



CONSERVATION DESIGN FORUM

Landscape Architecture • Community Planning • Ecological Restoration • Water Resource and Ecological Engineering

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Lakeland, Tennessee

Memorandum
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A fundamental element of the ecologically and culturally sustainable vision for the entire community of Lakeland is the idea of a healthy, diverse set of ecosystems and landscapes as the context for the homes, businesses, parks, and other aspects of neighborhood. This includes not only the high priority placed upon the individual specimen trees and the wooded areas of the community, but the wetlands, grasslands, and prairies that provide other facets of biodiversity, habitat, and beauty.

Mature trees, the lake, streams, wetlands, and other natural areas are some of the qualities that have drawn and continue to draw people to Lakeland as the best place in the Memphis area to live and raise their families. Ironically, the things most prized by residents are those that are threatened by the rapid growth and development Lakeland faces. In order to retain these essential landscape qualities over time, they must be identified, prioritized, preserved, and stewarded or maintained in perpetuity. In order for natural landscape systems to remain healthy even once they have been protected, **they must be actively managed** in a way that replicates the historic cultural landscape processes that are an essential part of their habitat. Clearing and removing invasive non-native tree, shrub, and weed species, controlled annual burning, and on-going monitoring are critical activities that must be deployed to some degree in all natural areas to maintain system health and vigor. Therefore, for all landscapes valued within the community, it is important to answer these questions-

1. What is the way in which landscape elements are protected and preserved?
2. What entity or entities are best suited to be responsible for them over time?
3. What is the best ecologically-based method or methods for long term natural area management, and how should this activity be funded?

Lakeland has already undertaken an ecological inventory that begins to identify and prioritize all of the landscape features within the community, driven by a community-based process, field inventory, and GIS-based mapping. As the process to define and prioritize essential vegetation and habitat zones, tree cover, lakes, streams, and wetlands, a series of tools to own, manage, and steward these areas over time must evolve as well. There are other community landscape amenities that must be taken into account as well. Public recreational features such as trails, trailheads/access, picnic areas, and other features that typically fall under the auspices of a parks department for a municipality will continue to be developed to serve the growing population, and will need a program in place for on-going maintenance and management of these built elements. Street trees, required within the public right-of-way of streets within every neighborhood, even

when provided initially by developers and subdividers, will need to be maintained, pruned, and replaced over time. A plan for the on-going responsibility of management of these features should be codified and funded to provide the best service for the community, along with a plan to bring all properties within the city into compliance with regards to street trees.

With regards to natural areas, some have already been identified and preserved as part of new subdivisions developed as planned unit development projects. Other areas have been identified as high priority areas, or will be considered as part of the cities natural features inventory. Several techniques and models for open space ownership and management have been used in other areas and should be considered and made into policy for Lakeland in anticipation of transitioning. These approaches should be discussed and evaluated, and then incorporated into the planning effort to integrate natural area open space as part of the overall green infrastructure for the community land use policy. The three primary forms of open space ownership and management are listed below:

1. Community-owned open space; acquired through planned community/entitlement process or outright acquisition.
Advantages: Community control, consistency in management.
Disadvantages: Requires negotiation and possible purchase, funding source for long-term management.
2. Conservation Easements that go to the community, managed by the community and/or through other open space management entities;
Advantages: Consistency in management; doesn't require property acquisition or transfer of ownership.
Disadvantages: Less community control; requires suitable third party natural area management entity.
3. Homeowner's Association or Property Owner's Association ownership of open space managed according to a long-term maintenance, monitoring, and stewardship plan approved by the community.
Advantages: Easier to negotiate in new planned developments, management is funded by the residents most closely associated with the amenity.
Disadvantages: Less control by the community; valuable natural areas could be mismanaged by homeowners associations without proper funding or expertise.

There are possibly other open space entities or combinations that could be explored. It is likely that all of these types will be most beneficial in different circumstances. The important thing is for the city to develop a proactive and consistent policy for the range of conditions, natural features, and landscape features that are so important to the quality of life in the community.