

Watcha Gonna Do?

The Situation

Al Truistic, a landscape architect who specializes in residential design, is a member of the zoning commission for one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. Al takes his responsibility as a member of the commission very seriously. So seriously in fact, that he goes out of his way to avoid becoming involved from a business standpoint in any planning or landscape architecture projects that might be brought before the commission.

The longer he serves on the commission, the more difficult it is for Al to determine where to draw the line. This is because even though he might not be involved in a project when it is brought before the commission, he can't be sure he won't become involved at a later date, giving the appearance that he ruled in his personal interest. Sadly, his business is suffering as a result.

Watcha Gonna Do?

What should Al Truistic do? Should he resign from the commission and restore his business prospects? If he wants to continue serving on the commission will he have to change professions? Or might Al be able to continue serving on the commission and arrange things so that he plays a more active role in evaluating the feasibility and legitimacy of the land use planning projects that are brought before the commission?

Recommendation of the Ethics Committee

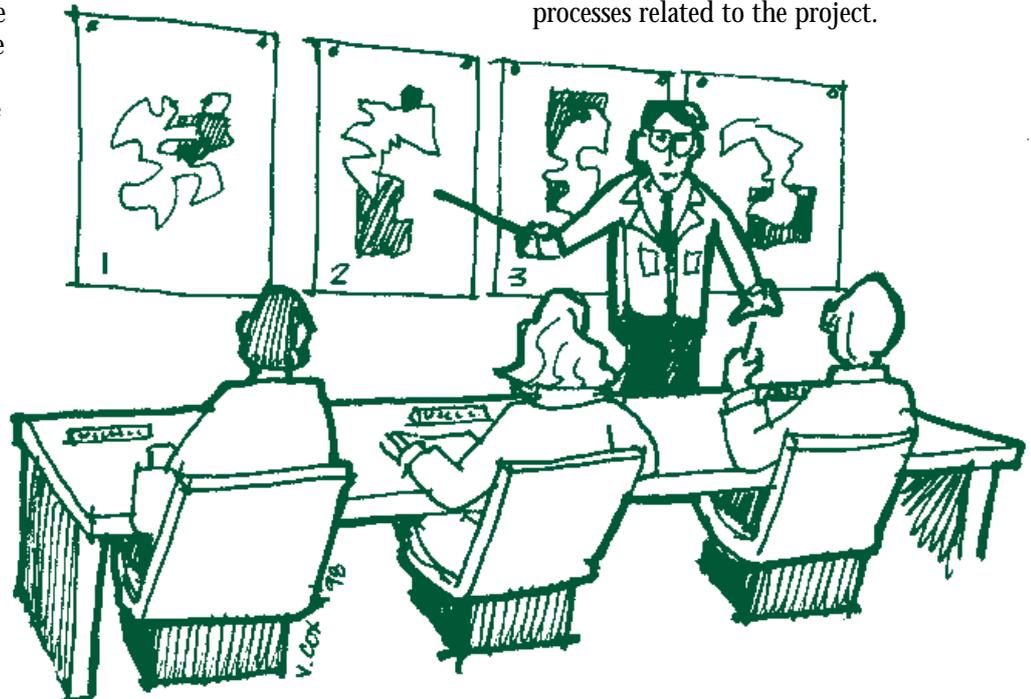
The ASLA Code and Guidelines for Professional Conduct is arranged in three tiers of statements: canons, ethical standards, and rules of conduct.

Canons are broad principles of conduct. Ethical standards are more specific goals which members should strive to obtain. The rules are mandatory and violation is subject to disciplinary action. By excluding himself from projects having to do with land use and land planning, Al Truistic is not only hurting himself unnecessarily from a business standpoint but also depriving the public he serves of his wide knowledge of the subject.

The committee observed that the ASLA Code and Guidelines for

At the same time, the committee believes that Al, or anyone in a similar capacity, should refrain from seeking to obtain contracts, awards, or other financial gain relating to projects or programs for which they may be serving in an advisory or critical capacity.

Therefore, the committee observed that Al should make full disclosure to the commission of his role in any project that comes before it where he might have a personal or financial interest in the outcome. The ethical procedure in that case, according to the board, would be for Al to remove himself from the debate and voting processes related to the project.



Professional Conduct encourages members to serve in elected and appointed capacities where they might bring their professional skills and training to bear in the best interests of the public.

Ethical Standard 3.2 states, "Members shall endeavor to participate in pro bono works in the service of the public good and to serve in elected and appointed capacities that improve public appreciation and understanding of landscape architecture, environmental systems, and the functions and responsibilities of landscape architects."

Editor's Note: One of the objectives of the ASLA Ethics Committee is to educate members about the ASLA Code and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. The code contains important principles relating to duties to clients and to members of the Society. Readers are invited to send their comments on cases appearing in LAND to Managing Editor, 636 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-3736 or e-mail to bwelsh@asla.org. Members are invited to submit questions regarding ethical matters along with supporting data to Allen Hixon, FASLA, Ethics Committee Chair, c/o ASLA 636 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-3736.