

Over decades, development brought damage to the Magothy River



Invited article by Paul Spadaro, President, Magothy River Association

I have been President of the Magothy River Association (MRA) and de facto Riverkeeper for the Magothy since the 1990's. I can state unequivocally that water quality in the river is declining. MRA has been monitoring water quality in the Magothy for 40 years. We have the records to verify that the River is only getting worse. The decline is related to issues driven by over-development and control of storm water.

A key point that I want to make here is that, in my opinion, the effectiveness of storm water controls has been oversold. If they had been working on the River, pollution from new developments would be mitigated and the River's health would not be declining

As we discuss future development plans for the County, consider this: When a lot is cleared of trees it typically increases runoff by 66%. A developer is only required to address that 66% to the extent practical. But for practical for WHOM? The way developers control environmental impacts to the extent practical is through a series of Best Management Practices (BMP's).

But what is a BMP? A BMP is a choice that planners and developers use try to control the impacts of the development. They make a list of land configuration options, choose one that they think might be better than the others, and designate it the Best Management Practice for the development. BUT, in my opinion none of those practices have any solid data or proof that they have improved the health of the Magothy or any similar river. Simply stated there is list of practices that do not work, and a BMP is chosen from that list. Yikes! It no wonder that the health of the River is declining.

Pollution damage to the River is a creeping devastation. It parallels the slow change in traffic congestion that has occurred on Rt.2, the main north-south artery in the Magothy watershed. Forty years ago it was possible to drive to Annapolis in 10 minutes; today it could take

40 minutes or longer. The change occurred slowly but was no less catastrophic. The point is that the damage to our environment was also catastrophic! Just like the traffic along Rt.2.

As we attempt to plan for the future and move forward, we must recognize the fact that most of the open land has already been developed, and much of the remaining land has steep slopes or wetlands. Any development on those lots would require modifications and variances to county codes and will cause greater environmental damage than previous developments.

Remember that all the past environmental damage to the Magothy and its watershed came from our failure to exercise control over development. We knew this in the 60's, 70's and 80's. If the goal is to preserve a certain quality of life, we must do a better job controlling development and issues relating to stormwater runoff. At some point we must come to the realization that even the best hotel has to put up the no vacancy sign.

To improve the environment, we need real change. Thoughts, prayers or ignoring the consequences will not improve the environment. Route 2, College Parkway and Mountain Road are not lands of opportunity for a developer. In the Magothy Watershed, they are our home.

About the Alliance

The Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities is a non-partisan coalition of 25 local and state organizations advocating for sustainable growth and environmental protections to safeguard and enhance residents' quality of life.

Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities

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