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OPINION



SIGNE WILKINSON

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Posted on Tue, Jul. 7, 2009

Nurturing the green economy

By ALLYSON SCHWARTZ & MICHAEL NUTTER

WHILE "going green" has long been associated with protecting the environment, we believe it should also be associated with saving and earning money. Clean, sustainable and livable communities go hand-in-hand with economic growth.

In these tough economic times, many American cities and towns are searching for innovative ways to go green, seeking to make investments that will ultimately save taxpayer dollars and increase local property values.

These efforts come in many forms - revitalizing municipal parks and public spaces, landscaping neighborhood gateways and key corridors, planting trees, constructing green roofs, cleaning and maintaining vacant lots. Collectively, these green infrastructure investments make neighborhoods healthier by improving air quality and lowering surface temperatures, increase property values and help municipalities effectively manage stormwater runoff.

For many cities and communities green infrastructure is integral to addressing short- and long-term economic challenges.

Philadelphia, thanks to local leadership, and strong state and federal partnerships, is a national leader in urban greening.

Our city believes in the economic merit of green infrastructure, and for good reason. Trees, parks and other green space change peoples' perception of their neighborhoods, adding economic value and enhancing real-estate values.

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Planting trees and creating new public open spaces also creates jobs.

At a recent congressional hearing in Philadelphia, experts from across the region and the U.S. noted Philadelphia's national leadership in thinking, planning and building green. Through Greenworks Philadelphia, Mayor Nutter's visionary sustainability strategy, Philadelphia is on track to become the greenest city in America by 2015. Greenworks Philadelphia sets up goals related to reducing local energy demand, lowering greenhouse gases and creating new green jobs, as well as significantly increasing the city's green infrastructure.

One of the reasons Greenworks Philadelphia could set forth an aggressive green-infrastructure strategy is that we have a wealth of local experts, including our own Water Department, to turn to for guidance.

Other areas of the nation are not so fortunate. Despite strong agreement on the economic benefits of building a green infrastructure, many cities and communities often lack the knowledge and technical expertise that has allowed Philadelphia to be such a leader.

To meet this challenge, Rep. Schwartz wrote the Green Communities Act (HR 2222), a plan that encourages public-private partnerships in 80 cities to educate local governments on the best strategies to plan, build and maintain green infrastructure. These cities will then be eligible for grants to help implement their green initiatives.

Business and environmental leaders recognize how important policies strengthening green infrastructure are to sustainable communities and economic growth. Already, more than 50 business, community and environmental organizations, including the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the Pennsylvania Nursery and Landscape Assn. and the National Association of Clean Water Agencies have endorsed the Green Communities Act.

Mayors from around the country also recognize the economic importance of green infrastructure. Recently, at its annual meeting, the U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution endorsing the ideas outlined in the Green Communities Act and recognizing the impact that green infrastructure has had in Philadelphia.

AS WE WORK to stimulate our economy, put Americans back to work, and improve the environment, it is clear that one essential way forward is through green infrastructure investments. The Green Communities Act and Greenworks Philadelphia are leading the way to a cleaner and more sustainable America for all of us. *

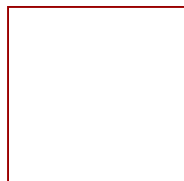
U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz represents the 13th District. Michael Nutter is the mayor of Philadelphia. Both are Democrats.

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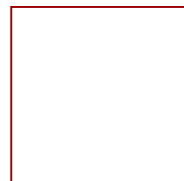
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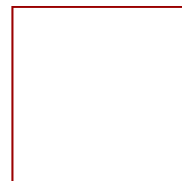
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