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Urban Leaders Showcase Green Infrastructure, Sustainability Connection

At a recent conference hosted by the Clean Water America Alliance, green infrastructure leaders from around the country gathered to share innovations, strategies, and best practices from some of the most progressive "green" cities in the nation: Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Milwaukee, greater Portland, San Francisco, New York City and Chicago.

The Urban Water Sustainability Leadership Conference took place Dec. 6-7 at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. The conference attracted 200 urban water, sustainability, transportation, planning, parks and recreation leaders to discuss how agencies can dovetail each other's efforts within a city to maximize benefits for the public.

"The real challenge for large cities is to get different agencies within their city on the same page," said Howard Neukrug, Chair of the Alliance's Urban Water Sustainability Council and Deputy of Sustainability for the Philadelphia Water Department. "Many cities are moving ahead aggressively into green infrastructure. We needed this conference to share innovations and learn from each other's experience. We found there were a lot of similarities with common obstacles and opportunities. The Urban Water Sustainability Council is planning to continue the dialogue in the months and years to come."



Karen Sands, Manager of Sustainability at Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer District.

Several common themes developed throughout the day-and-a-half event include:

- green infrastructure has multiple economic, social, and environmental benefits, but it must work within the greater quilt of water management, which includes traditional gray infrastructure
- there is a strong need for people within city departments to coordinate and cross hurdles together
- the benefits of green infrastructure must be clearly explained to the public and within city governments to advance greater implementation
- there is a need to shift the paradigm to consider triple bottom line benefits so that, through the gray infrastructure lens, green infrastructure doesn't look so expensive

In addition to the panel discussions, keynote speakers offered valuable perspectives. The Honorable Mayor Michael Nutter opened the event by describing the city's plan to transform one-third of Philadelphia's impervious land to "green" infrastructure and reclaim 20 miles of urban carbon from the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers.

"It's a win-win for everyone, and we are currently implementing green infrastructure into recreational centers, schools and highways," Nutter said.

Other keynotes included Nancy Stoner, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the U.S. EPA Office of Water, who shared key strategies and programs through which the agency is promoting green infrastructure. Vivian Chang, Director of State & Local Initiatives with Green for All discussed how best practices in green infrastructure can ensure high quality jobs and equitable access to new opportunities.



Nancy Stoner, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the U.S. EPA Office of Water.

At several points during the conference, participants acknowledged the need to continue the conversations begun in the meeting. Information about urban water sustainability needs to be shared within city agencies and between cities on a regular basis. The Urban Water Sustainability Council will continue to develop this work and serve as a facilitator for exchanging information. If you are interested in joining the Council or learning more, contact Lorraine Loken at (202) 533-1819, or via email at lloken@CleanWaterAmericaAlliance.org.

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Six 2-hour webcasts featuring video recorded live at the Urban Water Sustainability Leadership Conference are now available. Visit WaterWorld.com for more information.

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