

Sustainable Sites Initiative: A new approach to Landscape Management

By Linda Kiscellus, Moore Landscapes, Inc., Board Member – MELA (Midwest Ecological Landscape Association)

The Sustainable Sites Initiative is being adopted by the US Green Building Council into the LEED program. Its purpose is to provide standards for sustainable land practices that will increase ecological benefits such as climate regulation, clean air and water, and improve the quality of life. Points are awarded on a scale of low to high for over 44 benchmarks, ranging from new site selection and design through restoration. Restoration includes components of ecology, human health, materials selection, construction activities and maintenance and operations.

Now is a great time to incorporate these standards into your landscape plan and be 'point-ready' when the updated LEED program is unveiled.

Here are a few key opportunities for garnering LEED points:

Ecological – restore benefits of natural systems

- **Minimize or eliminate potable water consumption for irrigation.** After the establishment phase, it is desirable to have the landscape sustained without supplemental watering.
- **Control and manage invasive species,** such as buckthorn, garlic mustard and others.
- **Increase plant biomass on site** (using a weighted scale valuing trees at the high end, manicured turf at a lower value) to offset greenhouse gas emissions. We all benefit from clean air and climate regulation.
- **Reduce building heating and cooling requirements with vegetation.**
- **Promote a sense of place with native vegetation.** Native plants, including their named cultivars, support diversity of life and a healthier ecosystem than exotic species.
- **Cleanse water on-site.** Plants at the edge of retention ponds provide filtering and cleansing benefits.
- **Manage water on-site.** Municipal water and waste-water treatment facilities account for up to 50% of electricity consumed by municipalities. Keep stormwater on site reduces utility costs. Using permeable pavers, building rain gardens or other rain exchange systems are a few ways to do this.

Human Health – Building strong communities and sense of stewardship

- **Provide views of the natural environment to building occupants.** Desk workers report greater job productivity and fewer absences when they can view or interact with nature.
- **Provide opportunities for outdoor physical activity, social gathering and interaction.** Social connectedness plays a very important role in human health, and we all know the benefits of moderate physical activity.
- **Provide opportunities for mental restoration.** Work that demands focused attention leads to mental and physical fatigue often expressed as irritability. A brief interlude in a natural setting is restorative and helps us get back on track with work.



Photos courtesy of Moore Landscapes, Inc.

Photo caption 1: Trees and other vegetation help regulate temperatures, offset greenhouse gas emissions and when viewed from windows, can help increase worker productivity.

- **Optimize site accessibility, safety and wayfinding.** This encourages outdoor mobility by users.
- **Design stormwater features to be a landscape amenity.** It's the old "two birds with one stone" idea. A bench for reflection, a small patio for lunch or breaks, a path circling the area to encourage appreciation of the natural area... the points just add up!
- **Promote sustainability awareness and education.** Educational or interpretative elements help visitors understand how they can apply similar practices at home or away from the site.

Materials – Reuse/recycle existing materials and support sustainable production.

- **Eliminate use of lumber from threatened tree species.**
- **Secure plants and materials from sources engaged in sustainable practices.** Use peat-free planting media; reduce plant-pot waste.
- **Use products designed for reuse and recycling.**

Use adhesives, sealants, paints and coatings with reduced VOC emissions.

Operations and Maintenance – maintain the site for long-term sustainability.

- **Recycle organic matter generated from operations and maintenance.** This can lower costs in purchased fertilizers pesticides and irrigation.
- **Provide for storage and collection of recyclables** (including paper, glass and plastics).
- **Use renewable sources for site outdoor electricity.** This helps

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reduce the site's carbon footprint and minimize air pollution.

Minimize exposure to localized air pollutants. High point are awarded where smoking is prohibited on the entire site.

The Sustainable Sites Initiative includes identifying and creating action steps for 10 year desired outcomes. Moore Landscapes is using this worksheet to evaluate sites and determine long range goals for sustainable landscape management.

For further information on the Sustainable Sites Initiative, please visit: www.sustainablesites.org

You may contact Linda Kiscellus or member representative Jan Wemple at 224-383-2141, and visit their website at www.moorelandscapes.com



Photos courtesy of Moore Landscapes, Inc.

Outdoor gathering areas help build community and provide a place for respite and renewal.



Retention ponds can also be landscape amenities, enhancing an outdoor area and the visitors' experience. By adding plantings to the water's edge, a retention pond will get natural filtering and cleansing.