

Blue is the New Green

By Jeffrey L. Bruce, FASLA, LEED, ASIC, GRP

Green spaces have always represented value to the development community. We can observe classic examples of green spaces such as Central Park in New York significantly increasing real estate values. More recently Millennium Park in Chicago completed in 2004 had by 2006 increased residential real estate property values by \$100 per square foot and spurred over 1.4 billion dollars of adjacent development while turning the 60602 zip code into the hottest real estate address in the nation according to Forbes Magazine. While the asset value of green space is increasing within our new economy, it is also shifting in function. The Environmental Protection Agency's non point source storm water pollution targets have placed increased regulatory focus, both local and federal, on storm water management with the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit process. The solution to meeting these new requirements has turned "natural", by utilizing the natural water courses and drainage features of a development parcel as storm water management facilities, which function also as recreation and green space amenities. The development community has found a new appreciation of those difficult and underutilized natural features as ecological assets in solving regulatory compliance and increasing the desirability of a development for a new environmentally conscience consumer. The historical approach of bulldozing a site, installing concrete conveyance structures and re-establishing a vegetative cover is giving way to a much soft development footprint which takes into consideration the inherent natural assets of the site, including most importantly the drainage features while incorporating these assets into a green space framework. We are quickly learning that while working around these features may cost more initially than traditional approaches, in the long term the increased property values more than make up for this incremental development cost.

The shift from green to blue is not without its challenges within the new economy. The historical approach has been to engineer linear solutions for green spaces that move water as quickly as possible to the next land owner. The emerging blue approach is to management storm water to the greatest degree possible on site while allowing these systems to maintain their dynamics and natural processes. Green planning is no longer about using brute force in a man-made solution but rather letting nature do what nature does best, create equilibrium and balance. Undertaking a green development process requires adding new partners to the project team, including such diverse professionals as ecologists, landscape architects, wetland scientists, and urban foresters. Early in the development process these professionals are invaluable in identifying, protecting and enhancing these natural assets which will reduce infrastructure costs, reduce operational costs and increase market value of the project. As an industry we have only just begun to creatively apply the opportunities of sustainability to the development footprint. The future is only limited by our innovation to understand how to incorporate natural cycles and processes inherent in green spaces, to solve the impacts of human intervention on the land.

For all of history we have created our landscapes and green spaces primarily for aesthetics or visual interest. Today we are entering the era when green spaces will also function as green machines managing and mitigating man's impact on the environment. It is conceivable to envision a future world

where green spaces become a utility providing public service no different than the water, gas or sewer utilities. In this new era the focus of the solution will center on water, its availability, its distribution, its power to sustain a diversity of life within the urban context. In 2009 the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity stated that "The fight for all life on Earth will be won or lost in cities." As an industry we have the greatest responsibility and opportunity to contribute to a sustainable future by recognizing that green makes good business sense and that utilizing those precious natural resources as green spaces contributes to the viability of the industry. As we move forward the smart money is betting on blue as the new green.

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Mr. Bruce's accomplishments, commitment and vision are well documented. He has received over 80 separate design and leadership awards. Award winning projects of his firm, Jeffrey L. Bruce & Company, have been published 150 times. He has been licensed to practice in 26 states and has served as an invited lecturer, visiting critic, and speaker at over 130 conferences and trade shows. In 1996, Mr. Bruce was elected Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He is President of the American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) and Chairman of Green Roofs for Healthy Cities (GRHC). Mr. Bruce is a LEED accredited professional, a certified irrigation designer and an EPA WaterSense Certified Professional.