



## White River Vision Plan Transition Team | Meeting 3 Notes

---

Videoconference

Friday May 22 9-10:30am

### Attendance

#### *Team Members*

Matt Cohoat, Co-Chair  
Sam Odle, Co-Chair  
Betsy McCaw  
Brian Payne  
Aaron Smith  
Julie Thompson  
Amy Warner

#### *Panelists*

Linda Broadfoot  
Norman Burns  
Ginger Davis  
Andre Denman  
Julee Jacob  
Carolene Mays-Medley  
Sarah Reed  
Michael Strohl

#### *Staff*

Brad Beaubien  
Sarah Buckner  
Matt Carter  
Carmen Lethig  
Emily Mack  
Andrea Miller  
Brenda Myers

### Q&A:

**BETSY McCAW Q:** LOTS OF THEMES FROM YOUR NOTES, ONE WAS AROUND PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION AND SENSE OF PRIDE AROUND THE RIVER. OF COMMUNITIES YOU'VE LOOKED AT ELSEWHERE, WHICH HAVE DONE THIS REALLY WELL?

**Andre:** Portland, the Metro, has a good governance that works well: what's good for everyone and not just one. They have had decades to work on this.

**BRAD Q:** WHERE ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES TO ADD NEW MONEY TO THE COLLECTIVE POT SO THAT EVERYONE BENEFITS?

**Norman:** Larger grants. Conner Prairie is capable of grants for ourselves, but not for a regional model. We wouldn't be in a competition.

**Andre:** Gov's next level trails grant, connectivity is a priority.

**BRENDA Q:** A NUMBER OF YOU MENTIONED A WORRY OF DUPLICATIONS OF EFFORTS, CAN WE SORT THIS OUT, SORT OUT THE HIERARCHY. HOW DOES THIS HELP OR HURT?

**Mike S:** Bureaucracy, streamline regulations. Appropriate people at the table.

**Sarah Reed:** *It is often confusing on who has jurisdiction where. The decision makers can be brought together....almost a one stop shop to have questions answered. Ang organization chart for who does what...helpful to all types of stakeholders from public to landowners. We need to all be in this together, water doesn't stop flowing once it leaves Hamilton County. Helpful to have one point-person as the champion.*

**Norman:** *This can't be political or bureaucratic....what we come up with has to be representative of the entire White River, not individual jurisdictions.*

**BRAD Q: HOW TO ENSURE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY BUT ALSO BALANCE WITH EXPERTS. HOW DO WE DO THAT? REGION VS INDIVIDUAL JURISDICTION?**

**Sarah:** *Elected officials steering committee, the more holistic approach, the better. But leader can't be affiliated with single jurisdiction.*

**Mike S:** *Consensus in decision making process, create structure with decision making hierarchy that involves everyone – that could be effective. Can't just be political officials or just private interests.*

**BETSY MC Q: DESCRIBE THE WAY CITIZENS IS SET UP? CHARITABLE TRUST.**

**Mike S:** *132 years of operations. Five member board of trustees that is self-perpetuating. It's job is to fill its own vacancies and appoint 9-member board of directors. Must be residents of Marion County and obligation is to provide benefit to residents of Marion County through utility services and charitable giving. Function as a quasi-organization...operate as a municipality in some sense (borrow money on tax exempt markets, don't pay federal taxes) but as private in others (not influenced by politics, no mayor has control, make independent investment decisions). Has been very stable over time and able to withstand attempts at political influence.*

**Norman:** *Conner Prairie is also charitable trust. Foundation board of seven ("Team owner"), museum board ("General manager").*

**Brenda:** *Hamilton County Tourism, Visit Indy, and Capital Improvement Board use similar distinctions between governing body and operating entity.*

**BETSY Q: HOW HAS CITIZENS WITHSTOOD THOSE WANTING CONTROL, MULTIPLE ADMINISTRATIONS?**

**Mike S:** *Must have close relationships with whoever is in power. Through the residents of Marion County who have said "We like this because it is not a political entity" and not beholden to shareholders with a short-term view. Indianapolis Water Company is a good example...clear underinvestment in the infrastructure because of political environment.*

**SAM Q: PARKS ARE INFLUENCED BY, ADJACENT TO THE RIVER. DO YOU CONSIDER THE RIVER A PART OF THE PARK AND THE PARK'S MISSION?**

**Linda:** Short answer, yes. Spurred on in part by the WRVP. We have become a lot more strategic on how to reengage with that space. Parks had turned away from the river...newer master plans are turning back to the river.

**Brenda:** Agree on engagement but am also interested in the environment. Bank management, invasive.

**Ginger:** they are working to engage river with their property. What is causing invasive spread. Each individual park is looking at their property but we need to broaden this out to what is influencing the river, what is upstream. That is how we can engage everyone beyond who is just on the river.

**Linda:** Types of development that makes sense around the River – mindful of development patterns in different parts of the river. Downtown is different than suburban, how we connect is different.

