



Neighborhood for Nature Status Report

Green Neighborhoods Program

Neighborhood:	Maple Leaf Golf and Country Club
Date:	September 6, 2017
Steps Completed:	Neighborhood Assessment & Environmental Plan
Steps Remaining:	Neighborhood Environmental Projects Wildlife Water Education Resource Management Community Awareness

Overview

Your property has an excellent opportunity to become a successful neighborhood for nature by providing valuable wildlife habitat and educating staff and residents about environmental management. We appreciate your commitment to managing for environmental quality. By joining with other cooperators in the Green Neighborhoods Program, your efforts are helping to enhance, protect, and connect wildlife habitat and resources across the country.

Environmental Assessment

This section provides an assessment of current conservation projects you have implemented and provides recommendations for project areas to focus on.

You have done a great job of outlining your achievements to date and choosing projects to help you develop your neighborhood for nature. We are also pleased with your diverse and knowledgeable Neighborhood Audubon Committee that includes residents, staff, and outside experts. They can help not only with planning and project implementation, but spreading the word about your efforts and obtaining support. The plan that you have completed provides a thorough overview for each of the environmental categories and should offer a clear sense of direction for your property. You can further improve your plan by developing a time line and including projected start and completion dates for those items marked "No".

Given that about 125 out of 272 acres, or 46% of the neighborhood, is dedicated to natural areas, ponds, and open space, Maple Leaf is in an ideal position to model how a community can protect and enhance wildlife habitat and water quality.

We recommend addressing the threats to the community and nearby natural resources, such as seasonal flooding, by focusing on outreach and education projects that will help educate the

community on the importance of native, drought tolerant plants. Natural areas have tremendous benefits for communities – they provide space for wildlife, moderate heat island climate effects, clean the air making it healthier to breathe, protect drinking water, and offer opportunities for outdoor recreation. Strive to protect natural areas in and around your community through low-impact land management practices and by establishing no-maintenance areas.

You can further improve your plan by developing planned efforts and including projected start and completion dates. Most of your categories looked good and we were pleased with the diversity of plans and completed projects you included, however a critical component for the longevity of Maple Leaf's sustainability initiatives will be the development of a stated environmental management goal, which can help to outline your plans going forward. In addition, finding a way to evaluate your annual progress to report back to your residents will be an important piece as well.

It looks like waste management is an area that can be addressed in almost all areas of the community and could begin with a waste analysis. Critical projects include recycling, including composting, and purchasing materials made of recycled materials. Reducing the amount of waste sent to the landfill and closing the loop by providing a market for materials made of recycled materials are the basic, underlying components of a strong Waste Management program.

Another area for emphasis would be stormwater management. Stormwater and water quality are a concern in communities everywhere. Florida communities have special considerations because of pervious surfaces and heavy rainfall events. As urban areas spread, the need for more effective stormwater management strategies is imperative. We recommend a Stormwater Education Campaign for residents, especially new homeowners, and your local Charlotte County cooperative extension office is a good place to start.

Your goal of achieving the Neighborhood for Nature Award will require that you complete a project in each of the 5 tracks within the next year. To achieve the Neighborhood for Nature award, you will need to identify and complete projects within the Wildlife, Water, Education, Resource Management, and Community Awareness tracks (see page 25 of the Awards handbook for project ideas). You may already be doing some projects in these areas, and can submit those in project reports for each category.

Your community is eligible for this award every year, so don't feel that you need to complete more than one project in each track this year. If you save some projects to do next year, it will help to keep the community engaged over the long term!

If you have any questions or concerns about the recommended projects, please feel free to give us a call to discuss them further.

■ Comments and Further Recommendations -

1. **Neighborhood Audubon Committee**

We recommend that you expand your Neighborhood Audubon Committee in the early stages of your involvement. We have found that members who have formed a committee have had better success with Green Neighborhoods planning, project implementation, and publicity. This committee is there to help you with the planning and implementation of projects, and relieve you of some of this work.

The group has several functions. One purpose of the group is to provide technical advice as you begin to implement specific projects – this is where you want local experts who may not be residents to join. Local group members may volunteer time or labor and can help monitor enhancement efforts. An even more important purpose of your group is public, employee, and member relations -- your group can help disseminate information and help to publicize your Green Neighborhood efforts.

