



Greening Investments and Capacity Building
Sound Spending for 21st Century Cities

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Testimony By:

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Ladies and Gentlemen, representatives, and distinguished speakers,

My name is Drew Becher and I am the president of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Thank you for having me here today as part of this invigorating congressional hearing, and thank you for your attention to these important issues.

As some of you know PHS has been a center for horticulture since the early 1800's and the producer of the Philadelphia International Flower Show, which has served as the Greater Philadelphia Region's rite of passage into spring for more than 100 years. We invite you to visit year's show in early March, themed Springtime in Paris to see in person how splendid the show is and its profound economic impact on the Region.

In addition to the Philadelphia International Flower Show, PHS has been working throughout Philadelphia since 1973 through our urban greening program: Philadelphia Green. This urban greening work includes community gardens, ex-offender re-entry programs, youth education and programming, public landscapes and gateway projects, urban planning, civic engagement, park restoration projects, stormwater scapes, citizen training to care for the urban forest and the planting of thousands of trees each year. PHS uniquely brings the region's wealthiest and poorest residents together by working in partnership to improve community through horticulture.

The significant and demonstrated economic impact that horticulture and greening has is the central theme of my testimony today.

My testimony will cover the following specific topics:

- 1) Greening as part of Urban Revitalization**
- 2) Trees: Restoring the Urban Forest and Scaling Up Tree Plantings**

- 3) Redeveloping Parks as the Center of Communities**
- 4) Stormwater Scapes and Green Infrastructure**
- 5) Scaling Up: Capacity Building through State and National Partnerships**

1) Greening as part of Urban Revitalization

Our more than thirty years of experience using horticulture to help community and neighborhood revitalization in Philadelphia has demonstrated quantitatively, qualitatively, economically, socially, environmentally and from a business and resident-retention perspective that investing in greening makes fiscal and economic sense for cities and communities.

Some of the consequences of the changes in our economy over the past 60 years, particularly in urban communities, has been a proliferation of abandoned and underutilized vacant land and buildings, dilapidated commercial corridors and high levels of unemployment with growing 'difficult to employ' populations.

PHS' work cleaning and greening this vacant land has had a significant impact economically and socially. Neighborhood residents, who used to go out of their way to avoid swaths of vacant land instead make use of these park-like settings for community activities, gatherings, and play areas. More than 10% of the 7 million square feet PHS has cleaned and greened in Philadelphia has been subsequently re-developed due in part to the improved curb appeal of the land, bringing hundreds of new homes, new commercial land uses and new tax payers into the city. A study by Professor Susan Wachter of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School determined that property values increase by up to 17% for homes adjacent to a cleaned and greened lot as compared to a decrease of up to 20% in value for homes located adjacent to a neglected vacant lot. Greening increases home values and has been proven to be a sound investment.¹

Over the past two years representatives from Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Indianapolis and Cleveland have visited Philadelphia to explore utilizing the PHS greening model in their cities. Youngstown Ohio and New Orleans Louisiana have begun to implement work based on the PHS model.

Cleaning and greening is also an important inroad to creating Green Collar Jobs and offering employment opportunities to difficult to employ individuals, such as ex-offenders. PHS' cleaning and greening work has employed approximately 200 individuals in the City with living wage jobs, many of whom are considered difficult to employ. In close partnership with the City of Philadelphia, our Roots to Entry Program is currently working with its third class of ex-offenders and more than 65% of them have found entry level employment with landscape contractors at \$12-15 per hour wages. Job training for ex-offenders and other difficult to employ populations is an important part of how greening programs can help stabilize communities and support urban revitalization.

Regarding important commercial corridors, a multi year study performed for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, or LISC, found that the cleaning and greening of vacant land joined

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as the only two interventions that have been implemented in the City of Philadelphia which “demonstrated consistently significant relations to corridor success.” As you will see below, this finding is reinforced by our understanding of how tree canopy positively influences shopping behavior

The study defined corridor success as change in real estate values in and around Philadelphia’s 265 commercial corridors, year over year change in retail sales per corridor mined through Revenue Department records, and number of shopping trips through a Statistically-sound household survey. ⁱⁱ

PHS has a long history of success and innovation in using greening to build community and as part of broader urban revitalization efforts. We see the 21st century as ripe with opportunity for new thinking about how to spur economic impact in urban areas through greening.

