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2016: VOLUME 10, NUMBER 3 MICHIGAN CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS


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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings fellow landscape architects and friends!

Congratulations to our President Elect, Ben Baker, and his team who coordinated a successful Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner on September 28th and 29th in Grand Rapids. It was a busy two-day event including our second LA Ride bicycle tour, a scavenger hunt and a full day of educational sessions. The theme this year was focused on art in the landscape, which coincided perfectly during the Grand Rapids ArtPrize festivities. Thank you to those who attended, and of course to our sponsors and exhibitors who help make this type of event possible.

Additionally, we have just returned from the ASLA national meeting in New Orleans, attended by myself, our soon-to-be President, Ben Baker, and our Trustee, Bob Ford. As always, the sessions and Expo were top notch and it was good to see old friends and make new ones. If you are a member of ASLA, a non-member, or a friend of the profession, I encourage each of you to attend this event in the future as the speakers and field sessions provide unparalleled learning opportunities not only for landscape architects, but also for architects, planners, and engineers.

I hope you enjoy this issue of MiSITES which focuses on three types of open space design within our state: A revived Patriarche Park in East Lansing, connecting trails and corridors in Detroit, and green cemetery design, which discusses sustainable thinking in cemetery design. I hope you enjoy this issue and we welcome your ideas for future articles and stories. ■

Clare Jagenow, PLA, ASLA
President, Michigan Chapter of ASLA

For more information, please visit our website at www.michiganasla.org, or find us on Facebook and LinkedIn.

ON THE COVER: Detroit River Walk. Detroit RiverWalk was recently voted one of the six best city walks by The Guardian readers around the world.
Image courtesy of SmithGroupJJR.

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February 9, 2017
East Lansing, MI

MSU SPDC Career Fair
February 9, 2017
East Lansing, MI

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FROM HIGHWAYS TO GREENWAYS - RECONNECTING THE MOTOR CITY

By Neal Billetdeaux, ASLA
SmithGroupJJR

Detroit is experiencing a bright new start in urban growth and economic redevelopment. One element that is helping to support this growth is a renewed focus on the City's non-motorized network. Over the last two decades, an interest in revitalizing the riverfront has resulted in the Detroit RiverWalk, a reclamation of land along the Detroit River promoting highly desired public access. Another success was implementation of the Dequindre Cut; a new greenway on an abandoned rail corridor. This corridor has become a popular destination for Detroit residents as well as visitors to the City. In parallel with these efforts, and separate from the downtown core, the Midtown district has been implementing a multiphased greenway connecting local universities with a revitalized business core and numerous cultural destinations. Projects like these are connecting communities, activating public spaces and are helping to fuel the City's resurgence. This article will focus on a piece of the City's history, the rapidly growing greenway network in Detroit and the benefits it is providing. As a point of clarity, the term greenway is being used loosely to represent the spectrum of on- and off-road non-motorized infrastructure.

While Detroit is realizing interest and support for a connected non-motorized community, it has also suffered from decades of transportation planning with an emphasis on the automobile. This has resulted in a freeway system that has severed many of the City's neighborhoods from jobs and critical services. U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx has offered an honest appraisal of America's history of road construction that focuses on the damage that highways caused in many urban neighborhoods. He clearly identified the negative impact freeways have had on low-income and minority neighborhoods. Nowhere does this ring more true than in Detroit.

In the spring of this year, Secretary Foxx launched a new initiative called "Ladders of Opportunity", which aims to shape transportation policy based on how infrastructure can serve as a bridge to jobs, education and better health. Greenways are an important element of this infrastructure. They improve access to reliable, safe and affordable transit, aligning with the concept of Ladders of Opportunity, by using transportation to further opportunities, repair damaged communities, and build new infrastructure to serve these communities. Reconnecting neighborhoods to transportation systems helps to reverse the deleterious effects of freeway construction encouraging economic growth, and community revitalization. "Communities across the country know that if we want a strong, multimodal transportation system that will meet our needs in the future, we need to make meaningful investments today," said Secretary Foxx.

