

# Nature-Based Place-Making

## A holistic approach to community revitalization

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**T**he field of community revitalization has advanced to a point where we've realized we need to stop talking about assets and the benefits of starting to develop them, and start making the direct connections between assets and revitalization. So many of Pennsylvania's communities are chock-full of opportunities waiting to be realized. Enter Nature-Based Placemaking (NBP): an evolving, integrated theory utilizing a community's natural, outdoor recreational resources (assets), the recreational activities associated with those resources, and the potential economic impact of those activities on the communities involved.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) engaged Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) to develop a strategy to address these opportunities and provide communities the ability to develop them to their fullest potential. This project came out

of DCNR's *Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2013: The Keystone for Healthy Living*. Following recommendations and action items of the plan, PDC received a grant to develop select areas of the strategy, most specifically those action items related to the goal of strengthening the connections between outdoor recreation, healthy lifestyles and the associated economic benefits to communities. The deliverables are to create planning guidelines and standardized benchmarks that can be utilized in demographically diverse communities with all types of recreational assets.

As the statewide coordinator for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program and as the technical assistance link between the Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Keystone Communities Main Street and Elm Street Programs, PDC has seen what works and what doesn't work in many of Pennsylvania's core communities. This project is a

tremendous opportunity to partner with DCNR conceptually, and to combine some of Pennsylvania's best resources, our exceptional outdoor recreational assets and our extraordinary towns.

The project, which began in March 2012, will run through to the end of 2013. PDC will be developing the theory of Nature-Based Placemaking (NBP) as an approach for community revitalization and in the process will be identifying communities that may already be applying elements of the theory to their revitalization strategy. PDC will recognize those communities as examples from which to draw insights during the course of the study. The intent is to then select pilot projects to begin implementing the developed strategy in their own communities.

By autumn 2013, PDC's annual conference will focus on Nature-Based Placemaking (NBP) and the lessons learned to date of the implementation in the pilot communities. For the duration of the project, a multi-disciplinary

advisory board will oversee and provide council and direction to the project.

The NBP concept is not brand new, but the project provides an opportunity to blend a variety of theories and approaches into a strategic, thoughtful, and practical revitalization program. NBP will be integrated with DCNR's Conservation Landscape Initiative (CLIs); encompass the Main Street Four-Point Approach®; the Elm Street Five-Point Approach, with particular emphasis on the addition of Safe, Clean, and Green; and elements of Civic Tourism and Ecological Economics, which are both based off of the Triple Bottom Line theory.

NBP will combine the many facets of current outdoor recreation-economic development linkages into what is hoped to be the most comprehensive and sustainable approach to recreation-based community revitalization to date.

The NBP concept will link DCNR's Conservation Landscape Initiatives (CLIs) with a complimentary concept that supports communities and regions throughout Pennsylvania that are actively engaged in projects that include: sustainability, conservation, community revitalization and recreational projects. "Founded on the regions' sense of place and resource values, the CLIs motivate citizens and elected officials to take on the challenge of effective land use planning, investment, civic engagement and revitalization." Elements that need to occur or be in place for a CLI are: DCNR owned parks and forests, a sense of place, readiness, engagement and strategic investments.

In Dan Schilling's *Civic Tourism: The Poetry & Politics of Place*, he encourages communities to



**AT THE INTERSECTION** Opportunities can be created by measuring and building upon built capital, natural capital, social capital and human capital

"reframe" their role in tourism to be more than income producing, and to improve the quality of life for those involved. Schilling looks at tourism and the opportunities that accompany it to be more, do more, and demand more. He believes that tourism can "help communities preserve cultures, protect the environment, save historic districts, encourage citizen participation, and in general, foster a healthier quality of life." The three concepts for Civic Tourism are: rethinking economics, investing in the story, and connecting to the public. It is through the development of these strategies that Civic Tourism can have a holistic effect on communities, rather than create a drain on resources and ruin a local community's sense of place.

In Civic Tourism's approach to placemaking, the cultural (people), natural (land) and built (town) environments are merged into an approach that results in all three areas working together "to create a form of tourism that is not project-centered, but which privileges 'place' as the main attraction."

As with Civic Tourism, Ecological Economics also incorporates the basis of the Triple Bottom Line of people, planet and profit. Ecological Economics has a broader approach than that of conventional economics and includes the theory that human well-being encompasses more than material wealth. In Ecological Economics, four main types of capital are distinguished: built capital, natural capital, social capital and human capital. However, it is more than identifying these characteristics, it's about the interaction and integration of these areas. The integrated theory of Nature-Based Placemaking (NBP) will focus on ecological economics as it pertains to the relationships of the natural, built and social environment within our communities.

Most people are familiar to some extent with the Main Street Four-Point Approach® of Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring, and Promotion, for commercial district revitalization. What may not be as well known are the Eight Principles

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of Main Street: comprehensiveness, incremental, self-help, partnerships, identifying and capitalizing on existing assets, quality, change and implementation. ([www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org)) Elm Street's Five-Point Approach is similar to Main Street, yet different in the addition of a fifth point, that of Safe, Clean and Green. Elm Street's focus is slightly different in that it focuses on neighborhood revitalization and the role of the organization as a clearinghouse of information and a conduit of services not yet provided in the neighborhood.

The premise of the approach is that a healthy downtown needs to coexist with healthy neighborhoods, and that you truly cannot have one without the other. With the addition of Safe, Clean and Green, Elm Street has the ability and potential to focus on areas of environmental sustainability, including: green roofs, rain gardens, community gardens, rain barrels, and other "green" strategies. The Elm Street Approach will dovetail nicely with the concept of Civic Tourism as it pertains to maintaining a healthier quality of life for a community's residents. ([www.padowntown.org](http://www.padowntown.org))

By incorporating Main Street and Elm Street approaches into this integrated NPB theory, there is an opportunity to use a proven methodology that has existed and thrived for the last three decades, but continues to grow and evolve in order to respond to the changes in the economic, social, and environmental climate of our communities.

The last discipline is Triple Bottom Line (TBL), also known as the 3Ps: people, planet, profit, as mentioned above. PDC's attempt to incorporate this theory into Nature-Based Placemaking will only scratch the surface of how this practice can impact organizations and their ability to demonstrate success in business practices, social development, and sustainability goals. The Triple Bottom Line has become the basis for other areas of sustainable business practices, including a local living economy and paying a living wage. A living economy includes: "sustainable local food systems, green building, energy efficiency and renewable energy, local zero waste manufacturing, community capital, and others – within the context

of their local economies. These "building blocks" represent the basic pillars of most local economies." (BALLE-[www.livingeconomies.org](http://www.livingeconomies.org))

The NBP project also will examine, to the greatest extent possible, the successes of existing recreation/ economic development ideas based off of various area-based and corridor-wide initiatives such as the Trail Town Program®, the various "rivertown" efforts as they currently exist within Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide, the National Forest Service's Gateway Community program and other efforts.

Nature-based Placemaking takes all of these theories and incorporates them into a contemporary approach to community revitalization predicated on their linkages with Pennsylvania's natural recreational assets. PDC will provide updates as the project progresses and information on how your community might be selected as a pilot project to become a Nature-Based Place. For more information, visit [www.padowntown.org](http://www.padowntown.org). (B)



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businesses and other buildings. The summer is when consumers participating in Demand Response programs are most likely to be notified to reduce consumption during peak usage periods. At peak times, the grid system can become overwhelmed by consumer demand, which causes electricity prices to drastically climb and be extremely volatile.

**Consumer demand.** Ultimately, electricity prices are affected most by the amount of consumer usage,

and the time of day and season that electrons are consumed. Every day, grid systems across the U.S. work constantly to provide reliable supply to all consumers. Imagine the ever-increasing demand for electricity for schools, institutions, individuals, businesses, government, and other consumers. It makes sense that electricity prices are highest during times of peak demand in the late afternoon, and lowest overnight when demand drops. In any case, usage is likely to steadily increase.

#### About the Author

Michael S. Payne, JD, LLM, is Executive Vice President & Corporate Counsel of Affiliated Power Purchasers International LLC (APPI Energy), an independent consulting firm that is endorsed by 140 affinity groups. Since 1996, APPI Energy has assisted more than 3,300 organizations with locations across the United States to reduce and manage energy costs. For unbiased advice, at no upfront cost to you, contact APPI Energy at 800-520-6685. (B)