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COURTESY PHOTO

A large storage tank was recently installed at the Rockport Community House to harvest rainwater for use in irrigation.

Reeling in the rainwater

Irrigation system to sustain Community House grounds

BY JONATHAN L'ECUYER
STAFF WRITER

ROCKPORT — The Community House will soon harvest rainwater for use in watering its newly-landscaped grounds, local officials say.

Through a donation from Oakson Inc., caretakers will be able to keep the property adequately hydrated with rainwater even after the rain clouds have moved offshore.

Terry Duffy, a member of Rockport's Board of Assessors, works for the Gloucester-based drip dispersal, water re-use, and wastewater product distributor as a landscape designer. He and Oakson, Inc. President Daniel Ottenheimer both live in Rockport and support sustainable living initiatives.

The pair decided to contribute to the town's \$2.2 million effort to rehabilitate the historic building and its grounds by donating the rainwater harvesting system — a \$5,000 value — along with their time and expertise.

Public Works Director Joe Parisi immediately got onboard with the idea and brought it to the DPW Board of Commissioners for final approval.

A series of downspouts emanating from the building's rear roof funnels rainwater to a system of pipes that collects it at ground level and ultimately carries the stormwater into an underground, 500-gallon, plastic tank, Duffy said.

While the water could be used for an underground irrigation or

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IRRIGATION: Improving Community House

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sprinkler system, Duffy said the tank's pumps will drive water to a regular garden hose and allow caretakers to water the new garden, shrubs, and trees with rainwater rather than by tapping the municipal water supply.

"To live sustainably is something we need to do; these are the kind of things people are starting to do now when considering future development," Duffy said Tuesday. "It's something we truly believe in."

According to Oakson, Inc., one inch of rainfall on a 1,000 square-foot roof would yield 623 gallons of water.

The tank has been installed, but the system is not completely online yet as organizers are still waiting to receive power supply and other components.

There will be some required maintenance, but it won't come at any additional cost to the town, he said.

The electrical control box for the pump must be outside, which will force caretakers to remove the box each winter. Depending on the amount of debris that breaches the tank, it may need to be cleaned once annually, Duffy added.

To help prevent leaves, twigs, and other debris from getting into the tank, diverters will be installed within the drain pipes.

Because the first "flush" of water during a rainstorm is

likely to carry the most debris, the initial flow will be diverted away from the holding tank for a time, Duffy explained.

Rockport Garden Club member Gretchen Anderson said that, while she wasn't aware of the new system, its installation is especially timely given the group's plans to plant a new garden on the property and a water ban that's been in effect since July.

"We have had the watering ban, which has impacted what the Garden Club has been able to do with other gardens around town, so (the water system) would do very well," Anderson said. "The trees and shrubs will need to be watered every week until they are established."

The Community House won't be the first place in Rockport to save rainwater for later use.

According to Thacher Island Association President and local historian Paul St. Germain, a covered cistern collected rainwater into a 25,000-gallon, brick-lined tank beginning in 1948.

Today, the cistern is covered by a W-shaped corrugated sheet metal roof and enclosed with wire mesh walls to keep birds out. Rainwater is collected from the roof, directed into the cistern, and pumped directly to the keepers' house and visitors' museum.

The Community House system is expected to come online within the next several weeks.



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