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DEP and NYCHA Unveil Green Infrastructure Project at the Bronx River Houses

Several Green Installations Will Capture Up to 32,000 Gallons of Stormwater and Help Avoid Combined Sewer Overflows into the Bronx River Each Time it Rains

Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland and New York City Housing Authority Chairman John B. Rhea today announced the completion of a \$1 million green infrastructure pilot project at the Bronx River Houses. The joint project between DEP and NYCHA beautifies the residential complex while reducing pollution, and includes a blue roof, rain gardens, stormwater chambers and a perforated pipe system to slow and capture stormwater runoff to avoid combined sewer overflows into the Bronx River. During storms, the sewer system often reaches capacity and must discharge a mix of stormwater and wastewater—called a combined sewer overflow, or CSO—into New York City’s surrounding waterways. Since less water will enter the sewer system since it is absorbed on site, the project also helps minimize local street flooding and sewer backups. The Bronx River Houses is in the watershed of the Bronx River, one of the water bodies with impaired water quality that will be the focus of clean-up efforts. This green infrastructure project alone will capture more than 32,000 gallons of stormwater during a single rain event. The project is part of the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan, unveiled by Mayor Bloomberg in 2010, to drastically cut combined sewer overflows over the next 20 years through a mix of green infrastructure and more traditional stormwater capture projects.

“DEP is moving forward with cutting-edge green infrastructure projects that capture and treat stormwater runoff at the source to reduce combined sewer overflows,” said Commissioner Strickland. “This project will benefit not only the residents of the Bronx River Houses, who are enjoying a beautiful landscape, but also the environmental conditions in the Bronx River, which will see significantly fewer combined sewer overflows during an average rainstorm. New York Harbor and waterways like the Bronx River are starting to recover and innovative community projects are a key part of our strategy for the next few decades as we focus on the connection between the land and water quality. I thank NYCHA and the residents of the Bronx River Houses for partnering with us to keep our waterways clean.”

“At NYCHA, we believe that promoting environmental sustainability will help preserve public housing for future generations,” said Chairman Rhea. “This green infrastructure project at Bronx River Houses is an example of how NYCHA and its residents, together with our partners at DEP, can work with Mother Nature to make our developments more sustainable.”

“NYCHA is committed to contributing to the sustainability and quality of NYC’s water system, a key aspect of our Green Agenda,” said NYCHA Commissioner and Environmental Coordinator Margarita López. “NYCHA is excited to move forward with this agenda,

contributing to making New York City greener and greater with strategic partnerships like DEP, along with the full engagement of public housing residents.”

The Bronx River Houses pilot project has several distinct elements. First, landscaped areas have been converted into rain gardens where the water is infiltrated and cleaned in shallow basins or swales that can store more than 18,000 gallons of rainwater from surrounding grassed and paved areas. Basins and swales contain a mix of engineered sand and stone that provide temporary storage space for stormwater before the water is naturally absorbed by the ground instead of entering the sewer system. Second, a stormwater chamber and perforated pipe system were installed beneath two different parking lots to collect and hold stormwater so it can be slowly released to the city’s sewer system or infiltrate into the ground. The chambers have the capacity to collect up to 5,000 gallons of runoff and the perforated pipes can collect over 8,000 gallons. Third, a blue roof will collect up to 750 gallons of stormwater in roughly 180 small trays installed on the top of the community center. Stormwater stored in the trays evaporates into the air or flows slowly into the roof drain. DEP will maintain the pilot project, track performance and provide data reports for two years.

DEP and the New York City Housing Authority carried out a strategic partnership with full engagement of the residents of the Bronx River Houses. In the summer of 2010, DEP and NYCHA project managers met with the residents, local groups, Community Board 6 and the Borough President’s Office and informed them about the benefits of this project and also included the residents’ feedback into the green infrastructure plan built in the complex. Subsequent surveys of residents have shown that they enjoy the rain gardens and other elements of the project and believe that it provides overall benefits to the Bronx River Houses.

The New York City Housing Authority provides decent and affordable housing in a safe and secure living environment for low and moderate-income residents throughout the five boroughs. To fulfill this mission, NYCHA must preserve its aging housing stock through timely maintenance and modernization of its developments. NYCHA also administers a citywide Section 8 Leased Housing Program in rental apartments. Simultaneously, it works to enhance the quality of life at NYCHA by offering its residents opportunities to participate in a multitude of community, educational and recreational programs, as well as job readiness and training initiatives.

The NYC Green Infrastructure Plan proposed a total investment of \$2.4 billion over the next 20 years in green infrastructure to improve harbor water quality by capturing and retaining stormwater runoff before it enters the sewer system. Of the \$2.4 billion, \$900 million is expected to be funded through regulations on new developments. DEP has dedicated \$735 million in its most recent 10-year capital plan to building green infrastructure. Most green infrastructure includes vegetated features such as bioswales and green roofs, or structural aspects such as porous pavement, both of which can absorb and retain stormwater.

DEP manages the city’s water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,400 miles of sewer lines and 95 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP employs nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. DEP has a robust

capital program, with a planned \$13.2 billion in investments over the next 10 years. For more information, visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater, or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/nycwater.

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Bronx River Houses

Rain Gardens



Blue Roof

