



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 – January 17 , 2024

Next Meeting: February 22 (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, Avril Garland, Philip Latasa, Dave Lincoln, Parker Lee, Mike Perel, Brian Slawski, Kim Schauer, and Peter Clark all via on-line meeting.

• *Represent FACC:*

- o *EQAC Public Comment Hearing:* Brian said that he presented [testimony](#) to the Environmental Quality Advisory Committee on January 10, focused on the need to avoid additional paving of forested areas. Friends of Holmes Run made [supporting comments](#). He also said Jerry Peters, who is on the Soil and Water Commission, provided a statement. Mr. Peters indicated opposition to changes to the deer management program. Peter stated he would followup with Mr. Peters about FACC concerns as well.
- o *Plant NOVA Natives Partners Meeting:* Philip stated that Plant NOVA Natives invited us to attend their partners meeting on the morning of Tuesday, January 30th. Philip plans to attend and others are invited.
- o *Mount Vernon Town Meeting:* Dave said the Town meeting will be on February 10. Philip will arrange a transfer of display materials.

A small part of Cinder Bed Road Bikeway would go through Mount Vernon District, so Philip suggested that was one item to discuss if possible. Also, the Costco proposal to include gas pumps is in Mt. Vernon District along Accotink Gorge.
- o *Freshwater Tidal Communities:* Philip stated that the Friends of Dyke Marsh has requested that we cosponsor their program titled Native Plants of Freshwater Tidal Communities. There is no obligation other than adding our name. There were no objections noted. The program is on Sunday, March 3 at 3pm at Huntley Meadows Visitor Center.
- o *Federation of Friends Meeting:* Philip indicated that the next Federation of Friends Meeting is set for Thursday, March 7th at 7:00pm, online only. We have attended this many times in the past, and Avril offered to attend again.

- o *Annandale Greenway Earth Day*: Philip stated that we had a tent at the previous Greenway Earth Day event and he committed to do one again. Others are welcome to participate. The organizers plan to include a stream and trail cleanup in nearby Manassas Gap Park. This park's unnamed stream runs under I-495 Beltway & Little River Turnpike where it enters into Accotink Creek.

We have a few objectives with the [Annandale Greenway](#) :

- Make the project an example of how to connect existing infrastructure instead of paving forests.
 - Where the proposed route is on existing wooded paths, avoid new paving.
 - Try to have the project extend across the Beltway to connect with the Cross County Trail on the north side of Rt. 236, where the existing [ad hoc connection](#) is an eroding mess.
- o *Fairfax City HisTree*: Philip said he has committed to a tent at HISTree Day, which is Saturday April 27th from 10am-4pm at historic Blenheim. He expects we will have rescued native plants to give away as we did last year.

The worldwide theme of Earth Day 2024 is [Planet vs. Plastics](#) , if anyone has ideas on how we could or should try to illustrate that theme.

- *Braddock Road Project*: Mike Perel presented on the Braddock Multimodal project to see what the group thinks could be done to limit this waste of resources and unnecessary destruction of trees. The [latest version of the VDOT website](#) features a photo of the western end of the project that shows how there is already a functioning shared use path and how nice all the trees look there. Ironically, this photo illustrates several of the reasons that many residents think this project is misguided, a waste of money, and a reason to keep the trees. He still thinks it shouldn't be too late to have an independent peer review of the project by professionals in the field. The project does not have Phase II funding yet. Discussion indicated that FACC has commented throughout the process, and some of those comments did help address concerns on intersection changes that would have been harmful to the creek. But the dual trails seem to be required by DOT funding that was obtained. There was a change to Rolling Road from dual trails to only one, so maybe that is something to look at. Mike was going to followup with us with possible wording he'd like FACC to send again.
- *Accotink Gorge*: Philip stated that the main feature of our partnership with Plant NOVA Natives is the [Accotink Gorge](#) , it would be nice to have some progress to show them. Right now he is supposed to be gathering treatment estimates from additional contractors.

We received a reminder that Fort Belvoir is [planning new buildings](#) on the North Post, which could motivate their participation in the Accotink Gorge project, if anyone can follow up. Rekha from Plant NOVA Natives was supposed to be pursuing Fort Belvoir. Gary said he would followup and see what he could help with.

Gary also located some information about Costco's [acquisition of an adjacent property](#) it wishes to use as a gas station. Again, this can be turned into a form of leverage to extract cooperation and donations.

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The Accotink Gorge is largely in Mount Vernon District so we should try to take advantage of the February town meeting to engage the support and aid of the Supervisor's office. That aid could come in the form of making connections to donors and encouraging landowner cooperation, especially from Costco, VDOT, and Fort Belvoir.

- [Mussel Rescue](#): Philip and Katy talked about the latest mussel rescue efforts. On the evening of January 9th the [USGS stream gauge](#) briefly went over 2000 cubic feet per second. That's the threshold where mussels are pushed out of the streambed and stranded on the gravel bars. Four volunteers went out searching last Saturday and Sunday.

