



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

Rain provides critical water to Charlottesville creeks, ponds, lakes and rivers, natural irrigation for gardens and lawns, replenishes safe drinking water supplies and recharges groundwater aquifers. Paradoxically, these same rain events imperil local and regional water quality and river health through direct transmission of the wastes of our combined land uses and daily activities. Automobiles, pet waste, fertilizers, construction sites and pesticides each pose a threat when mixed with rainwater and snow.

This tainted brew of infectious bacteria, stream-clogging sediment, algae-nourishing nutrient pollution and toxins is, in fact, “stormwater” -- the fastest growing source of water pollution in Virginia. While no community can control rainfall volume, intensity or frequency, we can—for better or for worse—manage its influence on our environmental and public health, which is why the federal and state governments are requiring local governments to take action to solve their stormwater pollution problems and why the City of Charlottesville is holding a hearing on January 22, 2013, to solicit public comments.

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Twentieth century urban engineering designed our impervious (non-porous) city streets, rooftops and parking lots to shed rainwater as quickly as possible by crafting expensive networks of storm drains, gutters, culverts and ditches. According to government agency documentation, our “World Class City” is blanketed by more than 105 million square feet of impermeable surfaces. These surfaces do not absorb, retain, slow or purify water. Rather, they quickly funnel contaminated runoff into our local creeks. The impact of these massive runoff torrents can be seen during any short drive or walk through Charlottesville. These highly engineered stormwater systems generally function well to address the devastating effects of upland flooding to our homes and businesses. At the same time, these practices have literally transformed Meadow Creek, Moores Creek, Schenks Branch, the Rivanna River and James River into pollution conveyances – eventually ensuring each of these public waters an unwanted spot on the EPA “dirty waters” list.

From even a single rainstorm event, tremendous volumes of pollution-laden waters course through our waterways with such velocity and energy that the streams are literally eroded “from the inside out”. Steep, heavily eroded streambanks are not a rare sight on a stroll through Charlottesville. It is likely that you have seen this for yourself, at Riverview Park, Darden Towe Park, or at the Free Bridge on Rt. 250. It’s hard to miss the muddy brown soup of dirty water that follows each heavy rain storm. The visible effects of erosion are both remarkable and alarming.

FOR BETTER:



Modern green infrastructure and engineering design techniques can remove pollutants which currently run across our city and are discharged into our streams, in a reasonable and cost effective way. The results can be impressive and far-reaching. Charlottesville City Council is currently considering establishing a stormwater utility not unlike those enacted in Lynchburg, Richmond and numerous “World Class Cities” throughout the nation. The citizens of these communities receive the benefits of cleaner, safer local streams and rivers, and in our region, a cleaner Chesapeake Bay.

Charlottesville contains the most urbanized and impaired streams in the Rivanna River basin. As a result, Charlottesvilleians stand to gain the most from a dedicated stormwater utility. Many communities in our Commonwealth have made the commitment to establish stormwater utilities in order to improve environmental and public health, economic well-being and quality of life. These communities have also adopted innovative incentive measures whereby property owners may receive stormwater fee reductions for installing rain barrels, rain gardens, creek side vegetated plantings and other runoff controls.

The Rivanna Conservation Society, the James River Association and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, along with a host of other nonprofit and for profit organizations, strongly support the proposal for a Charlottesville stormwater utility to provide a dedicated source of funding to address the city’s runoff problems. Such a funding source would allow the city to take advantage of the \$35 million in state matching funds proposed by Governor McDonnell in pending state budget amendments. We urge the Charlottesville City Council to move forward and approve a stormwater utility – for better!