

- DRAFT -

I have a name. My name is North Fork of Accotink Creek, but please call me North Fork. Please do not call me 'nameless' or 'unnamed', for that I am not. If any intend to do me harm, may they address me directly and face the reality of what they propose to do and to whom they propose to do it.

My source is a sad stormwater pipe, my headwaters are a concrete channel, my midsection is locked in jumbled riprap and the darkness of nearly a half-mile of culvert. Yet I persist, I exist, I flow on, and life flows within me.

I will not permit the tiny lives that depend upon my flowing waters to be extinguished in silence. I will not go quietly into the darkness to be buried in an unmarked grave.

*A river or stream is a cycle of energy from sun to plants to insects to fish.  
It is a continuum broken only by humans. - Aldo Leopold*

**Northfax West comments of Friends of Accotink Creek –**

Mayor & City Council members,

We have come late to the Northfax West process. We are neither lawyers nor engineers. Yet even as laymen our viewpoint, our advocacy as the voice of Accotink Creek, needs to be heard.

We endorse the analysis and recommendations of the environmental portion ([attached](#)) of comments submitted by the Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth with **ONE EXCEPTION** – Our streams and natural heritage have been asked to sacrifice enough – North Fork should be preserved and enhanced – not asked to make further sacrifice.

We consider it would be an abdication of the obligations of our generation if we were to bury 1000+ feet of perennial stream, bounded by Resource Protection Areas, and filled with fish, in a concrete culvert to accommodate a private development. This is not a transportation project that must follow a certain course. This is not the minimal accommodation that property owners in Resource Protection Areas are due. Green space for Greenbacks is the straightforward exchange being offered.

We ask if what we are losing in terms of ecology has been surveyed beyond the numbering of mature trees removed. What other species of flora and fauna are present and will be lost along with this green spine? A fish population has been verified by firsthand observation, and their presence indicates much more must be present.

Now is the opportunity for this corner of the City to enjoy the benefit of a lovingly cared for and beautiful jewel of a healthy stream.

Dominion over nature is a gift which has been given us yoked to the trust for its preservation. Our duty here is to preserve that which has been placed in our trust, that which we have declared to be formally under protection as a Resource Protection Area.

The readers of this letter may not all be old enough to be familiar with the once well-known and deplorable quote from the Vietnam War, "*We had to destroy the village in order to save it.*" The money-motivated rationalization provided by the developer seems to echo the same illogic, "*We had to destroy the North Fork of Accotink Creek in order to save it.*"

We ask what metric is provided to verify after the fact the sanguine predictions of improvements to water quality, erosion, and flooding have been realized?

We ask what guarantee is provided for the same predictions of improvements to water quality, erosion, and flooding other than ‘It will be your problem, City of Fairfax – we will have moved on’?

Let’s review some points in the supporting documentation:

From Small Area Plans [NORTHFAX COMMUNITY CHARRETTE](#)



The vision of the Northfax Small Area Plan is inspiring. Yet, how jarring it is that the first step toward creating an "Environmentally Focused Area" is burying a naturally flowing stream full of fish.

From the [Comprehensive Plan Chapter 4, Environment and Sustainability](#)

"Guiding Principle: In 2035, Fairfax is a city with... a healthy ecosystem of naturally flowing streams, native plants, wildlife, contiguous natural habitat areas, and a healthy tree population."

This principle is not a mere aspiration, but rather is a commitment by which all decisions shall be guided.

From the Northfax West [Major Water Quality Impact Assessment](#)

The Assessment repeatedly refers to the "unnamed tributary of Accotink Creek", but it has a name – clearly marked on [City of Fairfax maps](#) as the North Fork of Accotink Creek.

Use of the phrase "culvert to culvert" is an effort to denigrate the status of the North Fork as a living fish-filled stream. Effectively all of our beleaguered urban streams originate in storm drains and pass through multiple culverts while crossing roadways. The North Fork is no different in this respect.

The assertion that "groundwater discharge provide[s] a minimal amount of input" is inaccurate and an attempt to denigrate the status of the North Fork as a living stream. Of course, the entire perennial baseflow of the North Fork consists of groundwater except during rain events.

By what magic is it possible to say that "Therefore, no net loss of RPA functions, values, or area will occur."? If the Resource Protection Area is removed from the North Fork no new stream will appear that will be protected. Rather, it will be an exchange of real living waters right here in the City for a relabeling of existing conditions elsewhere.

*“piping of the base flow and stormwater associated with the stream will eliminate the stream bank erosion and thus the associated sediment and nutrient inputs.”* By extension of this logic, shall we pipe all the branches and tributaries of Accotink Creek, so that they too may be purified in the same way?

*“• The development will not result in significant disruption of the hydrology of the site;”*

*“• The development will not result in significant degradation to aquatic life; “*

*“• The development will not result in unnecessary destruction of plant materials on site;”*

These conclusions of the Assessment seem on their face to be directly contradicted by all that is proposed to be done to the North Fork and adjacent wooded areas within the project. These assertions cannot be reconciled with plans to bury a perennial stream along with its fish population and to reduce total tree cover.

From [FACT SHEET](#) Virginia Water Protection Individual Permit No. 18-1003:

*“Complete avoidance was considered and deemed infeasible to meet the projects purpose and need as it would reduce the developable land to 4.40 acres thus reducing the Annualized Cost on Return (IRR) to well **below the target.**”*

This is a surprisingly frank admission of the green space for greenbacks proposition the developer has brought to the City.

*“The public notice was published in Fairfax County Times Friday-Sunday, January 18-20, 2019, on January 18, 2019.” “One public comment letter was received.”*

Although this method of public notice is traditional, we must ask if it is sufficient. The receipt of only one comment suggests it is not.

From U.S. Corps of Engineers [PROGRAMMATIC GENERAL PERMIT](#) 17-SPGP-01

*“28) Aquatic Life Movements: No activity may substantially disrupt the necessary life cycle movements of those species of aquatic life indigenous to the waterbody, including those species that normally migrate through the area...”*

*“29) Spawning Areas: Activities in spawning areas during spawning seasons must be avoided to the maximum extent practicable. Activities that result in the physical destruction (e.g., through excavation, fill, or downstream smothering by substantial turbidity) of an important spawning area are not authorized.”*

Plans to bury a perennial stream along with its fish population are noncompliant with these legal requirements.

From Virginia [Water Protection Individual Permit](#) No. 18-1003:

*“No activity shall substantially disrupt the movement of aquatic life indigenous to the water body, including those species which normally migrate through the area”*

Plans to bury a perennial stream along with its fish population are noncompliant with these legal requirements.

In closing, we reiterate our appeal that the North Fork of Accotink Creek and all the forms of life dwelling in it may be the beneficiaries of benevolent protection of our irreplaceable natural heritage now and in the future. We can say “YES” to smart growth and “YES” to naturally flowing streams.

Sincerely,

Friends of Accotink Creek : : [www.accotink.org](http://www.accotink.org) : :

“I was born upon thy bank, river, my blood flows in thy stream,

And thou meanderest forever at the bottom of my dream.” ~~Henry David Thoreau~~

*Lifeless dark culvert - Northfax West*