



# THE CRITICAL ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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## Introduction

AILA believes that positioning landscape architects as key professionals within local government is crucial to developing a liveable and functional public realm that meets the needs of local communities and businesses, while ensuring natural landscapes and environments are enhanced and managed over the long term.

Landscape architects can effectively engage with other design professionals as well as key stakeholders and the community. They are trained to work collaboratively and to understand cost efficiencies. Landscape architects locate specific issues in their broader context; because of this ability to work on a number of levels, more landscape architects are moving into leadership positions throughout the public sector.

Landscape architects within local government can ensure their municipality gets the best value and outcomes from major projects. When major infrastructure projects are proposed within municipal boundaries, landscape architects can advocate on behalf of local government for outcomes that maximise the health and wellbeing of residents.

## AILA Position

AILA believes that a design team of landscape architects provides great value for local governments pursuing liveability and cost effectiveness in the delivery of annual budgets and capital works programs.

AILA's position arises from the following five principles, which have been developed to ensure human activity and the global landscape sustain each other over time:

1. VALUE OUR LANDSCAPE
2. PROTECT > ENHANCE > REGENERATE
3. DESIGN WITH RESPECT
4. DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE
5. EMBRACE RESPONSIVE DESIGN

AILA believes that the presence of landscape architects in local governments promotes these five

principles as well as providing a critical service for the local community by ensuring:

- The environment and urban landscapes are great places to socialise
- Biodiversity is maximised
- Local culture is celebrated
- Health and well-being is improved
- Civic and community pride is promoted

AILA believes that all local governments should have landscape architects involved in framing, setting, and strategising approaches to their strategic plans and capital works delivery program for providing liveable communities.

Landscape architects in local governments would be responsible for the following:

- Developing and implementing key strategies relating to the public realm
- Development of a quality public realm including parks, green streetscapes, walking and cycling networks, and urban spaces within activity centres
- Providing strategic and detailed advice on development and planning permits
- Ensuring good public realm outcomes for major infrastructure projects
- Integrating cross organisation advice and direction for all areas of local government involved in public realm activities to ensure quality, cohesive design outcomes
- Representing local government and the local community on projects with other councils, state government, federal governments and other agencies (for example, service authorities)

## Case Studies

### **No.1 Landscape architects Brimbank City Council (Melbourne, Vic)**

Brimbank City Council established an urban design team of six landscape architects in 2008 in the Infrastructure and Environment Directorate. The primary aims of the Directorate are to maintain and upgrade council's infrastructure and open space assets in a safe and sustainable manner, manage and enhance Brimbank's natural and built environment in a safe and sustainable state, and deliver efficient and effective services. The team has since grown to twelve, including one engineer and two urban designers.

Prior to establishing the team, Brimbank lacked an integrated strategic direction for the public realm. Its park network was one of the least developed in Melbourne, cycling and walking trails were disconnected, and business hubs (from village shops to significant activity centres) were run down discouraging pedestrian and economic activity. Council was ineffective at advocating for quality public realm outcomes for projects delivered by council, developers and state agencies. Since the formation of the Directorate, Brimbank City Council has adopted key strategies and frameworks that have resulted in:

- 83 park upgrades, transforming the municipality's park network from one of the least developed in Melbourne to one of most developed.
- 25km of off-road bike paths to establish and continue paths along waterways and to connect into Melbourne's broader bike trail network.

- 20km of on-road bike paths to connect with activity centres and neighbouring municipalities
- Major improvements to key activity centres and village shopping strips, with over 20 projects completed.
- Successful advocacy resulting in good urban design outcomes for major infrastructure projects such as the Regional Rail Link and ongoing rail and road grade separations.
- Significant improvement in civic pride within the local community due to the creation of great spaces.

## **2. Landscape architects at the City of Sydney (NSW)**

The City of Sydney has a proud tradition of employing landscape architects. Latvian Ilmar Berzins (1921-93) who studied landscape architecture at University of Hanover, Germany, was the first qualified landscape architect to be employed in local government in Australia when he took up a position with the City in 1951.

During the 1980s and '90s, the City's Parks Department was the training ground for many graduating landscape architects providing experience in design, documentation and site supervision of construction works.

Today the City of Sydney employs 37 landscape architects undertaking a wide variety roles and services across the organisation, including:

- 22 landscape architects in the City Projects Office providing design and project management services to implement the City's annual \$100m+ capital works program that includes new parks, major park renewals, streetscapes and civic spaces, and bike paths.
- Three landscape architects in the City Design section developing policies and technical guidelines for the public domain and projects to a preliminary concept stage for the City Projects team to develop and deliver. City Design also provides strategic design advice to other areas of Council, such as the Development Assessment and City Plan teams and other state government agencies to ensure projects meet the City's *Sustainable Sydney 2030* plan and capture longer-term benefits to communities.
- Four landscape architects practising as 'Urban Designers' work in the Strategic Planning section and provide input into the public domain planning controls for new streets and public spaces for the City's urban renewal areas. One landscape architect works in development assessment.
- Six landscape architects work in the Public Domain section to ensure design and construction of public domain works undertaken by developers is to a quality and consistency as specified by the City's design codes and specifications.
- In Parks operations, landscape architects are in senior management and technical advisory roles.

At the City of Sydney landscape architects work across a wide spectrum to deliver great public spaces, demonstrating their capacity as 'integrators'. Landscape architects speak the 'language' of architects, planners, engineers and environmental professionals to deliver world-class public domain and spaces.

## **No.3 Landscape architects at the City of Adelaide (SA)**

The City of Adelaide was established in 1840, and in 2015 celebrated 175 years of continuous

governance. It is Australia's oldest municipality.

Adelaide is Australia's first planned city, established in 1836 and designed by Colonel William Light, South Australia's first Surveyor General. Set within 770 hectares of National Heritage-listed Adelaide Park Lands and settled on the River Torrens Linear Park, linking the Adelaide Hills to the Gulf St Vincent, Adelaide City Council ('ACC') is responsible for the Park Lands, the central business district, and a growing residential population as part of the state government's *30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide*.

Adelaide City Council has a team of thirteen landscape architects in the Operations portfolio. Within this portfolio there are three landscape architects within 'Design and Strategy', one in 'Transport Strategy', five in 'Design Projects' and one in the 'Parklands Strategy' team.

The Associate Director of the Design and Strategy program is a Registered Landscape Architect. There are four programs overseen by the Associate Director:

1. City Design
2. Transport
3. City Strategy; and
4. Park Lands Strategy

The Design and Strategy program will 'create a city of great places designed for people and facilitate safe and easy access to all of the city's places'. The program has clear objectives for its landscape architects: to consider the design, transport and design strategy across all of council, the City and Adelaide Park Lands, and the delivery of capital works. The team creates and manages two key policies: the 2012–22 integrated transport strategy, *Smart Move*; and ACC's urban design framework, the *Adelaide Design Manual*.

The Design and Strategy programs are also closely involved with major state government projects, with working relationships with the Adelaide Park Lands Authority, the Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, the Office of Design and Architecture, Renewal SA, the Riverbank Authority, the Capital City Committee, Department of Environment and Heritage, and surrounding councils.

Their role includes representing elected members, advocating to industry and governments at all levels the benefits of a design-led process, and using their experience for policy positions on transport and design strategies.

## Other relevant position statements

## Further information

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