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East Side group aims to recreate lost stream with rainwater runoff

Mount Pleasant students join in efforts

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Rita Wong, Shahira Sakiyama, and Naomi Steinberg.

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A community group wants a historic waterway in Mount Pleasant to flow again along St. George Street.

The St. George group and the Vancouver Society of Storytelling are holding a Creek Forum Nov. 5 with students from Mount Pleasant elementary and money from the Vancouver Foundation.

Their hope is to recreate the creek with rainwater runoff along St. George from Kingsway to East Fifth Avenue.

"How are we capturing [rain water] and dealing with it properly in a way that not only enhances our urban environment with green and blue spaces, increases biodiversity and actively contributes to Vancouver becoming one of the greenest cities in the world by 2020," said Shahira Sakiyama, community liaison for the St. George Rainway Project group.



She notes permeable surfaces, rain gardens or bioswales, such as grass channels akin to those in the former Olympic Village, could collect and filter rain water and take stress off aging sewer lines and the Iona Wastewater Treatment Plant. A biofiltration plant could be established on the False Creek Flats to clean storm water before it enters False Creek. Mount Pleasant's steep slopes could provide potential for micro hydropower.

The St. George Rainway group, an offshoot of the False Creek Watershed Society, and the storytelling society are collecting survey responses about possible designs for different blocks of St. George that they'll share Nov. 5. One concept is a woonerf, or a space shared by cars, cyclists and pedestrians, with no one dominant mode — something more common in Europe — with a rainway featuring a wooded boardwalk surrounded by greenery along the field at Mount Pleasant elementary, between Seventh and Eighth avenues.

St. George between Kingsway and 13th Avenue near Robson Park will be closed for the Nov. 5 event. That's the location of a sinkhole the city repeatedly paves over. That's where the St. George Rainway Project group wants the headwaters of the creek marked.

Sakiyama said architectural designer Bryn Davidson's thesis project from 2004 about St. George Creek was a finalist in a city design competition in 2004. Educator and poet Rita Wong discovered his project in 2009 and the pair organized an event with historian Bruce Macdonald in 2010 that spurred efforts to recreate the creek.

Elementary students mainly from Mount Pleasant have learned about streams, created related art projects and a community parade. The St. George Rainway project is meant to be a community-building project as much as it is an engineering project.

Sakiyama said the Nov. 5 event is being held on a weekday at Robson Park from 10:30 to 2 p.m. to make sure it's a child-inclusive and celebrates the work students have achieved. "Maybe when some of these [Mount Pleasant] students are going to say Emily Carr University of Art and Design at the new campus down there, they could be walking around these ideas that they helped bring to life when they were in fourth and fifth grade asking people in their housing places to sign this petition," she said.

So far, Sakiyama says, concerns have come from residents who face St. George between Sixth and Seventh avenues and are protective of their parking. She notes planning for a potential recreation of a creek needs to be done now before more hard surfaces are laid down in the redevelopment of Destination Auto near Robson Park, the Great Northern Way Campus and nearby residences and potential rapid transit to the UBC. For the more information about the Nov. 5 events or the surveys, see <u>vancouverstorytelling.org</u> (http://vancouverstorytelling.org).

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