



# YARD SMART RAIN REWARDS

## TECHNICAL & FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE PROPERTY IN KIRKLAND

Agreement # WQNEP-2017-KirkPW-00036

### PROGRAM TOOLKIT



Report Prepared By  
City of Kirkland  
Storm & Surface Water Division

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement PC-01J18101 to the Department of Ecology. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

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## Program Overview

The City of Kirkland conducts a technical and financial assistance program for Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) project installation on private properties in Kirkland, called *Yard Smart Rain Rewards*. The program was funded by a National Estuary Program grant administered by the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) from September 2018 to December 2021.

*Yard Smart Rain Rewards* focuses on improving water quality in local waterways through the implementation of GSI retrofit strategies on commercial, institutional, and residential properties in Kirkland. City of Kirkland staff provide technical assistance and a rebate program to encourage landowners to implement GSI retrofits to manage stormwater runoff on their property.

In 2018-2020, Yard Smart Rain Rewards focused on the Forbes Creek Watershed. City of Kirkland chose to focus the program in the Forbes Creek Watershed in order to build on stormwater retrofit planning efforts that were occurring there. In 2021, City of Kirkland transitioned Yard Smart Rain Rewards to a citywide program and created a standalone tree rebate program, acting on lessons learned in 2018-2020.

## Program Goals

The overall goals of the program are to:

- Reduce runoff volume entering Kirkland's waterways from private properties.
- Increase program participant awareness of the impact of their property on stormwater volume and what they can do to reduce that impact.

## Program Elements

Key program elements included:

- **Participant recruitment.** The target audience for this program was property owners whose properties were connected to the municipal stormwater system. Recruitment efforts included the use of social media posts, paid social media ads, Google ads, utility bill inserts, tabling at public events, promotion on City email listservs, and presentations at neighborhood association meetings.
- **Site assessment and report.** City of Kirkland staff conducted a site assessment with each Yard Smart Rain Rewards participant. During the visit, staff walked the participant's property with them and discussed potential stormwater management projects for their property. Following the visit, participants received a report summarizing the site assessment and project recommendations.
- **Project design and construction.** Program participants who chose to construct one of the recommended projects then designed and installed a project, either on their own or with the assistance of a contractor. City of Kirkland staff reviewed project design and construction and provided technical assistance as needed.
- **Project rebate.** Once projects were constructed and inspected by staff, participants were eligible to receive rebates for project costs – up to \$3,000 for single-family homes and up to \$6,000 for multi-family, non-profit and commercial properties.

A standalone tree planting rebate program was added in 2021 for property owners interested in just planting trees rather than a full Yard Smart Rain Rewards project. Participants were eligible to receive a rebate of \$150 per tree – up to \$500 per property.

## Program Implementation

### Participant Recruitment

City of Kirkland staff designed messaging, logos, and other branding elements to promote the program. These promotion and recruitment materials are included for reference in Appendix A.



*Yard Smart Rain Rewards program logo*

Recruitment occurs via multiple channels including:

- **News release.** A City of Kirkland news release about Yard Smart Rain Rewards was shared with local media at the beginning of the program.
- **Utility bill insert.** A program overview flyer was included in the City of Kirkland utility bill for 9,100 addresses in the Forbes Creek Watershed.
- **Google ads** with a focus on Kirkland zip codes and related search terms have been purchased throughout the program to drive traffic to the Yard Smart Rain Rewards program website.
- **City of Kirkland email newsletters.** Articles about the Yard Smart Rain Rewards program have been included in the *This Week in Kirkland* (3,993 subscribers) and *Kirkland Conserves* (1,227 subscribers) email newsletters.
- **Social media posts.** Posts regarding Yard Smart Rain Rewards have been included in both the City of Kirkland and Kirkland Conserves Facebook accounts. Targeted Facebook ads have also been purchased.
- **Tabling at public events.** Program staff tabled at the Kirkland Wednesday Market and at the Juanita Friday Market.
- **Presentations at neighborhood association meetings.** City of Kirkland staff have given a presentation about the Yard Smart Rain Rewards program at the neighborhood association meetings for Kirkland neighborhoods.
- **Yard signs.** Many program participants who installed projects agreed to post signs in their yards advertising their participation in Yard Smart Rain Rewards.

