



‘Stewardship of a Schoolyard Naturalization Project’

Stewardship Model

Green Committee

- Role of Parent Rep
- Role of Teachers and Students
- Role of the Community

Areas of Concern

- Care of the Site
- Use of the Site
- Enhancements to the Site
- Property Owner Involvement

Strategies and Tips

Introduction:

Naturalization projects are living entities that evolve and change over time, and this dynamism extends to the people involved. Schools find that interest and use of a naturalized site fluctuates as teachers, administrators, parents and students move on, and priorities within the school change. A long-term plan must be in place to ensure the sustainability and success of the project.

The CBE and the Calgary Zoo endorse the following model.

Stewardship Model

Green Committee

To facilitate and guide the stewardship of the naturalization project it is recommended that a committee be formed, to include:

- parent representative
- school staff representative
- member from the community

Role of the Parent Rep

The CBE requires that the Parent Council create a role that is responsible for overseeing the naturalization project. This person will be the point person on the Green Committee, taking on the bulk of the organizational duties. The parent rep is the link between the Green Committee, the school, the surrounding community, and the school board. They are responsible for:

- scheduling meetings
- scheduling maintenance activities
- liaising with the school board as needed
- monitoring the financial needs for the site, and spearhead any necessary fundraising efforts

- monitoring the level of volunteer support and spearhead any volunteer drives
- liaising between the school administration and Parent Council with respect to needs of the teachers
 - professional development related to integration of the site with the curriculum
 - resources needed to facilitate maintenance by the students
 - resources for new projects to be undertaken by students (i.e. birdhouses)

Role of the Teacher Rep

During the school year, it is appropriate to expect the school community to be responsible for the garden maintenance. With teachers co-ordinating student efforts, any necessary maintenance should be achieved. The teacher rep would be responsible for:

- organizing student maintenance activities (with the rest of the teaching staff)
- bringing any maintenance concerns to the Greening Committee including need for tools/resources to make maintenance efforts effective.
- bringing forward any PD needs for teachers around curriculum-based use of the site (i.e. necessary funds from the parent council)

Role of the Community

Keeping the community connected to this project is of the utmost importance. These are the people that watch over the project when school is not in session. They are a group that will be impacted both by the potential benefits of the added greenspace, but also by the possible negative impacts connected to vandalism and neglect. For these reasons it is important to directly involve the community with decisions around the project. They may also provide a good base for volunteers and other kinds of support. The Community Rep on the committee would be responsible for:

- liaising between the school and the community

Areas of Concern

- **Use** of the site
- **Care** of the site
- **Enhancements** to the site
- **Land-owner involvement**

Use of the site

Use of the site leads to a greater likelihood that it will be cared for. If the site is not used and valued by teachers, students, parents and the community, it runs the risk of becoming neglected. Users of the site can then be included in plans for care of the site. The Green Committee should be aware of the level of use of the naturalization project, and should be prepared to work to increase the frequency of use as needed. The following are some suggestions:

- Use by teachers and students
 - Teachers may need some additional training and support to help them increase their use of the space. Consider offering to send them to workshops, organized PD opportunities, purchase resources, bringing in a naturalist-in-residence. Guidance and support from the principal will be crucial.
 - Organize yearly school celebrations or events that may revolve around activities such as fall harvest, spring plantings, use of the native plants (wild edible salads, tea, dyeing cloth), orientation of new students and parents etc.

- Use by community
 - Make it more inviting, welcoming, starting by keeping it looking good!
 - Let members of the community know what the site has to offer (flyers, tours by kids, signage etc.)
 - Consultation/questionnaires on what they think of the site
 - Ask for help
 - Contact community association – make a presentation
 - Host a community event
 - Shared space to care for
 - Workshops for community hosted on the site (i.e. naturalists, horticulturists etc. – native plants, weeds etc.)

“If you haven’t empowered the students and parents to see that things can happen, you don’t have sustainability in the school ground. Sustainability comes through community empowerment and the whole notion that people are involved from the grassroots. Everybody is now asking what will happen next year.”

– quote from Grounds for Learning – Stories and insights from six Canadian school ground naturalization initiatives – Ted McLachlan – Windsor School, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Towards Community Engagement and Empowerment)

Building Traditions

‘While a school’s history and stories are commonly passed down through siblings, through multiple generations and through long-standing teachers, the stories in the landscape of a naturalized school grounds can provide continuity and meaning to a school community. In many cases, the feelings associated with the school’s outdoor setting become central to its identity and student pride.’

- quote from All Hands in the Dirt – page 65

Care of the site

The site must be maintained to ensure it does not become problematic for the property owner, the school, or nearby residents. This includes monitoring the following:

- Plant growth and health
- Weed growth
- Water requirements
- Soil quality
- Mulch coverage
- Condition of hard landscape elements (benches, signs, fences, seating etc.)
- General cleanliness (i.e. garbage)

The committee would be responsible for ensuring the following activities take place:

- Monthly walk-about of the site
- Spring clean-up
- Weekly spring maintenance during school months

- Weekly maintenance during the summer
- Weekly fall maintenance during school months
- Fall clean-up
- Any necessary additions of plants, mulch, soil.
- Repair or replacement of any structural elements (due to wear, or vandalism)

Enhancements to the site

As the site ages and the users change, there will be a need for modifications and additions to the site (i.e. signs, benches, etc.). These need to be carefully planned, and the necessary funds put in place. These changes and additions to the site can help to keep the site dynamic, maintaining momentum and interest in the site. Any suggested changes require consultation with relevant stakeholders (staff, caretaker, parents etc.) and approval by the property owner. If the funds are available, plans can go ahead. Those same funds may need to be replenished as they are used. If significant funds are required, discussions should be made with the school staff and parent council to decide how best to access the necessary funds (i.e. school fundraising efforts, grant proposals etc.)

Land-owner involvement

Through all these activities a connection and contact with the school board or property owner is crucial, not only to obtain appropriate approval, but to keep them informed as to the status of the site with respect to vandalism and other developments. Know who your school board or property owner contact is. Submit contact information for all members of the committee once a year. Keep the property owner abreast of any issues of concern. Ask for advice or help if you need it! Keep the lines of communication open. (any specific reporting sheets we can generate??).

Tips and Strategies

Tips for the committee that may make these activities easier to accomplish

- Raising awareness of the site, and its maintenance needs
 - Bulletin board, flyers, post maintenance schedule and reports (especially for classes) student representatives etc.
- Seek community volunteers
 - Gardening clubs, local gardener, service groups (Scouts, Girl Guides), community associations
- Be creative in involving ALL students in the maintenance needs
 - Divide the garden into sections, with each class ‘adopting’ an area
 - Have each student ‘adopt a plant’ and be responsible for weeding, mulching and watering their plant
 - Have students learn/research just one weed, and be responsible for removing it from the site
 - Create curriculum-based activities that revolve around maintenance
 - Count the weeds, weigh them, measure them
 - Study their growth habits, reproductive methods, history
 - Learn which weeds are edible (i.e. dandelions, chickweed)

CHECKLIST

Committee formed

Parent rep on council

School staff rep

Community rep

Names and contact info submitted to CBE

Spring clean-up planned

Weekly maintenance organized

Summer maintenance organized

Fall clean-up planned

Plan submitted to CBE