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) discretionary grant program is one mechanism Secretary Foxx is targeting to implement his Ladders of Opportunity initiative. This program focuses on capital projects that generate economic development and improve access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation for communities, both urban and rural.

Two greenway projects in the City are serving to ameliorate the impact of the freeway system by providing greater neighborhood connectivity to jobs, services, healthcare, food and education. Link Detroit was funded by a TIGER grant and had its grand opening this past spring. The Inner Circle Greenway is planned and is targeting TIGER grant funding to assist with implementation.

LINK DETROIT

In 2011, the City, in collaboration with a dedicated group of non-profit organizations, developed the concept of Link Detroit. Link Detroit proposed a series of multi-modal infrastructure improvements to create a non-motorized transportation network through the Midtown area to Eastern Market, continuing on to the Detroit RiverWalk and extending into the heart of downtown and north to Hamtramck. The improvements would link several of Detroit's wonderful assets — the Riverfront, Downtown, Eastern Market, Midtown and surrounding neighborhoods — creating access for residents and visitors. The TIGER 2012 grant program offered a way for the City, in collaboration with multiple non-profit organizations, to realize a true paradigm shift in establishing and implementing a collective vision.

RIGHT: The Dequindre Cut has been transformed from an abandoned rail corridor to a significant non-motorized connection between the City's assets.
Image courtesy of Michigan Municipal League.

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FROM HIGHWAYS TO GREENWAYS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

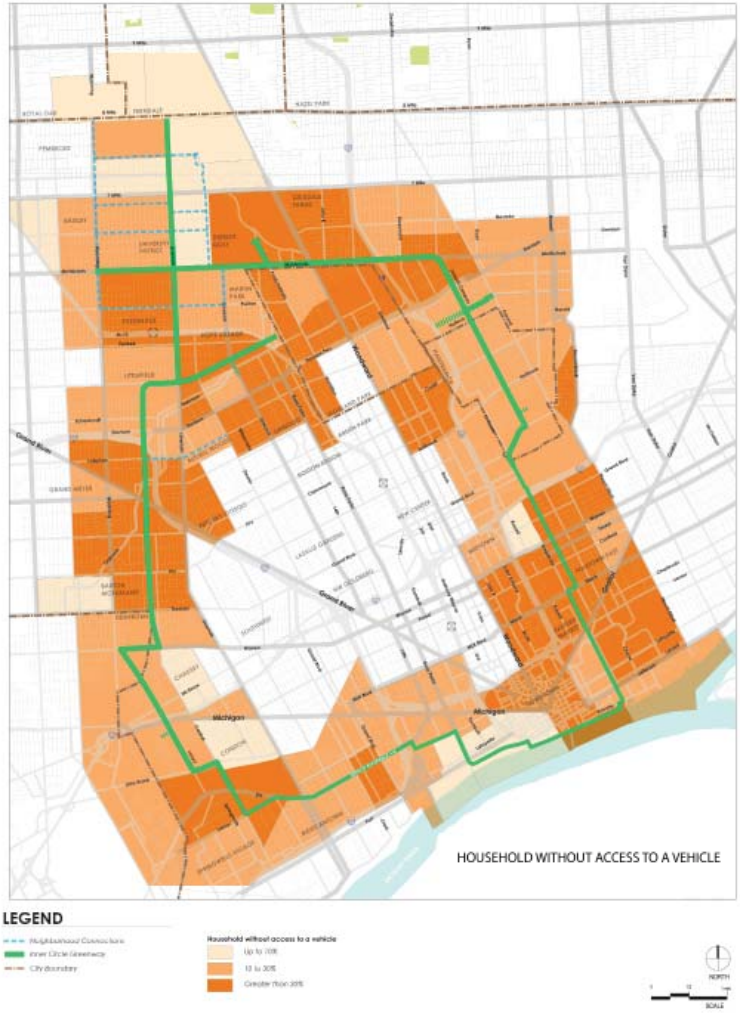
These improvements have generated opportunities for economic reinvestment, supported the local and regional community, and provided convenient and cost-effective transportation options to residents who live and work in the City. The project built off of the substantial investments already made in the development of greenways, streetscapes, bicycle paths, and associated infrastructure enhancements. It also leveraged other key local infrastructure investments, such as the Woodward Light Rail, and regional bus rapid transit. Improved functionality of Detroit's multi-modal system would enable visitors and residents to better access the city's commercial, recreational, educational and cultural offerings.

