

Metro Blooms Year End Report 2019



Metro Blooms

Neighborhood Projects

Resilient Landscapes at Affordable Housing

Autumn Ridge:

- 1,681,391 gallons runoff*
- 9 lbs phosphorus*
- 2,635 lbs sediment*
- 12,816 square feet of native habitat, including 13 new trees*
- Over \$200,000 in grant funding
- 12 engagement events to date
- 55 resident and staff volunteers

*Refer to glossary on page 7



At Autumn Ridge Apartments, a 17-acre affordable housing community in Brooklyn Park, we have been working with residents to improve livability through outdoor spaces since 2017. The focus is on equitable engagement, clean water, pollinator habitat and creating a diverse tree canopy. Partners include the City of Brooklyn Park, Sherman Associates (property owner/ manager) and African Career, Education, Resource Inc (ACER). As a pilot for our equitable engagement framework and for working with affordable housing communities, Autumn Ridge is a valuable demonstration site.

ACER helped us to recruit resident project stewards to co-create an engagement plan. This included education workshops, design charrettes, clean water picnics, celebrations and planting events. We have engaged with over 300 residents to create a 5-year stormwater retrofit plan to improve water quality that also enhances livability through a new playground, trees, and beautiful gardens. So far, 10 raingardens and 1 pollinator planting have been installed in partnership with Blue Thumb Partner Nelco Landscaping. The project also spurred the City to develop a new grant program for similar efforts focused on resilient outdoor spaces of rental properties.

"I have been involved with this project since its initiation. It [led to] a lot of projects like the playground and gardens. It opened a door with management and talking about potential projects that could be done. There is definitely a change in attitude and behavior about the environment." Autumn Ridge Resident and Project Steward

Riverside Plaza:

- 1,400 square feet of native habitat
- 12 resident project stewards
- 6 engagement events (2018-2019)
- 60 resident and staff volunteers



Riverside Plaza is an iconic landmark in central Minneapolis. Owned and managed by Sherman Associates, it is home to over 5,000 residents, many of whom are immigrants. Metro Blooms began working with Riverside Plaza in 2018 following our success at Autumn Ridge.

Partnership with the Riverside Plaza Tenant Association and property managers has fostered engagement here. We partnered with 12 resident project stewards who provided design direction and feedback and led tabling events to gather feedback from the community. In 2019, this culminated in a new raingarden in one of the parking lots. More than 50 residents, many of them East Africans who spoke of working the land as farmers in their home country, helped plant the raingarden. Future plans include more raingarden installations and a small park.

Metro Blooms in 2019

Neighborhood Projects



Resilient Landscapes at Affordable Housing

Brooks Landing:

- 18 resident project stewards
- 5 engagement events
- \$68,000 in grant funds leveraged for 2020 installation



Brooks Landing in Brooklyn Park, our first senior affordable housing community, is one of the most engaged resident populations we have worked with. Eighteen resident project stewards attended leadership training and project development meetings in 2019. These stewards led engagement with their neighbors to co-create a landscape design that provided shade, outdoor seating, beautiful flowers, gardening opportunities and habitat that would bring birds, bees, and butterflies to the site. We used the concept design to secure grants from Shingle Creek Watershed, Brooklyn Park, and the MN Lawns to Legumes demonstration neighborhood program.

"Everything about these projects excites me - the community engagement, stormwater management, and beautifying the environment." John Kinara, with the City of Brooklyn Park

Brook Gardens:

- 5 resident project stewards
- 5 engagement events
- \$115,000 in grant funds leveraged for 2020 installation



Brook Gardens, Brooklyn Park, an apartment and townhome community, is filled with families, including many long-time residents dedicated to making their home a place to be proud of. Resident project stewards and the City of Brooklyn Park helped us host a clean water picnic in 2019 to find out how residents currently use, and how they want to use, their outdoor spaces. The resulting design focuses on raingardens, shade and nature play. Grassy hills, tree stumps for walking along and logs for climbing encourage interaction with nature, increasing creativity in play. Grants from the MN Lawns to Legumes demonstration neighborhood program, Brooklyn Park, and Hennepin County will support installation in 2020.

