

Edmonston breaks ground on state's first 'green street'

■ Construction has begun on million-dollar project

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Construction has finally begun on Edmonston's long-awaited "green street" project, which will revamp Decatur Street with a slew of environmentally-friendly features.

The new street will include rain gardens and bioretention ponds to capture storm water runoff. Half of the road surface will be replaced with permeable pavement that will allow rainwater to soak into the ground. Low-energy street lamps will replace current ones.

The project will cost more than \$1 million, much of which comes from federal stimulus act money, although an initial \$25,000 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust gave the project its initial boost.

A number of local and federal officials were on hand on Nov. 24 to break ground, including Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa P. Jackson, who said the project is an example that should be copied by other communities nationwide.

"Environmental protection, if done right, is about protecting a community," she said at the event. "You should never have to choose between an economy that's vibrant and green and an environment that's vibrant and green."

U.S. Rep. Chris Van Hollen Jr. (D-Dist.8) of Kensington said the project is the first green street in the state and possibly the East Coast.

"We have to have our infrastructure designed in an environmentally sustainable way," he said at the event.

There are green streets elsewhere in the country, such as Portland, Ore., which in 2007 approved constructing several green streets.

Edmonston had been plagued with flooding for years due to poor a storm water management system, and Ortiz referenced the 2006 flood that

left 56 homes partially underwater.

"Contrary to popular to conventional wisdom, we didn't flood from the Anacostia River; we flooded from parking lots, shopping centers, highways, roofs," Ortiz said at the event.

The low-lying town recently installed a pumping station, but the green street project is projected to capture up to 90 percent of the storm water runoff.

"All streets have an expiration date, and the date for Decatur Street is coming soon. So we decided to do it right," Ortiz said.

Edmonston is small town of about 1,400 people, whose population are a third white, a third black and a third Latino.

"We're diverse in every way, except we don't have rich people," Ortiz said. "And if our little working class town can build a sustainable street like this, then anybody can."

Longtime Edmonston resident, Kathy Wakefield, 44, said she agreed with Ortiz. She also recalled the flooding from years ago and said she's also looking forward to the traffic-calming elements of the project.

"Anything to slow those cars down," she said in an interview.

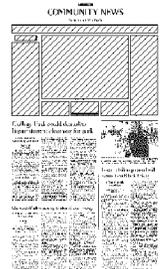
Resident Ken Graham, 62, served on a resident advisory committee for the project.

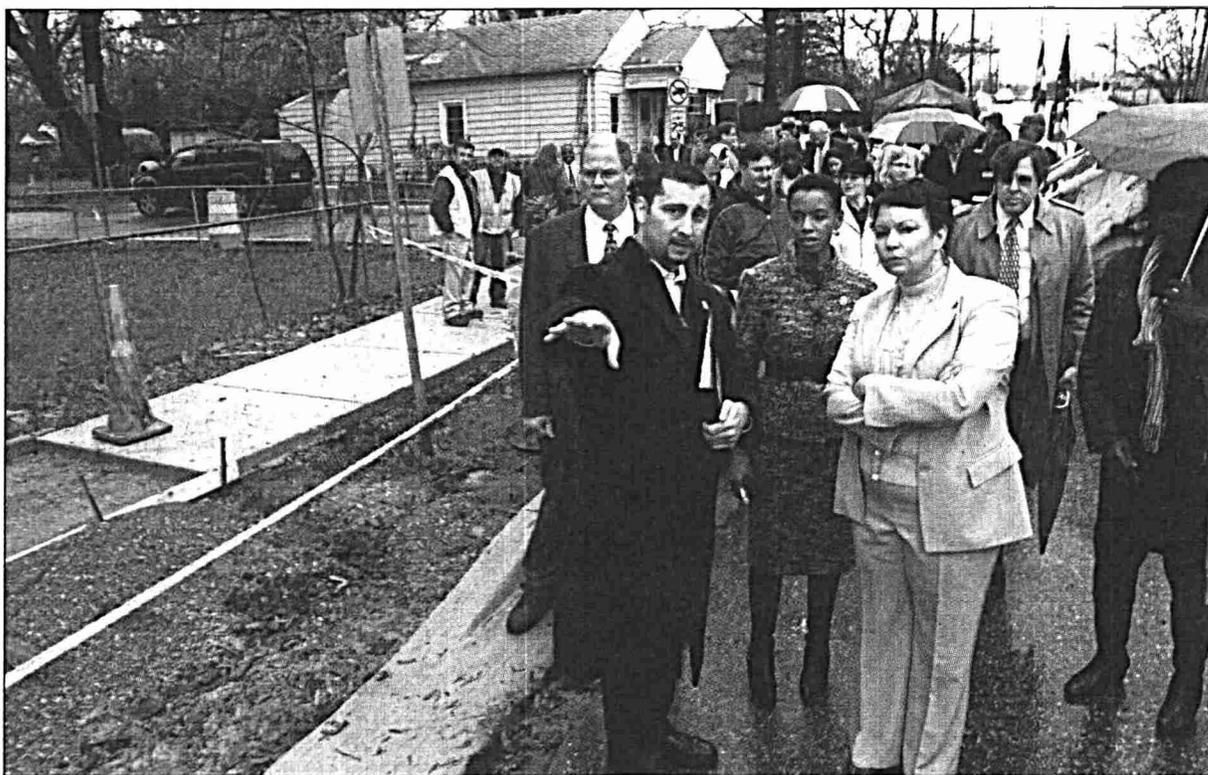
"We feel like we can work together to do this because it's our own lives at stake, our own future at stake," he said.

Construction on the street may take two months, depending on the weather, said construction supervisor Jerry Medley, but Graham said he's not concerned about it.

"The interruption is worth the sacrifice," Graham said in an interview. "We can take it. In fact, we're looking forward to it."

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LEAH L. JONES/THE GAZETTE

Edmonston Mayor Adam Ortiz (left) shows Congresswoman Donna Edwards (center) and EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson the Decatur Street Project during a Nov. 24 walking tour of the area. The town received federal stimulus money, which they are using to improve storm water runoff and employ other green measures.