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Brightening town with 'green'

Bladensburg wants to revamp busy corridor as eco-friendly

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer

When traveling along the busy Route 450 corridor in Bladensburg, one of the last adjectives that comes to mind is "green," said Mayor Walter James. But that's exactly what the town's administration wants to change.

James and other officials are looking to turn the road into a "green street" by widening sidewalks, using permeable pavement and making the road more environmentally and pedestrian-friendly.

James said the project would not only improve the local environment but would make the area "more marketable" and attractive to visitors. The Anacostia River runs through the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, located right off of the road for the proposed project.

"In connection with the Anacostia River, it could be a working force to really bring some great things to our community," he said. "We really need to clean that river up."

James wants the project finished in 2012, in time for the bicentennial of the War of 1812. A battle during the war occurred in Bladensburg. James said he envisions river taxis one day transporting tourists from the park to the Washington Nationals' stadium in Washington, D.C., along the Anacostia.

On average, 31,690 vehicles drove along the route daily in 2009, according to Maryland State Highway Administration statistics.

Anacostia Watershed Society president Jim Foster said storm waste has been a major contributor to pollution in the river.

"Everything that happens on the land ends up in the water," Foster said. Things like oil, exhaust, rubber and trash all flow into the river via stormwater runoff, he added.

Foster added that the Bladensburg project could be a model of how to address pedestrian safety and environmental issues.

"It's not going to turn water into wine as far cleaning up the river, but it's a great example of how through proper planning we can solve many problems at once," Foster said.

James said he is focusing on a half-mile stretch from Peace Cross, where routes 202 and 450 intersect, to Bladensburg Elementary School.

Construction began in November on a similar project on a half-mile stretch of Decatur Street in neighboring Edmonston, costing approximately \$1 million. The town, mostly using federal stimulus money, will soon have Prince George's County's first green street when the project finishes early this summer.

The street will be revamped to include low-energy street lamps, rain gardens and bioretention ponds to capture stormwater runoff and permeable pavement that soaks up rainwater.

James said Edmonston "kind of opened the door for us" to build a green street.

The likelihood of such a project in Bladensburg will rely heavily on outside funding, James said.

Earlier this month, state and federal officials met with town officials to discuss project feasibility.

"The partnership is key," he said. "If we stay focused, we can keep moving it forward."

Edmonston Town Administrator Guy Tiberio said it will be two years from conception to completion on their green street.

The Bladensburg project would likely cost more than the Edmonston one since Route 450 is a major state highway, unlike Decatur Street, a two-lane road, James said, but he could not give a cost estimate as of yet.