



American Society of  
Landscape Architects

Fig. 1



# Landscape Architects Design Vibrant, Resilient, and Just Communities for All

Recommendations for the Biden-Harris administration

# **Landscape Architects Design Vibrant, Resilient, and Just Communities for All: Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration**

## **Introduction**

Founded in 1899, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) is the national professional association representing landscape architects. Beginning with 11 members, ASLA has grown to nearly 15,000 members and 49 chapters, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. ASLA promotes the profession of landscape architecture and advances its practice through advocacy, education, communication, and fellowship.

Landscape architects analyze, plan, design, manage, and nurture the built and natural environments. The diversity and scale of work in landscape architecture is vast, and the mix of skills and expertise required make landscape architects uniquely qualified to design vibrant, resilient, and just communities for all. Landscape architects create well-planned livable communities, leading the way in creating neighborhood master plans, managing stormwater, designing cutting-edge parks and other outdoor spaces, planning complex multimodal transportation corridors, and more. The profession executes these projects in a manner that also addresses climate change and facilitates meaningful community engagement.

ASLA and its members urge the Biden-Harris administration to review and adopt the following policy recommendations and actions that will assist landscape architects in creating a more promising future for communities across the nation.





Fig. 2

## Executive Summary

The American Society of Landscape Architects compiled a comprehensive series of specific, actionable policy recommendations designed to give landscape architects a seat at the table and support for their vital work. The report is broken down into four sections.

The first, *Landscape Architects Apply STEM to Protect the Public*, outlines the measures necessary to assist landscape architects in meeting the economic demands and challenges facing our nation.

Recommendations in this section include:

- Support continued state licensure of highly complex technical professions, including landscape architecture, to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public.
- Provide targeted and sustained COVID-19 relief for small businesses, including landscape architecture firms.
- Appoint landscape architects to key positions throughout the Biden-Harris administration, including within the Departments of Transportation, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture, and in the Environmental Protection Agency, General Services Administration, the U.S. Access Board, and others.
- Include landscape architecture on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Designated Degree Program List.

The second section, *Landscape Architects Lead in Climate Solutions*, focuses on policy solutions that support landscape architects' work in designing resilient, sustainable spaces that help communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of the ongoing climate crisis.

Recommendations in this section include:

- Create a comprehensive, science-based climate action plan to significantly reduce carbon emissions.
- Establish adaptation and mitigation strategies using natural systems to make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Protect underserved communities from climate and environmental injustices.
- Adopt the Sustainable Sites Initiative® (SITES®) for all federal projects.
- Reverse rules, regulations, and policies from the Trump administration that weaken environmental protections and ignore climate change, specifically involving the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS).

The third section, *Landscape Architects Transform Community Infrastructure*, outlines policies to encourage the designing and building of community infrastructure projects in a way that fosters sustainable development, generates jobs, encourages healthy lifestyles, and creates resilient, equitable, and economically vibrant communities.

Recommendations in this section center include:

- Upgrade to a multimodal transportation network.
- Fix our nation's water management systems.
- Recognize public lands, parks, and open space as "critical infrastructure."
- Design resilient communities.

The fourth and final section, *Landscape Architects Seek Racial, Social, and Environmental Justice*, provides specific recommendations that seek to address the inequities that harm underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income populations, and Tribal and Indigenous communities across the country.

Recommendations in this section include:

- Work with Congress to codify Executive Order 12898, so that it is permanent law for federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse health and environmental effects of agency actions on low-income and minority communities.
- Join stakeholders across the country in advancing the tenets of the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 5986), which help to ensure that all communities are protected from pollution and that all voices are heard in federal environmental decision-making.
- Consider policies that promote design techniques as a tool to address racial, environmental, and social justice for all.





