

GOING GREEN FOR WELL-BEING

By Jeff Petry

Sustainability is the potential for long-term maintenance of well-being, which has ecological, economic, political, and cultural dimensions (so says Wikipedia) for human societies. It is traditionally viewed as making decisions today that take into consideration the economic, environmental, and societal effects of tomorrow. Sustainability is infused in our everyday work environments and personal lives.

Reuse and recycling is the original sustainable solution that reaches from the days of reusing glass milk bottles to the more recent recycling of everything from aluminum cans to building materials. Everyday sustainability conversations now focus on efficient lighting, environmentally-friendly cleaners, and supporting local businesses. Given the evolution of sustainability to date, how will the practice continue its transformation? And how does it tie into our parking profession?

Let's look at sustainability from the social perspective and discuss the use of public art panels in parking garages in Eugene, Ore., as an example that moves us forward toward a sustainable parking frontier.

Art in the Garage

Our first and largest parking garage in Eugene is the Overpark Garage. It is a five-story, 600-stall parking structure built in 1969 over a heavily used street—it is highly visible in our downtown core to motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and bus riders. Most people would agree that the garage would benefit from an extreme makeover, but the realities of our current budget situation put that option out of reach for the moment. So in the parking department started to focus on what we could do in this garage: What community assets could we highlight, and with whom could we partner? With the help of community partners (and a poetically-inclined employee) we connected with a local poetry group.

The end product was much more enriching than what a parking professional might have dreamed. It started with an initial installation of "Step into Poetry" panels placed on each landing of an internal concrete stairwell. Next, we expanded to a second stairwell with "Step into Stories," whose panels feature full stories in fewer than 200 words. The final installation of "Step into Theatre" features short plays of 200 words or less. In total, we installed 27 panels in all three Overpark garage stairwells.

When we came upon this opportunity to add words that are actually art to a downtown space, create local partnerships, reduce operating costs, support our local art community, provide a reason to use the stairs, and add to the fabric that makes our downtown unique, we jumped at the chance.

The Green Factor

What makes this a sustainable project?

- We created lasting partnerships with our local writing community, including the Lane Literary Guild, Oregon Poetry Association, and Young Writers Association.
- We supported local arts in our community and the development of future artists.
- The project helped reinforce the creative, distinctive culture of our downtown and its revitalization efforts.
- The project helps encourage our parking customers to take the stairs, getting them moving and helping fight obesity. More people taking the stairs also enhances security in the stairwells.
- The project reduced graffiti and tagging in stairways.
- By investing about \$3,600 for all three stairway installations, we received positive media coverage with an estimated marketing value of more than \$10,000.

Words surround us everywhere, every day, so much that our public spaces are crowded with text that tells us where to go, what to buy, and what not to do. So when we came upon this opportunity to add words that are actually art to a downtown space, create local partnerships, reduce operating costs, support our local art community, provide a reason to use the stairs, and add to the fabric that makes our downtown unique, we jumped at the chance. At the same time, we provided a small example of how the parking profession can push the sustainability frontier. 



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