



Ted Grabarz

Partnering to Sustain

City and its businesses unite to keep area clean, competitive

The city of Bridgeport, Conn., is set on maintaining its economic, environmental and social viability. Led by Mayor Bill Finch, the city has partnered with a local business consortium to implement a comprehensive sustainability strategy—dubbed BGreen 2020—over the next decade. Storm Water Solutions Managing Editor Caitlin Cunningham discussed the partnership and its storm water elements with Bridgeport public works and sustainability official Ted Grabarz.

Caitlin Cunningham: BGreen 2020 focuses on five areas: energy supply and demand; transportation and land use; open space and water quality; the green economy; and the amplification of sustainability benefits. How does storm water factor into this equation?

Ted Grabarz: Most of the downspouts on city buildings flow directly to storm drains and the city’s antiquated sewer system, which does not separate storm water from wastewater. We spend millions of dollars each year essentially cleaning rainwater and separating it from sewage sludge.

We’re encouraging residents to disconnect downspouts and install rain barrels to catch the water from their roofs. The Mayor’s Conservation Corps, a group of 20 young people who canvass door to door, have been raising awareness about recycling, energy conservation and storm water diversion as they visit residents throughout the city.

We are beginning to see these grassroots efforts pay off as residents ask for more information about how they can save money for themselves and for the city by diverting storm water.

Cunningham: What else is Bridgeport doing to address its storm water issues?

Grabarz: The city is addressing storm water issues at both ends of the pipe, so to speak. We are addressing the end of the pipe by the plan for a biomass

facility which would take the sludge that is generated in the primary treatment facility through a digestion process and convert it to electricity. At the origin of the pipe—the catch basins—we are reducing the flow into the line by “green” infrastructure solutions.

By selectively increasing our combined sewer overflow separation in high-impact areas of the city, we will use capital more wisely where engineered solutions are needed the most.

Lastly, we have thorough changes to our planning and zoning regulations that are assisting developers with incentives to reduce impermeable surface through PILOPS (payments in lieu of parking), which will facilitate smart growth opportunities and storm water regulations.

Cunningham: The overall sustainability plan is the result of a public-private partnership. What inspired this structure, and how is it working?

Grabarz: [The inspiration was] the recognition that in a market economy the government is a very small part of the solution—that it can steer the ship but can’t drive the ship. The larger segments of the economy, in particular the consumption and investment side, accounts for 80% of the economic benefit derived, and so that is where changes need to be ultimately instituted. The carbon footprint and current energy

use of the city are consistent with this empirical analysis.

Cunningham: What advice can you offer other municipalities for partnering to improve storm water practices?

Grabarz: Start with a triple bottom-line analysis, evaluating all social, environmental and economic aspects. Choose projects that synchronize other efforts in broad-based solutions, and seek out private-sector partners. **SWS**

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