

## **Organic Lawn Care: Proposal to Renewing Fund for Resource Conservation**

The Grounds Department will transition the five acre Mertz Lawn to an organic maintenance program, replacing conventional fertilizers and herbicides with aeration, humus and compost tea applications. The loan will be used to take the first step-- purchasing the soil tests, initial consultation and design of a customized organic lawn care program by Eric T Fleisher, Director of Battery Park City Parks Conservancy. Mr. Fleisher has been developing organic procedures on NYC's public lawns and athletic fields since 1989. He helped Harvard initiate its pilot lawn in 2008 and expand it to 25 acres in 2009.

This project is a great compliment to the more clearcut lightbulb-type upgrades, should the Committee divide the fund between multiple projects. Its unique strengths:

### **STRONG OUTREACH & EDUCATION COMPONENT** results in multiplied benefit

- \*Prominent location educates campus visitors and train riders
- \*Links to Arboretum network and resources
  - Sustainability themed workshops enrolled 70+ last year
  - Green roof tour series drew 200+ visitors last year
  - Newsletter mails to membership of 1200
  - Blog on green roof remains in top 5, getting 100 views/month. 1390 over the year.
- \*May influence homeowners and other institutions to adopt these practices, as with IPM.
- \*Hot topic-- New York Times article and alumni inquiries. The approach has been tested enough that we can be confident in its success, but is new enough to put the college on the forefront of the movement, for publicity purposes.

**CHANGE IN OPERATIONS**, not just a product. Students are asking for institutional change.

**IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN HEALTH** for students, camp children, staff.

\*Although we already aim to apply chemicals during non-peak times on campus, there are always students, dog walkers, and local families not far behind.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- \*Reduce pollution of waterways by nitrogen and herbicides
- \*Improve health at base of ecosystem. Insects, soil biology, etc --> birds++
- \*Reduce need for mowing and irrigating

### **COST: \$3000\* (pending)**

Covers initial consultation and lab analysis of soil

Results in customized lawn care program for Swarthmore College

### **PAYBACK**

*[Figures are estimates based on Harvard's program. Our costs will depend on our soil test results. To implement our customised program, we will seek other funds and ways to offset initial costs. The first 3-5 years' maintenance costs will be significantly higher than current costs. Then, inputs will decline.]*

- \*After establishment, savings of \$700 per year over the current cost of inputs.
- \*Sponsorship or discounts from our lawncare contractors will also apply to repay loan.
- \*Reduced mowing & irrigation. Much bigger savings if/when this expands beyond 5 acres.

**Further Info:**

[www.lawnreform.org](http://www.lawnreform.org)

*Elaborates on environmental issues of chemical lawns*

[www.scottarboretum.org/Sustainability/ourpractices.html#greenroofs](http://www.scottarboretum.org/Sustainability/ourpractices.html#greenroofs)

*Popular arboretum coverage of green roof, including videos and reader comments*

[www.uos.harvard.edu/fmo/landscape/organiclandscaping/soil\\_presentation.shtml](http://www.uos.harvard.edu/fmo/landscape/organiclandscaping/soil_presentation.shtml)

*Slide presentation about Harvard's pilot program*

[www.nytimes.com/2009/09/24/garden/24garden.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/24/garden/24garden.html)

*New York Times article on Harvard program*