Executive Summary

The Community Design Building (CDB) (3947 University Wy NE) is situated on the urban edge of West Campus, surrounded by student housing. The courtyard behind the building was intended to be a functioning rain garden, but the space is currently non-functioning and in disrepair. We are applying for the Campus Sustainability Fund to restore stormwater and irrigation capacity and revitalize the courtyard as a welcoming educational space for the UW community.

We propose a series of community design charrettes to develop and build a freestanding stormwater collection tank. The collection tank will be made primarily from recycled and salvaged materials, designed to slow and capture rainwater, and hold water for summer irrigation. The structure will be built primarily from salvaged and recycled materials. We also propose replanting the existing beds with native, drought-tolerant species that support native pollinators.

Our project gives UW students, especially non-designers, the opportunity to engage in a participatory design-build process led by College of Built Environments students and faculty. It will also provide the opportunity for ongoing, student-led monitoring in an urban ecological context. Both of these efforts serve to revitalize a forgotten corner of campus through student activity and relevant environmental education.

The Community Design Building courtyard has been through at least two previous phases of investment and disinvestment, and it's our intention to interrupt this pattern through robust student and stakeholder involvement.

Project Team

Nicole Loeffler-Gladstone

Emma DeBoer

Jim Nicholls

Detailed Timeline

csf-timeline-templates.xlsx

Implementation and Impacts

Impact/Goal	Metric	UW Stakeholders Impacted
Increase pollinator habitat in an urban setting and test effectiveness of habitat islands	80% survival of plantings and measured increase in pollinators present, year over year.	Undergraduate students, Graduate students, CBE Faculty and Staff, Multispecies Stakeholders
Engage students in design education and hands-on stormwater management and pollinator gardens.	Host 3 community-driven design charrettes, 2 design-build days, and ongoing rainwater sculpture maintenance events. Host at least 2 additional partnership events within the 2025/26 school year following project build completion, highlighting other ecological infrastructure on campus. Examples could include touring Burke Meadow, touring the bioswale design at the Population Health Building, touring Green Future Labs work in Seattle, touring campus medicinal garden.	Undergraduate students, Graduate students, CBE Faculty and Staff, Multispecies Stakeholders
Amplify community engagement with the space	QR Code asking students and faculty using the courtyard and Community Design Building to self-report the effects of the newly designed space. Public facing QR Code documenting interest and engagement with space, and providing more information about the space.	Undergraduate students, Graduate students, CBE Faculty and Staff

Project Longevity

The student leads for this project are first-year graduate students in the Department of Landscape Architecture. We will identify existing student groups and campus organizations (e.g. SER, Burke Meadow, Green Futures Lab, UW Farm) to begin recruiting and building a volunteer network.

Katie Kadwell (Gardener Lead Area 1) has agreed to advise on planting design for ecological impact and climate adaptation. Her input will be instrumental to successfully establish a drought-tolerant pollinator garden during our first year, setting the stage for a healthy and robust garden. Jim Nicholls (Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Architecture) is the faculty advisor for this project and will advise on necessary maintenance and repair for our freestanding stormwater collection tank.

We understand that the gardening and freestanding stormwater collection tank will both require significant review, guidance and feedback from UW staff, including College of Built Environments facilities staff, fabrication lab staff, and others. Our timeline anticipates this process and can accommodate required change as it arises.

We anticipate handing this project off to another graduate student lead and/or an empowered volunteer network by 2027. This transition must be intentional to be successful, and we will work alongside our peers to identify and support the next generation of project leads at the beginning of spring quarter 2026. This mentoring and support is built into our project timeline and budget.

Additionally, students and the broader UW community could use the revitalized Community Design Building rain garden for events, reintegrating the space into regular use. The student leads for this project hope to coordinate with existing contacts at the Burke Meadow, the Green Futures Lab, the UW Farm, and Youths in the Built Environment. Building these connections with existing and robust groups will integrate the CDB courtyard rain and pollinator gardens into wider sustainability efforts on campus and ensure its continued success.

