



Partners For Environmental Justice

Fall 2021

**WALNUT CREEK
WATERSHED
LEARNING
NETWORK**

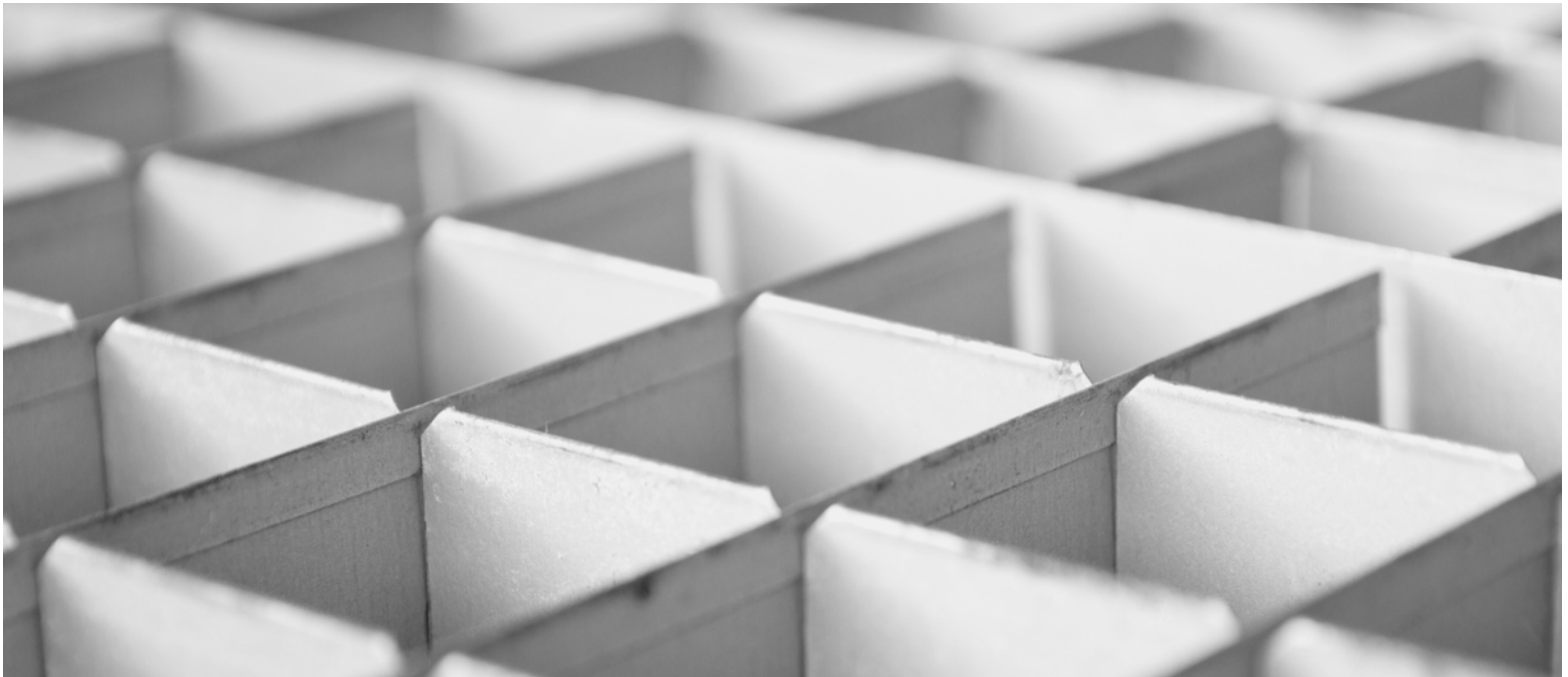


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PEJ STAFF MEMBERS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Through the Town of Cary's Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund, Partners For Environmental Justice (PEJ) was able to hire a Program Director and a Director of Community Outreach & Board Support (DCOBS). PEJ's goal with these hires was to expand engagement opportunities with residents and community stakeholders in and around the Walnut Creek Wetland Center. These two individuals will focus on the programs and activities that build community knowledge and empower residents to advocate for sustainable and equitable development solutions that benefit both the neighborhoods and the wetland habitat. The Program Director focuses on management of activities at the program level, while the DCOBS has been focusing on activities on a missional, organizational level.

