

Stormwater management a major concern on Capitol Highway project

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Stormwater management was on everyone's mind at the Southwest Capitol Highway subcommittee meeting in early February.

Record rainfall had recently fallen in the area causing widespread flooding, landslides, and road closures making this topic appropriate.

Residents who live along the stretch of Capitol Highway between Barbur Boulevard and Spring Garden Road have been afflicted with water run-off problems for years.

City project managers were on hand at the meeting to share stormwater and roadway plans for the proposed highway improvements.

Tim Kurtz, the Bureau of Environmental Services project manager, presented first.

"Water goes where it wants to,"

Kurtz told the 30 or so residents in the room, "such as ditches and culverts. In the case of Capitol Highway, it has a nice pavement but the side roads are not so good and many are unimproved."

"Water came into our guestroom," said Patti Waitman-Ingebretsen, who has lived along Capitol Highway for 40 years. "It then flooded through the wall into the family room. We had to move everything and unload book shelves."

Waitman-Ingebretsen said she and her husband were up until 2 a.m. sopping up over six gallons of water out of the rug pad alone.

"This has been the worst we've ever seen since living here," she said.

Recently there have been frequent road closures, overwhelmed storm drains, and water quality issues.

Kurtz explained that gray water needs to be mixed with lime which reduces acidity, improves fertility and oxygen levels, and acts as a filter.

"By tracking habitat, hydrology, sanitary overflows, and routes of conveyance," Kurtz explained, "we have a better idea on how to manage the water."

"The city now has a strict set of water management requirements," Kurtz continued. "This includes flow control, water quality drainage reserves, and green street details."

Streets that use vegetated facilities to manage stormwater runoff at its source are referred to as a "green street."

Kurtz added that the bureau also has to collaborate with

the drinking water unit, fire and rescue for emergency access, parks, and urban forestry.

"On top of it all," Kurtz said, "we have to coordinate with Oregon Department of Transportation, TriMet, and Metro who are planning the nearby light rail line."

Water management has many names. The most popular ones the city uses include basins, eco-roofs, green streets, planters, ponds, and swales.

The first Portland bioswale was built 20 years ago and is located at Southwest Palatine Hill Road and 47th Avenue. Now there are more than 1,800 bioswales. In 2004, the city adopted the Green Streets Program.

The project manager explained that Capitol Highway has extra special issues like unimproved rights of way, private yards, encroachments, trees, fences, and retaining walls.

"We also have to factor in infiltration, bedrock, clay, and topography," Kurtz went on. "Water also causes havoc when leaves clog storm drains and gravel remains in roadways."



City staff and neighbors inspected storm drains and pavement issues along Southwest Capitol Highway last summer. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)



A typical basin bioswale captures water at Southwest Barbur Boulevard and Capitol Hill Road. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Someone asked whether some of the basins holding water become a host for mosquitoes. Kurtz responded that the city has a great relationship with the county vector control.

"Typically, we don't have problems," Kurtz replied, "but if water remains for a while, it does. Mosquitoes love plants for shelter but actually people's

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