**Lexington’s Streams: Building Awareness**

Water is necessary for life on earth. It nourishes and cleanses. It makes possible the growth of plants on which all higher organisms depend, including we humans and the animals we eat. It filters pollutants as it seeps into the ground. It sustains public health and economic development. It is a precious natural resource that comes to us abundantly and free of charge.

Yet we do not take good care of our water. We count on our streams to absorb fertilizers and agricultural pesticides. Our industries discharge any number of chemicals and by-product of manufacturing processes into our rivers causing fish and aquatic life to die. Our creeks carry e-coli and other dangerous pollutants, not to mention tons of trash. We cover our urban spaces with asphalt so that rainwater cannot seep into the ground but flows away in over-burdened creek channels. We deprive our waterways of their natural flood plains by cutting down the vegetation on their banks and planting turf grass and concrete. Then, when a flood occurs and disrupts our lives, we blame the stream but not the damage we have done to it.

Lexington, like many other cities in the US, has made a commitment to clean up its act and its water. In January 2011 the city entered into a Consent Decree with the EPA to correct the storm water management system installed in the past, which calls, among other things, for an effort to re-naturalize our stream banks.

And here is where **Water Week** comes in. For eight days, from March 21 to 28, 2020 Lexingtonians are invited to celebrate their urban water. You may never have asked yourself what happened to the streams that flowed unencumbered through the woodland landscape of the Bluegrass once the trees were replaced by houses, factories, shopping malls and office parks. Where does the water go and why has it become invisible to us?

It turns out much of it gets channeled underground and flows through huge culverts underneath our streets and parking lots. The remaining surface streams are often hidden behind large hedges of invasive shrubs, mostly bush honeysuckle, that form tunnels over the creek beds and keep urban residents away from them.

**Water Week** aims to make our streams visible again. Our city government invites us to become aware of water in Lexington, to know where it surfaces and where it goes. Above all it wants us to care about our streams and to help restore them to something that resembles their natural setting. A healthy stream is a valuable asset in a neighborhood, a gathering place, an outdoor classroom, a quiet place for contemplation away from urban stress.

Find Water Week events here: https://www.lexingtonky.gov/waterweek