

Haverford nets grants to install rain gardens



Haverford Township Environmental Advisory Committee member David Schwartz shows off his new rain garden.

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Posted: 07/24/14, 11:13 PM EDT | Updated: 4 days ago

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Haverford — Speaking at the July commissioners meeting, township environmental advisory committee member David Schwartz announced two recent grant awards for developing rain gardens in Haverford and the region.

The first grant, for \$4,100 from the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters Water Resources Education Network, will fund a rain garden at Haverford Reserve. According to parks and recreation environmental activities Coordinator Nora Schmidt, the garden will mitigate stormwater and serve as a model for educational purposes. Additionally, workshops and literature will be available for do-it-yourselfers interested in learning how to build and maintain their own rain gardens.

Plans call for locating the garden in a high-visibility area along Parkview Drive, adjacent to the upper ballfield. Construction is slated for Sept. 13-14, Schmidt said.

Haverford will also take part in a larger, \$51,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Fund. Recently awarded to the Pennsylvania Resources Council and Eastern Delaware County Stormwater Collaborative, the funds are part of a \$2.4 million investment in 15 projects aimed at restoring “water quality and fish and wildlife habitat across the Delaware River watershed.”

Pennsylvania Resources Council and EDCSC’s plan is to make rain gardens “the new normal” in urbanized sections of the Darby/Cobbs Creek watersheds in Delaware County, where excess stormwater contributes to flooding and water pollution. Included will be five high-visibility, demonstration rain gardens on public land, and a collaboration with Haverford Township, which recently launched a “100 Rain Gardens in 10 Years” initiative, to construct additional gardens on commercial, private and public property.

Haverford’s EAC will serve as local project coordinator responsible for creating a pilot program that will serve as a model for other municipalities. Haverford’s share of Pennsylvania Resources Council and EDCSC project funding will provide materials for 10 residential rain gardens and one high-visibility model garden on public land.

“People can essentially apply for free rain gardens,” said Schwartz.

Ten applicants will be selected the first year to receive free rain garden plants and soil amendment materials, based on program requirements. Residents who don’t qualify will have access to technical support from the Haverford Rain Garden team.

Schwartz anticipates planting to commence next spring.

Getting into practice, Schwartz spent a recent Saturday installing a rain garden in his own backyard. After properly preparing an approximately 50-square-foot area, Schwartz planted milkweed, foam flowers, wild columbine and other native plants, chosen for their ability to tolerate both wet and dry conditions, in addition to supporting pollinators and indigenous wildlife.

Schwartz positioned the garden to capture runoff from two roof drains. Rain gardens absorb about 30 percent more water than lawns, and filter up to 99 percent of common pollutants found in urban runoff, such as pesticides, fertilizer, road salt, petroleum products and household chemicals, Schwartz said. Runoff from developed areas is responsible for up to 50 percent of urban water pollution nationwide, scientists say.

Haverford horticulturist Peter Hickman noted that rain gardens save money by reducing the amount of stormwater entering sewer systems and water treatment facilities. They can lessen flooding and soil erosion as well, Hickman said.

And, a properly placed rain garden mitigates or eliminates water entering basements, said Schwartz.

Parks and recreation Director/Assistant Township Manager Tim Denny said he views the rain garden project as “part of our mission.”

“We want to educate ourselves, our children and the community on how we can do a better job of understanding, protecting and preserving the natural world,” he said. “Green infrastructure is a key component of that.”

Haverford hopes to extend the public rain garden/free residential rain garden program in the future by eliciting additional funding, including business sponsors willing to “Adopt a Rain Garden.”

For more information on Haverford’s program, volunteering or adopting a rain garden, visit the parks and recreation department web page at www.haverfordtownship.com/parks, or email NSchmidt@havtwp.org.