

## **Ballston Pond Improvement Project Third Public Meeting Summary – October 27, 2011**

This document summarizes the Third Public Meeting for the Ballston Pond Improvement Project on Thursday, October 27, 2011. A revised concept design for the project was presented to the public.

The format for the session was an open house, designed to give the public a chance to take a first look at the proposed pond design that is a culmination of all the comments and concerns expressed at previous meetings. The agenda included an overview of the project, a presentation of the preferred concept, and an update of the project schedule and status. Consultants highlighted the changes made to the design based on comments from the stakeholders and the public from the previous meetings. In addition, the County gave a historic overview of its stormwater management program and how this project plays a role in the overall plan for County stormwater management.

### ***General Comments and Questions***

**Was there any damage to the underground stormwater system from the recent earthquake?**  
County staff replied that they are not aware of any damage at this time.

**Is there any written information regarding climate changes specific to Arlington and the effects of this on stormwater?**

This issue has been examined in relationship to the County's Stormwater Master Plan Update project, and the storm sewer capacity study. More information is available on the Stormwater Master Plan Update web page:

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/EnvironmentalServices/epo/page74076.aspx>

**Have there been any lessons learned from the design and construction of Sparrow Pond?**  
Yes. The staff person that managed the design, construction and management of the Sparrows Pond project has been involved with the planning and design of this project as well.

**How is this retrofit project being funded?**

In 2008, the County dedicated a specific fund to stormwater management using money generated from real estate taxes. The funding for this project is coming from this stormwater fund.

**Have you considered getting the National Science Foundation and/or the Department of Defense to sponsor the project by building the boardwalks on the metric system and using interpretive panels as educational tools about the metric system?**

No, we have not considered that approach for funding the project.

**This is a very well designed project that has been run and coordinated with great care. Thank you for the hard work.**

### ***Wetland Design***

**What wildlife is currently living at the pond now and will this wildlife be protected?**

We have a specific phase of the construction schedule for rescue and relocation of wildlife in the pond.

**Does the wetland design include plants specifically intended to attract the monarch butterfly?**

We are proposing to include swamp milkweed in the planting plan, which may attract monarch butterflies. There are also a lot of colorful, bright, nectar producing native plants included in the plan to attract birds and butterflies in general.

**Has any consideration been given for housing existing ducks in the pond?**

No, but it's something the team may want to consider.

**Along the lines of the bat boxes, is there an opportunity to add private beehives in the pond for the citizens that practice some beekeeping in their homes.**

It's something we haven't considered as of yet. One citizen offered a site to look at: Bat Conservation International.

**One citizen expressed concern about the impacts to wildlife from the proposed boardwalk on the eastern side of the pond.**

Typically, the wildlife that will inhabit this pond area will be somewhat tolerant of people and urban areas, so the boardwalk and any pedestrians on the boardwalk should not disturb them.

**Is there a Spill Prevention Plan for the pond or for the area upstream in Lubber Run?**

The County has a pollution prevention educational program to try to prevent spills and pollution from entering local streams. The County's normal procedure for responding to and cleaning up spills will continue to apply for Lubber Run and the pond. The wildlife plants may enhance the capability of the pond to absorb contaminants, such as oil, that enter the pond to a limited degree.

**Two citizens voiced concern about an existing smell from the sanitary sewer system surrounding the pond area.**

As part of the design process, we have identified the location of utilities around and in the pond. The project design was careful not to conflict with the existing sanitary sewer pipe line. If there are concerns about a sewer odor, that is something that can be investigated separately. Sometimes as part of the natural bacterial processes in pond and wetland environments, the mud may contain sulfur compounds that can give off a sewage odor.

***Overlooks, Boardwalks, Trails and Landscaping***

**One citizen expressed dislike of the access trail going through the grassy area north of the pond and asked why the tie-in couldn't be at the very south end of the park, to minimize the size of the access road.**

The steepness of the park required a longer tie-in path to allow the transition for the access road to work. This access road will not necessarily have to be impervious – the project team is investigating other options that will allow maintenance access, but minimize impervious surfaces.

