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**Inver Grove Heights, a Leader in Water Protection,
Continues to Receive Project Recognition after National Award**

At the annual conference on January 28, 2016, it was announced that the 2016 Environmental Leadership Award was given to the City of Inver Grove Heights by the Minnesota Erosion Control Association (MECA) for the city’s role in “Designing a City for Zero Stormwater Runoff”. The City worked with the local firm Emmons & Olivier Resources (EOR), a nationally recognized leader in water resource engineering and management, in “Designing a City of Zero Stormwater Runoff”. This award builds upon the project’s recent state and national engineering recognition in 2015 from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) where it was honored as one of the top eight engineering projects in the country. The MECA award highlights the project’s *“leadership in advancing effective erosion and sediment control and stormwater management ... that have advanced water resource quality in Minnesota.”*



Water protection and stormwater management are two critical issues facing communities today. In the northwest area of Inver Grove Heights, development was hindered by the high costs of managing stormwater. An initial plan called for a new outlet to the Mississippi River, along with miles and miles of piping. The landscape here is picturesque with rolling hills. It is located in close proximity to both Minneapolis and St. Paul, making it a prime location for development. The challenge was to responsibly and cost effectively manage urban runoff to prevent flooding and protect water quality, a difficult balancing act.

Instead of proceeding at high cost and high environmental impact, the City Council and staff of Inver Grove Heights sought a different path and worked with the local firm, EOR, to find a better way forward. Together they developed a zero-discharge, Low Impact Development (LID) approach which required no pumps, no river outlet, and much less piping that resulted in greater than 60% savings in capital costs. Advantages to this approach also included delaying capital costs, more desirable neighborhoods, and dramatically better environmental outcomes. Another unique aspect was realized by working with local planning experts, Hoisington-Koegler Group, Inc. to complement the stormwater needs with zoning code flexibility.

The LID plans took advantage of the city’s existing features to mimic natural hydrology and maximize infiltration. The Argenta Hills development was the first to be built using the new LID approach. This development features numerous innovative LID practices: raingardens, porous asphalt parking, pervious paver street intersections, infiltration basins, and water harvesting. Partnership with Argenta Hills lead developer, McGough Co., along with Tradition Development Co. and contractor Enebak Construction Co. contributed to the early success. After several years in service, these stormwater features are functioning very effectively and accomplishing the project’s zero runoff goals. Not only did the new approach reduce cost, it also helped to retain the area’s unique natural character, and added amenities such as “green streets” and abundant open space.

In the past many engineers argued that LID approaches were not effective on a large scale or for flood control, but this project, with the high bar of meeting zero runoff, solidly proves otherwise. In 2015 the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) took notice and awarded this project a National Grand Award. This prestigious honor calls attention to the stormwater management ingenuity, creative engineering, and municipal leadership that went into this project. It also shows that Inver Grove Heights can serve as a model for expanding this approach to other cities across Minnesota and the United States.

Additional project info. see: <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/07/27/rain-gardens-fight-pollution>
and <http://www.eorinc.com/2015 ACEC AWARD.php>

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