



Bulletin of the Proceedings of the Friends of Accotink Creek

Our meeting notes serve as bulletins of our activities, interests, and discussions, supplemented by your submissions.

Friends of Accotink Creek Town Meeting – February 21, 2023

Next Meeting: March 21, 2023 (Third Tuesday of each month via on-line meeting: Login info will be posted with the meeting notice in the [Friends of Accotink calendar](#).)

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Present: Gary Bangs, Sandy Collins, Avril Garland, Philip Latasa, Dave Lincoln, Katy Johnson, Beverley Rivera, Justin Riemersma, Tony Hill, and Bob Krieger (Trouts Unlimited) all via on-line meeting.

Opportunities Representing FACC:

Mount Vernon Town Meeting, February 11, 2023: Dave attended with a table and stated that various groups were represented including most of the “Friends” groups.

Mount Vernon District Environment Expo, April 22, 2023: Dave, Sandy, and Philip said they planned to attend. Avril will also be there but representing another group.

Choralis Concert, April 30, 2023: Avril and Gary will attend. [Choralis](#) is a semiprofessional choral group that partners with different charities at concerts. On April 30th, we are invited to have a display at the concert at Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Fairfax City. The church is right on the banks of Accotink Creek. We should certainly find ways to connect the concert location to Accotink Creek and our mission, such as a sign on the driveway, a mention in the publicity materials, and a graphic in our lobby display.

Choralis suggested we bring a cleanup signup sheet, and we could schedule a cleanup a week or two after the concert at the same spot. The concert may also be a chance to speak with the church's grounds committee about stewardship, such as salting their parking lot.

The church has a proposed [affordable housing and day care project](#) on its grounds. There are some environmental questions about the project that didn't seem bad enough for FACC to get into a tussle.

Plant Rescues - Stafford Drive Restoration: Katy reported that plant rescues ahead of the [Stafford Drive stream restoration project](#) have tentatively started. Workdays are Friday mornings beginning February 24th. Saturdays may follow. The plans show a much wider area will be cleared than we had imagined. This is no doubt due to the dual purpose of the project as stream restoration plus flood control for adjacent apartments.

Given the large area, there will be many plants lost if they are not saved. If anyone has destinations for the saved plants, please let us know. Right now, before the growing season, there are many evergreen Christmas ferns available. Dave said short term there may be room at Grace Church where the ferns could be maintained until restoration was finished.

Lake Accotink IMA Co-leader: Beverly stated that Brayan Pozo, a regular IMA volunteer, and one of our monthly donors, will host a workday at Lake Accotink Park IMA site Saturday, February 25th. Hopefully, he will become co-leader. He is finishing up the IMA team leader training program. The Microsoft grant for invasive removal at the park has been approved for FCPA. This will be separate from FACC's IMA area.

GMU Service Learning: Philip stated that Professor Cindy Smith of GMU, a Friend of Accotink Creek member, asked us to suggest service learning projects for her class. He gave a number of possibilities, but we have no takers so far.

Vernal Pools Video: The film, "Fairfax Vernal Pools with Mike Hayslett", based on our exploration in March, 2021, and produced by Kathryn Pasternak, Fairfax Master Naturalist independent filmmaker has been finished. Philip stated it was being placed on our online sites and encouraged wide distribution. Kathryn will produce two more film shorts, aimed at an elementary school audience, based on the same material.

Americana Drive Cleanup: Philip reported that we had our usual President's Day cleanup on Americana Drive. Conditions may have been worse than ever in terms of the amount of trash and dumped construction materials.

We had 80+ volunteers who removed 247 bags, 21 tires, 4 shopping carts, 3 barbeque grills, 8 doors, one toilet, one giant stuffed bear, and a couple tons of construction debris. This was NOT the extent of debris dumped there but what could be collected in the time allotted.

It was approved to reimburse Amy Gould \$212.70 for coffee and donuts for volunteers that day.





One volunteer caught sitting down on the job

Cinder Bed Road Bikeway: Philip reported that in January some took a long overdue walk through the Cinder Bed Woods with prominent local biologist Rod Simmons to identify the rare wetlands. We learned that the presence of sweet bay magnolia trees does not mean these wetlands are Magnolia Bogs, but they are, however, all acidic seepage swamps, which are also rare. We hope Rod will be able to formally document one specific area that the Bikeway will pass through and gain recognition on Virginia DCR maps, not that we expect it would make any difference.

More visits are planned in March and June to more fully document the wetland vegetation during the growing season.

Nature Forward has received some positive indications from the County that the power of eminent domain will not be used. That would seem to mean the Amberleigh Homeowners Association has the power to veto the project. We plan to distribute doorhangers soon inviting residents to a late March online slideshow presentation of the situation.

Potomac Watershed Cleanup: Philip said we already have a few dates on the spring stream cleanup schedule:

- March 10 - Cultural Crossways, by special request. This is a group of exchange students from different parts of the United States that joined us last spring, but had only one possible date this year.
- March 26 - City of Fairfax [Spring Community Cleanup](#)
- April 15 - Hunters Branch/Stonehurst. This is a spot that has long had stream cleanups, but has a new leader this year.