Highlights of Program Director

Renai Nez is PEJ's Program Director. Since joining us, Renai has been learning the unique ways that PEJ operates with its board members, local stakeholders, local partnerships, and the neighborhood. She had the opportunity to assist and learn from the coordinator of the Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network (WCWLN), a six-week capacity-building intensive about community watershed management in wetlands and flood-prone areas around South Raleigh designed to connect with and teach participants about watershed management.

She will be developing a third WCWLN in 2022 that will continue to educate the public on the importance of implementing green stormwater infrastructure and developing community-driven approaches to watershed management.



Renai Nez, PEJ Program Director

PEJ STAFF MEMBERS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to helping administer the WCWLN this fall, Renai has been managing PEJ's website and social media platforms and fostering PEJ's public online presence. Renai developed a bi-weekly newsletter of the WCWLN's activities to inform the Town of Cary and PEJ's partners of the work that was taking place at the Wetland Center.

She has also been working with North Carolina's Department of Transportation Intern in developing marketing documents for the WCWLN and other partners of PEJ, such as North Carolina's Division of Water Resources, City of Raleigh, Town of Cary, and United States Geological Survey. Finally, Renai also works with the PEJ Finance Committee to assist in grant tracking and reporting, a crucial function for the success of project budgets and expenses.



Amin Davis, Renai Nez, and Don Singletary (left to right) at St. Ambrose Episcopal Church.



Renai Nez, Anne S. Franklin, and Keshi Satterwhite (left to right) at the WCWLN Module 6.

PEJ STAFF MEMBERS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights of Director of Community Outreach & Board Support

Don Singletary is PEJ's Director of Community Outreach & Board Support. Don has been a wonderful asset to PEJ's team, principally through his communication with the community first-hand along Raleigh's greenways. Don's goal is to connect those that live adjacent to the greenway and flood-prone areas to the resources available through the City of Raleigh. During this process, Don has been working with an intern from Shaw University to develop a spreadsheet with the Walnut Creek Community Neighborhood Data that provides information needed to contact these groups, which include neighbors, schools, organization, and religious institutions.

Don has also made connections with Habitat for Humanity. Several PEJ board members have signed up for volunteering events that are to take place between December 11, 2021, and June 22, 2022. Finally, Don has provided introductions to We Plant It Forward, an environmental community service program in Raleigh that promotes the benefits of trees and tree planting.



Anne S. Franklin, Don Singletary, and Habitat of Humanity volunteer at the Maybrook Crossing Townhome project.



WALNUT CREEK WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WCWLN participants and Big Sweep Volunteers at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.

Introduction

November 20, 2021 marked the completion of PEJ's second Watershed Learning Network at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center. The Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network (WCWLN) is a six-week community education and empowerment initiative that PEJ first implemented in Spring 2021 based on the innovative [Atlanta Watershed Learning Network](#) with the primary objectives of: 1.) educating participants about various topics such as stormwater management, green infrastructure and environmental justice; 2.) making connections about why these topics are important to them and their communities, and 3.) providing participants with the resources to become more engaged stakeholders and be empowered to take action in protecting the integrity of their communities.

As was done previously, community outreach was focused in the flood-sensitive communities within the Walnut Creek Watershed.

Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network Executive Summary



Lauren Daniel mentoring participants on the capabilities of the community-based water quality monitoring application.

Collaborative Funding & Partners

The WCWLN could not have been successfully implemented without the support of PEJ's community partners. The Town of Cary provided PEJ with a significant amount of funding through a Southeast Sustainable Communities Grant they received. The City of Raleigh provided PEJ with funding through a National League of Cities grant they received. Through these grants, PEJ was able to provide compensation for contractual services, participant stipends, course printing materials, compensation of WCWLN coordinators, and compensation for the salaries of two new PEJ staff members.

PEJ contracted with the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association's former Community Engagement Specialist, and creator of the [Durham Watershed Academy](#), to coordinate and implement the WCWLN. PEJ contracted with Bourne To Film to videotape each module, create an educational video and to produce a multimedia marketing video. Environmental professionals from nonprofit organizations, state and local government, and NC State University generously donated their time and resources. Staff from the Warren County Environmental Action Team, City of Raleigh, Triangle J Council of Governments, NC Division of Water Resources and NC Cooperative Extension shared their expertise with the WCWLN participants about session topics found in the outline below.

Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network Executive Summary

WCWLN Outline

The WCWLN curriculum was divided into six modules, all of which were held in person at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. Sessions were principally facilitated by the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association’s former Community Relations Director and assisted by PEJ’s Program Director. Mentors for the WCWLN participants included staff from the NC Division of Water Resources, NC State University’s Water Resources Research Institute and a Spring 2021 Raleigh Watershed Learning Network graduate. The outline of the Fall 2021 WCWLN is below.

