

Golden Triangle BID

INNOVATION

The purpose of the project was to demonstrate to the local business and commercial real estate communities and the general public that retrofitting a highly visible public space in a built-out downtown with low impact development (LID) can provide environmental benefits to the city and simultaneously make the street more beautiful and valuable for property owners, restaurants and retail. With funding from government and the business community and the BID overseeing project management, the project also serves as a unique and innovative model of a public private partnership. Long-term maintenance is divided between the BID and adjacent properties.

The BID has been designing and installing LID in the neighborhood since 2012, but this project is considerably larger in scope, transforming two complete blocks with 11 bioretentions and 10 expanded tree boxes. They were installed on sidewalks in front of large office buildings in the central business district. The long-term environmental benefits are reduced local flooding (this area is nearly 100% impervious), additional habitat for wildlife with 33 new trees and 400+ native plants, improved local air quality, and reduced heat island impacts with the addition of shade trees to the streetscape. These bioretentions can treat up to 43,000 gallons of polluted stormwater per storm, which protects local waterways and reduces pressure on the city's aging sewer infrastructure. This being a high-volume pedestrian corridor (4,500 pedestrians per weekday, 6,000 workers in adjacent office buildings, and 17 restaurants), the educational signage reaches a significant audience on the value of low impact development.

OUTCOME

19th Street has been a busy corridor in the neighborhood for years, but it wasn't living up to its potential with overly wide and mostly concrete sidewalks and little green space. These conditions made it an ideal location for a large demonstration project to show the benefits of LID to property owners and managers and the general public. The project adds more than 4,500 square feet of new green space, significantly enhancing the scale and character of 19th Street. When combined with educational and artistic signage in the rain gardens, (co)branded street pole banners and waste receptacle plaques, and public art (to be installed in August), the totality of the project creates a cohesive, vibrant, and dynamic experience for restaurant-goers, passersby, and office workers. By enhancing the pedestrian experience on these two blocks, ultimately the project will benefit the local businesses and property owners by increasing patronage at these businesses.

The BID worked closely with property owners and managers to educate them on how LID functions and why it's important. Maintenance activities are divided between the property managers and the BID to ensure all groups have a stake in keeping the bioretentions functioning and beautiful. Continued demonstration and marketing of the aesthetic and environmental benefits and low maintenance cost advantages to our commercial real estate stakeholders will encourage them to include LID in future development projects and make LID in public space private-sector-funded. The BID's continuous demonstration and education efforts are how increased adoption of LID installation will be sustained.

EXECUTION

This well-planned and executed project was completed on schedule and under budget. The majority of the 5+ year timeline was spent building community and stakeholder support while taking advantage of grant and partnership opportunities. The last year and a half was spent on design and construction. As with most projects that take place in the public right-of-way, review by District agencies, local elected officials, and adjacent property owners/managers was a time-consuming and iterative process. The project highlights are outlined below:

1. Local technical assistance program grant to DC Office of Planning for pavement removal concept on 19th Street (February 2014)
2. Stakeholder outreach/education and fundraising (2014-2019)
3. BID applies to DOEE State Revolving Fund grant (November 2017 for Phase I and December 2018 for Phase II)

4. BID publishes RFP and awards contract for design and permitting (February 2018)
5. BID publishes RFP for construction (April 2019)
6. Construction begins (June 2019) and is completed (December 2019)

The project completion was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony for stakeholders/the public and luncheon for project partners and funders in December 2019. All of the installations exceed DDOT specifications for curbside bioretentions and tree boxes.

REPRESENTATION

The concept design phase included public and stakeholder meetings to garner broad support for the project. The project concept was presented to and approved by the local residents' commission with unanimous support. Being that the project would be installed in the central business district, the BID conducted an intentional and thorough outreach and education process for property owners and businesses on the many co-benefits of LID and how bioretentions function. Since maintenance is divided between the BID and adjacent property managers, the BID conducted "how to care for your rain garden" workshops and prepared complementary educational materials for them to reference.

Since this project involved highly technical and engineered designs that had to be compliant with strict District specifications, opportunities for purposeful inclusiveness in the design and construction phases were limited. Relevant DC government organizations, including departments of environment, transportation and planning, were involved as partners to review and provide comments/guidance related to the technical aspects of the project(s): designs, permits, and inspections. The Golden Triangle BID is the downtown organization where this project occurred.

REPLICATION

LID helps reverse environmental impacts by allowing stormwater to be retained on-site and infiltrated into the ground. Two major issues cities must take into account when considering where and how to implement LID are available funds and long-term maintenance responsibilities. City staff and funds are often stretched thin, and BIDs can be valuable partners to advance projects that otherwise may not be prioritized. This project serves as a model public private partnership for others looking to retrofit the built environment with LID at larger or smaller sizes. The BID worked closely with the commercial real estate community to educate them on the value of LID and to build consensus among them to provide support for project. Several of the business and adjacent property owners even provided significant financial investment toward the project. The BID and property managers divide maintenance activities to ensure all groups have a stake in keeping them functioning and beautiful. This process is replicable and scalable in DC's downtown or any other city to advance a portfolio of LID for the commercial real estate's and public's benefit.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

This project was complex and time-consuming to coordinate from start to finish, particularly due to its \$1 million+ price tag and it being in a busy public right-of-way. The major challenges included getting the project funded, negotiating design plans with stakeholders, and navigating the permit process for construction. The funding for design and construction came from a DC grant with a 45% match provided by the BID and several major donors. Due to existing positive relationships with property owners and effective communication, the BID was able to move the project forward with minimal design changes. The BID anticipated an iterative and time-consuming permit approval process, so a Preliminary Development Review Meeting (PDRM) was coordinated to allow city agency reviewers to pre-review the plans. The suggested changes from the PDRM were incorporated into the package submitted for permitting; this process reduced the number of revisions in the formal process, which reduced the permit approval timeline. These tactics paved the way for streamlining future LID retrofits, especially for BIDs and other similar entities. While a few novel solutions were employed, the project's ultimate success was dependent on BID staff being thoughtful, strategic and diligent with every step from concept to completion.