

LOCAL

Yonkers residents to see climate friendly landscaping, addressing heat and flooding

Heat islands in the southwest part of the city see roads and buildings attract heat during the day and release that heat at night to keep temperatures high.

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In some of the hottest streets in Yonkers, residents often search in vain for relief.

Those areas also often happen to be neighborhoods where discriminatory housing practices have occurred.

But now some relief is coming.

Residents in four municipal housing locations will see new landscaping to combat the effects of climate change, such as flooding and heat islands, by late summer or early fall.

Groundwork Hudson Valley has identified three main neighborhoods in Yonkers most impacted by climate change to focus on, Old Seventh Ward, Getty Square and Radford, and is forming a climate task force to address climate issues in those areas.

The problem is also larger than just those neighborhoods, said Brigitte Griswold, executive director of Groundwork, noting the southwest part of the city is one large urban heat island, an area that sees higher temperatures than surrounding areas.

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The heat island effect happens because of the way urban areas are designed, said Oded Holzinger, Groundwork's climate resilience manager. Roads and buildings soak in the heat during the day and release the heat at night when temperatures normally would fall.

"There's nowhere to go," said Yolanda Lee, 59, a resident of Joseph F. Loehr Court, one of four municipal housing locations that will see the new landscaping. She and other residents gathered outside the building Tuesday when the temperature reached 95 degrees.

On hot days, Lee said as she sat in a small patch of shade outside the building, she and other residents are forced to stay inside. A slab of concrete with a few benches and little to no shade is the only outdoor space for them to go.

The landscaping will include plants and trees that maximize shade and are absorbent, said Griswold. Groundwork is working with the Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers on the landscaping projects. Bioswales, sunken gardens that absorb rainwater, will also help with flooding.

As people get older, they need shaded areas if they're going to be outside, said Jose Mejina, 72, who also lives at Loehr Court. And the landscaping will satisfy another need Mejina identified: a place to socialize.

Fellow resident, Rosendo Figueroa, 78, is looking forward to smoother places to walk near the building, which has a large grassy area that wraps around the back, but doesn't have a sidewalk or seating there. The back of the building also borders part of where the Yonkers Greenway, an abandoned railroad being turned into an urban trail, will run through.

Loehr Court's landscaping will cost around \$250,000. The other municipal housing locations that will also get climate conscious landscaping include Ross F. Calcagno Homes, which will see about \$750,000 worth of landscaping. Kris Kristensen Homes and Msgr. Cajetan J. Troy Manor together will get about \$327,000 worth of landscaping. At the Calcagno Homes, where rapper DMX once lived, the landscaping will include a memorial garden honoring him.

"It's important that we can address the issue of extreme heat directly at their homes," said Holzinger. Instead of having to take a bus to the waterfront or stay inside on hot days, residents will be able to enjoy cooler areas right outside where they live.

The Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers factored in landscaping as it completed renovations on its housing units — All MHACY housing has already been

renovated or will be through a U.S. Housing and Urban Development initiative — said President and CEO Wilson Kimball.

Tree canopy helps with the heat, making streets more walkable. Where planting trees isn't possible, manmade shade structures are an option, or reflective rooftops, Holzinger said.

"Lower income people aren't going to be able to adapt to climate change as middle income and high income people are," said Griswold.

Kimball said the changes will prevent MHACY from facing expensive problems like it has in the past. MHACY has spent tens of thousands of dollars on flooding-related damage in the past few years, such as replacing boilers and clearing drainage systems.

Holzinger added: "Instead of thinking about climate change as this great issue of global warming, of melting ice on the poles, we can think about it as our ability to deal with the increase of heat waves and the increase of heavy rain events in our community."

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