

Email from Arlington County Manager Mark Schwartz
Friday, September 11, 2020, 1:27 pm

SUBJECT: Donaldson Run - Tributary B Stream Restoration Project

TO: The concerned stakeholders of the Donaldson Run Tributary B Stream Restoration Project:

First, I hope all of you are staying safe and doing well! I wanted to thank you for sharing your concerns and opposition to the project. I know many of you have met with, exchanged messages, and otherwise engaged generously with our staff and County Board members. We appreciate your commitment to what is obviously an important issue to you personally, to me, our staff, and to our wider community.

The project is advancing under my direction as currently funded, designed, and scheduled. Currently, we have entered the construction procurement phase, and it is neither desirable nor cost-effective to look at potential alternative design approaches.

The history on this project now dates back 16 years. Throughout the process, staff has listened, consulted, and incorporated community input into the design and the approach to construction management. As with nearly every project we undertake, we recognize not all concerns can be addressed as much as we strive to do so. I respect the opinions you've provided and your ongoing dispute with the merits of the project. However, our professional staff has provided a thorough and accurate response to concerns raised regarding the project, and I agree with staff that the proposed approach for Tributary B addresses the site-specific needs and vulnerabilities in the highest performing and most cost-effective manner.

Staff has documented these needs and vulnerabilities, and the responsive project approach, in exhaustive detail, in many public engagement settings and in our website materials [<https://projects.arlingtonva.us/projects/donaldson-run-stream-restoration-tributary-b/>]. As you are aware, the highlighted risks include exposed water and sewer mains, invasive plant/species spread, public safety, deteriorating water quality, massive erosion and already significant tree-loss. Many other stakeholders who have been involved throughout the

engagement process and care about correcting the grave state of this area have signaled their support for our approach.

As a County, we maintain a shared recognition that something must be done to address known deficiencies in our urban streams. A “do nothing” alternative is not an acceptable outcome. I understand that much of your argument centers around a desire to implement natural solutions in stream restoration. I want to be clear - the County has, does, and will continue to actively use natural solutions in stream restoration. Our ability to do so is limited in the Tributary B project due to factors including extreme prior disturbance of the area, a steep and narrow valley, at-risk critical infrastructure, proliferation of invasive plants, substantial and advancing bank erosion, projection of increased future flows, and other risk elements. As a result, these conditions require the integration of stability measures with highest reliability that can be used in constrained physical settings.

Notwithstanding the significant constraints I just highlighted, staff reviewed the assertion that a wood-based bank stabilization/armoring would present an effective and cost-efficient method for Tributary B. Staff reached out to a firm with significant experience in this technique, which uses trees adjacent to the stream to build stability structures. Because of the steep topography and severe erosion in the Tributary B valley, a large number of these structures would be needed, and significantly more trees would be removed to build these structures than the trees that will be removed for the project as currently designed. It is also a serious concern that this approach would be less enduring for the long-term as tree material degrades in an alternating wet and dry urban stream environment—reducing project integrity over time.

We also are taking a long-term view about the health and composition of the stream valley forest. Many of the trees in the forest today are at risk from further erosion or loss from age and related factors. The project will plant 332 native trees, more than four times the number of trees removed, along with 180 shrubs, 200 live stakes (cuttings that will grow into trees), and more than 4000 herbaceous plants. This native replenishment will follow removal of invasive species/plants that have proliferated throughout the previously disturbed areas. We are evaluating the incorporation of wood structures into the County’s next priority stream restoration project, Gulf Branch, within the overall context of

that stream valley and project objectives that also include protection of critical infrastructure.

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts, concerns and ideas. While some disagreement is inevitable, I hope that all those involved will continue to collaborate with us on other County projects.

Sincerely,

Mark

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Check out our coronavirus webpage for up-to-date announcements, guidance and a situation report: <https://health.arlingtonva.us/covid-19-coronavirus-updates/> ALSO please take the time to complete your census form by going to <https://my2020census.gov>

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