

smartplanet

The logo for SmartPlanet features the word "smartplanet" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "t" is stylized with a green leaf shape extending from its base. The background is a soft-focus image of green grass in the foreground and a bright, hazy sky in the background.

Killing the McMansion: Land development that gives back

By Heather Clancy | July 16, 2010, 4:35 AM PDT

Every hear of regenerative planning? Essentially, it's the idea that a given construction project or a building isn't just eco-conscious, it might even be eco-friendly.

That's the twist that sustainable New York design firm Ecological, which recently scored a regional alliance with building management company Cushman & Wakefield, puts on its business model for new projects.



Ecological is a firm that offers a whole host of services related to building sustainability planning (back to its regenerative planning focus in a moment), including how to use technology and software for smart metering, benchmarking and analysis in existing buildings that need an environmental retrofit. There are new New York City regulations that require all large buildings be benchmarked using metrics from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Just by making people aware that their energy is being metered, that alone saves 2 percent to 3 percent on usage," says Anthony Sblendorio, CEO and co-founder of Ecological and also the founder of Back to Nature, an organization dedicated to regenerating natural resources.

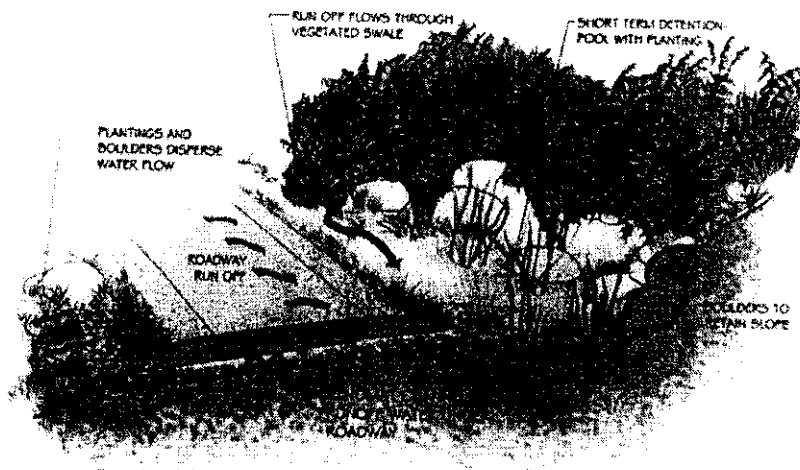
Sblendorio says technology is integral to enablement. His team starts any sustainability project at any existing building by measuring its unique environmental impact. A building that uses cubicles instead of walled offices, for example, would have an entirely different footprint. "Every building is like a human being, they operate and work differently," he says.

The challenge lies in extracting the relevant information from many different sources — utility companies, building lighting systems and so on — and presenting it back to clients, so Ecological has created a Web-based portal for helping analyze this information. The other big headache lies in keeping this information updated regularly.

But these sustainability planning services are all about making existing buildings more healthy. What about the whole regenerative thing? That's the spin the Ecological puts on planning new sites — whether it's a corporate headquarters, hotel or an entire community.

There are "8 Healthy Systems" associated with a regenerative planning project, such as Ecological's Mine Brook 89-acre community that is on the planning boards in Basking Ridge, N.J. Sblendorio believes that regenerative development can have a healing impact because it helps improve soil health and can be used to increase the biodiversity in a given region.

The graphic below is an example of the stormwater management system that Mine Brook would use. It would be built on the idea of uses vegetated swales to treat runoff and allow the groundwater to recharge more quickly. Essentially, every home would be able to harvest rainwater for irrigation.



By the way, if you're looking to construct a monstrosity that isn't in tune with its natural landscape, Ecological can't help you. Says Sblendorio: "We believe that the McMansion is dead and that we are at the start of a new generation of building design."

Photo: Carole Lynn Brescia

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