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Sweeter Streams in Reston

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Just down the street from my house, a little stream meanders through the thick, Virginia woods. Most of the time it's rather shallow and slow-moving, but it's a great little adventure for my two small children.

Erosion has taken its toll over the years, and there are areas we avoid along the creek bed because they are too dangerous to traverse. At some points, the walls along the creek are muddy, rocky cliffs about six feet tall, and at other points the rocks along the stream bed are too sharp and craggy to scale.

Late this past summer, my children and I watched as the Reston stream restoration project rolled into our neighborhood. We saw evidence of the construction project's arrival weeks in advance, as trees were marked and stakes were placed through the woods, showing the path the large-scale construction equipment would take to gain access to the stream valley.

Several weeks after work on the stream portion in our neighborhood began, my children and I took a stroll through the construction zone on a Saturday morning outing. The scale of the project was impressive. We had seen truckloads of trees being hauled away, but standing in the middle of the project and looking around at the open space being created was amazing.

The stream itself was beginning to take shape, with a lower bank and a much wider open space to handle excessive runoff during storms. While the old stream ran through thick, small trees, the reconstructed stream runs through a wider open area. We could look downstream and watch the creek head into the distance, where we used to lose sight of the creek after about 30 feet in the thick of the woods.

Lately, some people have expressed alarm that this project is far too large and that rather than helping the environment and improving the community, it is actually changing the stream for the worst. These critics are shortsighted and have an unrealistic vision of what the stream will look like 50 years in the future.

In the past 40 years erosion has taken its toll on the stream, which now carves a small canyon out of Reston land and slowly consumes trees, rocks and open space and threatens to gobble up bridges and pathways in the years to come. Erosion has exposed underground pipes nearby, threatening those pipes with advanced aging in the open air and leading to unpredictable bursts and expensive repairs. The sediment that has washed downstream over the years has grown and ends up in Reston lakes, and eventually needs to be dredged away at a high cost.

Reston Association and other community organizations have shown great leadership in

identifying the long-term problems posed by doing nothing, and deserve great kudos for creating partnerships that will result in Reston spending no money on the project and receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in environmental benefits.

One woman at a meeting this week expressed anger that the project took out trees that used to shade her running path. She failed to realize that those trees would be taken out sooner or later by the stream. This project makes it more likely that there will be strong tree growth in the same area decades from now.

Reston citizens have worked on this project since 2000, and it has been well covered in public meetings and in articles in all the local newspapers. The Reston Association Web site and other online resources have posted reams of information about the project, from its earliest planning stages to photographs and updates on the work in progress today.

Unfortunately, no matter how much encouragement goes into getting people involved in what is happening in their own backyard, it's often not until the trees start getting cut down that people actually take notice.

The stream restoration project is a good project that has been well-researched and independently verified. Residents who are interested in the project should take a moment to read the information readily available online. Search The Observer's archives for the news stories we have written, or go to reston.org for detailed information.

The project is a great benefit for Reston and I look forward to seeing the results of the work improve with age over the next decade and longer.

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