

IN MY VIEW

Project is intended to slow or stop riverbank erosion

By Caitrin Maloney

As you may have seen, work began last week on the riverbank upstream of the covered bridge in Waitsfield. I have heard that some concerned (even angry) citizens have contacted the town about the project.

I wanted to share my perspective on the project in hopes that we can understand the various factors at play here as a community.

First, the project is intended to slow or stop the riverbank from eroding along the Bridge Street parking lot, which is privately owned but used essentially as a public parking lot. Since the lot is used publicly, the town of Waitsfield applied for the funding to complete the project last year. The town hired an engineering firm to complete the design including specifics for the stabilization (rip rap) and the landscaping (to revegetate the area since trees will need to be cut in order to install the rip rap).

There has been information about this project released to the public on several occasions and there have been several select board meetings about the project, and information is available online. For what it's worth, I reviewed and commented on the project design on behalf of Friends of the Mad River (FMR).

Please keep in mind that this project is necessitated due to the conflict between the location of the historic village and the natural processes of the river. Rivers move and they flood and when we build things in erosion and flood-prone areas, we lose.

Here, everyone is losing. The river is "losing." We are losing riverside trees and we are losing (and have lost) money, property and the aesthetics of a "wild" river. But unless we move our village away from the river, we will need to continue to manage the river with big, expensive and invasive rip rap projects. And we will continue to sustain periodic and serious losses due to flooding. We cannot "have our cake and eat it too" - we can't have an untouched river with an unaffected village right next to it. I think this project is a necessary (while sad) reconciliation.

What else can be done to mitigate flooding and erosion? We must look holistically at the watershed and the factors at play. Where and how we choose to build (or not build) structures and roads, how we manage our stormwater, how we manage our forests and wetlands and how we manage the river's corridor can influence the intensity and duration of flooding and the extent of erosion. There are positive examples to look to, includ-

ing the bio retention garden recently constructed at Village Square Shopping Center. The garden is intended to better manage stormwater at the site and demonstrate a type of "green stormwater infrastructure" (GSI). GSI practices allow stormwater to infiltrate into the ground instead of rushing into storm drains and rivers; applied broadly, these practices can slow and reduce flood flows.

Another recent project involved the conservation of key river corridor above Waitsfield Village. Although the Mad River is eroding the land away there at an alarming rate, the landowner has agreed to forgo stabilizing the riverbank or otherwise constricting the river. By allowing the river to move across the landscape and "blow off steam" the river system has a better chance of finding a balanced state, therefore, reducing instability and erosion in adjacent areas.

In addition to the examples listed above, there are a host of other practices that we can use to improve the river and protect our community. For more information on this and other river and watershed-related topics, please visit the Friends of the Mad River website at www.FriendsoftheMadRiver.org. Maloney is the director of Friends of the Mad River.

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