



# Green Space Advisor

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## Message From The President

### President's message for the GSSGS newsletter of July 2014

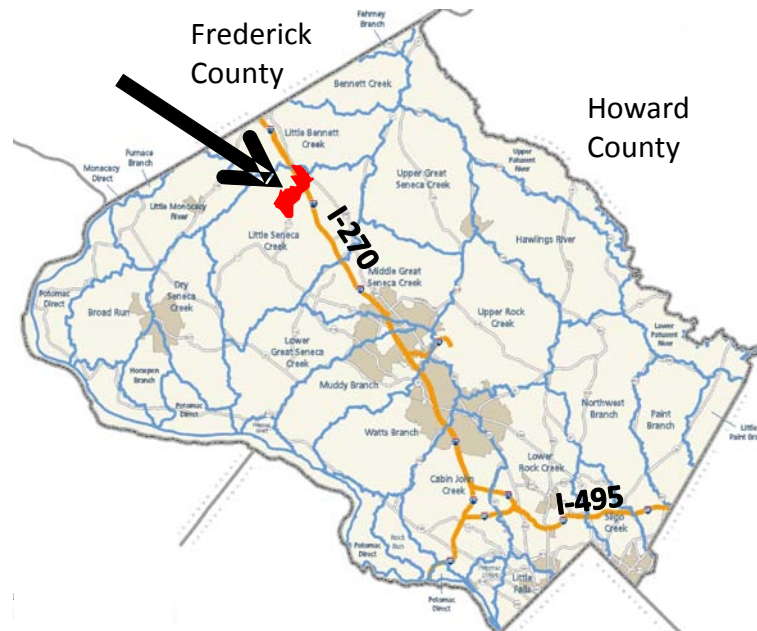
County Councilmember Marc Elrich and his chief of staff, Dale Tibbitts, attended our annual membership meeting in April. Elrich addressed three topics: Bus Rapid Transit, the re-write of the zoning code, and development near Ten Mile Creek.

Bus Rapid Transit differs from our present bus system by having dedicated bus lanes, bus priority at intersections, and subway features such as raised platforms and ticket machines. The plan championed by Elrich and adopted by the county council will create an 81-mile network with 10 routes, one of which will be on Georgia Avenue to Olney.

The re-write of the zoning code was approved by the council in March. Elrich voted against it due to concerns about neighborhood shopping centers and master plans, but he noted that Sandy Spring and Olney won't change much. See the article in this issue about how the re-write affects the Rural Neighborhood Cluster zone that is so important for our open space.

The Ten Mile Creek watershed, its history, and the concerns about the proposed development were reviewed by Elrich. See Sharon Dooley's article for

details, including the council's favorable decision in April.



**The development proposed near Ten Mile Creek is just west of Clarksburg. Its location is shown superimposed on a map of the Montgomery County watersheds.**

## Montgomery County Makes the Right Moves! by Sharon Dooley

### Ten Mile Creek Update

Ten Mile Creek and the development threats to this fragile water shed were discussed in our previous newsletter. The Planning Board had voted against the recommendations of staff and the community and approved several hundred homes on land near the head waters of this unspoiled creek. We can now report that the County Council has modified this Planning Board decision and legislated a compromise designed to provide permanent protections to the Ten Mile Creek and its nearby watershed. The back-up drinking water supply will remain protected from polluted inflow.

The County Council and the County Executive listened to the community, heard the testimony of the scientists and heeded the advice from the environmental communities. After impassioned debate on both sides of this issue, a Master Plan amendment was adopted by the council and eventually passed by a unanimous vote. This legislation created a safe zone to allow the creek to remain protected from development far into the future in addition to decreasing the residential development allowed. The County Executive removed land slated to house a school bus depot from development consideration. As a result of these actions, the most onerous proposal for close-in development was taken out of play.

Had there not been a several years effort led by the Audubon Naturalist Society and eventually joined by a coalition of more than 30 community groups from environmental, labor, civic and religious interests, the protective council action would not have happened; this shows that a campaign focused on important issues can sometimes win out over those who promote unfettered development. What eventually emerged was a compromise which provided protections for the creek and allowed some development. The main points for these changes are:

- 6% imperviousness limit on new development in the most sensitive areas

- Mandates 80% open space requirements
- 200 foot buffers for wetlands, streams and springs
- Reforestation goals of 65% forest cover for the entire watershed.

The development will be encouraged on parcels of land close to Route 355 and other currently developed areas, which will still have restrictions on imperviousness, just not as stringent. By protecting the headwaters from unleashed runoffs frequently seen in construction sites, the community will work to ensure the continued viability of this first class stream which currently supports a vibrant aquatic life with trout, salamanders and tadpoles.