## Landscape Architects Apply STEM to Protect the Public

Landscape architects are licensed in 52 jurisdictions. Ensuring public health, safety, and welfare in the practice of landscape architecture starts with a rigorous, STEM-focused higher education and culminates in a nationally administered four-part examination. STEM knowledge and experience put landscape architects at the forefront of addressing critical contemporary issues such as increased urbanization and remediation of post-industrial sites; protection of water quality; and addressing sea-level rise and storm surge, efficient transportation solutions, healthy communities, wildfire adapted design, crime prevention through environmental design, site security design, and appropriate management of our cultural and natural heritage—all of which impact the health, safety, and welfare of our nation’s citizens.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for planning and developing new and existing sites for commercial, industrial, and residential construction projects is expected to drive employment growth. In addition, environmental concerns and increased demand for sustainably designed buildings and open spaces should spur demand for the services of landscape architects.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, efforts to conserve water, prevent waterway pollution, mitigate flooding, and control wildfires are expected to persist. Landscape architects will be needed to design plans for managing these efforts. To assist landscape architects in meeting the demands and challenges facing our nation, ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:

- Support continued state licensure of highly complex technical professions, including landscape architecture. ASLA also urges you to encourage states to engage in thoughtful conversations with stakeholders around balancing existing licensing models that work, appropriate regulations, and maintaining high levels of public protection, instead of “one-size-fits-all” reform approaches. State licensure of landscape architects allows the profession to continue to design, plan, and oversee critical community infrastructure projects, including countless federally funded public projects that require licensed professionals. ASLA, a member of the Alliance for Responsible Professional Licensing, can offer best practices and solutions as models that work for both the public and the profession.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/architecture-and-engineering/landscape-architects.htm#tab-6>

- Provide targeted and sustained COVID-19 relief for small businesses, the backbone of the American economy. Many landscape architecture firms are small businesses and have been struggling due to the pandemic. Offering additional grants, loans, and other financial stimulus, without unwarranted tax liabilities would help these small businesses to continue providing critical infrastructure design and planning services to communities nationwide.
- Appoint landscape architects to key positions throughout your administration, including within the Departments of Transportation, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture, and in the Environmental Protection Agency, General Services Administration, the U.S. Access Board, and others. Landscape architects have expertise in varied areas and are underrepresented in the federal government. From design and planning, to community engagement, to protecting and preserving the environment and addressing climate change, landscape architects are pioneers in the spaces they occupy and would bring this critical knowledge to the federal government.
- Include landscape architecture on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Designated Degree Program List. Landscape architecture is a discipline that requires education, training, and application of STEM as part of the foundation of its academic criteria and professional practice. Landscape architects routinely apply STEM in the planning and design of sites where millions of people live, work, and play. Despite the reliance on STEM knowledge and applications, landscape architecture is not officially recognized as a STEM discipline by DHS. The DHS's STEM designation of landscape architecture would go a long way in achieving an adequate number of landscape architects to address the growing needs and concerns of our nation.
- Strengthen and streamline the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program to provide more opportunities for young professionals to work as government employees and in other public and community jobs in exchange for student loan forgiveness. In recent years, skyrocketing college tuition has saddled many students, including landscape architecture students, with enormous debt. The Bureau of Labor Statistics tuition index data shows college fees far outpacing inflation<sup>2</sup>. Created in 2007, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program provides an opportunity for some loan forgiveness. However, a recent report, by the Student Borrower Protection Center ("Broken Promises: The Untold Failures of ACS Servicing"<sup>3</sup>) documents how the program lacks clarity and has been grossly mismanaged, with over 5 million servicing errors and a failure to properly address them. Reinstating guidance, auditing the program, and fixing these errors should be a top priority for your administration's Department of Education. Addressing these issues while strengthening the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program will help to increase the number of much-needed landscape architects serving the public in all branches of government and in community-based organizations.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/factsheets/college-tuition.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [https://protectborrowers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Broken-Promises\\_ACS.pdf](https://protectborrowers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Broken-Promises_ACS.pdf)