**BRENDA Q: THAT BALANCE OF DOWNTOWN VS RURAL VS SUBURBAN IS VITAL. WOULD A GOVERNANCE ENTITY BE A CHALLENGE IN STRIKING THAT BALANCE?**

**Linda:** Pluses and minuses. We have grandiose plans for around the river and the thought of another entity to go to is difficult...difficult enough already. Flip side, I have used the WRVP to go to for reference and a guide.

**Sarah:** Noblesville is using the WRVP as the launching point for parks, engineering, rural planning. Where can infill development go? Where does flood plain/compensatory storage go? As long as we are all being inclusive, I see it as a team collab on getting something done, not a roadblock. White River is the fifth pillar in Noblesville.

**Mike S:** You can't do this without a regional governance entity, but to me what is most important on who is on the governance team. Right now lots of different types of people in agreement about how much river is an asset. If an inclusive group with a clear decision-making hierarchy, it can be effective.

**BRAD: RECOGNIZING ALL BOUNDARIES ARE ARBITRARY, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT A NEW REGIONAL-LEVEL ENTITY OWNING AND OPERATING PARKS? SOMETHING BETWEEN A LOCAL PARK SYSTEM AND A STATE PARK SYSTEM.**

**Linda:** Inability to do this is one reason we are the one of the most poorly funded urban parks departments in the country. The added tax layer opportunities would clearly be beneficial, but you would have to add another layer of governance.

**BETSY MC Q: IF WE ADD A LAYER, IS THERE A LAYER WE COULD REMOVE? IF SO, WHICH? OR CONSOLIDATED?**

**Linda:** *Maybe a regional entity managing separate regional parks from city parks.*

**Andre:** *Probably get more pushback from local, neighborhood level who may see regional governance taking away their space, their park.*

**BRAD Q: ARE THERE ANY TYPES OF PARKS OR AMENITIES (FACILITIES, ATTRACTIONS) THAT WE DON'T HAVE IN CENTRAL INDIANA, THAT WE COULD ONLY DO TOGETHER?**

**SAM Q: IS THE RIVER A PARK IN OF ITSELF, SHOULD THAT BE A REGIONAL PARK?**

**Sarah:** *Yes, it is a park. Shared amenity. We are missing more linear greenway type of park. Traditional idea of seeing the greenway along the edge of the river. We have gaps along the WR that could be enhanced with this regional concept. Do have private landowner concerns...people think if it is adjacent to their land, it is their land. Do not want to lose property rights...communication and education important. Help people see benefit, balance property with community.*

**BRAD Q: HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE RIVER AS A PARK?**

**Carolene:** *Connected to our park, we look at it as part of our own park. We have an agreement with the city, the City takes care of the cleaning of the river, we take care of the land around it. (dropped call, answer continues below)*

**MIKE S: CLARIFYING QUESTION: WHAT WERE YOU ASKING LINDA ABOUT AMENITIES IN PARKS?**

**Brad:** *We have park jurisdictions, no one wants to give that up. But are there types of space like that have a big enough market for what they have that could benefit from this?*

**Norman:** *Largest HC landowner. Do have concerns like many landowners....already many agencies to work with. Fearful of the added layer, it has to streamline things. Chattanooga TN is another model.*

**AARON Q: CRUCIAL TO HAVE "EASY WINS" HEADING OUT OF THE GATE. WHAT ARE SOME EASY WINS TO IDENTIFY:**

**Brenda:** *Pulliam grant to weave together what we have to create a cohesive message. Active and engaged portal while the governance team gets up and running and gets their footing. CP has early victories. HCT has begun a river districts study 2/3 done. Logan Street Bridge Expansion.*

**Norman:** *2/3 of the way through with WR Education Center planning. We also have a Pulliam Grant for an oxbow trail system. Part of CP's master plan, but connects to WRVP.*

**MATT CARTER Q: SOME OTHER MODELS USE COOPERATION AS PRE-REQUISITES FOR UNLOCKING NEW FUNDING. HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE GET OUT OF THE GOVERNANCE RATHER THAN WHAT MANDATES COME WITH IT. HOW DO WE MAKE THE STRUCTURE WORTH THE TIME THROUGH INCENTIVES/CARROTS?**

**Andre:** *Going back to my comment about neighborhoods giving pushback. One thing to help that pushback is letting them know they were getting improvements. Access to the river is something many can buy into. An improvement like that along the river would go a long way in getting people to give up some control.*

**GINGER Q: LOTS OF MANY STAKEHOLDERS, EACH WITH OWN CONSTITUENCIES AND EXPERTS. COULD GOVERNANCE ACCOMMODATE LIAISONS FROM EACH (MANY ALREADY HAVE THEIR OWN ORGANIZATION) THAT CAN BUILD NETWORKS, SHARE INFORMATION, BRING UP CONCERNS FROM THE EXPERTS?**

