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## The fight for alternative GST realignments continues

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Courtesy Photo

After months of sounding the alarm, Fairfax residents and conservation groups continue to urge Fairfax City Council to consider alternative routes for the George Snyder Trail (GST) extension.

While the current proposal would cut through undisturbed forest separating the busy intersection of Fairfax Boulevard (Route 50) and Chain Bridge Road, some advocates instead run the GST extension along Cardinal Road, cutting straight through the Mosby Woods neighborhood and Draper Drive Park.

According to Susan Kuiler, who spoke about the realignment at the Fairfax City Council meeting on Dec. 12, this option would accommodate bike traffic as pre-existing docking stations are in place.

“The alternative connects Cardinal Road to Fairfax Boulevard through Draper Drive Park, Beech Street, which is wide enough for a bike lane, and Draper Drive. The city has already placed bike share docking stations on Draper Drive and Fair Woods Parkway,” said Kuiler.

While the council has referred to this as the Not in My Backyard, or NIMBY, approach, proponents say it is the In My Front Yard, or IMFY, option as the trail would run along the front of their homes.

Additionally, despite those who criticize the GST realignment previously citing the likelihood of increased crime and foot traffic in the Mosby Woods neighborhood, this approach would preserve the natural forest separating their backyards from Fairfax’s busy intersection.

Kuiler also argued in the council meeting that realigning the trail to pre-existing streets would be a natural use of the infrastructure available as the streets are already well-lit, making them safer for pedestrians.

“Fair Woods Parkway, Cardinal Road, Draper Drive Park, and Beech Street are well lit, with low vehicle traffic volume, and safe. Draper Drive, which is well lit, could be made safer for pedestrians and bicyclists at a cost lower than the route through the woods,” said Kuiler.

Another alternative opponents of the realignment are considering is the improvement of walkability and bicycle access along Fairfax Boulevard, which would be possible without impacting the Mosby Woods neighborhood.

“Another alternative, which is likely as costly as the city’s plan but brings bicyclists directly to the city’s businesses, is to continue making Fairfax Boulevard safer for bicyclists and pedestrians as called for in one of the comprehensive plans,” said Kuiler.

Friends of Accotink Creek Representative Philip Latasa spoke in previous council meetings regarding the adverse environmental impact of the trail's realignment on the natural forest. At the Dec. 12 meeting, Latasa used a metaphor that eschews the efforts to build a trail through the woods.

"Let me tell you about my new diet: chocolate cake and ice cream. Nothing else, three meals per day, seven days per week, it's fun and it is delicious. People try to tell me there will be consequences of obesity and illness, but that won't happen," said Latasa.

After some laughs from those who could see where he was going with this, Latasa clarified his point.

"The George Snyder Trail extension promises to be a long, thin chocolate cake. Paved with good intentions, fun and delicious to recreational bike riders, but not without consequences to the fitness and health of city woods and wetlands," said Latasa.

It is yet to be determined if months of continued outreach from residents will influence the council members' decision to support the realignment, but it seems clear that they are not ready to give up.

According to Mosby Woods resident Henry Mann, the current natural forest in the neighborhood feels like Shenandoah National Park compared to the rest of the county.

"You can't see a racket club, you can't see the State Farm around it, you can't see houses, you can't see 50, and they're all right there. It's a little bit of true wilderness, and I don't think a trail would be helpful," said Mann.

Various opponents of the current realignment effort signed a statement Dec. 19 requesting further public hearings on the topic.