

Remarks by J. Glenn Eugster
on a "Community View of Water Problems" for the Fort Ward Park
Advisory Group
May 25, 2010

Thanks to the City and the Advisory group members for the opportunity to share my thoughts on a community view of the water problems at Fort Ward Park. Although I am an adjacent landowner to the park, I also have training and work experience in landscape architecture, ecological planning and design, and hydrology.

Let me start by asking for a quick show of hands in response to four questions.

1. How many of you have walked within the maintenance and nursery yard, Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery, and adjacent residential properties along the park boundary in the last six months?
2. How many of you have looked at the City's 1962 General Plan, and the 1978 Master Plan, for Fort Ward Park?
3. How many of you have looked at the development, grading and storm water plans approved by the City for Marlboro Estates?
4. Finally, how many of you have already made up your mind about the cause and solutions to the water problems at Fort Ward Park?

Here are some of the "facts" that people in the Fort Ward-Marlboro Estates community feel are important for you to know as you consider water issue. This information has been gathered from existing City of Alexandria information.

Starting in 1884 various African American property owners owned land in the Fort Ward area. Many of the owners buried family members on land that is now a city park.

In 1897 the Oakland Baptist Church established the private Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery. Ms. Spencer was buried in front of the entrance to the maintenance and nursery yard that same year.

In the early 1950's the Civil War Roundtable, the Seminary Hill Association, City Planning Commission, area residents, and the Recreation Department began working to create the Fort Ward Historical Park.

In 1962 the City did a General Plan for Fort Ward Park that did not include a maintenance and nursery yard. The park officially opened in 1964. The plan was followed by site plans and Special

Use Permits for the Museum, parking area, restrooms, and storage building.

In 1976 the City approved the Development Plan for Marlboro Estates with the use of above and below ground approaches for storm water management. People began purchasing their homes adjacent to the park with an understanding of what the park was, and wasn't, to be.

In 1978 the City, with financial support of City Council, approved funds for a Master Plan which was prepared by the Department of Transportation & Environment. The plan included: a historic area; playground; one proposed picnic area; an overflow parking lot; and a rip-rapped drainage ravine. The parking lot was proposed in an area where there were, and are, known African American graves. For some reason the overflow parking lot idea was dropped. However, the footprint for the parking lot became what is now the maintenance and nursery yard. Soil was added to the nursery, and a greenhouse and office building were constructed.

Around 2005-2006 the maintenance and nursery yard was expanded, and portions paved with aggregate, to serve city and District park maintenance functions. The area included vehicle and equipment storage, a solid waste transfer station, material storage, and mulch and organic matter disposal.

During the period when the use of the maintenance and nursery yard was modified, the city removed gravestones, removed vegetation, compacted the soil, and filled the drainage swale between the park and Marlboro Estates. These actions increased noise, odors and attracted rodents, as well as causing increased storm water, flooding, soil erosion, and sedimentation.

All of this was done without any public notice, Special Use Permit, Storm water Permit, or Erosion and Sedimentation Control Permit. Some of these actions may have been taken with the knowledge and approval of the Office of Historic Alexandria.

Today, despite some initial efforts by the city to correct this unauthorized change, the damage continues.

* Runoff from park property has changed the drainage swale that the city approved for Marlboro Estates forcing water onto residential properties and the cemetery.

* Storm water runoff from the maintenance and nursery yard has increased since the expansion of the maintenance yard causing increased flooding and erosion to the graves and gravestones at the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery. Graves continue to subside and grave stones are being covered.

* Plans to rip-rap the park ravine for storm water purposes were not implemented. The city continues to channel storm water into the ravine causing stream bank erosion, ponding from debris blocking the storm water drain, and flooding on private property.

In response to water problems, community members have been calling and writing city managers and elected officials over the last five years with minimal response. I request the Advisory Group to: 1) visit the area, and 2) objectively look at these problems and suggest alternative ways that residents, church leaders and city officials can work together to solve these problems in a timely and cost-effective way using low-impact development best practices. Only through our combined efforts can we solve these long-standing problems.

Thanks again for the chance to speak with you.