Why a Campus Landscape Master Plan?

The benefits of a multifunctional and well-managed campus landscape are wide-reaching and multi-faceted, from simple campus beautification to sustainable carbon sequestration, from living lab experiences to natural stress reduction and passive recreation. Campus grounds contribute to the economic sustainability of our university. Studies show that prospective students decide their future enrollment in the first ten minutes on site. Likewise, potential donors and employees, visiting alumni, and all other visitors from the public naturally make judgments about the excellence of our university based in part on the campus aesthetic.

The Campus Landscape Master Plan is an opportunity to address new challenges of this generation and future generations by viewing the landscape through new lenses, viewpoints and needs provided through input from the campus community. The CLMP will describe how to design and manage landscapes to achieve a more resilient, multi-functional and beautiful campus through detailed site-specific development requirements for each of the eleven landscape districts.

Numerous sustainable landscape commitments have been formalized over the last two decades including the iCAP, the 2002 Report of the Committee on a Sustainable Campus Environment, the 2016 Second Nature Climate Resilience Commitment, the 2018 Resolution for Campus Sustainable Landscapes and the Tree Campus USA Designation – it is clear that the UIUC Community agrees that the campus landscape should be “resilient” and “sustainable” – it is in the detail as to how the landscape is implemented where there are competing ideas of what constitutes a resilient and sustainable landscape.

What is the Campus Landscape Master Plan?

The Landscape Master plan will develop a shared vision for the overall campus landscape along with specific design guidance to achieve the vision set forth in the 2018 Campus Master Plan. The Campus Landscape Master Plan (CLMP) aims to provide the detailed guidance to create a campus landscape that fosters appreciation for the Illinois natural and cultural heritage and protects campus historic landscapes.

How can I contribute or participate?

The process has begun with a series of virtual listening sessions occurring in February 2022. These sessions are invited meetings focused on engaging all campus units, administration, operations, academic experts, research institutions and area municipalities.

A virtual public forum will occur in the springtime to review the consultant team’s findings related to opportunities within each of the eleven districts as defined in the 2017 Campus Master Plan. The forum will provide an overview of past and current plans and initiatives that have positioned us for this plan such as the Illinois Climate Action Plan. Following this overview, a series of live polling questions will gauge preferences on a wide range of topics such as landscape aesthetics, rainwater management, sustainable landscape design, and more. The input you provide will provide a framework for identifying achievable metrics and strategies to guide all future development on campus towards a more sustainable landscape.

In addition, two surveys will be widely shared throughout the Campus community’s media outlets.
What work has been done to date?

2018 Campus Master Plan
The Campus Master Plan was completed in 2017 with an update in 2018. The plan contains a set of “Design Principles” and outlines high level recommendations for access, connectivity, and neighborhood identity. The plan organizes the campus into landscape districts each with a “quality assessment” of the landscape. High-level guidance is provided on stormwater and utilities, while more specific recommendations are provided regarding proposed bicycle routes, primary pedestrian paths and the proposed open space network, which includes a series of new quad spaces and pedestrian walks throughout campus. Design Guidelines set the intent for common design qualities and visual continuity across the campus landscape which then inform the related Facilities Standards.

While the 2017 Campus Master Plan provides a broad vision and starting point for a sustainable campus vision – the document does not provide the necessary specificity and detailed guidelines to achieve the vision and allows too much flexibility at the small scale leading to the lack of a “unified” campus aesthetic.

The Resilient Landscape Strategy
The 2019 Resilient Landscape Strategy was authored following the 2017 Campus Master Plan and subsequent 2018 update. The report identifies five key issues and draft solutions to address them. The document notes the need for a Campus Landscape Master Plan (CLMP), thus setting the stage for the CLMP and outlining several intended outcomes.

The report summarizes the current challenges regarding the campus landscape:

“There are many sustainable site development practices already underway on campus. While these practices are becoming more common on our campus, they are not yet the norm in planning and development. Further, there are no minimum requirements for what constitutes a sustainable landscape, which allows site developers the freedom to remove sustainable features to cut costs. Transitioning to sustainable landscape design as the standard for our campus is necessary for the cultural change needed to live sustainably. This transition will require the shared vision and detailed design guidelines found in a comprehensive Landscape Master Plan.”

The report notes the following role for the landscape as it sets the stage for the CLMP process:

With proper design, direction and support, our landscapes can…

- Draw new students and donors to our doors
- Provide outdoor classrooms
- Provide passive recreation,
- Execute rainwater management,
- Contribute to carbon sequestration,
- Provide pollinator support,
- Provide a source of mental health and wellness for the community
- Provide a landscape that is future focused, able to withstand and recover quickly from the challenges of tomorrow: climate change, large storm events and the heavy use by tens of thousands of individuals.
- Provide a landscape that is designed and maintained in a fashion that is commensurate with our international world-class status.
Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP)

The iCAP is a report with a supporting portal that houses the University’s commitment to environmental stewardship to honor the work of the recent past and advance toward a sustainable future. The Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP) outlines a path for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible, and no later than 2050. The first iCAP was written in 2010, and it is rewritten every five years. The Portal contains updates, historical context, metrics, and contact information pertaining to all current and past iCAP projects. Information collected in the Portal is shared with over 17,000 public visitors per year, used for reporting purposes, and serves as an excellent resource for university courses and independent student projects. Facilities and Services is a key contributor to the content of the iCAP portal.

The 2020 iCAP update states: “Our campus has an urgent responsibility to sustainably manage everything from the water we drink to the crops we harvest to the pollinators we rely on for survival. Strategies to address these and other concerns include implementing green infrastructure, designing resilient landscapes, and restoring our ecosystems. As part of the university’s carbon neutrality goal, we must also increase the amount of carbon sequestered by our soil and vegetation.”