

**Date:** February 25, 2021

**Subject:** South Ellerbe Restoration Project Status Update

### Summary

The top two priorities identified in community survey results for the South Ellerbe Restoration Project is to improve water quality in Ellerbe Creek and to create a natural area that improves habitat for wildlife. The constructed wetlands and stream restoration at 808 West Trinity Avenue will accomplish this by filtering rainwater runoff from part of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Local residents, visitors to Durham, and students will also be able to enjoy walking around the restoration site to observe nature. Educational areas, plazas with seating, and a grassy seating area will make the space even more inviting. In the next step of the construction timeline, 50,000 cubic yards of soil will be removed from the project site in 2021. After that, construction will begin on the wetlands and stream restoration in 2022.

### Updated Project Concept Plan

During the October 10, 2019 Council Work Session, a presentation was made to City Council that reflected changes to the project concept plan. The boardwalks, some seating locations, and the beltline overlook amenities were identified as not being integral to the South Ellerbe Restoration project and could not be paid for with stormwater utility funds. The approximate cost of those amenities is \$1.8 million. Public Works staff informed Council at that time that a different funding source would be needed to cover the costs of those additional amenities at the time of construction.

Despite these amenities being currently removed from the baseline project, key amenities currently included with this project are:

- Trinity Street Plaza area with the demonstration bioretention cell and educational area (estimated cost of \$715,000),
- Duke Street Plaza area with educational signage and seating (estimated cost of \$100,000),
- An open grass area for seating behind the Trinity Ave Plaza (estimated cost of \$265,000), and
- A half-mile trail around the facility.

These plaza areas will provide for seating and education use by schools and other groups, and the trail will provide for walking, jogging, and cycling around the facility as well as maintenance access. The South Ellerbe trail travels through the project and will continue to the existing trail north of the site. Connections to the future Beltline trail are being coordinated with our staff. This also allows for some of the top-rated amenities from the community survey to remain in the funded project scope, which are access to nearby trails and educational signage.

At this time, another funding source has not been identified for the additional amenities noted above that could not be paid for with stormwater utility funds; however, there is the opportunity to add these additional amenities at a later date when funding becomes available (as discussed during the Work Session). Also, we are actively pursuing additional grants and other outside funding options for some of the unfunded amenities. If another funding source is identified, we will pursue adding the additional optional amenities back into the

current project. But, more realistically, we will need to work to add the unfunded amenities at a later date as funding allows under a separate project(s).

There have been several grants pursued for this project including Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Duke Energy Water Resources Fund, N.C. Flood Mitigation Grant, and Upper New Hope Clean Water Initiative. The Upper New Hope Clean Water Initiative Grant was approved for \$265,000 for construction of the wetland and an agreement is now being prepared.

City Council is being presented with another option as a funding source during the current budget process for the amenities not currently funded.

### **Project Timeline Delays**

The project has experienced some delays in the timeline originally provided. The primary reason has been the Phase 2 - Soil Removal. Phase 1 of the project was the demolition of the existing building (completed). The soil removal for Phase 2 requires the removal/reuse of about 50,000 cubic yards of soil. We are currently coordinating with other City departments (Water Management and Solid Waste Management) on other City projects to reuse the soil and minimize hauling and disposal costs. Additional time was also needed to work with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) to get approval for the soil reuse strategy while the soil reuse legislative rule was undergoing changes. The Phase 2 Soil Removal phase of this project will be bid this summer and Phase 3 - Construction of the Wetland will follow in 2022.

### **Background**

This South Ellerbe Restoration Project will help the City comply with the Falls Lake Rules by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus transported to Falls Lake and improve local water quality in Ellerbe Creek. This unique location will help treat the stormwater runoff from 485 acres of urban downtown development. The project will provide additional ecosystem enhancements such as: increased biodiversity, increased green space and pollinator friendly habitat, carbon sequestration, and improved aquatic life for South Ellerbe Creek and Falls Lake.

