MS4 Permit Section 7.3 Strategy

Wards 7 & 8 Engagement Strategy for MS4 Permit Programs

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes recommendations for improving engagement between the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit programs and Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, DC. The MS4 is the area of the District (Figure 1) where stormwater is collected and conveyed from streets, sidewalks, and rooftops to nearby waterways through stormwater sewers and outfalls. The MS4 Permit allows the District to discharge stormwater from the MS4 area and has requirements related to stormwater pollution control, stormwater pollution prevention, public education and outreach, stormwater pollution modeling, and monitoring. The MS4 Permit Programs are the activities the District engages in to meet these requirements.

A few of the MS4 Permit Programs include implementing and maintaining stormwater best management practices, upholding and enforcing stormwater management regulations for development and construction sites, managing and controlling illicit discharges and improper disposal practices, laws and bans that reduce the use of single use products, environmental education programs for students and teachers, a robust monitoring program to evaluate the effectiveness of the MS4 Permit Programs.

These strategies recommended in this report can also applied to other areas of the District, especially if they face similar issues to Wards 7 and 8. These recommendations were synthesized from the input of the Stormwater Advisory Committee for Wards 7 and 8, data collected at public engagement events, research on other cities' stormwater programs, and knowledge of DOEE's existing efforts.

The recommendations are summarized below:

- Center on youth education and green careers
- Increase community accessibility through effective outreach
- Connect stormwater to issues of health and well-being
- Increase financial support
- Considerations when choosing locations for green infrastructure implementation

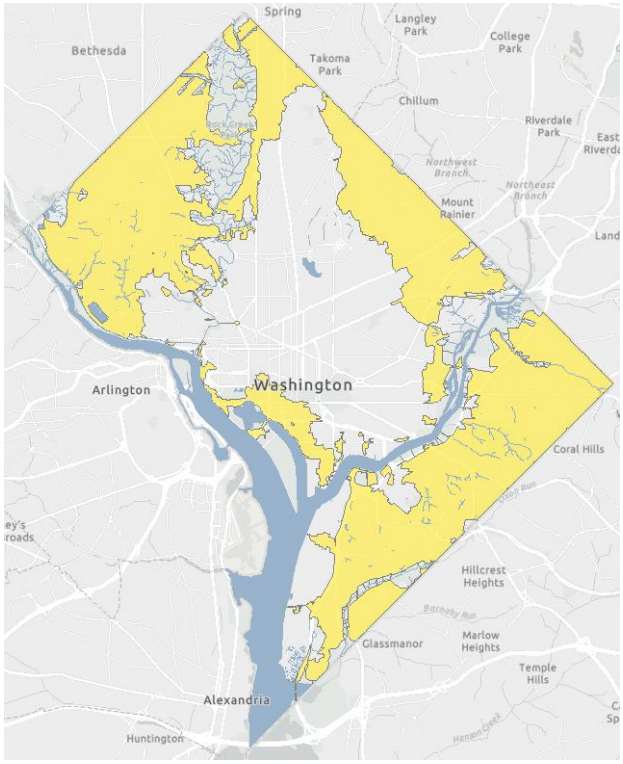

Figure 1. MS4 areas of Washington, DC highlighted in yellow.

The Advisory Committee emphasized that this strategy will be considered successful if the MS4 permit programs benefit the long-term resident populations in Wards 7 & 8. This is important to bear in mind when assessing the success of any interventions driven by this strategy, especially when using datasets and indices that are sensitive to demographic changes.

2 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Research on Other Municipalities

The project team researched other municipalities' stormwater programs to understand how their programs have approached engagement and community involvement. The research effort examined municipalities that had designated community engagement programs including the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board; the City of Oakland, California; the City of San Diego, California; the City of Sacramento, California; the Washington Stormwater Center; the City of Olympia, Washington; the City of Seattle, Washington; the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; the City of Baltimore, Maryland; Montgomery County, Maryland; the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Southeast New England Program; and the City of Providence, Rhode Island. A detailed summary of this research was shared with DOEE, and a high-level summary is presented here:

- Many municipalities use mapping tools to identify priority communities to implement projects, direct funding, and expand community engagement. Datasets used in these mapping tools include demographic data, environmental burden data, and health data.

- Several municipalities have created frameworks for engagement with communities disproportionately burdened by environmental impacts (including stormwater) that can be applied across programs.

- Tools used by municipalities included monitoring and assessment of environmental burdens; identifying regulatory pathways to reduce burdens; targeted education and outreach; technical assistance and grants; and improved facilitation of public participation and engagement.

