

NEIGHBORHOOD UPDATE

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And Neighbors for a Livable Community
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DOE RESTORATION PROJECT BRINGS NEW LIFE TO SPRING VALLEY PARK

Thanks to the dedication and persistence of neighbors over many years, especially Spring Valley resident Michael Putzel, who founded Friends of Spring Valley Park, residents will soon once again be able to enjoy walking safely on the trails of the Spring Valley Park. Spring Valley Park is located between Quebec Street NW and Hillbrook Lane NW stretching from 49th Street NW to Fordham Road NW.



Quincy, one of the neighborhood's most frequent users, explores the construction in Spring Valley Park that will restore the walking trails that have badly eroded.

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**Storm water run-off has weakened tree roots in the Park.
Some trees have had to be removed as part of the restoration work.**

The Spring Valley Park is a neighborhood gem. Yet, there are many Spring Valley residents who drive by the Park thinking it is just undeveloped woodlands. The Park offers residents of the Spring Valley neighborhood a quiet and serene oasis to walk two trails often accompanied by the family pets – or just to relax for some quiet time among the birds and the trees.

In recent months, the Park has been a hub of activity with environmental engineers, construction workers, and backhoes working to bring new life to Spring Valley Park after years of valiant efforts by neighbors to protect against the damage caused by severe soil erosion.

“I have always thought of the Park as a brief, but lovely escape from the pressure of our city where everyone seems too busy and the weather sometimes oppressive,” Putzel said. “Now that the Park is being restored, it is a joy to think it will soon be quiet again, even more beautiful, and easier to stroll through and enjoy.”

Storm water run-off over the years has taken a toll on the Park. Erosion has made the trails dangerous, if not impassable, at certain points.

Led by Putzel, a small group of residents have worked for many years to try to manage the erosion with little or no support from D.C. governmental agencies that have responsibility for managing the Park. At times, the local government, itself, was unsure which agency was responsible for the Park. Undaunted by this seeming indifference from city agencies, residents mobilized neighborhood volunteers on an annual basis to clean up trash and debris in the Park as well as combat the invasive plants that destroy the natural balance in the Park and contribute to the serious erosion problem.



Friends of Spring Valley Park cordon off native plants to ensure they are not damaged during the restoration process.

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Putzel, who has championed the Park and led efforts to preserve the Park, enlisted the help of Janet Conroy, a professional landscape designer, who assumed leadership of Friends of Spring Valley Park, and then-ANC 3D Spring Valley Commissioner Tom Smith to help mobilize support for restoring and maintaining the Park.

“My family and I moved to Spring Valley in 2004,” Conroy said. “We discovered Spring Valley Park while walking our new puppy, and we were delighted to find such a magical woodland so close to our home. The Park served many purposes for our family over the years: a place to walk the dog, a quiet sanctuary for my daughter to write music, a peaceful environment to recharge; and a green space that reminded me of my childhood home.”

By 2011, the Park had severely deteriorated, Conroy said, who then chose the Park as the subject of her thesis at George Washington University for a Master’s Degree in Sustainable Landscape Design.

“The paths were severely eroded exposing hazardous roots,” she said. “The stream was scourged to the point that water no longer flowed and invasive plants had choked out so many of our beautiful native species creating an impassable thicket encroaching upon the paths. The conditions in the Park could have led to its permanent closure.

“It was then that I met the Park’s longtime steward, Mike Putzel, and ANC Commissioner Tom Smith and we put our heads together to figure a way to engage the community and solicit assistance from DC government. After months of planning, meetings, and outreach, Tom was able to bring Ward 3 Council member Mary Cheh to the Park for a personal tour followed by a meeting where we presented Cheh with a plan and a proposed budget of \$1.1 million to restore the Park.”

Although the Park was not in Smith’s ANC district, he worked to secure a series of ongoing meetings first with the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and then with the DC Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE), when responsibility for the Park was shifted to that agency. After working to engage Cheh in discussions about the future of the Park, she agreed to seek funding from DC government to address the deteriorating and dangerous conditions in the Park.



Rebar is used to protect buried sewer pipes from heavy equipment used during the restoration process as workers build the riffles and pools to help limit future storm water damage to the creek and surrounding banks.

Nearly \$1.5 million is now being spent by DC agencies to restore the Park. After an extensive and lengthy process to select a contractor and complete a scope of work, construction in the Park began just a few months ago and is being managed by the DOEE.

“Our challenge was working through the city’s bureaucracy to get the Park on the radar screen of the DOEE,” Smith said. “Securing the funding for the Park demonstrated what neighbors can do when we work together, do our homework, and never give up despite feeling frustrated with the time and energy it takes to work with DC government. We were able to help the city’s politicians and bureaucrats understand how this Park contributes to the vitality of our neighborhood and the city as a whole.

