

# Living shoreline at Wilmer Park to benefit nature

By PETER HECK

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**CHESTERTOWN** —Wilmer Park, long a favorite site for dog walking, sun bathing and summer parties, is about to become a living shoreline.

That won't change any of the current activities in the park. In fact, it's a good bet that it will add a few — particularly for fans of nature watching and kayaking along the river.

The living shoreline project, funded by \$115,000 in grants from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, involves replacing the wooden bulkhead with a "soft" shoreline, including a sandy bottom and native plants. The project, which has been in the works for more than a year, should be completed by late November, according to Kees de Mooy, the town zoning assistant who is overseeing the instal-

lation.

Mayor Margo Bailey noted at the Oct. 19 town meeting that the shoreline is expected to become a habitat for small aquatic life, such as birds, crabs and minnows, as well as a pleasing view for human visitors to the park. It will also provide a gentle slope for kayak and canoe launching.

According to "The Green Book for the Bay," a guidebook on best environmental practices for waterfront property owners, "The success of a living shoreline depends on plant establishment." The chosen plants for the Wilmer Park shoreline include spartina, also known as cordgrass, and switchgrass. Both are native grasses known to bind shorelines against erosion. De Mooy said on Monday that a low temporary fence will be installed to protect the seedling grasses from water

birds that feed on them.

The proposal to create a living shoreline at the park has been in the talking stage since 2008, when Town Manager Bill Ingersoll told the council about the idea, which he credited to Chester Riverkeeper Tom Leigh. The initial stage of the plan, as outlined by Ingersoll, involved putting down filter cloth on the riverbed to cover glass fragments from an old dump, and installing stone groins to contain erosion.

One of the first assignments for de Mooy, after his hiring as zoning assistant, was writing grant applications for the shoreline. As de Mooy described the project in October 2008, it would replace a mud flat with a sandy beach, and provide "a real shoreline" for the annual Tea Party raft race. Leigh spoke at the same meeting, testifying that the project represented best practices for shoreline preservation.

The project has evolved since then. De Mooy said it now includes a layer of two to three feet of sand to cover the bottom some 25 to 30 feet into the river. A low stone retaining wall will help hold the "tons and tons" of sand in place on the bottom, according to Ingersoll.

The initial phase of the operation has turned up a fair number of antique glass bottles lying on the riverbed at low tide, de Mooy said. There was also a layer of oyster shells, which de Mooy said would be put back in the water in hopes of encourag-



PHOTO BY KEVIN HEMSTOCK

Chris Oakes, of Environmental Concern, uses a trencher to remove parts of the old bulkhead, during work, Friday, on the "living shoreline" project, at Wilmer Park.

ing oysters to colonize the area.

Installing the kayak launch site will be the last part of the project to be completed, according to de Mooy.

"Such a small project won't have much measurable effect on the bay as a whole," de Mooy said. "But it will create

a nice habitat for wildlife where there was none." He also said it would increase public awareness of the benefit of a natural shoreline and provide a counter example to the hard shorelines that so many landowners have installed.

Plans are to enlist volunteers

to help with the planting, the first couple of weeks in November. Anyone interested should contact the Chester River Association, the Chestertown Garden Club, or the Washington College Center for the Environment & Society.

## Meetings

### Chestertown Town Council

Monday, Nov. 2, 7:30 p.m.  
Chestertown Town Hall

### Galena Town Council

Monday, Nov. 2, 7 p.m.  
Galena Town Hall

### Historic District

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 4 p.m.  
Chestertown Town Hall

### Kent County Commission

Tuesday, Nov. 3, 8:30 a.m.  
400 High St., Chestertown

### Kent Planning Commission

Thursday, Nov. 5, 1:30 p.m.  
400 High St., Chestertown

### Kent School Board

Monday, Nov. 2, 6:30 p.m.  
215 Washington Ave.  
Chestertown

### Millington Town Council

Wednesday, Nov. 4,  
7:30 p.m.  
Millington Town Hall

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