

Dequindre Cut Native Planting

Today the Dequindre Cut is a broad paved pedestrian and bicyclist pathway. It begins at ground level at Woodbridge, between Orleans and St. Aubin, next to the Vigliotti Bldg. on one side, and the Vigliotti Bldg. parking lot on the other, but becomes below grade, as the property next to it rises from the river to Jefferson. It now continues 2 miles north under the E. Jefferson bridge to Mack Ave.

The Cut had its beginnings in 2003 when the City of Detroit began a plan to turn the abandoned former commuter rail line—discontinued in 1982—into the pathway it is today. In 2003 it abounded in wildlife, foxes, possums, birds, butterflies and flowering trees, and is on the migratory flyway.

As construction began, the Vigliotti parking lot hillside next to the Dequindre Cut between Woodbridge and E. Jefferson was no longer next to an abandoned rail line, but rather the very visible beginnings of a pedestrian/cyclist trail. The hillside was a hodge podge of weeds, junk trees and chunks of concrete from a former building that had been demolished there, hardly a welcoming sight to travelers down the Cut.

First, in order to remake this property into a lunchbox for the birds, butterflies, bees along this migratory flyway, the Detroit Garden Center(DGC) had to first negotiate a lease with Vigliotti Realty for the land, the only private property on the entire Cut consisting of the two steep hillsides, one dropping down to the Cut on the east, and the other on the Woodbridge side on the south. An agreement was reached and the Detroit Garden Center agreed to design, install and maintain a native plant garden on the hillside facing the Cut as the first phase, and to continue the planting around the corner, and lastly on the Woodbridge hillside. Vigliotti Realty agreed to remove trees, and trim down vegetation so installation could begin.

Secondly, the DGC had to find a partner (for Phase I) whose mission coincided with a native planting. The Greening of Detroit became that generous partner and agreed to provide volunteers, advisors, and funding for plants and much more. Lindsay Pielack from the Greening of Detroit and Jeff Klein, a talented landscape architect, are two of the many individuals who would work with the DGC to install Phase I.

Thirdly, a design. Suzan Campbell's* simple low maintenance design, was chosen for Phase 1, the property facing the cut: a gentle swoop of two native grasses, Indian grass above and little blue stem below. The grasses once established would require little more maintenance than cutting down in the spring. In return their abundant seed would provide bird food for fall bird migration and cover for wildlife.

Finally, in October 2009 after the hillside had been prepped, volunteers from the DGC and the Greening came together in the parking lot on a beautiful sunny day to begin the massive job of planting the steep Phase I hillside** with the waiting flats of grasses. Landscape fabric was first rolled down the hill starting in the middle, pinned in place, and planting holes marked with

spray paint and cut open so volunteers could follow with the grasses (following the design of Indian grass above and little blue stem below). Work continued in both directions and was miraculously completed in time for dump trucks to unload their wood chips (for mulch) at the top of the hill while volunteers spread them evenly around the newly planted grasses.

In ensuing years the grasses have continued to grow and prove their low maintenance and importance in feeding birds, as flocks emerge when one disturbs them in the fall.

The remaining steepest part of the hillside by E. Jefferson has since been planted with low grow sumac, chosen for its adaptability to conditions, beautiful red fall color, and ease of maintenance.

In 2010 the difficult corner planting facing Woodbridge began. This area showcases native plants other than grasses providing seasonal nectar for pollinators and beauty. Jeff Klein and his crew made over this area, first removing a former building foundation which filled an entire flatbed. The corner plan included an upper viewing area, and immense stone steps leading down to a plateau walkway with native plants above and below. The steps continue to the fenced street level. Doing all this, including cutting and moving huge pieces of stone was an amazing accomplishment---especially without the use of heavy equipment.

Visiting the planting in the fall, Monarch butterflies sip from cup plant, asters, and other nectar producing plants on their way to Mexico. Flocks of migrating birds rise when disturbed from the Indian grass section. Bees and other insects are buzzing, among the goldenrod and asters, and it is a quiet oasis shielded from E. Jefferson traffic by the hillside and punctuated by the sounds of nature it attracts.

Continuing down Woodbridge is an ongoing project. Native flowering trees and shrubs have been planted here along with more flowering plants.

Volunteers are always needed.....

*Then Director of the Belle Isle Nature Center whose native planting she designed there received an award from the EPA.

**To envision the steepness of the hill, standing at the top, the bottom is not visible.