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Stimulus money to fund Hickory Creek cleanup

By Jeff Borgardt Special to the Tribune
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A regional planner told New Lenox trustees Monday night about a \$209,520 plan to clean up Hickory Creek.

Jessie Elam of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning told the Village Board a \$209,000 grant from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, funded through federal stimulus money, will be used to clean up the creek.

"Aquatic life in the creek is not what it should be, and it is not safe for swimming or recreational activities," Elam said.

The creek was formally declared biologically unhealthy and unsafe for swimming by state environmental officials in 2008. Elam said pollution and bacterial contamination has led to the environmental deterioration of the creek over time.

Decades ago, the primary environmental concern for the creek was farming-related runoff flowing into the creek. However, now it is suburban wastewater discharge.

Infrastructure and habitat improvements along the creek should be made, and junk and debris removed, Elam said. Wastewater treatment plants should also be upgraded.

"The impairments to the creek are caused by a number of factors, but the major ones are chemical pollution, contamination by fecal bacteria and physical damage to the stream environment," Elam writes in a memo. "The fundamental purpose of the watershed plan is to evaluate and recommend the best measures to help restore the beneficial uses in Hickory Creek with the long-term goal of improving conditions."

In June, the Village Board is slated to vote on the official creek cleanup plan.

The volunteer advisory group, the Hickory Creek Watershed Planning Group, has been working to clean up the creek for three years, said New Lenox Public Works Director Ron Sly.

This group consists of government representatives, environmental advocates and volunteers.

The plan entails work to clean up Hickory Creek and its tributaries Spring Creek, Marley Creek, Union Ditch and the Frankfort Tributary.

Matching funds of \$58,200 are also available for creek cleaning.

Frankfort, Mokena, Orland Park, Tinley Park and New Lenox as well as Joliet, the Will County Stormwater Management Planning Committee, Will County Board and the Forest Preserve of Will County passed resolutions in favor of Hickory Creek cleanup efforts

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