thinks this is doable.
The size and scope of the building also were discussed, with the main points described below.

- Build it so it can be expanded.
- Consider the capacity of the entire site. The whole site is the classroom, so don't limit thinking to just the building.
- One idea is to model it after the French-American School where there is a core facility with portable classrooms.
- Need for community mtg. room – the neighborhood association uses various churches. There are occasions where it would be nice to hold a meeting for up to 50 people.
- Ease of use was discussed. The Hayward Environmental Education Center in San Francisco facility has microscopes along windows that look out onto the bay. The microscopes remain on the desks. The center uses all available space for education, i.e., murals on the walls, etc.

**Phasing**

The committee discussed phasing and specifically, what is presented at the open house. The committee concluded that for now, they can support a slight expansion in size over the existing facility as a first phase but should plan for a larger facility if the need arises and the site can support it. The “C” diagram was considered to be the first phase.

**Proposed Direction**

Mike Houck proposed that: (a) the Committee support some sort of EE Center that is a modest expansion on what currently exists and then do more research to determine future need; (b) the center should be designed so that is can accommodate expansion if demand exists; and (c) the existing center is inadequate, so the option of keeping the center “as is” is not an option.

Further suggestions from the committee were to consider the entire site as a classroom and that different environments can be created around the lakes to explore. Chuck Sams noted that the area was a traditional trading location for the Chinook Tribe and should thus be a place of safety and community.

The meeting concluded at 5:35 PM.
POST MEETING SUMMARY OF MEETING – MAJOR POINTS

- Ensure that "low-density" recreational uses can be accommodated for neighbors who want to walk trails, sit on benches, picnic, etc.

- An environmental center should be developed. The first phase should be a modest expansion on what currently exists and then do more research to determine future need; (b) the center should be designed so that is can accommodate expansion if demand exists; and (c) the existing center is inadequate, so the option of keeping the center “as is” is not an option.

- A feasibility study must be prepared as the first step in any improvement plan for the environmental center. The study should address: (a) need and demand, (b) funding sources for both construction and operations, (c) potential partners, and (d) other topics that can inform the size, scope, operations, and funding of the center.
  - PPR would not operate the facility, but could be involved in funding for capital improvements and some maintenance.
  - CSWC will have some involvement but it's unclear what this will be. It wants to continue to have an office at Whitaker Ponds and can contribute to operation of the facility.

- Build the center so it can be expanded.

- Consider the capacity of the entire site -- the whole park is a classroom. Different environments can be created around the lakes to explore.