



# **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC WELFARE**

A FOUNDATION PAPER BY ERIN RESEARCH FOR THE COUNCIL OF  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL REGISTRATION BOARDS

## **Executive Summary**

## BACKGROUND

In the interest of public health, safety and welfare, the practice of landscape architecture is licensed in 50 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces, requiring the demonstration of competence through a combination of education, experience and rigorous examination.

Despite licensure's emphasis on health and safety, experience suggests that the role landscape architecture plays in advancing "public welfare" is poorly understood—to the detriment of society and the profession. The results of this study provide a practical, new framework for understanding public welfare and how the profession uniquely contributes to its advancement.

These findings have reignited an important conversation on a poorly defined, understood, and appreciated area of the practice of landscape architecture that represents a substantial portion of its body of knowledge and application and differentiates it from other related disciplines.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODS

The primary objective of the research was to develop a holistic, working definition of public welfare and to make explicit the major ways it is impacted by the practice of landscape architecture.

The core research method was a review and analysis of relevant literature and exemplary case studies, supplemented by consultations with an advisory group comprised of professionals, academicians, and industry association leaders.

The findings were synthesized and presented in a foundation paper intended for use by a diverse audience that includes legislators, political decision-makers, practitioners, students, academics, allied professionals, and interested members of the general public.

## KEY FINDINGS

*The concept of public welfare blends two fundamental ideas: the public realm and welfare or well-being.*

"Welfare" has maintained its current sense of "well-being" since Chaucer's time. The idea of a public realm emerged as a third order of society, separate from church and state, as these institutions gradually ceded their once absolute authority. The concept gathered force during the 16th century and continues to evolve today.

*Public welfare rests on the well-being of the natural world.*

Public welfare in the context of landscape architecture means the stewardship of natural environments and of human communities in order to enhance social, economic, psychological, cultural and physical functioning, now and in the future.

*Landscape architecture impacts public welfare in seven distinct, observable ways.*

1. **Enhances environmental sustainability** by responding to development challenges with solutions that involve sensitivity towards natural systems. At the site design level landscape architects integrate sustainability measures into all designs. Their work protects natural systems ensuring that all community members have access to common resources and are involved in active conservation.
2. **Contributes to economic sustainability** by assisting policy makers and others to improve the marketability and long-term value of residential and commercial housing/property. Economic benefits include reduction of crime, smart development and growth, improved air and water quality, efficient energy use, enhanced quality of life and health, and access to culture and recreation.
3. **Promotes public health and well-being** by making connections between human health and well-being and the conditions of the outdoor environment. Landscape architecture projects directly affect the mental and physical health of individuals and communities and provide immediate and lasting therapeutic benefits.
4. **Builds community** by creating attractive, functional places. Landscape architects encourage people to engage in their surroundings, strengthening social cohesion, which results in healthier, more dynamic, more resilient communities at the local, national and global levels.
5. **Encourages landscape awareness and stewardship** by stimulating our awareness of the landscape, and increasing our understanding of the role that humans play in it. Landscape architects encourage citizens to appreciate the landscape and to participate in the processes that shape it. Cultivating a symbiotic and iterative relationship between people and their environment, the practice encourages protection, stewardship and understanding of the landscape.
6. **Offers aesthetic and creative experiences** that artists offer: the opportunity to experience enjoyment, contentment, stimulation or pleasure by participating in the aesthetic experience of landscape. An important part of this dimension is the preservation and protection of significant historic properties, buildings, structures, districts, cultural landscapes, artistic objects and archaeological elements.
7. **Enables communities to function more effectively** by enabling people to function more effectively in their environments. Landscape architects facilitate many critical human activities and functions such as efficient traffic flow, parking, waste collection/recycling, water use/drainage, air quality, optimal use of space.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH TO THE PROFESSION AND PUBLIC**

Initial implications to the profession of landscape architecture may include:

- A concise, logical, supportable set of themes, messages, and appeals for the profession to better communicate its value to diverse audiences.
- Contribute to enhanced, more relevant scope of practice at the jurisdictional level and clearer expression of “welfare” concepts in critical standards, such as the “Landscape Architect Registration Examination” (L.A.R.E.).
- Deepen an important source of inquiry for institutions and creates an opportunity to further connect planning and design concepts to practice in a way that enriches the profession and serves society through better quality of life.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER INQUIRY**

The study identified three key opportunities for further exploration:

- Further develop sound, practical methods of measuring the impacts of landscape architecture on public welfare and to integrate them into practice.
- Identify, develop, and systematically collect additional case studies that illustrate the important impacts of public welfare and deepen understanding of the profession’s impact on it.
- Conduct interdisciplinary research involving communications and the social sciences with a goal being to develop more effective methods for communicating qualitative, less-tangible impacts associated with the practice of landscape architecture.

Please contact the CLARB office at [vmeadows@clarb.org](mailto:vmeadows@clarb.org) or 1-571-432-0332 to obtain a copy or copies of the full report.

## **ABOUT THE COUNCIL OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL REGISTRATION BOARDS**

CLARB exists to promote public health, safety and welfare in the practice of landscape architecture. It accomplishes this goal by supporting its member state/provincial licensure boards that regulate the practice in 48 U.S. states, Puerto Rico and two Canadian provinces. Key services include:

- Establishing and promoting standards for their professional competency and conduct, and examining, certifying, and communicating their competency.
- Providing information and resources on the value and benefits of the licensed practice of landscape architecture.

For more information visit [www.clarb.org](http://www.clarb.org).