## Landscape Architects Lead in Climate Solutions

Extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and other impacts of climate change disrupt communities and economies, threaten landscapes, and set in motion global shifts. Communities are grappling with the challenges of protecting the public, the built environment, and natural environments from the ramifications of climate change. Landscape architects are uniquely educated and experienced to address climate change through resilient and sustainable design. The profession works with other design professionals, allied and sister organizations, and federal, state, and local governments and policy makers to achieve climate change and resilience goals. Together, as partners working in tandem, we can stave off the negative impacts of climate change before it is too late. To that end, ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:

- Rejoin the Paris Climate Accords of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and develop a global strategy to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ASLA specifically urges you to work with global leaders to implement a plan that follows the findings in the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Annual Report<sup>4</sup> and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Global Warming<sup>5</sup>, which both highlight the importance of green infrastructure, sustainable land use and water management, and nature-based solutions as tools for mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Send Congress a comprehensive, science-based climate action plan to significantly reduce carbon emissions; establish adaptation and mitigation strategies using natural systems to make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change; protect underserved communities from climate and environmental injustices; and create well-paying jobs, including opportunities for a new generation of landscape architects.

<sup>4</sup> <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/UN-Climate-Change-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/chapter-4/>



- Adopt the Sustainable Sites Initiative® (SITES®) for all federal projects, including the sites of federal buildings and courthouses, and for certain federally funded projects like public housing, Community Development Block Grant projects, federal aid transportation projects, and others. Developed by ASLA, the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center at The University of Texas at Austin, and the United States Botanic Garden, SITES is a comprehensive rating system that assesses the sustainable planning, design, construction and maintenance of designed landscapes. The SITES program promotes practices that conserve, restore, and improve the carbon storage capacity of landscapes and encourages project teams to minimize energy consumption and use low-carbon and renewable energy sources. The General Services Administration (GSA) has already adopted SITES for its capital construction program<sup>6</sup>. As an early adopter of SITES, GSA is encouraged to publish case studies, and document any climate and resilience analysis of the program.
- Reverse rules, regulations, and policies from the Trump administration that weaken environmental protections and ignore climate change. Specifically, ASLA urges the reversal of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rule that gutted the most important environmental protection law in history while denying climate change; the Waters of the United States rule (WOTUS) which ignored science and removed bedrock clean water protections, allowing countless bodies of water to become polluted; and the Affordable Clean Energy rule which overturned the Obama administration’s Clean Power Plan and removes important clean air protection from coal and other power plant facilities. We also request that when your administration is promulgating new rules, they always take climate change, resilience, and equity into account.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/design-construction/landscape-architecture/sites-certification>



Fig. 6

## Landscape Architects Transform Community Infrastructure

Our nation's infrastructure is crumbling and in dire need of repair, and good design and planning is a smart investment in creating a strong infrastructure, strong economy, and strong communities. ASLA supports the adoption of a comprehensive infrastructure plan that addresses the need to update and strengthen all forms of community infrastructure, including multimodal transportation networks, water and stormwater management systems, public lands and open spaces, and housing and community development, including protecting coastal communities. Any infrastructure development must include a sound, strategic planning-and-design process that includes approaches to prevent, reduce, and withstand the impacts of climate change and promote social and racial equity.

Landscape architects have the training, education, and expertise needed to lead in the design, planning, and implementation of community infrastructure projects in a way that fosters sustainable development, generates jobs, encourages healthy lifestyles, and creates resilient, equitable, and economically vibrant communities.



