

# The Capital

## Top Stories

### County Council ponders stormwater solutions

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

All appears well when one takes a quick look at the stormwater pond off Barrensdale Drive in Severna Park. The fenced-in, grass-lined, pond sits ready to do what it was designed for, hold rain water running off the surrounding neighborhood after a storm.

But step into the woods just beyond the pond, where the drainpipe sits, and it is evident all is not well - by a long shot.

The failed outfall has allowed a flood of stormwater to gouge out the creek bed, causing a large tulip poplar to fall across eroding banks that send silt and pollutants downstream.

A majority of the County Council saw that and three other sites on a tour last week of damaged watersheds.

The tour, organized by the Anne Arundel Watershed Network, was another step in the push to create a stormwater fee to provide the roughly \$400 million worth of work needed to reduce nutrient runoff into county waterways and the Chesapeake Bay. But only two of the council members on the tour back such a fee.

"This is a serious issue. We have to do everything we can - sooner rather than later," Councilman Barbara Samorajczyk, D-Annapolis Roads said after the tour. "The longer we wait the cost will increase exponentially."

She is supportive of the effort to create a stormwater utility, which as proposed would charge property owners around \$60 per year according to how much impervious surface - driveways, roof, parking lots - are on their property.

Pam Beidle, D-Linthicum, is too.

"I definitely support it. But if we don't educate people before we introduce legislation, if they don't understand, it is not going to pass."

Mrs. Samorajczyk and Mrs. Beidle so far are the lone yes votes on the council should a



County Council members Pam Weidle, left, and Ron Dillon survey the runoff damage at Cypress Branch. *By Joshua McKerrow -- The Capital*

bill be presented.

But that seems unlikely. County Executive Janet S. Owens has said such a fee will not get done on her watch.

And Council Chairman Ron Dillon, R-Pasadena and Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, the other two county legislators on the tour, said they don't want to impose a new fee on taxpayers.

Mr. Dillon said the four sites visited were a great illustration of the problem and what can be done to repair the damage. "We just saw a handful of sites and that really adds to my perspective of how big the issue really is."

He supports more expenditures to address the problems created by development that occurred before there were stormwater regulations to check runoff.

"But it is early yet," Mr. Dillon said. "It's just the beginning of the debate. It's too early to call for a fee yet.

He thinks adding another fee on top of the recent flush tax, increasing gas prices, and other costs of keeping a home is problematic.

"Maybe the most fair way is to do a referendum," he said. "I would not support a fee without knowing how the taxpayers feel."

Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, said if it came to a vote today, he too would support a referendum. "That would force citizens to become more educated on the issue," he said.

And education was what the tour was all about. The council members were joined by conservationists who have been pushing the issue.

When they peered into a 40-foot chasm off Severnview Drive in Arden on the Severn, the councilmen could hardly believe their eyes.

"The ravine behind that house was beyond the pale," Mrs. Samorajczyk said. "I was shocked."

Mrs. Beidle said she thought she understood the issue. But after seeing the ravine carved by water gushing from failed stormwater pipes in Allan Kreider's backyard she said "the degradation was just awful, I did not expect to see something like that. He must be horrified his house is going to fall of into the river."

Hurricane Agnes started gouging the hole. There were no drainage pipes in the community then, nor any storm water management regulations, so torrents of water from rooftops, roads, and driveways tore through the yard and began to



*Ron Bowen, right, explains the runoff damage at Barrensdale to, from left, CoCouncil's Barbara Samorajczyk and Ron Dillon, Keith Underwood, and CoCouncil's Ed Riley. Photo by: Joshua McKerrow – The Capital*

carve a gully in the hillside.

Later, the county installed pipes through the neighborhood that drained stormwater out a pipe in his yard.

It ended up making matters worse. The pipe failed and started carving a larger hole

That is illustrative of the problem the county faces Public Works Director Ron Bowen told councilmen on the tour.

"Most of our development occurred before there were any stormwater regulations," he said.

And repairing the damage done by years of runoff from those communities is the bulk of the problem.

The secondary problem is the thousands of stormwater ponds that were built since regulations come on line in the early 80s. After a period of time those ponds begin to silt in and fail, dumping nutrients and silt downstream. Then streambeds fill in with sediment, causing stormwater to gouge out another path that, in turn, creates more sediment.

The current tab to fix the 35 percent of county sub-watersheds that are degraded is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, Mr. Bowen estimates.

The last stop on the tour was Howard's Branch, where a restoration project recreated a working Atlantic White Cedar bog four years ago. It has blossomed into a perfectly functioning ecosystem, filtering and cooling stormwater before it dumps into the Severn.

"I was extremely impressed with that," Mr. Reilly said. "I showed what man's creativity can do with nature's automatic processes to (fix) and otherwise desolate area."

That restoration could be duplicated in many, but far from all, of the degraded sub-watersheds in the county.

"I would like to see more expenditure for those kinds of . . . retrofits," Mr. Dillon said. "The issue of how to pay for them is what the county is struggling with."

*Published October 03, 2005, The Capital, Annapolis, Md.  
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