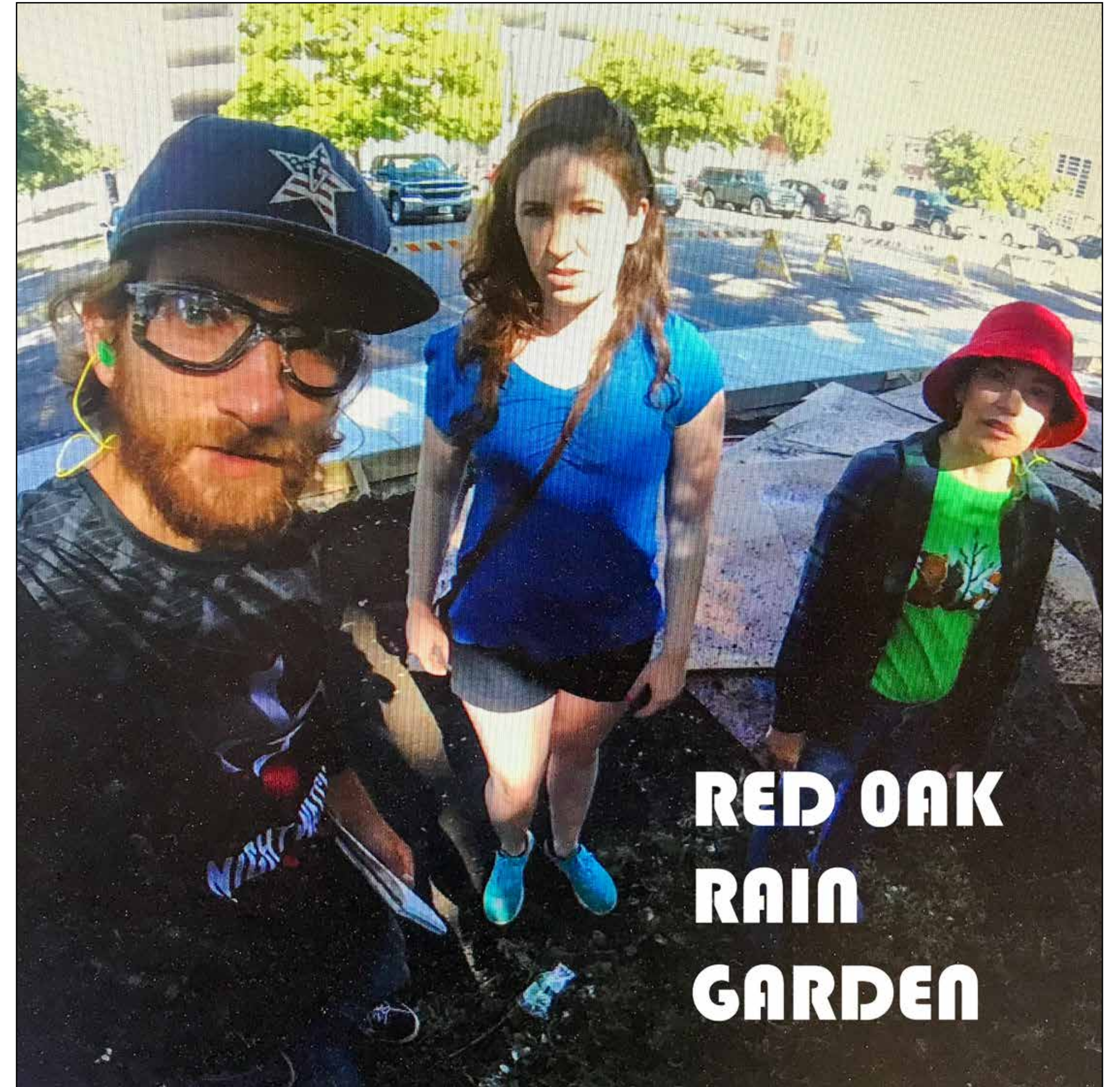


# Lessons Learned from the Community Listening Sessions

By: Tony Heath, P.E.

