

Dredge Meeting Notes 20230216

Notable Attendees:

Supervisor Walkinshaw; former Supervisor Cook (in the audience); Chris Herrington, DPWES Director; Ellie Coddling, DPWES Deputy Director, Jai Cole, Park Authority Director; Channel 7 reporter Jay Korff

Total attendance – perhaps 100 to 200

The tone of the speakers was almost entirely hostile. Too often, we witnessed speakers showing a disappointing display of ignorance of all that has gone before, combined with resentment, and encouraged by vigorous applause.

Sign I wore on my sweater:

AMITY
RESPECT
HARMONY

My statement to the room:

Amity, respect, and harmony are the principles we hope will apply to this next phase of the Lake Accotink dredge saga.

It has been clear for some time that the problem of Lake Accotink has no good solutions. Whatever is done, dredge or no dredge, there will be a price to be paid that will be too high in the opinion of many citizens.

Dam removal would facilitate aquatic wildlife movement in Accotink Creek, as it has in many other recent dam removals. However, without the lake the massive amount of sediment moving downstream will at the same time harm other forms of aquatic wildlife – no good solutions.

I've known Supervisor Walkinshaw and some of the County staff for years and these are good people. They may have fumbled the ball rather badly, but I can't interpret what I am seeing as subterfuge or bad faith.

The County's [Story Map](#) is a useful interpretation of where we are and how we got here.

Despite our frustration and disappointment, let's find our way through this muddle with restraint and goodwill.

Supervisor Walkinshaw – I will report back to the Board of Supervisors in spring, including a dredge option. I still support keeping the lake, but it's a heavy lift with the Board of Supervisors. Other supervisors need to hear from their own constituents on this issue. The state revolving fund can still fund part of the dredge. A bond issue is possible.

Chris Herrington – I apologize to the public and to the supervisors for the shaky early cost estimates.

Former Supervisor Cook - \$30 million to \$300 million is not a true comparison. We always knew maintenance dredges were coming. We were earlier told \$130 million would be needed for alternate sediment controls if the dam was removed. When I was in office, Wakefield Park was the only dewatering option – no Highland Street. We can do the dredge over a longer period to reduce the number of trucks per day. This has not been a fair process and we deserve better.

Charles Smith – Federal funds are available for dam removal. This dam is a priority for removal because it would open over 60 miles of stream for aquatic wildlife movement. We are mandated by the state to do stream restorations.

Jai Cole (in an after-meeting chat) – My background is a stream ecologist. Ways can be found to save the mussels.

Selected public comments conveying the general flavor:

Several citizens – Housing values will go down. / Mosquitos will go up.

Citizen – Is there accountability for poor upstream land use decisions? It is a disgrace we don't have more open space like Montgomery County.

Supervisor Walkinshaw – Yes, we need to preserve more open space.

Citizen – Why should we vote for you?

Parks and Recreation officer, North Springfield Civic Association – We need more than an opinion survey. The level of mistrust calls for crowd sourced feedback.

Allan Robertson, Save Lake Accotink – Scare tactics were used in the past. You have been pointing to the benefit of upstream stream restorations, yet sediment volume in the lake is now higher. You are ignoring the value of the lake. People who live here and who have no voice will suffer the most.

Charles Smith (later) – Most of the increase in sediment is due to the calculation of increased sediment capture as the lake deepens during the dredge.

Citizen – Where's our supervisor [presumably Lusk] tonight? The proposed senior facility in the floodplain next to Huntley Meadows is an example of the bad ideas that we still approve. Why do we have funds to attract the FBI and for commercial to housing conversions, but not for Lake Accotink?

Citizen - \$300 million equals 0.3% of the County budget over 25 years. We don't know what the wetland would look like if left alone.

Citizen – What would be the cost to maintain the wetlands free of invasives?

Citizen – There is no cost estimate of no action to save the lake.

Citizen – We need an estimate of the cost of no lake maintenance.

Supervisor Walkinshaw – I will recommend the Board of Supervisors commission a study of the future wetland.

Citizen – The USGS gauge shows a 260% increase in sediment over the past decade, upstream sediment control projects notwithstanding.

Citizen - Give citizens work to do [to address sediment at the source].

Me - If we did smaller annual maintenance dredges and pumped the sediment downstream over the dam, would that be any worse for the creek than letting the lake fill and having sediment flow downstream on its own?

Charles Smith – The amount of sediment going over the dam would be “no big deal” in the context of the creek. We wouldn't get a state permit to discharge. [Note – Seems contradictory.]

Gary (after the meeting) – Send the trucks down the Express Lanes, where the sediment came from.