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SUBJECT: T7107

Downtown Patuxent Branch trail Extension

This testimony concerns the downtown Columbia Patuxent Branch Trail Extension. This path would run along the Little Patuxent River from Downtown Columbia through the Allview neighborhood. 160 Allview residents have signed a petition opposing this path because of the extreme flash floods.

The Little Patuxent river drains Columbia including the mall area resulting in a huge amounts of runoff during storms. Attached is a photo of a flash flood behind my house with 6 feet of water in my yard. The dotted red line is where the path would be. No one could possibly walk, bike, or swim in this flood (Attachment 1-3).

The proposed path begins south of downtown Columbia and only goes about 200 yards before it crosses under the Route 29 bridge. The Route 29 bridge underpass is by far the most dangerous part of the path because it is only 18 feet wide and the water level is only 2 feet below the bank. Attached is a picture of the Route 29 Bridge underpass that was flooded on April 30, 2014 (see Attachment 4). This picture was taken during the middle of the storm. The proposed path is going under this bridge. At the height of the storm the water was up to the top of the bridge. I couldn't even get to the high side of the bank to take a picture. However, I did take a picture of the water on Route 29 (Attachment 5). Also, the distance between the Route 29 bridge to the ground is only 7 feet which is inadequate. The National Association of DOT's (ASSHTO) requires a 10 foot vertical clearance for a 10 foot path under a bridge.

Most of the bike path would be very close to the river. The most dangerous flooding area, which is the Route 29 underpass and Allview is blocked off with gates limiting access; however, there have been several incidences by the river. A few years 2 kids trapped in a tree had to be rescued by the fire department because of a flash flood from the river in an area where the proposed path would run. Also, Allview residents have seen deer drown in the flood waters.

Some people say, well, we will get just out of the way of the flood water. The problem is that people walking or riding their bikes, 1 mile, or 5 miles downstream will try to make it home in the rain. In only a few minutes the river could rise over its bank several feet. The result would be disastrous for people using the path especially trying to cross under Route 29 bridge during a flash flood.

Some of the path would run through special protected wetlands with signs posting "WETLANDS PROTECTION AREA" Caution. This area is a fragile plant and animal habitat, please help us protect this natural resource, DO NOT DISTURB. If a path were built through this area, the area would be negatively impacted. Columbia residents are warned, not to walk through this area and now a path might be built through this area.

The maintenance cost of the pathway would be high due to soil erosion because of high water, causing the blacktop to wash away. Mud, tree stumps, logs and debris from flashflood would pose constant risks for those who use the trail. The path would be constructed over the main sewer line and water mainline. Therefore, the path would have to be torn up and rebuilt if repairs to these utilities are needed.

The flood plain extends 20-28 feet in elevation from the river and this path would be at the bottom of the floodplain along the river only a few feet above the water level. With the planned expansion of downtown Columbia, millions of square feet of impermeable surface will result in additional large amounts of water runoff. The proposed path along the river with frequent flash floods is very dangerous.

There is currently a path that runs from downtown Columbia to Lake Elkhorn and onto Savage. I have ridden this path many times. The proposed path is unnecessary and duplicative. In addition, there are several safer alternative routes that could be used. There are many worthwhile uses for Howard county taxes. Schools, libraries, flood control, fire and police protection all need to be funded. The downtown Columbia Patuxent Branch trail extension should not be funded because it is unsafe and harmful to the environment.



Dotted Red Line is
approximate location of
proposed path



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Attachment 4 April 30, 2014 Route 29 & Little Patuxent River Mid-Storm



