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April 30 2009
Greening Newsletter

1. Tree Canopy

In 2009 The Reservoir Hill Improvement Council (RHIC), Baltimore City and volunteers will be planting 150 new trees along Reservoir Hill's streets! This is the result of many residents coming together to work with Christiana Usenza, RHIC's Environmental Projects Coordinator and to form the "Green Team. Together they began the process by conducting a street tree survey using the i-Tree program. RHIC organized this tree survey with the 12 volunteer residents that form the Green Team in May of 2008. They used the i-Tree program, hand-held PDA's, species identification books and good walking shoes to survey every street tree in Reservoir Hill, including its species, location, age, health, the size of the tree well, as well as those tree wells that are empty or have stumps that need to be removed. The survey was completed in July 2008. With this data RHIC and Parks & People Foundation created a map of all the empty tree wells, the dead trees and the stumps that need to be removed. RHIC and volunteer, Denys Davidson, analyzed this data and created a report on the state of our trees.

In August of 2008, RHIC's Environmental Projects Coordinator, Christiana Usenza, was able to use the data to send in requests to the City for all the dead trees and stumps to be removed. In September 2008, she met again with the Green Team to devise a plan to increase the tree canopy in accordance with the City of Baltimore's goal to double the tree canopy in 30 years.

Based on the plan and goals they came up with, In September of 2008, Christiana wrote a grant proposal for increasing the tree canopy to the Chesapeake Bay Trust. In December of 2008, RHIC was awarded the grant to plant 150 new street trees in 2009. This grant will help to expand the existing tree wells to city standards of at least 30 square feet, create new tree wells, amend the soil, educate and create awareness about the value of trees and how to properly maintain them, and provide residents with tools for maintenance, such as rain barrels, gator bags, buckets and hoses. Each member of the Green Team went door-to-door in January of 2009 to recruit people to maintain the new trees and have them sign maintenance agreements for new trees in the existing empty tree wells. The Green Team will also themselves maintain trees on their blocks. Christiana submitted 84 tree requests for the spring of 2009 planting to the Baltimore City Forestry Department. RHIC has hired a contractor to expand and amend the existing tree wells for the Spring planting.

On Earth Day, April 22, 2009, RHIC, and partner organization, Jones Falls Watershed Association, worked with the John Eager Howard Elementary School to plant 20 trees. They lead 40 volunteers from Morgan Stanley and KPMG LLP and 60 3rd, 4th and 5th graders in planting new trees at the school. They had the

adult volunteers plant 10 street trees while Christiana met the kids in the auditorium to teach them about Earth Day, Trees, the benefits of trees and how to plant and take care of a tree. She then led the children outside where they partnered up with each other and two adults to plant 10 trees in their school yard. WBALTV and The Baltimore Sun were both there to document the event. Both news sources aired videos of the project. The children had a lot of fun and seemed to want to continue to do more of this kind of work. This will hopefully engage children in becoming environmental stewards of their neighborhood and become role models for other children.

On May 3rd at the RHIC 4th Annual Green Fair, community members will gather together to plant 20 more street trees. The city will plant the 44 remaining trees.

In the Fall of 2009, RHIC will focus on creating brand new tree wells in areas that are lacking trees that also have committed residents that will take care of the trees for two years. Maintenance requires watering the tree with 20 gallons of water once a week from May until October. It also requires mulching the trees each Spring and Fall. The Green Team will help with amending soil for new trees, mulching new trees, planting trees, and administering gator bags throughout the community.

The Baltimore City Forestry Department has agreed to provide the trees, plant them, and hold a workshop on tree care for the residents in Reservoir Hill to attend. Jones Falls Watershed Association is going to host a workshop on building and installing rain barrels. Those residents that want a rain barrel will be assisted with installing it onto their home in order to collect rain water to water the trees for free and to also benefit the environment by naturally filtering out the rain water instead of collecting trash and grime into down storm drains and into the rivers. Hopefully the more the community takes ownership and pride in the trees and their surrounding environment and the more they understand the value and benefits of trees, the less vandalism will occur and the more healthy the community will become.