Choose people you feel comfortable working with and who will gladly volunteer their skills. There are no meeting requirements for this group -- some groups meet once a month, others meet four times a year, and still others have several core members who meet informally and outside resource people who are involved as needed.

2. **Creating a Demonstration Site**

Models play an important role in the Audubon International Programs. The primary contact person and Neighborhood Audubon Committee could initially focus on a community facility as your demonstration site. The Committee may also want to consider focusing on a single residence of an individual who would be willing to occasionally make their home accessible for a garden or home tour.

The purpose of the Demonstration Site is to demonstrate ways to promote ecologically sound land management, conserve natural resources, and promote environmental education and awareness. As people visit the site, they will see the commitment to environmental stewardship and a challenge to the community members to follow their lead. Some areas that you could focus on include:

Wildlife & Habitat Management

Properties can be managed to provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife species. The location, size, and layout of the property and the variety of existing habitats will affect what you are able to do. Actions you can take include naturalizing landscapes, minimizing chemical and pesticide use, and understanding wildlife habitat. Even urban sites can provide habitat for wildlife.

Resource Conservation

Establishing a comprehensive water and energy conservation program helps to demonstrate commitment to environmental stewardship. The Demonstration Site can audit current energy and water use and implement projects to reduce the use of these natural resources for a given building or facility. Resource conservation improves your economic bottom line as well as the environment.

Waste Management

The generation of waste products is a central economic and environmental issue faced by every business. The Demonstration Site can evaluate waste generated and implement strategies to reduce, reuse, and recycle the solid waste on a site.

Education

This section is designed to increase people's understanding of good environmental stewardship. The Demonstrate Site needs to include educational information in the form of interpretive signs or brochures. It will also help you to gain recognition and support for your environmental programs, increase resident participation, and let the public know that your community is being managed to maximize environmental quality which in turn fosters the public's sense of stewardship and environmental connection.

Community Awareness

Find out what projects residents have in mind that they would like to complete themselves. This will provide an opportunity for committee members to select projects and take the lead on implementation in certain areas. As an alternative, invite residents to participate in any of the other projects planned for this year to increase their engagement in the community-wide effort.

Put simply, site-specific actions taken at the Demonstration Site will help to showcase the Green Neighborhoods approach to environmental stewardship.

3. Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

Native Plants

Native vegetation is adapted to your areas' climate and soils, reducing the need for chemical inputs and extensive watering, and providing a valuable food and shelter source that local wildlife have adapted to. Exotic species are not adapted to the area and sometimes need significantly more labor and inputs than native plants. The importation of exotics is responsible for the introduction of some devastating plant diseases and insects. In addition, exotic plants can become invasive, replacing diverse native systems with a single variety of plant, such as has occurred with purple loosestrife in wetland systems. When incorporating new vegetation into the landscape, we would like to see you emphasize native plants.

To help with education and research on native plants, we recommend visiting the Florida Native Plant Society website (<http://www.fnps.org/>). This site has links that could help you identify native plants that will provide habitat and require less inputs.

Wildlife Inventory

For help in building up your wildlife inventory, we encourage you to contact a local college or bird watching group to find someone who may be able to visit your community and generate your list. For more information on endangered or threatened species found in your area you can contact your local wildlife agency or you can visit the Florida Department of Environmental Protection website at www.dep.state.fl.us/mainpage/default.htm.

There is great potential for creating a variety of wildlife habitats on your grounds. Your property is fairly large, and with some naturalization projects you should be able to attract a greater diversity of wildlife. Determine which “needs” are present (food, water, space, and shelter) on your grounds and provide what is missing. Allowing woodland understory to grow where possible can greatly improve available wildlife habitat. Also, focusing on smaller projects, such as creating a hummingbird garden or mounting nest boxes, can go a long way in benefiting wildlife while minimizing the amount of area needed on the property. If you need additional help in this endeavor, don’t hesitate to give us a call.

A valuable reference containing information about natural landscaping and community education is *A Sourcebook on Natural Landscaping for Public Officials* found at: <https://archive.epa.gov/greenacres/web/html/chap1.html>.

You are fortunate to have natural water sources on your property. Water will greatly enhance your grounds' wildlife value. We have included a fact sheet, *Managing a Pond for Wildlife*, to give you more information on this subject.

