

April 24, 2018

TO: Montgomery County Council members
RE: CIP and Water Quality Protection Charge, Stormwater

FROM: Kit Gage, Advocacy Director, Friends of Sligo Creek

We support a requirement for community involvement in the array of county stormwater projects and continuing well funded efforts to proceed with the Stormwater Program collaboratively across agencies

As an active member of the Stormwater Committee of Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC), a Master Watershed Steward, and now a Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional, I have been doing stormwater related work since 2005. FOSC and Stormwater Partners (I'm in the leadership group) have related actively and in many different ways with the county Department of Environmental Protection in its stormwater work and policy over many years.

Early on at least 10 years ago, FOSC took on micro-grants to do a combination of education and installation of rain gardens in peoples' yards with supplies paid for by the county Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). This first precedent of the need for public education was our requirement, and guidance for future work. The education included necessary reasons for doing this work, and combination positive environmental impacts of rain gardens and other stormwater projects. We found significant community acceptance to do these kinds of projects when local folks could explain them clearly.

Later, we facilitated some of the fine-tuning of the RainScapes program – working to simplify and tweak the evaluation of yard stormwater project opportunities. As well, several of us worked to establish a multi-jurisdictional National Capital Region Watershed Stewards Academy to increase the numbers of activist stormwater advocates across Montgomery and Prince George's counties and the District as well as connecting agency folks across these boundaries. Watershed Stewards met and then started cooperating with and supporting DEP staffers and projects from a shared sense of responsibility.

In recent years, Stormwater Partners advocates have been meeting with DEP to move the agency further in doing green infrastructure projects, streamlining the application process for RainScapes, planting more trees and doing alternate kinds of projects that are simpler, cheaper and more replicable. At the same time we have advocated that the county needs to recognize the role of local champions in helping educate community members in doing stormwater projects, whether small or large scale as GreenStreets. We have seen that progress was being made on several fronts. DEP increasingly has worked with local residents as they planned projects. Perhaps in part from our advocacy, they have modified their policies to require that 60% of them involved green infrastructure. The RainScapes program is much easier for people to use than initially, and emphasizes projects that are simpler for homeowners to implement themselves.

The proposed design/build/maintain contract structure, even if not representing the entirety of DEP stormwater program, would seem to run counter to recent efforts –

- a) if DEP abandons sunk costs in design of important projects,
- b) reduces outreach to and reliance on community environmentalists and champions, and
- c) deeds more of the choice of projects to contractors than to neighborhoods and watershed priorities.

A slowdown in doing projects because of the major reduction in the budget is shortsighted in that it:

- a) Sends the wrong signal to communities that there is no priority to repairing the impervious surfaces we've laid over our forested area, and
- b) ignores the fact that the state will set a new permit in less than a year.

The process of doing these projects is long and hard – revving it up after a pause is more damaging than the pause itself. Especially in our early-developed neighborhoods, the problems are complex. Please keep up the pressure and the priority on this program and facilitation of the involvement of the community in keeping it going and making it better.

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