



Friends of the Rappahannock
Advocacy • Restoration • Education

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Press Release

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City of Fredericksburg Passes Model Pollution Control Ordinance *Environmental & Developer's Group Worked Out Details; Offer Support*

The Fredericksburg, Virginia City Council has passed a new pollution control ordinance that sets a model for other local governments in Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The ordinance addresses pollution carried in water that runs off from pavement and rooftops, water that is often contaminated with chemicals and bacteria. The Federal Chesapeake Bay Program reports that runoff from urban and suburban areas is the fastest growing pollution source in the Bay watershed. The ordinance applies to new (future) construction projects only, and will not apply to projects that have already been issued a City permit or are in the permitting process.

"We are trying to make developed land absorb and filter water like it did when it was a forest", stated John Tippett, executive director of the Friends of the Rappahannock. "This is extremely effective at removing pollutants and reducing flooding downstream". The Friends received a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to help the City design the ordinance.

May Sligh, Watershed Field Coordinator for DCR's Tappahannock Regional Office, offered, "The Friends engaged a variety of partners in developing this ordinance, which promotes a more enlightened way to address stormwater - getting it back into the ground, replenishing our groundwater supplies and slowing and cleansing flows, as opposed to funneling dirty water to the Rappahannock and her tributaries. This new ordinance removes some of the barriers to this new way of thinking about taming stormwater flows and will serve as a benefit to local and regional water quality."

The ordinance requires that the first ½" of runoff from each rainfall event be "infiltrated into the ground, evaporated, or reused". Catching the first half inch is equal to 75% of the rainfall that falls on the site in the course of a year. By keeping this excess runoff water out of the streams, the ordinance will reduce erosion in urban streams like the City's Hazel Run. "That means a cleaner river downstream for the crabs and oysters", notes Tippett. The ordinance promotes practices such as "rain gardens", landscaped areas of vegetation and that filter runoff through the soil.

"There are many local governments that encourage Low Impact Development in their ordinance language, but very few that set a numerical requirement." noted Tippet. "This ordinance marks the difference between wishing the Bay clean and actually making it happen."

The Friends and City staff spent 18 months in negotiations with the Fredericksburg Area Builder's Associate to hammer out the details of the ordinance.

"The Fredericksburg Area Builders Association (FABA) is pleased to have contributed to the creation of the Low Impact Development Ordinance recently passed by the Fredericksburg City Council. We recognize this is a step forward in cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay while permitting needed construction to take place," said Glen Raymond, the association's President.

"This shows what can happen when groups take the time to listen to each other's concerns, and then dedicate themselves to finding constructive solutions", stated Tippet.

"Inviting the environmentalists and the developers to the table first brought about an understanding of their respective concerns, which in turn brought about an agreement that is a benefit to all. The Friends of the Rappahannock, the FABA, and City staff are to be commended for avoiding the, 'us against them" approach, and through their cooperative efforts, making Fredericksburg an even better place to live", stated Matt Kelly, Fredericksburg City Councilman.

Currently, the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg to City Dock is listed on the Commonwealth's "Dirty Waters" list due to bacteria contamination.

Photos

A demonstration "rain garden" in the City was built in the parking lot next to Check E. Cheese in Fredericksburg's Central Park retail center. Photos are available on the online version of this press release at www.riverfriends.org

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