



Green Infrastructure Inventory Report

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Introduction

For West Michigan to achieve the status of “a best place to live, learn, work, and play,” it must have a comprehensive set of plans to guide it along in this development. These plans must be anchored in solid forethought, research, and analysis, and must also incorporate vetted “best practices” for implementing its constituent parts.

One component of this crucial development is the integration of “green infrastructure” into our region. To this end, as a summer intern at the West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA), working under the direction of Ken Freestone, WMSA Green Infrastructure Initiative Project Manager, I began the task of surveying the existing green infrastructure work being done in West Michigan. The focus region was that of the eight counties on which the WMSA focuses on (Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Newaygo).

The purpose of the survey was manifold:

1. To document the specific green infrastructure work already being done in West Michigan;
2. To gain a better understanding of the subsequent gaps in green infrastructure;
3. To compile a list of green infrastructure contacts;
4. To better understand how these contact organizations function in terms of:
 - a. From where the organization’s funding comes
 - b. With whom the organization typically partners with
 - c. What tools the organization uses to implement its green infrastructure work;
5. To survey what tools and resources the organizations still needed to complete their work.

The end goal of the project is to be able to host the data collected by the survey on some sort of online portal designed for public access. The aim of this website, and the role that the Green Infrastructure Initiative will take after the survey, is to encourage the collaboration and sharing of resources between organizations working on similar projects (please refer to *Appendix A* for more information). This conversation among green infrastructure implementers will also hopefully help avoid the unnecessary duplication of services in our region.

Surveying Techniques

The survey document was sent via email and designed to make it easy for organizations to fill in all of the necessary information. It was formatted as a simple word document (.doc file) so that it could be opened and edited by any PC or Mac user. Most organizations sent the file back typed and by email, although some opted to fax (please refer to *Appendix B* for more information).

In addition to the survey document, some information was obtained by visiting websites and extracting the data, as well as making phone calls and conducting one-on-one meetings.

Results and Result Documentation

The results at the time of writing this report are incomplete; much of the desired and/or expected information is yet pending. However, a sizable chunk of data has been received and recorded. The data is sorted in an electronic spreadsheet (.xls format), with a separate column for each survey question. The individual projects undertaken by the organizations each received their own row, starting underneath the row for the information regarding the organization and its partners, etc. An additional column was added to the original 25 columns to make room for past projects, should the organization provide a listing of these in the future (please refer to Appendix C for a listing of surveyed organizations and their projects).

The spreadsheet was also designed with the capability to be imported into WMSA's database. In this event, only the first several columns (those pertaining to the contact information) would be selected to be imported.

It has been found that receiving the information in the format provided by John Koches at the Annis Water Resources Institute is particularly helpful and informative. The following is a format, provided in the form of a project example:

Spring Lake Storm Water Management (Elaine Sterrett Isely – Project Manager):

- *General Outline:* Researchers at AWRI have received funding to identify the causes, consequences, and corrective actions required to minimize the adverse impacts of storm water discharges to the water bodies located within and around the Village of Spring Lake and Spring Lake Township, including Spring Lake, the Grand River, and, ultimately, Lake Michigan. Ultimately, the ISC was responsible for updating the current land use in the watershed and running a population and pollutant loading model.
- *Focus Region:* Spring Lake Watershed (Muskegon and Ottawa counties)
- *Timeline:* Project ending January 2008
- *Tools Used:* GIS, Orthophotography, P-LOAD, and Population Allocation Model (PAM)

Although this format is perceived as being helpful and informative, it may be useful to survey prospective users of the website to understand what format would indeed be best utilized. For an example of inventory collected and recorded, please refer to *Appendix D*.

Interpretations and Trends

In response to the question “have you identified any additional gaps in services/projects for building Green Infrastructure in West Michigan,” the overwhelming reply from the surveyed organizations was that there exists a necessity to make known to the public the value of green infrastructure. These organizations feel that public awareness and education is an essential component to building a strong green infrastructure network. Additionally, some organizations responded that there are many meetings and much internal talk about green infrastructure, but that this conversation does not often translate into action.

The most common response to the question, “are there other resources you need for your project(s)” was that additional funding was the most-needed resource for the organization.

Most of the surveyed organizations receive funding in similar ways, mainly through government and charitable foundation grants. They also reported that they receive a limited amount through private donors as well (please refer to *Appendix B* for more detail on survey responses).

Suggestions for Continuation of the Inventory

There are a few suggestions that the author would make for the continuation of the green infrastructure project inventory.

First, the survey method should be revised to make it easier and faster for organizations to get their information to the surveyor. When the survey was first conceived, it was thought that sending it by email would be the cheapest, fastest, and most efficient way to gather information. However, while this is indeed an inexpensive and easy avenue for sending out the survey, it has proved to be inefficient because it does not yield the desired returns. The author has found that the recipients of the survey are often busy, and tend to either disregard it entirely, or delay their response for a significant amount of time. While this is expected because of the nature of surveys themselves, it underscores the fact that while email is indeed the most efficient way of *distributing* the survey, it is not the most efficient way of gathering the desired information.

Personal meetings have proven to be useful and effective in terms of the value of the information gathered from them, but are sometimes difficult to setup, and can take a significant amount of time to perform. They should, however, be considered as a component of information gathering.

Telephone calls have not been heavily utilized thus far as a survey method, but seem to be the most logical alternative.

The author would suggest a regiment of all three survey methods. Personal meetings provide the best source of information, and should be used when available. Scheduled telephone interviews should be used when meetings would be an inefficient use of time. Email should definitely play a role in the survey process, but its role should be reduced to that of setting up personal meetings or telephone calls, contacting otherwise unreachable people and organizations, or for gathering information from people who prefer this method.

Suggested Actions for WMSA and the Green Infrastructure Initiative

Although the inventory is yet incomplete, there are many things that can be gleaned from the existing research, as articulated below. The author has also included suggestions from his observations during his time at WMSA. The author suggests the following actions for WMSA and the Green Infrastructure Initiative.

WMSA, as an organization, should have a more aggressive push toward making itself known and recognized in the region. There is still a majority of people who have not heard of WMSA, or, at the very best, know little about it. The author feels that as WMSA is striving “to serve as a catalyst for regional collaboration,” it must have more name recognition. This would serve two purposes:

- To establish WMSA as a “first stop” resource for area organizations looking to collaborate in the region;
- To drive individual contributions of the common citizens of the region (For related information (please refer to *Appendix E: The Obama Fundraising Model and how it Relates to WMSA*).

The author also suggests that the Green Infrastructure Initiative should encourage organizations to more extensively partner with each other for grant proposals. As noted by almost every surveyed organization, funding has been one of the most difficult resources to attain. Partnership would help these organizations and projects become more attractive to granting organizations.

As aforementioned, the overwhelming consensus among green infrastructure organizations is that the most significant roadblock to accomplishing work in this field, besides a lack of money, is poor education and public awareness relating to green infrastructure issues. As such, it is imperative that WMSA and the Green Infrastructure Initiative organize or help organize a regional effort to educate and inform the public. This education should initially be focused primarily at the local governmental level, so as to have the greatest impact on decision-making. WMSA should consider many avenues for the implementation of this educational initiative, making it as simple and accessible as possible.