

Stimulus money is bringing green streets to Edmonston

BY ALEKSANDRA ROBINSON
Capital News Service

EDMONSTON — This tiny town of 1,500 is soon to join the ranks of the country's environmentally elite — towns like Seattle and Portland — with the reconstruction of Decatur Street into a new green street.

The project officially broke ground Tuesday. It will feature wind-powered LED street lamps, rain gardens, pervious pavement and native shade trees. The ceremony was attended by Rep. Donna Edwards, D-Md.; Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.; Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson; Edmonston residents and representatives from various state agencies.

Edmonston was chosen by the Chesapeake Bay Trust to receive a \$1.1 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to build the street because of past flooding problems. The town was inundated after surrounding towns like Hyattsville built lots of shopping centers and parking lots — surfaces that water cannot penetrate — allowing rainwater to flow unhindered into Edmonston.

"Several years ago our town was underwater," said Edmonston Mayor Adam Ortiz, of four floods of five feet or more. "We flooded from parking lots. ... We suffered from streets."

Ortiz said the town is diverse in every way — a third of the population is Latino, a third is black and a third is white.

"But," he said, "we don't have rich people. ... If we can build a sustainable road like this then anyone can and everyone should."

Edmonston sees about 40 inches of rain annually, and it all runs unfiltered into the Anacostia River and into the Chesapeake Bay. The new project will filter 90 percent of the rain that falls in Edmonston, said Van Hollen.

"As we rebuild our infrastructure, we need to do it in an environmental way," Van Hollen said. "[This project] will create jobs that need to be done." Edwards agreed.

"We have an opportunity and the EPA has an opportunity to say, 'We can make even the smallest communities green,'" Edwards said. "What we do on our streets and in our communities and with our transportation and our dollars has an impact on the bay."

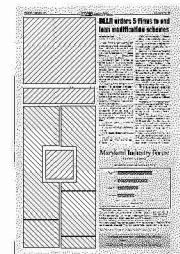
Allen Hance, executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Trust, said the project comes to Edmonston in part due to strong local leadership.

"We believe strongly that the restoration of the bay is going to depend on innovative local leadership," he said.

Plans for the Edmonston Green Street Project will be available free online to anyone, Ortiz said.

"In Maryland we're very focused on stormwater management," said Bob Summers, deputy secretary of the Department of the Environment. "This is a great example of what we need to do on a statewide level."

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Consultants, Low Impact Development Center and VMZ Consultants are contractors and partners in the project, which will directly create or preserve 50 jobs, Ortiz said.

Robert Kerns, a Town Council member, lost everything in the bottom floor of his house due to flooding, and said the upgrade, due to be completed in one year, is, "long overdue."

"It's setting an example for towns," Kerns said. "If we can do this, why can't they?"

Jackson, the EPA administrator and a New Orleans native, said she understands firsthand the problem of flooding in communities like Edmonston.

"Environmental protection is community protection," she said. "You should never have to choose between an economy that's green and an environment that's green."

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ADAM ORTIZ
Edmonston Mayor



CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY ALEKSANDRA ROBINSON

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson speaks at Tuesday's ground-breaking ceremony for a new 'green' street in Edmonston, which will be the first town in Maryland to get one of the environmentally friendly streets.