

George Snyder Trail Extension – Stand with the Trees Tuesday Oct 24 City Council Meeting

October 21, 2023

Sign the [petition](#) if you haven't already.

The council and mayor need to understand there is a large group of voting citizens who are truly disappointed that they are supporting this destruction of our public lands. They will likely run for re-election, and it doesn't hurt to remind them you vote and you will remember their vote on this.

MORE INFO BELOW:

Council member Kate Doyle Feingold is adamantly against this destruction as currently proposed (see her message at the end of this email). The Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (letter attached) and the Friends of Accotink Creek are also opposed to the project. Back in 2020 the Sierra Club and Nature Forward voiced their concern about destruction of habitat and the need to consider alternatives. There is an alternative and it is more usable, safer, less expensive and way less destructive. Staff and some council members are treating this as a train that's left the station. But in the words of another, until the bulldozers roll, it isn't a done deal. However, Sept 26 is the meeting where the Council and Mayor will publicly state their support or opposition to this project, and we need 4 of them to oppose it. Otherwise, they will continue to spend more money on this proposal and our only option will be to lay down in front of the dozers.

COST

The project is already projected to be millions over budget, meaning that a project that was promised to be built with "free" money from regional transportation funds, and not cost City taxpayers a dime, will now require more than 4 million dollars (city staff estimate) from our taxes. No one has yet said where that additional money will be coming from. We have already spent many dollars in the form of staff time pushing this ill-conceived project forward. And yet we still do not have any evidence anyone will benefit from this project or asked for this shared use bike path. No research was done, no surveys, no traffic studies.

WILL FUNDERS SUPPORT ALTERNATIVES?

Council member Jeff Greenfield, who is very knowledgeable about transportation funding in the region, indicated that the funding source would likely be flexible enough to accommodate a modified proposal.

TREES

The staff has "promised" to make sure that all the trees that are removed will be replaced. This is magical thinking and frankly no way to hold them to such a promise. For one thing, there will be a new council by the time this project is wrapping up, so their verbal promises to council are weak. But more to the point, there is no room to plant that many trees (and expect them to grow to maturity) in our city much less in the woods around the Accotink and this trail. Those woods are full of trees, and producing their offspring/replacements as all good forests do! No one, not even our wonderful urban forester, has been able to say how exactly adding in somewhere between 5-800 trees would work, especially when the trail itself will remove 3+ acres (the actual paved area).

ADA

The mayor said she supported this trail because it would serve disabled people, offering those in wheelchairs access to nature. This is specious at best. Not to mention that was never a stated goal and the trail plans do not have any number of facilities and features that would make it universally accessible. While apparently VDOT requires ADA design standards for paths (trail width, curve radii, slope and surface) in what world is a bicycle trail, with 20 mph bicycles whizzing by, a disabled-friendly place, much less an abled-friendly place? If we as a community want to step up to the plate and make our infrastructure more user friendly, I'm all for a real

discussion about universal design that includes the intended beneficiaries. Saying the GST is handicap accessible is ignoring the actual experience of a walker on a commuter bike path. Not to mention that once leaves fall and are wet, they will be slippery, branches/trees will fall and block the path, and no accommodations for a wide range of disabilities are being considered, only designing access for wheelchair users. There isn't even signage in the plans that identify this as ADA compliant (and no consultant on disabled access is on the project).

TRAFFIC STUDIES (spoiler, there aren't any)

There has not been any effort to study how many potential users there would be for this trail, certainly nothing shared with City Council even though council members have asked for such information about the trail. Bluntly, there was money from the I-66 widening to be spent, and very minimal justification needed. The stated intent is to connect the new I-66 trail (that trail is now visible along 123 at the new traffic light) with the Cross County Trail (near Pickett Road). There really aren't reasonable commuter paths that would take such a circuitous path, but that aside, connecting trails to create a continuous bicycle trail system may be a worthy goal and is a goal of the city's multi-modal transportation plan. A goal that is much more easily and inexpensively accomplished by constructing two very small portions of the proposed trail at both ends of Cardinal Road (formerly Ranger Road) and utilizing Cardinal Road as part of the route. Providing connector segments between Cardinal and Draper Park and between Cardinal and 123 (and the proposed multi-use re-development of Northfax where Fuddruckers etc sits in all its former glory) would provide greater access for everyone without eviscerating a fragile woodland. But apparently this simpler version doesn't spend enough money? What other reason could there be for not selecting a lower cost, lower impact alternative?

