



LD-12

Small town manages its environment

The city of Coralville, Iowa (15,000), was considered a bedroom community for the University of Iowa, located in nearby Iowa City. It is at the intersection of two interstate highways and had no downtown or historic buildings. But the city council decided to change all that about 10 years ago, when it began a series of initiatives to create a downtown, beautify the city, manage the environment, and, ultimately, create a sense of pride and identity. A highlight of these activities was the construction of an environmentally sound park shelter, the roof of which is planted with low-growing ground cover.

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Implementation notes

Leadership/staffing The initiatives have been led by the city council and several city department heads. But hundreds of city residents have played a major part in planning and implementing the beautification and environmental management initiatives.

Timeline The environmental management activities have been ongoing for approximately 10 years. The park pavilion took two or three years to plan and nine months to construct. It opened in the spring of 2003.

Budget/funding The park pavilion cost \$710,000. The city estimates that the special roof cost the city \$50,000–60,000 more than it would have spent on a conventional roof. State and federal grants provided \$225,000 for the project.

Program description The park pavilion has over 6,000 square feet of roof surface that supports the growth of plants. The roof design reduces heat loss/gain, extends the roof's life, and reduces stormwater runoff. Although the roof cost twice as much as a conventional roof, the building requires less heating and cooling equipment and uses less energy because of the roof. Although the roof may pay for itself eventually, the city council chose this design to provide leadership in environmentally sound design and to show that this type of design could be used in a public building. The building is also built, to the extent possible, from recycled and local materials; this kept



down transport costs and highlighted area products. It has energy-efficient windows, sliding doors, and an energy recovery ventilator to reduce heat loss and energy consumption. An adjacent parking area is covered with grass, but the grass does not grow directly from the ground. It was placed on top of a special mat that keeps the soil from compacting when cars are parked on it, allowing the grass to continue to grow and stormwater to be absorbed.

In other environmental management efforts, the recreation department works closely with volunteers to landscape the city with native plants and restore park areas with prairie grasses and woodlands. Although native plants require more care than other plants during the first two or three years, they require less care once they are established. Volunteers also help plant and maintain trees along city streets. The city hosts several community events that bring together schoolchildren and other residents to clean up parks and trails and assist seniors with landscaping. The community also helps hang holiday lights on trees. Coralville's new downtown is four square blocks and includes a new office complex, banks, an organic co-op, and restaurants. It is appealing to walkers and has a new street and a new entrance to the community.

Results Coralville's environmental management initiatives have had a major impact on the community's spirit and identity. The city has become a desirable home for faculty and researchers at the university. And the city recently won a prize in the international Nations in Bloom competition; the prize was based on its landscape enhancement, heritage management, environmentally sensitive practices, community involvement, and planning for the future.

