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Depave Paradise Green Communities Canada

Project Summary - Part I. Description

Participating organizations and geographic location of the project

Five communities in Ontario, Canada participated in Depave Paradise project, removing a total of over 5400 square feet of unwanted pavement by hand. Using prybars and shovels volunteers "got dirty" and liberated the soil beneath, replacing asphalt with trees, native shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers they planted themselves. Locations included:

- The Mulberry Waldorf School in Kingston, Ontario, led by Heartmakers Energy Cooperative
- a paved boulevard beside a grocery store parking lot in Toronto, Ontario, led by LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests)
- The school yard at St Augustine School in Hamilton, Ontario, led by Green Venture
- The rear parking lot of the Blue Mountain Arts Foundation in Collingwood, Ontario, led by Environment Network
- A paved boulevard beside a parking lot across from City Hall in North Bay, Ontario, led by Greening Nipissing

Background or problem statement

Conventional approaches to urban landscaping and storm water management result in polluted rivers and lakes. Urban areas are covered with hard surfaces (buildings, streets, parking lots, etc.) which disrupt the natural water cycle and prevent rain from soaking into the ground, thereby bypassing the natural filtration of soil and vegetation. When it rains, water picks up toxic substances from these hard surfaces, such as motor oil, tire residue, gasoline, cigarette butts, pet waste, and carries these unfiltered into the storm sewer system.

This affects water quality downstream by transporting heavy metals and other pollutants directly into lakes and rivers. Other negative consequences include urban flooding, erosion of shorelines and topsoil, and robbing groundwater aquifers of recharge capacity. Storm water also warms surface water thus increasing waterborne bacteria and threatening fragile aquatic life, while overflowing sewage treatment facilities allow untreated human waste to flow directly into surface water.

By ripping up asphalt and replacing it with soil and vegetation, Depave Paradise set out to reverse the proliferation of hard surfaces. The goal was to create new green spaces that would act as filters and sponges for polluted storm water/runoff and thus restore the natural hydrological cycle.

A one-paragraph general description of the project

Depave Paradise engaged five communities in a new approach to the urban landscape through the simple yet emotionally compelling act of "liberating the soil". Using pry bars and shovels volunteers removed parts of the old grey concrete jungle and made way for new green landscapes. The list of depaved sites includes two schools, two urban boulevards, and the parking lot of a local foundation for the arts.

Brief description of outcomes and follow-up

Hands-on depaving and planting events in the five participating communities engaged 126 community volunteers, and generated \$57,000 in value from local cash and in-kind contributions. Almost 500,000 litres of contaminated rainwater will be diverted from storm sewers annually, preventing about 128,000

grams of contaminants from reaching streams and rivers. These contaminants include lead, zinc, oil, grease, phosphorus, suspended solids and e-coli. Awareness was also raised significantly, with 90% of follow up survey participants reporting very high levels of awareness that:

- Rain flowing into sewers can carry significant amounts of motor oil, anti-freeze, and other pollutants directly to rivers and streams;
- Depaving helps keep streams clean by allowing contaminated rainwater to be filtered through soil; and
- Depaving helps trees and plants by letting rain reach their roots.

Photo galleries of the five projects can be viewed at www.depaveparadise.ca.

For more information contact Sharyn Inward, sharyn@greencommunitiescanada.org.

Project Summary - Part II. Analysis

Successes

As a community engagement project that elicits infectious enthusiasm, Depave Paradise is one of the most successful projects that Green Communities Canada has been involved with in recent years.

Feedback has included:

"This was a project that was enjoyed by everyone involved... It was an easy message to convey and to be able to beautify a space on top of that was a real bonus." Environment Network staff, Collingwood "It was a wonderful opportunity to work with the community and do something positive for my child's school."

Depave Paradise volunteer: "The project was VERY well organized and carried out. Very much looking forward to spring planting of our new greenspace". Depave Paradise volunteer "The project was very rewarding and I think there is a lot of interest for our community to do more projects of a similar nature"

Green Venture staff, Hamilton In terms of impacts on the local participants, follow up surveys revealed that 97% of Depave Paradise participants expressed an interest in being involved in future projects, and 41% indicated they would now consider doing depaving on properties they own or manage.

Another notable area of success was engagement and awareness among key decision makers (e.g. Mayors, City Councilors and Members of Parliament). For example in North Bay, Mayor Al McDonald stopped by as planting was going on, and posted a photo of the project on Facebook just a few minutes later: "I stopped by Greening Nipissing's project here in our city... which will create a garden with trees just across from City Hall.

Thank you ...Greening Nipissing for making our city even more special."

Media coverage was also a big success, with 34 media hits that included numerous TV spots, radio interviews and print and online media. (See Attachment 1 for highlights.).

Challenges

When developing our workplan, we had not anticipated the length of time that might be required to recruit potential host sites. We had originally anticipated that outreach would begin in the spring of 2012, and that all depaves and plantings would be completed by the fall of that year. But this schedule only proved to be viable in three of the five participating communities.

In Kingston, the first depave took place at the Mulberry Waldorf School in August. Toronto's then took place on National Tree Day, September 25 at a parking lot in the Junction neighborhood. And Hamilton's depave at St Augustine's school took place in October, 2012.

Delays in the other two communities were caused by complications with host sites. In Collingwood, the school they hoped to partner with was unable to move ahead due to a labor disruption. In North Bay, investigation of the site eventually revealed a concrete underlayment that would not be appropriate for depaving by hand. Both of these communities eventually found new partners to work with, but not in time for 2012 implementation.

Lessons Learned

Given the particular challenges that this project posed in terms of timely completion, we were extremely grateful to NAPECA and our other funders for the patience they displayed in extending the timelines for us to achieve our goals.

For future projects we have learned to build more flexibility into the timeline and workplan at the beginning of the process.

What next?

Green Communities Canada will be working with partners on five new Depave Paradise projects in 2014. Visit www.depaveparadise.ca or follow Depave Paradise on Facebook for news about these projects as they unfold.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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