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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Beautifying our Cities: Turning our Stormwater Basins into Creative Sustainable Environments

Land development patterns often focus on a utilitarian approach to stormwater treatment. Treatment areas consisting of dry and wet basins are often tucked away on a site or left as unattractive depressions. Sometimes sod and an unattractive chain link fence are the only ornamentation accompanying the treatment area. These stormwater facilities are often missed opportunities to practice Low Impact Development (LID) and enhance our environment's visual aesthetic.

Low Impact Development (LID) provides an ecologically-based stormwater management approach. This approach recognizes that every plant, animal, and micro-organism has an integrated and interconnected relationship in the ecosystem. It encourages the use of small scale, natural drainage features to slow, clean and capture runoff -- reducing impacts of development on streams, rivers, lakes, coastal waters, and ground water. LID technologies apply both mechanical and biological processes to the management and treatment of stormwater runoff. Additionally, a Florida-friendly landscape conserves water and can support ecosystem services such as the maintenance of a site's biodiversity. This is a stark contrast to the conventional stormwater basin containing a monoculture of turf that often relies on chemical fertilizers and herbicides.

LID can be attractive and enhance an environment's aesthetic. These development practices can be applied in both a rural and urban context. Throughout the country, we are seeing many cities taking steps to enhance our environments with LID principles. Many municipalities, such as Portland, Oregon, are incorporating rain gardens and stormwater treatment in the right-of-way of urban city blocks. These "green streets" incorporate stormwater planters that eliminate runoff and maximize water infiltration -- adding the potential benefit of groundwater recharge, much like the pre-development hydrologic profile. In many cases, there can be significant financial savings to treating stormwater with LID versus the hard engineering approach of piping and conveying stormwater.

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When designed correctly, these LID practices can provide for attractive sustainable elements within our environment. They may serve as interesting design elements such as gateways, focal points, street plantings, parking lot enhancements, bioswales, constructed wetlands, rain gardens, urban nodes, designate a boundary or place of arrival, buffers, or even public gathering spaces when used in combination with seating areas or boardwalks. They provide for very attractive backdrops in certain settings such as a small amphitheater or outdoor dining areas for restaurants. Ultimately, stormwater treatment areas offer the potential to be very attractive additions for placemaking endeavors within development sites and the cities in which we live, work and play.

Landscape architects play a vital role in LID practices. Ginevra and Chris Anuszkiewicz are landscape architects with PlaceMaker Design Studio, LLC in Clearwater. “Our clients find value in engaging landscape architects to incorporate attractive sustainable design principles in their projects,” Ginevra said. “Involving landscape architects early in the site planning phase is advantageous. Our knowledge of ecology, plant material, grading, hardscape, irrigation, and site design make us a valuable addition to multidisciplinary design efforts that look to incorporate LID principles,” Chris said.

Providing municipal incentives for the inclusion of LID principles is a great way to encourage developers and land planners to use these principles. Some potential incentive programs might include: reduced parking requirements, property tax reduction, fast track review process, reduced municipal submittal fees, density bonuses, etc.

Chris recommends that people interested in the use of LID continue to vocalize interest for such holistic design practices to their community leaders and local developers. You might very well find the occasional great blue heron or snowy egret joining you for a meal in the most unexpected location.

About PlaceMaker DesignStudio, LLC

PlaceMaker Design Studio, LLC is a full-service land planning and landscape architecture firm co-founded by Ginevra and Chris Anuszkiewicz. Working in collaboration with architects, developers, engineers, contractors and clients, the firm focuses on melding natural and creative man-made environments into a unique, holistic experience. The business is certified as a State of Florida Woman-Owned Small Business, Hillsborough County Woman-Owned Business, Pinellas County Small Business Enterprise, and City of Tampa Small Local Business Enterprise.

For more information about PlaceMaker Design Studio, LLC, please contact Ginevra or Chris Anuszkiewicz at (727) 726-6124 or info@placemakerdesignstudio.com.