3. Education

Letting people know about your environmental commitment and ongoing stewardship efforts, why the efforts are being made, and how they directly benefit the residents is vital to developing ownership of the program by individuals and encouraging action in their homes. There are multiple ways to provide residents with information, and a few include:

Nature Trail

Placing wildlife gardens (hummingbird, butterfly, and songbird), birdhouses, and naturalized areas along a nature trail can create an excellent education project which, along with well-placed seating, would also allow for quiet contemplation. A pamphlet can be designed to create a self-guided tour along the trail. Your trail should include as many ecosystems as possible and can focus on different types of wildlife habitat and projects, the history of the property, and particularly interesting trees and land formations. We encourage you to be creative. This type of project will help you reach your goal of receiving public recognition.

Public Display Kiosks

Informational display kiosks located in public locations – areas such as parks, office buildings, and entryways – are an excellent way to showcase your efforts, make announcements, and educate the public about your efforts. We recommend incorporating a wildlife inventory with a map designating where certain types of wildlife were seen in which part of the property. Locating these maps near the clubhouse or at the beginning of a nature trail is a fun way to prepare people for observing wildlife and nature and, at the same time, allow them to contribute their own observations.

A kiosk or sign can also be useful in communicating the value of a maintenance free area for wildlife habitat or watershed enhancement, and may help residents adjust expectations of what

landscaping should look like.

Brochures

Providing take-home brochures in public locations is another excellent way to educate citizens in your community. Brochures can be general and informational in content, such as describing your community's sustainability efforts, or can be specific and provide detailed information on specific topics, such as selecting "green" household cleaners, or maintaining an environmentally-sensitive lawn. If materials about watershed protection are available from the Town, we recommend distributing and/or posting them where residents can see them.

Invitations to Meetings

Promote individual engagement by actively inviting residents to attend Neighborhood Audubon Committee meetings and have their voice and opinion heard on important issues.

Presentation Series – Public Sessions

Schedule a regular speaker series, which can include Audubon International staff and/or other local experts to give educational public talks, presentations, and slide shows on selected issues of importance for the community (environmental issues and education, sustainability, case studies from other communities, etc.). You are in an excellent position to partner with local initiatives to further your environmental efforts. There are a variety of websites that list local resources; here are just a few:

- a. Native Plant Resources - <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>
- b. Local Harvest – <http://www.localharvest.org>
- c. Energy Tax Incentives Assistance Program - <http://www.dsireusa.org/>
- d. Conservancy of Southwest Florida - <https://www.conservancy.org/>

Schools and Youth

Planning to include children in projects is an excellent way to encourage action by both youth and their parents. Even if your neighborhood has no families, there might be residents that are actively involved in scouting or other youth groups. Providing a place for youth groups to create gardens, build a nestbox trail, or help remove invasive plants from a natural area, you can help young people learn valuable skills while helping to meet some of your environmental objectives.

4. Waste Management & Resource Conservation

There are many facets to waste management and recycling. All facets are driven by the goal of reducing your community's waste stream, the amount of garbage that is deposited in landfills, and by incorporating reuse and recycling efforts to minimize our impact on natural resources and find valuable uses for materials. We can even "close the loop" by purchasing goods made from recycled content (i.e. office paper, carpets).

Energy Conservation

Reducing energy consumption, improving efficiency, and seeking out alternative renewable sources of energy are paramount for the future of our communities. Conducting an energy audit of buildings on the property will help you to determine how the building's energy efficiency can

be improved. Some utility companies will provide this service at no cost or a nominal fee. Your local cooperative extension may also have a program designed for small businesses. Also, as light fixtures need to be replaced, install energy efficient lighting, such as compact fluorescent bulbs, to reduce energy use and save money in the long run.

We have included several fact sheets on energy efficiency in general and regarding lighting to give you more information on this subject as you implement your plans to improve lighting efficiency.

Environmentally-Preferable Purchasing

In a free market society, we vote with our dollars. We can create a demand for energy efficient, low waste materials, and you are in a position to harness the purchasing power of all Maple Leaf residents. In community offices and facilities, purchase items which can be reused or recycled. Approach local suppliers to determine if you can get a reduced price on compact fluorescent lightbulbs, low-flow showerheads and faucets, and items made from recycled materials. By increasing demand for a product, producers will be able to increase production, which will lead to future price reductions, allowing others to purchase more environmentally sensitive products at a lower cost in the future. A good example of this premise is recycled office paper. Environmental organizations, governments, and environmentally-minded businesses made it a policy to purchase office paper with recycled content, despite its higher cost. Today, we can buy recycled paper for the same, and sometimes lower, cost of paper made from virgin material. We have included a fact sheet on *EcoPurchasing* for more information on this topic.