"People of color are [often in places] that are environmentally 'bad'. Environmental racism is a real thing and it affects people of color disproportionately. This project exposes this group of people and [makes] their living quarters 'better' which is something a lot of environmental work doesn't touch on." ACER Community Organizer

Ripley Gardens:

- 81,463 gallons runoff
- 1 lb phosphorus
- 206 lbs sediment
- 1,720 square feet of native habitat
- \$35,000 in grant funding
- 3 engagement events
- 20 resident and staff volunteers



Ripley Gardens is an affordable housing community in Minneapolis' Harrison Neighborhood. We worked with Ripley Gardens and Aeon, property owner/manager, to install clean water and habitat projects. These projects were funded through our Clean Water Fund grant to partner with commercial properties in Northside Minneapolis. Residents provided design feedback. Blue Thumb partner Ecoscapes installed the raingarden, and residents assisted with planting. We also trained the Ripley Gardens caretaker in sustainable landcare to ensure long-term function and beauty.

Resilient Neighborhoods

- 127 raingardens
- 3 native plantings
- 2,083,679 gallons runoff
- 5.26 lbs phosphorus
- 946 lbs sediment
- 19,846 square feet of native habitat
- 40 days of Conservation Corps crew training

For the 10th straight year, we worked with Twin Cities neighborhoods and cities to install raingardens, empowering residents to take action to protect clean water and create habitat in their yards. A total of 130 participants in St. Louis Park, Minnetonka, Plymouth and 10 Minneapolis neighborhoods participated in *Neighborhood of Raingardens* projects. We partner with the Conservation Corps of Minnesota through their Clean Water Funding to provide low cost raingarden installations in partnership with these communities. Since 2009, we've partnered to install more than 1,000 raingardens throughout the Twin Cities Metro.

Boulevard Bioswales

- 283,569 gallons runoff
- 1.1 lbs phosphorus
- 233 lbs sediment
- 6,052 square feet of native habitat
- 15 ash tree stumps removed
- 6 volunteer Block Captains
- 6 engagement events (block parties and National Night Out)
- Funding from City of Minneapolis

Following the 2017 pilot project, the City of Minneapolis began funding boulevard bioswales in 2019 as an equitable engagement project to reach environmental justice communities in North Minneapolis, empowering residents to protect clean water and plant for pollinators. Engagement starts with community organizations and block captains. Six block captains recruited 37 participants in Harrison, Near North, Willard Hay, and Jordan Neighborhoods. We worked with Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) to hire and train 2 local subcontractors, ensuring the clean water investment stayed in the community. We partnered with the Mississippi River Green Team and local volunteers to plant. This project aligns with the Minneapolis Park Board's ash tree removal plan, creating an opportunity to excavate boulevards into raingardens when ash trees are removed.



Above: Landscape Architect Rich Harrison training Northside contractors to install bioswales
Right: Boulevard volunteer planting and boulevard planted in 2018 blooming with wild strawberries.



We partnered with the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to evaluate this project through participant interviews, focus groups, and resident-led mind mapping. Key takeaways: natural capital is most desired, social capital is most present and communication and targeted outreach could be improved to increase buy-in and participant diversity.

Metro Blooms in 2019



Neighborhood Projects

Commercial Projects

- 8 properties
- 717,800 gallons runoff
- 3 lbs phosphorus
- 1,044 lbs sediment
- 11,031 square feet native habitat
- 4 community plantings
- 3 community outreach events
- 2 sustainable landcare trainings



Working with community partner grants through the Clean Water Fund, in partnership with Hennepin County, Mississippi Watershed and Bassett Creek Watershed, we developed projects that focused on bringing clean water investment to revitalize commercial corridors.

We partnered with Fair State Brewing, Islamic Cultural Community Center, and Recovery Bikes (our first green roof!) along Central Avenue, and Venture North Bike Shop and KNOCK Inc along Glenwood Avenue. We focused on partnerships with long-standing community assets and created outreach opportunities for owners and their clientele. Across these projects, we installed fescue boulevards, 9 raingardens, over 3,000 square feet of native plantings, and permeable pavement.

We also partnered with St. Anne's Place of Haven in North Minneapolis to install our first boulevard raingarden of 2019, and with Hope Academy and Northeast Middle School to rehabilitate non-functioning raingardens to capture more runoff and sediment.

