

Looking good: Unusual Starbucks property design toasted by city

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VINELAND –A Starbucks opening here this year will do more than add options for coffee drinkers and fill a key corner in the high-profile West Landis Avenue commercial corridor.

City planners are savoring its use of “rain gardens” to handle storm water, an upgrade of the basic hole-in-the-ground common in New Jersey. “Bio-retention basin” is a more technical term for the landscaped concept.

“You’d just think they’re a landscaped area, unless you knew what you were looking at, essentially,” Principal Engineer Ryan Headley said Thursday. “They’re typically shallow, vegetated areas that will take that initial, smaller rain storm. And instead of dumping it into the city’s storm sewer system ... it will infiltrate it into the soil and then into the groundwater.”

No other commercial property along West Landis Avenue uses it. Vineland would like to see more than the few examples in the city now.

“We have the little rain garden at the corner of West and Landis, where they built the veterans clinic,” city Supervising Planner Kathie Hicks.

Vineland Construction Company, which is the Starbucks property owner and developer, also built the rain garden at the veterans clinic. The ones for Starbuck will be much more extensive.

Another example is at the Reber School building, next to City Hall. The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions installed that in 2019, but it needs more time to become fully vegetated.

“It functions,” Hicks said. “But it’s not pretty, yet.”

The Starbucks will seat 51 people and have a drive-through able to stack eight vehicles at a time. The coffee store will take up little more than half of a 4,210-square-foot building, with the rest reserved for another as-yet unsigned retailer.

The building sits on a roughly 1-acre property taking up the southeastern corner of South Orchard Road and the avenue. Rain gardens will line the north and south ends of the property. A larger underground catch basin will handle any overflow.

Headley said the relatively small size of the property was a major reason for coupling rain gardens with an underground system. “The combination of those two systems allowed the developer in this case to meet all the (water treatment) standards,” he said.

The Planning Board unanimously approved the project Wednesday night. The final design came out of a lot of discussion with Vineland Construction, Hicks said.

“And we’re hoping that the rain gardens are going to be kind of a star attraction,” Hicks said.

Board member John Casadia told the developer the Starbucks plan was a hit at a meeting earlier in the week of the city Environmental Commission.

“The environmental concern that you’ve all shown is wonderful,” Casadia said. “We especially like the landscaping, your rain gardens, and the subsurface drainage that you have planned for this. And it is our hope that future projects in Vineland follow in your footsteps.”

“I’m actually impressed that Vineland Construction is keeping the property and renting it out. It will maintain it much better,” board member Robert Odorizzi said. “And it is quite a nice look for that corner. Hopefully, that’ll set a standard for other people, other developers, and other businesses.”

Joe Smith is a N.E. Philly native transplanted to South Jersey more than 30 years ago to hunt and gather news. He is a former editor and current senior staff writer at The Daily Journal in Vineland. Have a news tip? Reach out at (856) 563-5252 or jsmith@thedailyjournal.com or follow me on Twitter, @jpsmith-dj. Help support local journalism with a [subscription to The Daily Journal](#).