

Cypress

Environmental and Land Use Planning

P. O. Box 1844 Aptos 95001
(831) 685-1007 www.cypressenv.com

Kim Tschantz, MSP, CEP



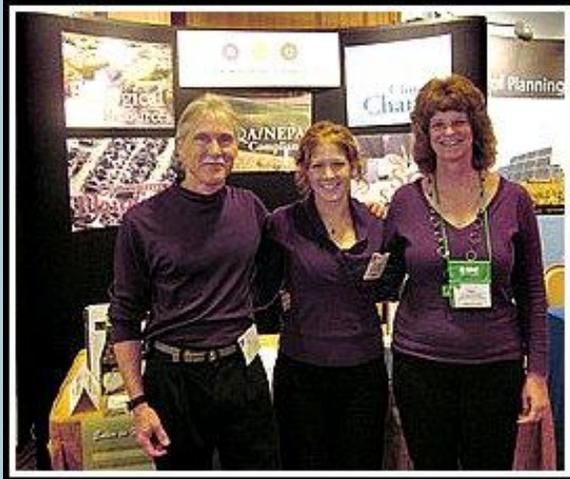
Spring Newsletter *April 2012*

Greetings, and a Happy Springtime to You!

In this edition of my newsletter:

- The Statewide AEP Conference: May 6 - 9. You don't have to be a planner or an environmental professional to attend. [Read below](#).
- The new concept of [Sustainable Sites](#), the "green" approach to landscape architecture and maintenance, launches its new rating system.
- Santa Cruz County [reverses the common zoning concept](#) encouraging non-conforming uses and structures to fade away. Why this is important to builders and property owners?
- If St. Patrick's Day is over, how come people are talking about monthly [Green Drinks](#)?
- Like the content of this newsletter? Then I hope you will share this newsletter with your Facebook and LinkedIn networks. Both buttons to share this newsletter are at the top of this newsletter. You can also "[like me](#)" on Facebook.

Newsletter continues



Purple Planners!

Kim and Monterey professional planners, Christine Bradley and Teri Wisler; three of the coordinators of last year's AEP Conference. The color coordination? It was actually a coincidence. Really!

Association of Environmental Professionals Conference: Sacramento; May 6-9

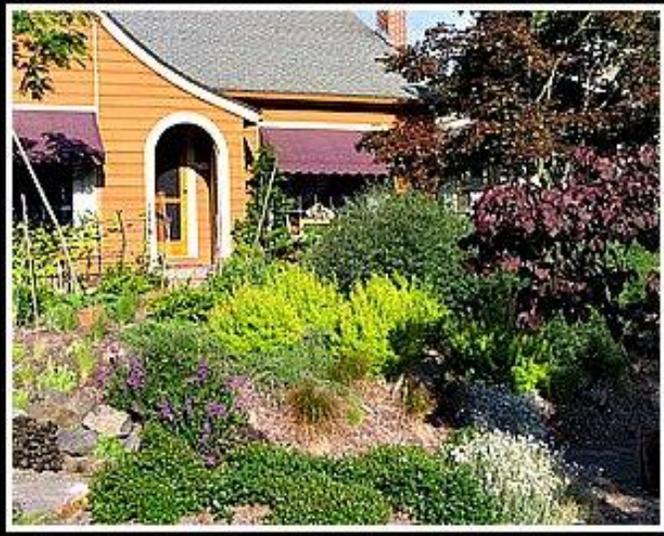
This year's AEP Conference will be held at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Sacramento during May 6-9. AEP is a professional organization of professionals primarily engaged in environmental analysis, research and management. Its members include environmental planners, land restoration specialists, hydrologists, biologists and land use planners. Unlike many professional conferences, you are not required to be a professional or a member of AEP to attend. You can get all the details for this annual conference at: www.califaep.org Once at the website, click on the Conference image.

My Website

I revised my website in December. It includes several new features, including copies of previous newsletters. To read past newsletters, just go to my website, www.cypressenv.com and click the Newsletter icon at the left edge of any web page. My new site also links up to my Facebook and LinkedIn sites.

Newsletter continues

Sustainable Sites Initiative: Landscaping Goes Green with its Own Green Rating System



Front yard lawn turf was replaced by drought-tolerant trees, shrubs and ground cover for this home in Portland, Oregon. SITES is applicable for any scale of land development



A new bioswale and adjoining pervious rock surface provides an attractive storm water conveyance and minimizes the need for landscape irrigation at Orange County Park in Irvine, CA

What is it and Why Have it?

