

DNDA Wetlands and Stewardship Project

Announcing the Wetlands and Stewardship Project, a community effort spearheaded by the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association (DNDA) to acquire, restore and protect the natural wetlands located at 23rd Avenue SW & SW Findlay Street in West Seattle! Imagine how incredible it will feel to walk through the Wetlands and Stewardship Project in Delridge and pick produce that you, your neighbors, and your children helped to grow. DNDA has one year to utilize funds received from King County Green Grants, which has launched the project into full gear. Over the course of this year, DNDA plans to do the pre-development work for the project, hire a master planner (landscape architect), develop and finalize a work plan for 2016 and beyond, and determine the roles and responsibilities for each of our Project Partners. This incredible way of building social and environmental well-being is the ultimate goal of this initiative. Here are some of the ways we intend to achieve this:

- 1) By restoring, preserving, and protecting the natural wetland on the site

At 1 acre, the Wetlands and Stewardship Project will develop the largest permaculture food garden in Delridge. The wetlands, which make up 1/3 of the green space, will benefit the community by helping to purify stormwater before it enters Longfellow Creek. Simultaneously, it will benefit homeowners in the area as it will help to alleviate flooding of yards and driveways in our neighborhood. The gardens and open spaces, which make up 2/3 of the space, will ultimately include fruit and nut trees, berry shrubs, a children's teaching garden, an interactive educational kiosk, and permaculture demonstration garden beds.

The entire project will be built around the concepts of permaculture, an ecological design system, philosophy, and set of ethics and principles used to create perennial, self-sustaining landscapes and settlements that build ecological knowledge and skills in communities. The concept of a restored wetland in the midst of a "food forest" is a core concept of permaculture design, derived from wild food ecosystems, where land often becomes forest if left to its own devices. In a food forest, everything from the tree tops to the roots is edible or useful in some way. This land management system combines aspects of the native habitat with edible forest gardening.

- 2) By developing community stewards with K-8 STEM students, families, and faculty to ensure that local youth are learning environmental science, wetlands ecology, and applied mathematics

The project envisions partnering with students at the local neighborhood school, K-8 STEM at Louisa Boren, and closely linking classroom instruction with hands on field experience to educate youth in environmental science and stewardship of the wetland, while they plant vegetables, edible shrubs, and trees to benefit students, their families, and the community as a whole. The effort is to have youth become stewards of the environment, while they grow food that is nutritious. There is currently a commitment from four classrooms at K-8 STEM to become involved in this initiative by becoming stewards of the wetland and benefactors of the urban agriculture to be developed in the project.

- 3) By implementing a children's teaching garden and a larger community garden that will teach community members permaculture techniques and best practices for producing food in their own gardens

This project combines teaching opportunities with the development of a community education program. Delridge is best described as a "healthy food desert," and this reality has been reinforced by the continued inability of residents to buy fresh fruits and vegetables near their homes. Resources that families can routinely and consistently access for produce do not currently exist. The wetlands, stewardship, and food forest development gives individuals in the surrounding community a sense of purpose while sharing in a collective project.

DNDA and its project partners will work together with residents, teachers, students, and scores of volunteers in a big way to make this vision a reality. Free workshops will teach skills like fruit tree care, plant identification, bamboo fence building, container gardening, seed storage, and food

preservation (canning, pickling, drying, etc.). Detailed, multi-lingual signage will attempt to help visitors understand the purpose of each plant and the design of the site.

In 2015, DNDA secured funds and/or commitments of \$80,000 from two separate King County departments to acquire the site. DNDA is now actively pursuing programming funds to support the proposed steering committee, to advertise and promote the project, and to construct the program elements at the site. DNDA is developing plans and budgets to accomplish a vision of wetland restoration, re-forestation and expansion of the tree canopy, development of the children's teaching garden, and installation of permaculture garden beds on the remainder of the site.

The project will have highly skilled community support and access to a wealth of volunteers, and these volunteer work groups are scheduled to come together in the spring and summer of 2016 to provide the labor needed to begin to construct many of the program elements. Various groups have committed to assisting with enhancing the physical structure of the wetland itself, including ground elevation and other adjustments that are needed. Volunteers from Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities have pledged to provide their expertise to ensure that the resulting wetland will perform the functions needed to improve water quality entering Longfellow Creek. Nature Consortium will recruit volunteers to assist with planting large trees and conifers. Seattle Tilth will provide volunteers to assist with building the garden beds. K-8 STEM school teachers and administrators will lead the effort to recruit volunteers to plant the children's teaching garden.

Project Partners and respective links:

- Seattle Tilth
- Seattle Green Spaces Coalition
- Nature Consortium
- Seattle City Light
- K-8 STEM at Louisa Boren
- Solid Ground (Lettuce Link)
- DNDA

By centering food justice, community and environmental stewardship, community building, and movement through collaboration, the Wetlands and Stewardship Project with the development of the Food Forest is the start of a larger movement toward a more motivated, vibrant, and self-sustaining Seattle. Delridge is a healthy foods desert, and this project begins the work to conquer that condition and motivates the neighborhood to do more. Check out our blog to keep up with updates!