In fact, the city has already designated Cardinal Road as a bike route, and is promoting efforts across the city to make our streets safer for bicyclists and pedestrians. So why are we bulldozing woodlands to build redundant roadways that aren't safer for everyone? We don't know of anyone who asked for this trail and the only public support for it in its current proposal has come from two groups with other things to gain by supporting city staff, the Economic Development Authority and Smarter Growth- and it is worth mentioning that building the two connector segments of the trail meets all the needs and wishes stated by these groups.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Many people, however, benefit from the existing footpaths and access to a quiet woodland experience that will be forever destroyed if this project is built. And of course very few of the current forest residents, from tree frogs and turtles to migratory birds, foxes and owls, will be able to sit out the 2 or so years of bulldozing, chainsaws, earth moving, and paving before returning to their homes. Where will they go? This isn't a 10,000 acre forest that can absorb such a hit and recover. There is literally no place else for these creatures to go.

Extensive boardwalks are part of the proposal. And while they are seen as "better" than paved trails, their construction is every bit as damaging and displacing as a paved trail. Again, such a small woodland doesn't have the capacity to absorb this amount of destruction over this period of time and sustain itself.

Invasive plants will gain a major foothold as a result of this construction. This project will open the woods to the aggressive plants that are currently taking over other vulnerable areas in our city. The city doesn't have a real plan (or staff) to deal with the damage already happening and yet is pushing this new project that will only increase the problem and damage an area that is currently relatively free of invasives.

How much impact climate change will have on a community will depend partly on how resilient its natural systems are. Further segmenting and paving over woodland, damaging a riparian buffer that is absorbing significant flood waters, allowing invasives to take over, is all harmful to our community's resilience in the face of climate change.

If you have observed the trail construction alongside Route 50 to the east of the city this summer, imagine all those dump trucks, log trucks, loaders, earth movers, etc going in and out of the sensitive stream corridor over and over. A stream corridor that by state law should be protected by the very entity planning on eviscerating it (Chesapeake Bay RPAs were created because such riparian corridors need protection).

SAFETY

Rather than making multi-modal travel safer, this proposed path may end up being more dangerous than current sidewalks and roadways. The design speed required for this bike path by VDOT is 15-18 mph. When you realize that those "safe" speeds that are posted on highway entrance ramps are way less than what people generally drive in ordinary conditions, then you can see how designing a trail for 18 mph likely means bikes can and will go much faster. Even a slow bike can startle pedestrians. Fast bikes make a trail unpleasant and dangerous for pedestrians. The current proposal also creates several potentially dangerous situations for bicyclists and pedestrians. The trail crosses both Fair Woods (don't miss the irony in the new name) and Stafford at mid-block points on/near curves no less. The plans include signage, but accident data is clear that mid-block crossings account for more serious and fatal accidents than any other pedestrian situation. There are stop signs where these roads cross Cardinal. The plans show GST ending at Route 50 mid block as well. For this reason, there is additional wetland destruction to curve the GST and a very expensive proposal to widen the sidewalk between the end of GST and Draper Road, but even with that additional destruction and expense, a mid block crossing of Route 50 will be attractive to some users, at their peril trying to cross 6 lanes. This is even more likely with anyone traveling westbound and trying to find the entrance of the trail from Wilcoxon Trail. We can avoid these potential dangers and expenses simply by using Cardinal Road for the bike route. And last, bicyclists are safer on a more "surveilled" route such as Cardinal where there are eyes on the street and other activity. The city's own consultants made note of the value of "surveillance" to make sure trail users both feel safer and are safer.

[Fairfax City Environmental Forum](#)