



## FAIRFAX CITY COUNCIL VOTE TO DESTROY STREAM AND FOREST OUTRAGES ANS, ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

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**FAIRFAX, VA** – The Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) and dozens of Fairfax City residents were outraged over the granting of a special exception late Tuesday night which paves the way for the elimination of a living stream and forest.

The Fairfax City Council hosted a public hearing on the rezoning and Master Development Plan of the Northfax West property. ANS strongly supports and encourages redevelopment to improve land use economically and environmentally. In this case, however, the economics for the developer appeared to be prioritized over the City's current ecological protections.

With several Council members reading prepared remarks, Council unanimously approved the development proposal without modifications requested by residents and conservation organizations. "The City encompasses the headwaters of Accotink Creek, home to fish, salamanders, buffered by a forest with birds and other wildlife. They should not have traded away this precious natural space for man-made green infrastructure and stream restorations," ANS Northern Virginia Conservation Advocate Renee Grebe said.



Although he voted to approve the project, Councilmember Yi, answering without prepared remarks, passionately stated "The way we do things is most concerning to me," highlighting the desire for independent consultants to help evaluate development projects. "People will walk away thinking 'The Council did not listen to us.'" He continued: "We heard you and what you said is very important and it's been weighing on me."

### **The City approval**

Nearly 70% of the 25 speakers opposed the current proposal and requested a delay to allow for alternative proposals that preserve the A1 section of the North Fork and would not require a special exception to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. Similarly, nearly 90% of the comments on the City's comment2Fairfax portal opposed the plan.

This development proposal raised several concerns. The biggest concern is the special exception granted to ignore stream protections, setting a terrible precedent statewide to allow building on protected land as an economic necessity to expand urban areas.

“The City Council did not request alternative development plans from the applicant. Instead, the City chose decades-old solutions for dealing with streams and natural floodplains –simply put the water in a pipe. Green infrastructure and stream restorations should be used to help minimize impacts to our urban streams, not as a replacement for them,” said Grebe.

## **BACKGROUND**

Tucked away from a sea of parking lots and close to a major road intersection is a 5-acre patch of forest and stream that hosts a variety of life, from barred owls to salamanders. This same area, Northfax, is projected to be an area of economic growth within the City of Fairfax. But to grow, redevelopment of the current activity center is needed.

Northfax West is one of the last properties in this area to be rezoned and it includes this portion of the North Fork of Accotink Creek and its associated forested Resource Protection Area. After many years of consolidating more than a dozen individual lots, and a few years of planning the proposal, the Northfax West proposal came before the Planning Commission and City Council for a vote.

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**About ANS:** *Throughout its history, ANS has championed nature for all by playing a pivotal role in conserving our region's iconic natural places from development including the C&O Canal, Dyke Marsh and, most recently, Ten Mile Creek. Past ANS member and board president, Rachel Carson, author of Silent Spring, is credited with launching the now global environmental movement. ANS's nature experts provide hundreds of opportunities each year for children and adults to enjoy, learn about, and protect the environment.*