5. Water Quality & Conservation

Often times, the issues faced by communities cannot be defined by political boundaries. Environmental issues, for example, are more often defined by watershed boundaries, ecological regions, and landscape features such as rivers, lakes, mountains, and forests.

Water Quality

Ensuring clean water supplies and protecting the health of rivers, streams, wetlands, and the ocean is an essential part of showing your commitment to environmental stewardship. Stormwater runoff is the number one cause of stream impairment in urban areas, making it critical to identify opportunities to collect and filter runoff from impervious surfaces to reduce contamination leaving the property. Adding rainwater collection areas along roads and parking lots, or installing permeable pavement, are two options for improving stormwater management on your property. To learn more about this topic and other best management practices to implement on your community, visit this website: <http://www.cwp.org/stormwater-management/>

Integrated Pest Management

Integrated Pest Management involves using a variety of management measures to keep turfgrass pest populations below levels that are damaging, without creating hazards to people and the environment. IPM calls for using the least-toxic chemical pesticides, minimum use of chemicals, use only in targeted locations and use only for targeted species. IPM requires routine inspection and monitoring. Integrated methods include site or pest inspections, pest population monitoring,

evaluation of the need for pest control and 1 or more pest control methods, including sanitation, structural repairs, mechanical and living biological controls, other nonchemical methods, and if nontoxic options are unreasonable and have been exhausted, a least toxic pesticide. These principles apply both to landscaping as well as pest management inside buildings.

Irrigation Water Conservation

Reducing the amount of irrigation water used can be accomplished several ways:

- converting to drought-tolerant turf species, xeriscaping, and naturalization can reduce the amount of irrigated acreage
- maintaining lawns at a higher mowing cut increases drought tolerance and decreases irrigation needs
- using weather data to determine when lawns need to be watered.

Indoor Water Conservation

Installing water saving devices in a majority of buildings can save water and save the community money on the water bill. Created by the Alliance for Water Efficiency, the Water Calculator provides a virtual house tour, water budget calculator, and tips for saving water in and around the house. The website can be found at <http://www.home-water-works.org/calculator>. Share this and other resources with your facility managers as well as residents in your community.

Creating Incentives

Strive to create incentives for members of your community to make sustainability “the way they do things.” Set a maximum water target for residents to keep household use under, and reward those who achieve it with recognition or local coupons.

Green Building and Design

Strive to retrofit existing buildings to, and ensure that new buildings, meet green building and design standards, which means that they have a smaller environmental footprint, or impact, are healthier to live and work in, and cost less to operate and maintain. Green buildings are energy and water efficient, use native plant landscaping, use building materials that are sustainably harvested, recycled content, or reused when possible, etc.

Documentation

We are always looking for promotional-quality pictures and slides to use in slide presentations, documents, and our website. Pictures should be clear, in-focus, and have good contrasts. They can be in color or black-and-white. We cannot use Polaroid pictures or color copies of photos for our promotional materials, although we can use them to review award requests. The subject matter we need includes: naturalized areas, vegetative buffers, close-ups of wildlife and native plants, before and after pictures of projects, and people involved in projects such as planting or monitoring nest boxes.

Audubon Information, Support and Guidance

We are available to provide additional information, support, and guidance to help you implement Green Neighborhood projects. If you have questions or need more information, feel free to call us. Also remember that your experiences, both positive and negative, may be very helpful to other properties involved in the program. If you are encountering problems with your management efforts, we'd like to know that too. Green Neighborhood staff are in the office on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We can also be reached by e-mail at [**jessica@auduboninternational.org**](mailto:jessica@auduboninternational.org).

Local support for your Audubon efforts is also available. Our *Steward Network* is made up of individuals who have brought a property through certification in the Audubon program. These stewards are eager to share their knowledge and help others implement the program. You can find a list of the stewards in your area on our website at <http://www.auduboninternational.org/steward-network>.

Thanks for your commitment to environmental quality. We are excited about all of your plans. Feel free to give us a call if you have any questions about the program or projects. Please keep in contact regarding your Neighborhood-Wide Awareness and Education Projects. Keep in touch!