

Signage and Greenspace Development

by

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Introduction:

In this paper I will discuss the importance of developing active urban greenspaces throughout the City of Binghamton and the importance of signage along the confluence river trail. I will also provide general examples in which the Binghamton area can improve in order to attract the young and the talented to the area.

The City of Binghamton has recently joined an ongoing initiative in our country and has begun to take steps in improving urban greenspace throughout the community. Urban greenspace projects started to gain attention at the end of the 1990's partly because of the increased talk of a deteriorating global environment. Across the country, advocacy groups have been formed to promote the development of greenspaces in large cities such as Chicago, Boston, Portland and New York City. Smaller cities such as Binghamton have a generous amount of greenspace, but can do more to improve the quality of greenspace and promote community involvement of outdoor activities.

One national organization is the Urban Greenspace Institute. The Urban Greenspace Institute is based in Portland, Oregon and its focus is to ensure that parks, regional trail systems, greenways and greenspaces are integrated with the built environment in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region; and to promote urban greenspace efforts nationally and internationally. The Urban Greenspace Institute is just one of many national organizations dedicated to promoting the development of urban greenspace. There are also smaller local organizations dedicated to improving greenspace. These local organizations reflect the efforts of citizens who are dedicated to improving their community.

Environmental Importance:

Cities depend on the design, organization and preservation of urban greenspace, as well as well kept public spaces that contribute to the visual representation of the community. Societies have become concerned with man-made environments and with protecting or shaping nature in urban areas, and this had led to specific landscape patterns in the countryside as well as to the creation of parks and gardens in urban areas (MacHarg). Greenspaces contribute to the image of towns, which can change the way people embrace their attractiveness. As young people begin to decide where they want

to work and live, the availability of greenspace and outdoor activities plays a key role in that decision.

Researchers in the Netherlands studied the relation between health and greenspace in people's living environment. The amount of greenspace in their living environment was combined with self-reported health. People with more greenspace in their living environment judged themselves to be healthier and report fewer health-related complaints. Results of the study concluded that living near greenspace created less health complaints and both better mental and physical health than an urban environment. For every 10% increase in greenspace there was a reduction in health complaints equivalent to a reduction of five years of age. (Groenewegen PP. (2001).

The development of greenspace in urban environments has ecological, social, and environmental benefits.

Ecological benefits:

- Green spaces provide habitat for a variety of birds, fish, animals, insects, and other organisms, while also providing corridors and greenways to link them.
- Trees have been shown to absorb pollutants; as few as 20 trees can offset the pollution from a car driven 60 miles per day.
- The urban heat island effect occurs often in urbanized areas, where buildings, asphalt, and concrete absorb solar radiation and then remit it as heat, causing the air temperature of the city to rise.
- Plants have been shown to reduce the urban heat island effect directly by shading heat absorbing surfaces, and, indirectly, through evapotranspirational (ET) cooling.

Social benefits:

- Provides recreational use: a place to play, meditate, gather, or rest.
- A connection between community residents and the natural environment that surrounds them, thus allowing for a more livable city. This is essential in order for a community to be sustainable.

Environmental:

- Is a community facilities constructed in environmentally sound ways.
- Community gardens provide chemical-free food production and gardening.

Importance of Signage

Signage is any kind of graphic created to display information to a particular audience. A good park signage system performs multiple functions. It provides effective information and direction for people to find their way around the park. It encourages learning experiences. It helps maintain the image of the park and communicates park rules. Signage can meet specific needs, target certain areas, and at the same time be kept to a minimum in the park as a whole. It can also provide a sense of place and local pride through incorporating the history of a specific site in the overall design. There are four key elements to good park signage:

1. Understand- the needs of special groups such as those who are at stroller height as well as those who travel through the park by bicycle.
2. Identify- unique aspects of the history of the surrounding area
3. Outline-determine who your visitor audiences are
4. Develop- directional, educational, and informational

Understanding the needs of the people using the walkway is important because safety is always an issue. Families with small children should feel safe in their community including greenspace features such as the walkway. Park signage includes safety information such as what route(s) are safe for children, what areas are hazardous, whether or not skateboarding, rollerblading, and biking is allowed, and the number of park security. Signs dedicated to relaying safety information to the public must display what activities are appropriate in which areas. Families walking with their small children in strollers should not have to worry about skateboarders flying by them potentially endangering their children.

Background

Binghamton has a very rich history that dates back to the 1800's. The area became known as the 'Valley of Opportunity' during the early 1900's when immigrants moved into the area to work an abundance of jobs. Binghamton is the birthplace of many prestige businesses such as IBM, Dick's Sporting Goods, and L3. Aside from businesses, Binghamton also has an important geographical location along the Susquehanna and Chenango rivers. The confluence project river walk is located along these rivers, which makes the river walk a perfect location for greenspace attractions. The more amenities made available to the public, the more interested the public becomes. A simple structure such as signage can help attract more people to the river walk, which provides great exercise and ultimately brings people to the downtown area.

Including signage along the walkway is an added feature which can make the walk somewhat of an ‘experience.’ Signage also opens the door to area schools as well as Binghamton University students. Classes would have the opportunity to develop class trips along the river trail and learn about the history of Binghamton and what see what the City has to offer.

Binghamton Impact

Binghamton already has various greenspace projects underway including a biking and walking trail that would link the Binghamton University campus to Downtown. This project has already received funding and construction is set to begin in the near future. This project was introduced by Mark Bowers, liason for the Department of Transportation, who is the planning and program manager for the city of Binghamton. When this project is completed it will connect the Binghamton University campus to an existing river trail, which extends to downtown Binghamton and beyond. This project will benefit both students and the Binghamton community economically, socially, and physically. Students will now have the opportunity to take in a bike ride along the rivers into downtown where they will be able to explore the quaint shops and restaurants located throughout the downtown area. The university will also have the opportunity to incorporate the new trail into existing health classes.

This project alone represents the developments that are being made to develop Binghamton’s greenspace, which can ultimately impact Binghamton economically. By adding simple amenities into the community, the opportunity for small businesses opens up. Using the rivertrail link to campus as an example, students will be able to use the trail for exercise, or simple enjoyment, but without the proper equipment, the trail will simply become a path. This project opens up the opportunity for a bike rental shop which will create revenue and jobs. An idea as simple as extending the river trail to campus has opened the door to an endless amount of ideas that can all have a positive impact in the Binghamton community.

Conclusion

Binghamton was known as the ‘Valley of Opportunity’ and I believe it still is today. I have walked around Downtown Binghamton with my friends countless times and it seems we always end up discussing the potential the City has. We all know it is easier to talk about doing things than to actually do them, but one thing I have learned through this whole research process is that Binghamton has the key players. I have met many local leaders who all seem to share a common vision in bettering the Binghamton community; all of whom share a concern on how to better incorporate students of

Binghamton University with the Binghamton community. Mark Bowers is one of these leaders who helped me realize that something is being done, but accomplishing what may seem to be a simple task is actually a meticulous process.

Trying to make a change for the greater good of the community might mean working your way through the bureaucracy system. However, working through the various levels of bureaucracy is still positive action. Rather than just talking about what would be a nice addition to an existing project, local leaders in Binghamton have come together to work towards accomplishing their goals and have included the minds of Binghamton students along the way.