

case study: GREEN SCHOOLS

Ecological Urbanism

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Ahmed Almulla

1. **title: EVERGREEN: A National-Scale Bottom-Up Initiative**
2. **location and dates of operation:** Evergreen started in 1991 as a Toronto-based tree-planting program, and has since grown into a national program supporting community naturalization initiatives on public land from coast to coast. Their national office is still located in Toronto today although they operate and provide services on a national scale.
3. **abstract and keywords:** Evergreen is a national Canadian non-profit environmental organization that provides services to communities in order to ‘green’ their schools, neighborhoods or food sources. Evergreen’s communication is their strong suit – they bring people together and direct people in the right direction while offering support. They organize social activates and workshops as well as large-scale conferences and hands on training to those who apply and wish to get involved. Key words: Environmental Stewardship, Green Schools, Green Schoolyards, Green Cities, Community, Sustainability. Website: www.evergreen.ca. Website links are situated where they provide the visuals necessary to accompany the text.
4. **type of case:** This type of case can belong in a range of categories, green schools being one of them. The high degree of detail, knowledge and support provides for schools to achieve their ‘local’ goals of greening their schoolyards. In a previous journal entry, I had observed that ‘green schools’ in the literature more or less focused solely on greening the schoolyards.¹ Therefore, although Evergreen deals almost exclusively with schoolyards, this is in line with what other organizations consider ‘green schools’. Although the organization itself is not a ‘green school’ per se, it can be considered a useful case study for how a non-profit organization can assist schools in becoming green on a large, national scale.
5. **mission and goals:** According to their website, Evergreen is a “non-profit environmental organization with a mandate to bring Nature to cities through naturalization projects. Evergreen motivates people to create and sustain healthy, natural outdoor spaces and gives them the practical tools to be successful through its three core programs: Learning Grounds (transforming school grounds), Common Grounds (working on publicly accessible land) and Home Grounds (for the home landscape).”² They believe that local stewardship creates vibrant neighborhoods, a healthy natural environment and a sustainable society for all. Replacing the term ‘maintenance’

to 'stewardship' has a transformative effect and changes the dialogue of community involvement greatly, and is a view supported by author Sharon Gamson Dank in *Asphalt to Ecosystems* (2010).³ The underlined terms are the key elements that make Evergreen unique in that it provides functional and specialized services in assisting schools to become green using their own resources with some outside help and guidance. The following link illustrates the different ways in which support through planning and designing is offered: <http://www.evergreen.ca/our-impact/children/greening-school-grounds/>

6. **context:** Evergreen's communications serve as a call to action. Its programs respond to this call to action and give people the practical tools to create change through:
- resources to train, educate and inspire—these include guidebooks, newsletters, policy guidelines, videos, curriculum activities and research reports (available in hard copy and on-line);
 - facilitating dialogue and providing training through a regional conference series and local workshops;
 - leading and supporting hands-on site restoration initiatives;
 - an interactive web site which includes a registry of school and community projects, an on-line searchable library of articles, organizations, other web sites and nurseries;
 - grants for school ground projects; and
 - a team of experienced staff across the country.

Additionally, Evergreen Brick Works (<http://www.evergreen.ca/get-involved/evergreen-brick-works/>) is a community center that "inspires and equips visitors to live, work and play more sustainably".⁴ This center provides a range of community driven services, such as a farmer's market, event space rental, and many regular featured programs. The center then serves as a motherboard, which connects all the different resources and members of the community of all ages. Because of its large scale, Evergreen can leverage the support of international partnerships (such as Toyota and Walmart) along with an array of smaller, more local partners. These partnerships should be critically analyzed as the intentions and agendas of these multi-national corporations into green schools should be questioned. Nonetheless, they provide for useful financial support and exposure. This exposure, through various media outlets and no doubt supported by their own website, provides for an umbrella of opportunities (including donations, volunteers, outreach, etc...). See: <http://www.evergreen.ca/news-media/in-the-news/> .