2) Trees: Restoring the Urban Forest and Scaling Up Tree Plantings

Cities and metro regions around the country have experienced significant and widespread loss of their tree canopies over the past 40-60 years, due to sprawling residential development, reduced municipal budgets and a general lack of knowledge about the importance of trees. PHS and our planting and academic partners around the country have done significant work demonstrating the economic, environmental and social benefits of trees. In Philadelphia, Professor Wachter’s previously mentioned study found that the relatively simple act of planting a tree increases adjacent property values by up to 10%. ⁱⁱⁱ We also know through research from Professor Kathy Wolf of the University of Washington, that people spend more time and are willing to spend more money in shopping districts that have ample tree coverage. ^{iv}

In New York, the MillionTreesNYC Initiative which was a collaboration between Mayor Bloomberg’s PlaNYC, the New York Department of Parks and Recreation and The New York Restoration Project, recognized how important tree planting was to the Mayor’s broader efforts to create a thriving and vital City. The project analyzed potential planting sites and which organizations had responsibility for them, clarified roles and responsibilities, and determined that for New York to achieve a 30% tree cover, one million trees needed to be planted. Responsibility for achieving this goal was divided amongst the public and private sectors as well as individual homeowners. Prior to the initiation of MillionTreesNYC, 5000-10,000 trees were being planted per year in the City. The average is now 80,000 trees planted per year and with several years 400,000 already planted since the campaign began.

In Chicago, tree plantings led a renaissance of greening efforts including green roofs, median plantings and other landscaping and beautification efforts which are widely described as one of the key ingredients to Chicago’s improved quality of life, and its recognition as a world class city.

An important bedrock for our future efforts and source of pride, is the PHS Tree Tenders program. PHS has trained more than 4000 volunteers who have learned to care for the urban forest in their own backyards. They exemplify the importance of successful outreach and

education . TreeTenders serve as the nucleus for residential tree plantings and represent thousands of hours of in kind labor and outreach.

In the coming months, PHS will launch TreeVitalize One Million. Building on our existing City and regional efforts, TreeVitalize One Million will lead a broad public-private partnership to plant 1 million trees across three states and eleven counties over the next ten years.

A new and robust partnership with the US Forest Service is bringing an even more expansive view of how to deploy resources to meet this goal. We are delighted that the Forest Service will be locating a new research station in Philadelphia on PHS premises as part of their interest in growing the level of their urban forest research and the capacity of their planting partners like The City of Philadelphia and PHS.

I am confident this broad view of the urban forest will expand new partnerships and funding sources that will enable us to meet and exceed our tree canopy goals.

3) Redeveloping Parks as the Center of Communities

PHS has a long history of working with parks in neighborhoods in and outside the City of Philadelphia. As the 21st century dawns, there is the opportunity to reintroduce the great parks and public spaces as the centerpieces of vibrant communities.

As municipal budgets shrunk and disinvestment in the communities surrounding urban parks set in, many parks faced marked decline in recent decades. We have lost sight of the big ideas promulgated by thinkers like Frederick Law Olmsted, who when he designed New York's Central Park and the other famed landscapes of the City Beautiful movement, a time when it was understood that grand parks and civic spaces are critical elements of thriving cities.

Change is afoot as cities have once again begun to highlight successful park design and investment as a component of their broader revitalization efforts. Chicago's Millennium Park or New York City's Highline (an elevated linear park) are high profile examples that demonstrate new interest, energy and investment being directed to urban parks as part of a new wave of big ideas. It is an exciting time for urban parks!

PHS has long been combining design and technical expertise with community development work and capacity building activities. We have worked with communities to help them understand that better design will result in better, more friendly, cleaner and safer places. We have supported a city-wide steering committee made up of park representatives from every neighborhood who now realize that they speak more loudly and effectively to elected officials and leaders when they speak together as one organized group. We work to help communities do programming and host activities which enliven their parks and neighborhoods and attract new users. We help plan and organize volunteer cleanups because organized participation is important and volunteers really do a good job and because tracking in kind support can help secure financial support. We support advocacy efforts around municipal budget decisions because sustainable funding for municipal maintenance is needed for parks to be successful. Lastly, public private partnerships,

and diversified funding streams, are an important way for parks to sustain the capacity needed to stay vital and beautiful.

There is ample evidence that investments in parks correlates with larger economic development for cities and regions. A study conducted by Ernst and Young for New York City found “investments in parks, when properly managed and maintained, positively impact the economic development of surrounding properties.” The study found 8 % to 30% increases in single-family home sale prices in close proximity to well improved parks (Prospect, Clove Lakes & Crotona Parks in New York). It also found a 115% to 225 % increase in asking rents for commercial office space near Bryant Park between 1990 and 2002 as compared to a 41% to 73% increase in asking rents in the surrounding submarkets.^v

A study done in San Diego concluded that that 5% of its tourism visits were due to its park system. Park-related spending by more than 1.3 million visitors to San Diego parks in 2006 equaled \$114.3 million dollars, creating tax revenue of approximately \$8.5 million dollars for the City.^{vi} In a 2006 study, The Trust for Public Land found that the parks system of Washington DC created almost \$1.2 billion dollars in residential property value, resulting in a \$6.9 million dollar increase in municipal taxes.^{vii}

As we look forward to the future, PHS is committed to continuing our legacy of support for good design, capacity building and technical assistance while pledging to think more grandly about the important role parks play as the center of the communities they serve.