They located 92 mussels and returned them to safety in deeper water. It was good to see how many were juveniles, indicating the population is healthy enough to continue reproducing. The smallest was 1.5 inches long vs. the largest about 6 inches.



A half-dozen of the rescued freshwater mussels

- [George Snyder Trail](#): Katy indicated that the group of the concerned have continued to speak at each City Council meeting. Unless City Council votes at its January 23rd meeting to change course, the project will go forward as planned. A couple of councilmembers may be inclined to vote for only the western part of the trail, but would still need to swing two more votes their way.

City residents should let the City Council know how they feel before January 23rd.

- [Lake Accotink Dredging](#): Gary said that there has been no update on dredging from the Supervisors as of the date of this meeting. The last he knew was it was within the Environmental Committee for discussion.
- [Vernal Pool Contamination](#): Philip said that we got some small encouragement this week when crews showed up at the pond to begin some shoring up of the temporary repair that has been deteriorating since it was installed in June 2022. The repairs consisted of installing new straw bales and a silt fence. The crew also said they were moving some of the mud to the north side of the pond until it could be used to fill in the gully in the slope.

According to the crew, plans are ready to make a final repair by putting in a new pipe, which is what should have been done almost 5 years ago when the original pipe first failed. The crew indicated the only holdup now is a permit to proceed from the County.

We need to meet with Supervisor Lusk to press for the inspectors to get this project moving.



New straw bales, same old mud

- [Conservation Legislation](#): Avril provided that some are going to Richmond on January 22 if others wished to go along. They plan to meet with several delegates. Philip indicated the website has been updated with 2024 legislative information if anyone wishes to read individual bills or provide comments. Some of the bills are:

1. [HB320](#) - A bill to clarify and loosen the restrictions on the use of herbicides by volunteers working on invasive plants.
2. A [budget amendment](#) to earmark funds (say \$500K) for VDOT to create a pilot project to remove invasive vines from their rights of way in Fairfax, Arlington and Alexandria.
3. [HB47](#) and [SB306](#) - A bill to require retailers to label invasive plants being sold for outdoor use.
4. [HB528](#) - A bill, supported by Nature Forward, to prohibit HOAs from ruling against native plant yards or "managed conservation landscaping" at the moment not protected by the Code of Virginia.
5. [HB1167](#) - Allows local jurisdictions to ban the sale of English Ivy

- [Americana Drive Cleanup](#): Philip said that we will have our usual Presidents Day cleanup on February 19th. Join us if you can. As of this week, the dumping did not appear to be as bad as previously, but there is still plenty to be done.

Adding to the problems of Americana Drive, an inlet drain left uncovered by VDOT ever since the completion of the 495 Express Lanes finally received a permanent cover last August. Unfortunately, the cover caused new problems, by immediately becoming covered with soil and organic debris. When I visited the spot on January 11th, the drain had ceased to function and a small lake was forming. I send out some alarming emails and photos, which got VDOT to unplug the drain. A more permanent solution is needed, since it will only become plugged up again.



New lake in Fairfax County?



It's just like unstopping a sink!

- *Potomac Watershed Cleanup*: Philip said that he had provided a draft list of cleanup dates and noted that he had moved the start to May 4 which is later than normal. There are a number of events already in April. No one expressed concerns with the proposed dates.

Other things that are happening where volunteers could be utilized include:

Request for cleanups in March by West End Rugby and HDR company, dates TBD

Hunters Branch cleanup in the Stonehurst Community on April 6th

A [total solar eclipse](#) some wish to see on April 8th

Annandale Greenway Earth Day on April 20th

[Fairfax City Community Cleanup Event](#) on April 21st

Fairfax City HisTree on April 27th

- *Giveaway Supplies*: Avril asked about obtaining more mosquito dunks and some bottles of insect spray as giveaway items at events. Her request was approved.

• *Charles Smith Retires*: Philip reported that Charles Smith, whom many of us have interacted with over the years, retired January 12th. Charles was always a steadfast advocate for the environment and was always forthcoming and supportive of Friends of Accotink Creek and similar advocates. We hope his retirement means we will see and hear more of him as an advocate, rather than less.

- *I-66 Outside the Beltway*: Philip said that the I-66 construction ordeal is over. Although there may be a bit of touchup still. The machines are gone and all the remaining open spaces have been planted with trees. While they all appear to be Virginia natives as far as he could tell, not all belong in our area, such as Bald Cypress and Arborvitae.

After being murky and muddy all last year, the North Fork of Accotink Creek finally cleared up in late fall as the construction activity came to an end.



Newly replanted I-66 cloverleaf

- *Donations*: Philip said that we had donations of:
 - \$41.31 from Amanda Dawson, whom some of you may have met at cleanups and monitoring recently. The odd amount means she contributed a bit extra to cover the PayPal fees, a feature just added to our donation page.
 - \$50 from Kurt Doehnert
 - \$100 from Jang Han, in response to Philip's daughter's Facebook appeal
 - \$300 from Philip's daughter
 - \$500 matching funds from Philip's daughter's employer
 - Additionally, Philip paid \$17.54 for domain name renewal & \$153.74 for web hosting, which was considered a donation.