Council member at large Marc Elrich led this preservation effort for several years; he was also joined by Council member (D1) Roger Berliner in crafting a compromise that all could be comfortable with. The environmental community did not get the impervious limits as strict as they wanted and the development community did not see all of their expansion allowed. However in the end, it appeared that all could live with the final decision and residents of Montgomery County will enjoy a win-win. They will still get to enjoy a unique stream with clear, clean water and yet find more development which will provide an increased tax base and provide more jobs.

So I am quite pleased to report that these efforts of many people over several years led to a victory, not just for us, as advocates, but also for the natural environment we presently enjoy and wish to preserve for future generations. Caution is urged for the watchdog groups to remain vigilant, so that the understandings reached now are ultimately carried forward in faithfulness to both the letter and spirit of the compromises made.

Many thanks to Diane Cameron of the Audubon Naturalist Society who led this effort and for all of those who joined with her.

**A New Vision for Conservation Land Trusts: Transforming Urban Centers in the  
Washington, D.C. Region**  
by  
**Rachel Toker**

There is a growing need to reverse the trends of air and water quality degradation, as well as species loss, throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The region's available open space is decreasing and its ecosystems are eroding, and, although the problem is acknowledged by our state and local governments, not enough is being done. We have reached a point where the *preservation* of remaining natural spaces is not enough: we must return some of our urbanized lands to their original natural functions.

Urban Ecosystem Restorations, Inc. (UER) is an emerging urban conservation land trust created to increase the number of green spaces serving ecosystem functions\* on privately owned urban land and to protect them over time. UER's vision is to work with landowners to develop small but numerous eco-functioning spaces (EFS) – at an urban scale – in the cities and suburbs of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Because urban land is in high demand for buildings and hardscapes, UER believes it is essential that each eco-functioning space serve multiple environmental needs simultaneously – using landscape designs and plant selections that sequester greenhouse gases, reduce heat island effects, provide habitat for birds and pollinators, and retain and filter rainwater, all at the same time. UER's goal is to develop these EFS, protect them over time, and, ultimately, connect them into greenways that UER owns or controls. The result will restore ecosystem function for generations to come, and, wherever appropriate, serve human wellness needs and promote science learning and conservation efforts.

UER will function in the following areas:

- (a) ***EFS development*** – UER will offer a menu of services to site owners and developers who are planning for new construction or landscape retrofits, or who may be trying to preserve natural or planted portions of their sites. These services will assist owners in the optimal location and/or design of EFS within their site(s). The services will include: landscape designs, optimizing stormwater management plans for water retention and filtration using natural materials and vegetation, preparing soil, accessing specialized green infrastructure expertise to inform building plans and site design, advising on planting plans for maximum performance, optimizing interactions between building systems and EFS, and satisfying and exceeding green building accreditation requirements.
- (b) ***EFS management and protection*** – UER will oversee or directly deliver specialized maintenance services to enhance property aesthetics, maximize eco-function, and monitor and protect the EFS. When appropriate and approved by the landowner, the EFS will be opened to the public for health and educational purposes.
- (c) ***EFS aggregation and strategic regional placement*** – UER will work within larger regional planning initiatives, such as master plans and sector plans, to locate and aggregate EFS so that public parks and other existing green spaces are protected by buffers and connected by greenway corridors through densely populated areas.

UER anticipates that, although there will be costs to dedicating space for protected EFS within real-estate developments, participating landowners will enjoy many benefits from partnering with UER as well, including cost reductions for new construction and renovations, increases in market value for participating developments, and higher ratings in eco-rating systems like LEED, Green Globes, the Sustainable Sites Initiative, and Enterprise Green Communities.

If you have comments or questions about Urban Ecosystem Restorations, or would like to volunteer with the organization, please contact Rachel Toker at: [toker.rachel@gmail.com](mailto:toker.rachel@gmail.com).

*\*For these purposes, “ecosystem functions,” “eco-functions,” and “eco-services” are terms referring to ecological functions that occur on lands within normal, undisturbed ecosystems and that provide some of the basic necessities for human survival, such as: water retention/filtration, greenhouse gas sequestration and air filtration, decomposition/composting, and the provision of native habitats that support naturally-occurring food webs. These functions also include land and water temperature modulation that enables the growth of various native plant and animal communities.*

## How the zoning code re-write affects the Rural Neighborhood Cluster zone

by  
Bobby Berg

In March, the county council approved a re-write of the zoning code. As with most changes of law, there are winners, losers, and uncertainties. The primary question for Greater Sandy Spring Space was: How will the re-write affect the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) zone that is so important for preserving open space?

A neighborhood with RNC zoning is guaranteed to have at least 60% open space in the form of fields and woods. Examples include Ashton Preserve and Auburn Village in Sandy Spring and Batchellors Forest in Olney. The open space is usually owned by a neighborhood association, but it benefits the wider community also.

The open space forms viewscapes visible from the road, the woods and fields preserve habitat for wildlife, and the limited size of the lots reduces the amount of fertilizer and pesticides that wash from lawns into the water table and nearby streams.

