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January forecast in landscape architecture: Back to the future for 2015

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Wow what a year 2014 was here in New England! Throughout this economic uptick, William Fleming Associates has been fortunate enough to work with many great clients and some of the best commercial developers throughout New England. As with many professions, landscape architecture is experiencing a resurgence in development project's because our client's needs to meet a new goal - a "green" goal. WFA has been a part of this evolving profession for over 30 years and no other time has been seen as so challenging as the upcoming problems we are facing. Consumers are more educated on environmental issues and taking them more seriously and these values will be important as the national merchants are becoming green to match this goal. Our growth over the past decade along with the economic downturn has put tremendous pressure on our landscapes both suburban and rural. In order to develop centers for commerce in these underdeveloped areas we constructed the infrastructure to service these new locations of human activity. Incrementally our clients have financed many necessary city/town improvements from sewer, water, traffic and addressed neighborhood problems including an increased tax base. Therefore, skills of environmental design professionals will become increasingly valuable for all communities. The building industry professionals are working diligently to achieve a balance of thoughtful and profitable green projects!

As we enter 2015, after a couple of resurgent economic years, we are confronted with the absolute need for innovation. Americans if nothing else are entrepreneurs! Everyone, of our clients is an innovator, explorer and to a certain extent are calculated risk takers. The new financial engineering that can best build the new infrastructure is the "x" in the equation. The "x" of financings equation is how to identify the ongoing value of savings to the end using tenants and the community at large and how profitable sustainable design/the LEED process is to our clients, during the entire life of a project. Being a landscape architect and a practicing architect, it always seemed logical to embrace a sustainable design process. We have worked to incorporate low impact design/rain garden/roof garden systems to increase energy efficiency and environmental quality. Now that I am LEED-NC-AP, building the future is about the bottom line, how to confront growing costs of energy and to improve quality of life at the same time. I was reminded by my son who works with me about a movie called Back to the Future Part II (he was 9 when the movie came out in 1989 and I was 39!), and was set in 1985 with the future being set in October 2015! We both feel dated from this, but we have looked back at the movie to see what the movie had right: personal hoverboards and flying cars are being developed (can't wait to get one of those), flat panel television sets mounted on walls, the ability to watch six channels at once, Internet video chat systems like Facetime also the town center had rain gardens, smart lighting and a mixed use downtown with commercial tenants as anchors. But for the most part what we both liked about the movie is to think of the future from a

design perspective and what advances we can make in the next 25 years!

Boston is at a moment in time where they can seriously think about the future on many different social, economic and infrastructure issues as we are the United States of America's representative for the 2024 Olympic Bid. For those pundits out there who think Boston should not be entertaining the notion of being a host city obviously haven't seen Back to the Future Part II and what a future visioning process can create! Quite frankly all these issues have been kicked down the street for years and we need to plan for the future even if we do not become the host city for the Olympics, visioning / planning for the future is needed more than ever with the expanding population! Many of these important systems have been accomplished without breaking the bank. WFA suggests further incremental inclusion of a few of these green building ideas so in time our clients can bank the results. The verification of these green - building system tests is in the cost savings. Design professionals are working diligently to incorporate the sustainable solutions and identify the results. Our culture has been shocked into a world of conservation. The automobile industry leaders are now obsessed with efficiency, as the electric/hybrid car is in our shopping center parking lots.

Flat roofs will be vegetated, pitched roofs with photovoltaic / solar panels will use sun energy to heat the hot water, run automatic building systems and to re-energize customer's electric cars! The best innovators and entrepreneurs (our clients) are ready to meet the smart growth, integrated developments and other multi-use prototypes that will yield the "quality of life" desired by the public. All of the above innovations came to fruition thru years of trial and error so as Boston plans for 2024, I ask them to plan for 2050! As both my son and I know too well the future will be here before you know it!

Marty McFly: Tell me about my future. I know I make it big, but do I become, like a rich rock star?

Doc: Please Marty, No one should know too much about their destiny.

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