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New committee to help Milton grow green

by Jason Wright

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MILTON - When Kermit the Frog lamented about how "It's Not Easy Being Green," he surely hadn't envisioned the burgeoning multitude of environmentally safe options for all aspects of our modern lives.

And in Milton, there's a group dedicated to bringing those options to the forefront. It's called Milton Grows Green, and like the Disability Awareness Committee before it, is a mix concerned council members, City Hall staff, knowledgeable citizens, business owners and educators determined to bring a comprehensive approach to smart, sustainable growth to their hometown.

Councilwoman Julie Zahner Bailey first brought the idea to City Council in September, 2007 of making Milton a green community. The plan was to create a sort of citizens action committee that could look into the world of green city building and give Milton's handlers realistic options they could use.



(JASON WRIGHT/www.northfulton.com) Milton Grows Green, a group of knowledgeable citizens, City Hall staff, elected officials, business owners and educators, is hoping to make environmentalism a core tenet in their city's future growth. Here, they gather at Councilwoman Julie Zahner Bailey's family business, Bailey Farms and Gardens, off Hickory Flat Road. (click for larger version)

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But it's more than just research and talk — Milton Grows Green wants to demonstrate tangible value to show how realistic these options can be. The official group had its first meeting in February and has since launched a charter education program in Hopewell Middle School and is on the cusp of starting a free recycling program at Bell Memorial Park.

Though not an officially sanctioned volunteer committee, Zahner Bailey is hoping to pass a resolution recognizing the group in early October.

"The whole premise is to link across all areas," she said. "We're talking about sustainable growth, environmentalism, how to implement these things as we grow as a community and ways to encourage citizens to pursue environmentally friendly options.

"Everybody is working together to preserve the unique elements of Milton."

Tom Sewell is a sixth grade Earth Sciences teacher at Hopewell Middle School. He heads up Milton Grows Green's charter program in the school, and is hoping to expand it to other institutions in the area.

So far, the school arm of Milton Grows Green has two projects — Adopt-A-Stream, in which members chemically monitor water quality in all of Milton's streams, and one of the group's biggest tasks, placing stickers on the city's storm drains to warn people what goes down the hole leads directly to a river.

"It's a bit of a massive project," said Sewell.

So far, he's got 10 students and 10 parents signed up to monitor water quality after school. He hypothesizes it could take 50 to get to all of Milton's hundreds of unnamed streams.

There are also between 2,000 and 3,000 storm drains that need stickers as well.

"We can't do it alone with just the groups we have now," he said.

Milton Public Works Director Dan Drake is a member, as well. He said the volunteer projects not only keep Milton clean, they aide the city in one of its most important, behind-the-scenes tasks: applying for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit.

The NPDES permit allows Milton to discharge stormwater from its roads and rights-of-way into state waters. It's essential and comes with a lot of strings, including establishing a volunteer base.

"With the stream side cleanup and storm drain marker work, it gives us that volunteer base," said



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Jon McPhail co-chairs Milton Grows Green with members Melissa Estes and Jack Lindon. He said he joined the group to "see the attractive aspects of Milton preserved."


McPhail said in addition to education and activism, the group is looking particularly at smart growth options like green incentives and building standards as a way to increase overall efficiency.

"As the cost of energy rises, the more efficient a building is, the better value it has," he said.

But, he said, they won't make the rules, only present decision makers with information so they can make up their minds.

"There are all kinds of things available that people just aren't aware of," he said.

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
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