With a desire to measure the impact that the Link Detroit projects are having, and to justify the continued nonmotorized investment in Detroit, the City uses automated counters to track bicycle and pedestrian usage of the corridors. Since the counters were installed in December of 2015, over 190,000 users have taken advantage of the greenway, averaging over 2,000 people per week.

INNER CIRCLE GREENWAY

The Inner Circle Greenway is a transformative transportation and economic development project that forges connections across dispersed Detroit-area neighborhoods long separated by freeways and underserved by disjointed transit. It is comprised of a number of existing segments including the Detroit RiverWalk, Dequindre Cut, and the Southwest Detroit Greenlink. The remainder of the route is a mixture of proposed on and off road infrastructure driven by existing conditions. The largest segment is the construction of 7.6 miles of shared use path on an abandoned Conrail corridor.

The Inner Circle Greenway, which unsuccessfully pursued a 2016 TIGER grant, will provide, when funded, significant benefits for local communities by aligning with all three pillars of USDOT's Ladders of Opportunity agenda: Connect, Revitalize and Work.



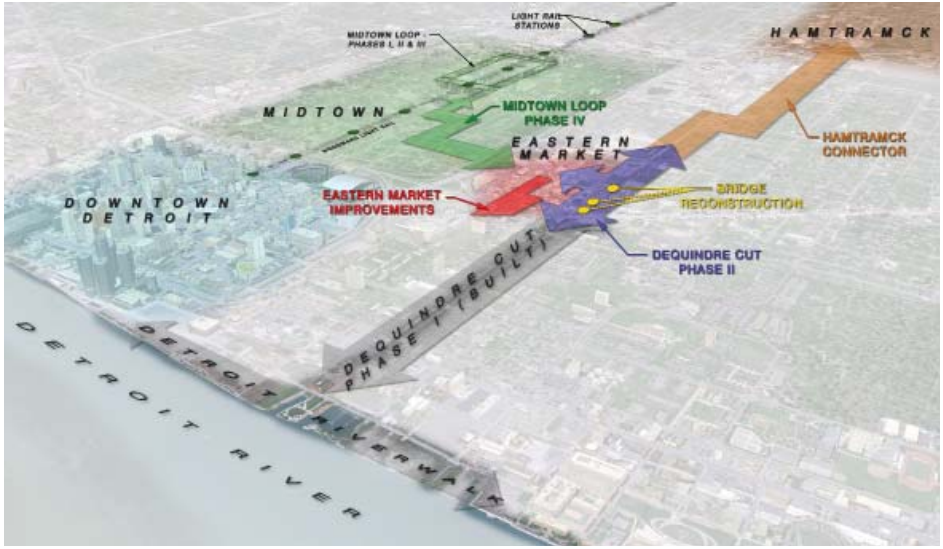
RIGHT: A disproportionate number of City of Detroit residents do not have access to a vehicle. Images courtesy of SmithGroupJJR.

Connect: Use Transportation to Further Opportunities

Twenty-six percent of the households in Detroit do not own a car, compared to nine percent nationally. The transit catchment area can be as much as 16-times greater when non-motorized access is considered. Through improved mobility, this project will enhance the quality of life for residents with better access to job training, employment, education and services.

