

Money Does Grow on Trees

Six practical reasons illustrate how and why trees do actually bare green fruit.

By Pepper Provenzano

The old joke among environmentalists is that developers bulldoze the trees and then name the streets after them. But today's leaders in developing planned communities are well aware of the value of green planning, sustainability and green marketing.

For those who aren't, here is a primer: Trees are not only a major indicator species of a healthy community, dollar for dollar, there is no better investment in the local environment. Neither controversial nor political, trees bring a win-win to homeowners and businesses alike.

And here is a bonus: The return on a developer's investment is as good as gold. Talk about "green!?!". When it comes to the bottom line, thinking green is the value-added ace in every developer's back pocket. Here are some practical reasons why:

Reason No. 1: Trees boost real estate values. Trees can add up to 20 percent to property values, according to research from the University of Washington.¹ Think curb appeal, curb appeal, curb ap-

peal. Besides location, this is all about attracting new customers.

Subdivisions with trees command higher real-estate prices and they also attract people with deep pockets who care about landscapes and home towns.

If a picture is worth a thousands words, then satellite photos speak volumes. When recent satellite snaps are compared to those of 20 years ago, the difference is striking in city after city, often clearly showing the difference between wealthy and poor neighborhoods. In fact, after seeing side-by-side satellite photos of our nation's capital, one woman contributed \$50 million to renew the urban forest of Washington, D.C.²

Reason No. 2: Trees boost urban revitalization. Is your company going after community improvement contracts? Urban revival is happening nationwide, so if you want work in this sector, turn your tool kit green. "No urban renewal program is complete without an urban forest component," says Janette Monear, executive director of the Texas Trees Foundation.

Nowadays the terms "green" and "sustainable" pop up everywhere you look. It seems that both monikers are open to a broad spectrum of interpretation. There is green building and sustainable living; green urban planning and sustainable communities; green marketing and sustainable design; the list goes on and on.

"The great irony is that so few of these green efforts contain an element that is actually the color green," says business consultant Steve Klass of Klass Strategies.

So put this in your pitch: Studies show lower crime rates in communities with trees.³ That's right; trees put the

neighbors in neighborhoods. When people are attracted to nature, they spend more time outdoors, according to University of Illinois researcher Francis Kuo. People linger and shop longer on tree-lined streets. In addition, apartments and offices in wooded areas rent more

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quickly and have higher occupancy rates.

And trees can actually extend the life of streets, according to the Center for Urban Forest Research. The asphalt paving on streets contain stone aggregate in an oil binder. Without tree shade, the oil heats up and volatilizes, leaving the aggregate unprotected.⁴

Urban forests are also efficient stormwater management systems that can slow runoff and help cities reduce infrastructure and water treatment costs.

Reason No. 3: Trees help schools in five significant ways:

- Strategically planted shade trees significantly lower cooling costs. The net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- Playgrounds with trees inspire outdoor exercise. Access to trees and green spaces promotes greater physical activity, reduces stress, and reduces asthma risks.

- Tree canopy protects children from skin-damaging ultraviolet rays.

- Leaves absorb the invisible fine particulates that can damage the lungs of children.

Help Yourself

Include the "right tree in the right place" in urban-renewal plans.

Include "smart trees" (strategically placed) in plans for schools.

Learn more about community trees at www.TreeLink.org

Help Your Community

Share this article at city planning meetings.

Include trees in residential home building plans.

Ask authorities: does your community have a TreeBank?

■ And let's not forget that trees bring critters back. It's amazing what songbirds can do for kids with "nature-deficit disorder." Who needs all that blacktop?

Given a choice between a "concrete jungle" and a shaded playground, where do you want your kids to go to school?

Ah, yes, trees are indeed beautiful, and the aesthetic appeal cannot be overstated, but we are talking about so much more than just a pretty face here.

"Beautification be damned," says Don Willeke, cofounder of the Tree Trust of Minneapolis/St. Paul and past chair of American Forests. "We plant for economic, environmental and social reasons."

