

Green Infrastructure and the *Green Communities Act*
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Chairwoman Johnson, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Committee. Thank you for asking me to testify on the importance of green infrastructure and my proposal, the *Green Communities Act*. As a former member of this panel, it is an honor to return and testify before it. I want to commend the Chairwoman and the members of this committee for their leadership in working to improve the environment and water quality in our country.

Meeting our nation's water infrastructure needs with green infrastructure

The water infrastructure needs of the United States are immense, and implementing green infrastructure solutions can enable municipal governments to better meet water quality standards while addressing other crucial priorities in their communities. Benjamin Grumbles, the Environmental Protection Agency's Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water during the Bush Administration, wrote in a 2007 memo, "Green infrastructure can be both a cost effective and an environmentally preferable approach to reduce stormwater and other excess flows entering into combined or separated sewer systems in combination with, or in lieu of, centralized hard infrastructure solutions."

It is the capacity of green infrastructure to meet multiple goals, which makes its implementation such a worthwhile and cost-effective investment. In addition to improving water quality to ensure compliance with standards that protect our health and welfare, green infrastructure has been demonstrated to attract businesses, increase property values, and improve people's perceptions about their communities. University of Pennsylvania research showed that the greening of vacant lots created a 37 percent increase in adjacent property values while properties located next to a non-greened vacant lot saw their property values decrease by 20 percent. In addition, University of Washington research demonstrates that putting trees in the streetscapes of a business district improved visitors' perception of the location and typically resulted in longer shopping visits. Green infrastructure can create not only results in cleaner, safer water

quality, but also can revitalize depressed economic areas and contribute to economic growth. It is a sensible and wise investment.

Philadelphia's commitment to green infrastructure

In recent years, my home city of Philadelphia has been recognized as a national leader in implementing green infrastructure. Mayor Michael Nutter's Greenworks Plan - a vision and plan to become the greenest big city in America by 2015, has put Philadelphia on the cutting edge. Specific goals include:

- Increasing tree coverage by 30 percent by 2025 by planting 300,000 trees;
- Providing parks and recreation resources within 10 minutes of 75 percent of residents by expanding open space; and
- Making a \$1.6 billion commitment to managing the city's stormwater by using green infrastructure.

Philadelphia has used both public and private institutions to accomplish these goals. First, Mayor Nutter created the Office of Sustainability to promote sustainability efforts across all departments and agencies within the city government. Their efforts include increasing the number of green roofs, expanding pervious pavement to an additional 25.7 acres, and distributing more than 1,600 rain barrels. These efforts and other improvements to building efficiency, recycling, and alternative transportation have already led the city to be recognized nationally by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for its commitment and achievements. Second, Philadelphia has strong community and philanthropic institutions, like the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the William Penn Foundation, that muster much needed human and capital resources in the private sector. Third, Philadelphia is fortunate to have a municipal water department that is determined to find and implement innovative solutions to address serious stormwater problems through green infrastructure.

The Green Communities Act

While Philadelphia takes pride in its national leadership in green infrastructure innovation, we don't want to keep it to ourselves. We want to share our knowledge and experience with other cities – large and small. That's why I introduced the *Green Communities Act* (H.R. 2222), which aims to take the excellent work that we are doing in Philadelphia and disseminate it to communities across the country that are less experienced with the use and value of green infrastructure. Specifically, my proposal would authorize the Secretary of Commerce, through the Economic Development Administration, to partner with five non-profit organizations with experience in implementing green infrastructure initiatives in order to work with 80 municipal governments to build capacity in the implementation of green infrastructure. The Secretary of Commerce would select the communities with input from the non-profits and with sensitivity toward areas with need for economic revitalization. The bill would authorize \$180 million over a five-year period to accomplish this work.

The proposal has received bipartisan and bicameral support in Congress. It currently has 24 co-sponsors from many parts of the country and there is companion legislation in the Senate. In addition, many business, environmental, and water agency organizations have expressed support, including: the Alliance for Community Trees, the American Nursery & Landscape Association, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. Just to highlight the support that this proposal has from businesses, the American Nursery & Landscape Association said of my bill, "Investments in landscape systems, such as those found in H.R. 2222, will yield visible and high returns in the form of employment, economic and social benefits, and will increase in monetary value over time."

Conclusion

In summary, green infrastructure can play a vital role across the country in meeting our water infrastructure needs. The City of Philadelphia has made a commitment to do this and I believe its approach can serve as a model for the rest of the country. *The Green Communities Act* can better enable the dissemination of information and training necessary to offer beneficial green alternatives to gray infrastructure to address our nation's water infrastructure deficiencies. This will yield multiple benefits –

improved water quality, a cleaner environment, and enhanced economic development. Infrastructure investments can accomplish multiple goals and yield multiple public benefits. In tough financial times, the ability to meet multiple community needs with smart and targeted investments makes common sense. Thank you for your time this morning. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.