Transitioning to Sustainable Landscape Practices

For: Properties managed by on-site staff

Overview
In 2011, Swedish Medical Center transitioned its First Hill campus from conventional landscape practices to more sustainable ones. In the process, Swedish saved money, reduced water use, improved its landscape appearance and quality, and protected the health and safety of patients, visitors, staff and the environment.

Step 1 – Assess the landscape
Landscape Coordinator Liesl Zappler assessed the landscape using the following criteria:
- Landscape area uses
- Visibility to the public, patients, and staff
- Plant health
- Weed problems
- Maintenance effort required
- Appearance

Step 2 – Develop a plan
Liesl developed the Swedish Grounds Department Plan based on using proper horticultural practices to create and maintain landscapes sustainably. The Plan’s foundation is to eliminate the need for using pesticides by improving soils, designing beds to fill in quickly and shade out weeds, applying arborist wood chip mulch in beds, using a weed flamer for hardscapes, and ensuring plant health by putting the ‘right plant in the right place’. Using the Step 1 criteria, grounds staff renovated landscape beds using a mixture of evergreen shrubs, perennials, and landscape features such as rocks, logs, and art to provide year-round interest. They renovated the irrigation systems to be more efficient and eliminated past practices of overwatering.

Step 3 – Implement based on priorities and affordability
Landscape changes were prioritized based on the results of the assessment and ease of implementation. Small projects were worked into existing budgets, while larger projects were developed and budgeted into a five-year plan which estimated costs and benefits. An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy was adopted, resulting in a 5-Star EnviroStars award for the campus.

Step 4 – Budget for materials and labor
The purchase of weeding tools, and upgrading power equipment to be either battery powered or to comply with California emissions standards, cost approximately $3,000. This was partially offset by a $500 matching voucher from the King County EnviroStars program. Due to budget cuts, staffing was reduced by 1.6 FTE, but the new landscape was more resilient so quality was maintained.

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### Examples

#### Short-Term Project: Tropical Garden
*(fits within existing budget)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEFORE</th>
<th>THE CHANGE</th>
<th>AFTER: RESULTS &amp; BENEFITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bed was sparsely planted with juniper, daphne, and annuals.</td>
<td>Plants were chosen for drought tolerance, ease of maintenance, and year-round seasonal interest.</td>
<td>Aesthetics and habitat of the area were greatly enhanced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The daphne was leggy; the area lacked interest.</td>
<td>Compost was added to improve soil and plant health.</td>
<td>Hummingbirds are frequently seen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herbicides were used for weed control.</td>
<td>Arborist chips were used to suppress weeds and retain moisture.</td>
<td>Herbicides are not used.</td>
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Cost estimate: Annual maintenance: $300

Implementation: $1,245

Annual maintenance: $60

#### Long-Term Project: Carl Linnaeus Tribute & Healing Garden
*(part of 5-year plan)*

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Cherry trees suffered from brown rot.</td>
<td>All plant material was removed.</td>
<td>Aesthetics greatly improved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shrub were hedged and made into 18 round balls that required repetitive pruning.</td>
<td>The irrigation system was improved.</td>
<td>Patients, visitors and staff have a place to relax and enjoy nature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herbicides were used.</td>
<td>Soil was amended with compost.</td>
<td>Annual spray contract and supplemental applications were eliminated.</td>
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<td>An annual calendar-based insecticide program was used on trees and shrubs.</td>
<td>Stone wall, path, and benches were added.</td>
<td>Water use was cut in half.</td>
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</tbody>
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Cost estimate: Annual maintenance: $1,020

Implementation: $43,000

Annual maintenance: $160

### Resources

- Seattle Public Utilities “For Landscape Professionals”  
  [www.seattle.gov/util/landscapeprofessionals](http://www.seattle.gov/util/landscapeprofessionals)
- King County EnviroStars Program  
  [www.envirostars.org](http://www.envirostars.org)
- Water Efficient Irrigation Program & Rebates  
  [www.savingwater.org](http://www.savingwater.org)
- Seattle area watering index  
  [www.iwms.org](http://www.iwms.org)
- Thurston County IPM Pesticide Ranking  
  [www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehipm/ipm_cntyimp.html](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehipm/ipm_cntyimp.html)