

SITES CERTIFIED PROJECT

WEST LAUREL HILL'S NATURE SANCTUARY

2018

SITES GOLD

Bala Cynwyd, PA, United States



SITES CERTIFICATION

Address: Bala Cynwyd, PA

Project Size: .68 acre

Project type: Green Burial Ground



Nature's Sanctuary is the first cemetery to ever achieve SITES certification
 It is the first project in Pennsylvania to achieve certification under SITES v2
 It is the sixth project in the world to achieve SITES Gold

West Laurel Hill's Nature Sanctuary

SITES v2 Gold (2018)	108*
Site Context	5/13
Pre-design Assessment + Planning	3/3
Site Design - Water	17/23
Site Design - Soil + Vegetation	16/40
Site Design - Materials Selection	20/41
Site Design - Human Health + Well-Being	14/30
Construction	13/17
Operations + Maintenance	13/22
Education + Performance Monitoring	7/11
Innovation Or Exemplary Performance	0/9

*Out of a possible 200 points and 9 bonus points
 Certified 70–84, Silver 85–99, Gold 100–134, Platinum 135–200

“We are extremely honored to receive this SITES certification, as it means that we have met the high standards that align design and development with healthy ecosystems,” **said Nancy Goldenberg, president and CEO of West Laurel Hill Cemetery & Funeral Home.** “West Laurel Hill’s green burial site, Nature’s Sanctuary, is the first cemetery ever to be SITES-certified. We work hard to ensure sustainable practices throughout our entire organization, and this award is certainly a badge of pride that recognizes our commitment and sets us apart from our peers.”