Fig. 7

**Upgrading to a Multimodal Transportation Network:** Our current auto-centric transportation system is outdated, perpetuates our dependence on fossil fuels, and does not meet the needs of many users. Currently, many communities want less-costly, more convenient active transportation options, such as walking, bicycling, and access to public transportation. The current surface transportation law, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act is set to expire in September 2021, providing Congress

and your administration a unique opportunity to chart a new course for our nation's transportation systems. The recently House-passed INVEST in America Act included many



promising policies, such as support for expanding active transportation. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to build upon this measure and:

- Support active transportation programs, such as the Transportation Alternatives Program, Recreational Trails, and Safe Routes to School programs. Together, these programs are providing low-cost, climate-friendly transportation options for individuals, families, and communities across the country.
- Emphasize design techniques to address pedestrian and bicyclist safety in our nation's rights-of-way. Landscape architects are pioneers in the Complete Streets and Vision Zero movements, creating some of the safest, yet innovative multimodal transportation networks across the country. ASLA urges your administration to support policies and funding that are dedicated to the planning and designing of transportation projects that are safe and equitable for all users.
- Invest in transit and transit-oriented development, to meet the growing demand for expanded public transportation and intercity passenger rail systems across the country. Transit-oriented development is also critical to jump-starting local economic development.
- Provide funding and resources for the National Scenic Byways Program, a grassroots collaborative within the Federal Highway Administration to help recognize, preserve, and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. Landscape architects routinely provide archeological, cultural, historic, environmental, recreational and scenic advice, and expertise in identifying and protecting and preserving these special places.
- Establish an Active Transportation Administration reporting directly to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary that will provide vision, focus, and priority for active transportation programs.
- Provide increased funding to U.S. DOT and its Federal Highway Administration to develop additional resources to assist states, municipalities, and communities in conducting meaningful environmental justice analysis in transportation planning and projects.

Fixing Our Nation's Water Management Systems: Our nation's drinking water and wastewater systems are deteriorating and are costing municipalities and ratepayers billions of dollars in maintenance and repairs. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), more than \$600 billion in investments is needed to address our water infrastructure needs<sup>7</sup>. Many communities are looking to employ less-costly green infrastructure solutions to address stormwater



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/waterfinancecenter/about-water-infrastructure-and-resiliency-finance-center#goals>



runoff—the major contributor to water pollution and unsafe drinking water supplies. Green infrastructure techniques naturally absorb stormwater, which allows more water to remain on site, which reduces burdens on storm drain systems. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to address the needs of our nation’s water management systems and specifically to:

- Increase funding for the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds. The state revolving funds provide critical resources to states, localities, and water systems to improve water treatment infrastructure and includes funding, research, and other tools to implement green infrastructure projects.
- Make permanent and increase the percentage of the required “Green Project Reserve” of the Clean Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF). Currently, states must reserve at least ten percent of their CWSRF funds for green infrastructure projects. ASLA believes that number should be increased to twenty percent. Additionally, the “Green Project Reserve” is mandated through the appropriations process. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to support legislation codifying and increasing the reserve and instructing the EPA to encourage increased green infrastructure water projects across the nation.
- Support the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) green infrastructure and low-impact development programs and policies, such as the Green Infrastructure Collaborative, Soak Up the Rain, Campus Rainworks, G3, and others, which help communities with tangible, cost-effective solutions to address their water management needs.
- Adequately fund the Chesapeake Bay Program and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Together, these programs are making great progress in restoring some of nation’s most important water resources. Specific projects include improving water quality, combating invasive species, and restoring habitat and addressing shoreline erosion—all project types that landscape architects lead. While Congress has taken action to provide adequate funding for these programs, recent administrations have proposed slashing their funding. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to request and support increased funding for these programs that help protect some of the most critical water systems in the world.
- Enforce the directive of the America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (commonly referred to as WRDA—Water Resource Development Act), which urges the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to consider natural or green infrastructure when planning and implementing projects. Since passage, the Corps has been reticent to implement these environmentally friendly and sustainable projects.
- Work to ensure that all communities, including communities of color, low-income populations, and Tribal and Indigenous communities, have access to safe drinking water supplies. Aging and deteriorating water systems are creating a public health crisis for many communities and must be replaced. ASLA urges you to support more environmentally sustainable practices, especially the use of nature-based systems and other green infrastructure, when replacing and creating new water infrastructure projects.