Detailed Budget

csf-budget-form-24-25.xlsx

Project longevity - financial

Long term maintenance will be conducted by student volunteers coordinated by a Landscape Architecture graduate student and/or volunteer leads. They will provide gardening and freestanding stormwater collection tank maintenance under a plan developed during the first two years of operation.

Maintenance will most likely include weeding, watering and replanting of garden beds, and cleaning and storing equipment. After the first season of seed collection, new plants will mostly come through on-site propagation. Maintenance will also include seasonal cleaning of rainwater sculpture. These activities are low- to no-cost.

Potential funding reductions

Student labor accounts for the largest individual cost in this project, followed by project materials and advising stipends. Funding cuts could be absorbed and redistributed by reducing student leadership from two people to one, or by reducing total hours worked, by reducing or eliminating compensation for project advisors, and by reducing the total materials budget.

These cuts would inhibit project success by placing a larger burden on a single student for project administration. Another cost reduction could include a non-UW volunteer advisor or coordinator, however this would limit student learning opportunities and exposure to design and ecology professionals.

10% cut: Reduced materials budget

20% cut: Reduced materials budget and advising stipend

50% cut: Reduced materials budget, advising stipend and student labor hours

Project leads would prioritize maintaining equitable funding for non-UW advisors by reducing student labor hours.

Problem Statement

The Community Design Building courtyard has experienced at least two cycles of institutional investment. It was originally constructed in 1997 as a Department of Landscape Architecture design-build studio project. In 2011, it went through a renovation. Both designs intended for the space to be multifunctional, and considered stormwater management, urban food production, and multispecies habitat.

Unfortunately, the CDB courtyard has remained relatively under-utilized despite investment. We don't think that a third design project will miraculously solve the CDB courtyard's chronic issues. However, as landscape architecture students dedicated to environmental justice, multispecies design, and collaborative place-making, we *do* believe that empowering students to co-create and maintain a shared space will contribute to its activation and longevity.

Our proposal addresses two sustainability problems that are common in urban ecosystems: stormwater control and fragmented habitat. The courtyard rain garden has existing infrastructure in place to filter and control stormwater (water that picks up pollution as it runs across hard surfaces and into storm drains) and existing garden beds with a defunct irrigation system. We aim to address both of these issues through our planting design and construction of a freestanding stormwater collection tank made from recycled and salvaged materials and designed to store water for irrigation.

According to King County, toxic stormwater is the number one source of pollution in Puget Sound. The existing CDB rain garden does not effectively capture all of the site's stormwater. Our stormwater collection tank will help capture onsite stormwater and hold it until it can be used for hand watering. Depending on design, the tank may have potential to treat collected stormwater as well, via infiltration through a soil matrix.

This outcome corresponds with regional goals to reduce stormwater pollution to Puget Sound and increase climate resilience, as well as reduce watering in the summer. Instead of irrigating the rain garden beds, we will use stormwater captured and stored on site.

Our planting design will prioritize drought-tolerant native plants and successively blooming native annuals and perennials. The garden will provide food and habitat for urban wildlife and it may support native pollinator populations, by contributing to the mosaic of native plantings on the UW campus.

This project directly aligns with our personal values and educational goals as landscape architecture students and representatives of the College of Built Environments. We take a multispecies perspective in our design work, and are considering more-than-human-species as direct stakeholders in this project. Our goal is to help create a comfortable and welcoming space for organisms in the University District – human and otherwise.

Problem Context

Green stormwater management, like bioswales and rain gardens, already exist on campus as do successful pollinator spaces like the Burke Meadow. The restored

Community Design Building courtyard would serve as an extension of this UW priority along the edge of West Campus.

Our proposal would complement existing work on campus by exemplifying positive outcomes from community-driven design, demonstrating that the UW community is empowered to engage in hands-on solutions to urban ecological challenges.

