

REGARDING THE GEORGE SNYDER TRAIL – Comments of Friends of Accotink Creek

Testimony before City Council , February 13, 2024

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek regarding the George Snyder Trail extension.

The citizens of this City are not pleased with either the outcome or the process they have experienced during this saga of the George Snyder Trail extension. It is certain that chapters are yet to be written.

The Friends of Accotink Creek urge the City to take this opportunity to review similar projects to avoid similar unsatisfactory outcomes. We speak most specifically of the [Pickett Road Connector Trail](#), a project that is even more redundant than the George Snyder Trail extension.

The Pickett Road Connector Trail would sacrifice woodlands and wetlands to duplicate a connection that already exists within a stone's throw of the proposed route,

- an existing connection that is safe,
- an existing connection that is abundantly marked by trailside signage,
- an existing connection that is trumpeted as an accomplishment in safe non-motorized travel by that very signage.

We urge you to guide the Pickett Road Connector Trail onto the nearby existing route on existing pavement, and to do likewise with all trees-to-asphalt conversions. Let's make our streets safe for people before we make our forests safe for pavement.

Testimony before City Council , January 23, 2024

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek regarding the George Snyder Trail extension.

Thank you to all the City's elected officials and staff members who responded to the citizens concerned about the George Snyder Trail, whether it was to agree, disagree, or simply to listen and share information.

Thank you especially to Councilmember Bates for proposing building only a modified western A1 section using routings through the WillowWood office park redevelopment and merging with the sidewalk between Eaton Place and the Boulevard Marketplace.

We have arrived at the point where this proposal represents the best (or perhaps least unsatisfactory) way forward to fulfill the goals of the project while limiting loss of habitat, and while also fulfilling City goals of people friendly streetscapes.

Beginning at the end of the new I-66 path at Chain Bridge Road, this modified A1 only route leads the traveler eastward alongside the Moose lodge, then crosses the WillowWood property on improvements already provided in their redevelopment plans. From that point, widening of the Fairfax Blvd sidewalk takes the traveler to the Boulevard Marketplace, connecting to an existing paved section of the George Snyder Trail. From there, the traveler may either enter Stafford Drive Park or continue eastward via the planned "Neighborways" on Fair Winds Pkwy and Cardinal Road.

There can be little doubt the funding sources will be entirely amenable to this adjustment in lieu of new paved surfaces in the wooded corridor.

We urge the adoption of a modified A1 only plan as the best way forward for the George Snyder Trail and for the City.

Again, thanks to all of you for your patience in dealing with the different perspectives on this issue.

Testimony before City Council , January 9, 2024

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek. We ask again that the George Snyder Trail extension be paused and realigned away from woods and wetlands onto existing infrastructure.

We ask that this be done in atonement for the Northfax West project, which was permitted to bury a portion of the North Fork of Accotink Creek, alongside which this project proposes to add yet more pavement.

Allow me to borrow from greater poets than myself.

***“The brook was thrown
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone”*** - (Robert Frost)

***“And to us here, she remains
A lovely memory,
Until Eternity;
She came, she loved, and then she went away.”*** - (Angelina Weld Grimké)

Please! Let’s not make our last forests a memory. No more pavement for Accotink Creek and the woods that shelter it!

Would the reputation of the City suffer if the decision were made to find an better way, a new route that would improve bicycle and pedestrian travel while preserving our woods?

On the contrary, the reputation of the City would be enhanced as a jurisdiction
Capable of recognizing hard choices,
Capable of making clear-eyed decisions,
Capable of pioneering new problem-solving approaches, and
Capable of turning away from the path of inertia when more prudent paths appear.

We urge you to guide the George Snyder Trail onto the exit ramp of viable alternate routes available on nearby existing pavement.

Testimony before City Council , December 12, 2023

Mayor and City Council

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek. We ask again that the George Snyder Trail extension be paused and realigned away from woods and wetlands onto existing infrastructure.

But first, 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. It won’t happen because I have good intentions to remain fit and healthy. And as we all know, good intentions always lead to good outcomes without consequences.

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.

Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail extension and all trees-to-asphalt conversions.

Testimony before City Council , November 28, 2023

Mayor and City Council

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek. We ask again that the George Snyder Trail extension be paused and realigned away from woods and wetlands onto existing infrastructure.

We are all of us aboard the Titanic of climate change. We can see the iceberg of global warming looming. There are NOT enough lifeboats. We must stop rearranging the deck chairs and instead pull hard, hard, on the tiller to change course.

It is already too late to avoid collision, but we must strive to lessen the impact. Business as usual cannot in any way be our course. At global climate change conferences, world leaders have issued stirring declarations to commit collectively to halt and reverse forest loss. The world cannot make good on that pledge if we here cannot.

The George Snyder Trail extension is the tip of this deforestation iceberg. An entirely optional route that sacrifices the value of mature forest and floodplains in exchange for assumptions. An entirely optional route that overlooks the opportunity to maintain and improve the infrastructure we already have in exchange for assumptions.

The greater portion of the deforestation iceberg we face - road widening, commercial and residential development, utility expansion, and even railroad expansion – is much harder to resist. Therefore it is imperative that we turn away from optional deforestation where alternatives exist.

Please resolve to change course. Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail extension and all trees-to-asphalt conversions. Our grandchildren and their children need every tree we can save.

Testimony before City Council , November 14, 2023

Mayor and City Council

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek.

Let us praise the George Snyder Trail extension. No doubt it will:

- Provide a comfortable and pleasant ride
- Put bicycle riders in the midst of greenery, and
- Provide a welcome alternative segment for the Cross County Trail

All this is true and desirable, but at what cost?