spaces help mitigate the consequences of climate change. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:

- Recognizing Public Lands, Parks, and Open Space as Critical Infrastructure: America's parks and public lands should be protected, preserved, and enhanced to continue providing optimal community and public health benefits. Parks, trails, urban forests, and other open spaces enhance communities and augment the value of other types of infrastructure. Our public lands are also economic drivers and support critical jobs, tourism, and other economic development, yet they remain underfunded. Additionally, parks and open spaces help mitigate the consequences of climate change. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:
- Invest in our nation's public lands, including providing for construction, maintenance, and restoration projects at the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service. Without proper funding and management, the maintenance backlog will continue to grow even with the additional funding stream created by the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act.
- Support funding for parks for all Americans, especially those in underserved communities that lack adequate outdoor and recreation spaces. Programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund's (LWCF) Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) help communities access the outdoors in neighborhoods that lack parks and recreation facilities. ASLA urges the administration to properly fund ORLP and to support legislation like the Outdoors for All Act, which would permanently authorize this important program.
- Bolster USDA's Urban and Community Forestry program, which focuses on the stewardship of communities' natural infrastructure and resources, providing a variety of conservation, health and well-being, and economic benefits.
- Reverse Trump administration orders that harm the environment, destroy protected and sacred areas, and hasten climate change. Specifically, ASLA urges the administration to end the lease sale of lands in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas companies for exploration and extraction; replace protections and safeguards against logging in Tongass National Forest, one of the largest temperate rainforests left in the world; and restore Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument to their previous footprints.
- Implement the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) and protect the LWCF. This includes releasing project lists on time, submitting reports to Congress, and distributing funds properly and within the spirit of the GAOA regarding the federal and state/local splits. Additionally, the new Secretary of the Interior should immediately rescind the possibly illegal order requiring state and county-equivalent sign-off for LWCF acquisitions that was issued in November 2020 by Secretary Bernhardt.

**Designing Resilient Communities:** Many communities are increasingly faced with addressing hurricanes, tornadoes, severe flooding, wildfires, and other natural disasters. In some communities, natural disasters occur repeatedly, destroying homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure. Community planners and designers, like landscape architects, have the education, training, and tools to help these places rebuild in a more resilient manner. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:



- Resurrect the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a federal interagency partnership between the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation with the goal of ensuring that the agencies' policies, programs, and funding work together to consider affordable housing, transportation, and environmental protection. This partnership mirrored the integrated approach and principles that landscape architects employ as they successfully design for communities.
- Support increased funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which helps communities achieve sustained and systemic action in addressing community needs such as infrastructure, economic development projects, public facilities installation, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, microenterprise assistance, homeowner assistance, and other critical activities. ASLA also urges you to provide targeted funding for the CDBG Disaster Recovery Program, which helps cities, counties, and states recover from presidentially declared disasters, with a focus on low-income communities.
- Direct the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to make grants to communities to carry out climate-resilient living shoreline projects that protect coastal communities by supporting ecosystem functions and habitats with the use of natural materials and systems as outlined in the Living Shorelines Act of 2019 (H.R. 3115/S. 1730). As you may know, ASLA and its California Chapters worked with then-Senator Kamala Harris to author and introduce this innovative legislation. ASLA urges Vice President-elect Harris to continue her outstanding leadership on this issue and to rest assured that landscape architects stand ready to assist in this effort.
- Support the creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency hazard mitigation revolving loan fund, as outlined in the Resilience Revolving Loan Fund Act of 2019 and the STORM Act (H.R. 3779/S. 3418). The program would provide communities with low-interest revolving loans for disaster planning and mitigation projects to reduce risks from disasters and natural hazards, including drought, severe storms, wildfires, earthquakes, flooding, shoreline erosion, high water levels, storm surges, and others.





