

Center for Urban Habitats

The IX Project, summary.

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The Center for Urban Habitats (CUH) is a collaborative effort that furthers the advancement and understanding of biodiversity in Charlottesville, Virginia by installing and monitoring local native plant communities.

We install Biodiversity Experimental Plots (BEPs) for your enjoyment and for the advancement of understanding of local native ecosystems and the species they harbor.

Our project at the IX property is called:

Pollocks Path and Meadows *A Living Art Installation at the IX Property*

I have proposed a project that will bring a great amount of beauty, color and richness to the IX property. It will be an interactive art exhibit that is teeming with color, sweet smells, and wildlife. It will be a bit of time travel to a time in the past when biodiversity far exceeded what we know today. It will be a trip to the future to see what hope, understanding and action can do for biodiversity, and for the richness of our day to day lives. It will be art that creates an atmosphere that inspires wonder.

It is 100% experiential and educational, and it is designed to be a leading example of biodiversity conservation gardening in an urban setting.

The exhibit will be a 12,000 square foot meadow with more than 5000 locally adapted native plants. It will contain a raised walking platform, stream "listening stations", insect habitat walls, and an observation/picnic/gathering space.

Visitors to the site will be beckoned to stroll along a meandering pathway, a path that follows the approximate historic path of a stream that was once the heart of an ecosystem in this part of Charlottesville (Pollocks Branch). The path will be a slightly raised (raised just enough to give one the sense being aloft, floating and moving) and gently meandering boardwalk flanked by a wildflower meadow noted for its biodiversity, species richness, and ability to attract and support wildlife. It represents the power of life and potential for renewal and regeneration in a place that has seen complete ecological destruction. It will echo the grace of a stream that was flanked by the sweet smells of field and forest, the sounds of buzzing insects and birds, and the bustling activity of mammals, amphibians and reptiles. The path will also have a mural painted on its surface, and it will be adorned with swirls of blues immortalizing aquatic movement and sound.

Participants will enjoy the beauty of a living art exhibit while learning about local habitats and the plants and animals that live there. One will also take away ideas about the potential that resides in their own living and working spaces. Biodiversity and the joys that come with it may be enjoyed in urban areas. Only locally adapted native plant species will be installed in this meadow.

The project is both cultural and natural, as it draws inspiration from the landscape changes of the past, the ideas of the present and the potentials of the future. The project will be a living art exhibit that engages the public with first-hand experiences that explore the potential that resides in the intersection of an urban industrial archaeological/architectural complex, a buried stream valley, and local native biological richness.

Longterm?

Well, maybe this project will add enough fire to the conversation around saving the stream to get the political will moving again! Daylight the Stream! Bring back a vibrant ecosystem!

What sets it apart?

- The art exhibit will be living and interactive
- It bridges cultural and natural
- It allows the participant to discover the unique history of the site, human activity of the past, the present and the potential that resides in the future...all at once
- The heart of the project is a buried stream
- We will be installing an entire ecosystem, instead of just individual plants.
 - Lots of efforts are underway here and in other places throughout the country to increase native plant gardening and installations. However, most of them take a “plant installation” approach, instead of a plant community installation approach. And further, rarely do the installations include only locally adapted native species.
- All plants will be locally adapted species in order to spawn a more dense and active wildlife situation.
- It will maximize the potential for native biodiversity at this site
- Juxtaposition: The biodiversity at this site will inspire wonder with its buzzing richness and colorful beauty. It will rest upon an industrial archaeological site dominated by wasted meadows, concrete, and a buried stream..

Why “LOCAL” when it comes to native plants and why plant real plant communities that consist of plants that are coadapted to one another? It maximizes the potential for biological diversity in any given location.

When considering sustainability, education, and the conservation of local biodiversity I cannot overstate the importance of paying attention to what actually exists locally, both now and historically. I encourage a very strict and local definition of the word “native” that shows a certain knowledge of site conditions and how those shape plant communities. By site conditions I mean aspect, slope, amount and quality of light, soil drainage regime, amount of annual rainfall, elevation, geologic substrate and soil chemistry, and history of human land-use and site modification. - D. Floyd