

Spotlight on Landscape Architecture

By Doris Preisendorf Sullivan, FASLA

What is landscape architecture and what do Landscape Architects do?

As described on the American Society of Landscape Architect (ASLA) website:

“Landscape architecture encompasses the analysis, planning, design, management, and stewardship of the natural and built environments.” Landscape architects plan and design traditional spaces, plan the restoration of natural places disturbed by humans, and undertake preservation planning projects for historic sites and areas. Some of the types of projects tackled by landscape architects include: campuses – corporate and academic; commercial developments; arboreta; site restoration – both natural and historical; resorts; monuments; parks; residential developments; security design; gardens – pleasure, public, private, and therapeutic; transportation corridors; urban design; and water resources. Considering that these projects can vary in size from a few square feet to many acres or square miles, the scope, challenge and the appeal of the profession comes into focus.

As with other professions, a true landscape architect professional can make an extremely complex project look effortless. Complicated sites that accommodate large numbers of residents, employees, the general public, and treasured natural assets are not easy. This is where licensure, and the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare, becomes necessary.

When a project encompasses a watershed or an industrial campus, it is easy to understand that the services of a licensed landscape architect are required. To ensure the protection of the public, the services of a licensed professional are needed to site buildings, layout circulation that accommodates pedestrians and vehicles, provide adequate and logical infrastructure space, and end with a pleasant, ecologically sound place.

However, it is less cut and dried for smaller projects. What if a homeowner just wants help placing trees around the house? In order to determine if a licensed landscape architect must be involved in a project, refer to the list of exemptions found in Minnesota Rules Chapter 1800.5900. This rule describes the elements that must be met for work to be done by an unlicensed person.

Licensure of Landscape Architects in Minnesota

When licensure of landscape architects became a requirement in Minnesota in 1976, the law was written to allow professionals who were already practicing the profession to grandfather into licensure. Licensure could be granted under a complicated set of conditions that specified requirements for varying amounts of experience dependent

upon particular types of education. These conditions are currently still a part of the Minnesota Statutes and Rules.

As the years have passed, the varying combinations of education and experience needed for grandfathering has become less and less relevant to those seeking initial licensure now. The process is underway to revise the landscape architect licensure education and experience qualifications. The current rules, with a fairly intricate combination of educational backgrounds paired with varying amounts of professional experience required for licensure, will be simplified to reflect the current types of professional degrees that are available. To be added to the Board's rulemaking mailing list and receive updates throughout the process, you may e-mail your mailing address and request to Andrea Barker (andrea.barker@state.mn.us), Rules Coordinator, in the Board office. Updates are also posted on the Board's web site as they become available.