

Green Infrastructure Plan for Hot Springs Arkansas

Program Overview and Frequently Asked Questions

The City of Hot Springs has contracted with a nonprofit firm, the Green Infrastructure Center to help the city identify, evaluate and prioritize the city's highest value natural resources – its green infrastructure – along with finding opportunities to restore them. The project began in April 2015 and will take approximately one year to complete. An advisory stakeholder group made up of city agencies, the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Hot Springs, will evaluate maps and models of the best resources in the city as well as opportunities to improve areas. While work to revitalize the downtown is on-going, there are many areas of the city that can also be improved or better protected. See the *Frequently Asked Questions* below to learn more about the planning process.

What is Green Infrastructure? Green Infrastructure refers to all the natural elements that help support our community. It includes our trees and forests, waterways, wetlands, soils and natural areas such as parks and trails. While we manage our grey infrastructure – roads, bridges, power lines or pipelines – we sometimes forget that we also need to manage our 'green infrastructure' too.

Why do we need to map and manage Green Infrastructure? Green Infrastructure includes intact forests, tree canopy, wetlands, springs, parks and rivers, or agricultural soils that provide clean water, air quality, wildlife habitat and food. These natural assets create healthful communities and sustain the local economy. Tourists and residents alike appreciate a healthful, attractive community. However, if we don't know where our green infrastructure is located, we can lose it over time. Communities can reap many benefits from their natural systems if they identify, rank and map them as part of the communities' "infrastructure."

Connections Count: When landscapes are connected, wildlife and birds can move across the landscape, ensuring their ability to obtain food, find the best open shelter, and maintain a diverse gene pool for healthy populations. Pollinators, which we all rely on for food and natural beauty of our flowers, also need habitat to allow them to do their work! And it's not just connections for wildlife, people also need a connected landscape to allow for recreation, adventure and alternate transportation – how about walking to work on a nature trail? We look for ways to maintain existing connections and make new ones too!

Why is Hot Springs interested in doing this work? For many reasons! Following are just a few of them:

- ✓ The greener a community, the healthier the people.
- ✓ Areas with more green spaces are able to better attract top companies and well paid jobs. Even though downtown Hot Springs is surrounded by a national park, the quality of the entire city is important.
- ✓ Cities can save funds in the long run by making better, smarter investments in water, trees, trails, food systems and parks.
- ✓ Hazards, such as flooding, can be abated or avoided with better planning, thereby saving lives and lessening risks and costs.
- ✓ Greener communities are safer communities; less crime occurs in green areas than areas without green spaces.
- ✓ The greener the community, the better the air quality, even at the neighborhood level.

- ✓ A connected landscape is healthier, more diverse and more resilient.

How will the plan be created? An advisory stakeholder group made up of city agencies and others will review the maps to determine areas of focus. Staff from the nonprofit firm, the Green Infrastructure Center will help the city recognize new options for addressing local needs. For more background on green infrastructure planning visit www.gicinc.org

How are maps made? Using local data and satellite imagery, we can determine the extent of our trees, waters, soils and many other features that make up the City of Hot Springs local environment. We can also see areas where trees are lacking or where flooding could be a problem. Once a map is made, it is evaluated to determine if it is correct and if it shows the most important features. Maps can show what is unique, important, or needs more attention.

Why a Green Infrastructure Plan now? Communities can use their green infrastructure plans for many purposes, such as revitalizing a downtown business district, protecting current and future water supplies, protecting or expanding their economy, creating healthful cities, protecting wildlife and biodiversity, providing or identifying new outdoor recreation options, informing transportation, comprehensive plans or zoning decisions. A computer model has been created to help communities identify many of these resources and thanks to a prior project initiated by the Arkansas Forestry Commission to create a state Green Infrastructure Model, there is extensive guidance on how to do this work.

What will implementation of the plan look like? It's too soon to tell, but other similar communities have abated stormwater runoff and flooding problems, created green buffers and trail connections, identified areas for community gardens, determined streets that could be redesigned using Low Impact Development techniques and complete street elements for added beauty and safety, and obtained grant funds to provide support projects in the community.

Will this plan restrict my property rights? This plan is not intended to identify land to restrict and it is not a land acquisition project. Just like the City Comprehensive Plan, this plan will look at the entire city. Any project ideas that result will still have to follow all the usual procedures for any new development or changes to public property. Ideas from this plan may be used to inform future updates of the Comprehensive Plan or plans for future zoning or redevelopment.

How can the public contribute? A community open house will be held on Saturday, October 24 from 10 AM to noon at the Transportation Depot, 100 Broadway Terrace, to provide an opportunity to review the maps and offer comments and ideas. In addition, you may contact [Parks & Trails Director Jean Wallace](#) to share ideas or ask questions.