***Recruitment of multifamily, commercial, and non-profit properties.*** While very successful with residential properties, the outreach methods listed above had limited effectiveness with multifamily, commercial, and non-profit properties. For this reason, the City of Kirkland hired a contractor, BEA Environmental, to manage the recruitment of this specific audience. BEA Environmental reached out to these properties in the Forbes Creek Watershed via email, phone, and in-person visits.

Timing was a challenge for these recruitment efforts, as BEA Environmental was hired in February 2020, just prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and Shelter in Place order from the Washington Governor.

### Program Materials

A suite of resource and educational materials, listed below, were created to support the Yard Smart Rain Rewards program. These materials are included for reference in Appendix B.

- **Program web pages** serve as a hub for program participants, providing guidance on project steps and links to resources and program forms. They also provide information for property owners interested in learning about the program.
- **Fact sheets** provide a brief overview of the different types of rebate-eligible projects. Each page includes a description of the project type including benefits, site considerations and, criteria for rebate eligibility. Fact sheets were also created to describe the program rebate and eligibility to participants.
- **Installation guides** were created as resources for participants interested in installing projects themselves. The guides focus on three project types that do not require technical expertise - downspout disconnection, tree planting, and native landscaping.
- **Maintenance guides** were created to assist participants in the maintenance of their projects. These guides focus on the care and maintenance of cisterns, young trees, and native landscaping.
- **Contractor list** of potential landscape contractors who perform services eligible for the Yard Smart Rain Rewards program. The list is a starting reference and participants are not required to use a contractor from it.

## Site Assessments

After registering for the program, participants receive a one-hour site assessment with City of Kirkland staff and receive a folder containing the rebate fact sheet, project checklist fact sheet, project approval forms, contractor list, natural yard care resources, and information about the City's spill and flooding hotline.

During the assessment, staff walk a participant's property with them and discuss site conditions, the flow of stormwater on their property, and the potential for installing rebate-eligible stormwater solutions on their property. Information is collected by staff on a data collection form, included in Appendix C.

After their site assessment, participants receive a report with a summary of conditions on their property in the following categories:

- Site history
- Impervious surface
- Downspouts
- Topography
- Soil quality
- Vegetation
- Site constraints

The report also contains recommendations for Yard Smart Rain Rewards projects best suited to their property, as well as an aerial map of their property marked with existing conditions and features and suggested areas for recommended projects.

The report notes other beneficial stormwater practices and includes a link to the Project Approval Form. Following review for technical feasibility and accuracy by City of Kirkland staff, reports are emailed to program participants. Staff follows up with each participant individually to review recommendations and answer questions. A sample report is included in Appendix C.

## Rebates

Participants complete a Project Approval Form when they are ready to move forward with a project. The form lists all the requirements for each project type and includes spaces for participants to enter installer information (contractor or DIY), simple drawings, and cost estimates for their proposed project. Once a participant submits this form, City of Kirkland staff reviews and approves the project or works with the participant to address any issues.

Participants then work with contractors to complete the project – or complete it themselves – and submit a Project Rebate Form, W-9 form, maintenance agreement, itemized invoices and receipts, and proof of payment. Staff also conduct an inspection to verify that projects are installed in accordance with approved plan. Program forms are included for reference in Appendix D.

Rebate structure is described in the tables below:

	Single-family residential	Multifamily, commercial	Non-profit
<b>Percent rebate</b>	75% project costs for work done by contractors. 100% project costs for DIY.	75% project costs	100% of project costs
<b>Total max rebate</b>	\$3,000/parcel	\$6,000/parcel	\$6,000/parcel
<b>Native landscaping</b>	Min 400 sf area converted	Min 800 sf area converted	Min 800 sf area converted
<b>Rain gardens</b>	Min 400 sf contributing area	Min 800 sf contributing area	Min 800 sf contributing area
<b>Cisterns</b>	Min 400 sf contributing area, 200 gal	Min 800 sf contributing area, 400 gal	Min 800 sf contributing area, 400 gal

Simple, stand-alone projects were rebated on a per item basis (rather than a percentage) to streamline the program and simplify the rebate process for program participants and City of Kirkland staff.

