

Riverside Park Stormwater Greenway opens



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Revitalized wetland space to provide recreation, create healthier waterways

HOPEWELL — After decades of disuse and disrepair, the wooded wetlands of Riverside Park are once again accessible to the public as the Riverside Park Stormwater Greenway.

Marking the project's completion after more than three years of planning and construction, city officials gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the greenway's trailhead across from Hopewell City Marina on Friday.

The greenway features walking trails that wind along a stream through approximately 24 acres of natural and newly constructed wetlands, connecting to a trailhead with a permeable pavement parking lot.

Five acres of invasive species like English ivy and Chinese privet have been removed, and hundreds of new native trees and shrubs adorn this purposefully crafted green space.

“It's a considerable improvement on where (Riverside Park) was just a few short years ago, and it adds a tremendous amenity to the community for our citizens to be able to utilize,” City Manager March Altman said of the greenway.

These enhancements are not just aesthetic, however; they also serve key roles in stabilizing the waterway, so the stream does not erode the hillside of the adjacent Appomattox Cemetery, and the added greenery helps filter out pollutants that would otherwise flow into the Appomattox and James Rivers.

Other stormwater control elements include trash vaults to capture debris and a regenerative stormwater conveyance, which creates step-pools that filter water down through a sand and wood chip mixture.

The stream also has a new, shallower channel to pass through, with water features like log sills and rock cross vanes. This channel design works to curb erosion and slow the shuttling of pollutants from rain runoff into the major waterways. In all, more than 290 acres of urban development drain into this streambed.

“If you’re looking for something to do when a big old storm rolls into town, be careful, but there’s no better place to see the power of an urban watershed raging through this valley,” Stormwater Program Manager Joe Battiata said during the ceremony.

In fact, the heavy rains earlier this summer that washed out several roads in Central Virginia also took out some of the new foliage in the greenway, though Battiata said repairs will be made soon.

The brainchild of former Stormwater Systems Engineer Benjamin Leach, this project began as an effort to help the city meet state-mandated requirements for reducing pollution into the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. As completed, the greenway will remove 453 pounds of phosphorus, 1,616 pounds of nitrogen and 78,843 pounds of sediment from the watershed each year.

Special guests at the ceremony included State Del. Riley Ingram, former City Manager Mark Haley, former City Councilor Wayne Walton and Ward 1 Councilor Christina Luman-Bailey.

Funding from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the city of Hopewell made this project possible.

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