



# Columbia Neighborhood Rain Garden Project

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Project Overview and Background

#### **Why is Bellingham Public Works installing rain gardens?**

Runoff from streets, rooftops, lawns, and parking lots carries pollution into lakes, streams, and Bellingham Bay. Polluted runoff harms fish, wildlife, and swimmers. Because of these impacts to water quality, the federal Clean Water Act and state regulations require that we take action to reduce pollution in runoff. Not only will engineered rain gardens improve water quality, they can help reduce stormwater infrastructure costs and beautify the neighborhood.

#### **Why in the Columbia Neighborhood, specifically?**

The Columbia Neighborhood's stormwater mains (pipes) are over 100 years old and in need of long term maintenance. This project will reduce maintenance needs for the currently outdated stormwater mains and improve the quality of water that leaves the neighborhood and flows into Bellingham Bay.

#### **What is the project overview?**

Bellingham Public Works, with funding assistance from the Department of Ecology, plans to install rain gardens along with other storm drainage improvements within a specific area of the Columbia Neighborhood. Final rain garden locations will be determined based on where they will provide the best water treatment benefit, where the adjacent landowner is willing to adopt the rain garden, and where there are not existing mature trees, parking, or other landowner improvements.

#### **What is a rain garden?**

A rain garden is a bowl-shaped garden with mulch, living soil, and specific plants designed to slow, filter and absorb polluted runoff from streets and yards. Rain gardens reduce flooding, protect natural habitat, clean our waterways, save money on pollution clean-up, and beautify neighborhoods. The rain gardens installed by Bellingham Public Works are engineered bio-infiltration facilities that meet the standards of the Department of Ecology's design manual. These facilities have operation, maintenance, and inspection requirements because they are part of a stormwater treatment and flow control system, and are held to a high standard of functionality.

### Project Design and Maintenance

#### **What plants are appropriate for the gardens?**

Bellingham Public Works uses plants that help clean stormwater and allow it to slowly seep into the ground. Plants also need to be easy to maintain and be able to withstand wet winters and dry summers to thrive in the unique growing conditions of the natural drainage system. Plants native to the Pacific Northwest are typically best, but some non-native plants can be included if they meet the above criteria (non-invasives only). Shorter plants are often used to ensure safety and visibility.



**Who will be responsible for future maintenance of the project?**

Bellingham Public Works is responsible for ensuring the proper function of the drainage systems. Maintenance activities may include pruning trees and shrubs, adding mulch, and clearing inlets and outlets.

Homeowners who volunteer to adopt a rain garden adjacent to their property will help with the aesthetic maintenance of the gardens, which may include weeding and trash removal.

**Impacts to Residents**

**Will this project cause me to lose parking space in front of my house?**

Bellingham Public Works knows that parking and access from the street to the sidewalk is very important to residents. No legal on-street parking is affected by the project.

**Environmental, Health, and Safety Impacts**

**Will there be standing water in the rain garden?**

Rain gardens are designed to temporarily hold rainwater while it slowly seeps into the ground. In most cases they are built to drain within a few hours. When there are back-to-back storms, or an unusually large storm, the water level in the rain gardens will rise and fall. This rising and falling water level is a sign that the rain gardens are functioning properly.

**What happens if the rain overflows the rain garden?**

The gardens will be designed so that any excess stormwater will bypass the rain garden and continue down the street gutter, or overflow directly into the storm main system.

**Stay in touch**

Bellingham Public Works is happy to answer questions and provide any information you need to be informed about this project and its impacts to you and your neighborhood.

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