You have heard all the arguments questioning the cost of the George Snyder Trail extension:

- Financial cost for construction costs exceeding the available grant money
- Financial cost to City taxpayers for perpetual maintenance
- The cost of opportunities foregone to use the available grant to make our streets safer for non-motorized travel
- The cost to City goals for tree canopy

- The cost to City goals for stormwater control
- The cost to the future of the entire world every time carbon sink trees are sacrificed for heat sink asphalt.

By the arithmetic of the Friends of Accotink Creek, the cost is far too high. Alternatives are readily available using existing infrastructure. Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail extension.

Testimony before City Council , October 24, 2023 & via email

Mayor and City Council

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek. We ask again that the George Snyder Trail extension be paused and realigned away from woods and wetlands onto existing infrastructure.

An [analysis provided this week](#) by the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia puts the abstract engineering drawings and graphs of the George Snyder Trail extension into layman’s terms. Our hearts sink at reading in that analysis the Panama Canal style cutting and filling and clearing needed to make this trail fit into the unsuited terrain.

Yet just yards away, the [Bike Fairfax City](#) plan provides for a parallel Neighborway on the welcoming, already graded, already paved, Cardinal Road.

It is a simple equation. The George Snyder Trail extension would provide a nice amenity for recreational bicyclists, but at what cost?

- The cost is too high in - Finances - The City would not have undertaken this engineering extravaganza if it had to pay with taxpayer funds. Now the cost estimates are already \$4 million over the budgeted "free" grant money.
- The cost is too high in - Environmental sacrifice - Tree City USA cannot replace the function of the riparian forests lost to construction and permanent asphalt. There is simply no City property that could conceivably be restored to an equivalent state.
- The cost is too high in - Setbacks to other important City goals - Tree canopy, stormwater control, and climate change, all of them negatively impacted by the sacrifice of riparian forest.

Rather than marginally improve theoretical access to Nature, let’s instead devote our resources to exclude the very real intruders (in the form of invasive exotic species) that are denying access to native species and people alike by overtaking our limited natural habitat. Let’s also instead expand access to alternatives for the desperate people whose refuge of last resort is to make their sad homes in these very same wooded areas.

Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail onto existing infrastructure. Please do the same with all similar projects that would pave our woods and wetlands.



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

Testimony before City Council, October 10, 2023 & via email

Mayor and City Council,

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek. We ask again that the George Snyder Trail extension be paused and realigned away from woods and wetlands onto existing infrastructure.

Accessibility is offered as a motivation for the George Snyder Trail extension. Yet how much accessibility is enough? Accessibility to wooded areas has already been achieved in a number of City parks. Among these are the wooded trails in:

- Wilcoxon Park
- Thaiss Park
- Van Dyck Park
- Even the portion of the existing George Snyder Trail in the woods adjacent to the playing field.

Rather than sacrifice any more of our dwindling natural areas to pavement, let's instead expand accessibility to Nature by planting Nature along existing sidewalks. We might even begin now to implement the [Linear Park](#) concept of the Northfax Small Area Plan.

Right in the same vicinity as the George Snyder Trail extension, Eaton Place lacks continuous sidewalks and in many places also lacks wheelchair ramps. Shouldn't shortcomings like this be the first priority for accessibility here and throughout the City?

Just yards from the proposed route along the banks of Accotink Creek, the City is spending millions to rectify the erosion caused by excess runoff from paved surfaces. It is that erosion that compelled the City to impose the [Stormwater Utility Fee](#) on paved surfaces. Should the City expand its paved surfaces at the same time citizens are asked to pay additional tax for their own?

Throughout our parks we face the accessibility issue of thickets of rampant invasive exotic plant species, which deny access to everyone.

In considering the George Snyder Trail extension, we have to ask what is the cost – millions in cost to the City treasury above and beyond the grant funding, the perpetual cost of maintenance, the cost of setbacks to other important City goals such as stormwater control and climate change avoidance.

Not to mention we need to hang onto every carbon-sink tree we have at this critical time of climate change.

Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail onto existing infrastructure. Please do the same with all similar projects that would pave our woods and wetlands.

Testimony before City Council, September 26, 2023 & via email

Mayor and City Council,

I speak tonight representing the Friends of Accotink Creek.

The George Snyder Trail extension as proposed would certainly be a nice trail and a pleasant recreational ride, but at what cost? What we want is not always what we need.

Accotink Creek is a neighbor and friend to all citizens of the City. On behalf of Accotink Creek and on behalf of the woods and wetlands that shelter and protect the creek, we ask the Council to pause and realign the Trail away from our limited remnants of those woods and wetlands and onto existing infrastructure.

Let's be inspired by the example of what has recently been done at the Vienna Metro for improved on-street bicycle facilities. Let's be inspired by this City's very own plans, such as [The Spine](#), the [Mason to Metro Route](#), and the [Blenheim Blvd Study](#) to weave safe and inviting non-motorized mobility into the fabric of the life of the City.



New Bike lanes at Vienna Metro, Virginia Center Drive

During a recent stream cleanup, I met a homeless individual who was familiar with the area proposed for the route of the George Snyder Trail. He exclaimed 'How can they build there? It's all marsh!' Indeed.

The sight of the tree sacrifice now underway by the County at Rt. 50 and Pickett Road should cause us to ask if what may be unavoidable along a transportation corridor is what is appropriate for our forests. Our woods are not improved by asphalt. Tree City USA need not add a black scar of tar to every remaining woodland.

Please pause and realign the George Snyder Trail onto existing infrastructure. Please do the same with all similar projects that would pave our woods and wetlands.



Few of us need to ride our bikes in wetlands