Revitalize: Strengthen Affected Neighborhoods

Many low income and minority neighborhoods in Detroit were severed by freeway construction. The Detroit Expressway Plan of 1945 promoted large-scale slum clearance routing freeways through "substandard areas." The Inner Circle Greenway will leverage comprehensive, multi-sector planning efforts in five target neighborhoods, including those sliced by the I-96, I-75 and I-375 freeways, which aim to increase density through mixed-use development, small business support, blight removal and demolition, single family home rehabilitation and vacant land activation.



RIGHT: Map of connections identified by Link Detroit
Images courtesy of SmithGroupJJR.

Work: Create Jobs through New Infrastructure

The Inner Circle Greenway will build new nonmotorized infrastructure and enhanced bus stop facilities to serve the communities it passes through. It will build new bridges and improve existing bridges across current highway barriers and reclaim an abandoned rail corridor serving the revitalized adjacent neighborhood. This construction will create new jobs for area residents through clear connections to the City's workforce development system. The Inner Circle Greenway will also spur development in adjacent neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

Urban greenways are a critical component of revitalization efforts across the nation. The City of Detroit and its residents are realizing the benefits as these networks serve to connect neighborhoods, stimulate economic reinvestment and attract people to the City. They also offer travel options to access jobs, commercial centers, and services addressing equity in the transportation network. ■

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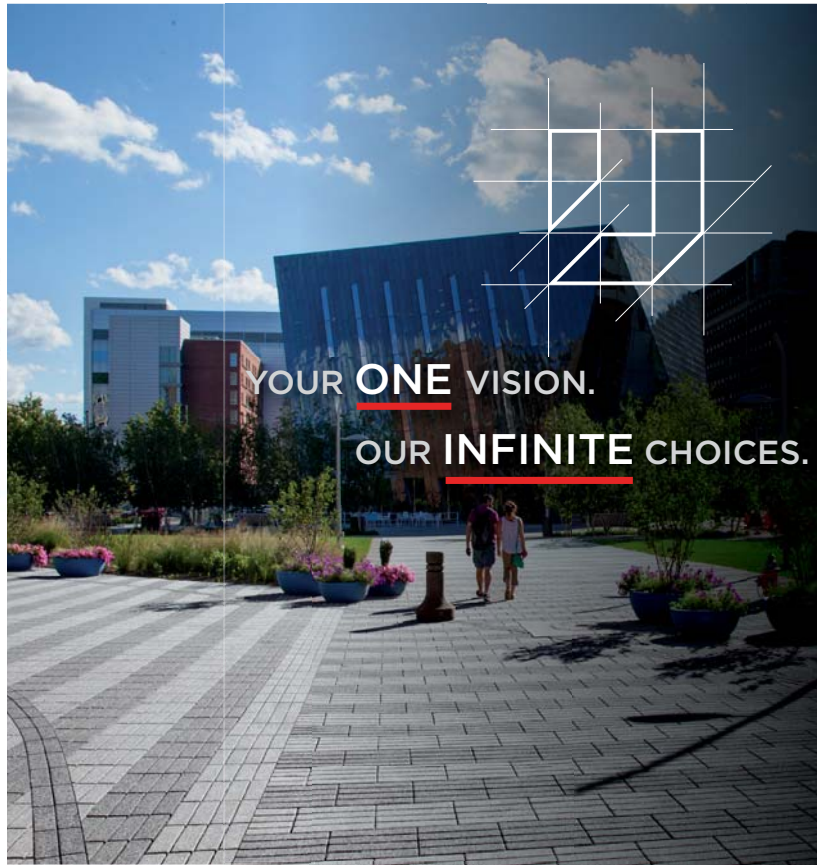

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PLAYGROUND-IN-THE-PARK — RE-IMAGINED

By Robert Ford, ASLA
LAP + Creative

What happens to a park's wooden playground when it reaches the end of its useful life? Many of these playgrounds were funded, built and maintained by communities over 20 years ago. Here is a description of the renaissance of one such playground at Patriarche Park in East Lansing, Michigan. Many of the people who built the original playground now have children of their own and wanted to share those same types of experiences and memories that they had growing up. The answer in this case, according to the citizens of East Lansing, was to build a new playground compliant with current standards within the same footprint to reminisce and celebrate the inevitable transition.

