



City of Seattle
Seattle Public Utilities

Dear Ballard Community Member:

You are receiving this update because you reside within the project area for the Ballard Roadside Raingardens. This pilot project has been conducted by Seattle Public Utilities to evaluate the use of raingardens in lessening the impact of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) on nearby receiving waters, such as Salmon Bay and Puget Sound.**(see footnote below)*.

Raingardens are natural drainage systems and have been used effectively for controlling stormwater runoff in other parts of Seattle, including Broadview, Pinehurst and West Seattle (High Point). These raingardens are constructed exclusively in the public right-of-way.

With help from federal grant funding, the City constructed 50 raingardens in your neighborhood in 2010 with the hope of controlling 50,000 gallons of stormwater runoff which contribute to CSOs. The raingardens were designed to capture runoff from the street, hold it temporarily, and provide gradual infiltration of the water back into the ground. Over time, the raingardens fill in with plants. In addition, this project is the first time that the City has used extended portions of the right-of-way (“bump outs”) to create more capacity to retain water.

Seattle Public Utilities held a public meeting on February 2nd at which several concerns were heard from the community regarding the functioning and aesthetics of the raingardens. Among those concerns were:

- That several of the raingardens were not infiltrating as designed due to localized soil conditions
- Concern about mosquito breeding from the non-draining raingardens
- Objection to the signage placed on the “bump outs” to prevent vehicles from driving into the raingardens
- Concern about safety hazards posed by 6 or more inches of standing water
- Concern about the effect of the raingardens on property values
- Concern about the side slopes of the raingardens and difficulty finding level footing when getting out of a car
- Concern about inadequate information provided to the community, in the advance planning stages of the project, about the appearance of the proposed raingardens.

SPU made a commitment at that time to set up a Task Force with representatives from each block that had received raingardens and to address these concerns. The Task Force met from March 8 to April 26 and worked with SPU on how to approach those concerns.

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Since this was a pilot project and the concerns stated above were unexpected outcomes, SPU agreed to remove raingardens that were not working and/or that met with serious objection. SPU also worked with residents on designs for the rest of the raingardens that will serve as prototypes for other areas:

- **Infiltration:** The raingardens on 30th near Loyal Way function as originally designed and have not been altered.
- **Modified Infiltration:** Approximately 14 of the raingardens were modified (or soon will be) to address concerns about side slopes, swale depth and standing water. These raingardens are providing infiltration of street runoff at a slightly reduced rate from what was originally designed. (See an example at 6602 28th Ave. NW)
- **Live Storage:** Many of the raingardens along 28th Ave will be converted to a new design that allows the water to flow from one raingarden to another before eventually returning to the combined sewer system. This type of design helps reduce the peak flow of stormwater during rains, thus helping provide some relief to CSO volumes.

All told, about two-thirds of the raingardens are working fine or will be when retrofitted, and one-third will be removed. The residents of 77th and 29th will see all of their raingardens removed and returned to the pre-project condition. The work on removals and retrofits is taking place right now and is expected to continue through the Fall. The remaining raingardens will continue to be monitored by SPU for performance, safety and aesthetics.

The raingardens included in this project have provided prototypes for designs that will help address CSO control needs if applied on a broader scale. SPU is planning to take a year to gain experience from these designs before looking at possible roadside raingardens in other parts of Ballard or the rest of the City's CSO basins, including ongoing evaluation of the costs and benefits of raingardens as compared to other traditional approaches.

SPU would like to thank the Ballard Task Force members for working with the City on this important project, as well as the residents in the pilot project area. Our experience with this pilot has been immensely valuable, and we are already taking advantage of the lessons learned from this project in our ongoing work with green infrastructure. If you would like to learn more about CSO control in Seattle, see www.seattle.gov/cso. Thank you again for your participation in this important work on behalf of water quality in Salmon Bay and Puget Sound.

Sincerely,

Nancy Ahern

Deputy Director
SPU Utility Systems Management

*CSOs are discharges of untreated sewage and stormwater released directly into marine waters, lakes and rivers during heavy rainfall, when the sewers have reached their capacity. Although the sewage in CSOs is greatly diluted by stormwater, both CSOs and stormwater may be harmful to public health and aquatic life because they carry chemicals and disease-causing pathogens.