Fig. 11

## Landscape Architects Seek Racial, Social, and Environmental Justice

ASLA is committed to addressing racial, social, environmental, and climate justice for all communities. We believe that policy makers at all levels of government can and should seek to eradicate the inequities that harm underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income populations, and Tribal and Indigenous communities across the country. ASLA looks forward to working with this administration to eliminate the disproportionate impacts that plague these communities and to advance regulations that promote a just society for all. ASLA urges the Biden-Harris administration to:

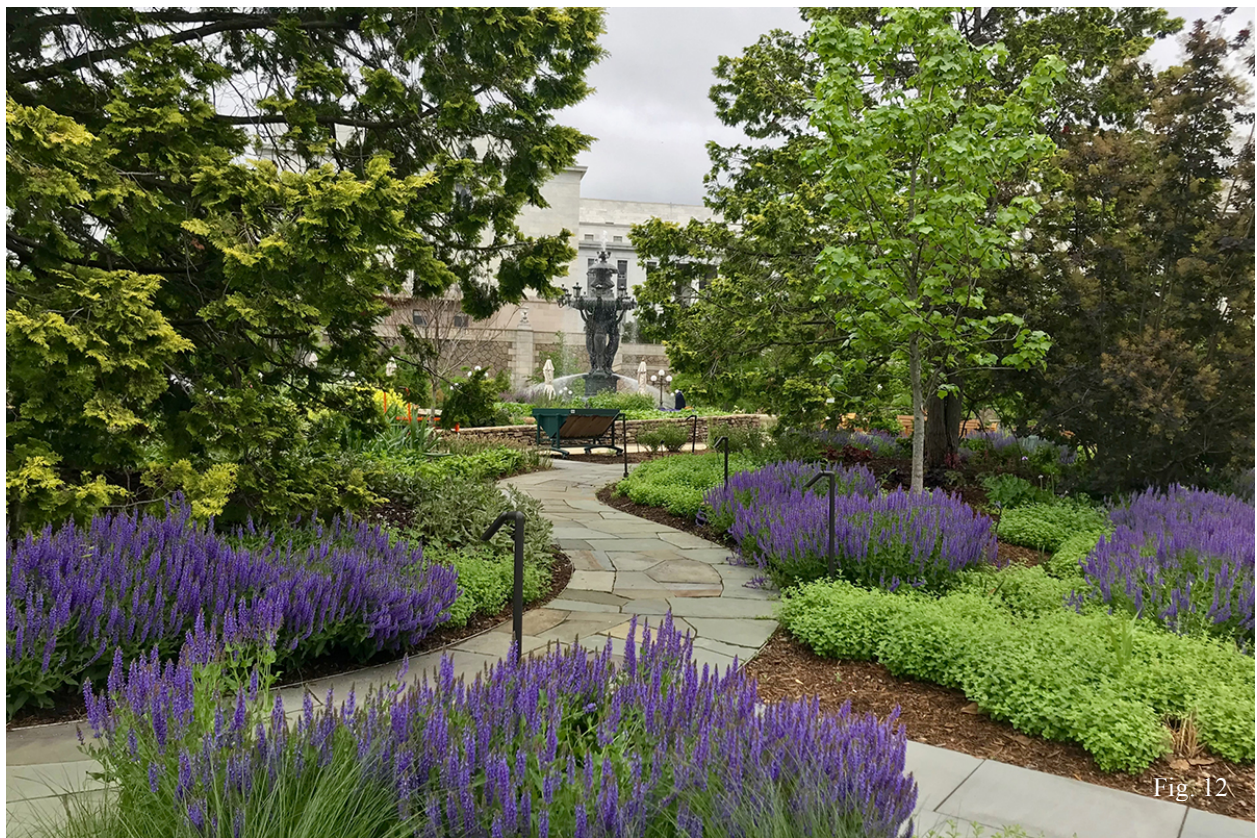
- Work with Congress to codify Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, so that it is permanent law for federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse health and environmental effects of agency actions on low-income and minority communities. ASLA also urges the Biden-Harris administration to develop additional guidelines on achieving “meaningful community engagement,” and include community representatives on the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice.
- Join stakeholders across the country in advancing the tenets of the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 5986), which help to ensure that all communities are protected from pollution and that all voices are heard in the federal environmental decision-making process. The measure also establishes grant programs that not only create outdoor and other recreational spaces for critically underserved communities, but also increase those communities’ access and mobility to public lands and recreational opportunities.
- ASLA urges the administration to consider policies that promote design techniques as a tool to address racial, environmental, and social justice for all. Landscape architects have the expertise and a proven track record in designing public spaces in a manner that can mitigate, reduce, and control crime. These well-designed public spaces, instead, promote positive social interactions and community harmony. During last summer’s public calls for racial justice, many landscape architecture projects were reimaged to become safe, accessible, and equitable stages for social change.



