

# Stakeholder Engagement in the Darby Cobbs Watershed

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## Research Goals

1. Understand why the past Darby Cobbs Watershed Partnership (DCWP) was unsuccessful.
2. Analyze watershed-related groups' concerns and their recommendations for creating sustainable and equitable partnerships.
3. Propose concrete next steps for the Water Center at Penn (WCP) based on our research.

## Background/Past Efforts

- The Darby Cobbs Watershed includes the western border of West Philadelphia and eastern Chester and Delaware counties.
- Philadelphia Water Dept. (PWD) initiated the DCWP in 2000 to help facilitate PWD's watershed restoration plan published in 2004.
- PWD never implemented its plan, but DCWP hosted meetings through 2013, connecting groups across city borders and facilitating events (clean ups, 5Ks, rain barrel giveaways, etc).
- During and after DCWP, individual watershed groups continued important work, including the DCVA and EDCSC (both based in the suburbs).
- Cobbs Creek Environmental Center (CCCEC) became apart of Parks and Rec in recent years, with a couple full-time staff to facilitate activities.

## Results

1. DCWP was unsuccessful because it lacked:
  - Full resident involvement/ownership at the *founding* of the group
  - Trust and coordination b/w city and suburbsAnd at the end of the partnership:
  - Shift in PWD priorities -> no full-time staff to run partnership
2. Stakeholder Concerns and Recommendations Summarized  
Six largest watershed concerns from interviews:
  - Dumping and Littering
  - Stormwater Management
  - Trail Maintenance
  - Park and Trail Safety
  - Lack of Watershed Awareness
  - Lack of Cohesive Watershed Identity

### Pathway to Successful Partnerships:

- Talking with residents at initial stages of a partnership is crucial
  - Small wins build trust and attract more residents to volunteer
  - Partners must solidify group with clear goals and transparency
3. Proposed next Steps for WCP:
    - Speak with interested residents from two West Philadelphia neighborhood groups we identified
    - Create email listserv for all stakeholders we interviewed to stay in contact and continue conversations started at virtual roundtable.
    - Find community champions and work with watershed groups to plan community meetings to receive resident feedback.



## Methods

- First spoke with WCP staff who had worked in the watershed and close contacts of the center.
- Researched the history of the watershed and its relationship to West Philadelphia, compiling an in-depth literature review.
- Researched DCWP, all watershed-related related groups, and community organizations and contacted dozens of groups and individuals.
- Held 27 virtual interviews with stakeholders and afterwards asked them to complete a survey (N=14).
- Analyzed and compiled interview notes, survey results, and online research into a comprehensive report with recommendations for the future.
- Presented report to over 15 stakeholders at a virtual roundtable, answering questions and leading a discussion on future partnership opportunities.

## Discussion

Our research provides a detailed overview of Darby Cobbs watershed advocacy in the past two decades and a clearer understanding of the issues with the DCWP. Meeting with stakeholders, we learned the biggest concerns and recommendations for a path to partner on future projects. However, our research lacked resident voices, particularly of Black West Philadelphians. With this limitation in mind, we proposed next steps for WCP that center on including Black community voices. Our final report only began the research needed to create equitable and sustainable engagement in the watershed. But we provided the necessary scaffolding for WCP to continue the work.

## References:

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