

# DAILY JOURNAL OF COMMERCE

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## Making parks greener

*City parks department comes up with a sustainability scorecard*

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LEED has set the standard for making buildings green, but what about parks?

Seattle officials require new buildings and major remodels to be sustainable, and those larger than 5,000 square feet must achieve at least a LEED silver rating.

Seattle Parks and Recreation spends \$50 million to \$60 million every year for projects in design and construction, but most aren't eligible for LEED.

Erin Devoto, Parks and Recreation director of planning and development, said sustainable parks are also important so the staff decided to see what it could do to complement the city's efforts on sustainable buildings.

Parks and Recreation maintains 400 parks, 185 athletic fields, 151 outdoor tennis courts, 90 restrooms, 80 picnic shelters, 24 community centers, 10 swimming pools and five golf courses.

Facility managers were asked what could be done to save money as well as improve environmental and human health. Their tips became the base for an in-house scoring system, which the department created to measure sustainable features. Devoto said the program gives department staff targets and an organized system for achieving them.

Reusing topsoil earns one point, planting native vegetation earns four and managing stormwater on-site can win up to eight. A translucent roof for restrooms reduces lighting costs and the natural light stops mold from forming. Roof overhangs stop rain from washing paint into groundwater.

At some parks, collected rainwater is used to flush toilets and retaining walls are made from broken concrete. At Roxhill Park and Longfellow Creek, tree clusters and ground cover help conserve water and curb invasive species.



**Carkeek Park Environmental Learning Center is the first city facility and the first building in Seattle registered to achieve the gold-level LEED certification. It was made from 80% recycled or salvaged construction waste, including peeler logs from a naval building in South Lake Union.**

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Some figures are easy to project: salaries, maintenance, utilities and waste disposal are known quantities, but social and environmental benefits are less tangible.

"We'll never be able to measure something like, 'improved pedestrian access,'" said Richard Gelb, who works with both the Parks and Recreation department and Seattle Office of Sustainability and the Environment. Other targets include creating habitat diversity and deterring crime.

Seattle Police said to design safer areas, it's better to leave out shrubbery that obstructs lines of sight. Adults supervising children need to be able to see them.

Educating the public is part of the program. Devoto said there will be signage in parks explaining what is being done and why, as well as workshops and information on the department's Web site.

A lot can be done with little expense if people concentrate their energies, said Devoto. Design features that are especially efficient will become part of design standards.

Parks isn't alone in writing its own green rating system.

Residential buildings of four or more habitable stories can go for LEED certification, but smaller houses can't. The Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties created Built Green standards to help developers create low-impact communities.

Government officials, environmental consultants and architects came together to lay out rules. It took one year to refine and create a handbook that explains a checklist of green features.

"Our community checklist is specific toward site development," said Robin Rogers of Built Green.

In the same way commercial buildings look to LEED, community developments can use Built Green standards to gain green certification.

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