



**GREEN VALLEYS ASSOCIATION AT WELKINWEIR**

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## **PICKERING CREEK PRESERVATION TOPS ASSOCIATION'S**

**AGENDA** - Green Valleys members want waterway designated as 'exceptional value' stream under state law

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By Joe Langdon – *The Daily Local* Staff Writer

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EAST WHITELAND — The Green Valleys Association's annual dinner focused on continuing efforts to preserve Pickering Creek.

Bernard W. Sweeney, the president of Stroud Water Research Center, delivered the keynote address at the Desmond Hotel recently in front of more than 200 guests.

The association, with support from Stroud, is seeking to have Pickering Creek designated an "exceptional value" waterway under state law.

Under the creek's current "high quality" designation, businesses and developers may file for exemptions that allow them to discharge lower-quality water into the watershed. Under an exceptional value designation, no discharge that would degrade the quality of the creek would be permitted.

"The Stroud Water Research Center included Pickering Creek in its research program over 30 years ago because it appeared to be among the most outstanding streams in the region. More recent studies continue to support that conclusion," Sweeney said in his remarks. "However, those

same studies, which include other tributaries of the Schuylkill River, strongly suggest that the quality of Pickering Creek will degrade unless special protection is given to its watershed and special thought and care is given to future development."

Sweeney said he is concerned environmental efforts focus disproportionately on restoring polluted streams. He said such efforts are necessary and valuable, but preserving clean waterways is equally important and potentially more effective.

Director of Watershed Advocacy John Hoekstra for the GVA, northern Chester County's only watershed advocacy organization, has been working on the effort for many years. After two years of gathering information and support, the petition to upgrade Pickering Creek's designation was formally accepted for review by the state Department of Environmental Protection in 2005. The state is conducting tests, and Hoekstra said a decision could come by next spring.

Hoekstra said research performed by Sweeney and the Stroud Water Research Center has been crucial to the effort.



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"Stroud has been doing this for decades. There's none better," Hoekstra said. "Fortunately, they're in Chester County, in our backyard."

Hoekstra said the GVA has worked hard to make an airtight case and has secured support from all but a few public officials. Recently, they have encountered resistance from the Home Builders Association of Delaware and Chester Counties, which last month submitted to the state studies that partially contradict the GVA and Stroud's findings.

"We're not opposed to clean water or necessary environmental protection," said Michael McGee, the builders association's executive vice president. "Our organization has a strong interest that any regulatory action is based on sound science. ... The study concluded the heightened designation was not scientifically warranted."

Noting that the study commissioned by the builders association did find some samples that qualify for exceptional value status, Hoekstra said the discrepancies can be attributed to specific pollution events around the time the samples were taken. He also said Stroud has studied the creek for many years and did not base its findings on a "grab sample."

"The data Stroud collected surpasses other watersheds that have already been designated exceptional value," Hoekstra said.

The builders association members "basically don't want any higher standard to come into play," Hoekstra said. "We're talking about our drinking

water, ultimately. Shouldn't anyone be held accountable for degrading those resources?"

At the dinner, the GVA also presented the Environmental Fellowship Award for outstanding leadership to state Rep. Carole Rubley, R-157th, of Tredyffrin, who is retiring this fall.

"She's been very supportive of our work. We're going to miss Rep. Rubley very much," said Executive Director Catharine Swan.

Former Executive Director Ralph Heister recounted his work with Rubley, dating back to the 1970s, when the two helped form the Valley Creek Coalition and worked to secure exceptional value status for that waterway.

"Without Carole Rubley as a part of that, it would never have happened," Heister said.

Rubley said it was a great honor to be recognized by the association.

"I was very moved," she said, calling the organization's work "critical" to the environmental well-being of the area.

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