

# Envisioning a Black River Pathway: Creating a Heritage Destination through Social Development



## Abstract

Maitland Garden Village (MGV) and Oude Molen Eco Village are two geographically and socially isolated communities located along the Black River. The goal of this project was to link pathway development along the Black River to community development through increased tourism and support for community gardens. In collaboration with the MGV and Oude Molen communities, and our sponsors, the City of Cape Town's Environmental and Heritage Management Department, we developed a pathway plan that incorporates community gardening, walking tours, and builds on the community assets found in MGV and Oude Molen. This project helped to connect key stakeholders and generate interest in creating a pathway.

*This project summary is part of an ongoing research programme by students and faculty of the WPI Cape Town Project Centre to explore and develop with local partners options for sustainable community development in South Africa.*

*For our full project report: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/homepage/projects/p2012/pathway/>*

*For more about the Cape Town Project Centre: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/>*

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The City of Cape Town's  
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# Introduction

## Project Goals

This project has three major goals that were developed in conjunction with key stakeholders. The goals are community supported, strategic, and can be implemented in both the short and long term. These goals are as follows: incorporate and build on current gardening initiatives; increase connectivity throughout Two Rivers Urban Park (TRUP); identify current community assets in MGV and Oude Molen as a basis for a walking tour.

## Our Partners

This project was a combined effort of multiple stakeholders. We worked closely with the City of Cape Town's Environmental and Heritage Management Department, represented by Crispin Barrett, Juan Nomdo, and Clive James, as well as the Green Light Project, represented by Ronell Trout and



Figure 1: Oude Molen Eco Village signage



Figure 2: Houses in Maitland Garden Village

Sheila Galant. We also worked regularly with Megan Lukas from the Environmental Resource Management Department who serves as a representative on the Two Rivers Urban Park Committee. As a university project, our advisors, Scott Jiusto and Robert Hersh, guided project development during both the preparatory phase and implementation phase in Cape Town.

## Background

The Black River became polluted when it was canalised in 1943 by the City of Cape Town (Gravel *et al.*, 2011). This directed pollution from industries located upstream to contaminate the entire river. Similarly, surrounding river communities experienced social and economic marginalisation at the hand of rapid urbanisation. This has caused the City of Cape Town and communities surrounding the river to begin looking at restoration projects, such as projects focused on tourism, heritage, and agricultural opportunities that can connect visitors to the Black River corridor, mak-

ing it a destination. The city's hope is to use agriculture and tourism as a way to improve employment and social opportunities. Our project explores ways to revitalise the Black River and surrounding communities through a linked process.

Our project continues the work done in 2011 by a WPI student team in the Cape Town Project Centre. That group initiated planning a pathway along the Black River corridor. Our project focused on a smaller scope within the corridor to more thoroughly evaluate pathway opportunities as they pertain to the specific development of Maitland Garden Village (MGV) and Oude Molen Eco Village (MGV). These communities are located within the Two Rivers Urban Park (TRUP), the area surrounding the Black and Liesbeek Rivers as well as the additional communities of Alexandra Hospital, Valkenberg Hospital, and Observatory. A common theme between these projects is that the community is



Figure 3: Desire line in the wetlands

a large and necessary impetus in pathway planning processes to create a sustainable effort (Delgado, 2005). See Figure 7 for a map of this area.

## Key Outcomes

Our team experienced successes and met challenges while developing the pathway vision. The key outcomes of these experiences are as follows:

1. Facilitated connections between Maitland Garden Village to the Two Rivers Urban Park Committee and several city departments.
2. Generated interest throughout multiple city and community organisations by meeting with and/or presenting to stakeholders.
3. Identified possible attractions within Maitland Garden Village and Oude Molen Eco Village to help develop the area as a destination.
4. Drafted and submitted a pathway vision proposal to the City of Cape Town's Environmental and Heritage Management Department.
5. Created a sample pamphlet for a featured walking tour through Maitland Garden Village and Oude Molen Eco Village and designed key interpretive signage for the area.
6. Reflected on notable events throughout the project for our team's website.