2.2 Survey of DOEE Staff

The project team developed a survey for DOEE staff in charge of MS4 permit programs to inventory and understand engagement efforts to date. Survey respondents indicated that while DOEE offers some specific engagement training, such as REIA, NRA, DOEE, and DC Government trainings, they were not able to implement public engagement in their programming due to insufficient funding, competing program priorities, or unclear guidance and expectations. A few MS4 permit programs are already tracking or using demographic community data to inform distribution of program efforts, such as the RiverSmart and Ecological Restoration programs. Many more interact with the public or receive public feedback in some form. Nearly all respondents also indicated that their program would benefit from community engagement.

The findings of this survey were shared with Advisory Committee members to inform their recommendations. The respondents to the survey were also engaged at the mid-way point of the Advisory Committee meetings to provide feedback on the early recommendations emerging from the committee's sessions.

2.3 Advisory Committee

The primary source of the recommendations in this strategy is the Stormwater Advisory Committee for Wards 7 and 8. The project team recruited committee members who live, work, or have an impact in the MS4 area and are leaders in the Wards 7 & 8 communities. Potential committee members were identified through local non-profits whose missions overlap with MS4 programs and recommendations from other community leaders. Advisory Committee members were compensated for their time and participated in a personal capacity, expressing their individual perspectives.

The committee was convened for six working sessions. The goal of these sessions was to increase committee members' familiarity with MS4 programs and permit requirements, increase transparency and accountability in MS4 permit programs, plan public engagement activities, and identify elements to include in the strategy. These working sessions themselves were a form of increasing community participation in the MS4 permit programs.

2.4 Public Engagement

In addition to the Advisory Committee's contributions, the strategy also considered feedback solicited via three public engagement activities. These activities were developed with the Advisory Committee's input, and several committee members were involved in facilitating them.

2.4.1 Engagement Activity #1: Tabling at the Anacostia River Festival

A project team member and an Advisory Committee member shared table space with DOEE's *RiverSmart Homes* during the festival. Attendees who approached the table were invited to answer simple questions about green features to gauge their knowledge of infrastructure designed to mitigate stormwater runoff and its impacts. Pictures of various types of green infrastructure (GI), such as rain gardens, rain barrels, green roofs, urban planter boxes, permeable pavement, and more, were shown on an iPad to support their understanding. Follow-up questions assessed their preference for specific green features, potential locations within their neighborhoods where these interventions would be helpful, messaging and communication channels to share the benefits of green projects with the local community, and potential questions, concerns, or pushback DOEE might encounter.

The team wrote down notes manually on comment cards as people provided insights, in compliance with the National Park Service's rules for feedback gathering during the event. Participants were given chocolates and small toys for children as incentives. All respondents were residents from Wards 7 and 8.

2.4.2 Engagement Activity #2: Ward 7 & 8 Faith Leaders Meeting

A committee member coordinated an opportunity for the project team to conduct a 45-minute presentation and feedback gathering session on stormwater management with faith-based leaders in Wards 7 and 8. The presentation provided an overview of the effects of stormwater runoff, issues related to pollution affecting local waterways in the District of Columbia, the MS4 areas and permit programs, and the activities that the DOEE has been developing to mitigate negative impacts, including green infrastructure. The presentation

included imagery depicting different types of green infrastructure and its role in helping reduce runoff and contamination. Participants were invited to answer questions about the green features by participating verbally or by typing their responses in the chat. The questions assessed their preference for specific green features, potential organizations and groups to connect with for discussion and outreach, messaging and communication channels to share the benefits of green projects with their communities, and potential questions or concerns DOEE should address.

Attendees included residents and community organizers living or working in Wards 5, 7, and 8. Leaders from different faith-based groups included the Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, the East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership, the DC Alliance Empowering Homicide Survivors, the Peace Lutheran Church, and the Islamic Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque. Participants also included representatives from the DC Prevention Center for Opioid Response, DC Public Schools (DCPS), and the DC Office of Planning, as well as active community members.

2.4.3 Engagement Activity #3: Tabling at Minnesota Avenue FreshFarm Market Stand

A project team member and a committee member set up a pop-up table at the FreshFarm stand located at the East River Park Shopping Mall parking lot in Ward 7. Fresh produce from local vendors was available both for purchase and for food distribution to residents using SNAP, EBT, and WIC benefits. Market visitors who approached the table were invited to spin a wheel and answer simple questions about green infrastructure to gauge their knowledge of stormwater impacts and mitigation alternatives. Printed imagery depicting various types of green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, rain barrels, green roofs, bioretention, permeable pavement, and an infographic about stormwater pollution, was displayed on the table to support their understanding. The questions assessed their preference for specific green infrastructure installations, potential locations within their neighborhoods where these interventions would be helpful, communication channels to share the benefits of green projects with the local community, and potential questions, concerns, or pushback DOEE might encounter.

The engagement team captured notes on comment cards as people provided insights. Participants were offered reusable bags to carry their produce, cold water, and bookmarks with watercolors for children as incentives. All participants were residents from Wards 7 and 8.

2.5 Emerging Themes

Themes that emerged from the Advisory Committee and other activities, which shaped the recommendations presented in Section 3, include:

- The success of an engagement strategy depends on how much the MS4 permit programs benefit the long-term residents of Wards 7 & 8 at the time of this strategy development. This was noted with respect to indices of health and income that may change as demographics of the area shift, but don't necessarily indicate that long-term residents in the area at this time are experiencing those benefits.

- The Ward 7 & 8 communities are generally supportive of green infrastructure in their neighborhoods, but effective engagement and consulting with communities on how and where green infrastructure is implemented is critical. Committee members stressed the importance of

approaching public green infrastructure projects with respect for existing communities and ways of life.

- There is a need to build a shared understanding about the risks associated with poor stormwater management and the benefits of green infrastructure. Youth education, community ambassadors, and city-wide media campaigns were common ideas to help educate community members about their direct ability to be a change agent and make a positive impact.

- Committee members were energized by visions of a swimmable Anacostia River, increased access to the river and outdoor green spaces for recreation, a Bottle Bill to reduce plastic pollution, and community-level environmental stewardship.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were synthesized from the Advisory Committee's input and supplemented with input from the public engagement activities. Some actions listed here are already being undertaken by DOEE; these should be taken as affirmation that efforts are headed in the right direction and that there is an opportunity to promote visibility and broader reach.

3.1 Center on Youth Education and Green Careers

DOEE already has a number of youth education and green career pathway programs such as the Living Classrooms, Meaningful Watershed Education Experiences, Aquatic Resources Education Center, RiverCorps, RiverSmart Schools, Kingman Island Rangers, Latin American Youth Center, and Green Zone Environmental Partners programs. The Advisory Committee felt that it was still important to emphasize youth education and green career pathways as a tool for perception and behavioral changes surrounding stormwater, stormwater management, and green infrastructure. The Advisory Committee also noted a need for increased advertising of DOEE's existing programming in Wards 7 & 8 as members of their communities were not aware of the existing programs.

Committee members emphasized that helping youth understand why stormwater issues matter is key for the Wards 7 & 8 Engagement Strategy. Engaging youth is a way to shape the perspective of the next generation and can have an intergenerational ripple effect. Youth education is also the first step in developing a pipeline into green jobs. Key players and partners for these recommendations would be schools in both the DC Public School System and Charter Schools, after-school programs, summer programs, the District's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (specifically the Environmental Literacy Advisory Committee), parents, caregivers, teachers, and school administrators. Additional partners for building career pathways are workforce development organizations (such as Earth Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps) and other stormwater-related employers (like DC Water, local landscaping businesses, and local environmental non-profits). Potential actions include:

- **Using interactive learning and hands-on activities to share and reinforce stormwater management concepts.** This could include using physical watershed models, involving children in planting native plants and removing invasive species, and developing youth-focused stormwater activities (such as relay races at festivals or mapping/modeling stormwater pathways in their communities). Friendly competition can also spark youth engagement. These activities could be implemented in academic curricula, at after-school or summer programs, and other community events.

- **Making stormwater content more engaging**. Utilize technology and other tools to make stormwater issues more interesting and demonstrate the severity of issues. Develop public service announcements and other media about stormwater impacts specifically geared towards youth.

- **Developing a city-wide stormwater education plan.** Coordinate with DCPS, charter schools, OSSE, and after-school programs to integrate and standardize stormwater curriculum. Increase capacity for logistics to support school programming (busing, scheduling) and dedicate funding for

transportation. Create a summer or spring break camp focused on stormwater issues and education. Utilize parent-teacher associations and back-to-school nights to reach parents as well.

- **Building a pathway to green careers, including internships, apprenticeships, and certifications.** Increase funding and reach of existing youth training pipelines and develop new ones. Partner with local businesses, agencies, and non-profits to hire or mentor youth. Pay young people to engage with on-the-ground projects, help them build practical skills, instill environmental stewardship, and encourage them to be ambassadors for their community. Develop a network and directory of workforce development organizations focused on green infrastructure. Building these pathways should be done in a phased approach to ensure the long-term sustainability of youth job programs.

3.2 Increase Community Accessibility Through Effective Outreach

Committee members identified the need for clear, inclusive, and relatable messaging to build community trust around stormwater efforts. To effectively reach audiences in Wards 7 & 8, technical language needs to be simplified, and data needs to be presented in ways that empower residents to understand and act. Many residents are unaware of the resources available through DOEE for stormwater management and maintenance of green infrastructure. In instances where green infrastructure has received pushback from community members, better outreach was identified as the key to building community buy-in. Potential actions include:

- **Raising awareness about stormwater issues and solutions through better marketing.** Promote awareness year-round, beyond Earth Day. Avoid jargon and focus on simple, actionable messages. Share water quality testing results with communities and explain the implications for swimming or fishing.

