



CHANGING the LANDSCAPE

Healthy Yards = Healthy People

WINTER
2022



Image courtesy of Chris Coucill

Thank you, Changing the Landscape Project Team!

What a difference a year can make. Last February, we were voting on a name for our project and feeling our way through our first monthly Steering Committee meetings. Now, we not only have a recognizable name, but also a notable list of accomplishments and a contact file full of new colleagues, partners, residents, landscapers, and friends - all willing to work to make Princeton a healthier place by encouraging more sustainable lawn care practices.

As we close out the year-long Changing the Landscape: Healthy Yards = Healthy People project, we at Sustainable Princeton want to offer our heartfelt thanks to the project partners, Princeton residents, and the landscaping community for their collective time, insights, and passion for creating a more equitable and sustainable community. When we started this project, we could not have hoped for a higher level of engagement and commitment from all involved as we learned from one another and worked toward a common goal.

We are grateful to the following project partners: the Princeton Environmental Commission, Unidad Latina en Acción NJ, the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Quiet Princeton, Rutgers School of Public Health, the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program, and several Municipality of Princeton departments and commissions, including Human Services, the Board of Health, and the Civil Rights Commission.

In addition to the project partners, we would like to extend a special thanks to the following people that helped us along the way:

- Richard McCoy from McCoy Horticultural for his tireless advocacy for better land care and for the landscaping profession in Princeton and across the state of New Jersey*
- Samuel Garcia, Sustainable Princeton intern, for helping us expand our reach into the landscaping community*
- The FUTURO students from LALDEF for their help with the meetings with landscapers and providing health and safety educational materials*
- The CAPERS team, including Jack Green and Khiara Berkowitz-Sklar at Princeton University and James Lomonte at Rutgers University School of Public Health, for helping research precedent policies and crunching the numbers*
- Dan Mabe, founder, American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA)*
- Jamie Banks, Executive Director of Quiet Communities*
- Sharon McCrae, Rutgers Environmental Steward, for helping to put our work into words*
- Project funders: the Partners for Places grant funded by The Funders Network, Eve Coulson and an anonymous donor*

*With gratitude to all and best wishes for a healthy and sustainable 2022,
Molly Jones, Christine Symington, Josh Perlsweig, Jenny Ludmer
Sustainable Princeton*

Reflecting on a Year's Work

The months went by quickly, but when the members of the Changing the Landscape project team look back on their accomplishments of 2021, they do so with a sense of satisfaction, even as they always wish they could do more.

The five accomplishments the team is most proud of are:

- 🌿 Contributing to the creation and adoption of the equitable and inclusive process used by the Princeton Council as it considered ordinance changes that would restrict the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and other lawn equipment
- 🌿 Building partnerships between Princeton's local government, sustainability groups, place-based foundations, and community-led frontline groups
- 🌿 Encouraging improvements to landscaper registration requirements and non-police enforcement of ordinance regulations that bear in mind the concerns of landscapers, many of whom are vulnerable community members
- 🌿 Establishing the Landscaping Equipment Transition Fund, which incentivizes the switch to electric lawn equipment by providing financial assistance to small landscaping businesses that purchase battery-powered equipment such as leaf blowers, string trimmers, hedge trimmers, and mowers
- 🌿 Raising awareness among landscapers that there is an ongoing sustainable landscaping movement in Princeton that will have a positive impact on the local environment as well as their personal health and safety

“When we embarked on this project in late 2020, we knew it was important to employ a collaborative approach,” says Molly Jones, Executive Director, Sustainable Princeton. “The Partners for Places grants are designed specifically to help communities work through the complex issues involved in municipal policy making and follow an equitable process that brings all voices to the table. Our team stepped up to that challenge.”

Along the way, the Changing the Landscape project team also raised the bar on sustainable landscaping practices in Princeton. They educated both residents and landscapers about alternative practices that were healthier for the local environment as well as the landscape workers themselves.



above Samuel Garcia, left, and Josh Perlswieg at the August 2021 AGZA Workshop for professional landscapers

Grant Focuses on Municipality and Public Schools

Work continues on a separate but related grant-funded project designed to help the Municipality of Princeton and the Princeton Public Schools (PPS) develop financially viable plans to transition away from fossil fuel-powered landscaping equipment.

The municipality and school district, with assistance from Sustainable Princeton, have been working together since early 2021 to develop more environmentally friendly land management techniques that create a healthier work environment for groundskeepers. Reducing their exposure to chemicals, noise and related hazards is beneficial to them as well as the local environment.

Among other things, the \$10,000 grant from Sustainable Jersey and the Gardinier Environmental Fund supports training as well as the purchase of battery-powered equipment.

PPS students have been actively involved in the project as well, under the guidance of Jim Smirk, AP Environmental Science teacher, and Jack Green from Princeton University's CAPERS

(Climate Action Plan Emission Reduction Strategies) team. One of the students' tasks has been the analysis of landscaping equipment and usage data in order to assess the emissions impact of the proposed land management changes. This year, they will produce a cost-benefit analysis of transitioning from gas-powered to battery-powered grounds maintenance equipment for both PPS and the municipality.

"If we are going to ask Princeton residents and businesses to change their approach to landscaping, the municipality must lead by example," explains Princeton Councilwoman Eve Niedergang.

Likewise, PPS has embraced the challenge, seeing it as an opportunity for students to study a real-world challenge as they learn more about the district's sustainability priorities.



Landscaping Equipment Transition Fund Is Up and Running!

The Landscaping Equipment Transition Fund – established by Sustainable Princeton in partnership with Quiet Princeton – is designed to benefit those most impacted by the new gas-powered equipment restrictions. The fund is currently active and accepting applications from small landscaping businesses that meet some simple requirements.

Funding of \$21,500 will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis to landscapers who apply for reimbursement of up to \$500 for electric equipment (including batteries and chargers) that was purchased after October 25, 2021.

"The Transition Fund was a real team effort," says Josh Perlsweig, Program Coordinator, Sustainable Princeton. "As an organization, we

have never done something like this. We are grateful to have earned the trust of the many people who contributed to the fund, and we are excited about distributing these grants to small businesses to help them make the change to battery-powered equipment."

Landscapers are invited to review the eligibility criteria for the Transition Fund and submit an application in English or Spanish by visiting www.sustainableprinceton.org/equipmentfund



PROJECT PARTNERS



This publication is part of an internship project through the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program.



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