

Place-making and Sustainability

A discussion series hosted by the Place Studies program
of the Center for Sustainability and the Environment

Sylvan Dell Nature Park & Farm: An Innovative Approach to Recreation, Conservation, and Education



Reflections by
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The Sylvan Dell Nature Park and Farm implements a comprehensive strategy for conservation, recreation, and education, while connecting residents with Williamsport's, and the region's, bountiful natural resources. The Sylvan Dell project encourages smart growth and asset-based development in its land-use ordinances and by connecting existing natural areas with a network of public access trails and parks. The park makes the most cost effective use of limited resources by achieving many 'stacked benefits', including high-quality recreation, innovative stormwater management, and accessible environmental education.

How does your work relate to the concept of place-making?

The mission of my work is, "connecting people and communities to the natural world in ways that foster environmental understanding, stewardship, and a shift toward a sustainable future." For many in my generation, a connection with the natural world came 'standard' in their childhood experience. I was a free-range child, set loose to explore farm, field, creek and woods, and I fell in love with the places and landscapes of central Pennsylvania. That connection to the natural world is missing for many of today's youth, and my work seeks to create an entree to the outdoors in the design of quality greenways, parks, and natural and restored landscapes. The Sylvan Dell Farm and Nature Park is set to become a hub of the region's evolving greenway and open space network, and has the potential to connect with a broad range of residents, whether their interest is in the natural environment, healthy food production, or the history and heritage of the site.

What are potential benefits and/or shortcomings you see for place-making in sustainability?

First off, I rarely use the term 'sustainability' when speaking with a prospective client, mainly because I need the work and want to win the contract. 'Sustainability' and 'green' are loaded terms that place you at odds with the dominant culture of rural Pennsylvania. Instead I speak about the ability of good design to solve problems and to create the kind of environments that make you feel good, while having other benefits including reduced maintenance costs. My goal is help others (clients, residents, students) see and understand natural patterns, and the connections between cause and effect – so they can make an informed decision to work with, and not against, natural systems. There is so much potential to re-think the built environment, and re-design a sustainable future; we need to empower young people to lead that effort.



What aspects of your work can we apply to a place-making approach to sustainability at Bucknell and in our local region?

Most projects are designed to achieve one or two goals or objectives, resulting in limited benefits for few constituents. The Sylvan Dell project seeks to integrate many stacked benefits into one project, addressing the widest range of social, environmental and economic needs of the community. The project will develop broad partnerships, and through the farm and park's innovative model and environmental outreach, spread its influence throughout the region and the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Sylvan Dell project will provide cost effective and accessible outdoor recreation, environmental education, and innovative watershed management to comply with municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) requirements, while building the region's greenway and trail network.

The Place-making and Sustainability discussion series invites the campus community to explore how we can apply a place-making approach to creating sustainable communities. As Andres Edwards (2010) argues in his book, *Thriving Beyond Sustainability*, place-making "involves nourishing our connection to the cultural and ecological fabric of our community" which then "encourages us to take responsibility for our neighbors and our resources."

The BCSE Place Studies program supports teaching, research, and outreach on how we imagine, sustain, and understand, and engage with place.