



A new Hampton Bays rain garden is an aesthetic and ecological win-win

The Hampton Bays Beautification Association, which adopted the post office years ago, is taking on another project at the site facing Ponquogue Avenue. After removing hedges and planting grass, adding a sprinkler system and brick walkway, and planting flowers, association president Susan von Freddi Gassman announced the addition of a rain garden.

“It is important to have ecosystems in the community — that you don’t just plop a garden somewhere, you try to make it sustainable and economically advantageous,” von Freddi Gassman said of the rain garden, which will replace an old and unused driveway. “It will also be a teaching thing — for students to come up to and learn about it.”

Rain gardens can reduce runoff by allowing the water to soak into the ground, as opposed to flowing into storm drains and surface waters which causes erosion, water pollution, flooding, and diminished groundwater.

Permaculturist Marc Fasanella from the Ecological Cultural Initiative, a local nonprofit that develops environmental programming and field projects, in collaboration with community groups, cultural institutions, and government, came up with the idea a few years back. Fasanella did not have the funds to make it happen, so von Freddi Gassman adopted the idea, and brought it to life with association funds and a grant from the Muriel F. Siebert Foundation.

According to Coastal Landscapes owner Daren Poles, climbing hydrangeas, wild bergamot, swamp milkweed, Northern blue flag, and echinacea magnus, among other native flowers and plants, will pack the rain garden. It will also attract butterflies and bees. According to Poles there will also be native stones, a recreation of a riverbed, and a bridge to cross over it. The rain garden will be revealed ahead of the eighth annual San Gennaro Feast of the Hamptons, which begins Saturday, September 29.

“We thought we could come up with some ideas to naturalize that area,” Poles said of the previous concrete slab. “I think the project adds interest and value downtown. We also wanted to leave a section of it closer to the road for artists to display their work.”

The HBBA president said being that the area is close to the train station along Good Ground Road, and across from the community center, she saw it as an important corner that needed aesthetic improvement. She said the project fits the goals of the association, which spends time planting flowers, hanging plants, fixing town pergolas, cleaning medians, and enhancing signage.

“It improves the look of Main Street, improves quality of life,” von Freddi Gassman said. “People like and respect what we do. This will leave us with one of the prettiest post offices on Long Island.”

Another environmentally-friendly addition was purchased by the association this year. New pots for hanging plants along Good Ground Road contain reservoirs that act as a water-saving feature. In the hot summer months when there’s little rain, the town waters the plants, which cost the HBBA \$10,000 a year. The association hopes this project will alleviate the stress placed on town water trucks.

“I grew up in Hampton Bays, so for me it’s personal,” von Freddi Gassman said. “To me it’s important that the main streets look good. We just want to make Hampton Bays look beautiful.”