Metro Blooms staff and Fair State Brewing Co. volunteers after planting Fair State's raingarden.

Maintenance and Installation

Maintenance

- 18 Minneapolis Public Schools
- 6 Minneapolis Public Housing
- 1 commercial (Sentyrz)
- 2 CommonBond sites

2019 marked the first year of our *Sustainable Landcare* crew, and our first year with a truck! We employed 3 youths through Minneapolis Step Up and 4 young adults pursuing careers in the environmental field. This green infrastructure job training crew provided hands-on experience and training. Crew members participated in our *Sustainable Landcare Training* program.

Installation

8 residential properties and 1 public park hired our crew to install raingardens and native plantings

Crew members had a busy first season. We continued our maintenance program with Minneapolis Public Schools and began working with Minneapolis Public Housing Authority to care for raingardens and landscaping at 6 of their sites. We also installed a number of landscapes our design team developed, including a wheelchair-accessible park raingarden for St. Anthony East.

Online Presence

Social Media

Facebook -1,883 likes, 244 posts
Instagram - 651 followers

We nearly doubled our Facebook posts from 2017 to 2019. A few posts related to pollinators and installations reached over 3,000 people! We are building our Instagram account.



Resilient Yard Workshops

- 14 *Creating your Resilient Yard*
- 7 *Turf Alternatives*
- 4 *Healthy Soils*

Workshop Attendance

- Twin Cities *Resilient Yards*: 451
- Twin Cities *Turf Alternatives*: 313
- Twin Cities *Healthy Soils*: 133
- Rochester *Resilient Yards*: 61

A total of 958 citizens attended statewide!



Workshop attendees learn how to plant for clean water, meet Blue Thumb partners who consult with them about their properties, and receive partners' marketing materials in workshop packets. We are constantly expanding our workshop offerings, with *Healthy Soils* as our newest addition in 2019. *Turf Alternatives* and *Creating your Resilient Yard* continued to be very popular with our audience.

Top motivations for installing raingardens include preventing water pollution and creating habitat. For *Turf Alternatives* participants, habitat was also the #1 motivator along with reducing dependence on irrigation, fossil fuels, and mowing. Of these attendees, 37% had installed or had begun to install turf alternatives by the fall, and 45% planned to do so soon.

End of Season Survey: 23% of attendees are working on a raingarden and 31% plan to do so in the near future; 32% had a site consultation with a Metro Blooms Landscape Designer.

Metro Blooms Landscape Designer Jennifer Moeller leads a *Resilient Yards* workshop in Minneapolis.

Professional Trainings

- St. Cloud (1): 20
- Detroit Lakes (1): 17

We partnered with the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for the second time in 2019 to lead professional trainings for soil and water conservation district staff in rural Minnesota. Trainings focused on site assessment, design, installation and care of raingardens.

Lawns to Legumes

7 train the trainer workshops

- Rochester (1): 31
- St. Cloud (1): 21
- Mankato (1): 20
- Twin Cities (4): 156

3 resident workshops

- Twin Cities (2): 101
- Rochester (1): 70

The MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) launched the *Lawns to Legumes* program in 2019 with funding from the MN Legislature. *Lawns to Legumes* is a nationally recognized program to replace residential turf with pollinator habitat. Blue Thumb, a program of Metro Blooms, is leading the cost share and education components of the program. In fall 2019, 228 conservation professionals and volunteers attended Train the Trainer workshops in the Twin Cities, Rochester, and Mankato. In the future, these "coaches" will assist residents with their pollinator habitat installations and ongoing care. Over 700 cost share grants will be awarded in 2020 to MN residents planting for pollinators.

We also held 3 resident workshops focused on the *Lawns to Legumes* program and pollinator habitat. These popular workshops will be continued and expanded to reach a broader audience in 2020.



Sustainable Landcare Training

- 93 project stewards and volunteers
- 204 youths and young adults
- 98 facility, maintenance staff or landscape contractors

395 total participants trained in 2019

- \$50,000 in grant funding from Hennepin County and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

395 youths, young adults, volunteers and contractors participated in 1 or more *Sustainable Landcare Training* courses focused on vegetation management, weed/native plant identification, and raingarden inspections. This was our third year developing the *Sustainable Landcare Training* program, and was the most successful in terms of training a variety of audiences.