## Conclusion

Landscape architecture is everywhere. From the largest community master plan to the smallest community pocket park, landscape architects design, maintain, and protect the built environment all around us. Landscape architects are not only designing critical infrastructure, resilient open spaces, and places for community gathering – they’re also designing public policies that support their vital work.

ASLA and the thousands of members we represent strongly urge the Biden-Harris administration to review, adopt, and put into action the policy recommendations contained in this report. Further, we urge this administration to call on landscape architects to aid in drafting additional proposals to design communities that are vibrant, resilient, and just for all.



## List of Images

Figure 1: 2020 ASLA Professional Urban Design Award of Excellence. Dilworth Park. OLIN (Image credit: James Ewing / OTTO)

Figure 2: 2019 ASLA Professional General Design Honor Award. Sundance Square Plaza, The Heart of Fort Worth. Michael Vergason Landscape Architects (Image credit: Brian Luenser)

Figure 3: 2019 ASLA Professional Analysis and Planning Honor Award. Public Sediment for Alameda Creek. SCAPE (Image credit: SCAPE; Public Sediment Team)

Figure 4: 2016 ASLA Professional Communications Honor Award. Sea Change: Boston. Sasaki Associates (Image credit: Sasaki Associates)

Figure 5: 2019 ASLA Professional General Design Honor Award. Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park Phase II: A New Urban Ecology. SWA/BALSLEY and WEISS/MANFREDI with ARUP (Image credit: Singleton/SWA, courtesy of SWA/BALSLEY and WEISS/MANFREDI)

Figure 6: 2017 ASLA Professional General Design Award of Excellence. Klyde Warren Park - Bridging the Gap in Downtown Dallas. OJB Landscape Architecture (Image credit: Thomas McConnell Photography)

Figure 7: 2019 ASLA Professional General Design Honor Award. Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park Phase II: A New Urban Ecology. SWA/BALSLEY and WEISS/MANFREDI with ARUP (Image credit: Lloyd/SWA, courtesy of SWA/BALSLEY and WEISS/MANFREDI)

Figure 8: 2020 ASLA Professional Urban Design Honor Award. The 606. Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. (Image credit: Alex MacLean)

Figure 9: 2018 ASLA Professional General Design Award of Excellence. Brooklyn Bridge Park: A Twenty Year Transformation. Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates (Image credit: Scott Shigley)

Figure 10: 2018 ASLA Professional General Design Honor Award. Re-Envisioning Pulaski Park. Stimson (Image credit: Ngoc Doan)

Figure 11: 2017 ASLA Professional Analysis and Planning Honor Award. Fitzgerald Revitalization Project: Landscapes as the Framework for Community Reinvestment. Spackman Mossop Michaels (Image credit: Alexa Bush)

Figure 12: Bartholdi Park at the U.S. Botanic Garden, Washington, D.C. Andropogon