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Thursday, March 26, 2009

Edmonston plans 'green' street

Move aims to beautify town, save water

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer



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Edmonston officials anticipate breaking ground on the state's first "green" street as early as May after the town put the project out to bid last week.

The \$1 million-plus project will revamp Decatur Street with better sidewalks, more trees, traffic-calming devices and a water drainage system that will capture storm water in retention ponds.

The town is financing the project partly through Chesapeake Bay Foundation grant and bonds.

Mayor Adam Ortiz said the project is a candidate for federal stimulus money, but the town will move forward with the project even if it doesn't receive the federal money and the worsening economy.

"There are a few things that towns have to do well — that is to maintain a high quality of life and maintain safe streets and safe communities," he said. "It's an investment we made long before the downturn."

Bids are due April 22, and the town will award the contract in May, Ortiz said.

Margaret Pooley, who lives on Decatur Street, is also a member of the project's advisory committee. She said all aspects of the project are equally important.

"I'm interested in how the project is going to look and how it's going to impact the environment," she said. "I think it needs to be looked at holistically."

Construction may begin as early as May, but Pooley said she won't mind it too much.

"You can't have the improvement without having to stop traffic on the street to make the changes," she said.

Ortiz said the town has embarked upon a "green agenda" and will also install a series of environmentally-friendly rain barrels in May in a partnership with the Anacostia Watershed Society. The barrels help lessen storm water runoff that can damage the Anacostia River by collecting excess rainwater that can be used for landscaping, said Steven Reynolds, the society's director of communications and outreach.

"What this allows local homeowners to do is to participate directly in controlling storm water runoff in our watershed," he said.

Reynolds said rain barrels are just recently catching on in Prince George's municipalities.

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"As people are getting conscious about the environment in their own backyards, and cost-conscious, we're seeing more and more people interested," he said. "We've not only got places putting in water barrels, but also putting in rain gardens."

Rain gardens are green swaths of land that easily soak up water and allow it to slowly permeate the ground, Reynolds said. Brentwood has been working for a year on building one.

The Anacostia Watershed Society will host a workshop on the water barrels at 10 a.m. May 2 at the town hall for residents and will give away barrels to the first 10 households to RSVP for the event.

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