Session	Dates	Session Topic
Module 1	9/11/2021	Program Overview - Purpose, Goals, Expectations
		Communication and Negotiation: Leadership Skills for Community and Home
		Community Watershed Stewardship
Module 2	9/25/2021	Community Science Mobile Tool Prep
		Wake County Big Sweep
Module 3	10/9/2021	Watershed Basics & Urbanization
		Floodplain Management Strategies
		Green Infrastructure Overview & Tour
Module 4	10/23/2021	Policies and Regulations Governing Watersheds
		Raleigh Climate Plan and Current Projects
		Warren County Environmental Justice Movement
		Equity and Environmental Justice (Remote)
Module 5	11/6/2021	Overview of Planning, Design, and Implementation of Various Scales of GSI
		NC Cooperative Extension Workshops
		City of Raleigh Stormwater Innovation & Financing (Remote)
Module 6	11/20/2021	Individual Project Presentations and Testimonials
		Program Trivia
		Individual and Group Action
		Participants Receive Graduation Certificates

“There are lots of great programs/people in place to help better the environment. Many groups are very passionate about keeping the environment clean and have been super successful about implementing sustainable systems just like the WCWLN”.

- Participant, Module 2

WALNUT CREEK WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Fall 2021 WCWLN Graduates (1 participant not included).

Community Projects

The WCWLN participants were able to apply what they learned from each session to their community projects, which included the following:

- Creation of a mobile application, Gaia Raleigh, to execute community involvement in environmental awareness and local resources in Raleigh.
- Initiation of a one-year stream monitoring of Little Rock Creek, which has been known to be polluted due to the city's runoff.
- Provided a “do it yourself” disconnection of a downspout, while finding multiple uses for the collected runoff.
- Management and organization of a Wake County Big Sweep in the Hedingham community of Raleigh, involving 12 volunteers who collected 16 bags of trash.
- Hosting of a litter clean-up and a watershed educational exchange along the Rocky Branch Creek beside North Carolina State University’s Campus, a project two participants designed and implemented together

“I noticed that all of the presenters were very involved in the information they presented, showing that they truly care about the topics”. - Participants, Module 4

WALNUT CREEK WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Amin Davis (right) explaining the green infrastructure practices outside of the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.

Conclusion

The WCWLN, along with the Durham Watershed Academy, are truly unique outreach programs to the Triangle area. Six participants successfully completed the Fall 2021 WCWLN and were eligible to receive a \$400 stipend or their participation. Participants developed community projects to address issues in their neighborhoods and conducted a presentation about their project during the final 'graduation' session of the WCWLN.

PEJ is pleased with the outcome of this Fall 2021 WCWLN and hopes to host another version of the WCWLN in 2022. For more information about the WCWLN, visit PEJ's website:
<https://www.pejraleighnc.org/wcwnl>.

"Seeing all of the completed projects motivates me. It makes me want to start a new project. It's encouraging since it shows all of the success others have had and how easy it is to implement the plans once you have the work force and tools". - Participant, Module 5

Community Projects Executive Summary

Introduction



Completed rain garden at 808 Elkhart Dr.

Partners of Environmental Justice (PEJ) is collaborating with Kris Bass Engineering (KBE) to design and implement seven green infrastructure (GI) projects funded through the Town of Cary's Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund. A total of five rain gardens and two cistern/irrigation projects are currently being developed. Four of these projects are located in the City of Raleigh (808 Elkhart Dr., Cross Link Rd., 2107 Dandridge Dr., and 507 Glenbrook Dr.) and three projects are in the Town of Cary (415 Webster St., 116 Clay St., and 1132 Ivy Lane).

These projects required similar steps. First, KBE representatives conducted site visits with homeowners which included consultations with the homeowners and documentation of stormwater issues. KBE then developed and drew up design plans for each site, according to the homeowner's specifications, and shared them with the homeowner. Each project has also involved an application to the Raleigh Rainwater Rewards (RRR) cost-share program, which required contractor estimates for the work. Once the project was accepted under the RRR, KBE was able to proceed with construction. The status of each project is as follows:

Community Projects Executive Summary



Rain garden at 2107 Dandridge

Rain Garden Projects: 808 Elkhart Drive, 507 Glenbrook Drive, and 2107 Dandridge Drive

Construction started on December 14th, 2021 for these three projects. Construction is anticipated to run through the week of December 25th, 2021. The 808 Elkhart Dr. project was completed on December 17th, 2021 and the 2107 Dandridge Dr should be completed on December 20th, 2021. These projects will be reflected in the Raleigh Rainwater Rewards program reimbursement. The estimated total cost of these projects are \$24,372; the RRR program will reimburse \$5,000 for each project.

