

A better plan saves North Main park

Greenville News 2/14/10

Pipes were the beginning. Not the beginning of the park, which was decided in 1936, but of how it is now and what it will become.

Nine years ago, in the summer of 2001, Courtney Shives walked down into the North Main Rotary Park behind his house to find "huge pipes" lying around. Why?

He called the city of Greenville. The city, he learned, was going to put the creek that winds through the park into pipes and cover them with earth to make a flat small field.

Back in those days, says Steve Mills, a North Main resident and former president of the neighborhood association, these particular six acres or so on either side of the creek were affectionately known as "the mud park." And the creek's banks were seriously eroded.

Burying the creek might've been one solution, but not the best one environmentally. There was another.

That's the rest of the story.

Shives' brother Fletcher, who worked for the Environmental Protection



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Agency and happened to be in town then, wondered if the city had a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to do the work it planned on doing.

The question of a permit brought the creek a reprieve and gave Shives and other North Main residents time to enlist support from their neighbors and groups such as Upstate Forever and the Sierra Club for a different way to approach what needed to be done in the park.

Because the creek wasn't the only concern. Also, the hillsides were overgrown with English ivy, kudzu and dense stands of bamboo — all of which are essentially interlopers, none being native to South Carolina or for that matter the



Steve Mills sits at the amphitheater at the North Main Rotary Park.

JEANNE BROOKS / Staff

United States.

The North Main residents wanted an attractive, low-maintenance, usable park. "We wanted a more natural area," Mills says.

They lobbied the city for a master plan. The city agreed. Residents helped choose the company:

Earth Design Inc. of Pickens, owned by Rick Huffman.

Huffman's plan called for native plants such as wild indigo, blue start, purple cornflower, native azaleas, black gum, red bud, spiderwort, crested iris, green and gold, and more.

All plants that, because they are native, grow well in South Carolina, without a lot of watering and babying and spraying of pesticides.

Shives and others raised money, the county chipped in, as did the city.

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Among other things, the city built a stone amphitheater for school children to come and learn about native plants, also a new

playground, a picnic shelter, a new main path that strollers can now travel.

Huffman contributed advice and work supervision for free, and the North Main community contributed hard work, time, backs, muscle. Over the past two years, they have cleared and weeded,

and planted 500-600 plants, Mills says.

The creek bed has been restored, the creek saved, the park reclaimed and made better. There's more work to do, for instance legacy trees like oaks to plant.

But already people with dogs and kids are drawn

here throughout the day. And just wait a few months. The trees will leaf and the flowers unfold. You'll really see the natural splendor planted here come spring.

Bravo, North Main.

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