# About Me

- Bachelor of Engineering, Vanderbilt University, 2013
- Master of Urban Planning, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2019
- 7 years of experience with green infrastructure and low impact development site design
- Joined Illinois Extension in 2019 as part of Red Oak Rain Garden Project at the Urbana-Champaign campus



*Me and (part) of the Red Oak Rain Garden team.  
Check us out @raingardenuiuc and redoakraingarden.org*

# Need for this Study

- Green Infrastructure (GI) provides community benefits and can be a tool for social justice
- As GI becomes widespread the number of related jobs will continue to grow
- However, lack of institutional knowledge and formal guidance have led to a highly-localized approach

# Listening Session Overview

## 3 Main Questions:

1. How are communities using GI to address equity issues?
2. How are communities using GI as a means for workforce development?
3. What other barriers exist for communities to implement successful GI and how can we help address them?

18 listening sessions across 9 states representing more than 30 communities.



*Listening Session Locations*

# Green Infrastructure & Equity

- Stormwater management is an equity issue.
- Residents in flood prone areas are often **marginalized in other ways**
- GI has unique potential to **not only address flooding but also long-standing social inequities** such as pollution and lack of access to green space through derived co-benefits

# A Co-Benefit Mindset

“We never want to do anything for just one reason, we always look at the triple or quadruple bottom line.” -Lisa Sasso, Milwaukee MSD

- GI is a **tool for community improvement, not just stormwater management**
- Funding is tight. Ask what else this project can do and **get more for your money**
- Despite this potential, communities preferred technical approaches to avoid the appearance of bias but **technical approaches are not neutral**
- Institutional biases mean that if equity is not an explicit part of the decision-making process, projects will **continue to deepen existing inequities**
- **What are we hoping to achieve with this project? Who is this going to benefit?**

# Case Brief: Boulevard Bioswales, Minneapolis, MN

- City of Minneapolis partnered with Metro Blooms to engage residents and administer boulevard retrofits as part of ash tree replacement program in North Minneapolis
- Metro Blooms partnered with local organizations to establish relationships with community leaders and **give residents power in decision making process**
- City values and community values don't always align. **If we're going to ask people to care for these improvements we need to ensure that they're tangibly benefiting from them**
- Building trust took "lots of time and lots of talking"



# GI & Workforce Development

- Communities employ both **incidental** and **deliberate** approaches to workforce development (WD)
- **Incidental** WD is the natural diffusion of skills as practices becomes more widespread
- **Deliberate** WD is when communities take a programmatic approach to growing the industry



# Deliberate Workforce Development

## 3 Main Approaches:

1. Training & certification programs
2. Pathway to employment programs
3. GI incubators



# Workforce Development Challenges

- Existing programs have had **mixed results**
- Programs successfully disseminate skills but **fail to provide pathways to long-term GI careers**
- Lack of demand, seasonality, and low wages make GI installation an **unattractive career path**
- Move away from GI jobs and **focus on GI careers**

# Case Brief: Rainwise, Seattle, WA

- More than 1,700 installations since 2010
- Small, private contractors install & owner maintains
- SPU acts as facilitator



# Case Brief: Rainwise, Seattle, WA

- SPU holds 2, 8-hour trainings each year
- Required for partners but no certification offered
- Focus on technical skills



**RainWise**



**Seattle  
Public  
Utilities**



**King County**

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# Case Brief: Rainwise, Seattle, WA

- GI incubator program launching in 2021
- Aimed at under-represented communities
- 0-100 training with hard and soft skills training



**RainWise**



Seattle  
Public  
Utilities



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# Next Steps for Workforce Development

- How do we create green infrastructure careers, not just jobs?
- How do we reach underserved communities and grow the pool of green infrastructure contractors?

# Top 5 Lessons Learned & Best Practices

1. K.I.S.S.
2. Emphasize co-benefits
3. GI careers, not jobs
4. Education at every level
5. Build relationships & establish partnerships



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- Everyone who participated!



# Questions?

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