- **Celebrating the Anacostia River.** Build on initiatives like the Year of the Anacostia (2018) and Enjoy the Anacostia (ongoing). Regularly highlight the positive aspects of the river, show the progress achieved thus far in restoration and cleaning efforts, and emphasize the history of how the river used to be (before widespread pollution issues).

- **Going beyond digital outreach.** Leverage WMATA ads, grocery stores, and TV stations (such as the Mayor's TV station) for broader reach. Text message and social media campaigns are still viewed as effective.

- **Using trusted messengers.** Partner with Ward 7 & 8 museums, parks, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), faith-based organizations, local Advisory Neighborhood Committees (ANCs), and other local leaders for outreach and programming. Train teenagers and adults to be neighborhood ambassadors and lead green infrastructure walking tours. Utilize porch-to-porch engagement rather than traditional door knocking. Build on initiatives like "Hicky Run Heroes."

- **Utilizing effective signage.** Place placards and signs on green infrastructure installations that are visible to cars and bikers, not just pedestrians. Signage should explain, in simple language, what the GI feature is, and its benefits. Existing signage is seen as useful and informative.

- **Approaching outreach with respect.** Acknowledge the ways that Ward 7 & 8 infrastructure and resources may differ from other parts of the city, which leads to differences in modes of transportation and other habits. Understand that changes to neighborhoods are uncomfortable for many people and raise the possibility of displacement. Consider informing the community through multiple channels (beyond those currently used) about plans to install green infrastructure projects in residential areas and communicating the benefits these will bring to their neighborhoods. If possible, solicit input from the community early enough to inform project location and other design decisions.

- **Focusing on hyperlocal issues for neighborhood-specific campaigns.** The concept of water quality in the Anacostia River may be too abstract for some people to connect with, but local issues of flooding, impacts to property and health, or access to green space may resonate.

- **Partnering with First Nations.** Ground stormwater programs in traditional knowledge of the land and incorporate insights from First Nations people into stormwater programs and curriculum.

3.3 Connect Stormwater to Issues of Health and Well-being

Effective stormwater management can improve health and well-being in many ways, from the mental health benefits of green space to improved indoor air quality when basement flooding is mitigated. However, these connections are not widely known among the public. Committee members felt that drawing clear connections between stormwater and health would be compelling for Ward 7 & 8 residents.

- **Communicate about the health risks of poor stormwater management**. Share information about the risks of mold and increased asthma rates, especially in flood-prone areas. Draw connections between reduced stress, access to nature, and the role of green infrastructure. Develop messaging around how green infrastructure can protect your home and other property.

- **Promote outdoor wellness as a benefit of improved stormwater management**. Promote fishing, nature access, and swimming for physical and emotional health. Ensure that outdoor spaces are safe by reducing trash and pollutants and ensuring adequate lighting at night in parks and public spaces.

- **Improve data access**. Make water quality data more accessible and easier to understand, using visual aids and plain language. Draw clear connections between water quality and health issues.

- **Partner with health-focused organizations.** Explore collaborations with healthcare, housing, and mental health organizations. Incorporate information on health and wellness into river tours and include stormwater management concepts into health-focused workshops.

- **Connect stormwater management to food security**. Rainwater harvesting to support urban agriculture in areas with limited access to fresh produce resonated with committee members and community faith leaders as a stormwater management method that would be widely welcomed in communities.

- **Promote proper pet waste management and litter reduction**. Continue messaging and funding infrastructure improvements around responsible disposal, while promoting clean streets as an easy way for community members to contribute.

3.4 Increase Financial Support

Committee members and the public identified a strong need for additional funding to support stormwater management in Wards 7 & 8, as well as an increased awareness of existing funding sources. The committee acknowledged that DOEE may not have funding to address these suggestions in the near term and recommends these areas as priorities if and when funding is available.

- **Directly fund green infrastructure**. Sustain and expand funding for programs that directly support residents, like RiverSmart Homes. Provide grants or microgrants for practices like rain barrels and green roofs. Explore micro-lending opportunities for smaller groups and projects.

- **Support local leadership and programming**. Fund grassroots organizations, local leaders, and smaller non-profits working on stormwater issues. Allow local panels of community leaders to guide funding decisions in Wards 7 & 8.

- **Fund youth programs**. Support youth-focused trainings and workforce development programs at schools and other venues. Fund youth-led and youth-serving programs that combine workforce development with stormwater management. See section 3.1 for further recommendations related to youth engagement.

- **Increase awareness of existing programs**. Leverage in-person outreach, public events, job fairs, ambassadors, and promotional campaigns to connect residents to funding (see further recommendations in Section 3.2).