This project will be open to the entire UW community, allowing participants to practice ecological urban design skills. As a community-driven design project, stakeholder involvement and engagement is required from the start. The quality and functionality of the final freestanding stormwater collection tank for irrigation design and the planting designs will reflect the depth of community involvement.

We are excited that Buster Simpson, a nationally recognized environmental artist, may advise on this project. Some of Simpson's best known work in Seattle deals with stormwater management, bringing a uniquely poetic perspective to an otherwise utilitarian, and often overlooked, process. Regardless of his involvement, a free standing stormwater collection tank and a robust, thriving planting design will announce UW's commitment to sustainability and multispecies resilience to anyone who passes the CDB courtyard.

Education and Outreach Goals

We have already fielded tremendous interest in this project from within the Landscape Architecture department, and we believe that our shared network beyond the department is extensive. Steady and regular recruiting will help us welcome a strong volunteer community to this project.

We will use the College of Built Environments email listserve, the UW Landscape Architecture Instagram, and physical flyers across campus to begin building awareness for design charrettes and volunteer opportunities. Several members of our department work at the Burke Meadow, the UW Farm, and the Green Futures Lab, and are interested in helping us spread the word. We will reach out to like-minded student groups, as well.

Our specific outreach and education goals include:

- Building relationships within the College of Built Environments, so that students with shared interests can learn from their peers by tackling hands-on projects and shared goals.
- Exposing the broader UW student body to urban ecological design, through stewardship, maintenance and other hands-on projects including the design process.

- Creating the conditions for urban ecology monitoring driven by student interest.
- Cultivating an ethic of care and multispecies awareness through stewardship.
- Challenging the urban/nature binary by making ecological function and multispecies habitat explicitly visible through the design process.

In the summer, the CDB courtyard is often used for high school programs. A functional pollinator garden and freestanding stormwater collection tank could provide additional educational opportunities for anyone using the space.

Additionally, the graduate student facilitators of the charrettes will practice creating and implementing an effective community design exercise, gaining invaluable experience. This experience will benefit the facilitators in communication, balancing multiple perspectives and will aid in gaining skills that will extend beyond their academic career into professional practice.

Continuing education opportunities could involve monitoring plant survival and pollinator populations on site. This would be valuable opportunities for student involvement and learning about data collection and data management.

Following the revitalization of the space, it would serve as a welcoming event space for the College of Built Environments and beyond.

Student Involvement

The success of this project, and our education and outreach goals, depend on robust student involvement with the courtyard. Our intention is to use ecological design service/learning projects as a catalyst, building a dedicated community of student leaders committed to stewardship as an ongoing practice.

This project includes multiple volunteer opportunities, and many of them include educational components. Volunteers will be trained and empowered to participate in planting design, urban gardening, seed harvesting, and rain garden maintenance. Volunteers will benefit from exposure to peer education through partnerships with UW organizations and student groups, and they will learn new skills through their volunteer efforts.

The freestanding stormwater collection tank for irrigation will be the result of community-driven design. The summer design charrettes will be a valuable opportunity for students across the university, especially from outside the College of Built Environments. Participants will engage in a community-driven design process and gain

hands-on experience building a collection tank. We are especially interested in empowering first-time designers and builders who may otherwise be intimidated by the process.

Two graduate student project administrators will be responsible for organizing the first two years of garden design and maintenance, the freestanding stormwater collection tank workshop, and facilitating the process of introducing the wider UW community to the courtyard. These paid positions will allow the project leads to gain skills in community outreach, community-driven design facilitation, volunteer training, project management, and working within higher education.

Additionally, there will be ongoing opportunities for student-led monitoring on the site. These projects could be student group research, and could include pollinator tracking, assessing plantings, and more. These potential research projects present partnership opportunities with established campus ecological projects like the nearby Burke Meadow and Green Futures Lab green wall.