

Introduction to Better Site Design and the Code and Ordinance Worksheet

Published in 1998, the Center for Watershed Protection's Better Site Design Handbook outlines 22 model development principles for site design that act to reduce impervious cover, conserve open space, prevent stormwater pollution, and reduce the overall cost of development. The model development principles were created through a national Site Planning Roundtable, a consensus-based process initiated to create more environmentally sensitive, economically viable and locally appropriate development. The roundtable consisted of over 30 influential individuals from various organizations around the nation, including environmental groups, transportation officials, planners, realtors, homebuilders, land trusts, fire officials, county managers and more.

For each model development principle, the Better Site Design Handbook summarized practices that were recommended around the nation at the time, outlined their economic and environmental benefits, addressed perceived and real barriers, and presented national case studies. The Better Site Design Handbook also presented a process for evaluating local development regulations based on the model development principles so that strategic code changes could be made in the community. The tool provided to facilitate an in-depth review of codes and ordinances at the local level was the Code and Ordinance Worksheet (COW). Since its creation, the COW has been used by the Center to conduct 13 local site planning roundtables and review local development regulations in over 75 communities in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin, New York, Alabama, and the District of Columbia. Other organizations, such as the Cumberland River Compact, Southeast Watershed Forum, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Potomac Conservancy, James River Association, and Tennessee Valley Authority, have used the Better Site Design process to make updates to their local codes or to conduct their own roundtables.

Runoff Reduction Practices

Runoff reduction practices, often interchangeably referred to as Green Infrastructure practices or Low Impact Development practices, are stormwater treatment strategies that aim to replicate pre-development hydrology by reducing runoff volume. Many runoff reduction practices integrate trees and other vegetation, and runoff volume is reduced through disconnecting impervious cover, infiltration, evapotranspiration, collection and re-use, and other mechanisms.



Green rooftop



Porous asphalt



Rain garden



Cistern