**There was discussion about planning the grassy area north of the pond, where the maintenance access road will be installed. Why was this not done?**

Although there was some discussion about possible improvements to the grassy area north of the pond, it was decided that planning for this area was outside of the scope of this project.

**Several citizens asked about the safety of bikers and pedestrians crossing paths at the plaza area. Some suggestions included adding way-finding to inform bikers to keep going**

**southeast outside of the pond area towards Ballston, thereby minimizing bike traffic through the plaza area.**

The turn radius around the plaza was designed such that it would be difficult for bikers to speed through – they must slow down to make the turn. In addition, the design may be changed to include bollards in certain areas to deter/slow down bikers, specifically at the plaza and at the entrance of the boardwalk being constructed in Phase 1.

**What is currently located in the area of the proposed plaza? If it is vegetated, I would prefer that it remain that way. I would prefer habitat to plaza areas.**

The plaza was a proposed addition to the plan, but is not a definite component.

**Is there a proposed plant list for the project?**

Yes, the draft plant list has been reviewed by the County Natural Resources staff and it is posted on the Ballston Pond project web page.

**Have you considered adding a row of deciduous trees inside the evergreen trees that are used to screen the pond from I-66? This would allow more diversity of trees, because the evergreen trees are not native.**

The project team will evaluate if it is possible to add additional trees along I-66.

**One citizen suggested adding steps to the boardwalk to prevent bikers from entering.**

It would be difficult to do that due to ADA requirements.

**An additional overlook at the corner of the pond near I-66 might be good, as it is a high point offering good views of the pond.**

An overlook at that location is not planned as part of Phase I, but it can be considered for future phases.

**Several comments were presented about the Bradford Pears along the bike trail, which will be removed as part of the invasive plant control management.**

- One citizen liked the “snowlike effect” produced by the flowering pears and asked if new trees intended to replace them would produce a similar scene.
- It was also noted that Bradford pears produce a very unattractive smell simultaneously with the spring flowers.
- A commenter noted that Bradford Pears provided much-needed shade on that path, which gets extremely hot in the summer.

Bradford Pears are very invasive trees that block other native plants from growing, take over any space they occupy, leave little room for the diversity we are striving for in this project. As part of the invasive plant management around the pond, the project team has decided to remove the Bradford pears and replace them with native trees. Bradford pear trees are also a maintenance challenge because they frequently fall over.

Some trees that are under consideration by the project team include: serviceberry, cherry, crab apples. The new trees have not yet been selected. The native species chosen, however, will be decorative and will likely have some flowering although they will likely not have the “snowlike” effect that the Pears have. The new trees selected will most definitely provide shade.

### ***Trash Control, Sediment and Maintenance***

In general, the group seems to approve of the two trash control devices that are planned to be installed as part of the improvement project.

#### **What is the long term plan to keep invasives out once they are removed?**

There will be an on-going invasive management plan put into the overall Operations and Maintenance manual for the project. This plan will be reviewed and approved by the existing maintenance crews that the County already has on staff. Although it is difficult to completely eliminate invasive plants, many native plants will be added during the project and they will help create a more balanced ecosystem.

#### **How will sediment be collected in the pond?**

The addition of a forebay at the north end of the pond where runoff enters the system was put in specifically to collect sediment, before it has a chance to enter the pond. It won't prevent all sediment accumulation in the pond, but it will reduce it significantly. The access road will be used to allow maintenance crews to easily access the forebay and clean out trash and sediment on a routine schedule.

### ***Interpretative Elements***

#### **Several suggestions were made related to interpretive elements:**

- Consider adding new wayfinding signs for bikers to get through the pond area and out onto the street.
- One citizen expressed concern with pedestrians stopping to read interpretative panels in the proposed plaza at the southeast corner, and not paying attention to oncoming traffic from bicyclists, with the potential for resulting accidents.
- One citizen suggested a special interpretative panel be included to explain the metric system and using it in conjunction with building the boardwalk on the metric system as an educational tool.

#### **Will there be new lighting with the project?**

Lighting has been discussed, but generally this is not included in Phase I design plans. In addition, the pond and most County parks close at dusk, so may not want to attract citizens with lighting to a closed area.

