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What Does Offering a "Green" Equestrian Facility Really Mean?

Mon, 01/04/2010 - 17:59 | Allison Mouch and Equestrian Services LLC

The real estate world—whether it be a resort developer or residential community developer – has acknowledged that more environmentally-friendly properties are a trend that is here to stay. The desire for unique and different amenities, coupled with the desire for more “green” facilities overall, has caused many developers and builders to turn their attention to equestrian amenities.

As equestrian amenities become more popular at communities and resorts, worldwide, real estate developers are discovering that a truly “green” equestrian amenity involves a comprehensive approach from beginning to end. This includes effective land planning decisions guiding where an equestrian facility might best be located, on-site design decisions working within the context of existing ecosystems, and, including LEED certified design and construction that supports more sustainable facility operations and best management practices for the amenity. (Sustainable design includes many aspects, but one of the most important attributes is “green” or environmentally-sensitive practices.)

First Steps

Where a facility is located is the first step in developing a sustainable amenity. If an equestrian facility (and its associated community) is located far away from existing development, the environmental costs of transit, waste disposal and access to resources outweigh the “green” benefits of developing an equestrian facility. Finding ways to balance a “new ruralist” lifestyle with current smart growth techniques is one way an equestrian community and its associated facility can become a steward of the environment.

Once a site has been chosen that meets sustainable land use requirements, consideration should be given to regional issues, existing land cover, topography, and location of wetlands and sensitive natural areas when selecting the location of an equestrian facility on site. Development, with respect to the existing landscape and ecosystems, is key to creating a sustainable equestrian facility. Where you choose to locate your barn and covered arena, ancillary structures, pasture and circulation should always reflect the existing natural conditions onsite. A sustainable

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facility works with the existing landscape, not against it.

A "green" equestrian facility also should take into consideration stormwater management, onsite hay production and manure composting. Stormwater management techniques are just a few ways to mitigate the environmental impacts of an equestrian facility, including pervious pavement options instead of asphalt or concrete, using bioswales to retain and filter stormwater before returning it to the ground, installing intensive green roofs to minimize runoff or utilizing a graywater catchments system to collect water for pasture or arena application.

Conserving land for onsite hay production is yet another way an equestrian center can operate sustainably, especially as weather extremities and ongoing land loss that threaten existing hay supplies nationwide. Manure management continues to be a buzzword in the equestrian community, and on-site composting techniques are becoming more popular and easier for large-scale equestrian facilities to implement.

While standards for sustainable barn design currently do not exist, many of the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) LEED recommendations can be applied to barn design and construction. Green roofs are highly beneficial for onsite mitigation of stormwater, and most barns consistently address natural lighting and ventilation concerns identified in the LEED for New Construction Program. Utilizing existing standards in the design, construction and material selection of an equestrian facility is imperative when aspiring to create a truly "green" amenity.

Equestrian facilities bring an advantage to developers seeking to promote sustainable land use and construction practices nationwide. However, to be genuinely "green", no single item listed above is enough. It is a beginning. Sustainability is a thorough process, beginning with land use, site development choices, natural systems, green building design and well-managed site operations. A "green" equestrian facility looks at how each step influences the next, and how a comprehensive approach produces superior results for horse, rider, and the environment both enjoy. But, implementing any one of these measures is a good start, which will lead our communities down a more marketable, and sustainable path.

This article is reprinted with permission from Equestrian Services LLC, January 2008.

*The LEED Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings.

Allison Mouch is an Equine Land Planner for Equestrian Services, LLC (Charlottesville, VA), which is setting the standards for planning, designing, and managing equestrian amenities for resorts and communities worldwide.

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About Equestrian Services, LLC:

Founded in 2000, Equestrian Services, LLC, plans, designs and manages equestrian amenities for communities and resorts, worldwide. Setting the standard for equestrian facilities, the company offers the only branding opportunities, under the Karen and David O'Connor and John Lyons names, for builders and developers offering equestrian amenities. Equestrian Services provides comprehensive services from feasibility studies to equestrian facility management. Equestrian Services is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia. For more information, visit <http://www.equestrianservicesllc.com>.

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