Over the years, playground standards have changed significantly. The whimsical and enchanting design-build wooden playgrounds, built in the 1980's – 90's, were a wonderful way to bring together a community for a 2-3 day community-build event, including food, beverage and music. It was a community party of sorts that brought many families and neighbors together for a worthwhile cause. These playgrounds functioned well for the most part, but they also had serious deficiencies. Many of these structures had creosote or chromate copper arsenate preservatives embedded in the wood which is toxic if ingested or absorbed; and potentially could leach into the ground. There are also problems with wood rot, splinters, checking/cracking and rusty nails and fasteners that can cause lacerations, tetanus, and infections. Many of the paints and finishes that were used to extend the life of the wooden playgrounds also had deficiencies if absorbed, ingested or inhaled. The continuous flaking or peeling of those toxic chemicals is also a concern. Older playgrounds for the most part do not meet newer design standards developed during this current time period. So the City decided it was time to retire the magical fortress that held so many treasured memories by the community.

How does one go about raising the funds to re-build a playground? The Rotary Club of East Lansing led the charge to create a new playground by forming a Patriarche Park Playground committee. The Rotary was a logical partner in this project because they led the charge on the first playground, so some of the members had experience. They adopted a theme entitled "Playground-in-the-Park – Re-Imagined" to rally around, and recruited a well-known celebrity to help the community raise the funds to build a "play environment" that would welcome children of all abilities. Suzy Merchant, Michigan State University Women's Basketball head coach, was approached and she enthusiastically accepted the position. From there, it was a three-year effort to raise $750,000. The first goal was to communicate the reasons why the existing playground had to be replaced. Numerous public meetings, news articles and fundraising events convinced the community that this was a valid undertaking even though they would miss the old playground.

The City retained LAP + Creative, Landscape Architects, of Lansing, MI, along with Sinclair Recreation who represents Game Time, of Holland, MI, to meet the standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), ASTM International and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under their guidance, the Playground committee made a conscious decision to meet the seven basic principles of universal design as defined by North Carolina's College of Design which included: equitable use, flexibility in use, intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort and size and space for approach & use in a public environment.

The second goal was to commemorate the efforts of the volunteers and the contributions made by corporations, businesses, and organizations. A "Donor's Plaza" was created to greet visitors as they approached the play environment to explain who had made the playground possible. The plaza includes the City of East Lansing and Rotary Club seals embedded into the plaza's refined paver pattern and a sign listing all who contributed to the project. A plaque acknowledging the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for their funding contribution to the project is also included in this area. An overhead structure welcomes visitors, creating a "sense of place" and defining the Donor's Plaza as the entry to the playground. The Plaza also contains a well-landscaped seating area for people to relax and enjoy the entire playground from this ideal vantage point.

The third goal was to invite the community to partake in the design process. The initial design was envisioned in terms of passive and active use zones.

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Entry into Patriarche Park.
Images courtesy of LAP + Creative.

PATRIARCHE PARK (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

Above: Extended play concept plan.
Top Right: Passive zone play area.
Right: Donor's Plaza.
Images courtesy of LAP + Creative.

After some discussion through public forums, the activities became more integrated and graduated so that the edges of these zones were blended and less distinct. This provided a more integrated play environment with seating throughout, and active and passive play areas side by side. This integration allowed parents and grandparents to join in the play activities to an extent which allows for a complete mixture of age groups since there are few barriers to interfere. It also created a safe area for children to return to after an exhilarating excursion of active play to calm down with parent(s) or caregiver(s).

