



# KEEPING CURRENT

With the Clinton River Watershed Council



## WaterTowns®

Chris Bobryk

**G**reen infrastructure (GI) has risen in popularity over the last few decades as an effective tool for helping minimize impacts from intense rain events. This type of nature-based approach to stormwater management—which mimics nature by soaking up and storing water—also has a keen ability to revitalize neighborhoods and communities by connecting social, economic, and environmental values together.

Many cities throughout the Clinton River watershed are beginning to [incorporate GI](#) into their long-term stormwater management and community-development plans. However, visualizing what, where, and how to construct GI still remains a barrier for some. Luckily, CRWC has a program for that, called WaterTowns®.

[WaterTowns®](#) is a community-based initiative that helps cities within the watershed enhance water resource protection by focusing on two elements of stormwater management:

- 1) Education** - increasing awareness and accessibility to water resources, and
- 2) Green infrastructure** - diversifying stormwater management techniques using low-impact, 'greener' methods.

The educational portion of the WaterTowns® process is extremely important to the initiative and can work for communities in various ways.

CRWC staff delivers [educational content](#) to communities to help define GI, identify alternative methods to capture and treat stormwater runoff, and explain how GI can strengthen communities' roles in protecting the environment.

Broadening public understanding and increasing accessibility to water resources helps build greater awareness of the need to protect our environment.



*Natural shoreline installed in 2016 along the fishing pond in front of the Clinton Township Department of Public Works office. Clinton Township became a WaterTowns® that same year and has put in considerable effort to maintain this structure and ensure its functionality and aesthetics (for example: conducting controlled burns in March 2020). The natural shoreline exhibits various native plant species (milkweed, ironweed, Indian grass, coneflowers, to name a few) and provides food and shelter for a plethora of bees, butterflies and other wildlife species. This native planting was designed to provide a buffer between the pond and surrounding urban land and manicured lawns; acting as a filter strip that captures runoff and sediment before entering the pond.*



Since 2014, the WaterTowns® initiative has helped 22 communities envision, plan, and even construct GI systems. With generous funding from the [Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation](#), this program is free of charge and comes equipped with a consultant ([Drummond-Carpenter, PLLC](#)) that works closely with municipal staff to create beautiful and informative renderings specific to each community's stormwater management needs. Additionally, each participating community receives a \$5,000-matched mini-grant (matched by cash or in-kind services) to help jump start a GI project.

The types and placements of GI that communities can use to tackle stormwater management issues are designed with both nature and community values in mind, says Dr. Don Carpenter – Vice President of Drummond Carpenter, PLLC.

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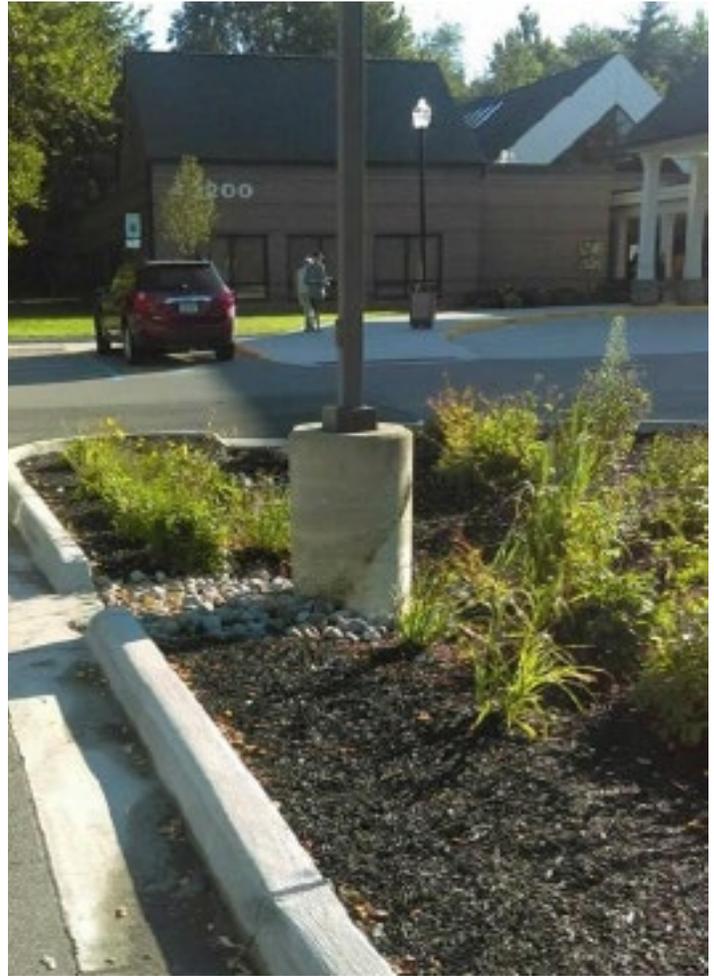
**“The grassroot approach is to start with a community’s values and figure out what their goals are.”**

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The success of this program is driven by the values and aspirations of each community, whether they value native plants, pollinators, shade, or have a goal to build a greater sense of place for residents to explore. By identifying the value structure of each community, “we can then align our messaging and designs with those goals and values in mind,” says Carpenter.

Solving urban stormwater management issues is not easy and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Using tools, like GI, sometimes requires a shift in how we perceive and use water – perhaps rethinking and recognizing the true value of water that sheds off parking lots, rooftops, and roadways. It comes down to improving how we manage stormwater closer to where it falls.

This is one of the benefits to incorporating GI into your community plans and WaterTowns® can be the avenue to help you get started. Please contact us today if you would like more information about our program or would like your city, township, or village to get involved.



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*Inverted parking lot bioswale at the Senior Center in Sterling Heights. This type of green infrastructure system exhibits a depressed planting surface with curb cuts to allow water to enter the garden space, where it can slowly fill the depression, soak into the ground and be absorbed by the plants. A minimal number of plant species are used in this space to help ease maintenance while adding natural aesthetics and functionality to the parking lot.*

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**For more information about WaterTowns® visit [CRWC.ORG](http://CRWC.ORG)**

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