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Quassaick Alliance acting to protect watershed

Do you know what watershed you live in? Just as you know your home address, you should know your 'watershed address'. Your watershed likely provides the water that you drink and prepare food with, fueling your livelihood.

For portions of the towns of New Windsor, Newburgh, Plattekill and Marlborough, and the City of Newburgh, residents' watershed is the Quassaick Creek.

The Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance formed over one year ago and is committed to acting to improve and protect the labyrinth of streams, creeks, lakes and reservoirs that make up the watershed. According to the Alliance, "The Quassaick Creek, part of the Hudson River watershed, covers portions of five municipalities in two counties, from its headwaters in the rural Ulster County Town of Plattekill, flowing down to the main channel of the creek in the Town of Newburgh in Orange County, winding through the City of Newburgh and joining the Hudson River Estuary in the Town of New Windsor."

The Quassaick watershed includes Lake Washington, a drinking water reservoir for city residents, and Chadwick Lake, a source of drinking water for the Town of Newburgh and occasionally New Windsor. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Quassaick Creek powered mills, providing employment to many.

Now, the Alliance is meeting with municipal officials to introduce the Alliance and its goals. David Church, commissioner of the Orange County Department of Planning, has reached out to the municipalities to meet. On Monday night, representatives of the Alliance and the Department of Planning spoke with the New Windsor Town Board at their monthly workshop meeting. Last year, the Town Board joined the Alliance.

Commissioner Church explained that the Department of Planning has been selected as a recipient of a \$43,500 grant from the New York State Department of State Local Waterfront Revitalization Program to create a Quassaick Creek Watershed Management Plan.

John Gebhards, coordinator of the Alliance, said that the grant amount will be matched with funds and support in the form of in-kind services from Alliance members, the planning departments of Orange and Ulster counties, Orange County and Ulster County Soil & Water Conservation districts, Orange County Land Trust and the Orange County Water Authority.

Gebhards explained to New Windsor officials, "You have a relatively small space, but a very important space." The portion of the Quassaick watershed that falls within New Windsor town lines is not large. Silver Stream Reservoir, a backup drinking water supply for the Town of New Windsor, where it is located, and owned by the City of Newburgh, can be connected to Lake Washington.

Consequently, the Moodna Creek Watershed, which Silver Stream Reservoir is part of, and the Quassaick Creek Watershed, overlaps.

The Alliance's mission is "To involve individuals and entities, both public and private, as advocates for the development and implementation of a Quassaick Creek Watershed Plan. Our efforts will focus on the protection and restoration of water quality and quantity, recreational values and biodiversity of the Quassaick Creek and its tributaries to promote the health, safety and welfare of our communities."

Presently, the Alliance is working on having kiosks constructed to be placed at locations where residents can acquire information on their watershed. They also participate in activities like creek cleanups, monitor herring counts for the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and conduct water sampling – indicators of the status of the watershed's overall health. Alliance also participates in Trees for Tribs, a program through the state DEC that plants vegetation alongside stream banks. Buffers made up of trees, shrubbery and grass alongside tributaries can reduce the amount of pollution entering the watershed, acting as a natural filter, protecting water quality, while also stabilizing the banks of the tributary, and providing a home for wildlife. Finally, in the course of their activities, Alliance members can identify problems that could be threatening the health of the watershed.

Chris Eachus, a county legislator and member of the Alliance, became involved because the Quassaick Creek literally runs through his backyard. He said the group's goal is not to police the creek.

"We can work together to solve them," said Gebhards of any issues that are discovered.

Alliance member Ronald Hughes, Jr., known to most as "Animal", also pointed out that in the course of addressing problems throughout the watershed, municipalities could realize a cost savings, as he believes water is unnecessarily flowing into municipal sewage systems and being treated, but could otherwise be managed, such as with retention ponds.

Following the presentation, New Windsor Supervisor George Green noted the value of the creek, and added, "We are concerned with the creek."

Commissioner Church said another meeting regarding the Quassaick Creek

Watershed Management Plan will take place in the future, when work on the plan is ready to begin.

For more on the Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance, visit the Orange County Water Authority's website: <http://waterauthority.orangecountygov.com>.

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