The passive zones were separated to a degree by low landscaped beds immediately adjacent to the active play zone. These zones provided comfortable break or snack areas allowing children to be flexible in their decision to be active or less active and to transition between zones quickly and seamlessly. The plants were designed to create interaction with the five senses (sensory gardens hosting audible, texturized and olfactory elements) and invite children to interact with the plant materials. It also allows very young children an opportunity to explore more intimate spaces (chimes, drums, stepping stones, etc.) with the parent while their older siblings run about. Interpretive signs playfully describe plants, insects, amphibians and mammals. One could take a break in the less active areas and still feel included because all the play areas were in full view and relatively close to the main play structure.

The fourth goal of the Playground-in-the-Park project was to make the play environment barrier-free and accessible to children of all abilities. The ground surfaces were designed to exceed ADA specifications by using poured-in-place surface materials with contrasting colors to visually differentiate use zones by age (2-5, 5-12) and activity level. The concrete walks and interspersed connecting paths made it easy to see and for children to intuitively move back and forth without hesitation and without exerting extra effort since all of the ground planes are accessible within the play environment.

Linked play was another goal throughout the playground. This concept allows for children of all abilities to move fluidly from one play component to another in a somewhat orderly fashion. Obviously, vertical height is a challenge for less mobile individuals so multiple ramps were included throughout the vertical play elements with stairs, decks, slides and chutes for children of all abilities. There were also multiple ground components that provided inclusivity in the overall structure which allowed children to conveniently interact with one another and socialize while playing below the structure as well as above. The equipment addressed: balancing, swinging, sliding, climbing, overhead hand to hand movement, and spinning required to provide the basis for proper physical development for all ages so individual motor skills were tested with moderate risk.

The final primary project goal was physical fitness. A perimeter trail was defined around the play structure, swings and climbers. It was color coded and was embedded into the synthetic surfacing which allowed a walking trail for those that wanted to make an imaginary voyage from one location to another. It also served as a visual signal that you were entering the active play zone. Along the trail was the “Island of Imagination” linked by a bridge. The island was surrounded by a swale (moat during rain events) which was intended to represent a far-away world, providing the solitude that one would enter to become separated from all of the commotion. Along the path was another quiet area with bench and interpretive panel explaining the secrets of the “rain garden.” This garden is adjacent to the playground and works hard to retain all of the rain water that falls onto the playground that is then transferred down through the synthetic surface into pipes which feeds the plants.

“Playground-in-the-Park” is a playground that demonstrates teamwork, community, determination, vision and resiliency. It emphasizes the social, physical, sensory, communicative and cognitive benefits of play. The Patriarche Park playground process has been noticed. The Michigan Park and Recreation Association provided East Lansing an outstanding design award at the 2014 annual conference saying it was one of the best playground examples of integrated play.

One user explained, “the playground provides fun for everyone, including adults,” referring to the community-build part of the project, which is great, but the process of coming together and sharing a vision can take on a life of its own and become hallowed ground based upon meeting people, creating fond memories, reacquainting friendships and enjoying outdoor family gatherings. When projects like these elevate to this level and touch so many lives in so many ways, they become integral with the community and underpin the core values of everyday life by simply being a “playground in the park.” ■