A citizen noted that there is already lighting on the bike path along the south end of the park. Another citizen offered a site to look at for types of lighting that prevent excess light spillage, from the International Dark Sky Association.

### ***Additional Comments Submitted After the Meeting***

#### **Comment #1:**

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the October 27 public presentation because of a conflict with another public meeting that the County was holding at the same time. However, I note from the

slides that you are planning to construct a paved plaza at the southeast corner of the site, near the Fairfax Drive entrance to I-66.

Please remove this plaza from the plans. The plaza will destroy a natural area and will create an impervious surface. This is not environmentally-friendly. It will serve as a glaring contradiction to the stated aims of this so-called "Improvement Project", which is allegedly intended to "improve" a natural area. The Plaza will be less attractive than the natural area that it will replace.

The plaza would not be an "improvement" at all. Instead the plaza would represent yet another example of the County's long-standing "Paving the Parks" program. It will extend Ballston's overly paved development into an existing County park.

Even worse, the plaza is unnecessary, as there will be relatively few visitors to the site. Visitors and passerbys do not need it and will not appreciate it. A planting of one or more trees or the construction and maintenance of a small meadowland at the site would be far more consistent with the goals of the project than would a paved plaza.

---

**Comment #2:**

The following recommendation originally came from Daniel Costanzo, Founder and Public Relations Officer (PRO) of S\*T\*A\*R\*S Unlimited:

**Recommendation #1: Include Lighting In The Project Utilizing Lighting And Lighting Practices That Minimize Light Pollution And Maximize Fresh AIRE**

At the 2011-Oct-27 (Thursday) Ballston Pond Improvement Project's 3rd Public Meeting, the matter of "lighting" was brought up. The Arlington County representative replied that "lighting" had been discussed. But they weren't showing anything about it at this time in the Project's Concept Plan. The County was then encouraged to include "lighting" as part of the Project by incorporating it into the Concept Plan.

I endorse this inclusion of "lighting" as part of the Project. However, I recommend going beyond just incorporating the nebulous term "lighting" into the Project's Concept Plan.

I recommend that, the Ballston Pond's motto of "Wetlands. Water. More." requires that the Project utilize only "lighting" and lighting practices that minimize the lighting's emission of light pollution while maximizing the lighting's incorporation into the County's Fresh AIRE – "Arlington Initiative to Reduce [Greenhouse Gas and Other Pollution] Emissions."

This includes – but is not limited to – removing all the existing, inefficient pseudo-Colonial lighting along the section of Bike Trail running along the Pond's southern side and replacing it with lighting meeting the above two requirements.

This means that the Concept Plan needs to have added to it a section called "Lighting" that includes both the phrases "minimizing light pollution" and "maximizing the County's Fresh AIRE," that then elaborates on how the Project will meet these two requirements.

Specifically, "minimizing light pollution" means that the Project must incorporate into its Concept Plan lighting design and practices that minimize as much as possible the amount of artificial light falling inside the Pond's boundaries. It also means minimizing the amount of artificial light marring views

into the dark Pond at dusk and at night for visitors looking out into the dark Pond from its current Existing Overlook, its future Boardwalk, and any overlooks and boardwalks installed in this Project's future phase(s).

Accomplishing this requires that the Project must use only lighting fixtures, lighting shields, and lighting practices that are approved by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA).

At the 3rd Public Meeting I made this recommendation about consulting with IDA verbally to one of the contractors. She replied that she was familiar with IDA. Thus, at least one of the individuals working on the Project knows about IDA.

IDA can make usable recommendations – at no charge – about lighting that don't compromise safety, security, or utility, but do save taxpayers money, while reducing both energy waste, and the pollution associated with generating the electricity wasted by that energy waste. This means that before the County and its contractors make any lighting decisions for this Project, they need to first contact IDA for advice, and then follow that advice.

However, before the Project's people contact and consult IDA, they first needs to contact and consult with the County's own David M. Brown Planetarium, which also is located near the Ballston Pond. You can say that I referred you to them. The Planetarium needs to at least be made aware that the County is implementing a project involving trying to minimize light pollution at a site near the Planetarium's location.

