

## Gilleland Creek Implementation Plan Revision Facilitator's Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

### Introduction

This summary is intended to provide insight into expectations, issues, interests and concerns of stakeholders who may be involved in the Gilleland Creek Implementation Plan (I-Plan) revision process, with the hope that the insights gained from such understanding can improve the chances for success in this stakeholder effort. This summary was developed by Suzanne Schwartz, Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution (facilitator for the I-Plan revision effort) following interviews with 10 people who were involved in the Gilleland Creek I-Plan initial development and/or who may be involved in the I-Plan revision.

### Expectations

Stakeholders who were interviewed generally were happy that the I-Plan revision process was being initiated and optimistic about its success. They expressed hope that the effort could stabilize and improve water quality in the watershed. Many looked forward to the opportunity for entities to improve collaboration and better align their efforts, while still maintaining their ability to tailor management measures to their jurisdictions' needs.

### Substantive Issues/Interests

For the plan to be credible, those who will implement it and be impacted by it must believe the substantive issues important to them are considered and balanced in the deliberation of the group. Those interviewed identified the following as important to them:

- Clearly define the watershed for the purposes of the Implementation Plan. The jurisdictional boundaries related to the I-Plan and TMDL should be clarified and possibly aligned, including considering whether there are areas in the I-Plan's boundaries that may not impact water quality.
- Maintain flexibility for targeting management measures and BMPs to specific areas and entities. Many people interviewed discussed the importance of recognizing the differences among implementing entities, including political differences and site-specific differences that would impact which management measures might be useful in a particular area. Participants noted that one size does not fit all in this situation, and that one entity's management practices should not be forced on others. Many expressed a desire for the flexibility to customize management measures to different areas and different entities, so they can be sold politically, meet on-the-ground realities, and be funded. This will allow each entity responsible for a management measure to "own" that measure.

- Changing nature of the watershed.  
A theme echoed by many is that the watershed and entities in it have changed since adoption of the current I-Plan and will continue to change. Municipalities have grown and evolved since the current I-Plan: the watershed is urbanizing although it still maintains strong areas of more rural/agricultural nature. These changes warrant a reexamination and review of water quality issues from a new perspective.
- Communication with the public.  
A recurring comment by several persons interviewed was the need to include more education and outreach to landowners, both in development of the I-Plan revisions and in implementing its measures. The public needs to understand the issues impacting water quality in the watershed.
- Consider how management measures will be funded.  
A focus on including management measures that can be funded will make the plan more successful. This will vary by jurisdiction and political will. Explore the availability of grant funding to implement management measures.

### **Process Insights, Opportunities and Concerns**

How a collaborative effort is designed and conducted can greatly impact whether participants are able to honestly share information and concerns, work together to craft a solution they all can live with, and build support with their constituencies in implementing the plan. Several interviews identified issues related with how the process to revise the Gilleland Creek I-Plan is structured.

- Need to bring in representatives of a greater diversity of interests. These could include the following interests.
  - Smaller landowners
  - Large landowners
  - Agricultural interests
  - More public representatives
  - NGOs
  - Federal agencies
  - MS4 permittees: new small MS4s provide an opportunity not there at first I-Plan development
- Don't throw out what has already been done, but look at what has worked, not worked.
  - Share knowledge of what works among different entities.
  - Incorporate realistic measures shown to help reduce bacterial levels.
  - Look to plans like Improving Austin Streams, other Austin tools that are good and can streamline Gilleland Creek work.
  - Optimize existing strategies.

- Find ways to keep interest going for long-term implementation, and to build energy and commitment to take steps that will actually improve water quality.

Those interviewed noted the following two factors that could impact implementation of the plan:

- Many participants in the first I-Plan development lost interest because of length of time TMDL/plan development took; participants expected a shorter timeframe.
- The current I-plan is not robust in terms of causes of pollution and impacts of management measures. We need hard science to show causation and benefit of proposed management measures in order to sell proposed management measures to elected officials.

### **Concerns/Challenges**

Various concerns and challenges were noted by those interviewed (some reflected in discussions above), including the following.

- How to work together in areas where jurisdictions intersect, meshing codes of various jurisdictions
- How to implement management measures in built-out watersheds
- Limited ability to take action on OSSF
- Costs and burdens on growing cities of implementing MS4 and other water quality related actions

### **Information needs and concerns**

Participants were interested in making sure they had information to understand the water quality issues related to Gilleland Creek and to make decisions on appropriate methods to address the bacterial contamination. Specifically, they noted the following informational needs.

- Understanding the current I-Plan
- Information on Gilleland Creek water quality and impact of I-Plan
  - If/how the current I-Plan is impacting water quality
  - Specifically, what's working, what's not, what don't we know, who is doing what?
  - Why do some segments show increased levels of bacteria?
  - Understand sources of impairment by jurisdictional boundaries
  - GIS interface to incorporate what's been done at different locations with water quality data to see what has worked
  - Reliability of volunteer sampling
  - More data collection and scrutiny of existing data in various stream conditions to understand what's going on
  - City of Austin water quality data on Gilleland Creek and tributaries
- Changes in development and regulation since I-Plan was implemented

- Changes anticipated in the near future (such as changes in water treatment plant discharges, subdivision regulations, etc.)
- Funding sources available for projects
- Review of UT Austin professor Michael Barrett study on impacts of flood control ponds on bacteria compared to other management measures
- Best Management Practices
  - Review other I-Plans, research on best management practices to better understand what works.
  - Review and understand Austin I-Plan strategies.
- What, if any, impacts are OSSF having on bacterial levels in creek.
- Add more sample points – especially in urban areas – to understand differences within a segment, thus helping identify sources of contamination.