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Residents fear erosion

Some worried money spent on gabion baskets will have been wasted if new development occurs

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Posted Oct 06, 2009 @ 08:52 PM

Last update Oct 06, 2009 @ 09:22 PM

PEORIA — Gabion means "big cage" in Italian, but locally these baskets are defined as a tax-supported item used to curb erosion.

To the residents of the Trails Edge Condominiums in Far North Peoria, the thousands of dollars spent on these boxes filled with rocks and strategically placed at the edge of streams could be a waste of money if more nearby development occurs.

"We spend all of this money for the gabion baskets," said resident Nancy Heidewald, "but we might not be getting the results."

At issue is a zoning matter approved by the city's zoning and planning commissions allowing for a 96-unit apartment complex at Allen Road and Alta Lane. The City Council will vote on the zoning change proposal Oct. 27.

Residents within Trails Edge believe a new apartment complex will, among other things, increase storm water into an unnamed stream that flows behind houses along Pheasant Lane.

According to letters sent to the city from residents within the subdivision, the creek has widened considerably since the subdivision was built in the late 1990s. Residents blame nearby development for contributing to the erosion.

Wire-mesh baskets filled with rocks line the western side of the creek, protecting homes from erosion. The other side of the creek has no gabion baskets.

The city recognizes the problems the residents face, but there appears to be little opposition from City Hall to block the zoning change.

Fifth District Councilman Dan Irving, who represents the area, said he is not philosophically opposed to the apartment project, adding that the city is requiring two water retention ponds on site.

But Irving said he wants to meet with city officials to make sure the problems at Trails Edge are not compounded.

"I want to see what we are requiring on drainage and runoff and make sure we are not compounding (the problem)," Irving said. "I want to make sure we are slowing the water down."

Public Works Director David Barber said the gabion baskets are doing their job at Trails Edge by protecting properties from erosion. He said the baskets never were intended to prevent backyard flooding, a complaint of homeowners in the area.

The city spent about \$160,000 last year to address private drainage problems throughout Peoria. That money includes appropriations to purchase gabion baskets, stabilize stream banks, etc.

Peoria has, since 1983, had an assistance program with homeowners for stream bank stabilization. The program used to be a 50/50 split, but it was changed in 1994 to the city paying for 75 percent of a project and the homeowner, 25 percent.

Peoria is rather unusual in offering gabion baskets to residents, let alone offering assistance to homeowners in curtailing private erosion matters.

East Peoria, Pekin, Washington, and Germantown Hills - all communities affected in the past decade or so with new development - do not have assistance programs. Most local communities include erosion control measures within their own budgets, assuming 100 percent of the costs.

Morton does have a program in which it will pay 100 percent for the installation of gabion baskets.

"The problems in Peoria are pretty unique," Barber said. "A lot of towns in Illinois are flat as a pancake. We have significant erosion problems here. The water drops pretty quickly, going down from way up in the bluffs to the river."

The program's availability probably won't wane anytime soon. "It's pretty popular," Barber said.

The homeowners at Trail Edge, though, hope the council notices the expense of the baskets when considering if future development could cause erosion to continue. The association and homeowners spent a combined \$6,500 to have the gabion baskets installed.

"It wasn't cheap," said Jim Wickert, a condo resident.

Gabion baskets

What are gabion baskets?

They are wire mesh containers filled with rock or small pieces of broken concrete. They come in many different sizes, depending on the size and scope of a project.

Where are they located?

They are primarily located along stream banks to support an embankment and prevent erosion.

Where are some locations of gabion baskets?

Locally, you'll find the baskets at Bradley Park, Springdale Cemetery and at EastSide Centre. They are also located in some subdivisions within the city of Peoria.

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Trails Edge Condominiums resident Tom Reams shows the gabion basket retaining wall that is used to stop the erosion in the neighborhood. Some residents think the development of an apartment complex nearby will contribute to erosion of the stream bank.



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A gabion basket wall, made with stones and a wire basket, is used in the Trails Edge subdivision to slow erosion.