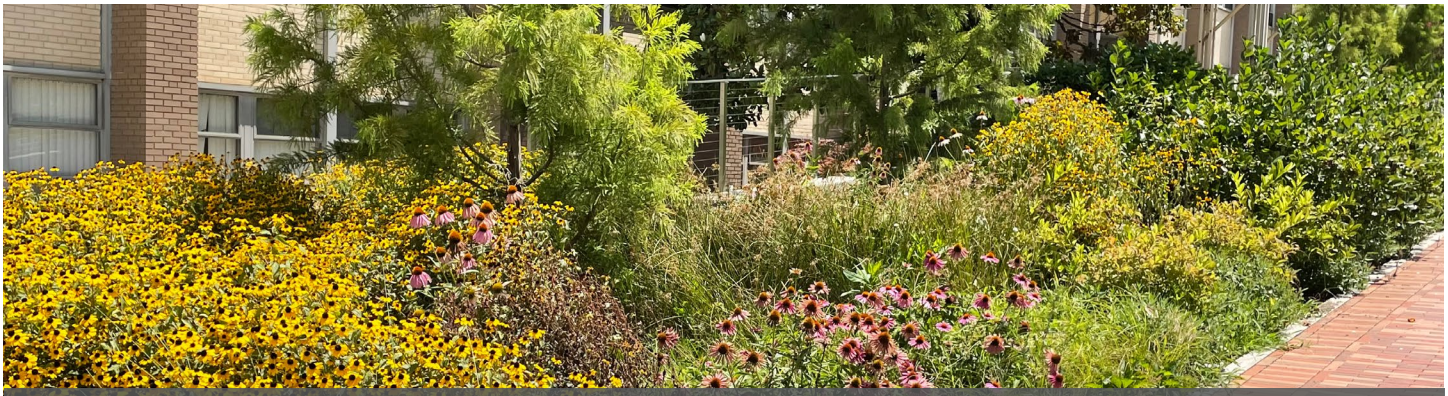

Pope Leo Lane - The Catholic University of America

NORTHEAST WASHINGTON, DC

Photo: The Catholic University of America

The permeable sidewalk and native plants along Catholic University of America's Pope Leo Lane are just two of the features that serve the dual benefits of making the space an inviting pedestrian avenue, and a source of Stormwater Retention Credits that can generate revenue for the university.

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Prior to 2020, the main thoroughfare onto The Catholic University of America's campus from the nearby metro station was anything but inviting. Today Pope Leo Lane is a shining example of the measures the university has taken to make the campus more sustainable. And instead of coming at a cost, these efforts are actually a potential wellspring of revenue: Catholic University is reducing harmful stormwater runoff with tools that pay more than environmental dividends.

A TRANSFORMATION TO GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Permeable pavement and bioretention areas blossoming with native and pollinator-friendly plants are among the features that make Pope Leo Lane a source of pride, community identity, and even income for Catholic University's 176-acre urban campus. The walkway is one of many projects that enable the university to participate in the District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment's Stormwater Retention Credit (SRC) Trading and Stormwater Management Facility Self-Inspection and Self-Reporting (SISR) programs. These programs work together to both incentivize the construction and ensure the long-term maintenance of new green infrastructure projects to protect watersheds. The result is reduced stormwater runoff that otherwise would carry harmful pollution from roads, rooftops, walkways, and other impervious surfaces into the district's rivers and streams.

About the Alternative Stormwater Compliance Program Uptake Initiative

Through this initiative, the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), in partnership with the Urban Land Institute, seek to gain insight into current perceptions of, and experiences with the SRC and SISR programs in order to promote awareness and understanding of the programs, increase market uptake, and inspire more sustainable stormwater management throughout the District.

Large development sites in the District of Columbia are required to manage stormwater runoff because of its negative environmental effects. This can be achieved through a combination of on-site and off-site green infrastructure projects, such as green roofs, bioretention basins, permeable pavement, etc. When these projects

help exceed regulatory requirements, they can generate SRCs that can either be applied to meet compliance needs on different areas of the same site, or be sold to other landowners who need additional capacity. Property owners can also voluntarily generate SRCs.

In Catholic University's case, the university's landscape architect, Greg Osband, finds opportunities to add retention capacity to new and ongoing projects—such as Pope Leo Lane—to make the university eligible to produce SRCs. The university generates credits from sustainability initiatives across campus including green roofs, tree plantings, rain gardens that absorb and filter stormwater, and bioretention basins and cisterns that naturally retain and treat stormwater instead of letting it run off campus.

baseline regulations. Now, what were once seen solely as added costs can be converted into financial gain.

"I can explain to others at the university that it's basically like a bank account. If we build it, it's not just doing something good for the environment, but we can actually recoup some of our investment and generate returns," Osband says.

To help ensure the maintenance of the green infrastructure and the continued ability to generate SRCs, the SISR program allows landowners to self-monitor their stormwater compliance. Rigorously maintained records are audited by DOEE, eliminating the need for regulators to visit every site to ensure compliance.

"I can explain to others at the university that it's basically like a bank account. If we build it, it's not just doing something good for the environment, but we can actually recoup some of our investment and generate returns."

Osband stresses that the positive impacts of such projects reach far beyond any one site, and that they are very efficient at harnessing the natural processes that promote healthy watersheds.

"Regional stormwater facilities fail to do what green infrastructure does very well. It filters and recharges groundwater, cools the air and removes pollutants, and slows down the release of runoff, which protects local streams from erosion. This all in addition to myriad other wildlife and ecosystem benefits," he says. "And, ultimately, the runoff that does make its way to our streams and rivers is of higher quality than that temporarily stored in facilities."

MONETIZING STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Osband, who has long been involved in green infrastructure implementation, says one of the appeals of the SRC and SISR programs is that they help overcome concerns about the expense or complexity of green infrastructure projects that go beyond meeting

Osband notes that staying in control of compliance monitoring through SISR enables the university to, "eliminate the unexpected" when it comes to regulatory site visits. "You never know what the inspector is going to find," he says. "It's better to proactively identify any problems and be able to report that you have everything under control rather than having to report back on how you've addressed an issue" that comes to light during an inspection.

BANKING ON THE FUTURE

The success of Pope Leo Lane as a part of the SRC program has inspired Catholic University's continued commitment to sustainably "bank on the future"— and has been met with support from students, faculty, and the broader community around the campus. These and other elements in Catholic University's Sustainability Plan also offer significant appeal to potential students making decisions in the competitive college application process.

"It's the right thing to do," says Osband. "The SRC program makes us as site owners and developers responsible, good stewards of the environment, but also serves as good PR for setting the right example. Others can see that you are actually monetizing stormwater management—making an environmental asset a marketable commodity—which has always been a challenge."

This case study was completed in collaboration with The Catholic University of America which supplied images and insights included in this document.