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movement



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and it's tax-deductible.

*Wild Ones members often focus on prairies, woodlands, or our own backyards when we think about landscaping with native plants, even though our mission is to encourage the use of natives in all types of landscapes. This is an example of a project, still in the planning stages, which incorporates native plants into an urban streetscape as part of a most interesting and creative way to manage storm water run-off. Wild love to hear more about projects such as this one.*

## Growing Vine Street

by Maryann Whitman

**W**ith creativity that would challenge the best Rube Goldberg inventions, eight blocks of Vine Street, in the old Belltown section of Seattle, at the core of the Pacific Northwest's most densely populated neighborhood, is taking seriously its designation by the City of Seattle as a "Green Street." When Carolyn Geise, an architect and developer of a 1914 factory building on Vine Street, could not ascertain what this designation meant, she and her neighbors invented their own answers.

With Geise as chair of the Growing Vine Street Project's steering committee, the group considered the problems plaguing any urban environment — polluted water, polluted air, polluted soil — and found their solutions in the basic principles of ecology and natural processes. The Belltown P-Patch (a Seattle term for "community garden"), with its greenery and fanciful artwork set the tone for the group. The steering committee embarked on a course of grant writing, designing, and brainstorming that drew on the talents of every member. The goal was not to come up with a fixed design but rather to develop a design concept; a kit of parts, to guide development over the years and one that would permit individual property owners to be creative in the stewarding of their communal environment.

Vine Street is to be a laboratory and a celebration of water, bringing the serenity of nature to the heart of the city. Carlson Architects was hired as the architectural firm of record, bringing into the picture Peggy Gaynor, landscape architect and native plants person; Buster Simpson, an environmental artist of some renown; and planner Greg Waddell, as project manager and shepherd.

One of the design's principal features is the capture, detention, and biofiltration of rainwater, no easy feat in a setting of permeable and impermeable surfaces in all the wrong places. But the design did have one or two facts of nature working for it: storm water arrives on a roof of its own accord; and, water flows



*Downspouts become interesting architectural elements — and wetland "gardens," filtering rainwater while growing native plants*

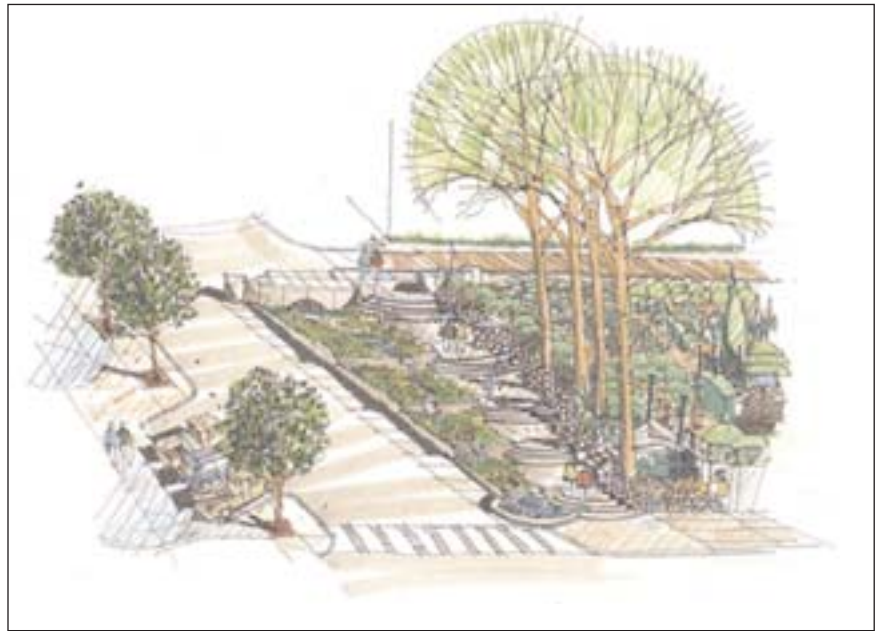
downhill. This eight-block section of Vine Street has plenty of roofs, and some wonderful slopes in its street surface, all leading to Elliott Bay and Puget Sound.

On the roof of Geise's development, the 81 Vine Building, is a "demonstration lab," aspects of which other owners along Vine Street may choose to copy. The storm water that falls on the roof is channeled through an artificial wetland contained in large, artistically dissected, galvanized culvert pipes, a Buster Simpson design. In the marshy medium that begins the filtration process grow blueberries, Oregon grape, and willows, all native to the Pacific Northwest.

The corrugated, galvanized downspout from the roof is designed to do more than simply carry the water to street level. It can best be described as being tied in bows, with protruding, upturned elbows here and there, out of which sprout more native plants. As the water obeys gravity, it is filtered further and oxygenated.

Another of Buster Simpson's creations is the "beckoning cistern" a complex of pipes designed to permit the controlled release of storm water into a runnel, which will be planted with native wetland species. The runnel or bio-swale will be arranged in a series of broad curves slowing the flow of water down the hill, through a series of planted basins, and drains. Each step will be another in the native plant bio-filtration process, and will represent another part of the natural habitat that will be created.

The master plan of "Growing Vine Street," as this project has been named, describes the process this way: "An ultimate goal of the runnel is to provide bio-treatment of storm water from the Vine Street 'watershed' to a degree that the storm water, under normal storm conditions, may be discharged directly into Elliott Bay rather than into the combined metro sewer system."



*An artist's rendering of what Vine Street could look like if Seattle, Washington's Vine Street project becomes reality. The project includes native plants and creative ways to manage storm water run-off.*

Geise, the main catalyst for community engagement in the project through its eight years of development, explains that the eventual lessening of the load on the metro sewage treatment plants will be one of the project's main benefits and won't require some important bureaucratic support. When the plan was first presented to the city in 1998, the design was completely alien to the departments responsible for developing the street right-of-way. The permitting process has been a slow one, but Geise seems to take it cheerfully in stride. She sees herself as the project's "continuing thread over time" and is eager to share credit with all the talented people who worked on it.

Since its publication, the Growing Vine Street design has drawn significant critical acclaim, including the 1999 Awhahnee Award from a coalition of agencies and organizations that advocate sustainable design and smart growth. ♻️

*Maryann is a member of the Oakland (MI) Chapter and serves on the national Board of Directors.*

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