PROJECT BACKGROUND

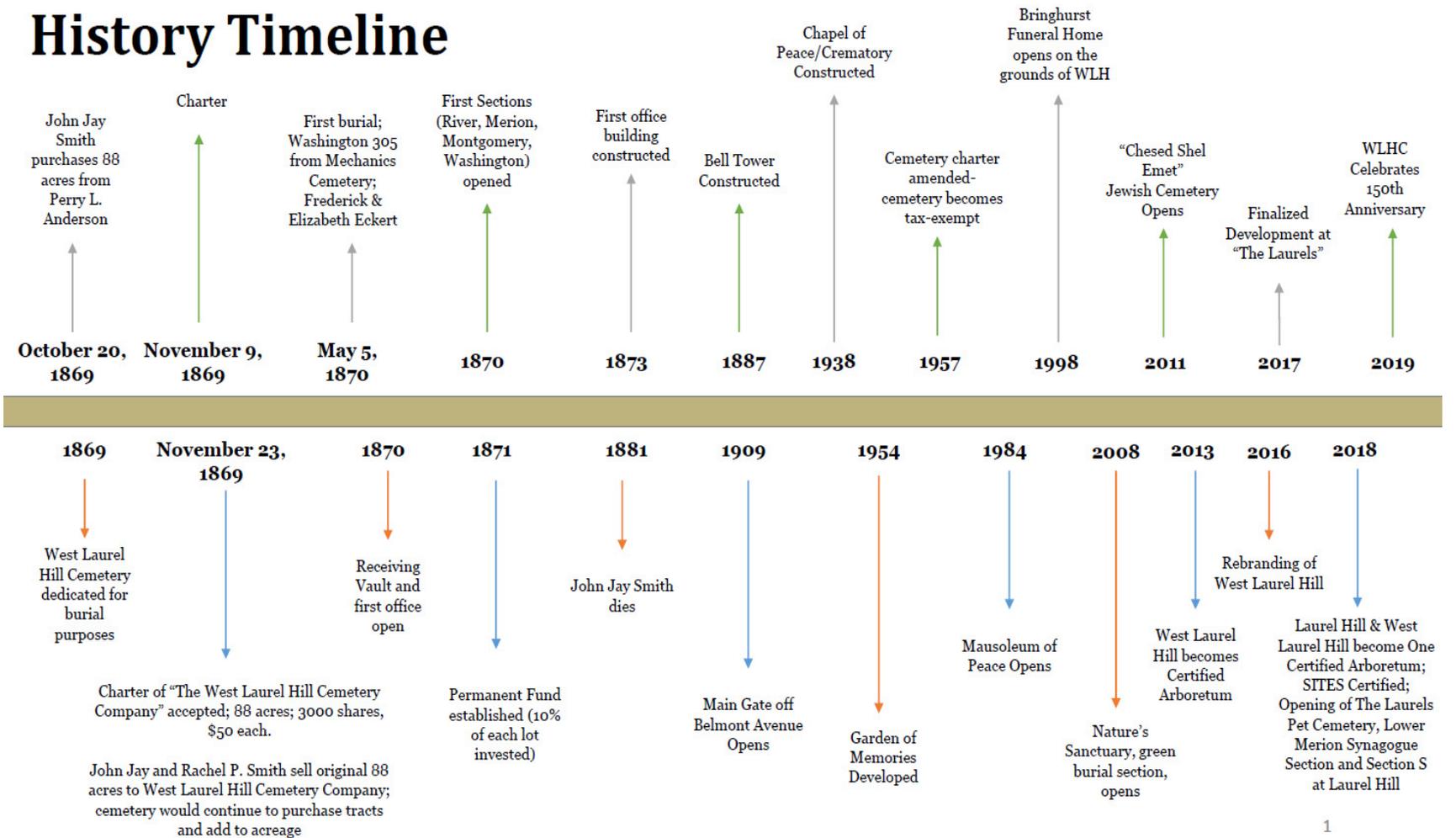
About West Laurel Hill Cemetery

Incorporated in 1869, the historic West Laurel Hill Cemetery & Funeral Home is a privately-owned, non-profit, non-denominational cemetery, a 187-acre arboretum and an outdoor sculpture garden rich in cultural and social history. They offer one location for all funeral and cemetery needs including monuments/engraving, an onsite crematory, chapels, reception areas and Jewish and green burial and funeral services. West Laurel Hill Funeral Home is located on the grounds of the Cemetery, 225 Belmont Avenue, Bala Cynwyd, PA. To learn more about West Laurel Hill, visit www.westlaurelhill.com.

History

The histories of Laurel Hill Cemetery, West Laurel Hill Cemetery and Bringhurst and Turner Funeral Home are extraordinary. Both cemeteries are home to generations of Philadelphians from all stations of life including well-known names past and present representing nearly every discipline – artists, architects, authors, doctors, musicians, politicians, scientists, war veterans, civic leaders, innovators in industry and more. In 1994, West Laurel Hill Cemetery purchased Bringhurst Funeral Home while under the leadership of William Sickel and H. Blair Anthony. In 1997, the present funeral home was erected on the grounds of the cemetery. In 2016, the funeral home rebranded to be recognized as West Laurel Hill Funeral Home, Inc.

History Timeline



+ In 2019, the cemetery celebrated its 150th Anniversary.

■ PROJECT GOALS

Create a green cemetery that is going to be an ecological system designed to care for and manage itself,

Restore the damaged site,

Transform the space into an ecologically diverse native habitat.

Located on a once disturbed urban dumpsite, West Laurel Hill's Nature Sanctuary is perhaps one of the most unique projects to achieve SITES certification. While most may assume this is solely a public park, it's actually, first and foremost, a green cemetery—the first of its kind to receive a SITES designation in the country.



■ PROJECT TEAM

Alta Planning + Design, a firm with more than 30 offices across North America that specializes in planning, design, and building of public outdoor spaces, was the lead landscape architect on West Laurel Hill. The goal was to restore the landscape to a sustainable and thriving ecosystem.

“Because of the nature of what a cemetery is—a final and forever resting place—it calls for perpetual eternal care.” says Adam Supplee, lead landscape architect on the project and principal at Alta Planning + Design.



■ STRATEGIES



+ **Land Conservation:**

The Land Conservation Action Plan increases biodiversity and decreases erosion as well as the amount of mulch, topsoil, and stone purchased. Land conservation refers to practices that are designed to maintain the land as close to its original state as possible, thereby improving ecosystem stability, biodiversity, and aesthetics.



+ **Energy & Waste Management:**

The Energy and Waste Action Plan ensures our organization meets its long-term energy and landfill waste reduction goals. Baseline metrics were completed for electric and natural gas, waste and recycling, gasoline and turf management. Laurel Hill and West Laurel Hill are 90% converted to LED lighting and they have introduced a solar-powered mower. Also, quarterly staff recycling education sessions have been implemented.



+ **LED Lighting Replacement:**

The funeral home replaced 58 florescent light fixtures containing 136 florescent tubes, with 58 LED fixtures. The florescent fixtures used 40,804 kwh annually. The new LEDs will use only 13,144 kwh annually, which is a 67.8% reduction in energy equating to a \$3,904.89 in annual savings.



+ **The Philly Goat Project:**

The Philly Goat Project is a unique community-based program offering grazing, animal-assisted therapy, goat yoga and community wellness. The intention of the program is to provide these unique services while practicing responsible environmentalism, respectful and humane treatment of all creatures, while creating a platform that brings really fun agricultural experiences to the urban landscape. West Laurel Hill has partnered with the Philly Goat Project to move forward with their new sustainability efforts. They have employed their goats to help control invasive species, weeds, thorns and poison ivy behind our green burial site, Nature's Sanctuary. With the help of these cute creatures, they will be using fewer tools for landscaping that emit toxins into our environment.



