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# GET STARTED

What does it take to launch  
your own firm?

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## ROLL WITH IT

Steve Durrant of Alta is making  
better places to bike

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## CHICAGO RIVERWALK

Sasaki takes city dwellers  
down by the river

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## LEARNING FROM DROUGHT

How a die-off helped Houston's trees



## SEED MONEY

**IN BALTIMORE, MAHAN RYKIEL UPENDS THE TYPICAL MITIGATION PROCESS.**

BY TIMOTHY A. SCHULER

### ABOVE

At a Baltimore elementary and middle school, an inventive approach resulted in the Anthem Arboretum, a series of learning landscapes.

In the winter of 2014, the designers at Mahan Rykiel Associates had one question on their minds: What could they do with \$16,000? Earlier that year, the Baltimore-based landscape architecture firm had been hired to design the streetscape and courtyards for Anthem House, a new mixed-use development in the city's Locust Point neighborhood, a historic mix of row houses, industrial parks, and active port terminals that jut into the Patapsco River.

Although the brownfield site was vacant, developers still had to remove approximately 100 trees, and because it was located in Maryland's Critical Area (which encompasses everything within 1,000 feet of the state's tidal waters), the replacement ratio for the lost canopy was 3:1. In its design for Anthem House, Mahan Rykiel came close but could not quite

satisfy the requirement. This wasn't a problem—the developer would simply pay a fee in lieu, which the city would use to pay for environmental mitigation elsewhere.

But the landscape architects pushed back. Why not take the fee and use it as seed money for a local placemaking project, one that could replace lost ecosystem services but also provide social and educational value to the middle-class neighborhood?

Isaac Hametz, Associate ASLA, the research director at Mahan Rykiel, and the rest of the design team persuaded the developer and the city to pilot the process. "They didn't know what to make of it at first," says Richard Jones, the president of Mahan Rykiel. "No one had ever asked before."

The designers identified a public elementary and middle school a few blocks down the street and approached the principal about using the money to fund landscape improvements on the property. As discussions continued, however, the project became more and more layered. The



**TIES TO CURRICULUM**

**BALTIMORE ECOSYSTEM STUDY**

- ▶ Tree Community Study
- ▶ Sun/Shade Leaf Study
- ▶ Urban Soils Investigation

**7TH GRADE**

- ▶ Investigating Structure & Function of Living Things
- ▶ Investigating Structure & Function of the Human Body
- ▶ Investigating Genetics & Evolution
- ▶ Ecology

**6TH GRADE**

- ▶ Astronomy
- ▶ Investigating Weather
- ▶ Investigating Earth Systems
- ▶ Investigating Geologic Process

**8TH GRADE**

- ▶ Basic Chemistry
- ▶ Advanced Chemistry
- ▶ Investigating Forces of Motion
- ▶ Investigating Energy & Waves

**PLAN**

**1 ENTRY AREA WITH OAK AND HICKORY PLANTINGS**

**2 PLAY AREA**

**3 EXPERIMENTAL GROVE**

**4 RAISED BEDS WITH COMPOSTING AND VERMICULTURE STATIONS**

**5 OUTDOOR CLASSROOM**

landscape architects used i-Tree to select the highest-performing tree species possible, calculating the ecosystem services that the school landscape will provide compared to the services lost in the course of development. They also partnered with universities and the Baltimore Ecosystem Study to develop a design activities workbook, which introduces the design process to students and includes drawing and problem-solving exercises.

Now known as Anthem Arboretum, the final design for the schoolyard at Francis Scott Key Elementary and Middle School includes

four distinct learning landscapes, including an experimental grove inspired by Alex Felson, ASLA, of Yale University’s Urban Ecology and Design Laboratory. “I think this area is exciting because it’s set up with the right number of controls and replicates so that we can actually have some statistical significance in terms of studying plant–soil interactions,” Hametz says.

And yet Mahan Rykiel’s real innovation may be its choice to use the process to develop a kit of parts that can be employed across the city. “This could be a one-off process: We get some mitigation money, we go and plant some trees,” Jones says. Instead, what began as a mere \$16,000 has helped jump-start a capital campaign at the school, a citywide design research project, and innumerable new partnerships across sectors. As Jones puts it, “arming the community with the knowledge that they need, and the teachers with the resources that they need, is as important as the feel-good story of working with these kids.” ●

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