

Response to Questions on the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisor Gross

Question: Are there less costly options to constructing retaining walls with County sidewalk projects? Are County construction requirements overly restrictive?

Response: Retaining walls are only used in County sidewalk projects when necessary in order to avoid significant impacts to adjacent properties. In certain cases, retaining walls may minimize tree loss and prevent steep slopes which may be difficult for homeowners to maintain. Where possible, retaining walls are avoided and slopes are graded as necessary to construct the sidewalk. In some cases, graded slopes planted with a non-invasive ground cover may be used depending on the specific site conditions. Using a planted ground cover eliminates the need for the property owner to mow the slope. Typically, the design engineer works with the property owner to investigate alternatives which may include a slope with plantings or where possible, adjustments in the sidewalk alignment before proceeding with the design and construction of a retaining wall as a last resort. In reviewing the sidewalk/trail projects completed over the past three fiscal years, only seven percent of the completed sidewalk/trail projects required retaining walls.

County sidewalk projects are required to comply with the same design standards as private development. The applicable standards include the Public Facilities Manual (PFM) design standards, VDOT design standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. These standards set the design parameters for safe sidewalk facilities. While compliance with these standards may at times be challenging, we do not believe they are overly restrictive.