

Protecting wetlands might hinder Evansdale growth

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EVANSDALE — An old set of federal laws facing a new era of enforcement could put a damper on future commercial, residential and recreational development, a consultant told the City Council on Wednesday.

Jane Shuttleworth of Brice, Petrides-Donohue, a Waterloo engineering firm, told the council that wetland areas, though hard to locate and even more difficult to define, need to be a part of the city's planning and zoning laws for 1991 and beyond.

Shuttleworth said the federal government is poised to shift its focus to saving wetlands — identified by soil

types, vegetation and particular water source — and could begin levying stiff fines to cities that allow them to disappear in the name of progress.

"In the old days, everybody wanted to drain wetlands," she said. "Now we realize their importance."

That includes not only wildlife preservation, but natural flood control and the recharging of underground water supplies, she said.

Shuttleworth identified two possible wetland sites in Evansdale that have been targeted for various projects, and warned that further studies should be done to make sure the city doesn't run afoul of federal regulations.

One of the areas is included in the

Meyer's Lake project near I-380, where the city plans a series of nature trails and recreational spots on land it acquired from the Department of Transportation through Resource Enhancement And Protection grants paid for by lottery proceeds.

"The first thing you need to do is prove that you've done all you can to avoid impacting the wetland," Shuttleworth said. Step two is to apply to the Army Corps of Engineers for permission to alter the area in question.

City Engineer Harold Jensen, also of Brice, Petrides-Donohue, said he has applied for the necessary permit

and thinks there is a "90 percent chance it will be approved," thus keeping the lake project afloat.

Violating the Corps of Engineers' guidelines anywhere else in the city could result in heavy fines by the Environmental Protection Agency of as much as \$1,000 a day, Shuttleworth said.

The penalties apply to private landowners as well.

"This has become more enforced on the East Coast," she told the council. "And it's coming this way."

National focus on the use of wetlands started increasing during the mid-1980s, when the Reagan administration tried to relax restrictions.

Since then, environmentalists have battled to win back control of the areas, of which an estimated 90 percent have been partially or completely drained or filled to pave the way for development.

But President Bush's Clean Water Act went a long way toward establishing a system of oversights for wetlands management.

Meanwhile, state agencies are attempting to write a solid definition of what a wetland is and come up with a map showing all existing areas that meet the definition.

The issue promises to surface during the upcoming legislative session, Shuttleworth said.