## Shared Action Learning

This project is guided by Shared Action Learning (SAL), a philosophy used by all 2012 CTPC projects. SAL provides a way to think about and engage in partnerships with stakeholders. This method focuses on sharing knowledge, ideas, resources, and inspiration; taking action



Figure 4: Learning from Oude Molen resident

that supports creativity and community growth; and learning from our interactions and research through group and personal reflections (Juisto, S., Hersh, R. & Taylor, S, 2012). It combines initial background research and planning, with action and project reflection in Cape Town.

Sharing ideas with, interacting with, and learning from our sponsor and other stakeholders helped us understand many views about the potential for a pathway. Hearing the perspectives on the project from both the city and MGV community increased our understanding and helped us serve as a bridge be-

tween the community and the city. Our key partners for collaboration were our sponsor liaisons, MGV and Oude Molen community members, and another student team working in MGV. In the early stages of our project, there was extensive collaboration between our team and these partners, especially community members. Our time spent in MGV and Oude Molen, whether it was walking the desire lines, hearing about gardening heritage, or listening to community stories, helped us understand community dynamics and needs through active observation. Collaborating with the city and communities provided a solid foundation for us to execute the main deliverable of our project, the pathway vision proposal.

## The Journey

Our project involves a seven week preparatory phase at our university and a seven week implementation phase in Cape Town. The following is an account of our journey.

### Preparatory Phase

Our preliminary research focused on urban agriculture, tourism, and pathway design elements. The urban agriculture aspect mainly focused on community supported agriculture (CSA), a scheme where buyers enter a mutual agreement with growers/sellers, which guarantees a source of income for the grower and a source of food for the buyer (Thornton, 2008). Our interest in tour-

ism for the pathway vision stemmed from the possibility of ecotourism and a walking tour through Maitland Garden Village and Oude Molen. Walking tours are an effective way of bringing visitors to the area and showcasing community assets (Wong, 2001). Our team also looked at multiple river restoration efforts, notably the Bronx River, Spicket River, and South Platte River. A common theme between these efforts is that the community plays a large role in the clean-up and design process (Renn, 2008). Collectively, these research topics guided us through the initial phases of our project.

## Experiencing MGV and Oude Molen

Arriving in Cape Town, we strived to build good working relationships with Maitland Garden Village residents. Our community liaisons, Sheila Galant and

Ronell Trout, facilitated interactions with community leaders, youth, and elderly residents. As our project developed, heritage became an important aspect to incorporate into the pathway planning, so we used community connections to gather information. We discussed both the agriculture and social history of the area with the community members and learned more about their life experiences in MGV. This notion of heritage complemented the more customary notion that heritage related primarily to a community's architecture, its built environment. Community members felt it was important to highlight the long held gardening competitions and home vegetable and flower gardens, while our sponsors initially focused on MGV's unique domestic architecture. We learned that in the 17th century, MGV land was used for farming and supplied Dutch shipping companies



Figure 5: WPI students with MGV gardeners



*Figure 6: MGV community member showing students around community footpaths*

and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, MGV residents held gardening competitions. Community members recounted stories where winners of the gardening competitions were awarded prizes such as fruit trees. In the pathway proposal, we reflected MGV's rich agricultural history by providing plans for community gardens.

We also learned about the role that previous residents played in the World War I Battle of Delville Wood, a historically significant battle where South Africans fought alongside the British. Parts of MGV were originally built in the early 1920s as housing for soldiers returning from the Battle of Delville Wood, so the architecture of the houses mirrors British World War I semi-detached homes. Community members were

proud to narrate stories of their fathers' roles in the battle and their lives growing up in MGV. Such a rich link to South African history made a strong case for MGV to be recognised as a heritage destination. We suggest this part of South African history be incorporated into the pathway through a memorial attraction.