As a result, we developed fee-for-service guidelines to continue offering this program in the future. We also developed a weed identification field guide to accompany the training, which we plan to make available to workshop and project participants in the future. Our crew members participated in our *Sustainable Landcare Training* program and at the end of the year, all 4 young adults had full-time employment in an environmental field.

MN State Fair

Blue Thumb volunteers counted 8,000 visitors who interacted with our exhibit.

Our volunteers had 4,000 conversations with attendees about the new *Lawns to Legumes* program and pollinator habitat.

bluethumb.org

Unique views: 60,725 (77% growth)

Partner finder visits increased by 30%. The Blue Thumb website was updated to feature the *Lawns to Legumes* program.

Social Media

Facebook - 1,619 likes, 92 posts

Twitter - 859 followers

Instagram - 430 followers

The most popular posts were about climate change, *Sustainable Landcare Training* and workshops. Blue Thumb Instagram account was launched.



Metro Blooms Landcare crew showing off their *Sustainable Landcare Training* certificates of completion

Metro Blooms in 2019

Glossary of Impact:



Why Plant for Clean Water? Polluted runoff is one of the top threats to clean water, according to the US EPA. Rainwater runoff sweeps pollutants like oil residue, sand, salt, grass clippings and fertilizer into storm drains that empty into lakes and streams. Raingardens and native plants capture runoff, soaking in and naturally cleaning and cooling the water before it enters our waterways.

Blue Thumb Partnership: A partnership of local governments, native plant nurseries, and landscape design+build contractors committed to planting for clean water and pollinators.

Equitable Engagement: The intentional participation of a community, emphasizing those most impacted or underserved (renters, low-income, people of color, or otherwise marginalized) by green infrastructure projects, and underrepresented in environmental improvements projects.

Runoff: Rain that falls onto and then runs off of surfaces like roads, roofs, and lawns. It picks up trash and other pollutants on its way to storm sewers that empty into lakes and rivers.

Raingarden: Bowl-shaped perennial garden that captures runoff. Rather than flowing into the storm sewer system, it soaks into the soil and is used by plants.

Native Plants: Plants indigenous to a given area that have evolved to thrive in that region's ecosystem. Native plants hold soil in place, provide food and habitat for wildlife, and are hardy.

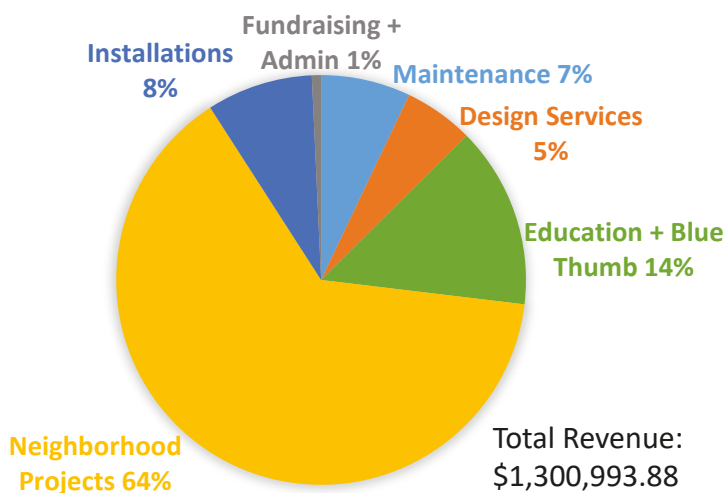
Phosphorus: A nutrient pollution. It leads to algae blooms in lakes and rivers which are harmful to animals and humans. One lb of phosphorus can create 500 lbs of algae.

Sediment: Soil particles that have detached from the land by erosion. Sediment decreases the quality of drinking water and harms aquatic habitat.

