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- Land use is the key driver for environmental problems, and communities have, with some exceptions, authority over their own land use. So we need to work with communities to assist them to accommodate new growth and redevelopment while minimizing impacts to the environment, their community character, and also to restore natural resources on previously degraded sites.
- The development of the Urban Environmental Design Manual was co-funded by EPA and Blackstone Corridor Commission. Worked with Dodson Associates (Peter Flinker, Landscape Architect) and Rich Claytor (Horsely and Whitten). Rich is becoming recognized nationally for his work on innovative stormwater mgt. BMPs.
- Communities can require developers to look at the cumulative impacts and community context of proposed development, but CRMC and DEM cannot do this.
- Most urban areas have excessive parking requirements that lead to more impervious area than is necessary. Those standards come from Institute of Transportation Engineers, but those are based upon suburban shopping malls, and this is not necessarily transferable to urban areas. So we spent a lot of time talking about this issue with the cities. A lot of open space that is shown on the proposed development of the Tidewater site would be gobbled up by parking.
- Innovative approaches: the UDM covered over 18 urban design principles. However, the biggest emphasis was on practical stormwater best management practices that will work in urban areas and the need to restore riparian buffers where possible.
- The manual used 4 actual urban sites to demonstrate what was currently built and how each site could be improved using the urban environmental design principles. The Tidewater site in Pawtucket was shown to provide an example of how an abandoned 28 acre Brownfield on the banks of the Seekonk River could be redeveloped to restore natural resources, allow public access/recreation to the river and provide needed economic development for the city.
- Innovative stormwater BMPs were discussed including the use of raingardens and lined bioretention units. Draining into constructed wetlands. Using vegetative swales to handle small rain events. In urban areas it is more important to effectively manage stormwater runoff with specific BMPs than to just require a vegetated buffer. A buffer by itself is typically ineffective at abating and treating urban stormwater. Moreover the driver for redevelopment of this brownfield is the proximity to the river and the scenic beauty that it affords. Since it is more costly for developers to reclaim brownfields we need to be flexible and not make it more costly than necessary to redevelop these sites. Therefore on this site a low vegetated buffer of warm season grasses interspersed with wildflowers to provide some habitat that is easy to maintain was considered a better option than a forested buffer that would block the view of the river.
- There's an opportunity on this site to daylight an old culverted, forgotten stream. Towns can use their land use authority to negotiate the restoration of degraded natural resources, but CRMC and DEM can't. The Zoning Enabling Act allows communities to place any kind of limitation or restriction as a condition of a zone change without limitations. So town and city planners can begin to negotiate with developers to get environmental improvements that benefit both the city and the developer.