We also walked along informal footpaths, or desire lines, to envision what a Black River pathway can look like. A member of a community based club, the Roaring 60s, guided a tour through these desire lines and along the M5 highway. From this tour and from other residents' accounts, it was clear that the pathway could be of great benefit to community members, particularly because it could increase the level of gar-

dening and recreational activities in MGV. It would especially help to keep youth occupied during the holidays, which is a major concern for many parents and older community members.

During our tour, we came to understand a prevalent issue currently facing MGV residents. We noticed that the desire lines often led to the M5 highway but there is no safe way to cross the multiple lanes of traffic. Residents hope to regain pedestrian bridge access over the M5, which would greatly improve their access to leisure activities as well as improved public transportation on the other side of the Black River. Presently, children cross during their summer holiday to access a pool, and many other residents cross to access public transportation, hospitals, the bird sanctuary, and the astronomical observatory. The previous pedestrian bridge was demolished when the highway was updated and the Valkenberg Bridge, accessible from Oude Molen, was originally intended for pedestrian use. However,

the community has found that their attempts to cross the Valkenberg Bridge are refused. Consequently, our proposal includes recommendations for allowing pedestrian access across the M5 and Black River to reflect the MGV and Oude Molen community's needs.

## Mapping the land

We were able to incorporate community assets and residents' visions for the pathway through the use of mapping programmes provided by our city sponsors. Having been on numerous walks along the desire lines in MGV and Oude Molen, we understood the layout of the area and how we might plan a pathway including the two communities and their assets. The amount of planning necessary for the pathway map design required that we work with a technical assistant from the Environmental and Heritage Management Department. We first needed to determine property boundaries, owners, and ratepayers in areas that could potentially be useful for gardening initiatives. We were able to know who owned different plots of land that we wanted to include in our pathway using a programme called ISIS. This programme also allowed us to see the zoning, such as land designated for residential development. With ArcView, a GIS mapping software, the city technical staff helped us develop maps suitable for expressing our pathway plans and, later, recommendations included in our proposal. This can be seen in Figure 7.



*Figure 7: Sheila, Lorenzo, Ronell*



# Meeting with Stakeholders

A critical part of this project was meeting with several stakeholders to discuss options for the pathway. Our team met regularly with the Green Light Project and the City of Cape Town’s Environmental and Heritage Management Department. Additionally, we met with several other city departments to discuss their involvement with the project:

- Storm Water Management to discuss issues with the water hyacinth on the Black River and possible removal alternatives
- Parks and Recreation to discuss the possibilities of a gardening agreement with the MGW community
- Property Management to discuss the potential for a community garden on the old MGW driving range land

We also presented our vision to the Sustainable Livelihoods Network, a department that promotes initiatives for livelihoods in an environmentally friendly way; the TRUP Committee, a coalition of residents invested in the areas of TRUP; and the TRUP Steering Committee, a committee of various city and province officials, politicians, and select members of the TRUP committee. Table 1 summarizes our gained perspective from key stakeholders.

We frequently met with the Environmental and Heritage Management De-

partment and the MGW community. These interactions shaped our project expectations and allowed us to integrate these expectations into a pathway proposal to spark future interest in the project. The city was interested in surveying MGW as a potential heritage site. MGW community members were largely interested in using the pathway as a tool for the city to begin housing updates. If MGW were made a heritage site, then the community members

hoped this would force facility updating. Ultimately, we formed connections with these groups and fostered a future relationship between the city and MGW community to collaborate with one another regarding these issues.

