



## Comments Regarding the George Snyder Trail

**Primum non nocere "First, do no harm."**

March 30, 2020

Mayor and City Council members:

The Friends of Accotink Creek offer comments on the proposed route of the George Snyder Trail extension. Our concern is with unintended environmental effects, particularly on our streams.

We are unaware of public discussion or hearings at the genesis of the proposal, dating to its appearance on the future trails project list nearly two decades ago. We suggest the neighbors and citizens of the City need to be consulted now before more their future is irreversibly committed.

This proposal can be fairly described as pushing a one-lane roadway into what is now a relatively intact stream buffer where the Resource Protection Area will be violated extensively.

The planned asphalt road/path cuts through the narrow wooded corridor along the North Fork of Accotink Creek and its Mosby Woods tributary. The devastation of this very same stream at its headwaters by the [I-66 widening](#) says this stream has suffered enough. This [photo](#) shows the fate that is befalling both branches of this stream within the cloverleaf, formerly wooded and filled with fish. The entire cloverleaf is now a moonscape. Ironically some of the funding for the George Snyder Trail comes from the very perpetrators of this upstream destruction, as so-called mitigation.

Even while the City spends millions in corrective action to restore streams from the effects of paving, we still pave for roads, parking areas, and, yes, trails, without mitigation, without compensatory reforestation.

All trails routed through natural areas have a significant footprint on the ground, eliminating habitats used by wildlife and plants. Moreover, paved trails, especially those designed to VDOT standards for bicycles, inevitably lead to increased human disturbance to adjacent habitats and become barriers to the movement of small creatures. We advocate for use of the hundreds of miles of already-paved quiet residential streets as connected marked bicycle paths while keeping pavement out of our natural areas

The 30% plan does not indicate any alternative options, including a do nothing option, were examined.

The 30% plan appears to be lacking analysis of natural resource impacts (tree loss, wetland and stream impacts, native flora and fauna impacts, impervious surface increase, soil compaction), climate change impacts, alternative routes considered, long term stormwater management, native species replanting plans, etc... All of these factors need to be thoughtfully evaluated so that you as City leaders are fully aware of the detrimental aspects of this project. Only then will it be possible for negative impacts be avoided or mitigated.

The heat island effect of this exchange of carbon-sink trees for an additional acre and a-half of heat-sink black asphalt cannot be escaped. If this effect cannot be 100% mitigated, it must be avoided altogether.

The stated purpose of this trail is to connect to the planned shared-use path along I-66 which will surely be a miserable concrete canyon - should we not be spurred to preserve instead of pave?.

The City Council has paramount responsibility for stewardship and preservation of the largest tracts of undeveloped land in the City – our parks. As our supply of such lands continues to dwindle, their future is a collective decision involving Council and citizens, as advised by the relevant administrative staff, weighing the desired benefits versus stream and environmental impacts and examining alternate approaches.

For this and all similar proposals, we call for policies of:

- Avoiding new trails or extensions of trails in floodplains, where they are certain to be battered by the greatest forces of nature to be found in our region.
- No net loss of habitat - no sacrifice of natural vegetated areas for trails or other purposes without compensatory replanting.
- Redirection of all transportation bike routes to surface streets, where the hundreds of miles of paved roads in our city offer enormous potential to be knit into a network to make the City truly bicycle-friendly at lower initial and recurring costs.
- Inclusion of climate change consequences in all project planning.

We ask why yet-to-be-determined sums of future taxpayer money are being committed to fighting to maintain this floodplain trail against the forces of nature when paved alternative routes already exist?

We ask why we should embark on another trees-to-asphalt conversion project when there are parallel on-street biking options, such as use of Ranger Road or making this stretch of Fairfax Blvd bike friendly? Ranger Road offers the option of a quiet residential street that runs parallel nearly the whole distance, needing no tree loss and no cost beyond signs and striping.

The Mason To Metro Bicycle Route provides an alternate model of bicycle and pedestrian improvements to existing infrastructure. <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showdocument?id=156#page=16>

This lovely vision of a network of people-prioritized greenway streets in Columbus, Ohio, takes the concept even further. <https://clintonvillegreenways.org/2015/05/08/phase-1-route-and-design.html>

In the City's own Northfax Small Area Plan, the descriptions of the "Linear Park" "The Spine" and "Fairfax Boulevard Streetscape" are precisely the concepts we would advocate as an alternative to the George Snyder Trail. How ironic that the trail plans seem divorced from this inspiring vision for the immediately adjacent neighborhood. <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showdocument?id=14684>



It isn't too late to say "No!" to a black scar of tar in this green corridor.

**"Of all the paths you take in life, make sure some of them are dirt." - John Muir**

## Friends of Accotink Creek

><(((o>`.,.,.,~`.,.,><(((o> "Find just one other person who cares." ><(((o>`.,.,.,~`.,.,><(((o>`.,.,.,~`.,.,><(((o>