

# Taming Stormwater with Green Streets

*A seminar by*

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## **Abstract**

Average Portland rainfall is nearly 37 inches a year. This rainfall usually runs off streets and other impervious surfaces such as roofs and into the sewer system, but this can cause two major problems. First, disposing of runoff in a storm sewer that drains to a river or stream sends dirt, metals, oil, pesticides, and other pollutants right into the water. Second, in neighborhoods with combined sewers, (that is, sewage systems that combine household sewage with the runoff waters from rain), after a heavy rainfall, the high volume of sewage sent to be treated can overwhelm the treatment center and lead to raw sewage discharges into the Willamette River.

About 27% of the city is covered by buildings, streets, sidewalks, and other hard, or impervious, surfaces. Paved streets cover about 19% of Portland's land area, but those streets account for nearly half of Portland's impervious surfaces. Paved streets contribute 66% of the total annual stormwater runoff and 77% of the pollutants in the runoff.

To address this problem, the City of Portland has begun investing in ways to treat stormwater runoff before it enters the sewer system. The city has built and is developing a number of "green street" projects that mimic what happens to rain when it falls on undeveloped areas. A green street uses landscaped curb extensions, lowered infiltration planters and basins, swales, trees, and permeable surfaces such as porous pavers and pervious asphalt or concrete to slow stormwater runoff and let it soak into the ground as plants and soil filter pollutants. Green streets keep runoff out of sewer pipes and reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) to the Willamette River.

Rain generates millions of gallons of polluted runoff from the city. Treating stormwater at its source instead of piping it to waterways improves water quality, enhances fish and wildlife habitat, and promotes healthy watersheds.

For more information about the City of Portland's Green Streets Program:

<http://www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?c=34601>

### **Speaker Biography**

The Portland Tribune called Portland's newest City Commissioner Sam Adams "The council's most vocal advocate for public arts, neighborhoods, diversity, transportation, economic development, and transparency and accountability in government." Sam's well-known work ethic was born in a childhood that included public housing and public assistance. He says it's this experience that fuels his passion for making government work better for people. He gravitated to politics early in life as a University of Oregon intern for Congressman Peter DeFazio, where he stayed on staff until 1987. Sam then went to work for the Oregon House Democratic Campaign Committee and Carl Hosticka, then Democratic Majority Leader and current Metro Councilor. Sam turned his focus to Portland in 1991, where he successfully managed Vera Katz's first campaign for mayor. At age 29, he began the first of 11 years as the youngest mayoral chief of staff in the city's history.

Today Sam continues to conquer those political first ascents serving as Portland's first-ever openly gay City Commissioner. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Cascade AIDS Project and in his role as City Commissioner serves on the boards of the Portland Streetcar Inc., Portland Area Tram Inc., Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation, the Bi-State Coordination Committee, and Kenton Business District Association.

Sam recently passed his 100th business day in office with the passage of legislation aimed at getting more small businesses owning their spaces and throwing a party at Oregon's only organic brewery.

For more information about City Commissioner Sam Adams:

<http://www.commissionersam.com>