

# Richmond City Council votes down funding for Reedy Creek stream restoration project

By GRAHAM MOOMAW Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Monday, November 14, 2016 9:40 pm

The Richmond City Council on Monday voted down the controversial Reedy Creek stream restoration project, bowing to strong opposition from South Richmond residents who opposed the water-quality measure because it would mean the removal of several hundred trees.

The council voted 8-1 to refuse \$635,000 in state grant funding, effectively halting the \$1.2 million project for the foreseeable future. The council also voiced its desire for a fuller planning process and more governmental collaboration with interested groups.

Fourth District Councilwoman Kathy C. Graziano was the only member to vote in favor of accepting the money.

The council majority seemed to side with residents of neighborhoods near Forest Hill Park who argued that project planners failed to gather sufficient public input.

“Government is something in which you participate,” said Third District Councilman Chris A. Hilbert. “It’s not something that should be done to you. I think in this case, we need to be inclusive of citizens’ opinions and get that buy-in.”

The city billed the 3,000-foot project as a cost-effective way to reduce pollutants flowing into the Chesapeake Bay and move the city toward compliance with the federal Clean Water Act. Opponents, spearheaded by the volunteer Reedy Creek Coalition, said the project would destroy a “neighborhood treasure” and pushed to preserve the wooded area behind George Wythe High School and between Westover Hills Boulevard and Roanoke Street.

“This is not restoration. Call it what it is. It is deforestation,” resident Alistair Jones said during the meeting’s public comment period. “It is ridiculous. It is shameful.”

In an earlier presentation to the council, the city’s Department of Public Utilities warned that a failure to approve the project could result in the city being ruled out of compliance with environmental regulations by 2018.

Alex Martin, another speaker at Monday’s meeting, urged Forest Hill residents to consider the “greater problem” that officials want to solve.



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Signs along the 4300 block of Forest Hill Avenue reflect neighborhood opposition to the Reedy Creek project.

“Let’s think larger than just our neighborhood,” Martin said. “Let’s think about Richmond. Let’s think about the state of Virginia.”

In other action Monday, the council voted to reject a rollback in the city’s property tax rate for 2017 caused by a 3 percent increase in real estate assessments.

Under state law, local governments are required to hold a public hearing and consider a tax reduction if assessments rise by more than 1 percent.

The council kept the rate at \$1.20 per \$100 of assessed value, instead of lowering it to \$1.18. The rollback would have provided an estimated \$4.3 million in tax relief for city property owners while reducing city revenue by the same amount.