Cistern Project: 1205 Cross Link Road

Consultation for this site was completed on December 2nd, 2021. We are preparing an RRR application, which we expect to submit in January 2022. Construction of this cistern is anticipated to begin in March or April, pending approval of the RRR application. The estimated date of completion is late May at an estimated total cost of \$12,000 - \$15,000. If this project is approved by RRR, there will be a reimbursement of 75% of the total project cost.

Community Projects Executive Summary

Rain Garden Project: 415 Webster Street

The rain garden project has been completed and was paid for under the Town of Cary's Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund grant. The cost of this project is \$5,000, with no reimbursement from RRR.

Rain Garden/Cistern Projects: 116 Clay Street & 1132 Ivy Lane

These projects have been placed on hold due to budget constraints within the Town of Cary's Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund. PEJ and KBE will continue with this project if funding is available after the 1205 Cross Link Road project is complete. There is no current project cost estimate at this time.

Community Projects

List of the 7 Community Projects under the Town of Cary's Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund.

Site Address	City	Project Type
Clay Street	Cary	Raingarden, Swale
Ivy Lane	Cary	Cistern
Webster Street	Cary	Rain Garden
Cross Link Road	Raleigh	Cistern
Dandridge Drive	Raleigh	Rain Garden
Elkhart Drive	Raleigh	Rain Garden
Glenbrook Drive	Raleigh	Rain Gardens

TRASH TASK FORCE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Walnut Creek Wetland area has been a hotspot of trash accumulation and dumping for over 100 years. Addressing excessive trash dumping in the Rochester Heights community was one of the primary reasons Partners For Environmental Justice (PEJ) was formed in the 1990s. PEJ hosted cleanups around the Walnut Creek wetlands and its surrounding communities which are now hosted by [Wake County Big Sweep](#). Since 1995, more than 60 tons of trash has been removed from the Walnut Creek wetlands adjacent to the Walnut Creek Wetland Park.

The Trash Task Force (TTF) is a dedicated group committed to strategizing and developing solutions for Walnut Creek's lingering dumping problems. Aside from wetland stewardship, the TTF's goal is to raise awareness of the problem around the City Manager's Office and other local government offices by way of Trash Task Force Summary Report (spring 2021). Our hope is that the TTF becomes a trusted community partner and liaison with the City of Raleigh and Wake County as we work to combat the wetland's lingering dumping problems.

The TTF consists of 42 members, which include 18 members from nearby neighborhoods (Rochester Heights, Biltmore Hills, State Street Village, etc.), 15 City of Raleigh staff members, and 9 community based members from local businesses, entities and partners.



Homeless campsite on the Walnut Creek Greenway.



Construction debris dumped down a ravine in Rochester Heights (11/2020).

TRASH TASK FORCE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights

The TTF met in a hybrid format (virtually and in-person) a total of four times during March 29 - May 10, 2021. In the first meeting, the participants addressed the history of trash that accumulated in and around the Walnut Creek Wetland area. At the second meeting, TTF identified some barriers that prevent visitors to the wetland from disposing of trash the correct way. At the third meeting, the participants brainstormed some solutions to the barriers presented in the second meeting. At the final meeting, the TTF were able to rank solutions based on the most feasible outcome (costs, implementation, and successful completion).

The TTF was able to successfully bring the community together and identify the multiple problems and barriers that lead to disposing litter. Some of the solutions discussed were distribution of educational materials about litter disposal, allowing any quantity of tires to be disposed at the Wake County Multi-Material Recycling Centers, increasing convenience center access for lower-income and disadvantaged neighborhoods, and adding additional trash cans to heavy use areas such as greenways and bus stops.

The TTF was selected as the winner of the 2021 Community Action Award on behalf of the Raleigh Environmental Advisory Board. This award recognizes a volunteer, individual, or organization working in Raleigh on the stewardship of natural resources, environmental justice or conservation.

PEJ plans to connect with Wake County's Solid Waste Manager in January 2022 to discuss issues such as disposal of tires and mattresses and to brainstorm ideas for how the City of Raleigh and the TTF can partner together.