While standards exist for sustainable structures—"green buildings"—there are no comprehensive guidelines and performance benchmarks for those who want to create and measure sustainable landscapes. Yet landscapes have great potential for both environmental good and severe environmental damage. For example:

- **Greenhouse gas emissions.** Vegetation and soil help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, in the atmosphere by capturing and storing it for use in plant roots, leaves and bark.
- **Urban climate.** Use of vegetation, shade structures, and other techniques to cool the air can reduce costs associated with urban "heat islands".
- **Control of invasives.** Invasive plant species compete with native plants and typically over-colonize and harm native plant and animal communities.
- **Water waste.** Irrigation of unsustainable landscapes accounts for *more than a third* of residential water use—more than 7 billion gallons per day nationwide. Typically, half of irrigation water can be wasted as a result of evaporation, wind, improper system design, over-watering and providing for the water needs of non-drought tolerant plants.
- **Water pollution.** In the U.S. polluted and contaminated stormwater runoff accounts for 70 percent of water pollution in urban areas and is the leading cause of poor water quality and the degradation of aquatic habitat.

The Sustainable Sites Initiative™ (SITES™) picks up where LEED® (green building construction) ends, by providing a voluntary national rating system for sustainable landscape design, landscape materials and maintenance practices

that can be used for sites with or without buildings. SITES™ addresses the issues listed above by promoting the concepts of native habitat creation, oxygen producing plants, water conservation landscape, designs that foster a natural cycle of habitat regeneration, biodiversity and preservation of good habitat and floodplain function. SITES™ was created through a collaboration of the American Society of Landscape Architects, University of Texas' Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the United States Botanic Garden.

SITES™ Rating System Certifies the First Projects

Modeled after the LEED, The SITES™ rating system includes 15 prerequisites and 51 potential credits which collectively make up a 250-point-scale rating system. Projects can earn one through four stars for obtaining 40%, 50%, 60% or 80% of the total points. The pilot phase rating system was initiated in 2009 with this four-star rating system. Points are awarded in the following categories:

- Site Selection
- Pre-Design Assessment and Planning
- Site Design—Water
- Site Design—Soil and Vegetation
- Site Design—Materials Selection
- Site Design—Human Health and Well-Being
- Construction
- Operations and Maintenance
- Monitoring and Innovation

Over 150 Pilot Projects are participating in the SITES two-year Pilot Program (June 2010-June 2012) in 34 States in the U.S. and a few projects in Canada, Iceland and Spain. This past January SITES™ announced the first projects to be certified by the rating system. These initial projects are the St. Charles, Missouri, campus of Novus International (image at right.); the Green at College Park of the University of Texas at Arlington; and the Woodland Discovery Playground at Shelby Farms Park in Memphis, Tennessee.



At Novus: A new pavilion, overlooking the improved aquatic habitat, is a venue for meetings and after hours events. The parking lot is in the background.

Features at Novus' nine-acre headquarters project include a parking lot with stormwater retention features, a walking trail that winds through restored prairie and other habitat, and a vegetable garden that staff maintains. The garden is fed by a windmill-powered well that retrieves rainwater stored underground. A detention basin captures stormwater on site and provides aquatic habitat and a scenic view from a nearby pavilion topped with a vegetated roof.

Why is this Important to You?

With the finalization of the tested rating system this June, builders, homeowners and planners will have an objective metric to assess land development projects outside the walls of the building towards meeting various sustainability objectives. In most cases, achieving a particular sustainability objective, such as substantially reducing water use, results in a dramatic cost saving for long-term maintenance. SITES™ will provide tools for those who influence land development and management practices and can address increasingly urgent global concerns such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and natural resource depletion.

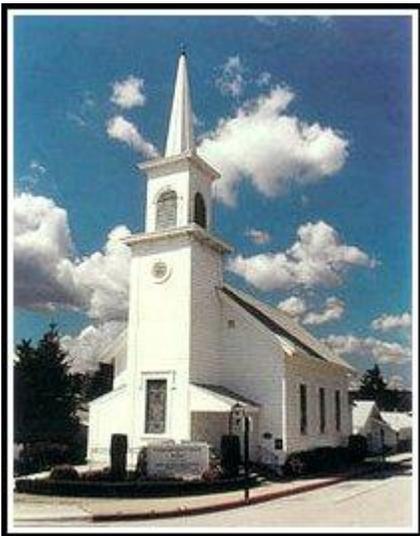
A leader in the development of SITES™ is landscape architect, [April Philips, ASLA](#), owner of April Philips Design

Works in San Rafael, California. You can see some of her projects at www.apdw.com. April's website is quite impressive. For more information or to get involved with the Sustainable Sites Initiative, visit their website at: www.sustainablesites.org.

