

Too much concrete

By LOUISE WREGE - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, February 9, 2017 6:00 am

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Almost 50 business owners, landlords and elected officials gathered around maps Wednesday at the Orchards Mall in Benton Township to discuss ways to reduce the amount of pollution running into Ox Creek from the mall district.

“Ox Creek is not very healthy,” said Marcy Hamilton, a senior planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

She said the problem is that most of the wetlands, which cleaned rain water before it entered the creek, have been filled in or built over. She said that when the mall and surrounding businesses were built decades ago, the idea was to get rain water off the parking lots and into the creek as fast as possible.

“That rain hits and is carrying those pollutants into the creek from all the parking lots and other surfaces,” she said. “... We’re trying to figure out better ways to manage (the rain water) on the land so the pollutants don’t end up in the creek.”

Ox Creek is so bad that it is on the list of impaired water bodies in the state, she said.

“The fish aren’t doing well ... because of all the pollution coming in,” she said.

Hamilton said the pollution in the creek flows into the Paw Paw River, which feeds into the St. Joseph River and eventually gets dumped into Lake Michigan.

Jorden Parker, architect and planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, said the focus is on I-94 Exit 29, the Pipestone Road corridor in Benton Township and the mall district, which includes the Orchards Mall, Home Depot and Meijer.

He said rain gardens not only slow down stormwater, but can beautify the area.

Officials from Wightman & Associates on Pipestone Road are planning to turn part of their parking lot into a rain garden to demonstrate how it can be done. Hamilton said they plan to do that later this year.

Work to clean up Ox Creek is being funded in part by a three-year, \$600,000 grant the Michigan Land Conservancy received from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

The conservancy received the grant during the summer of 2015. Local sources contributed another \$400,000 to match the state grant, Hamilton said.



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Business owners in and around the Orchards Mall in Benton Township talked Wednesday about ways to decrease the amount of pavement, which is contributing to the pollution of Ox Creek.

Another part of the project is funded through a grant the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, received from the Stormwater, Asset Management and Wastewater (SAW) Program, Hamilton said. That program is also run by the DEQ.

She said the information gathered at the meeting will be compiled with information from other meetings to help her organization come up with a plan.

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