Spring Creek Watershed Plan Prospectus: Moving to Phase 3 Plus

Bill Sharp, May 8, 2019

# Brief history of Phase 2

In 2003, the SCWC published a Phase I Spring Creek Watershed Plan. This document served to assemble relevant information about the watershed and develop a potential “solution matrix” of planning topics. It was the first of three anticipated phases. Funding and staffing were cut at that time. The second phase was proposed to set priority objectives for preserving the quality of the watershed and quality of life in the region. Phase 3 to develop a collaborative planning framework.

In 2016 a twentieth anniversary celebration of the Spring Creek Watershed Commission was held. The planning team found a remarkable amount of work had been done by governments, nonprofits, Penn State and other interest, to preserve the quality of our water and of the watershed community. A lot of things were accomplished but what was most notable was the lack of coordination and communication between the many entities involved – a lack of a sense of community.

In 2017, following the Celebration, a core group of the Spring Creek Watershed Commission formed to continue the watershed planning process. An AmeriCorps staff person had been hired to provide administrative support. SCWC chair Denny Hameister secured $16,250 in contributions from stakeholders that included government, non-profits, Penn State and local business interest. A facilitator was contracted.

A number of issues were identified including:

* Phase 1 was 15 years old in 2018. A lot had happened, a lot had been learned.
* There was continued population growth and demand which added 30,000 people, nearly 20%, over 20 years. If growth remains steady it could be another 30-35,000 people by 2050.
* All of our water comes from the sky. What do we do in case of a long-term drought? The wells are deep, but the streams are 85% groundwater, and even a greater level during dry periods. Should water tables drop significantly, stream ecosystems could suffer.
* There is a very long list of stakeholders.

A Phase 2 project was approved by the Watershed Commission in January 2019, a facilitator contracted, and a series of events scheduled including:

* Public Forum, April 2018, with over 120 participants. A comprehensive report was published.
* Stakeholder Forum, July 2018, during which a visioning exercise (for 2050 bnd beyond) was conducted and further organization of the Phase 2 project discussed.
* Technical Issues Work Group was then formed which met eight times between July and November 2018. The workgroup discussed two issues areas:
  + Water Quality
  + Water Quantity
* A third public meeting was held in December 2018 at which a report on the project was given and further comments solicited.
* A formal presentation was made to the Spring Creek Watershed Commission January 2019

## Value Proposition: What is it worth to you?

The value of an integrated water plan is both environmental and economic. Potential benefits of such a plan include:

* Cost savings/taxpayer burden
* Greater return on investment
  + Reduce duplication of effort
  + Sharing information and expertise
  + Collaborative/partnerships
* Systematic public education and engagement
* Other stakeholder (business/tourism) engagement
* Emergency preparedness
* Climate change adaptation
* Economic planning and development

What we all wish to conserve and advance is quality of life. Livability is a measure that defines why people want to live in a community. Spring Creek communities are repeatedly listed in the top ten of lists of livability in the country. Livability, sustainability, and a robust local economy are mostly congruent.

Livability is increasingly about resiliency:

* Stronger Community
* Sustainable Economy
* Enhanced Environment

Quality of life is about a safe and healthy Happy Valley. It is the product of building and strengtheningour partnership with each other

Leadership brings deserved recognition.

# Where To Next?

The Spring Creek Watershed Phase 3 project was proposed when the Watershed Commission had staff and funding. An administrative structure will have to be redeveloped, funding sought, and staffing acquired. As initially intended, Phase 3 of the watershed plan would have been creating the plan itself. I suggest that Phase 3 would now develop the requisite capacity to develop the plan.

It has been proposed that a workgroup be established under the Watershed Commission. The current technical committee could form the core of this working group. The current steering committee should be continued. The relationship between the Watershed Commission and the administrative entity will have to be clarified.

## Phase 3:

* Staffing: Director and Admin
  + Skill Sets. While a knowledge of the watershed is important, Phase 3 is about: Organization, Planning, Political Systems, a Systems Perspective.
* $150,000 to $175,000 Startup
* A non-profit organization formed by the SCWC is a useful as well as a proven organizational framework, especially for a non-regulatory program.
  + Board, Bylaws, Etc. would need to be created
* Clarify Vision/Goals, Objectives, Strategies
* The Pitch (Value Proposition)
* Stakeholder Network/Work Groups

## Phase 4: Create the Plan

* Finance (Budgeting Process/Grant Cycles)
* Stakeholder engagement
  + Form work groups and task forces
* Develop the planning document
* Get regional acceptance.

## Phase 5: Develop a non-regulatory organization to implement an action plan

For Janie, Watershed Related Organizations

There are at least 50 local governments organizations and Penn State, with some decision-making role in the watershed.

* Centre County Government
  + Centre County Planning Commission
  + Metropolitan Planning Organization
  + Conservation District
* Centre Region Council of Governments
* Four Regional Planning Commissions
* Fourteen Municipalities
  + Councils
  + Municipal Planning Commissions
* Penn State University
* Twelve Water/Wastewater Authorities
* MS4 Partnership - Stormwater
* Two dozen or so Environmental/Conservation NPOs

We can add to this list:

* US Environmental Protection Agency
* Susquehanna River Basin Commission
* Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
* US Geological Survey
* Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County: Local Businesses
* Bellefonte Intervalley Chamber of Commerce

There are a number of landowners including:

* DCNR Bureaus of Forestry, State Parks
* Game Commission
* Penn State University
* Army Corps of Engineers
* Rockview State Correctional Institute
* Fish & Boat Commission
* PennDot
* Local Governments
* Individuals and Businesses

Wrapped around this organization framework is Pennsylvania water law.