

Albemarle, Charlottesville settle sewer easement issue  
written by Newspark Team | September 2, 2014



Albemarle and Charlottesville officials have come to a tentative agreement over an easement on county property required to increase the size of a pipe that carries sewage from a large portion of the city.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to grant two easements that will enable the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority to increase the size of the Schenks Branch Interceptor. That sewer line currently passes on the eastern side of McIntire Road before connecting to the authority's larger network of sewer pipes.

"The city has determined that this 21-inch terra cotta interceptor is undersized to accommodate present operations and additional flows during heavy rains," said Lauren Hildebrand, the city's utilities director.

The work will be performed by the authority, which builds major wastewater infrastructure for both the city and the county.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has entered into a consent order with the authority that requires the replacement of existing line to be replaced because heavy rainfalls currently lead to sewage overflows.

The new pipe will be 30-inch ductile iron pipe.

If the city and county had not agreed to the terms for an easement, Rivanna officials had suggested either building a pump station or building a new line underneath McIntire Road. Both of those options were considered to be more expensive. The latter would have involved shutting down the road for an unknown period of time.

A part of the Schenks Branch line has been replaced as part of the Meadow Creek Parkway interchange construction.

As part of the agreement, the city, county and RWSA will work on a landscaping plan to preserve and protect existing trees on county property. Albemarle officials also said they are willing to support the possible extension of the Schenk's Branch Greenway to Preston Avenue. That would involve the use of county property.

"The city is requesting the county to commit that we're interested in having an extension of the greenway trail, but they are not asking the county to take any action on that now," said county attorney Larry Davis. "That would be subject to a future easement."

One of the issues regards how to protect certain trees on the county property.

"There is a big tree right next to the visitor's entrance," Davis said. "The city sewer line is going to actually bored under the tree as part of that plan and there's a lot of interest to take as many precautions as possible."

Davis said the city sewer line will be moved from the oak tree as far away as possible.

One person spoke during a public hearing required for one of the easements.

"McIntire Road is one of the most attractive entrance corridors in the city," said Bitsy Waters, chair of the city's Tree Commission. "We certainly understand the need to replace this infrastructure, but we ask that the project be done in such a way that minimizes the harm to the tree canopy."

Waters also called upon the city to demand that only native species be planted when new vegetation is installed.

The Albemarle Board of Supervisors plans to take up the matter at its Sept. 10 meeting.

As part of the agreement, the council also agreed to rezone the land on which the Albemarle County Office Building stands.

The county purchased the property from the city in 1978 for \$800,000 shortly after Lane High School was closed. The land and the building are currently assessed at \$13.1 million.

County officials wanted the land rezoned to a district that allowed government usage without a special permit. The county office building technically has been a nonconforming use since 2003, when the land was last rezoned.

The property is now in the B-1 classification, which allows government buildings without a permit. Staff had recommended against rezoning to the more intensive B-3 due to a concern that a new structure could be built without being set back from the road.