

Fruit of the Woon

A Look at the Urban Planting Component
of the Woonasquatucket River Project

by

Joshua Berman

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Abstract

What are the biological, cultural, and regulatory issues that surround the urban planting component of the Woonasquacket River Project (WRP) in Olneyville, Rhode Island? To attack this question, I became an active member of the Woonasquacket River Coalition (WRC) and began to raise more specific inquiries concerning how plant species are selected, what landscaping criteria are important, and how the community's role should be determined.

My research methodology consisted of some traditional academic book-work, but relied primarily on personal and telephone interviews with a host of experts in numerous fields. In addition, by posting messages on several international newsgroups, I established a number of extremely helpful e-mail correspondences. These communications were held with plant biologists, wetland ecologists, landscape architects, policy-makers, and community organizers existing in WRC member groups, city, state, and federal agencies, universities around the country, nurseries, and landscape architecture firms.

The use of these research methods and my active participation in WRP meetings and events led me to several conclusions regarding the planting issues mentioned above. Although time-frame conflicts prevented me from drawing up a list of appropriate species for the Woonasquacket's banks, I was able to establish a set of criteria for doing so in the future. I found the most important of these to be a plant's usefulness for meeting the goals of the individual site plan, with its degree of invasiveness weighing heavily into the picture. I also determined that although it is important to favor native plant species, it is not always the clearest or most appropriate option to do so in an *entirely* exclusive manner.

One of the WRC's primary goals has been to involve the residents of Olneyville in the planning process. I analyzed the current state of these attempts (focussing on planting-related issues), and found that I could contribute to the effort in several ways. One of these involved using the classrooms of Perry Middle School as a channel for community education, and the other consisted of assisting an active individual neighborhood resident in his attempts to establish a community greenhouse and garden.

In addition, I compiled numerous data into an appendices section to serve as a reference for coalition members in the future.