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The Greening of Detroit installs green infrastructure land treatments on 10 vacant lots

Detroit Water and Sewerage Department kicks off vacant lot greening program

DETROIT, June 6, 2013: The last of 10 blighted, vacant lots owned by the Michigan Land Bank was treated with green infrastructure today. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), The Greening of Detroit, and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) are partnering on a pilot project to transform 10 vacant residential property lots in the city's Cody Rouge neighborhood into greener, healthier public spaces. The primary goal of the green infrastructure initiative is to reduce the amount of storm water entering the sewer system, but the additional benefits of neighborhood stabilization, improved property values, better air quality, and beautification are significant.

"We at DWSD believe in increasing green infrastructure in the city," said DWSD Director Sue F. McCormick. "Green projects help divert runoff from going into the combined sewer system, and that could reduce costs that are passed on to our customers. The project in the Cody Rouge neighborhood is one of the first steps in a multi-year greening program at DWSD. We're excited about its potential."

The Greening of Detroit is collaborating with Cody-Rouge neighborhood residents and community groups to transform vacant residential lots into natural, low-maintenance spaces that will become neighborhood assets.

Community residents were engaged in the process of selecting one of four low-maintenance treatment plans for each location: a low-grow prairie grass; a perennial wildflower mix; a rye grass and wildflower combination; and tree planting. The community voted on plans for each of the 10 properties.

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“This pilot project will demonstrate how the use of natural seed mixes can help absorb more rain water, stabilize property values, and decrease maintenance costs associated with vacant land across the city of Detroit,” said Dean Hay, director of Green Infrastructure at The Greening of Detroit.

Repurposing vacant land in ways that add economic, environmental, and social benefits to Detroiters is part of the vision laid out in the Detroit Future City strategic framework introduced in January. The Greening’s Vacant Lot Treatment Program is an example of community engagement and successful collaboration among multiple community, nonprofit, and municipal partners.

“Partnerships are essential for making green infrastructure work in our region and the City of Detroit. Including the neighborhood in determining the types of green infrastructure, along with support from the state, nonprofits, and the city is a winning combination for the long-term success of this program.” said Amy Mangus, Manager of Environmental Programs at SEMCOG.

“The type of partnership developed between public agencies and a local non-profit to execute this important project is indicative of the formula needed to successfully implement the recommendations within the strategic framework,” said Dan Kinhead, the Director of Detroit Future City. “Together they used the framework to guide their approach to effect change in the Cody-Rouge neighborhood; each using their particular strength to achieve the larger goal of improving the quality of life in Detroit and creating a more environmentally and fiscally sustainable city.”

Treatment plans provide beautiful flowers, reduced maintenance, and natural habitats for birds. Trees cleanse the air by intercepting airborne particles, reducing heat, and absorbing pollutants such as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. Those treatments are also part of a larger urban ecosystem, creating a healthier urban environment over all. Kenyetta Campbell, Executive Director of the Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance is grateful for the community’s involvement in this process. She says, “This vacant land project aligns with our mission to revitalize and sustain a healthy community where residents promote and have access to a higher quality of life. This moves us closer to a more healthy, vibrant, and green community.”

The Greening of Detroit is a nonprofit organization committed to inspiring sustainable growth of a healthy urban community through trees, green spaces, food, education, training and job opportunities.

DWSD supplies high-quality drinking water to Detroit and 127 other communities in southeast Michigan. The Department provides wastewater services to Detroit and 76 other southeast Michigan communities.

SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, is the only organization in Southeast Michigan that brings together all governments to solve regional challenges and enhance the quality of life for the seven-county region's 4.7 million people

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