3.5 Considerations When Choosing Locations for Green Infrastructure Implementation

DOEE specifically asked for input on choosing locations for green infrastructure implementation on city-owned properties and the public right of way. Committee members participated in a mapping activity where they identified census tracts of highest interest for green infrastructure implementation. Committee members and members of the public also suggested specific sites for green infrastructure implementation. Detailed results of the mapping and public input have been shared with DOEE directly and are summarized here:

- **Areas with relatively high asthma rates should be prioritized for green infrastructure implementation (Figure 2).** Committee members noted that higher asthma rates likely reflect poor air and housing quality, and that while green infrastructure alone cannot solve these issues, it can play a role in mitigation. Tree planting for improved air quality and addressing basement flooding issues were seen as key interventions.

- **Areas with low proximity to parks should be prioritized for green infrastructure implementation (Figure 3).** Although green infrastructure practices do not provide all the same benefits as parks, committee members felt that these areas would benefit from any increased greenery and vegetation.

- **Areas that experience higher temperatures should be prioritized for green infrastructure implementation (Figure 4).** Higher temperatures are typically seen in areas with higher levels of impervious cover. Reducing impervious surfaces in favor of green infrastructure and increasing tree canopy can play a role in lowering temperatures.

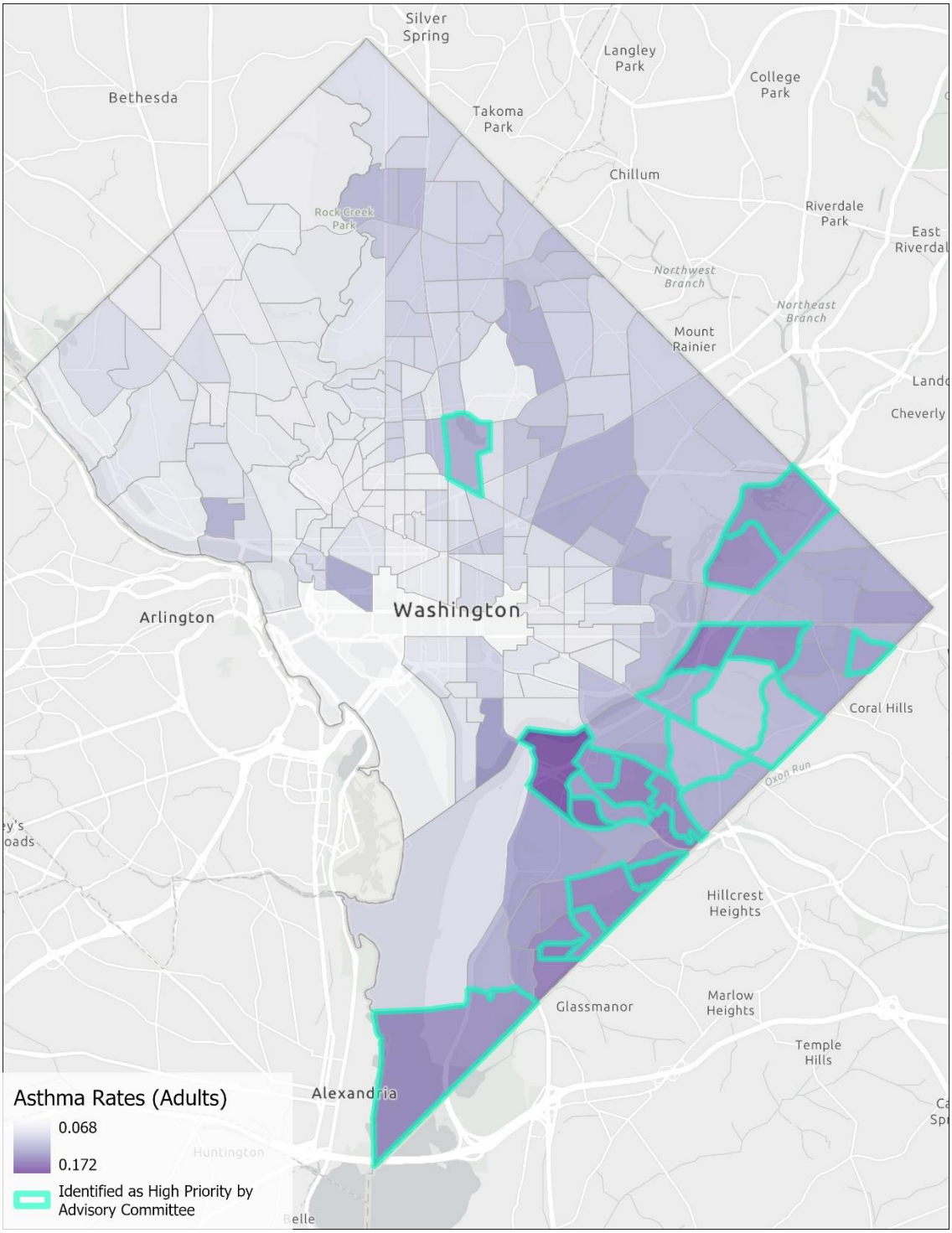

Figure 2 Map showing asthma rates among adults in the DC at the census tract level. Highlighted census tracts indicate areas identified as high priority for green infrastructure implementation by the advisory committee. Asthma data obtained from DOEE.