2. Kids on the Hill Environmental Program

RHIC has partnered with Kids on the Hill (an after school program for high school students that focuses on Art and Social Change) to create an Environmental Program. The environmental class focuses on topics such as environmental racism, pollution, trash, recycling, global warming, resource depletion, composting, gardening, tree planting, rain barrel making, watershed education and urban sustainability. The teens have thus far attended an Environmental film festival put together by the Jones Falls Watershed Association and the Herring Run Watershed Association, the Bioneers Conference held at MICA in Baltimore in November 2008. The RHIC Environmental Projects Coordinator, Christiana Usenza, taught a class called “Water, Trash and Our Bodies” about urban waste ending up in the streams, rivers, harbor and Chesapeake bay through storm water runoff. At the end of the

class, the students went outside to stencil drains. They later designed their own stencils with unique slogans telling people why they should not dump trash down storm drains. RHIC and Kids on the Hill have coordinated workshops for the students on composting, drain stenciling, recycling, green jobs, rain barrel making and painting, rain barrel installation, and wallet-making by reusing plastic bags. They have taken a canoe trip as well as hikes in the local parks, and visited nature centers to become more connected to and aware of the natural environment in their surrounding area.

In February 2009, the teens learned to make and administer rain barrels for row houses in Reservoir Hill. They will help to plant trees in the neighborhood as part of the RHIC Tree Canopy Plan. The students have even become teachers around these issues. In February, they also helped lead the RHIC composting workshop, taught by Michael Gaffney at the St. Francis Neighborhood Center for the larger community. In the future they will also help teach a rain barrel making workshop for the larger community. And will be available to assist residents in installing rain barrels onto their houses.

On March 21st, class took a trip to Annapolis to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Arthur Sherwood Program to tour the Chesapeake Bay by boat and canoe. This enabled them to see, understand and experience the fragile beauty that we need to continue to protect. The group saw a great Blue Heron eat a snake upon arrival which was very exciting. Many of the kids had never been on a boat before and were given the opportunity to drive the boat. We dredged for oyster and muscles. We caught plankton and herring. We saw hawks and eagles in their nests. This was a very exciting opportunity for the teens. We believe it will inspire them to keep teaching others the importance of minimizing our impact on the bay and even working to save it.

The students are currently creating and painting two signs to be placed in the center of our community with environmental messages. One has our slogan: "Pride in Reservoir Hill is Picking Up" and is about picking up trash and the other is about recycling. We will be unveiling the first sign at the Green Fair.

Upcoming plans for the class before the school year is out, is to install a rain barrel onto the side of the St. Francis Neighborhood Center to help Father Tom water his tree park. In culmination of the course the students will create an art project to serve as an educational tool for the rest of the urban community surrounding Reservoir Hill. And finally during this program we hope to illuminate for them many job possibilities and link some of the students to green jobs for the summer.

3. Community Gardens

Reservoir Hill is one of the Site Partners for the Community Greening Resource Network or *See Green*. Parks and People Foundation and Maryland Cooperative Extension have put together this network for all gardeners in Baltimore City. Members will now have a chance to pool together resources to make gardens more successful in Baltimore. Members will be able to attend workshops on gardening, and free seed-giveaways and to use tools from community tool sheds located across the city. There have been several workshops on gardens and vacant lot restoration held in Reservoir Hill in the winter and spring of 2009 through CGRN.

2009 is an exciting year for both of Reservoir Hill's community gardens, not only because it is the first spring where there is a Environmental Projects Coordinator at RHIC devoted to greening Reservoir Hill and to help them coordinate, but also because they have access to CGRN resources. The gardeners have many ambitious goals to revitalize the gardens this year. The Whitelock Community Garden is starting a program called the Soul School that will teach children every Saturday about organic gardening. The crops that the program produces will be donated to the John Eager Howard Recreation Center's afterschool cooking class, also for youth. It is working with many volunteers around the community to beautify the appearance of the garden.