A Major Shift in Zoning Philosophy in Santa Cruz County Is this the New Trend?

Overview

A typical aspect of local zoning regulations is to have uses and buildings conform to new zoning requirements. While, non-conforming uses and structures, that pre-date today's zoning laws may be allowed to continue after the zoning has been changed, it is often quite difficult to obtain approval for anything beyond limited maintenance and repair of non-conforming structures or structures containing nonconforming uses. For the uninitiated, a "non-conforming use" is a land use that no longer conforms to the allowed uses in the zoning district, such as a lumber yard in an area now zoned for small-scale retail and/or office use. A "non-conforming structure" is a building that no longer meets the site standards of the zoning district (bldg. setbacks, bldg. height, lot coverage, etc.). The philosophy that non-conforming uses and structures are undesirable and should wither away over time is undergoing a major shift in Santa Cruz County. On March 20, 2012 the County Board of Supervisors adopted code amendments that will allow more non-conforming uses and structures to remain and be improved under significantly more lenient requirements.



The historic Congregational Church in unincorporated Soquel Village doesn't meet today's setbacks from two intersecting streets and from property lines, but the non-conforming structure is an iconic resource for the village.

One of the major new code provisions is that, in most cases, up to 65% of the main structural components (wall and roof framing and foundation) of a non-conforming dwelling can be altered with just a Building Permit. Previously, proposed structural alterations of a more minor scope required a public hearing and a Use Permit. Another new provision allows changes to commercial buildings with just a Building Permit if the changes will not result in an intensification (more impacts) of the use. Previously, any changes to commercial buildings required a Use Permit before submitting plans for a Building Permit. Projects needing Use Permits are not always approved or approved exactly the way they are proposed.

Why Should You Care?

I have been following this interesting code amendment process over the past 12 months because it represents a major change in zoning philosophy pertaining to the value of non-conforming uses and structures to a community. Santa Cruz County land use regulations have never been known as lax. However, the new code amendments not only relax regulations regarding non-conforming uses and structures but underscore a new view that non-conforming uses and structures are not always a bad thing in land use. According to the staff report prepared by County Planning, the zoning code amendments "acknowledge the prevalence of legally established non-conforming uses and structures and their benefit to the neighborhood when they are well maintained and (they will) preserve and improve existing housing stock and commercial space". In other words, this action encourages the retention of existing structures and uses even when they are at odds with current zoning laws.

Included in the County's March 20th adoption of new zoning rules are revised regulations that now reduce the situations where a Use Permit is needed for projects involving non-conforming structures and uses. In most cases only a Building Permit will be needed. This will result in substantially less time and costs to property owners wanting to carryout projects, such as renovation of a house that is too close to a property line or that doesn't meet today's other site standards. On the other hand, it significantly reduces the opportunities for public participation and scrutiny involving projects that may affect a neighborhood. There are a lot of details with these newly revised zoning regulations. Please contact me at kimt@cypressenv.com if you would like to understand the

Green Drinks are Going on All Over California ... and the World



Every month people who work in the environmental field meet up at informal sessions known as Green Drinks. The free-form gatherings consist of a lively mixture of people from non-profit organizations, academia, government, business and interested individuals. It's a great way of catching up with people you know and also for making new contacts. It's common to have a different crowd at each gathering, which is typically held monthly. Many people have found employment, made friends, developed new ideas, done deals and had moments of serendipity. Folks gather every month to share libations, discuss, debate and explore ideas.

It's a force for positive networking and its spreading across the globe. Green Drinks are occurring in towns and cities in all 50 states and more than 80 nations.

A few of the Green Drinks gatherings are:

- Green Drinks Santa Cruz: First Thursday of the month. Cafe Mare in downtown Santa Cruz. 5:30 p.m.
- Green Drinks Monterey: Sustainability Academy, 98 Del Monte Avenue in downtown Monterey. 6:30 p.m.
- Green Drinks San Francisco: First Tuesday of the month. 111 Minna Art Gallery, @ 2nd Street. 5:30 p.m.

Many Green Drinks gatherings include brief informal presentations on "green" topics and businesses. Past Green Drinks gatherings in Santa Cruz have included presentations on solar energy installations and projects of the University's Sustainability Office. A wealth of information can be found at: www.greendrinks.org

*Kim Tschantz, MSP, CEP
Environmental Planning and Analysis, Permitting and Project Management*