Maximizing the County's Fresh AIRE means that this Project's lighting component needs to be officially incorporated into the County's Fresh AIRE to lower emissions through energy efficiency investments. This will dovetail perfectly with the County's working with IDA to provide lighting that minimizes light pollution.

Minimizing light pollution also means that the County needs to approach VDOT and request that it install and maintain some kind of light shields on the I-66 pole lights visible from the Pond to minimize their light pollution spilling onto the Pond. While VDOT may be reluctant to install them, doing so will actually increase lighting of that the section of I-66 near the Pond by sending light down onto I-66 where it belongs, and not allowing it to spill over the Pond as wasted light (and wasted energy).

Minimizing light pollution also means that the County needs to approach the owners of the high rise buildings closest to the Pond and request that they install and maintain some kind of light shields and utilize lighting practices that minimize wasted light (and wasted energy) spilling over the Pond.

The Project also needs to minimize light pollution by including in its Concept Plan the planting of native trees that produce foliage thick enough to serve as light shields, particularly on the Pond's east side along the high rise buildings. That would favor planting evergreen trees that could serve as light shields all year round. However, if the County decides to only plant native trees that drop their leaves in the Fall, then it needs to choose trees that, when fully leafed out, produce crowns that are thick enough to serve as effective light shields, again, particularly on the Pond's east side.

At first, this recommendation may sound implausible. However, if a deliberate effort is made, it can be incorporated into the Project.

Once the County does this, it needs to advertise that it has done so on the interpretive signage around the Pond, as well as on the Pond's Internet/Web site. This advertising needs to include

mentioning that the County consulted with both IDA and the County's own David M. Brown Planetarium about it, as well as making it part of the County's Fresh AIRE.

At the 3rd Public Meeting, when I discussed the need for addressing lighting with one of the contractors, she told me that the Pond is closed at dark. I'm certain that is the case. However, the County must understand that the Pond's being rimmed by two highly accessible Bike Trails means that bicyclists and pedestrians (including myself) are briefly stopping at the Pond's current Existing Overlook along the Bike Trail at dusk and night to look out over the Pond, e.g., to listen to frogs, or to watch and listen to waterfowl. So, looking out over the Pond at dusk and night is part of the total Ballston Pond experience. There's no reason why this experience should be denied to future visitors.

Therefore, the County needs to officially recognize this kind of experiencing of the Pond at dusk and night as fact, and incorporate proper lighting to accommodate it in its Improvement Project. For unless the County spends extra funds to put lockable gates on the current Existing Overlook, the future Boardwalk, and possible future overlooks and boardwalks, it can still expect the public to stop on them to look out over the Pond at dusk and night in the future. And I'm currently not aware that lockable gates are part of the Concept Plan.

The County's controlling light pollution as much as it can on this Project will also facilitate helping another kind of welcome animal live in the Pond area that the public can enjoy viewing from the current Existing Overlook, the future Boardwalk, and possible future overlooks and boardwalks: fireflies. However, I will be recommending incorporating facilitating fireflies into the Project's Concept Plan in a later recommendation that I plan on e-mailing you at a later date. I am simply mentioning it here so that I can claim credit for being the one who originally recommended it.

---

### **Comment #3:**

I have no specific recommendations on which of the three options would work best; to a large degree, I have to trust that county staff and the consultants will select the option that is the most practical and suitable for the area. No matter which option is selected, I would hope that 1) the new pond will provide adequate storm-water management for the surrounding highly urbanized area, 2) the design is optimal for cleaning the runoff and removing trash before it hits Lubber Run, 3) creating suitable habitat for animals and plants takes priority over its use as a recreational area, and 4) there is sufficient access to and infrastructure supporting the pond to make it feasible to keep the pond maintained so that a major overhaul is not required for at least another 8 to 10 years.