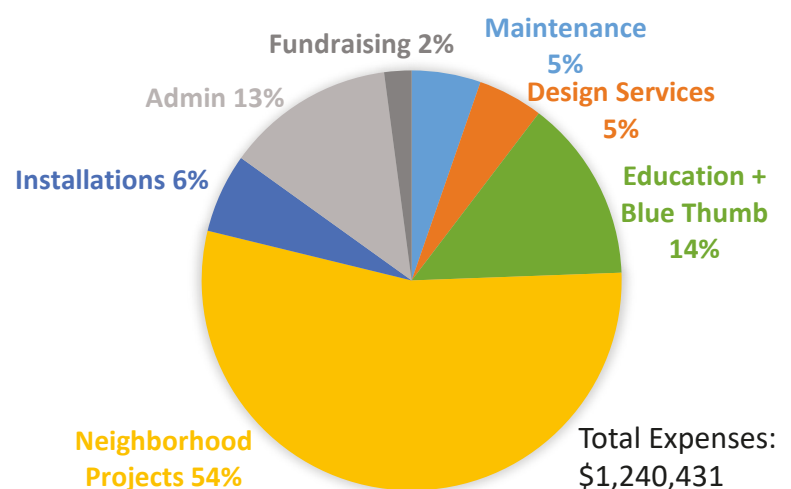


Metro Blooms Financials

Revenue by Program



Expense by Program



Metro Blooms in 2019



Grant Funding Provided By:

- Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission
- Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN
- Hennepin County Green Partners Grant Program
- Hennepin County Natural Resource Grants
- McKnight Foundation
- Minnesota Clean Water Fund
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Environmental Assistance Grant Program
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- Mortenson Family Foundation
- Shingle Creek Watershed Management Commission

Blue Thumb Partners

Anoka Conservation District, B.E. Landscape Designs, Carver County Watershed Management Organization, City of Elk River, City of Faribault, City of Minnetonka, City of Shoreview, City of St. Louis Park, Earth Wizards, Ecoscapes Sustainable Landscaping, Elm Creek Watershed Management Commission, Field Outdoor Spaces, Glacial Ridge Growers, Green Guilds, Inhabit, JL Theis, Landscape Alternatives, Landscape Direction, Living Sculpture Tree & Shrub Care, Mama Terra Gardens, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, Minnehaha Falls Landscaping, Minnesota Native Landscapes, MN Nice Gardens and Landscapes, Morning Dew Gardening, Morning Sky Greenery, Mother Earth Gardens, My Garden Goddess, Nelco Landscaping, Patio Town, Plaisted Companies, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District, Rice Creek Watershed District, Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District, Shingle Creek Watershed Management Commission, Studio Gro, Trio Landscaping, Twin Lake Design Group, Washington Conservation District, Water in Motion, West Mississippi Watershed Management Commission

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Bob Wolk
Carl Wolk



Metro Blooms in 2019



Mission: *Metro Blooms partners with communities to create resilient landscapes and foster clean watersheds, embracing the values of equity and inclusion to solve environmental challenges.*

Vision: *Engage with communities to create resilient landscapes*

Values: *Ecological Health -- Environmental Justice -- Education -- Inspiration
Community Engagement -- Partnership*

Staff:

Rebecca Rice - Executive Director
Laura Scholl - Associate Director
Rich Harrison - Director of Landscape Design
John Bly - Director of Blue Thumb Education Programs
Deborah Jopp - Office Manager
Aleli Balagtas - Communications Coordinator
Jennifer Ehlert - Graduate Landscape Architect
Mike Morrison - Landscape Designer + Crew Manager
Tara Hanlon-Nevins - Landscape Designer +
Sustainable Landcare Training Manager
Lacey Doucet-Campbell - Landscape Designer
Jennifer Moeller - Graduate Landscape Architect
Katy Thompson - Landscape Design Assistant
Will Franta - Crew Leader
Taj Pozzani, Amir Sheikhali, Patrick Starr, Maziere Flynn,
Nick Berg, Fernanda Ocasta-Tellez - Crew Members
James Wolfin - Project Manager
Yordanose Solomon - Equitable Engagement Manager
Lilah White - MN GreenCorps Member

Governance:

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Susan Nelson, Vice-Chair
Norm Greenberg, Treasurer
Joelle Van Gaalen, Secretary
Lois Eberhart
Johnn Kelly
Rachel Popken
Bridget Rau
Randy Rau
Bob Wolk

Blue Thumb Steering Committee Liaison

Beth Carreño

Staff celebrate the end of a successful first
Sustainable Landcare Crew season







Metro Blooms



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