“As with many other Spring Valley residents, the Park is very special to me. How many neighborhoods can boast of such a quiet place amid the growing chaos and noise of today’s urban life? But, I must admit that Mike Putzel’s passion for the Park and Janet Conroy’s ongoing commitment can’t help but be a little contagious.”

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The restoration work at the Park has been extensive. The two walking trails are being rebuilt. The bed of the stream is being raised to reduce the drop-off from the trails to the stream. The stream is also being redirected within the Park. Damaged sewer pipes have had to be replaced by DC Water. Some trees also have had to be removed.



Engineers have been working to address the impacts of storm water run-off. For example, the first view by a resident entering the Park today from 49th Street NW will be what appear to be pools of water. But, these pools of water are designed to help counter the amount of storm water that flows into the Park from nearby homes.

The contractor also has built about 20 riffles, which are sloping rocks and soil barriers. The pools and riffles will slow and control storm water as it moves downstream so that the creek bottom and banks will not wash out. The water in the pools also will help support native plants and a return to sustainable wildlife in the Park.

However, neighbors also can do their part to reduce the storm water run-off into the Park. DOEE sponsors a program called **RiverSmart Homes**. This program offers incentives to homeowners interested in reducing storm water run-off from their properties. Homeowners receive a free storm water audit which determines eligibility for subsidies for property enhancements, including rain barrels, that will

help reduce storm water run-off from your home. More information is available at <https://doee.dc.gov/service/riversmart-homes-overview>



Stephen Reiling (far right), an environmental engineer in the Watershed Protection Division of the DOEE leads Mike Putzel (not pictured), Janet Conroy (second from left), who has taken over leadership of Friends of Spring Valley Park, neighborhood activist Tom Smith (third from left), and a team from the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) on a walk-through of the Park to examine restoration progress and plan for the future.

Spring Valley Park will now be managed by the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Recently, a team from DPR joined with DOEE staff and neighbors to review the progress of the construction effort. The team also discussed ways the Park could be enhanced when the restoration work is completed. Residents and city officials explored options that included the planting of new trees as well as new signage.

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Spring Valley resident Ann Blackman stands along one of two trails that has severely eroded resulting in a steep drop off. The wood planks cover an area where a portion of one of two walking trails has disappeared. The trail will be rebuilt and the stream bed is being raised to ensure the trail is safe.

Conroy stressed that residents will have to be vigilant to ensure the Park does not again fall into a state of disrepair.

“Our public sewer system is taxed beyond capacity and often overflows into the Park on its way downhill to Little Falls,” she said. “As a community, it is imperative that we work together to improve the quality of our natural footprint by

planting more native plants that soak up the water. We need to install permeable walks and driveways, direct water from gutters and downspouts into lushly planted beds, and most importantly, not send storm water into the Park via pipes or swales.

“Every person and property matters.”



Mike Putzel (second from left) and his “team,” including SV resident Tom Smith (far left), Janet Conroy (not pictured), DOEE Environmental Engineer Stephen Reiling (far right), and DPR staff explore the progress made in restoring Spring Valley Park.

Throughout construction, residents have continued to use the Park, including for dog walking. City officials expressed some concern that dog waste was being deposited in the portable toilets that are being used by the workers at the site. So, if you walk your dog through the Park, remember to pick up and take the dog waste home to deposit in your trash cans.

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The restoration work is continuing at a rapid pace and may be completed within the next two months depending on weather and other factors. When it is completed, the result will be a safe and enhanced Park that – with continuing support from Spring Valley residents – will enrich the lives of residents for many years to come.

Without the active involvement and commitment of Spring Valley residents and volunteers sustained over many years, the Spring Valley Park may have disappeared.

The restoration of the Park is the single most significant event taking place in our neighborhood today – and it is because people – some of whom have passed away or moved from the neighborhood – have cared passionately about the quality of life in Spring Valley and have been committed to ensuring that many future generations also will be able to enjoy and experience this neighborhood gem – Spring Valley Park.

Neighborhood Update is a newsletter established by **the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA)** and **Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC)** to report news and information on issues of importance to residents of Spring Valley and Wesley Heights. You may send information appropriate for publication to Tom Smith at tmfsmith@rcn.com. No portion of this newsletter may be duplicated without written permission from the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association. This newsletter is distributed electronically. If you want to be on the distribution list, send your email to tmfsmith@rcn.com. Please share this with your own personal e-mail networks.

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