

The new Lincoln Street Church rain garden

By John Shorb, architect

The congregation at Lincoln Street United Methodist Church recently completed a redesign of the south-facing landscape at 52nd and Lincoln. Overgrown plants and a sun-bleached sign necessitated a face lift. The church seized the opportunity to manifest shared attitudes about both community and the environment.

I responded to a modest request from pastors Tim and Elizabeth Winslea for thoughts on a new sign and garden with an integrated rain garden concept featuring the following elements:

- disconnect all the downspouts on the south side of the church (draining more than 50 percent of the roof area)
- remove two large areas of concrete, replacing one with a pervious patio and another with a new garden
- construct a landscaped rain garden, fed by river rock channels, to infiltrate roof runoff
- locate a new sign centered on the church steeple.

The church members responded enthusiastically in favor of the project, and a number of people stepped forward to help design it. Josh Lighthipe, a civil engineer, conducted an infiltration test on site and accordingly sized the rain garden basin. Krissy Forness of Fusion Landscape Design, a neighbor, designed the planting scheme to provide four-season color while carefully selecting plants to match the moisture level of their location. For example, native red twig dogwoods are located in the rain garden basin, where their roots will remain wet much of the year and dry out over the summer.

An inherent problem this project aimed to solve was flooding in the adjacent basement restroom. River rock trenches lined with heavy gauge plastic were used to move the water away from the building and foundation (the minimum recommended distance is 10 feet) to infiltrate in the rain garden. In order to channel the rainwater across two sidewalks, the concrete was cut and removed, a trench dug, a new concrete channel poured, and salvaged City of Portland cast iron water meter covers used as a bridge. Volcanic boulders, removed from a church member's landscape, reflect the geological history of the Mt. Tabor location and anchor the slopes of the rain garden.



To raise funds for the project and honor the many past and current church members, the church sold personalized concrete pavers for the patio. Over 50 families supported the project by buying pavers. A reclaimed wood bench is planned for the patio, where passersby will be able to stop, rest, and visit with neighbors.

All the work was done over the past three months by church members and community volunteers in a series of Saturday work parties. To complete the plan, Kevin Baker, the project manager, designed and built a new sign stand. Three highlighted words on the sign, "search, create, embrace" express strong beliefs of the church that are now present physically in a beautiful and functional rain garden.



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