7. **programs:** Programs foster change at the local level by inspiring people to take action, providing them with the "training, tools and education to bring about positive change, and supporting their efforts through recognition and celebration."⁵ The Toyota (partner/sponsor) Evergreen Learning Grounds program brings school communities together to transform barren school grounds into healthy, natural and creative outdoor classrooms. By planting trees, shrubs and vines, and adding shade, seating and heritage vegetable gardens, the learning opportunities come alive. These outdoor classrooms provide students with "a healthy and safe place to play, learn and develop a genuine respect for nature and each other."⁶ The following link:

<http://www.evergreen.ca/get-involved/resources/school-ground-greening/> provides an extensive and comprehensive guide to support the greening of schools – from the very beginning to the end of the project. The program allows you to connect to an expert to guide and support the transformation, booklets with detailed steps to take, and directions on where to find all the parts to bring the project to life, in addition to submitting for grants or call for volunteer assistance.

8. **assessment:** The assessment will be displayed in a table using a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis (alternatively SWOT matrix) is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in a project or in a business venture.⁷

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of support and detailed knowledge • Wide and diverse range of partnerships • Corporate style management • Local stewardship and community involvement • Diversified green projects (vacant public lands / urban farms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small examples of ‘case studies’ provided for green school yards • Interventions seem focused on one aspect rather than a holistic approach (see: http://www.evergreen.ca/get-involved/resources/case-studies/)
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International scale initiatives and involvement • Learning kits and guides could be adapted by local communities elsewhere • Guidelines could be used as a baseline for a universal Green Schools Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effect of large multi-national partnerships (hidden agendas) • Community driven work might be unsustainable at times when participation is low.

9. **lessons for Philadelphia:** In my opinion, the main takeaways from this case study moving forward in developing our own program(s) for Philadelphia are:

- Local stewardship & community involvement: both the water department and the school district brought up the issues and complications of maintenance several times. The term maintenance in this context is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it is associated with a perceived undesirable facilities management type of job and secondly, it assumes a state of stability (to maintain) rather than improve, grow or change. The term ‘stewardship’ holds a higher regarded association, which would encourage community members to get involved and take long-term ownership over the greening projects.

- Local and national (corporate) partnerships: while the partnership between the water department and school district is ingenious for achieving multiple goals for both sides, they are both within the State. Perhaps partnerships outside into the realm of commercial activities, retail, etc... would provide necessary exposure as well as funding for some projects.
- Live impact timeline and annual reports: Because Philadelphia is using an identifiable and measurable metric to track the effectiveness of its Green City, Clean Waters programs, Greened Acres, this provides for a visually captivating opportunity to show that progress online. One of the easiest and most effective ways to capture audiences is through live impact timelines (<http://www.evergreen.ca/our-impact/>) and annual reports tracking accomplishments, failures, changes and updates (<http://www.evergreen.ca/about/annual-reports/>). I could easily imagine a similar ‘map’ online that is filled in every time an acre is greened in Philadelphia.
- Integrated and community driven website: Evergreen capitalizes on its self-proclaimed strongest suit, communications, and activates its website as a fully integrated, community driven power horse. It provides access to experts and resources, a live timeline, upcoming events (local and national), ready to print booklets, best practices, etc...
- ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’ – large scale intentions done in small scales: While this recommendation is ingrained in the mission of Green City, Clean Waters, the initiative taken in school yards could be duplicated in other small scale interventions using the same basic tools (for small scale residential, large scale commercial, vacant plots, etc...). The way in which Evergreen clearly splits its programs (while under the same umbrella of sustainability and ‘green’-ing themes) into ‘Greenspace’, ‘Children’, ‘City Works’ and ‘Food’ makes for easy to follow programs. A categorization of similar sorts would be useful for Philadelphia in achieving its citywide program at more manageable small-scale increments across different sectors of the city.

Endnotes

¹ Ahmed Almulla, Journal Entry 4: Green Schools.

² <http://www.evergreen.ca/about/>

³ Sharon Gamson Danks, *Asphalt to Ecosystems* (New Village Press, 2010)

⁴ <http://www.evergreen.ca/get-involved/evergreen-brick-works/>

⁵ <http://www.evergreen.ca/our-impact/children/>

⁶ <http://www.evergreen.ca/our-impact/children/greening-school-grounds/>

⁷ https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm