

CREATING GREEN SPACES IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY



This image shows what the lot used for this study looks like when first obtained from the Allentown Redevelopment Authority. The portion of the undeveloped area with the grass mowed is where the project took place in downtown Allentown, PA.



The image provides a preview of the type of changes that were made to the abandoned lot to create a more inviting and affable space for the urban city residents to go to when in need of green space.



An example of the fence used to create some form of a barrier to emphasize how the space is different from its surrounding area.

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Abstract

The objective of this research project is to create a green space within the Lehigh Valley/Allentown neighborhood that fosters many benefits not only for the environment but for the people of the community as well. According to Euro WHO, a green space is "used to improve environmental conditions, protect and improve biodiversity, promote outdoor activities and active lifestyles, increase social interactions, and provide healthy urban conditions for good physical and mental well-being". For this project, the goal would be to find an unused lot in a popular area of Allentown and clean and green it up in order to provide the residents of that area with a place to interact with nature and cultivate benefits from it. The procedure used to conduct this research project would be to find a lot to work with through the Allentown Redevelopment Authority, clean and green it up by planting shrubbery and grass, creating a slight barrier between the green space and surrounding area, and clearly labeling it to ensure usage for the surrounding community. The result of this project was a location in downtown Allentown where local residents could come and take a break in the open, clean grassed area and also benefit from the small yet effective herb garden placed in the lot. The study is in the process of connecting back with the Allentown Redevelopment Authority to see if more green spaces like this can be made throughout the Lehigh Valley with any abandoned lots in their possession in order to further benefit the local community.

Analysis

The purpose of a green space is to create a location, in a very urbanized area that lacks a lot of trees and shrubbery, with trees and shrubbery. Through many studies done with green spaces in urbanized areas, it has been summarized that green spaces have a very large effect on the mental and physical health of people who live near one. These studies found that the suicide rate, depression rate, and anxiety rate of those living near green spaces went down after one was created near where they live. It also was found to be linked to the greater physical health of the residents due to increases in exercise and physical activity such as walking to the green space and or within the green space. The reason why this green space was created in Allentown was to create some form of a similar effect for the area. It also was to create a location for community members to get together in a clean and affable environment. Many different aspects of studies done on green spaces were implicated in this project. The first was planting trees and sod in the area in order to create an exaggerated "green effect". This has been linked to a decrease in mental disorders. The second would be putting up a fence or some form of a barrier between the green space and the neighboring urbanized area. This is done to show how the green space can be a form of sanctuary for those who use it, as well as ensuring that those in the urbanized area recognize the separation between the impervious surfaces and the green ones. And finally, signs were posted throughout the green space to welcome members of the community into the area as well as to make it very clear that this is a location meant to be used by the surrounding neighborhood. Some environmental benefits of green spaces are having previous services that are beneficial in reducing floods and acting as a natural drainage system. They also help with global warming and carbon dioxide levels in urban areas by having trees and shrubbery available. And finally, they can help bring some natural wildlife to the urbanized area where wildlife can very rarely be found.

Introduction

This study is looking at the effect of creating green spaces in urbanized areas and the effects it has on the surrounding community and environment. The importance of this study is to see how completely urbanized areas can be detrimental to the mental and physical health of city dwellers and how adding spaces in these urban areas with open green space helps lower those statistics. This study takes the major factors of larger studies similar to this such as the Green Spaces in Philadelphia Project and implements it in our local community of Allentown.

Methodology

The procedure I used to conduct my research for this project was to first finish working with the Allentown Redevelopment Authority in order to find an abandoned lot in downtown Allentown to use as my location to create a green space. I did this with the help of Kelly McElroy who is a part of the ARA and my advisor Karen Pooley who put me in contact with Kelly. After I had found a lot and gotten permission from the ARA to conduct any and all necessary steps required to complete this project I began the actual "greening" of the lot. I started by cleaning up all trash that was left in the lot, moving on to applying grass seeds and sod to the area to deal with the patchy dead spots. I then began to add shrubbery and flowers to the lot in small subsections. After a small subsection was made to be used as a small herb garden with sweet mint, basil, hot red peppers, and a few more. The last step was to put up small 12-inch fence pieces to create a barrier between the green space and the sidewalk or neighboring areas.

Conclusion

A major key finding that can be summarized as a result of this study would be that and that there is a lack of green spaces available in the entirety of the Lehigh Valley cause a need for many more green spaces like this within the Lehigh Valley. When connecting with current residents in the area who were accessing the green space, they discussed how present it will be to have such a location for them and their children to go to. While the mental and physical benefits of having a green space in an urban area were not discussed with them, the fact that they want to interact with such an area and felt a want or need for one shows that they will indeed benefit from it. Some future work that can be done with this project and is currently in progress of getting done is sharing the methods and procedures of how this green space was created with the Allentown Redevelopment Authority and trying to see if they would be interested in getting more projects like this started in the other abandoned lots they have ownership of. When finding a location to create this green space, I was presented with many different potential lots to work with and all of these locations are in centralized urban areas in the Lehigh Valley as well as being relatively far from any current green spaces. By having the ARA start a project like this, not only can there be potential for some economic growth in the area through job creation but also potential for mental and physical health development as that is associated strongly with green spaces. Furthermore, it can make Allentown and the greater Lehigh Valley associated with bigger cities like Philadelphia who already have green space creation projects up and running.

RELATED LITERATURE

Mair, Callum. "Why We Need Green Spaces in Cities." Natural History Museum, www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/why-we-need-green-spaces-in-cities.html#:~:text=Green spaces in cities mitigate, a result of human activity.

"Urban Green Spaces and Health - a Review of Evidence (2016)." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, 9 Feb. 2021, www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2016/urban-green-spaces-and-health-a-review-of-evidence-2016#.

"5 Reasons for Creating Urban Green Spaces" (2021, March 24). N. Retrieved from <https://www.urbanespora.com/en/5-reasons-for-creating-urban-green-spaces/>