



Up the creek

March 05, 2008



Tanis Douglas is the coordinator of the Bowker Creek Initiative, a group that is trying to restore the creek to a more natural state, such as this portion of the waterway flowing near St. Patrick's elementary school.

Dunc Malcolm/News staff

Impact of development on Bowker watershed studied

Bowker Creek could be coming up for air.

The eight-kilometre creek is a constant source of flooding, but a comprehensive study by the Bowker Creek Initiative has pumped out a plan to reduce the occurrence of floods and make the creek a more intrinsic part of our urban landscape.

“This allows us to look at some different scenarios,” said Jody Watson, chair of the Bowker Creek Initiative, who made a presentation to Oak Bay council last week announcing a study about the work on the waterway was completed.

Most of Bowker Creek runs underground through a network of pipes. As development increases, so does the amount of impervious surfaces. When it rains, a high volume of water rushes into the creek from the city all at once, causing the flow to swell and leak through the pipes and flooding several areas of the city – especially Fireman’s Park in Oak Bay and Trent Street in Saanich.

Members of the Bowker Creek Initiative collected data from the creek, such as how much water flows in when it rains, where that extra water comes from and where it leaves the creek. Using a computer program, they were able to predict how increased development will cause more water to head to the creek faster, resulting in flooding.

The program also factored in the effects of climate change.

“Then we were able to run future scenarios,” Watson said. “We could say, if we continue to do what we have been (developing), what’s going to happen in 20 years. This has caused us to start to think to change the way we’ve done things.”

The report, called the Master Drainage Plan, found that flooding would continue and even worsen, especially downstream in Oak Bay.

Members of the Bowker Creek Initiative aren’t ready to prescribe exactly what needs to be done to put an end to potential floods – such a step will take extensive consultation with staff from Oak Bay, Saanich and Victoria. But researchers have provided some options for the future.

Tanis Douglas, Bowker Creek Initiative co-ordinator, said daylighting the whole creek would be ideal, but it’s not really feasible. Daylighting means allowing the creek to flow above the ground.

“It’s hard to call a network of pipes a creek (and) it’s a pretty big deal to daylight a creek,” she said. “It involves the neighbourhood around it as well as the municipalities.

“If you think about where the creek runs – under Shelbourne Street – it’s going to be a pretty big societal decision to bring it above ground again.”

Members of the initiative have also considered detention ponds along the creek, which would temporarily hold excess stormwater, easing its flow downstream and increasing

the girth of the existing pipes to accommodate more water.

“The options range from doing nothing, which really is one of the options, to going on an extensive program to daylight any sections of the creek that are possible,” Douglas said.

What kind of work will ultimately be done boils down to public response, politics and money.

So far, the Bowker Creek Initiative has poured \$150,000 of mostly grant money into the project. They believe another \$50,000-\$80,000 will be needed before work wraps up, hopefully in the next year. Those figures don't include the cost of actually doing the work to the creek.

The District of Oak Bay plays an important role in any work that might be done because work has to start downstream and work its way upstream.

ecardone@saanichnews.com

Find this article at:

http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_south/victorianews/news/16238362.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright Black Press. All rights reserved.