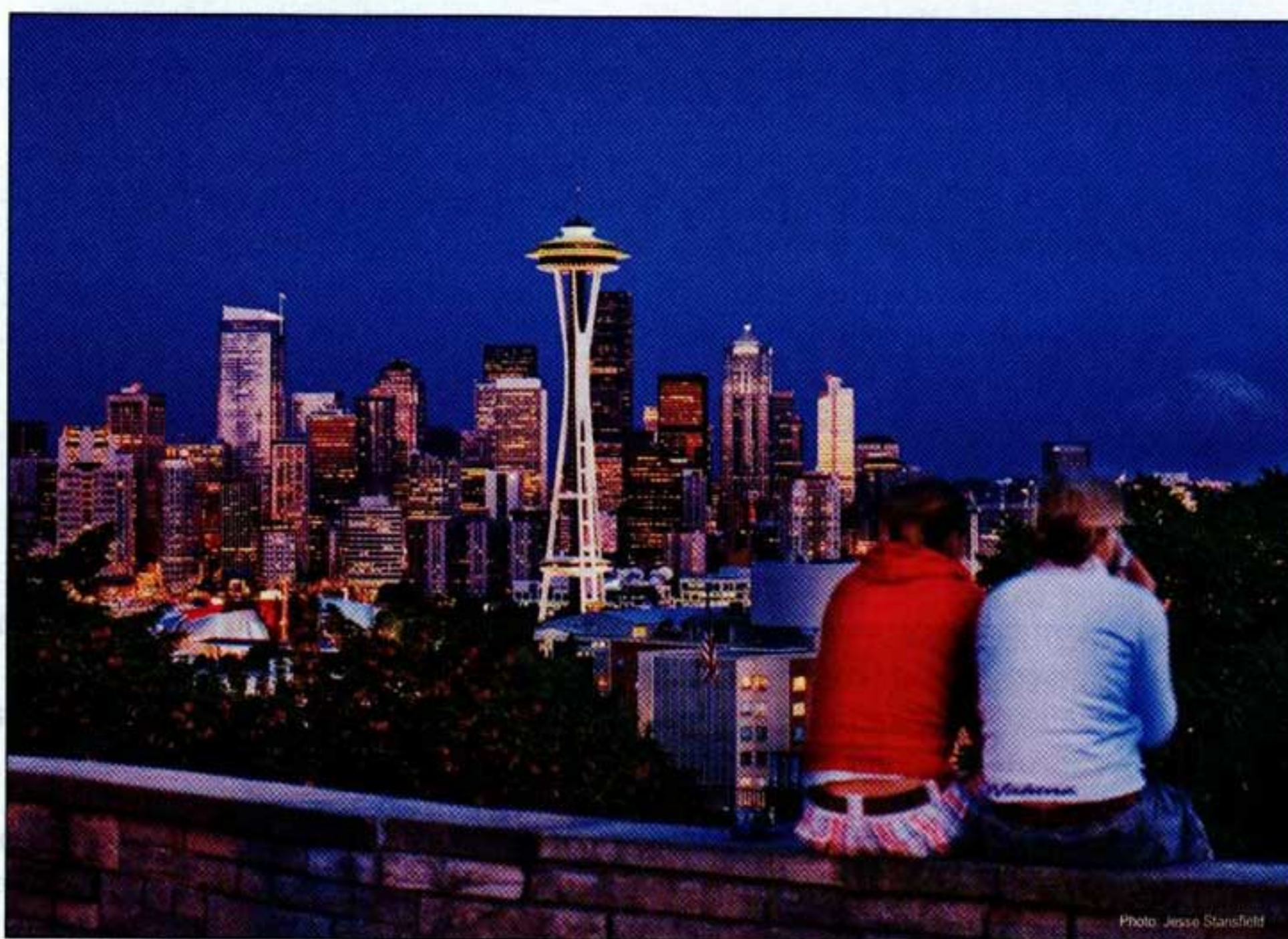
So let's take a closer look:

Reason No. 4: Energy savings. According to the Department of Energy, the shade of strategically located trees can slash home cooling costs by 20 to 50 percent. When evergreens are planted as wind breaks, winter heating bills decline. And when those deciduous (leafy) trees drop their leaves in winter, they let the sun warm your home. It's elemental, and it all adds up to savings.

Reason No. 5: Health. Trees can reduce social service budgets, decrease police calls for domestic violence, and decrease the incidence of child abuse, according to research by University of Illinois researchers Francis Kuo and W.C. Sullivan. They studied the impact of trees on residents of the Chicago Robert Taylor Housing Project, the largest public housing development in the world. Chicago officials heard that message last year and the city government spent \$10 million to plant 20,000 trees, a decision influenced by Kuo's and Sullivan's research, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

"People need trees, and trees need people," says Bill Rutherford, urban forester for Salt Lake City.

Reason No. 6: Designed by nature. "Just from a design standpoint we can all appreciate the ability of trees to make oxygen, sequester carbon, fix nitrogen, distill water, provide habitat for hundreds of species, accumulate solar energy as fuel, make complex sugars and food, create micro-climates and self-replicate," says world-renowned archi-



tect and author William McDonough. "All this and they change color with the seasons."

So you see, trees aren't just nice to have. They are an essential ingredient in the health and happiness of our people and our communities.

So why do most people still take trees for granted? Perhaps because "trees are all around us. They touch our lives in so many ways," says Ray Tretheway, chair of the board of TreeLink and executive director of the Sacramento Tree Foundation. "But when a homeowner's tree is removed, the mercury rises." That's when tempers flair. Ask any municipal forester.

Today nearly 85 percent of Americans live in cities and towns, and those are powerful demographics. In the past half century we have changed from an agrarian society to an urbanized society, so urban forests need public awareness more than ever.

Trees are not yet considered a capital asset, and most communities are struggling just to keep up with growth and essential services, so they often lack funds for trees.

For this reason, more than 45 major metro areas have established a local "TreeBank" – a community fund for trees – to attract private donors.⁵ "TreeBank offers a great way to build resources for

our local tree planting efforts," according to Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper.

More and more, the message is spreading to leaders, planners, architects, engineers and landscapers, from the top down and the bottom up. "We have to keep ringing this bell for people to get it," says senior editor Rob Kundert at Sustainable Land Development International.

Any way you look at it, all trees add up to a higher quality of life in subdivisions. That translates to better planning and more value for your customers. As that resonates with home buyers and community leaders, it will add "green" to your balance sheet. **SLDT**

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Notations/Citations

- 1) Wolf, K.L. August 2007. City Trees and Property Values. *Arborist News* pp. 34-36.
- 2) Casey Trees Endowment Fund
- 3) FE Kuo, WC Sullivan - Environment and Behavior, 2001
- 4) McPherson, E.G., Muchnick, J. 2005. Effects of Street Tree Shade on Asphalt Concrete Pavement Performance.
- 5) TreeBank™ is a web-based tool that allows any city or town to develop a local community fund for tree planting, care and education. Learn more at www.itreebank.org.