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Courtesy of Reading Health System | The Seventh Avenue project of Reading Health System will have green roofs.

Greater Berks could get a lot greener

By Jennifer Hetrick

Tuesday August 25, 2015 12:01 AM

READING, PA — Green infrastructure studies in the greater Berks County region are examining ways to give local waterways a reprieve from the contaminants they've been carrying.

FYI

The studies will help to identify areas that need the most improvements.

Environmental engineering experts note that rethinking basic street design can lead to walkable greenways necessary to recharge groundwater and reduce pollution.

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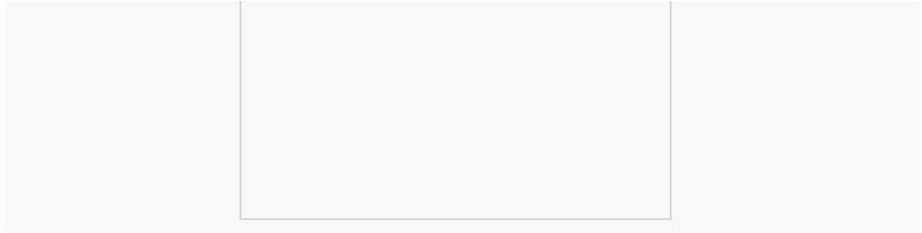
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In cities such as New York and Philadelphia, green infrastructure has led to increases in real estate value, healthy living and safety while decreasing vehicle crashes and even crime.

Green infrastructure

"In the future, we will see bike lanes with streetscapes incorporated into our existing sea of asphalt, which will connect green infrastructure to parks, businesses and schools," said Ann Sellers, green infrastructure coordinator for C2C Design Group in South Heidelberg Township.

Sellers is involved with the Schuylkill Action Network's Stormwater Workgroup, Smart Growth Alliance of Berks County and Recreation Commission of the Antietam Valley. She also serves as a board member for the Antietam Valley Community Partnership and Antietam School District.

Revitalizing and restructuring the intersection of Liggett Avenue and Hancock Boulevard in the Oakbrook section of Reading is a project that involves a number of affected stakeholders who are waiting to see what's possible to improve the area through green infrastructure.

While more stakeholders may be in the final mix, so far, the list potentially involves the Reading Housing Authority; Tom Masano Auto Group; Reading Truck Body; Reading's Planning Department, Redevelopment Authority, Public Works Department and Parking Authority; O'Pake Institute of Alvernia University; Olivet Boys & Girls Clubs; Gilmore Henne Community Fund; and Queen City Diner.

Drainage issues

"There are drainage issues with this general area," said Brian Kelly, executive director of ReDesign Reading Community Development Corp., a primary stakeholder for the intersection's improvement.

The corporation applied for a \$55,000 grant in June from the Greenways, Trails and Recreation program through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

The grant would help to pursue a deeper level of planning by engaging area stakeholders to improve intersections, such as Liggett Avenue and Hancock Boulevard. It also would cover engineering studies to connect trails, parks, businesses and schools in this area of Reading, known as the 18th Ward.

"The scope would include assessing traffic patterns, street analysis, street conditions and hydrological studies," Kelly said.

Adding greenways and bicycle trails are just some ideas for this intersection if funding is received and if eventual studies show the area will be practical for redesign.

Historic Carsonia Park, in Lower Alsace and Exeter townships, is owned by the Mount Penn Borough Municipal Authority.

This is because two of the park's wells are part of a water system managed by the authority, explained Teresa Christof, the authority's office manager.



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Stormwater discharge

Christof said underground pipes installed many years ago send stormwater discharge from Lower Alsace directly into Crystal Lake at the park, where swimming is not allowed.

In 2014, Lower Alsace Township, Mount Penn, Exeter Township, St. Lawrence, the Antietam School District, the Mount Penn authority and Antietam Valley Community Partnership formed the Recreation Commission of the Antietam Valley, a regional park commission to work on cleaning up and revitalizing the area.

"With a Going Greener grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, we're trying to obtain funds for a lake assessment," Christof said of Phase 1 of the potential project. "It would determine what contaminants are in the lake. What to do to fix the stormwater issues in the area are in Phase 2, through best management practices with green infrastructure. It's a really good opportunity for the park, the authority and the community."

The grant amount requested for the first phase of assessing the park's needs, starting with Crystal Lake, totaled \$103,000.

DoubleTree with green roof

DoubleTree by Hilton hotel on Penn Street, slated to open by December, will have a green roof.

A succulent plant called sedum will make up the green roof's expanse around lower portions of the hotel.

"The green roof is relegated to the entire main floor roof area, equaling around 25,000 square feet of roof space," said Lee Olsen, president and CEO of Olsen Design Group Architects Inc., based in Bern Township. "It is also on the porte cochere (a porch roof projecting over a driveway at an entrance) as well as the roof of the grand ballroom."

The green roof works best on large areas "and on the second floor, which is the roof of the main floor," he said. "Hotel guests and visitors will enjoy a lush view out their windows onto the roof below, as opposed to a black-rubber roof."

Sedum is an excellent choice as a growing organism, Olsen said, "in that it is uniform in its growth, and once it reaches its desired maturity, it stops growing. It doesn't need mowing, and it keeps its rich color all growing season."

He said the trays are self-draining and will allow the water to be collected, metered out and then directed into the roof drainage system.

"What this does is keep the roof area cooler due to the water retention, reducing the energy necessary to run the HVAC units because the interior spaces benefit from this cooling effect," Olsen said. "Water does not evacuate the roof quickly, as in normal drainage scenarios."

Retention makes it so the water is somewhat purified and cleaned as it filters through the base of the sedum, before it is released into the stormwater system and eventually the Schuylkill River, Olsen said.

"The water going into the river will be cleaner than normal rainwater runoff going directly into the river," Olsen said.

RHS green roof

Reading Health System is constructing an 88,000-square-foot green roof in its construction project in West Reading, said Mark McNash, vice president of support services.

The roof involves one rectangular portion that is only for plantings, The remainder is a creative, accessible space for staff and patients, including a healing garden with a waterfall as well as a 26-by-44-foot pergola and several sitting areas around trees and other plants.

The cost of the green roof is \$635,000, according to Jessica Bezler, the public relations and corporate communications specialist for Reading Health System.

There are drains built into the system to help divert the storm system's water off campus, McNash said.

"From a hospital perspective, it'll be the third largest green roof in the U.S.," he said. "We're trying to create a patient experience."

Contact Jennifer Hetrick: money@readingeagle.com.

OTHER STORIES

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The image shows a horizontal row of four promotional banners, flanked by left and right navigation arrows. From left to right: 1. A red banner for 'the drifters' featuring a vintage microphone and text: 'SATURDAY, APRIL 9 @ 7:30 P.M. Santander Performing Arts Center. CLICK HERE FOR TICKETS!'. 2. A light blue banner for 'The Passing Scene - Vol. 23' with a black and white photo of a horse-drawn carriage and text: 'CLICK TO ORDER NOW!'. 3. A black banner for 'R·E·P COMMERCIAL PRINTING' with colorful paint splashes. 4. A yellow banner for 'Berks CountryFest an americana music jamboree' with text: 'June 6-19, 2016. Stay up to date on festival information! [Facebook icon] berkscountryfest.com'.