

Bethesda Intelligence campus renovation could flow to C&O cleanup
Work could begin next year on extensive upgrades
by Jessica Ablamsky, Staff Writer



Greg Dohler/The Gazette David Berg, board member of the Civic League of Brookmont and Vicinity, points out areas of the Potomac Palisades that he says have been affected by stormwater runoff from the nearby Intelligence Community Campus in Bethesda, including the erosion and fallen trees shown at left.

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More News: Plans to renovate the Intelligence Community Campus in Bethesda could allow the National Park Service to remediate decades of damage to C&O Canal National Historical Park, said Kevin Brandt, superintendent of the park.

“It clearly won’t happen this year, but we could begin to see work next year,” Brandt said.

The Intelligence campus will be renovated as part of the 2005 federally mandated Base Realignment and Closure, which moved thousands of National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency employees from Bethesda to Fort Belvoir, Va.\

Upgrades will include a new stormwater treatment system and a 43 percent decrease in concrete, which will allow the site to retain more stormwater. The Intelligence campus sits uphill from the Potomac River, but stormwater flows untreated into the canal. It flows in two natural streams etched into the hillside by decades of rushing water, and one gully that was created by runoff, said David Berg of the Civic League of Brookmont, who has been working with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on issues such as traffic, deforestation and stormwater treatment.

The gully is at least 5 feet deep and 7 or 8 feet wide, amid a thick canopied forest. Berg said water has run with enough force to fell mature trees. As water runs downhill, it picks up dirt and rocks that settle in the canal. On a warm May afternoon the canal was flooded, but sediment could be seen in shrub-covered islands that could be removed as part remediation efforts. The islands act as dams that can cause low-water problems farther south, particularly during August and September when water is generally at its

lowest, Brandt said. He said the National Park Service operates a tour boat in Georgetown, where there sometimes is not enough water to float the boat. Some stormwater should empty into the Potomac River, but Brandt said the drainage system is blocked. "It's still not clear to me who in the intelligence community is taking responsibility for this," he said. Still, Brandt said preliminary discussions with the intelligence community are going well. He is hopeful that after the campus is upgraded, repairs to past damage will be paid for by the intelligence community.

On campusThe new campus will host 3,000 employees by 2016, including the National Intelligence University, additional personnel from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, administrative personnel from the Defense Intelligence Agency, and select personnel from the National Media Exploitation Center, an agency that analyzes collective intelligence, such as documents, said James Manzelmann, an executive agent for DNI who has been working with residents since December. New employees on campus will come mostly from Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. High turnover, approximately 25 percent each year, could motivate new hires to relocate to Montgomery County, Manzelmann said.

Some trees in the Palisades, an area along the Potomac River characterized by wooded bluffs and slopes, will be cut to make way for a new parking garage. Up to .45 acres might be cleared during construction, but only .2 acres to .3 acres are trees, he said. A new parking garage will be no higher than the tallest building on campus and occupy most of the parking lot that is closest to the C&O Canal. The top three levels will be visible from MacArthur Boulevard during the winter, but Manzelmann does not think it will be visible from the Potomac River, classified by Maryland as a Wild and Scenic River and thus protected.

Photovoltaic cells will line the roof of the garage and help power interior and exterior lights. Two new buildings will be off the grid, and landscaping will use native, low-water-use plants.

For those who prefer to use public transportation, a shuttle runs between campus and the Friendship Heights Metro station. There also will be 500 to 600 feet on campus for vehicles to line up before going through security, rather than backing up on Sangamore Road.

Manzelmann said the director of National Intelligence will work with the community on façade upgrades, while the new security fence will look more like the one surrounding the White House.