4) Stormwater Scapes and Green Infrastructure

I worked closely with Mayor Daley in Chicago to support the green roof that was built on Chicago’s city hall. It has become an iconic landscape and has ushered in support for green roofs and other forms of stormwater scapes throughout the country. As my colleagues testifying here today will I am sure mention, our country’s urban areas are challenged by our existing stormwater infrastructure and the regulatory and capital budget environments in which municipalities and water authorities exist.

At PHS, we believe the shift towards green infrastructure and the proliferation of green roofs, as well as smaller scale residential solutions like rain barrels, are an ideal way to begin to address deteriorated infrastructure, particularly in older cities. Green infrastructure, while to some still nontraditional, offers significant benefits and presents a long-term, sustainable solution that will ensure future generations a healthier environment. They offer respite for people by improving or creating new green spaces.

Still, significant challenges developing green infrastructure remain. Funding for new engineering strategies is not firmly in place to provide for the level of impact they are able to achieve, both in the short and long term. I am delighted to be here in support of Representative Edward’s Green Infrastructure Bill. Passage will help fund a backlog of infrastructure projects throughout the country, creating jobs and expanding innovative green practices. .

PHS, working in partnership with Philadelphia Water Department's Office of Watersheds has designed and installed a variety of types of pilot green infrastructure projects. Together, we have designed and built stormwater scapes in streets, sidewalks, in parks, on the grounds of recreation centers and on roofs, through green roof designs. We are just at the beginning of this exciting trend and eager to continue innovating with non profit, municipal and utility partners throughout the country.

5) Scaling Up: Capacity Building through State and National Partnerships

Our experience has also demonstrated that greening is a viable, scalable and exportable approach that can be deployed in a variety of types of communities through a variety of locally developed public private partnerships.

PHS' national partnership with Keep America Beautiful (KAB) focuses on how to use greening to initiate and sustain other economic development and beautification efforts. We have helped augment KAB's more traditional offerings with technical assistance regarding landscape architecture, engineering, and urban planning, as well as softer skills such as community development. We continue to learn from KAB and its affiliates through meetings, visits, webinars and working together.

We have also hosted a number of tours for public private partnerships from other cities that seek to use greening strategies to spur economic development. To date, we are pleased to report the following outcomes:

- A visit from a Pittsburgh-based public private partnership led by their Urban Redevelopment Authority has led to the adoption of a package of policy changes, code changes, and agency actions to initiate a new greening program incorporated into their land bank and redevelopment activities.
- A joint delegation of Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Kansas-based Keep America Beautiful affiliates visited Philadelphia and following the trip the Indianapolis partners are weighing a multi-million dollar investment to begin cleaning and greening their vacant land and the Keep Cincinnati Beautiful organization is currently establishing a land greening program.
- Youngstown Ohio and New Orleans Louisiana have both recently launched land greening programs modeled on a landscape maintenance and land banking approach that is tied to broader redevelopment efforts.
- A visit from a Cleveland-based public private partnership led by the Cleveland Planning Commission led to the development of a survey of greening activities in a number of cities for review and implementation. Cleveland will also host the Reclaiming Abandoned Properties Conference in October.

In conclusion, the recession has helped tipped the scale in favor of the sort of outreach and capacity building efforts PHS seeks to scale up across the country. Cities and towns without the ability to undertake new public private partnerships have been less able to adapt to challenges

impacting their local communities. The communities that have faired best are those with existing public private partnerships who have deployed innovative approaches quickly and comprehensively. Communities without these sorts of partnerships may also missed opportunities for funding to help address these problems because by working together, additional resources can be leveraged to bring projects to scale.

The Green Communities Act and the Green Infrastructure for Clean Water Act are critical tools for supporting green infrastructure solutions and public private partnerships such as ours in cities and towns across the country. I appreciate your leadership, interest and support. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and we look forward to working with you in the future.

ⁱ The Determinants of Neighborhood Transformation in Philadelphia. Identification and Analysis: The New Kensington Pilot Study” Professor Susan Wachter, The Wharton School. University of Pennsylvania 2005.
<http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen/seeinggreen.htm>

ⁱⁱ “Commercial Corridors: A Strategic Investment Framework For Philadelphia” Econsult Corporation 2009
http://www.econsult.com/articles/031009_Exec_Sum.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ The Determinants of Neighborhood Transformation in Philadelphia. Identification and Analysis: The New Kensington Pilot Study” Professor Susan Wachter, The Wharton School. University of Pennsylvania 2005.
<http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen/seeinggreen.htm>

^{iv} “Business District Streetscapes, Trees and Consumer Response” Kathleen L. Wolf. Journal of Forestry, December 2005.
http://www.naturewithin.info/CityBiz/BizTreesAll_JFor.pdf

^v “How Smart Parks Investment Pays Its Way” A New Yorkers for Parks and Ernst & Young Study which chose 6 parks from all 5 boroughs and 30 neighborhood parks for a city-wide survey in 2002.
http://www.ny4p.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=54&Itemid=164

^{vi} City “Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System” The Trust for Public Land 2003
http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22879&folder_id=3208

^{vii} “Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System” The Trust for Public Land 2003.
http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22879&folder_id=3208