While this was the first occasion hearing about a Black River pathway for many, we were invited to meet with and present to multiple interested organisations. These meetings afforded us a

greater understanding of perspectives involving the pathway idea and proposed land usage. For example, the Green Light Project was focused on a specific site for a community garden and help centre at the start of the project period. As our team attended city meetings, it was clear that other land considerations were necessary due to ownership complications. Different city departments expressed varying perspectives as well. For example, when we

Table 1: Stakeholder perspectives

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <div>The Green Light Project</div> <div>•The Green Light Project is very enthusiastic for the pathway because of the opportunities it will bring to the MGW community. While they would like to see more progress, they are still hopeful that plans are moving forward.</div>  | <div>Environmental and Heritage Management Department</div> <div>•Our sponsor felt that the pathway vision had potential to connect communities within and surrounding TRUP. This involves many different city departments, so it would take time to finalise a vision and allot funds to build it. They are optimistic about our pathway vision serving as a next step in the pathway building process.</div> | <div>TRUP Committee</div> <div>•The TRUP Committee is interested in our pathway vision as a way to connect TRUP. They provided suggestions to help move the project forward, such as exploring other types of agriculture and meeting with different stakeholders who could be helpful.</div>   |
| <div>Parks and Recreation</div> <div>•A representative from Parks felt that the gardening aspect of the pathway vision was feasible. Gardening on city land would involve transferring land to Parks to create a public open space and drafting an agreement between MGW and the Parks department. They thought gardening in combination with a pathway would be beneficial to the community.</div> | <div>Storm Water Management</div> <div>•This department felt that using a pathway to stimulate ecological restoration of the river wasn’t practical. They also felt there was no permanent solution to the water hyacinth problem in the river. They did not have a strong opinion on the pathway itself but indicated there was little that could be done with respect to the river’s pollution.</div>        | <div>Property Management</div> <div>•Property Management has recently learned about land and lease issues in MGW, but felt that transferring land to Parks for a community garden was viable, but would take time while they sorted out ownership. Upon learning of the whole scope of the project, they were interested in the idea but did not comment much on the vision as a whole.</div> |



met with Parks and Recreation, the idea of a community garden along the pathway was exciting and seemed like a simple process. However, when we met with Property Management, we learned about the technical challenges in obtaining land such as lease agreements and competing interests.

### Wrapping Up

The proposal writing process involved balancing the many factors we learned about over the seven weeks onsite, including land ownership complications, community needs, the City of Cape Town’s expectations, and our advisors’ suggestions. We worked on integrating agriculture into the pathway through community gardening and tourism initiatives that could create jobs, such as walking tours. The vision also includes integrating MGV and Oude Molen’s community assets by creating a feature based plan.

Some of the biggest challenges came from working with multiple stakeholders and reflecting their vision, along with our vision, in the plan. The Environmental and Heritage Management Department was interested in making MGV a heritage site and wanted heritage to be the proposal’s main theme. We were concerned, at first, because our preparatory work was based on agriculture and tourism. We found, however, that MGV’s heritage is rooted in agriculture which can serve as an attraction for potential tourists. We also had

to be sensitive to other community initiatives. MGV’s Green Light Project was initially interested in a plot of land for a help centre and community garden. Through city meetings, we found that another city department was looking into alternative uses for the land. In our proposal, we suggested compromises for the land to allow multiple uses.

The final product for our sponsor was a visually stimulating proposal that used

images accompanied by text to walk a reader through the pathway experience. We also presented to multiple stakeholders as a final presentation. This represented our final vision for the pathway and will hopefully catalyse future action.

### Final Recommendations

### Highlight features through pathway development

A pathway through Maitland Garden Village and Oude Molen Eco Village would help make these communities destinations for walkers who could enjoy the views along the Black River, for those interested in social history and heritage, and for those who would like to see firsthand local community development initiatives. Our pathway vision



Figure 7: Map of pathway feature locations



highlights community and natural assets in both Maitland Garden Village and Oude Molen Eco Village. Features along the pathway include:

- Existing community gardens at the Methodist Church, crèche, and in residents' yards
- A community garden on the old driving range land
- A playground
- Delville Square
- Wetlands
- Oude Molen's Micro-Businesses
- Food Garden Village
- Horse stables
- Millstone Café
- Valkenberg Bridge

There are features along the pathway that will need minimal renovation with the creation of the pathway, such as the existing community gardens, Delville Square, the wetlands, Oude Molen's micro-businesses, Food Garden Village, the horse stables, and the Millstone Café. Interpretive signage could be added to all of these features to further incorporate them into our vision. Recommendations for community garden expansion, the playground, and the Valkenberg Bridge are given in subsequent recommendations.

