

River Ecology and Governance Task Force

09/12/23 | 3 pm to 4:30 pm

MEETING MINUTES

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began at 3 pm with participants introducing themselves in the chat. Approximately 37 members of the Task Force attended the meeting.

Task Force Goals and Objectives

The group began with a refresher on the Task Force objectives and the broader role of the Task Force. The Task Force is focused on transforming the waterway system into a thriving and ecologically integrated natural asset through coordinated planning, investment, and management. Ultimately, the goal is to have an inviting, productive, and living waterway system that contributes to the city's resiliency. The Task Force allows for coordination across multiple types of partners to achieve common goals, creates space for dialogue on ongoing issues and challenges impacting the river system, and provides a place to share successes in advancing progress.

Short-Term Goals Revision Recommendations

The Task Force reviewed the goal recommendations that were shared at the last meeting:

- Keep existing goal #2: *Review current policies and create recommendations to strengthen them and update the goal with new policies.*
- Keep existing goal #3: *Inform near-term planning opportunities to advance collective priorities and update the opportunities.*
- Keep the existing goal #4: *Develop criteria to prioritize projects for identified funding opportunities and better understand how the Task Force would approach and strategize around the goal.*

Small Group Discussion and Jamboard Activity

Additional input was needed from Task Force members to further refine goals #2 and #4. The Task Force was divided into four groups to participate in a Google Jamboard activity and small group discussion. For goal #2, each small group responded to the same question and put their ideas on the Jamboard. The question was "For which policies should the Task Force review and develop joint recommendations?" For goal #4, the group was asked to discuss the following questions:

- What sources of funds are available?
- How can we organize/how are we organizing around funding opportunities?
- What scale of project are we/should we be focusing on?

Facilitators in each of the breakout rooms documented the conversation. The summary of key takeaways will be shared as a follow-up to the meeting and will be discussed in the December quarterly meeting. Some of the key takeaways from the discussion included the following:

- The Task Force should explore a role in cataloguing the different types of funding opportunities that are available and providing that information to members.
- It may be helpful to create a better understanding of how government partners prioritize projects and what they fund. That includes whether they use certain criteria or metrics to identify projects or if it is related to project readiness.
- This goal could include a better understanding of the types of projects members are currently working on that are being funded by specific sources as well as their overall project trajectories and next steps.

This can help identify ways that others may be able to coordinate or become involved – especially for funding sources that are more narrowly focused.

Our Great Rivers Progress

At each of the quarterly meetings in 2023, the Task Force will be reviewing progress on the [Our Great Rivers](#) Vision. Our Great Rivers was released in 2016 and was a vision developed through a community-focused process that articulated 26 goals to create a Chicago River system that is inviting, productive, and living. This meeting focused on two goals, one from the Inviting category and one from the Living category. They are: Real-Time Water Quality Information and Coordinate Prevention of Water Pollution. Task Force members presented information providing background on policies and practices related to improving water quality and preventing discharges into the Chicago waterway system, along with an update on a project that is specifically focused on providing real-time water quality information. This included presentations from Friends of the Chicago River, Andrew Billing (Lead Stormwater Reviewer, Dept. of Buildings), and Current.

Background Information and Project Updates

Friends of the Chicago River discussed the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. This program regulates point sources that discharge pollutants into U.S. waterways. Friends has led ongoing advocacy efforts to update the permit for the City of Chicago. It is currently under review at the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Information about the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago's Water Management Ordinance (WMO) was also provided. The WMO is currently up for a broad review.

Andrew Billing, Lead Stormwater Reviewer with the Department of Buildings presented information on how stormwater permit reviews are conducted in Chicago for new projects. The goals of the Chicago Stormwater Ordinance were discussed along with its applicability and an understanding of how rate and volume control are defined.

Current provided an update on their H2NOW project that focuses on providing real-time water quality information to the public. Their new site along the Calumet River recently launched and they have a new field site at The 78 development. They also discussed their educational programs for students and their Blue EDU curriculum. Since 2020, Current has greatly expanded moving from one testing probe to multiple testing probes, partner facilities, and Lake Michigan Water entry points.

Questions / Remarks from Task Force in response to presentations:

- A member of the Task Force wanted additional information about the advisory group that would be formed by the City of Chicago following the issuance of the NPDES permit. The timing is 60 days after the permit is issued.
- A member of the Task Force shared about New York City's award-winning incentive program that funded decentralized water reuse for an 11-acre site to reduce combined sewer overflows. There was a question posed whether Chicago could create a similar program. This question would need to be directed to the Dept. of Water Management and was marked for follow-up.

Updates: Government Partners

MPC provided updates on projects being led by government partners. These updates are included as part of the overall slide deck for the meeting. Additionally, dedicated time was provided to discuss the release of the Chicago Waterways Restoration Framework Plan, which was published in early August. The Task Force provided significant input into this plan through working sessions and helped identify the opportunity sites that were included. The plan is significant because it recognizes the role of the Task Force, documents and

compiles future project concepts, clarifies the role of agencies in advancing the work, and outlines next steps to advance future phases of improvements.

The US Army Corps of Engineers shared that there is an earmark in the senate bill to fund a comprehensive study as a next step, with the hope that if there is an appropriations bill then they can move forward.

Updates: Working Groups

The System Plans Working Group met in July and discussed the North Branch zone of the Chicago River.

Throughout 2023, the Working Group is meeting to compile river segment specific opportunities, constraints, and issues as well as resources and information that can be used to develop additional resources to accompany the current Design Guidelines.

There were no Development Review Working Group meetings hosted from June to September. MPC and Friends of the Chicago River worked together to prepare a draft of expectations and requirements to provide to developer teams in advance of a Development Review Working Group meeting. These materials provide an overview of the Task Force, and the development review working group, the organizations that participate in the development review working group, the meeting structure and process as well as presentation and response expectations. The draft materials will be shared out as part of the follow-up to this meeting along with information on how to provide feedback.

Adjourn

Upcoming dates for 2023 Task Force and working group meetings were provided to members:

- Development Review Working Group: October 3, 6 pm – 7:30 pm
- System Plans Working Group: October 18, 12 pm to 1 pm
- Task Force Meeting: December 5, 3 pm – 4:30pm

The meeting concluded at 4:30pm.