

Over 75 Arlingtonians attended an October 17 meeting with County Board chairman Christian Dorsey, county environment services chief Mike Moon and county environmental management and sustainability director Demitra McBride. The subject was county plans for stormwater mitigation in the wake of the calamitous July 8 flooding that caused so much damage and distress in our community.

The meeting was co-sponsored by four civic associations, including the Tara Leeway Heights, Westover, Highland Park Overlee Knolls and Leeway Overlee CAs.

Chairman Dorsey reminded the audience that 4 -1/2 inches of rain fell on our area during a 20-minute period on July 8. For comparison, he noted that during the infamous Hurricane Agnes in 1972, roughly 12 inches of rain soaked Arlington County over a 4 day period. The 2006 rainstorm that led to the creation of the county's 2010 stormwater masterplan did not

Dorsey said county staff had picked up almost 40 tons of debris in our area after July 8.

McBride led a spirited discussion which included both generally forward-looking questions and the stories of many of our neighbors who suffered devastating damage from the July 8 storm. Some highlights:

-- Land coverage by impervious surfaces in Arlington rose by only 3% during the past dozen years. Neither this fact, nor the construction of more large homes covering most of their building lots, accounts for the stormwater damage.

-- 400 million gallons of rain fell on Arlington July 8.

-- While expanding some of the underground pipes carrying Torreyson Run water out of our neighborhoods may eventually help to alleviate stormwater damage from future storms, additional measures will be required. Among some possibilities are county land acquisition for increased open spaces and construction under current parkland for underground stormwater storage and remediation.

-- Contractors and county engineers working on the new Reed School will look during this 2-year construction project for opportunities to better manage Torreyson Run, which currently runs underneath the site.

-- Arlington County has around 100 miles of streams; over two thirds of that water is presently contained in underground pipes.

All of the speakers pledged to keep us informed as county remedial measures are developed. They also urged all residents who suffered damage on July 8 to be sure to make a report to county officials via the county website, if they have not already done so.