## Improve communication among stakeholders

We facilitated meetings between community members, city departments, and

the Two Rivers Urban Park (TRUP) Committee, which we recommend to continue after our departure. Regular meetings between stakeholders regarding the pathway will help ensure that interested parties are notified and involved in planning processes. Attendees to such meetings should include community representatives from both MGCV and Oude Molen, members of the TRUP Committee, the ward councilor for MGCV and Oude Molen, and representatives from relevant city departments. MGCV has also gained representation on the TRUP committee and it is imperative that their representation continues to keep the community voice active in future decisions. An example of this is the lack of a pedestrian bridge across the M5, an issue that was brought to the TRUP committee through this project.

## Promote pedestrian access to connect Two Rivers Urban Park

Pedestrian access over the M5 and Black River is necessary for connecting TRUP and providing accessible transportation for MGCV and Oude Molen residents. The Valkenberg Bridge is the best potential solution because it does not require additional funding or construction. Pedestrians should be allowed access past the first boom of the bridge, which ensures that they will not enter the hospital grounds or disrupt patients.

## Develop a multipurpose area that allows the implementation of community supported agriculture



Figure 8: Valkenberg Bridge over the Black River

Based on multiple agricultural business models we evaluated, a community supported agriculture (CSA) model is a feasible option for MGCV. This would entail a combination of working and paying members so that interested participants could buy into regular shares of produce either through providing labour (known as a work-share) or paying. CSA would allow community members to begin, and ultimately sustain, a small-scale garden that could expand as the amount of land and produce increases. While initial gardening stages would provide produce to the gardeners, there is potential for expansion of CSA membership to residents beyond the programme and for the creation of a farmers market, allowing further income generation.

The land included in the driving range lease would provide a suitable location for the beginning of a community garden. The garden will start in a small plot of land and grow in phases as more land is needed. This land could be shared with other MGCV community groups to accommodate multiple visions and benefits. The driving range building space could also be divided for offices and storage. A playground near the community garden patch would allow parents to work in the garden and provide a safe play space for children.

## Initiate Black River walking tours

Guided walking tours, which could generate a supplementary income for guides via admission fees or gratuities, provide opportunities for job creation. These tours along the pathway will visit



Figure 9: Phases for MGCV's community garden



Figure 10: Sample walking tour brochure

highlighted features while discussing their heritage significance. Interpretive signage throughout the pathway will enhance these tours by visually bringing the tour together. The Green Light Project is interested in guiding these tours. Bringing walking tours through MGW and Oude Molen will help to make them a destination.

## Reflection

Shared action learning, the guiding philosophy we used for collaborating with community members, city officials, our project advisors, and the TRUP Committee, was not only useful for creating visions for the pathway, but also facilitating communication between stakeholders in the pathway. Liaising between stakeholders that previously lacked communication provided a challenge for our team because we were new to this project, the MGW community, and municipal government. As a team, it was difficult to express our concerns and opinions among the other stakeholders because we felt that they often knew more about community and government issues.

Even within the MGW community, communication difficulties led to duplicated, unsupported, and disjointed visions for the driving range. These ideas include a help centre, soccer field, and community garden. If WPI became equally involved with other leadership organisations within MGW, we perhaps could



Figure 11: Wetlands behind Oude Molen

have mediated between these organisations instead of advocating for one group over the other.

We also learned continually about city government relationships with both local government and provincial government. As we attended various presentations and meetings with the city, we realised that we were inexperienced with the government structure and political dynamic; however, we found that learning about these things was an interesting and valuable educational experience. When it was time to put the pathway vision into a formal proposal, we were unsure how to balance appro-

priate text with captivating visuals. For our final proposal, we were able to respectfully create a pathway vision for different organisations to read and sell the pathway idea.



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