



DRB Approves Stream Restoration

Scores show up to support project at meeting of Design Review Board.

By Mike DiCicco

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After droves of residents turned out to protest the stream restoration project underway in Reston at a lively meeting of the community's Design Review Board in December, board Chairman Richard Newlon urged members of the overflow crowd at last week's meeting on the same topic to remain civil and try not to direct their remarks at each other. However, this time, almost everyone who showed up to speak supported the project. At the conclusion of the Jan. 27 meeting, the Design Review Board (DRB) unanimously approved plans for the restoration of the first three of six "reaches" in the Glade watershed and the work is to begin shortly.

The outcry against the restoration project began after hundreds of trees were taken down during work on the badly damaged lower reaches of the Snakeden watershed. However, Mike Rolband, president of Wetland Studies and Solutions Inc. (WSSI), the company that is carrying out the project, has said the Glade watershed will require less intense work and has also modified his original plans for repairing the streams.

"We did deal with a lot of citizens and a lot of this came from their comments, as well as our own review," Rolband said of the plan modifications. He again laid out the company's plan for saving trees, as he had explained it to interested residents over the previous several weeks. In addition to sparing trees, an area frequented by fireflies and another that is home to lady slippers will be avoided at the request of residents.

ANYONE INTERESTED will also have a chance to take home plants that are removed during the project and felled trees will be cut up and given away as firewood. And Rolband promised continued community involvement, including meetings with Reston staff and residents.

Jerry Volloy, the former Reston Association CEO who was part of the decision to give the project to Rolband, said the plan modifications demonstrated that he had put his trust in the right company. "Mike has been more than willing, whenever anyone in the Reston community raised their hand, to respond to them and to respond to their concerns," he said. Volloy was also speaking as president of the Alliance of Reston Clusters and Homeowners.

A factor in the decision to have WSSI do the work was that the \$70 million job would be done for free, as developers that damage wetlands more or less pay Rolband's company to offset the damage by repairing wetlands elsewhere. Localities compete to have the work done on their streams.

Diana Carter, though, said she wanted plans to be considered for the entire watershed at once, rather than a few reaches at a time. She wondered whether the DRB would have approved plans for early work on the Snakeden watershed if the board had known what the later phases would look like. Carter spoke on behalf of Save the Glade, a coalition of about 20 residents who have raised concerns about the project.

"The Glade is a very, very special place in Reston. It's a very special place in Northern Virginia," Carter said, her voice wavering. If the same techniques were applied there as in the Snakeden watershed, she told the board, "it is going to destroy the environment and you really, really owe it to the community to save this and not to let that happen."

WHILE THE PROJECT has been touted as helping the Chesapeake Bay, WSSI has not said the streams' water quality would be improved, she said. While advocates of the restoration have said it would reduce the need to dredge lakes, the Glade watershed empties into a marsh rather than a lake. Finally, Carter said, the restoration would not fix the source of the problem — the concrete culverts that funnel water from streets and parking lots into streams.

Rolband said the restored streams were designed to handle water from the culverts, although he added that he "would love to rip all those culverts out" if he could get paid for the work.

Ron Rubin, co-chair of the Reston Association's Environmental Advisory Committee, said his group's job was to offer the association independent advice on environmental issues. "We've looked into this, we've followed it for years and we fully support it," he said.

While it was easy to count the number of trees removed during stream restoration, said resident Carolyn Badila, no one knew how many trees had been and would be lost to erosion undercutting stream banks.

Cindy Crane, whose house backs up on the Snakeden watershed, said the stream behind her house now looks "thousand times better."

"The rest of Fairfax County has a program to restore their streams. It would be crazy for us not to do it here," John Thillmann said.

Ted Moline said he couldn't wait until restoration started in his area along the Colvin Run watershed, which he called "an unholy mess."

Katharine Hunter said she looked forward to seeing fish and tadpoles in the Glade streams.

Many others testified on behalf of the project and a few spoke against it.

RESTON FOUNDER Bob Simon said one reason so many supporters of the project had attended the meeting, in spite of the sleet and freezing rain that was falling outside, was that he and others had asked them to come. However, he said it was still rare to get a large turnout of people who weren't angry about something.

Simon said he had been "appalled" by some of the criticism at the previous meeting. "Here we are getting this enormously important project given to us," he said. "Seventy million dollars, to us, is a lot of money. I understand it's a nickel to people across the river."

"Your solutions in the Glade would appear to be more responsive to community concerns than they would have been in Snakeden," DRB member Michael Miller told Rolband, before the board approved the project. "I'm not saying you did anything wrong in Snakeden, other than surprising the hell out of everyone," he added.

"I've tried my hardest to make everyone happy," Rolband said. "It's not possible. But I'm still trying."

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