

MEMORANDUM

To: District Department of Energy and Environment
From: Nspiregreen LLC
Date: August 14, 2018

RE: RiverSmart Homes Focus Group Findings

Nspiregreen organized two focus group meetings regarding the RiverSmart Homes program at the Capitol View Library in Ward 7 and Bellevue Library in Ward 8. The purpose of the meetings was to find out how homeowners in Ward 7 and 8 best receive information about District based programs. Homeowners were made aware of the meeting via a MailChimp email blast, the NextDoor App and their Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs). Although there were a number of residents who wanted to participate in the focus groups, the team initially limited participation to people who were unaware of the program or who had signed up but not completed the process. There were a few homeowners who had been through the entire process and were enjoying the benefits of the RiverSmart Homes program. Homeowners were asked questions that gauged their knowledge of the RiverSmart Homes program, their willingness to join the program, and the best methods to reach people in their community to interest them in participating in the program. All focus group participants were awarded a \$15 Home Depot gift card as a token of appreciation for their time and feedback.

Focus Group Findings

Homeowners in Ward 7 and 8 are interested in participating in the RiverSmart Homes program in order to mitigate their storm water issues and beautify their property. With examples in their neighborhood and hearing satisfaction with the final implementation by those who have participated, homeowners recognize the benefits and value of the program for themselves and the environment and are eager to sign up.

Participants of the program discussed having knowledgeable auditors and the ability to customize design options. Most homeowners understood they were

responsible for their own maintenance and appreciated beautiful, low maintenance green infrastructure options.

As more homeowners participate in the program, they are sharing their experiences through traditional forms of communication such as discussions with friends, family, and neighbors. For example, word of mouth from friends, family, neighbors, and community listservs either encouraged other homeowners to seek more information and/or to sign up or discouraged them from participating. However, those who were unaware of the program or who had not signed up expressed that making the information easily accessible and available would encourage them to inquire and participate. Although homeowners of Ward 7 and 8 generally receive information from their neighbors, they also receive their information from display tables at events and direct mail. In addition, they encouraged using channels that already exist within the community such as community institutions like churches and beauty/barber salons, farmers markets, rack cards, fliers or newspapers, neighborhood canvassing, and a website that is easier to navigate.

Currently, people who have signed up but have not completed implementation on their property are not championing the program due to negative experiences such as:

- **Misinformation:** Though homeowners are familiar with the program, they are unsure of what the program actually has to offer due to information discrepancies between the website, auditors and contractors. In addition, homeowners felt lost in the implementation process once signed up and often receive conflicting information regarding options, costs and maintenance between auditors and contractors.
- **Wait time:** Homeowners expressed dissatisfaction of current wait times and follow-up practices. In particular, homeowners that signed up for an audit felt that they were lost in a pool of other applicants as they waited two to four months for an audit. Other homeowners were dissatisfied with extended wait times for follow-ups after signing up and meeting with auditors. They expressed frustration at delayed wait times for green

infrastructure implementation. With one participant claiming that she has not heard from anyone in almost two years.

Recommendations

Based on feedback received during the RiverSmart Homes focus groups and best practices, we recommend the following:

- Reconsider language in current marketing tools to better manage participant expectations of the program.
- Use riversmarthomes.org rather than the current DOEE website to advertise the program. During our research, we found riversmarthomes.org. The site was more informative, visually appealing and digestible for residents of varying backgrounds because it wasn't as text heavy. We believe this site has the potential to better manage homeowners' expectations of the program and could create more educated program participants.
- Include automated follow-ups to reduce the feel of an extended and empty wait time. Automated follow ups could take the form of green infrastructure and stormwater fact sheets, maintenance recommendations and a "Before the Audit" checklist to include and prepare homeowners for program participation.
- Review and adjust the program's implementation process and establish consistent messaging across contractors
- Use standardized email templates to disseminate information to homeowners.
- Recruit RiverSmart Homes Ambassadors from participating homeowners who are satisfied with the program and can speak positively about their experience. Train the community ambassadors on the program so that they can serve as trusted representatives of the program.

Moving forward, we will use our findings from the focus group discussions and research to develop an engagement plan and toolkit which will be piloted within one neighborhood East of the River. We will draft a report on the results of the pilot and make recommendations for encouraging homeowner participation in the program.