The bottom line is that the RNC and its main requirements remain intact. This includes the requirement for 60% open space and the allowance of most types of farming, including animal husbandry. Here are some of the minor changes caused by the re-write:

- A parking lot is no longer allowed for a commercial purpose, even if that purpose is permitted in the RNC zone.
- A solar collection system that is freestanding (not on the roof) is allowed, but it cannot exceed 120% of the lot's energy consumption.
- "Agricultural processing" (think of a sawmill) is no longer allowed.
- Some uses are still permitted but are limited by particular use standards. An example is a small bed-and-breakfast.

The requirements of the new zoning code are nicely summarized as a table in Section 3.1.6. You can download the document at:

[montgomeryplanning.org/development/zoning/](http://montgomeryplanning.org/development/zoning/)

## THE RACHEL CARSON GREENWAY

by  
Steve Berry

The Rachel Carson Greenway is a system of interconnected trails that will run between the historic Adelphia Mill in Prince George's County and the Patuxent River State Park, which is located in northeastern Montgomery County. The Greenway will be an interpretative natural trail for the entire 25 miles of its proposed length with proposed interpretive segments describing the Greenway's key natural, historic and cultural resources. Each interpretative theme will be based on a quote from *The Sense of Wonder* by Rachel Carson. Suggested themes include

- 1) sounds of water;
- 2) teaching children;

- 4) changing seasons;
- 5) the night sky, the Underground Railroad and Quaker Traditions;
- 6) contemplating nature;
- 7) a sense of wonder; and
- 3) the world of little things;
- 8) watershed protection and agricultural heritage.

The Rachel Carson Greenway, as planned, will join together three currently existing trails. The Northwest Branch Loop Trail in Silver Spring starts just inside the Capital Beltway and ends just north of

Wheaton Regional Park. The Underground Railroad Experience Trail runs between the Woodlawn Manor Park and the historic village of Sandy Spring. The bulk of the Rachel Carson Conservation Park is located in northeastern Montgomery County near Gregg Road and Georgia Avenue but overall it extends between Sundown Road and the Patuxent River. A new Sandy Spring Heritage Trail hopefully will be built to link the Underground Railroad Experience Trail and the Rachel Carson Conservation Park. Moreover, Montgomery County has approved plans to extend the trail systems located in Rock Creek Park north to connect with trails in the Rachel Carson Conservation Park.

The clear intent of the plan is to make the Rachel Carson Greenway continuous. Most of the Greenway will be on land that is publicly owned but two parts of the proposed Greenway will be on privately owned land. With regard to these two areas, either additional parkland must be acquired or public use easements must be established. The plan recommends that the Greenway consist of a natural surface trail for its entire length except for the existing hiker/biker hard surface trail that connects the North

Branch Loop Trail to the Anacostia Trail system in Prince George's County.

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, Inc.'s very first easement – given in 2001 – preserves multiple acres of open space surrounding headwaters of old Sandy Spring. The Underground Railroad Experience Trail – which runs between the Woodlawn Manor Historic Park and the village of Sandy Spring – passes by the fenced monument marking the headwaters of the Sandy Spring while running through a conservation easement owned by Greater Sandy Spring Green Space.

The Underground Railroad Experience Trail commemorates the journey undertaken by freedom seekers traveling from pre-Civil War slave states to free states and, ultimately, to Canada. The Village of Sandy Spring played a critical role on the Underground Railroad as a staging area. The village and surrounding farmland was settled by Quakers, some of whom participated directly in the Underground Railroad and nearly all of whom were sympathetic to escapees who had been held in bondage south of the Mason-Dixon line.

## **North Branch Trail May Not Soon See Completion**

**by  
Sharon Dooley**

The long proposed completion of the Rock Creek Regional Park of this trail which is co-located also within the North Branch Stream Valley Park may be put on hold as funding for the final portion of the CIP was not included in the County Executive's budget. The final portion would have run between Lake Frank and Muncaster Mill Road near Emory Lane, completing the connection to Olney.

This trail is one of a series of hiker-biker trails which follow Rock Creek from Montgomery County into the District of Columbia. This trail has been planned as part of the Master Plan of bikeways, first started in 1978. This last section is only a bit over 2 miles long but it is considered a vital link in the completion plans.

The Planning Board approved construction in 2013; Parks included the design planning in its budget with construction to follow in their 2015-2020 budget with an eventual cost somewhat over 4 million dollars. Plans were also to consolidate funding from the County Department of Transportation and some ICC mitigation projects.

Many in the Olney community testified at County Council hearings earlier this year in support of completion and a return of these funds back into the budget process. Some spoke of the safety of recreational trail rides as opposed to riding along busy roads. Area bicyclists also came together in support of a speedy completion of this long anticipated link in the local trails.

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