

APPENDIX G – Focus Group Results

NEW FOCUS GROUP 1

INTRODUCTION

As identified in the St. Clair County Northeastern Watersheds (SCC NEW) Public Participation Plan, an important part of the watershed planning process is to involve the public. Soliciting their knowledge about the watershed and their opinions about how to improve conditions within the watershed provides the Watershed Advisory Group with important information to guide development of this Plan. The SCC NEW Watershed Advisory Group hosted three public focus group meetings to gather input during the development of this plan.

LAND USE PLANNING FOCUS GROUP

The first focus group meeting was held at the St. Clair Community College MTEC Center in Port Huron in December, 2005. Many people attended the meeting, representing many of the communities within the watershed. In addition to residents, several attendees were public officials, representing their community's Planning Commission, Board or Council. The evening began with a light dinner and casual conversation. As people finished their meal, Kristen Jurs of St. Clair County welcomed everyone and initiated introductions of the attendees.

John Jones, Supervisor of Ira Township, then gave a short presentation describing his community's response to growing development pressures in the area. A main emphasis of the Township's efforts is to maintain the community's rural character and protect its existing natural resources while accommodating development. Preserving water quality is an important goal. The presentation was well received and many attendees expressed interest in hearing more from Mr. Jones.

The large group then broke into four small groups to begin discussing the land use issues they felt should be included in the Watershed Management Plan. The groups were facilitated by St. Clair County staff or a consultant, and aided by a worksheet to get the conversation going. Each group recorded the important topics of their discussion on flip charts. After approximately 45 minutes, the participants were asked to vote for their five top issues discussed that evening. They did this by placing a sticky-dot next to the topic on their small group's flip chart. Attendees could use all their dots on one issue, or spread their dots out over up to five issues. The large group then reconvened to share the small group results.

Focus Group Results

While there were many topics recorded by the small groups, a few themes emerged as important in most of the small group discussions and are summarized below. The results of each group's dialogue are summarized below.

- 1) **Education.** This was a broad topic that included educational opportunities for local officials, developers, and the public. Participants felt that local officials could benefit from information on land use and water quality issues such as pollutants in runoff, and ever higher quantities of runoff. Techniques to address these issues could be incorporated into the Site Plan Review process. Another topic for local official training is administrative procedures (specifically sited was documentation / recording of zoning decisions). Other general educational topics include communicating the value of resources and potential impacts of land use decisions on natural resources. Related to education was the perceived jurisdictional confusion over different land cover types (such as wetlands and County drains), and the need for additional education in this area.
- 2) **Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control (SESC).** The perceived lack of effective Best Management Practices (BMPs) and the need for more soil erosion control throughout the County in both developing and agricultural areas describes this issue. Discussions identified specific projects in developing areas that have generated concern about soil erosion, and potential solutions, including a lawn establishment ordinance. The related topics of agricultural drainage practices and livestock exclusion were also discussed.
- 3) **Natural Feature Preservation.** This topic was discussed in several of the small groups, identifying specific natural features of concern including floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, and ground water. One group identified the issue of inventorying natural features as a significant topic that could be addressed through the Watershed Management Plan.
- 4) **Site Plan Review process.** The small groups thought that this process needed to be improved in general, and that enforcement of ordinance regulations in the field should be enhanced. The idea that some type of oversight for construction of single-family residences also should be considered.
- 5) **Pollutants in stormwater.** This topic was brought up in the context of education as well as controlling pollutants from urbanized areas and road right-of-ways.
- 6) **Sanitary Treatment.** Several small groups identified both septic systems and package treatment plants as potential land use issues that need to be addressed.

(NOTE: THIS SECTION WILL BE COMPLETED AS THE REMAINING FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS ARE CONDUCTED.)