



# CREATING A WALKABLE WATERSHED

A community finds that improving water quality enriches equity, public health and smart growth

## PROJECT GOALS

Restore a neglected and impaired waterway to bring an underserved community together, while also providing an improved environment, public health and neighborhood infrastructure.

## COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Provided enhanced pedestrian safety.
- Developed outdoor recreation sites.
- Beautified community through gardens and tree plantings.
- Increased shade from tree plantings helped lower energy costs.
- Encouraged community to become more involved with local nonprofit and volunteer activities.
- Provided exercise for children walking to school and enhanced their access to nature.
- Created outdoor learning stations and interpretive signs that educate students and residents about watershed health.
- Promotes community resiliency.

## ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Reduced erosion through the stabilization of stream banks.
- Slowed stormwater, which reduced flooding concerns.
- Improved water quality through natural filtration.
- Restored wildlife habitat.
- Reduced the urban heat island effect.



Staff and volunteers stand by the installed green infrastructure. (Photo: James River Association)

“ It is so exciting to be involved in this project as it has the potential to be the cornerstone of a community transformation. The new school, community center and watershed project will bring our children, families and our community an educational facility that will be truly 21st century!”

- **Bob Argabright**

*Trinity United Methodist Church*

## CONSERVATION PROJECTS INSTALLED

- Tree plantings.
- Bioswales.
- Native shrub plantings.
- Stabilize stream banks.
- Repair existing culvert crossings.
- Create nature trails.
- Rain gardens.
- Community gardens.
- Installation of interpretive signs.



Rain garden helps reduce stormwater runoff in the surrounding area. (Photo: James River Association)

## PROJECT SUMMARY

Goodes Creek, a tributary of the James River, bisects the neighborhood of Bellemeade, an underserved community in Richmond, Virginia. In 2011, the City of Richmond was developing a stormwater master plan while also building a new elementary school adjacent to the creek. To better support the Bellemeade community, the City partnered with the Green Infrastructure Center and Skeo Solutions to develop a Walkable Watershed Plan. The groups held a working session and walking tour for community members and other stakeholders to identify strategies for improving the watershed and the neighborhood's walkability. Helpful elements included engaging students who would be attending the nearby school and having local government and agency representatives walk the neighborhood to see the issues firsthand. The final Walkable Watershed Plan contained five primary goals: (1) Connect the neighborhood to the creek and the James River; (2) Improve walking routes to the nearby community center and new school; (3) Slow, infiltrate and clean the stormwater runoff; (4) Develop a sense of community; and (5) Create outdoor education and recreational opportunities. The involvement of the community is a key success of this project, as members regularly took part in tree plantings, trash pick-ups and community festivals. Ultimately the project succeeded in restoring natural areas, creating community gardens, providing outdoor learning labs and recreational opportunities, and building secure walking paths.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Bring a mix of stakeholders to the table.
- Think beyond the project scale to a watershed-wide strategy.
- Connect multiple benefits—in this case, walking, learning and water quality improvement.
- Leverage multiple funding sources.
- Generate fun and inspiration!
- Take advantage of current conditions (e.g., new school, stormwater master plan) to seek change.

## CONTACTS

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## THE PARTNERS AND FUNDING SOURCES

- 3North
- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- Altria Group
- James River Association
- Baltimore City's Office of Sustainability
- City of Richmond
- Green Infrastructure Center
- GroundworkRVA
- Harbor Dredge & Dock
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Skeo Solutions
- Timmons Group
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Forest Service
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Wells Fargo