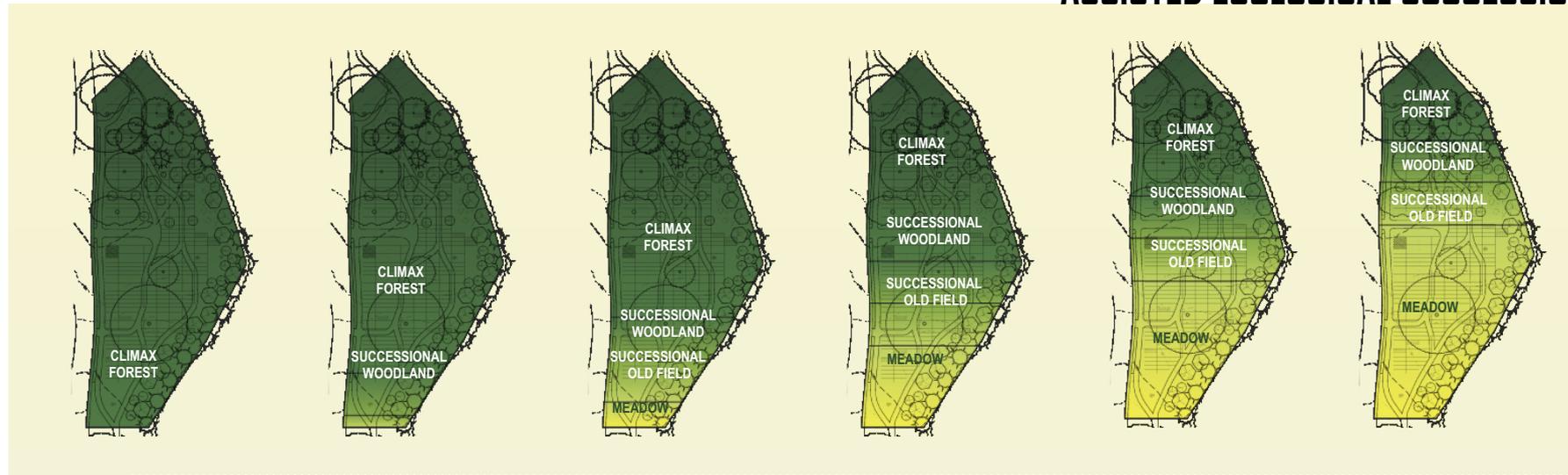
+ **Employee Wellness and Engagement:**

The Employee Wellness and Engagement Plan is designed to help understand the needs of our employees and to continually improve upon employee wellness and satisfaction. Employees were surveyed twice a year and the results were shared with all employees during staff meetings. Also, West Laurel Hill has started a weekly walking program for staff. Each walk is 30 minutes and takes attendees through different parts of the Cemetery grounds.

FINAL DESIGN

ASSISTED ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION

SITE PLAN



+ The West Laurel Hill's Nature Sanctuary proposes a process called **"Assisted Ecological Succession"**. The intent is to **Achieve Perpetual Care by Nature**, rather than the current unsustainable practice of perpetual care by a lawnmower or pesticides. Starting as a **Meadow**, and progressing to a **Successional Old Field**, **Successional Woodland**, and eventually a **Climax Forest**. The resting place of ones' loved ones will be beneath the branches of a native tree, amidst the foliage of shrubs and ground covers. This process is transforming a degraded landscape into a **Functioning Ecosystem**. This innovation is allowing the overall landscape to thrive and will change the **Green Cemetery Industry** as well as the overall cemetery industry.



