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When cutting costs for a project, landscape architects should be considered a critical team member

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In these tough economic times, it's easy to jettison design team members who may appear extraneous. As tends to be the case, appearances are often deceiving. When it comes to designing and approving a project trying to cut costs with the design team will result in time lost during approvals. As the adage says, in design development, time is money.

Although a property owner or developer may believe they can save some preconstruction costs by reducing the size of the design team, most times this is not to be. Even simple properly zoned projects within existing corporate parks require a plethora of consultants. Engineers can find a solution to your problem, but they rarely find the right one straight out of the box and they seem reluctant to consider multiple options. Architects often do concept site plans, but usually are not prepared to do full submission drawings. Landscape architects are trained to consider the overall context, multiple options, and how best to present the information to Boards and Commissions to get across highly specialized information in a manner the general public understands. They are generally the least expensive consultant and prepare the most plans - grading, erosion control, lighting, planting, and layout.

Too often, a project sponsor knows that they have to have an engineer (for utilities) and an architect (for the building) and no one else seems important. Unfortunately, with the current regulatory environment, you most likely also need a soil scientist, wetlands biologist, traffic consultant, and other specialists. These consultants are hired to answer specific questions and then they are done. Landscape architects can help identify pitfalls to be avoided, provide a clear interpretation of the regulations, and help you visualize the ultimate final solution. Landscape architects are generalists. We look at both the big picture and those nagging details. Because some of what we do seems to overlap with those "essential" consultants (engineers and architects), a landscape architect is often considered a "luxury."

A good landscape architect can prepare site plans which provide the interface between engineers and architects and which consider the human environment being created. It's not just about parking for 80 cars, but the layout of 80 parking spaces in a manner that is clear and understandable to an inexperienced 16 year old shopper, an uncertain 70 year old driver, and a hassled parent with kids. It's about entrance and arrival; procession and spaces; and visual clues. And, of course, it should meet all municipal requirements and handle fire trucks.

It is surprisingly easy to identify those projects designed by landscape architects, both historic and new. The original campus of CIGNA created a landscape of corporate success; the new Central Core of Central Conn. State University is designed to emphasize the center of campus in a way that works on both a human and grand scale; the Shoppes at Farmington Valley create an exciting new main street shopping experience. These places are considered memorable to visitors, residents,

and staff. All are the work of landscape architects and a team of designers.

Landscape architects are often called on to "pretty up" a plan with plants. A poorly designed site plan won't be anything but that even with lots of nice trees and shrubs. Landscape architects should be considered an essential part of the design team no matter the times. Plus, in these days of "green" awareness, landscape architects have been using "green" principals to improve the overall human experience for over a century.

Terri-Ann Hahn, ASLA, CPESC, CPSWQ is a principal at LADA, P.C., Simsbury, Conn.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540