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GREEN CEMETERY DESIGN

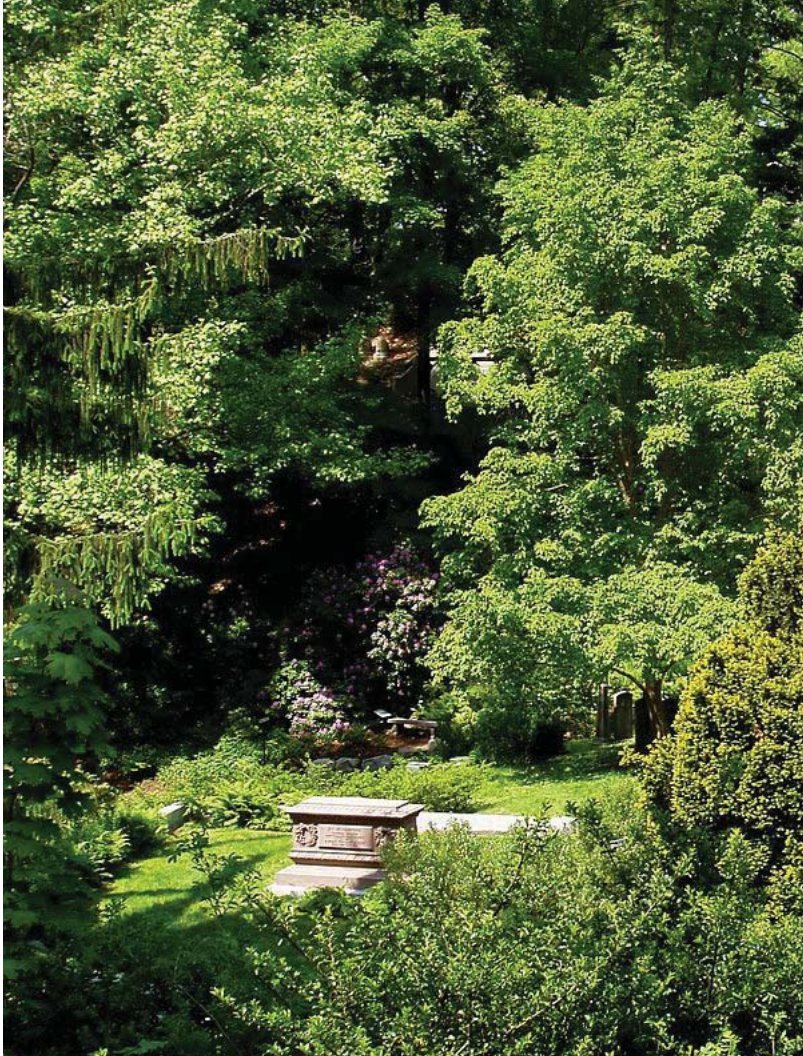
By Jack Goodnoe, ASLA
Cemetery Planning and Design

Green burial is the way mankind buried their dead before the invention of the modern death care practices which emerged from the American Civil War. Battlefield doctors embalmed officers with arsenic, and carpenters were employed to “undertake” the task of shipping the bodies home. This grew into the elaborate funeral industry that we know today. The Green Burial movement seeks to revert to the simpler and more natural ways of caring for our dead. It extols the virtues of returning the body to the earth in an environmentally friendly manner and in a naturalistic environment. This recent manifestation of the environmental ethics of burial presents new design opportunities and sustainability challenges for cemeteries of the future.

The philosophy of creating burial places dominated by nature is not unique in our nation’s history. At the beginning of 19th century, the major cities of the eastern seaboard were struggling to remedy unhealthy urban environments. The first civic minded organization to address the burial aspect of this situation was the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. This unique group of naturalists, public officials, and businessmen were both inspired by, and part of, the emerging Transcendentalist Movement in New England. The Transcendentalists viewed Nature as a divine source of inspiration, comfort and refuge. They conceived of a public cemetery situated in a natural environment with its inherent spiritual power and ability to soothe grieving families.

When Boston horticulturalist Henry A.S. Dearborn designed Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1831, he looked to Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris as a land design model. Pere Lachaise was established by Napoleon in 1804 for the specific purpose of providing a safe, healthy, and inspiring burial environment for the city dweller. This was the seminal, truly public, “garden style” cemetery.

Inspired by Pere Lachaise and the Transcendentalist perspective, Mount Auburn Cemetery created the first wholly American garden style cemetery. This uniquely American synthesis of English and European romantic landscape



design principals enabled the transition of the American cemetery from secular, colonial burial grounds and church graveyards to egalitarian, non-denominational, commercial cemeteries located in sylvan environments. It marked the birth of the American Rural Cemetery movement that spread rapidly across the US and Canada until the end of the 19th Century.

