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With help, H Street going green

May 15, 2009

By Andrea Swalec

Voice Correspondent

Sara Loveland, executive director of the urban environmental organization DC Greenworks, has a fresh plan for H Street NE: installing tree boxes made of recycled material.

The initiative is one component of the 18-month-long H Street Grows Green initiative that Loveland's organization — along with its partners Green Living Consulting and H Street Main Street — launched in late April. Loveland said the tree boxes will help mitigate the impacts of work on the street, including installation of streetcars, which is expected to extend through 2014.

"We're under construction, still under construction, still under construction, and this is one way we're going to express our commitment to the neighborhood," she said.

Another part of Greenworks' project is the installation of 11 green roofs along the corridor, an effort the White House has recognized. An online video posted to the White House Web site on April 21, Earth Day, features DC Greenworks staff as they installed a green roof at their headquarters at 1341 H St. NE.

Coinciding with green agendas announced by the District and the White House, the H Street Grows Green project is working to catalyze the neighborhood's adoption of green practices.

The objective of the project is to help make the corridor "environmentally sustainable and economically successful," said Adrienne Spahr, chief executive officer of the Hill-based Green Living Consulting, which advises businesses and households on how to achieve green goals.

DC Greenworks' Web site expresses high hopes for the impact of the project: "H Street NE has an opportunity to create the greenest Main Street in the District of Columbia, and possibly the country."

More than 50 H Street business owners, property owners and government officials recently attended a kickoff reception for the project at the Bearden Arts Building, DC Greenworks' headquarters. The goal, Loveland said, was for business owners to meet each other and talk about the ecologically friendly practices they can adopt on the corridor.

Despite the impacts of major construction and a down economy, "initial interest is brewing" among local businesses, Spahr said.

"It's great to see a project like this stay afloat in these times," said Eric Emerick, who is taking initial steps to open a bar on H Street.

The project is also aiming to have a social impact by mobilizing volunteers and training "green-collar apprentices" who will help install the green roofs. Green roofs are low-maintenance rooftop garden installations that decrease buildings' operating expenses and increase their life spans, as well as reduce rainwater runoff, thus cutting down pollution of waterways.

The Deputy Mayor's Office for Planning and Economic Development awarded DC Greenworks a \$150,000 grant for its green roof program through the Neighborhood Investment Fund. The grant will fund about half of the cost of installing each green roof, at a rate of \$9 per square foot, up to a total project subsidy of \$9,000, Loveland said. Businesses will also receive free design, labor and project management services.

Some H Street shop owners have already begun to "green" their businesses. SOVA Espresso & Wine's owner, Frank Hankins — a Green Living Consulting client considering installing a green roof at his 1359 H St. NE shop — started by using recycled and biodegradable plates and napkins and energy-efficient light bulbs. As for the financial benefits of his choices, he said it's too soon to tell.

"There are some costs upfront and savings later. From a pure financial savings standpoint, it will take a couple of years to recoup the investment. From the other perspective, this is more eco-friendly," he said.

Casey Taylor, co-owner of Taylor Gourmet, 1116 H St. NE, said he expects to see savings once the

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For more established businesses on H Street, adopting greener practices is "an educational process," according to H Street Main Street executive director Anwar Saleem. He said he began reaching out to H Street businesses about environmentally friendly choices a few years ago. He recommended trash compactors and energy-efficient light bulbs.

"Businesses can work incrementally," he said. "And the impact will go from one building to another."

Saleem thinks businesses will invest in green roofs to reap long-term benefits: "People will do it, especially if their roof is falling down. They'll even take out loans to do it."

H Street Grows Green is currently conducting a survey to gauge businesses' needs. Contact Spahr at rsvp@greenlivingconsulting.com or 202-518-6195.

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