

# Plan-it sustainably

## San Francisco — a partner in the Biophilic Cities Project

Scott T. Edmondson, AICP, edited by Katja Irvin, AICP

***Biophilia:** love of life or living systems. The biophilia hypothesis suggests an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems.*

The Biophilic Cities Project is an international research initiative organized by Prof. Tim Beatley, School of Architecture, University of Virginia. It aims to advance the theory and practice of planning for biophilic cities through collaborative research, dialogue, and teaching. San Francisco's planning department anticipates learning about biophilic cities' principles and tools and applying them to create higher quality and more prosperous places.

Prof. Beatley describes biophilic cities as redefining "the very essence of cities as places of wild and restorative nature, from rooftops to roadways to riverfronts. It is about understanding cities as places that already harbor much nature and places that can become, through bold vision and persistent practice, even greener and richer in the nature they contain." Beatley goes on to describe biophilic city planning and design and its value as more than intensified traditional open space planning:

- First, research is finding that "Nature is not something optional, but absolutely essential to living a happy, healthy, and meaningful life."  
<http://biophiliccities.org>
- Second, biophilic city planning extends the principles and processes of nature to the human economy and metabolism of the city. This extension will increase productivity and transform the economy's negative environmental effects into benign or restorative impacts, heralding a new approach for urban and regional economic development.
- Third, planners would use the net zero environmental impact philosophy to extend biophilia to the built environment, at all scales, and to spur the ongoing economic innovation that will ultimately create a sustainable economy.
- Fourth, a biophilic approach will embed a deeper understanding of nature in each community's culture.

The Biophilic Cities Project will build on path-breaking efforts made since the Board of Supervisors' 1997 resolution to make San Francisco sustainable. The Department of Environment's initiatives have included public and private sector Green Building ordinances, renewable and efficient energy programs, zero waste ordinance, and urban agriculture. Together with the planning department's current initiatives listed below, these programs set a strong foundation to test biophilic planning ideas.

- **Green Connections.** Increase access to parks, open space, and the waterfront by re-envisioning city streets as "green connectors."

*(continued on next page)*

- **Pavement to Parks.** Temporarily reclaim swathes of land and quickly and inexpensively turn them into new public plazas and parks.
- **Urban Forest Master Plan.** A comprehensive policy plan to further develop and manage the city's public and private trees for open space, health, environmental, and climate change benefits.
- **Sustainable Development Program.** Coordinate building development and public infrastructure to implement district-scale energy, water, and waste systems while balancing the needs associated with growth and land use. Related projects include the Park Merced residential development, the Transit Center District, and the Central Subway Corridor.
- **Better Streets San Francisco.** A new web portal of features and guidelines for each streetscape type that "attends to the needs of people first, considering pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, street trees, stormwater management, utilities, and livability as well as vehicular circulation and parking." <http://www.sfbetterstreets.org/>

One of the next important steps towards sustainability will come through the Biophilic Cities Project, as San Francisco and other cities advance biophilic city planning for their own benefit and that of their larger regions.

*An earlier version of this article appeared Aug. 10 at <http://biophiliccities.org/blog/>*

#### Interesting links of the month

- **Video: Updating the American Dream**, with Peter Calthorpe Sustainable Cities Collective <http://bit.ly/OMw42P>
- **STAR Community Index™:** ICLEI's consensus-based rating system for community sustainability. Become a pilot city, <http://bit.ly/PcfTy5>
- **NASA Sustainability Base** (beyond LEED® Platinum for Cradle to Cradle solutions) **site tour**, October 5, 9 am–12:30 pm. RSVP ASAP, space is limited. <http://bit.ly/003ae3>

#### Sustainability Committee website

- **Learn:** <http://bit.ly/NqSUkg>
- **Stay current** with E-update: <http://bit.ly/OivxWA>
- **Subscribe:** <http://bit.ly/MVdpQh>
- **Collaborate:** <http://bit.ly/Oh7sxp> ■