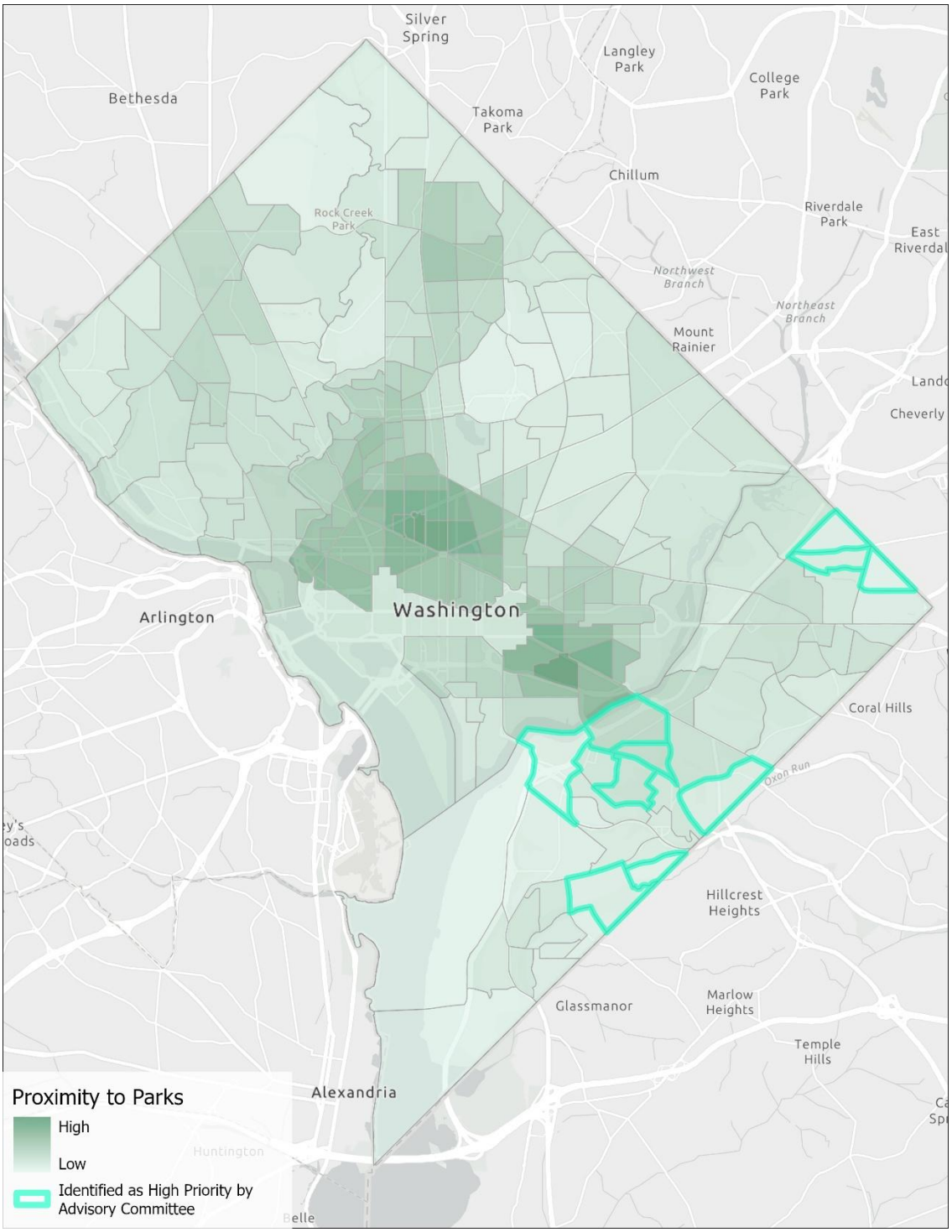

Figure 3 Map showing relative proximity to parks at the census tract level. Highlighted census tracts indicate areas identified as high priority for green infrastructure implementation by the advisory committee. Park proximity data obtained from DOEE.

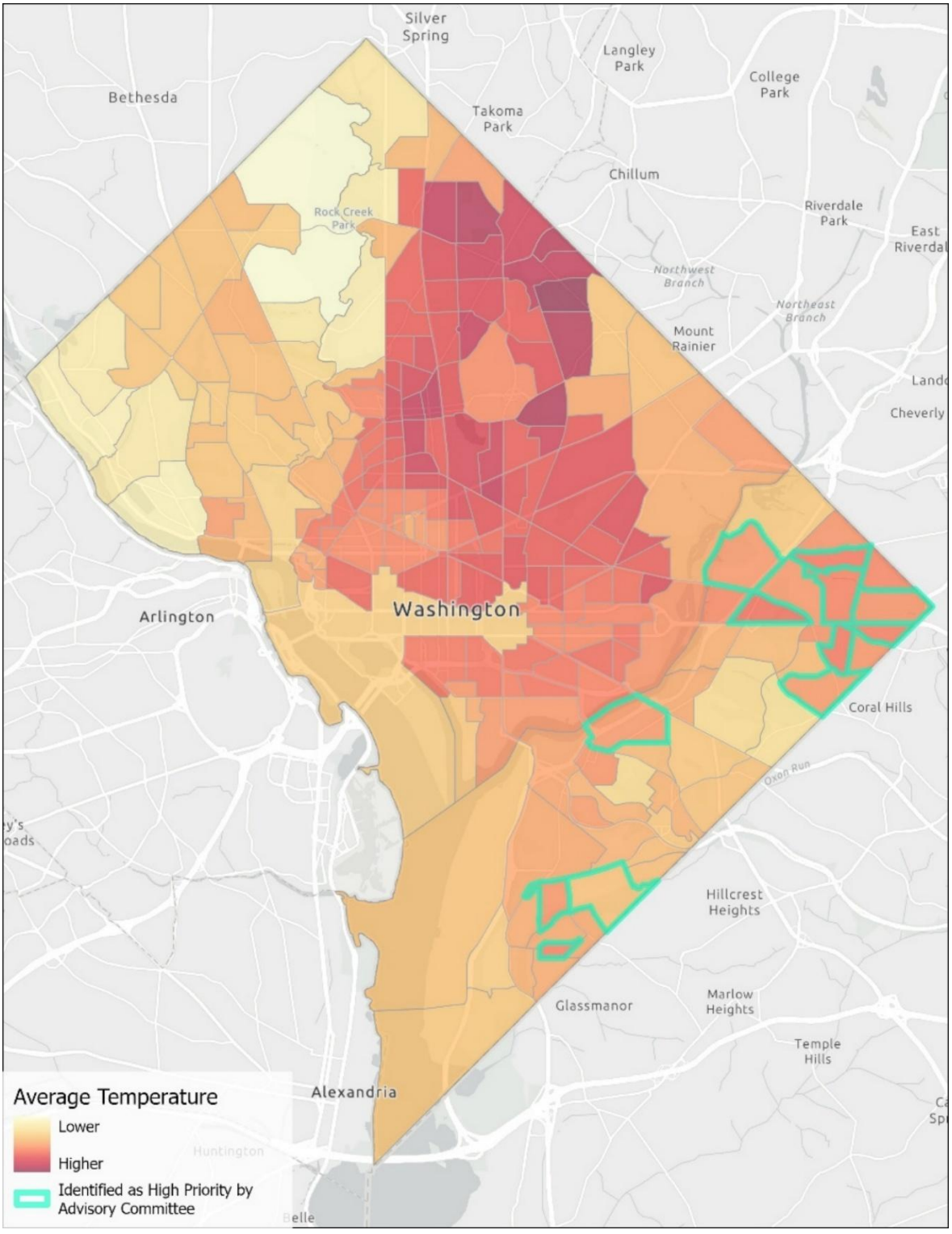

Figure 4 Map showing average temperature at the census tract level. Highlighted census tracts indicate areas identified as high priority for green infrastructure implementation by the advisory committee. Average temperature data obtained from DOEE.

4 IMPLEMENTATION

These recommendations should be used as an internal guidance document for DOEE staff and applied to MS4 permit programs as they are applicable. The proposed recommendations should be incorporated in a manner that leverages existing DOEE resources, advisory groups, and partnerships within the communities they serve. Implementation of recommendations can be scaled as financial resources are available. Current managers of the MS4 permit programs can identify ways that their programs can better serve residents of Wards 7 & 8 using these recommendations. Existing engagement efforts with Wards 7 & 8 should continue and build upon these recommendations. This document can also be used to inform future engagement activities undertaken by MS4 permit programs and choosing locations for green infrastructure implementation to meet permit requirements.