Once constructed, the project will achieve the top two priorities identified in community survey results - improve water quality in Ellerbe Creek and create a natural area that improves habitat for wildlife. This project will also include some of the top-rated amenities identified in the community survey results - access to nearby trails and educational signage.

### **Community Outreach Activities**

Outreach and input from community members has been an important part of this multi-year process. Below is a list of just some of the community outreach activities for the project to incorporate as many voices as possible into the creation of this important project to improve water quality in our city:

#### **Public Information Sessions**

1. June 26, 2012 - InterNeighborhood Council of Durham
2. July 12, 2012 - City Hall
3. August 7, 2012 - North Regional Library
4. July 27, 2017 - City Hall
5. September 27, 2017 (Design Workshop) - Durham Arts Council
6. April 2, 2018 - Durham Co. Health Services Building

#### **Focus Group Meetings**

1. Public Art & Education (10/18/2018)

2. Public Art & Education (11/8/2018)
3. Habitat Enhancement (1/10/2019)

### Videos

- Project Introduction Video (July 2017) <https://youtu.be/88K7JHMZzP4>
- Video Recap of Public Info Session (July 27, 2018) <https://youtu.be/An1noPP9mfA>
- Video Recap of Design Workshop (September 27, 2018) <https://youtu.be/N4bcrZeT5hl>
- Video Recap of Public Info Session (April 2, 2018) <https://youtu.be/0EemA5zisDA>
- Functions and Benefits of Wetlands (February 2021) [https://youtu.be/iK8rgCj\\_Nqg](https://youtu.be/iK8rgCj_Nqg)
- Functions and Benefits of Wetlands (February 2021) Spanish Version <https://youtu.be/JYXLCUU2WcQ>

### Spanish-Speaking Outreach

- Hispanic/Latino Committee update (September 2017)
- Bilingual (Spanish/English) postcards to doors of surrounding residents (September 2017, March 2018) and Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association helped distribute to Spanish-speaking business, such as La Loma and Compare Foods.
- Spanish-speaking staff members attended two Public Information Sessions for translation needs (September 2017, April 2018)
- Two Spanish Surveys:
  - April 2018 (3<sup>rd</sup> Public Info Session)
  - Assessing Equitable Outreach for the South Ellerbe Stormwater Restoration Project (April 2019)
- Neighborhood Improvement Services (NIS) Dept. - Stormwater staff attended two events organized by NIS at apartment complexes in PAC 3 in an effort to share Spanish and English outreach materials and build relationships with the community. Staff spoke to 84 people at Duke Manor on April 9, 2019 and 58 people at The Garrett on April 16, 2019.
- In the fall 2019, staff created a new [Spanish factsheet](#) summarizing the project that was posted on the project website and a new bilingual informative postcard.
- Collaborated with General Services Department and NIS on door-knocking efforts targeted areas of low-income, renter, and Spanish-speaking residences near the Urban Avenue project, which is approximately 2 blocks northeast of the South Ellerbe Project. (9/16/2019)
- Project Staff attended two community open houses at which South Ellerbe Project information was distributed in both Spanish and English (9/26/2019, 9/28/2019).
- Attended Community Engagement Division's Bilingual Open House at City Hall on 10/7/2019
- Hosted an information table at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (October 27, 2019). Spoke to and distributed post cards to approximately 100 people.
- Approximately 80 bilingual postcard Distribution March 2020 to nearby residents.

### Other

- Fence Art collaboration with Lee Crawford & three local schools (2019) - Staff hosted a Creek Week event dedicating the Clean Water Habitat art created by students from three local schools. The art is currently hanging on construction fence. See Bull City Today video <https://youtu.be/slrSI58mLJc>

Additional information can be found on the project's webpage: <https://durhamnc.gov/1616/South-Ellerbe-Project>. We will also post updates on our various social media pages: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/durhamncstormwater/>, Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DurhamStormH2O>.

For any questions or more information, please contact Project Manager Sandi Wilbur by email at [sandra.wilbur@durhamnc.gov](mailto:sandra.wilbur@durhamnc.gov) or by calling (919) 560-4326, ext. 30286.

