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ENVIRONMENT

Our Bay: Developer praised for stormwater control

System does away with holding ponds

By PAMELA WOOD, Staff Writer

Published November 08, 2008

It's not often that developers and environmentalists find themselves congratulating each other, but there they were last week, marveling at construction techniques at a new Millersville housing development.

The 73-home Preserve at Severn Run features natural techniques



Pamela Wood — The Capital

Officials plant a sweet bay magnolia in a stormwater control area at the Preserve at Severn Run yesterday, including, from left: Ron Bowen, county director of public works; Bob Baldwin of Reliable Contracting; Steve Barry of the county school system; Betty Dixon, county director of

Spectacular service

James D. Harrison & Associates

Front Page



to control polluted stormwater runoff that's normally damaging to the environment.

Instead of having a giant stormwater holding pond and large pipes that dump rainwater into a local stream, the project has a shallow earthen bowl planted with water-loving plants that soak up the rain. In the event of big storms, excess water will be diverted to a long, stream-like channel with more rocks and plants to slow and absorb the rainwater.

The system has a simple concept - absorb as much water as possible - but a mouthful of a name: "regenerative stormwater conveyance design."

Any rainwater that reaches the nearest stream, the Jabez Branch, should be cool and free of most pollutants. The Jabez is home to a rare population of brook trout that are sensitive to heat and pollution.

inspections and permits; Larry Tom, county director of planning and zoning; Jay Baldwin of Reliable Contracting; Lina Vlavianos of the Severn River Commission; Mike Baldwin of Reliable Contracting; state Sen. Janet Greenip, R-Crofton; Del. Tony McConkey, R-Severna Park.

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For babies



The techniques have been used in restoring streams, but the Preserve at Severn Run is the first private development to use them. It was designed by local landscape architect Keith Underwood with the help of Joe Berg from Biohabitats in Baltimore.

Mr. Berg called the project "the best stormwater management project that has been implemented in the state of Maryland."

The process took extra time to gain permits and has cost the developer, Reliable Contracting and Baldwin Homes, slightly more so far. But Reliable's Jay Baldwin said he expects to save on maintenance, because the stormwater system grows into its own ecosystem.

The company had permits in hand for a traditional stormwater system, but was convinced by the county and members of the Severn River Commission to try the new techniques.

"We kind of took a leap of faith," Mr. Baldwin said at a ceremony at the construction site last week.

More developers are expected to use the techniques in the future. Now that Reliable served as something of a guinea pig, county agencies can use the project as a model for other developers.

"This was something that was not in the books," said Betty Dixon, the county's director of inspections and permits. "We couldn't turn to a certain page and say, 'OK, this is what they're doing here.'"

The Maryland Department of the Environment also is moving forward with state regulations that require developers to use these and other natural techniques as much as possible.

The Preserve at Severn Run has generated excitement among those interested in the



environment. Members of the Severn River Commission and the Severn Riverkeeper Program were among those applauding at the ceremony.

County schoolchildren learned about stormwater controls in the classroom and then took field trips to the site to help plant trees and shrubs through the school system's Chesapeake Connections program. Students from Odenton Elementary and Marley Middle turned shovels and put in place Atlantic white cedar trees, pitch pines and sweet bay magnolias.

Steve Barry, the school system's director of outdoor and environmental education, said the project is a good example to show kids how government and businesses can work together toward a common goal.

"This is the best opportunity to teach students real environmental solutions," he said.

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