4.1 Capturing Community Engagement Demographics

To ensure that the demographics of Wards 7 & 8 are represented and engaged in any outreach event or activity, an anonymous short survey can be distributed to event participants where they can self-identify by marking options for gender, race/ethnicity, age range, how long they've lived in the area, and whether they've previously heard about the topics being discussed in the event or activity. These questions can also be made available online and provided to participants via QR codes, if they prefer to fill out the short survey that way. Collecting this type of demographic information can help confirm that the desired audience is being reached and signal to DOEE if any adjustments in community outreach need to be made.

4.2 Measuring Progress

The successful implementation of these recommendations can be seen as the point in which long-term residents of Wards 7 & 8 feel like they are able to have an active voice in DOEE programs and advocate for the benefits they want to see in their neighborhoods. For example, this can look like knowing which division, branch, or individual at DOEE to contact about implementing a BMP that manages stormwater and subsequently reduces or eliminates basement flooding. It could also look like DOEE continuing to leverage the Stormwater Advisory Committee assembled for this project, or recruiting a similar group of Ward 7 & 8 community leaders, to help measure progress. To track progress towards success, the following metrics are examples of those that can be measured for each of the recommendations in Section 3.

Center on Youth Education and Green Careers

- Number of stormwater, stormwater management, and green infrastructure focused activities held in a given year.
- Number of children and students who participated in stormwater, stormwater management, and green infrastructure focused activities.
- Engagement metrics of online stormwater education media (e.g., number of hits, impressions, video watch time, etc.)
- Enrollment in stormwater, stormwater management, and green infrastructure focused activities after public service announcements and media publications are released/distributed.

- Amount of dedicated youth education and green career funding.
- Implementation rate of a standardized stormwater curriculum across DCPS, Charter Schools, and after-school programs .
- Enrollment in a stormwater summer or spring break camp.
- Number of partnerships with local businesses, agencies, and non-profits.

Increase Community Accessibility Through Effective Outreach

- Number of outreach campaigns that do not rely on social media.
- Number of easy to read and understand signs on green infrastructure installations.
- Number of hyper-local campaigns that focus on local issues rather than watershed-wide issues.
- Number of trained local leaders to be neighborhood ambassadors and lead green infrastructure walking tours.
- Number of partnerships with First Nations.

Connect Stormwater to Issues of Health and Well-Being

- Number of health and stormwater campaigns.
- Number of partnerships with health-focused organizations.
- Number of food security and stormwater campaigns.
- Number of outdoor wellness and stormwater campaigns.

Increase Financial Support

- Amount of funding dedicated to green infrastructure grant programs.
- Amount of funding dedicated to supporting grassroots organizations, local leaders, and smaller non-profits working on stormwater issues.
- Number of funding decisions guided by local panel of community leaders in Wards 7 & 8.

Considerations When Choosing Locations for Green Infrastructure Implementation

- Number of new green infrastructure practices in areas with high asthma rates in the District.
- Number of new green infrastructure practices in areas with low proximity to parks in the District.
- Number of new green infrastructure practices in areas with high temperatures in the District.

4.3 Evaluate and Adapt

Any recommendations in this document that are implemented should be monitored and evaluated for efficacy in line with adaptive management strategy (Figure 5). Implementation plans should be adjusted as necessary based on the results of the evaluation of collected metrics and available resources.

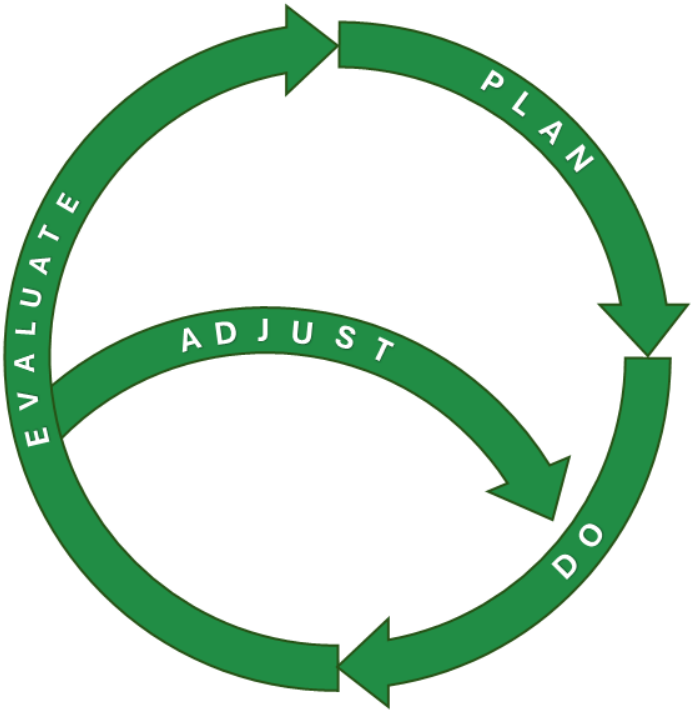

Figure 5: The Adaptive Management Cycle