



## The EPA Blog

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# Photo Essay: Old and New Environments Coming Together in Pittsburgh

*Blog and Photos by Christina Catanese*

A few months ago, home in my native Pittsburgh, I paid a visit with my family to a place I went to many times growing up – [Phipps Conservatory](#). My childhood recollections of the place mainly revolve around the stunning plant displays, and the plethora of colors and types of flowers that seemed to grow out of every possible surface. I was enchanted by the re-creation of various ecosystems, like the tropical plant room that thrived even in the bleak Pittsburgh winter. But during this visit, I encountered a new aspect of the Conservatory that changed how I saw the place, and indeed, my hometown itself.

The [Center for Sustainable Landscapes](#) was opened last year as Phipps' hub for education, research, and administration. Striving to be "one of the greenest buildings on earth," the Center utilizes innovative technologies to generate all its own energy, as well as treat and reuse all water captured on site.



- Taking a stroll through the Center for Sustainable Landscapes' grounds. The center building's exterior incorporates repurposed wood salvaged from barns in Western Pennsylvania.

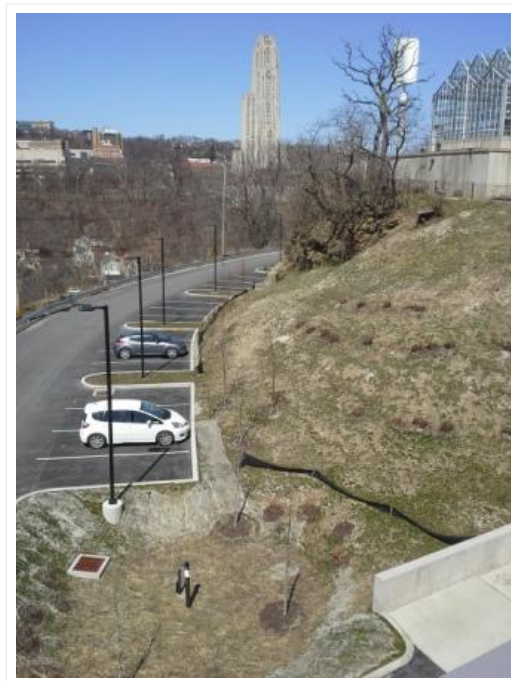
While a beautiful architectural construction, I was most impressed with the stormwater management measures the Center took, from the green roof, to rain gardens, to the pervious pavement used on the walkways.

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- Center visitors enjoy an early spring day on Phipps' green roof, with Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood visible in the background. The roof captures rainfall before it becomes stormwater pollution, and also regulates temperature in the building.

Capturing stormwater onsite instead of letting it run off during a storm reduces the impact to local waterways and adds capacity to local water treatment systems.



- A vertical axis wind turbine (top right) stands tall, with the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning in the background. A vegetated drainage basin (bottom left) provides a place for runoff from the parking lot and the center above to collect and infiltrate.

There are even lagoons and constructed wetlands that treat the sanitary wastewater from the center, using natural processes instead of sending the wastewater to a treatment facility.



- Natural processes hard at work. Water being cleaned up in a lagoon system, and solar panels catch the sun for energy on the roof.

All the rain that falls on the property is reused in some way, from low-flow toilet flushing to watering the center's many plants.



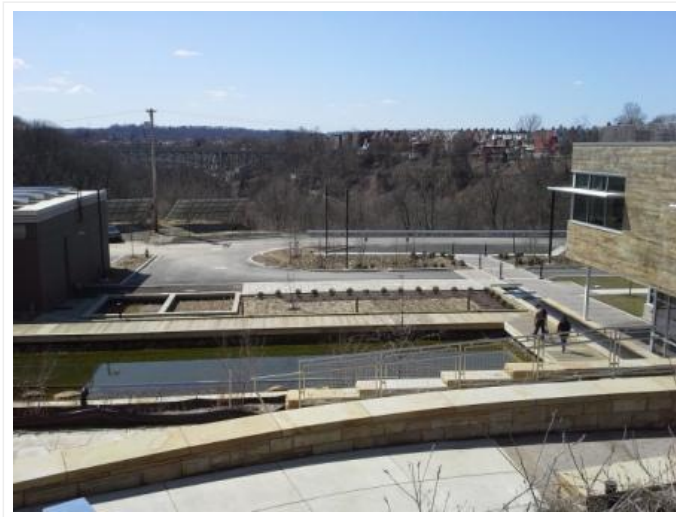
- Rain tanks (which look like milk crates!) store captured rainfall from the center underground until it can be used.

When I visited the center, the outside plants weren't quite in bloom. I'm anxious to see the center again when trees are in leaf and shrubs are flowering.



— Looking back from the green roof: the new landscaping (all with native plants) is visible, along with the older part of the conservatory in the background.

I felt that the Center for Sustainable Landscapes was an example of how we can re-envision what our cities can be like through the pursuit of sustainability, while maintaining the things that make them so special. I felt a powerful sense of place as I looked over Panther Hollow from the top of the center. I could sense the merging of the classic Pittsburgh character (of bridges and neighborhoods perched on hilltops in the distance) with new approaches to pressing environmental problems (with rain gardens and solar panels in the foreground), and felt excited about the future of our urban spaces.



— Looking forward: A blending of old and new.

Have you been to visit Pittsburgh's new innovation? What approaches are combining the old with the new where you live?

*About the Author: Christina Catanese has worked at EPA since 2010, in the Water Protection Division's Office of Program Support. Originally from Pittsburgh, Christina has lived in Philadelphia since attending the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied Environmental Studies, Political Science, and Hydrogeology. When not in the office, Christina enjoys performing, choreographing and teaching modern dance.*

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