

Norfolk Insider

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“What’s Going on at First and Norfolk Avenue?”



The grass is greener, or just as green, as the other side of the street at First Street and Norfolk Avenue. According to Sheila Schukei, human resources director for the City of Norfolk, the southwest corner of the Alco parking lot will soon be an oasis of green grass and flowers like that on the opposite side of Norfolk Avenue.

“The southeast corner at First and Norfolk was expanded years ago and improved during the renovation of HyVee East. The City of Norfolk owns the

majority of the land that is being converted to green space however a small land swap between the owner and the city allowed the parcel on the north side to closely mirror the south side in size,” Schukei said.

Schukei said there will eventually be three benches on the new green space. Walkways, a circular flower bed with linear flower beds on the borders will make up the space.

“It will be a nice visual welcome to all of the improvements in the downtown area. This space will be a good way to make a visual focal point to highlight our downtown business areas. We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from citizens regarding the flowers planted on public spaces around the city. This is another way to make our community welcoming and inviting,” Schukei said.

Benches on the south side of Norfolk Avenue were donated by the Ed Amen family in his memory. Other benches in Skyview Park and at the Norfolk Public Library have all been donated. Schukei said if anyone is interested in the opportunity to donate benches or other items to the new north green space area, they can contact the City at 844-2010.

“Rain Garden”



One inch of rainfall on an acre of land equals about 27,000 gallons of water. Most of that slips off the roofs and sidewalks and flows down into the city's storm drains. Rod Wilke is putting in a rain garden in his property at 2401 Hardison Drive to minimize that drain off.

“As a research educator (UNL Northeast Research and Extension Center), I work with farmers helping them to reduce runoff and improve water quality. Putting in a rain garden to retain the runoff on my property is a contribution that I can make to improve water quality,” Wilke said.

Wilke contacted Katie Pekarek, a member of the statewide UNL Stormwater Management Team to come up with a plan that would catch the water that drains off of his home and property through a drainage system. Draining tiles take the water from the drain spouts on the house to the water garden.

The rain garden is a holding spot for the water until it has time to soak into the ground. “A rain garden retains water and gives it a chance to infiltrate the ground. The roots of the plants in the garden, the soil and microbes treat the water naturally so that it's much cleaner when it reaches the groundwater,” Pekarek said.

The rain garden is contoured so that it contains the water for 12 to 24 hours. That is long enough for it to be absorbed into the ground but not long enough for it to be a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

“The plants in the rain garden are regionally adopted so that they can survive drought conditions and wet conditions. This is not a place where cattails would grow as it's only wet for a few hours after a rain,” Pekarek said. Black-eyed susans, yarrow, pestemon, grasses and sedge make up some of the plants in the garden.

The City of Norfolk teamed up with the UNL water management team in helping to install the rain garden.

“Storm water management is important as whatever water flows into the streets goes down the storm drains and directly into the Skyview Lake then on to the Elkhorn River. The water is not treated so any oil, pesticides and other contaminants that are in the stormwater goes into the lake or river. Rain gardens such as this one help reduce the amount of contaminants that enter the river stream,” City Stormwater Director Jim Koch said.

City of Norfolk workers helped build the contours of the rain garden and provided the compost and bark weed barrier for the garden. “I can't emphasize enough the amazing partnership we've had with the members of the community and the City of Norfolk in working on this project to improve water quality in the area,” Pekarek said.

“Water quality is an issue close to my heart. I hope my project encourages other people to consider using rain gardens and other practices to preserve our groundwater quality,” Wilke said.

On June 3, 2011 a Rain Garden Workshop will be held from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm at the Lifelong Learning Center. Wilke's rain garden will be used as a teaching tool for the workshop.

For more information or to register for the workshop, call 402-370-4040.

