

Using less water is one way to go green

by Tim Johnson

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Today's landscape architects face a number of new challenges that affect the future of our communities, the environment and the economy.

Many commercial clients working to become greener, are requesting the incorporation of sustainable design into their projects. Landscape architects are the bridge between the natural and the built environment – developing spaces for human use while also preserving and restoring natural environments.

Many landscape architects now follow practices incorporated in the U.S. Green Build Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) goals. LEED certification provides verification that projects are environmentally responsible, profitable and a healthy place to live and work.

The LEED program has grown to encompass more than simply the building and now places a high value on the site design and other aspects generally under the responsibility of the landscape architect. Additionally, LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) and the Sustainable Sites Initiative promote sustainable land development and management practices and can apply them to planned neighborhoods and sites with and without buildings.

Perhaps the single greatest trend affecting the profession is water. Globally, water resources and the environments upon which they rely are becoming increasingly scarce. Locally, there is increased emphasis on conservation and restoration of water courses and riparian habitats. Local landscape architects working on new commercial developments are experiencing pressures to plan and design solutions, which incorporate alternatives to traditional water management techniques. Some options include non-traditional grading concepts and porous paving designs which provide greater use of on-site storm water for irrigation and ground water recharge.

Increasingly, Tucson is becoming more urban and landscape architects will need to adapt. Many new projects are on infill sites with less than ideal conditions. Landscape architects need to balance the need for better urban design with site constraints and limitations.

Connectivity is also now a priority for landscape architecture projects; whether it is the connection of humans to nature or of humans to one another. In an increasingly urban environment, an individual's connectivity to nature is becoming more important. Systems of interconnected walking and biking paths and other methods for outdoor relaxation and recreation have become one of the greatest factors influencing people's choices of where to live, work and play.

Meeting the need for greater connectivity can meet sustainability objectives too. The establishment of green-belts or linkages which offer outdoor routes while meeting storm water and conservation goals at the same time is just one example of such congruence.

Much of what is proposed by sustainable initiatives, such as LEED, require a greater amount of cooperation among developers, design professionals and the community. The key to the success of these approaches and programs will be the extent to which such practices can benefit the environment while not adversely impacting the economic viability of future projects. Projects that successfully incorporate green design will do so in a manner that benefits the environment, the users and the bottom line.