RHIC is working with the Lennox Street Gardeners to revitalize the garden. The garden has experienced some vandalism that has discouraged gardeners overtime. The Environmental Projects Coordinator gathered the gardeners to discuss the challenges they are facing. The management had almost completely dissolved, but over the course of a few meetings at the RHIC offices with several of the remaining gardeners, we have mustered up a core of about 10 people not willing to give up on the garden. The main necessity for the garden to move forward is to build an eight-foot fence. It was originally designed with a four-foot fence designed to invite people into the garden. But, unfortunately, due to urban reality, this only attracted vandalism. RHIC is working with the Community Law Center to get permits and permission to finally build a tall and secure fence. The Madison Park North Apartments has also, very generously, offered to pay for the fencing. The gardeners are certain this will attract and retain gardeners in the community.

RHIC and Community Greening Resource Network (CGRN) coordinated a city-wide volunteer Garden Workday for both of Reservoir Hill's community gardens to prepare the gardens for the planting season, that was held on March 28th from 10am – 12pm. CGRN provided about 20 volunteers. RHIC coordinated the volunteers, the publicity and provided the tools and trash pick up. Prior to the event, RHIC went door to door with fliers inviting people to come help out and sign up for plots at the garden. We advertised the gardens as open to anyone in the community to come to sign up for a plot and to receive free seeds provided to the gardens at the CGRN free seed-giveaway day. Both gardens gained a handful

of new members that day and each had about 15 volunteers. They cleared and mulched the pathways, picked up trash, weeded plots, planted seeds and repaired their fences. The gardens look great! Christiana Usenza coordinated another workday on April 26th in the gardens with 20 volunteers from J-Serve and Jewish Volunteer Connection. The teens helped the garden managers complete the finishing touches to make the garden ready for the new planting season.

4. Recycling Initiative

RHIC is now a site through which Baltimore city residents can order recycling bins from the city. RHIC has organized a door-to-door campaign to educate Reservoir Hill residents about recycling. We have devised a flier that explains Baltimore's single-stream recycling system that was implemented early 2008. All recyclable items can now go in one bin to make it easier for residents. It all gets sorted out at the recycling center. We also let them know they can order bins through our office or use cardboard, paper bags or trash bins as long as they label it as "recycling." RHIC's Environmental Projects Coordinator and Associate Director attended the Baltimore City's Department of Public Works meeting on the new One Plus One proposal that may start on July 1st. This program will switch the city's waste collection system from two trash pick-ups a week and one recycling pick-up every other week, to one trash and one recycling pick-up per week. Baltimore city is the last city in the nation of its size to have two trash days a week. People that recycle are very excited to have this change because we all know what it is like to have recycling items piled up in the kitchen for two weeks waiting for recycling day. But residents who do not recycle are resistant. Many efforts will have to be made on the part of residents and organizations such as RHIC to educate people about recycling until then. And the city will need to increase the amount of citations they give to enforce that people dispose of trash properly in order for this switch to work. Benefits of switching to One Plus One are that it frees up a crew to devote their time to clean alleyways, and issue citations to people who are dumping or not leaving trash in trash bins. It also decreases the amount of waste that goes into landfills and incinerators. And it decreases the depletion of natural resources. We hope to double the amount of people who recycle in Reservoir Hill in 2009.

Annual Green Fair

Every year, RHIC has a Green Fair. This usually involves about five greening projects throughout the community and a central area with tables from eco friendly organizations and vendors. The RHIC Green Fair 2009 will be held on Sunday May 3rd 2009 from 10 -3 pm. We will have several projects.

- 1) RHIC will engage the community in planting 20 street trees as part of the Reservoir Hill Tree Canopy Project. Volunteers will receive a tree-planting training and will be placed in groups to plant a street tree in the central area of the community. Jones Falls Watershed Association and City Parks

and Recreation Dept are providing tools. The Forestry Department is providing the trees.

- 2) Flower Planting in flower pots on Chauncey Ave and Brooks Lane.
- 3) A group will clean up our central German Park
- 4) There will be a mulching project for the Park on the 2100 block of Mount Royal Terrace let by residents.

The weekend before the Green Fair, residents worked with a contractor to knock down the concrete wall that blocks German Park from our main corridor, Whitelock Ave and to open up the park to community to make it more user friendly. At 1:30 pm we will be celebrating all of these greening accomplishments in German Park with live MUSIC and FOOD until 3 pm.