This rebate structure is described in the table below:

	Single-family residential	Non-profit, multifamily, commercial
<b>Downspout disconnections</b>	\$50 rebate per downspout	\$50 rebate per downspout
<b>Tree planting</b>	Up to \$150 rebate per tree, up to \$500 per property (cost of tree & mulch)	Up to \$150 rebate per tree, up to \$500 per property (cost of tree & mulch)



## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The Yard Smart Rain Rewards program was intended to both achieve program outcomes and to generate lessons learned for future phases of the program. The following are lessons learned and recommendations for future program implementation.

### Recruitment and Outreach

**Refine outreach and advertising strategy.** Through successful outreach efforts, demand for site assessments quickly outpaced staff availability. For future outreach and participant recruitment efforts, consider a strategic release of outreach materials over a longer timeframe, and as needed, rather than pushing out all recruitment materials at the same time. Implement timeline and/or calendar to plan outreach and track audience responses.

#### Create outreach strategy specific to business and non-profit sectors

- *Refine marketing approach.* Decision makers for the commercial sector are usually either the property owners or the property management firms authorized by the owner. Send marketing materials to listed property owners, in conjunction with direct outreach to the businesses. A two-tiered approach focused on engaging both the business and the property owner would be ideal for various reasons, including sharing of necessary contact information, locating the appropriate decision makers, and more.
- *Refine timing of outreach.* The primary challenge to participation of multifamily properties was timing and annual budgets for the properties. According to 7 multifamily properties interviewed by BEA Environmental, their property improvement budgets for the following year are developed in late summer/fall and submitted in October. For these types of facilities to participate in future projects, outreach to these facilities should begin at least the summer prior to the timeframe for project installation so property managers can include costs in the following year's improvement plan and budget.

### Program Resource Materials

In surveys and conversations with City of Kirkland staff, participants have expressed a need for additional resource materials regarding native landscaping. The average property owner is unfamiliar with native plant species and where to source them.

**Create resources or collect existing resources to aid participants** with these challenges. Resource materials could include:

- lists of native plant appropriate for suburban yards
- example planting plans for a variety of yard conditions (sun/shade, wet/dry)
- lists of nurseries and plant sales that specialize in native plants

### Site Assessments

The average time between a site assessment and the delivery of the site visit report was 20 days in 2021. Site visit reports are reviewed by another Education & Outreach Specialist and a Surface Water Engineer for technical accuracy/feasibility. This delay in delivery of the site visit report results in a missed opportunity to capitalize on the excitement generated during the site visit.



Moving forward, Kirkland will pilot a new method that moves the review by the Surface Water Engineer until the project approval stage, which will likely decrease the turnaround time to 3 days or less.

## **Project Design and Installation**

Participants in 2021 reported significant difficulty in securing a contractor for their Yard Smart projects. Most reported that contractors never returned their calls. When a bid was provided, costs were substantially higher than what participants expected and rebates were not enough to offset the total cost.

Future programs might consider adding more support for do-it-yourself (DIY) participants, including workshops for plant selection, site design, material sourcing, etc.

## **Rebates**

**Continue offering 100% rebate option for participants who choose to install project themselves instead of hiring a contractor.** This option reduces financial barriers to participation.

## **Timeline**

While this current program faced numerous delays and challenges due to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, timing will always be a challenge with this type of program. Participants will always have competing priorities and landscape contractors will always be hard to schedule.

**Consider scheduling multiple check-in points with program participants.** These could include:

- Newsletter-format emails to all participants with project tips, plant sale information, and timeline reminders.
- Quarterly phone call check-ins.
- Skill-building workshops for program participants, where staff can assist with project planning and design elements.

## **Appendices**

- A. Overall Project Accomplishments**
- B. Recruitment Materials**
- C. Program Materials**
- D. Site Assessment Materials**
- E. Program Forms**