

Trail (PATH) Update April 21, 2008

Clairmont Heights Civic Association

On April 7, the PATH Foundation, under contract to DeKalb County, began construction on Phase One of the South Peachtree Creek Trail from Medlock Park to Mason Mill Park. The primary purpose of the trail, according to Commissioner Jeff Rader, is not only recreation; it is to provide connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. When completed, Phase One will result in a ten foot wide trail, 70% of which will be boardwalk and 30% concrete, from the Medlock Park parking lot to the stone bridge in Mason Mill Park over Burnt Fork Creek. Completion of Phase One is estimated to take three months.

Phase two of the project would connect the stone bridge to McConnell Drive via a tunnel under the railroad tracks. The county and the PATH Foundation have received approval from CSX to prepare engineering plans for the tunnel to submit to CSX for final approval. The other proposed segments of the South Peachtree Creek Trail in our larger neighborhood area, which would ultimately connect Medlock Park to North DeKalb mall for example, are still many years in the future.

An oversight committee (also called a steering committee) that includes community representatives from CHCA, MANA, and the Medlock Floodplain Coalition met with Commissioner Rader and the PATH Foundation on April 18 to review construction issues and will continue to meet monthly until construction is finished. Members of the oversight committee and concerned citizens have been monitoring construction. Governmental responsibility for the environmental impacts of the project rests with the state's Environmental Protection Division.

Concerned citizens called EPD the week of April 15 to report possible violations of BMP's (best management practices) for ESC (erosion and sediment control). PATH contractors were found to have violated BMP's in three areas: 1) Between Willivee Drive and the proposed Peachtree Creek crossing, silt fences were installed about two feet within the twenty five foot stream buffer; 2) In Medlock Park next to a creek branch, an area of approximately fifty square feet of privet was cleared within the buffer; and 3) In Mason Mill Park on the ridge clearance had taken place before silt fences had been installed. PATH apologized to the oversight committee and responded by 1) moving the fences, 2) committing to restoring the cleared areas and 3) installing the rest of the silt fence line from the ridge to the stone bridge manually. They stopped work voluntarily for a few days to ensure EPD satisfaction with their responses.

Most of the clearance for the trail has been completed. Only the segment from the sewer cut in Mason Mill to the Peachtree creek crossing site remains to be cleared for which smaller equipment will be used. Silt fencing is now installed throughout the construction route to prevent the disturbed soil from being carried by runoff into the creeks. PATH reported that approximately sixty five pines and sixty hardwoods over 6-7" in diameter were cut. As spring plants and flowers have appeared, it has become possible to identify native species that are

of special interest. Members of the oversight committee and others, in coordination with PATH, plan to mark or rescue these plants within the week.

On April 22, a concerned citizen noticed a leak in a sanitary sewer line behind Heritage Heights in Peachtree Creek next to Mason Mill Park. Crews from the County's Watershed Management Department used the access road cleared by PATH to get most of the way to the site of the leak but had to travel about 150 yards further into the woods from the PATH construction site, cutting several more trees. The county has determined that the leak was unrelated to PATH construction. The sewer line is not the same one that PATH crews passed over in the middle of Mason Mill Park.

After construction, the access road from Willivee Place will be replanted as will areas on either side of the trail itself. They will monitor the plantings until they are established and the soil stabilized. In addition to removing any trash or debris along the route, PATH will also remove two large pieces of loose sewer pipe and a junk motorcycle that have been sitting in the woods for years. PATH, drawing on a special endowment for this purpose, will have responsibility for maintenance of the trail into the future.