

Rejuvenating of older industrial cities with green infrastructure:

Congressional Field Hearing in Philadelphia and The Green Communities Act HR 2222



For decades many cities have perceived park maintenance, tree planting and green landscapes as too costly and as a result have neglected their urban green spaces. Green was considered a luxury, a low priority for cash-strapped city budgets. But can an increased tree canopy, additional park space, and green roofs actually help cities save money? Philadelphia seems to think so.

In recent years the Philadelphia has taken great strides in upgrading both the quality of life and the water quality of the lower Delaware River basin by implementing new stormwater management practices that replace costly, traditional “greyscape” with a more natural, greener means of handling stormwater. Parks, vegetated buffer strips, trees, and permeable surfaces are the basis of green infrastructure. Rather than channeling water through concrete ditches and installing expensive pipes, green infrastructure incorporates trees, plants, and natural soil absorption to mitigate runoff and remediate polluted water so it doesn’t simply rush into waterways.

In May, the Northeast-Midwest Institute organized a Congressional field hearing designed to investigate the role of federal policy as it relates to the implementation of green infrastructure. Experts at the hearing, convened by Representative Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) and Chaka Fattah (D-PA), testified about three primary aspects of greener engineering practices, vis-à-vis the triple benefit of green infrastructure initiatives:

1) Low impact/low cost: Replacing traditional “gray” (concrete channels, subsurface drain pipes, etc) with more natural “green” infrastructure (tree canopy, permeable surfaces, vegetated stormwater basins, etc) is a more cost effective and environmentally friendly way to manage stormwater.

2) Economic and esthetic value: Creating cleaner, greener, more livable dense urban areas has a positive impact on property values. Along with helping to manage stormwater runoff, tree planting, development of small parks, and installing vegetated buffers contribute both esthetically and economically to urban neighborhoods.

3) Green collar job creation: Greening projects create employment opportunities. Green infrastructure projects add to the growing list of “green collar” employment opportunities.

The hearing also detailed the significance and importance of *The Green Communities Act HR 2222* to historic, industry-reliant communities. Information about the hearing and written testimony can be found at: http://www.nemw.org/Phila_program_Testimony.pdf

HR 2222 the Green Communities Act

To help replicate the successful green infrastructure efforts enjoyed by Philadelphia, Representative Schwartz introduced *The Green Communities Act HR 2222*. The legislation would direct the Secretary of the Department of Commerce, through the Economic Development Administration, to provide grants for programs promoting community greening initiatives. The grants, up to \$2 million, can be used for a variety of greening projects. Examples of eligible uses include: green stormwater infrastructure; vacant lot management; revitalizing municipal parks and public spaces; landscaping community gateways and key corridors; tree plantings and urban forestry projects; comprehensive planning for open space preservation; green roof construction; and education, training, and volunteer management concerning community green initiatives. The bill also enables cities to get technical advice from national experts on how to best plan, design, and implement a green infrastructure strategy for addressing their economic development needs.

Rep. Schwartz stated that, “*The Green Communities Act* represents the type of public-private partnership that we need right now to get the economy moving and plan for essential infrastructure that improves quality and value of aging urban communities across the country. “

The legislation was written to help cities across the United States finance new, effective, low-cost strategies that will grow their economies through increased greening initiatives. Green infrastructure is one of the most effective ways to improve quality of life, attract new business, and improve the general environment. While many cities might be interested in turning to green infrastructure strategies, they lack access to the concepts and techniques used to effectively plan and implement these solutions. This is especially true for older cities, both large and small, that are looking to reinvent themselves and revitalize their commercial, industrial and residential areas.

More information about HR 2222 can be found at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.2222>: