THE EROS of CITIES

Street Life

The marriage of vibrant neighborhood life and bioregional ecology can be called the "Eros of Cities". The culture enhancing Eros reinvigorates community well-being by affirming commitments to neighborliness, real places and the felt specifics of bioregions. And how their fates are interlocked.

Neighborhoods are the basic social experience and physical building block. Let's put them back in the center of city life and allow Eros to speak in myriad ways as cradle of culture and human drama. Shared local knowledge, by its nature time-tested and practical, allows for the maturation and protection of neighborhoods knowing that collective effort will result in a coherent and organic whole.

Eros understands that those who build cities should be city lovers. What opens up when city builders are guided by the Eros of Cities and not narcissism and greed? It is locating community decision-making in the complex of reinhabitory and biological interrelationships that is its appropriate context.

The cultural diversity and vitality of the city combined with the best of what we associate with village life — social intimacy, stability, and mutual aid.

The alignment of human and bioregional purposes fosters a sense of being part of a larger whole that is socially enriching. Place-building helps embed local design and construction at the appropriate scales of neighborhood to bioregion.

Practical experience has provided landmarks to help navigate and design this unique terrain:

Safety for All: Buildings, streets, landscape features and good lighting create a safe and stable neighborhood.
Streets for People: A common space for enhanced social interaction and shared use.

Mixed Use: The practicalities of daily life are close by and elegantly integrated into streets and buildings.
Diversity: A range of housing types, densities, and price levels strengthen the civic bonds of community.
Neighborhood Wildness: Water features, plantings, and art evoke an understanding and respect for the wider natural community that makes city living possible.
Walkability and Transit Access: Getting around is safe and pedestrian friendly.
Community Living Rooms: Comfortable public spaces and safe streets provide opportunities for social gatherings and watershed awareness.

The Daylighting of Rivers and Creeks

Daylighting combines the restoration of natural landscapes and habitat conservation areas with a green infrastructure program that can help with stormwater run-off and the improvement of water quality. The neighborhood becomes a more beautiful place to live and work benefiting nearby businesses (while generating jobs, especially for the lucky ones who tend to the maintenance of the daylighted river). From the essential perspective of living-in-place, daylighting can help foster the elementary association with, and sanctification of, the hydrological cycle as an everyday experience.

Thornton Creek

The watershed area of Thornton Creek in Seattle (12 square miles) is the largest in the city. An important section of the Creek was buried under the parking lot for the Northgate Mall and used for urban runoff. When a larger piece of the Mall area, including the parking lot, became available for redevelopment, years passed before the City, local activists and developers came to a hard earned consensus as to its overall design.

What makes the daylighting of this section of Thornton Creek unique? It is well integrated into the design of a higher density mixed use neighborhood and built for walking and public transportation and to LEED Silver standards.

Largely completed in 2009, the Creek restoration addresses the basics: in-stream and riparian habitat improvements while also helping to maintain water quality and control flooding.

As befitting a transit oriented project, there are pedestrian connections to the surrounding residences and stores as well as to a regional transit hub. These walking choices often take one along Thornton Creek where there are overlook areas, public art and educational signage.

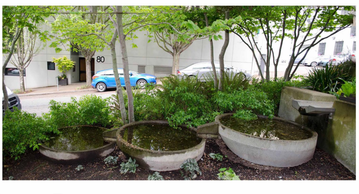
Blurring the edges of traditional neighborhood design and alive nature, especially running water, conjures up, not only a healthier environment, but a more fully realized human community.

Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure has become a viable alternative to conventional hard infrastructure stormwater management. It accomplishes this with a basic premise: imitate local hydrology and aquatic ecosystems rather than reordering them. How? By employing an equally elementary and trustworthy approach: reduce paved over areas and then allow rainwater to enter soils slowly, as it normally would.

Green infrastructure is a suite of ecologically grounded landscape choices that address stormwater management. It is also often used to describe an interconnected open space system, from the local to the bioregional, which includes parks, urban forests and public and private green spaces laced together with vegetated and riparian corridors. The benefits of this "core and corridor" approach to open space planning extend to the entire life community: biodiversity conservation; flood hazard reduction; cleaner water and air and peace and quiet.

Belltown's Vine Street



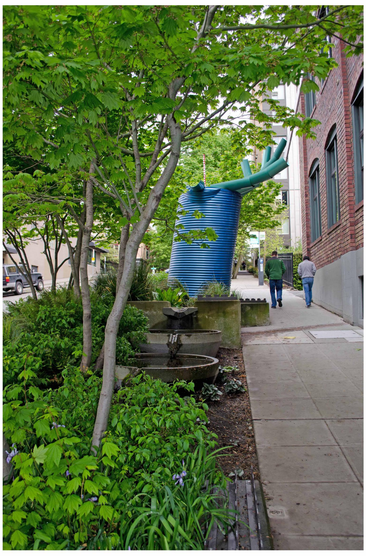
Public street art can also serve as green infrastructure. That is the promise of the visionary work of "Growing Vine Street", the name of an art project and neighborhood organization in Seattle, Washington.

Vine Street neighbors describe their work in the following way:

> The goal from the earliest time has been to turn the entire length of Vine Street into a street park—a parade of art and nature.
>
> One of the principal design features of the Growing Vine Street project involves capturing the local runoff and allowing the water to follow the course of the natural watershed. Since urban runoff contains a variety of pollutants, some filtering is mandatory before this water is released into local streams, rivers, lakes, and bays. Growing Vine Street proposes to treat stormwater through biofiltration, the science of filtering water-borne pollutants with plants and other organisms. Growing Vine Street thus becomes a test project for urban neighborhoods, demonstrating the double benefit of reclaiming problem storm runoff while also creating a desirable, living green space.

Some principles that guide the Vine Street design process:

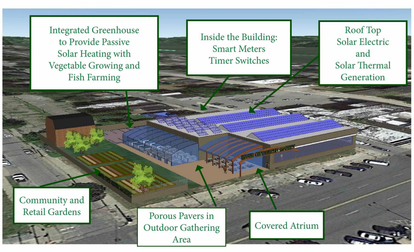
- Nature should serve as an analogy.
- The green street is a laboratory for urban rejuvenation.
- Green streets are not just green in color. They are green politically, ecologically, and socially.
- The green street is an environmental model for bringing our neighborhood into balance with ecological concerns.
- It provides a laboratory that explores the dynamic tension between natural and man-made elements, creating a mix and experimenting with a seamless blending of the two.
- Gives open space and green space priority over parking.
- Contrast with the built environment by creating as many opportunities for greenery as possible and minimizing paving and hardscape.
- Find ways to embrace our weather: When it rains, it pours, it spins, it spits, it gets mossy. Embrace storm water by integrating it into the landscape in an ecological useful manner (i.e., biofiltration, irrigation for gardening, and landscaping).



Energy Democracy

Consider the possibilities of energy democracy expressed as a bioregional utility: an organization responsible for supplying power for necessary sevices while maintaining the bioregion through a soft and distributed supply system embodied in reinhabitory practices. Scaled to local ecosystems and direct observation and reaction by local inhabitants, a bioregional utility is the attempt to satisfy basic human energy requirements while safeguarding the health of local watersheds and their populations. Examples of tying the scale of the utility to watershed conditions include Smart Buildings and Microgrids designed for neighborhoods or villages.

The Green Market as Smart Building

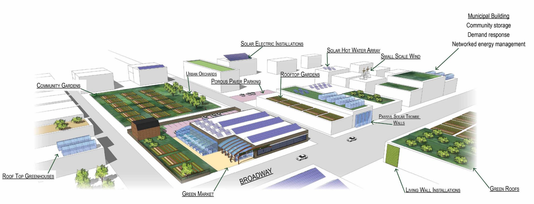


The Green Market can be a standalone public market that provides a building and home for small farms, farm to table operations and related cottage industries including regional artisans to sell their wares with an emphasis on offering and celebrating nutritious food.

Complementing the essential community roles of the public market, it can also be designed and built as a Smart Building.

A Smart Building can be understood as a distributed renewable energy system that is designed to conserve, best use and generate electricity and can be a home, commercial or industrial building. Smart Buildings, when taken together, can be the foundation for a local MicroGrid that benefits the owners and wider community.

A Green City MicroGrid



Smart Microgrids, like centralized grids, generate and distribute electricity but do so at a more local level. As an alternative to centralized fossil fuel based electricity generation, Smart Microgrids can enable the use and integration of renewable energy with a simplified connection and management process.

Localization can encourage communities to more consciously define their energy needs and goals (for example, reliability and carbon emission reduction) and builds upon a diversification of distributed energy sources and conservation while shifting control to the community. An example of this would be a smaller municipality or larger neighborhood operating its own Smart Microgrid to encourage the use of renewable sources of energy.

The "Small is Beautiful" Benefits of Green City Microgrids:

- Creates livelihoods and keeps money circulating in the community.
- Reduces air pollution that damages human health and the global climate.
- Smaller projects are easier to plan for and finance and less complicated to build.
- Dramatically reduces costs of upgrading electrical infrastructure while lowering transmission and distribution costs.
- Reliability and management improves by having the grid.