All dates will be on the calendar. There are issues with the Fullerton Road location due to the fence put up by Costco but for now we will work around it. But if that can't be resolved we may need to discontinue that location.

Lake Accotink Dredging:

Philip spoke of the unfortunate outcome of years of back and forth over the future of Lake Accotink. The whole process will possibly start over as part of a new Master Plan for the Park. The County [Story Map](#) provides a useful description of where we are and how we got here.

Neighbors are understandably disappointed and frustrated, some to the point of making accusations of bad faith and ulterior motives by County staff and supervisors. The February 15th online meeting had nearly 800 attendees. ([video](#) , [notes](#)) went reasonably well, but it was not without some of these same unpleasant feelings. The February 16th in person meeting was different, with a pitchfork and torches mood nearly unanimous among the roughly 150 public attendees. ([WJLA report](#) , [notes](#)) Philip had worn a large sign with the words "AMITY, RESPECT, HARMONY" and included those principles in his remarks to the meeting, with little effect.

Although the [Story Map](#) suggests the lake could become a new Huntley Meadows. Philip has to wonder, given the invasives that dominate the upper end of the lake that filled in years ago.

During the meeting, Philip began to wonder if small dredges to maintain the status quo for the lake could just pipe the sediment over the dam and it would be no worse for the creek than filling the lake and letting the sediment go downstream anyway. Certainly there would need to be a planned transition with major restoration work, followed by regular maintenance for a healthy marshland.

Either way, if the sediment goes over the dam, the mussels are doomed. There is some faint hope the Flag Run restoration could be designed to provide a sanctuary and we need to pursue that idea.

Philip's assessment after attending the two meetings is that the Board of Supervisors will fund the dredge at the new higher price after some additional squalling from the public.

Comments are due by April 1st. Philip will draft something for FACC and send it around, but everyone may want to submit comments of their own. If the board members concur, FACC will continue to endorse keeping the lake because:

- It is still the least bad option, and the surest way to keep the mussel population alive.
- Philip believes that the Board of Supervisors will fund the dredge project even at the increased cost.
- Nothing will be gained by spitting into the wind stirred up by all the disgruntled neighbors who want their lake.

Dam Decor

Philip also stated that a longtime lake neighbor contacted us with a proposal to add a mural or other beautification to the blank concrete wall at the west end of the dam. We have discussed [art in the park](#) as part of the Master Plan. It was suggested back that the décor might incorporate water itself as some sort of fountain effect and could be part of an attractive fish and eel passage. We'll stay in touch.



Accotink Marsh Park - a new Huntley Meadows – or a fresh headache?

Site Specific Plan Amendments: There is something in process called the [Site-Specific Plan Amendments](#) which allows landowners to propose changes to the County’s Comprehensive Plan. Philip stated that some of those proposals seem worth submitting comments. ([interactive map of all proposals](#))

- o *AT&T Site* [PR-004](#)
This is an office building surrounded by parking lots near the I-66/123 intersection. The plan for conversion to mixed used development looks good, with much promised tree save and respect for its neighbor, Borge Street Park, location of an IMA site. However, there is a tiny stream on the property we hope can be preserved, despite its lack of any RPA protection. I have already exchanged emails with the developer and copied the Providence Supervisor with noncommittal results.
- o *Vienna Transit* [PR-005](#)
This is an existing office park at the corner of Rt. 29 and Nutley St. To our surprise, the proposal does not intrude into the Hunters Branch RPA that is a good part of the parcels involved. The group approved Philip’s draft comments.
- o *Church of Good Shepherd* [BR-003](#)
This is an Episcopal Church at the corner of Olley Ln and Braddock Rd. The church proposes to convert the north half of its parcel into eight single family units, with a loss of about 2.5 acres of tree cover. Philip will draft comments for FACC.
- o *Sheridonna Lane* [LE-007](#)
This seems to be the worse of the bunch. It is off Telegraph Road adjoining Huntley Meadows and includes a stretch of Dogue Creek. The proposal is to consolidate nine parcels with existing single family houses, all in floodplain easement, and build a senior living

facility. As an inducement, the proposal offers to do stream restoration on the creek and transfer five acres to the County. In return, the developer proposes to build a berm to permanently shift the floodplain eastward away from their new buildings. Drafted comments were approved to be sent.

Gary talked about the Boston Blvd, Costco, and area on Frontier by Springfield Mall proposals and will send FACC comments.

Planning Commission Site-Specific Plan Amendment [workshops](#) will be held March 2nd, 9th, & 23rd. It's not clear yet what these workshops will accomplish or which amendments will be discussed which days.

Shutterfly Share Sites: Philip reported that Share Sites are being discontinued, effective March 25, 2023. This is the feature of Shutterfly we have used for almost all of our photo storage. He hasn't been able to devote a moment of time to migrating our photos to other parts of Shutterfly or somewhere else. It appears other parts of Shutterfly will now require a purchase every 18 months. Various options were discussed involving Shutterly, Google or others.

Donations: We received a donation of \$40 from Phil Church

AmazonSmile ended, so whenever we get the next payment from them it will be the last. That payment will include a one-time equivalent to one quarter of what we accrued in 2022.

#SaveCinderBedWoods