**Brad:** *We have heard that providing the table is important, that is what we are deciding.*

**Carolene:** *Came back on the call. Agreeing with Ginger's comments. Who has true ownership of the land and the river. At WRSP, agreement made with the federal level where WRSP had ownership but the city receives money from the federal government to keep the river clean and any major infrastructure. But the State owns the levee, so in talks with the city to do work on it. A lot of confusion on who owns what, who can do what – as we get more and more into these conversations, there will be a perception that they own the river.*

**Mike S:** *Whoever is on this is going to have to be a leader, thick skin, who is picked is vital.*

**Sarah:** *A few local examples to look at: already have the MPO to allow everyone to submit projects, vet them, do regional studies. Nickel Plate Trail in Fishers and Noblesville, Nickel Plate Express...regional in a different way. Find the middle ground.*

**BETSY McC Q: GOVERNANCE ENTITY VERSUS OPERATING ENTITY, HOW DOES THIS LOOK? WHERE DOES THE INFLUENCE NEED TO SIT?**

**Matt Carter:** *Indianapolis Unigov model came with a parallel secondary model of MiniGov. Intended to balance the loss of micro for the macro. Eventually repealed by the macro.*

**Sarah:** *Planner by trade, processes are a part of what we need to do. Gov and ops – checks and balances.*

**BRAD Q: SOME PARKS HAVE "FRIENDS OF..." GROUPS FUNDRAISING AND CAMPAIGNING WHICH WORKS BEAUTIFULLY FOR SOME, BUT THEN THAT BRINGS EQUITY ISSUES FOR PARKS IN NEIGHBORHOODS WITHOUT THAT CAPACITY, THOUGHTS?**

**Linda:** *When it works, it works. If the Friends of Holliday came to me tomorrow and wanted to work with us, I would say great...long track record, trusted partner. Equity issue is interesting –*

*in some ways the parks with the Friends support let us focus more on the parks that don't have that capacity...so not entirely unequitable*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS...

**Matt Cohoat:** Seeing consistent desire for regional governance board of some sort. Seeing an organization chart...one box is regional governance authority, somewhere below that box is 1,000 operators. The ability to streamline and pull those together. Framework starting of top group gives something down while operators give something up. Excitement of a non-governmental structure possibility. As developer, we find people with money. They decide what to do, the governance, then we do what we do without them dropping down into what we do. All partners do what they do well, aligned with vision, and we stay out of their way.

**Brenda.** Partners also need help getting through the bureaucracy. Is that operational or governance? But needed.

**Matt Carter.** MOAs establish who does what, but skillset at the higher level so there's a reason you want to be there. Referenced Miami Conservancy in Ohio established because expertise in flood needed.

**Aaron.** Opportunity to simplify, the one-stop shop that is the expert. Ability to go after bigger grants/projects by coming together.

**Sam.** How big is our vision...what will it be like in 20 years?

**Betsy.** Pretty big...its refocusing the region to be based on a river. Sustainable resource, awareness of its importance, protection, new development, economic development that come from it, fitness/education revolved around it. Not just us...community, connecting families, neighborhoods.

**Matt Carter.** Most transformative project we've ever had in Indiana. River can do lots of things...food, water, importance of democracy, diversity of community. Its much bigger than a park. This can make Indiana more powerfully aligned than anything we've done. It won't leave or ask for a pay raise. But this is also why is so hard.

**Brian.** Every pandemic has been portal from old world to next. It's a disrupter. It's stopped capitalism and commerce all over the world. What do we pack from old world, but lets be flexible and pack lightly so we can create next world. This is a big idea, but everything has to be rebuilt...status quo won't prevent us from doing it.

**Julie.** Aerodynamic goals...top level goal that never goes away, it outlasts us and still visible after we're gone. Pandemic has given us opportunity to create something that keeps going sustainably. Gives us chance to overcome territoriality.

**Betsy.** Worry about a congress...has to be able to make decisions. Can't have everybody on it, hard to include everyone, especially when not designing the organization under it. Executive Director has to be the right person.

**Aaron.** The governance structure keeps things going, ensures it lasts beyond us and beyond the first executive director or board.

**Matt Carter.** Like the public trust model....self-perpetuating nature of small governance that has clearly defined role. Act less as self-interest/special interest and more as civic trusted entities...the trusted community voices. Harder to hijack civic leadership than political leadership. You can't apply for the job...its community trust built over time. Different than the operating body.

**Brenda.** Talked to two elected officials this week who have said you have to have elected officials on it. Whether or not that's best, that matters.

**Aaron.** It's more accountability than actual presence on board. Reporting back to the Council/entities providing funding is an example of accountability.

**Betsy.** Accountability back to every jurisdiction but no way to put every jurisdiction on it....How do we create accountability without literal representation. Like the public trust model.

**Thomas.** Why would any jurisdiction give up power? If mayor is saying needs to be on the board, that's because they're thinking they're funding it. Not going to fund anything they don't have control of. Opportunity is bringing new funding to the table. Early on need to raise money outside of local jurisdictions.

**Betsy.** People don't want taxation without representation. What if we're not taxing the cities and towns coffers? Then focus on citizen representation. Accountability isn't to a jurisdiction, its to every citizen.