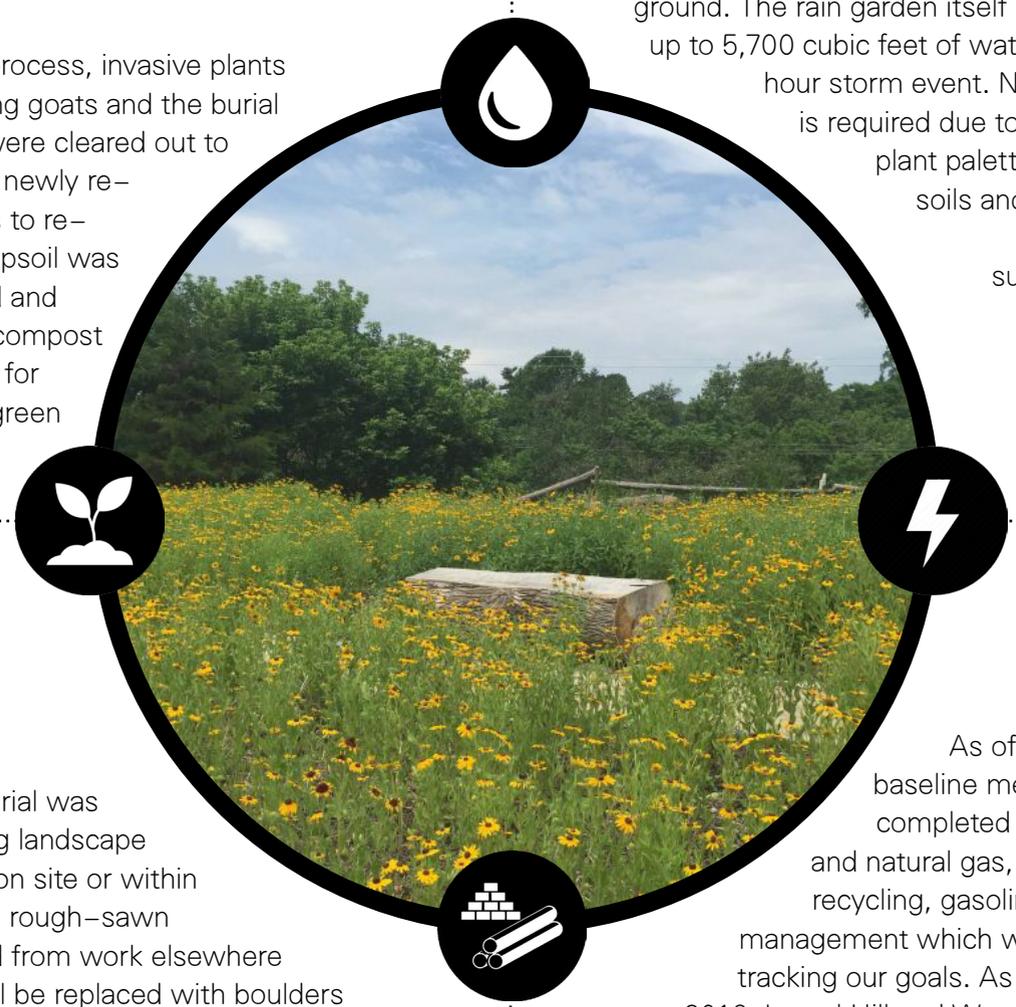
VALUE OF SITES

+ Plants + soils

During the restoration process, invasive plants were removed by grazing goats and the burial site and a buffer zone were cleared out to offer an opportunity for newly re-introduced native plants to re-establish on the site. Topsoil was also removed, screened and amended with organic compost and returned to the site for the new plantings and green burial sites.

+ Materials

A large amount of material was reused from the existing landscape debris that was stored on site or within the larger property. The rough-sawn benches were collected from work elsewhere in the cemetery and will be replaced with boulders harvested within the project site. Stone used to construct the memorial wall and edging for the pathways were also excavated from other projects within the cemetery.



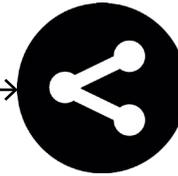
+ Water

Native plants established as part of an assisted ecological forest succession design and a large rain garden allow water to more effectively soak into the ground. The rain garden itself can accept up to 5,700 cubic feet of water in a 24-hour storm event. No irrigation is required due to the native plant palette, restored soils and meadow, and forest successional plantings.

+ Energy

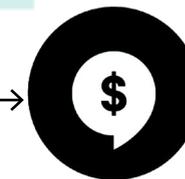
As of July, 2016 baseline metrics were completed for electric and natural gas, waste and recycling, gasoline and turf management which will assist in tracking our goals. As of August, 2016, Laurel Hill and West Laurel Hill are 90% converted to LED lighting.

ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES



SOCIAL

“In addition to hitting all the checkboxes SITES requires in terms of water, soil and plants, and materials, there’s also a box for human health and well-being,” notes Witek. “That means improved human health and increased outdoor recreation opportunities. Indeed, this is a place to gather and go find mindfulness.” West Laurel Hill Cemetery connects people to nature with quiet strolls through the forest and adjacent Cynwyd Heritage Trail. A large community volunteer base and family members of loved ones buried here are dedicated to assisting with maintenance and the honey beehives located within the site.



ECONOMIC

As for materials, most came right from the site, reducing the amount of overall items purchased and transported, as well as ensuring as little as possible went to the dump.

Using the Small Business Advantage Grant, the funeral home replaced 58 florescent light fixtures containing 136 florescent tubes, with 58 LED fixtures. The florescent fixtures used 40,804 kwh annually. The new LEDs will use only 13,144 kwh annually, which is a 67.8% reduction in energy equating to a \$3,904.89 annual savings.

■ VALUE OF SITES

West Laurel Hill is a valuable asset providing a legacy of support and comfort to the community. The site not only provides an interment option, but also acts as an environmental oasis creating a powerful connection between nature, people and communities. West Laurel's innovative design and development strategies are supporting ecosystem services and elevating the value of land and its impact on human health and wellbeing across the area.