

From: Joe Stowers [sydec@patriot.net]

Sent: Sunday, April 11, 2010 3:33 PM

To: Merkel, Heidi T.; Nicoson, Patty; Smith, Sandi M.

Cc: Thompson-Deahl, Claudia ; Shaw, Katie; Blust, Diane ; Matthews, Milt; Chew, Richard; Thomas, Paul; Simon, Bob; Rolband, Mike; Butler, Larry; Smyers, Robin; Schlichting, John; Bruce, Loren; Edwards, Dave; Gowin, Stan; Murphy, Brian; Helms, Adrienne; Martin, Kathryn

Subject: Re: Future of the Sunrise Valley wetlands

Patty, Heidi, and Sandi,

My request to have the April 2 email report of our tour of the Sunrise Valley Wetlands sent to the RMPSS Task force Members (see below) apparently did not result in that being done -- it was not included in Sandi's email distribution of new materials to the TF last Friday. Perhaps this is my fault -- I failed to include Sandi on my CC list for that email.

Since it is a very timely issue for the TF, I would greatly appreciate it if this could be done tomorrow (Monday) to allow time for everyone to read it before Tuesday's meeting.

Thanks:

Sorry Sandi for not including you on that email list!

Joe Stowers

P.S. I have made 2 corrections to that April 2 email, both shown highlighted in a larger bold italic font.

On April 2 Joe Stowers wrote:

Patty and Heidi,

I would like to pass on to RMPSS TF members a few observations and suggestions for their information as a follow-up to the walking tour of the Sunrise Valley wetlands Wednesday afternoon.

(1) Claudia had Nicki Foremsky send me (and Dick Stillson) a copy of the Conservation Covenant (not called an "easement") agreement signed by Reston Land to protect this 15.35 acre wetlands "in perpetuity" in 1994 (copy attached). Although this agreement does not spell out the process that would have to be followed to vacate this covenant, Claudia told us that it would require a public hearing and comments were made by more than one person about the political difficulty of getting the covenant vacated by the current property owner (Mass Life?). Heidi earlier told me that she has asked the County Attorney for information about this, and expects to have that done soon. I trust that RA will want to have its attorney review that material and make that review available to the TF.

(2) During the tour of the site, several questions were asked by us about what RA staff would like to have happen to the site in the future. It is clear that RA staff who make use of this site for environmental education and related activities would like to see these wetlands acquired by RA so that it could be better protected and enhanced. However, my impression is that RA has not yet taken a formal position on this and has no specific plans of this kind.

(3) I checked my old copy of the County's tax map for this area and, after my reading of the wording on the Conservation Covenant, I tentatively concluded that Reston Land apparently did not subdivide the 2 parcels that contain the wetlands to separate the developable parts along Monroe Street from the larger part that is probably in flood plain.

(4) Two RA Board members, Joe Leighton and Richard Chew, plus RA's CEO Milt Matthews and 3 or 4 RA environmental staff were on the tour. Because of the attention that the future of this property is now getting, I think it would be desirable for the RA Board to put this issue on its agenda ASAP.

(5) TF Chair Patty Nicoson and at least three other voting TF member, John Schlicting, Judith Pew, and Bob Simon, were on the tour. I think it would be desirable for the TF to put a report of this tour on its agenda and perhaps discuss next steps.

(6) My suggestion, offered to those most concerned about saving and enhancing the wetlands a few days ago (see my email below), was that it would be desirable to have them ask for some time on the TF agenda to present their suggestions for the future of the site. Based on what I heard and saw on the tour Wednesday, I suggest that the following be considered:

(a) RA staff, in conjunction with others interested in preserving and enhancing the S.V. wetlands, should prepare a brief discussion paper with a list of enhancements that should be considered, such as:

- walkway improvements, using RA's good standards, with connections to all adjoining properties and around the site to facilitate tours and wildlife observations
- parking desired for visitors and staff, both for autos and buses, probably best located on the rail station site, rather than on privately-owned parcels
- elimination of invasive plants
- additions of desirable new plants and trees
- control of beaver population and their potential damage to the woods
- facilities for environmental education and related program activities, including benches and natural looking furniture
- signing and additional exhibits
- widespread public information throughout the region about the wetlands and its programs

(b) The RA Board should send a letter to the Dulles rail project ASAP asking for any changes to the Herndon-Monroe rail station that should be modified or added to improve access to the wetlands. Unfortunately, few concerned people are aware of how rapidly the 2nd Phase of rail development is now moving from preliminary engineering and final design into construction. Recommendations for changes or additions are likely to be firmly rejected even now and certainly will be very soon.

(c) The TF should consider land use and other changes, such as a possible ped-bike grade-separated crossings of Monroe Street and the Dulles highway, that could enhance the benefits of an improved wetlands to future visitors, residents, employees, and users of the rail station, such as the provision of residential development on the periphery of the wetlands using developable land on the surrounding parcels, including the County-owned rail parcel.

Thank you for considering these observations and suggestions!

Joe Stowers

On March 25 Joe Stowers wrote:

Larry, Claudia, Katie, Diane, and Mike,

On Tuesday evening the Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force had a fairly lengthy discussion of the future prospects for the large wetlands next to the existing Herndon-Monroe park and ride off Sunrise Valley Drive.

I would urge you to plan to organize and present your preliminary thinking about the long-term future of this wetlands property -- at least in broad policy terms. I am concerned that this important natural area and its value as an environmental education asset might not survive unless the Task Force is convinced of its importance to Reston, Fairfax County, and Northern Virginia. I'm fully aware that it is not possible for RA or any other important community organization to formally agree on any such policies in the next few weeks; however, it might be helpful to tell the TF that you will be working toward that objective within the period of the TF's time-frame (2010-2011).

A basic question discussed Tuesday evening was: Is this wetlands of sufficient value to forgo its alternative use as high- or medium-density mixed-use transit-oriented development? This discussion, I believe, is not a debate between developers, residents, and environmentalists (none of whom are really represented on the Task Force). An honest question is: What, if anything, can be done to enhance its value to the much greater number of residents, employees, and other transit users who will be in this area in the future. I would ask whether this wetlands' value to those future residents, employees, and other transit users can be improved so that, at least in qualitative terms, is comparable to its alternative market value, or its lost opportunity cost of perhaps \$10 to \$20 million?

When looked at in these terms, is it worth considering (a) enhancing public access to the wetlands. (b) permitting development of some portion of the property (e.g., for residential use on the periphery of the wetlands), and (c) investment in environmental improvements such as you have done so well in the Nature Center and the stream valleys of south Reston?

I would urge you to discuss this; and then ask Task Force Chair Patty Nicoson and County Planner Heidi Merkel, both of whom I'm copying, to put you on the agenda for perhaps a 15-minute presentation some time within the next few weeks to try to address these questions.

Thank you for considering this recommendation!

Joe Stowers
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