With respect to what is currently being considered, I understand everyone's desire to replace invasive species with natives, and ideally that should be the goal. However, sometimes what is ideal may not be practical, and with a limited amount of resources I think it's important to use every dollar wisely. Several people spoke lovingly of the Bradford pear trees that provide a leafy noise barrier to the surrounding roads and provide shade along a trail that would otherwise be too hot for comfort.

Before we break out the chainsaws to remove those trees, I would love to know what Landscape Supervisor Patrick Wegeng and Urban Forestry Commission member Nora Palmatier think about it. Both have served as excellent resources to me in the past whenever I have had questions about trees here in Bluemont.

Because the beaver pond area is somewhat difficult to access, I'm wondering how easy it will be for Patrick's team to access the area to water any new trees that are planted. With only two watering trucks available countywide, his team is stretched pretty thinly during the hot summer months. And

not only are trees dying in the first and second years after planting, but we're now beginning to see a high mortality rate amongst trees that have been established for a much longer time.

As I'm sure you already know, Arlington has already lost approximately 80% of its mature tree canopy over the past 30 years, so we can't afford to lose more trees. Though not ideal, the Bradfords are surrounded by highways and hardscape urban development that limit their threat as invasives. Bradfords are known for splitting and splintering, but they are one of the few species that can be severely pruned (if done properly by a professional) every 20 years or so to reduce the chances of splitting and to keep the trees in good shape. I know this because my neighbor across the street had her Bradfords rehabilitated about 8 years ago, and my brother had his rehabilitated 2 years ago. All the trees are continuing to thrive.

Moreover, Bradfords are better at adapting to air pollution than some other species—their location next to I-66 and other major roads may have been one reason why they were selected in the first place.

If comparable replacement of the Bradfords can't be reasonably guaranteed, then I would hesitate to be in favor of their removal. So much of the site will be disturbed when the pond is excavated, and I would hate to see additional erosion occurring because we chopped down healthy mature trees that were capable of holding the soil in place and absorbing some of the excess rainwater.

My second comment is based on what another attendee said—namely that the smell of the water coming out of the pond and flowing into Lubber Run is so offensive as to be nauseating. Not only is this true near the pond, but the smell is equally horrendous after it passes underneath Wilson Boulevard and resurfaces on the south side of Wilson along N. Abingdon Street. Whether the smell is due to a sewage leak somewhere along the line, I can't say. But the temperature doesn't have to be very high for the odor to be easily noticeable from the street.

Whereas I recognize that Lubber Run is not the main focus of the beaver pond project, I would recommend that county staff keep it in mind as part of the bigger picture. After all, one fundamental reason for the beaver pond's rehabilitation is to improve the quality of water entering Lubber Run, Four Mile Run, and ultimately flowing into the Potomac River. Greg Zell was kind enough to include Lubber Run in his Natural Resources Management Plan because it is one of Arlington's most endangered streams.

Right now Lubber Run is essentially dead. I have no illusions that will change in my lifetime. However, what I'm recommending is that staff begin to look now at how the parts of Lubber Run south of the beaver pond could be restored both to improve water quality and to re-create a viable wildlife corridor/greenway to connect the Fields Park/bike trail area with parkland to the south. Such a plan would require the county to purchase property that is already in or close to flood plains, as outlined in the recently revised federal flood insurance maps. One of my neighbors, Paul Chernoff of N. Abingdon Street, has mentioned to me his interest in selling his property to the county in order to provide greater space for the run to flow in a more natural fashion. In the coming decades, with heavy rainfall events occurring more frequently, there may be other homeowners along the run who may be interested in selling their properties to the county.

In 2009, Mike Nardolilli, president of the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, announced the Connecting Our Greenspaces initiative to link together existing natural spaces. Streams can provide such a link. And if I'm not mistaken, there was grant money available (not a huge amount, but some) several years ago for the express purpose of re-establishing links between green spaces in Northern Virginia. If Arlington is interested in trying to re-establish a natural link between the Fields Park area

and green space/parkland to the south, then I'm sure that Mike would be happy to help you determine what types of federal, state, and private grant funding sources might be available.

Again, I appreciate your and your team's hard work to rehabilitate the Ballston Beaver Pond. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to help.