These American Rural Cemeteries were purposely set on rolling and wooded topography, and were designed with roads and burial layout that honored and fit the existing land forms. They preserved and incorporated natural features, natural drainage systems, and existing woodlands. The design of the Rural Cemeteries, like the other manifestations of Transcendentalism in art, literature, and education, was founded upon the belief in the inspirational and emotional healing capacity of being close to Nature. This is the same philosophy that is driving the Green Cemetery movement.

WHAT IS A GREEN CEMETERY?

Green cemeteries seek to minimize or eliminate the negative environmental impacts of the burial process below the ground and the cemetery maintenance operations above the ground, and create cemetery landscapes dominated more by nature than by the hand of man.

The overriding goal of the green burial process itself is to eliminate hazardous and non-biodegradable materials buried in the grave. The outer concrete burial vault used to facilitate easy burial and prevent slumping in the cemetery lawn creates the single largest carbon footprint in the burial process. The typical coffin that goes into this concrete vault is composed of highly contaminating plastics, finishes, glues and fabrics. With green burial the coffin is made with biodegradable materials such as cloth, wood, bamboo, recycled paper, and other environmentally safe materials; or is it replaced completely with a biodegradable cloth shroud.

Green burial design creates environments which honor, protect, utilize, and enhance the natural systems of a site. To accomplish this they minimize or eliminate traditional cemetery lawns to reduce mowing requirements, reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers, reduce or

LEFT: Mount Auburn, Cambridge, MA. The first American Rural Cemetery where nature dominates the cemetery landscape. Image courtesy of Jack Goodnoe.

GREEN CEMETERY DESIGN (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

eliminate the need for lawn and landscape irrigation, use native plant materials for landscape development, utilize natural drainage for storm water management and special features, use unpaved access roads, and use natural, locally available materials for construction and memorialization.

THE DESIGN CHALLENGES OF GREEN CEMETERIES

Eliminating or reducing the amount of mowed lawn requires a landscape design using alternative land covers. This creates two general landscape environments for burial in the green cemetery: the open meadow and the woodland. The burial meadows can use native grasses, groundcovers, and wildflowers with minimal maintenance requirements. The woodland setting requires protection strategies as much as enhancement in its planning and design.

The use of both meadows and woodlands for burial does, however, raise significant operational issues of access to the grave. Access is required for the grave digging process (most green burial graves are still dug using a backhoe for practical reasons, and even hand dug graves require significant foot traffic and soil handling in the process), the graveside burial services which can include dozens of people, and grave visitation which can continue for years after the burial.

THE ROLE OF CREMATION IN GREEN CEMETERIES

Cremation is sanctioned as a green burial option by the Green Burial Council (www.greenburialcouncil.org). This is significant because both in-ground burial of cremains in biodegradable urns and above-ground cremation placed in niche walls provide opportunities for conserving land by burying in smaller, leftover areas adjacent to curving walkways, in woodlands, or in concentrated cremation gardens located throughout the cemetery. The cremation rate in the US is over 30% nationally. It is increasing very rapidly and exceeds 80-90% in several states. This makes cremation an important land conserving element of comprehensive green burial design and needs to be part of any green cemetery master plan.

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

The landscape design for the Green Cemetery can be as light-handed as implementing a comprehensive forestry or meadow management plan. Additional landscape plantings in the Green Cemetery should be native, low maintenance, and locally sourced materials. Landscape design of the pathways and of meditation spaces should create places that offer both shelter for inward reflection and views for psychological release. They need to be places of refuge and places of inspiration. The historic, Rural or Garden cemeteries offer wonderful models of naturalistic landscapes with both closed and open vistas, simple but majestic overstory plantings, and strong simple ground planes with seasonal accents.

This new landscape expression for an ancient need offers the opportunity for landscape architects, as synthesizers of environmental planning, site engineering and landscape design to influence and guide the design of the cemeteries of tomorrow. ■

For more information contact:
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The Preserve, Waterford, MI. On-site rocks are used to create a meditation node with cenotaph memorials for cremation and meadow burials. Images courtesy of Jack Goodnoe.

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