

Pennsylvania Chapter of APA Policy Statement on Green Infrastructure

Vision

We see green infrastructure – a network of parks and open spaces, greenways, hiking and biking trails, water access for activities such as boating and fishing, and natural resources – as essential to the health, economic prosperity, and environmental quality of Pennsylvania’s communities. Green infrastructure provides many benefits, such as reduced flooding, improved air and water quality, better health outcomes, and increased business activity, often at a lower cost than conventional gray infrastructure. Numerous studies have documented these benefits, for example by demonstrating reduced healthcare costs from access to parks and trails and increased retail sales from street trees in business districts. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the pressing need of Pennsylvanians for access to green infrastructure resources to sustain physical and mental health. Preservation, development, and maintenance of a green infrastructure network at the local, regional, and state levels must be supported by policy and stable sources of funding.

What is Green Infrastructure?

Two definitions of green infrastructure are commonly used in practice. The first defines green infrastructure as a strategically planned and managed network of parks, greenways, natural areas, and natural resources that conserves ecosystem values and functions, sustains clean air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife. Developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the second defines green infrastructure as stormwater management systems and practices that use or mimic natural processes to infiltrate, evapotranspire, or reuse stormwater on the site where it is generated. In reality there is no clear differentiation between these two definitions, which have in common the environmental, economic, and social benefits they provide for urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Health

1. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports policies and investments at all levels of government that promote integration of natural resources and green infrastructure into the fabric of local communities and neighborhoods, allowing residents to experience the health benefits of direct contact with nature.
2. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports investments in outdoor recreational facilities, such as trails and parks in close proximity to residential neighborhoods, to enable active, healthy lifestyles.
3. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports proactive documentation by health care providers on the health benefits of active lifestyles and access to natural resources to help justify state and local investments in parks, trails, and other forms of green infrastructure.

Economic Prosperity

1. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports efforts to provide business opportunities and jobs for Pennsylvania residents through investments in green infrastructure.

2. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports green infrastructure investments that improve regional and local economies by enhancing quality of life and attracting visitors, businesses, and residents to communities.
3. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports efforts to help commercial districts and businesses adapt to e-commerce and other retail trends through measures such as reduced parking/impervious surface requirements and “green” retrofits of excessively large parking areas for other uses. Such policies and investments will help maintain economic vitality while yielding co-benefits such as improving community health, reducing stormwater runoff, and contributing to meeting water quality standards.

Environmental Quality

1. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports urban and community tree planting initiatives to improve air and water quality and reduce the urban heat island effect.
2. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports investment in green infrastructure as part of an integrated water resources management approach that enhances community attractiveness, improves environmental quality, and reduces costs of water treatment and stormwater management.
3. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA supports policies and investments to protect, restore, and maintain the quality of the Commonwealth’s water supply and watersheds, through measures such as land acquisition and easements, incentives, riparian buffers, and agricultural best management practices.

Intergovernmental & Public Coordination

We recognize that a common vision must be shared about the vital importance of green infrastructure for Pennsylvanians, and coordination encouraged among state, regional, county and local governments to develop and communicate a statewide agenda.