

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2 **MICHIGAN** CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY  
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# MISITES





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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings fellow landscape architects and colleagues!

Well, it happened again. I blinked, and now the holiday season is upon us and we're staring right at 2019. The memories of spring and summer that felt so fresh in my mind are quickly fading, thanks in part to the early appearance of Jack Frost. The premature presence of accumulated snow likely has you either smiling or grimacing as you look out your window. Whether you are ready to break out the snow shoes and sleds, or you are returning to your annual tradition of looking for real estate in Florida, the white landscape signals the inevitable final act of the year and sets the stage for our perennial 'new beginning'. What does 2019 have in store for you? Our chapter? Our profession?

As faithfully as the New Year comes, as does our annual tradition of setting new goals, dreams, and resolutions for the upcoming year. We set personal goals and professional goals, goals for our businesses, our families, and our futures—all focused around helping us grow and live happier, fuller lives. What if this year you included a goal relative to the profession of landscape architecture as well? Michigan ASLA members and friends, this year I have a challenge for you:

**Help elevate our chapter and profession by becoming a leader and advocate of our profession.**

This may sound daunting to some people, while to others it may be the type of mentality you exhibit on a daily basis. Start with the level of leadership you are feel comfortable

with—but push your boundaries. Not many people casually enter the field of landscape architecture. Landscape Architects are passionate about their work and the impact, both realized and potential, that we have on the future of our world. And our profession needs passionate leaders on every front. Our profession still flies under the radar and we can be marginalized because of that. The world deserves, and desperately needs, landscape architects to be the leaders of the greater design profession in the 21st century—and we need to answer that call and take the lead. No one else is going to do it for us. Are you up for the challenge?

This is a great issue of MiSITES to read as you reflect on this challenge. These pages feature insights from our Chapter's newest Fellow, a model leader of our profession, Tom Mroz; an article detailing a variety of tools we can utilize to successfully promote our profession; and examples of how our Chapter is utilizing social media to spread awareness about landscape architecture to a greater audience.

I hope you enjoy this issue of MiSITES and are inspired to take a hand in the leadership of this profession. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or other members of the Executive Committee if you are interested in getting involved or are looking for support for your own leadership endeavors.

**Wes Landon, ASLA**  
President, Michigan Chapter of ASLA

## ON THE COVER:

Tom Mroz, FASLA, accepting the 2018 Firm of the Year award on behalf of SmithGroup at the 2018 MiASLA Conference.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5 Thomas L. Mroz, Jr., Elevated to ASLA's Council of Fellows
- 11 How Can We Better Promote Landscape Architecture?
- 14 @michiganasla Takes Off

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## STUDYING FOR THE LARE?

If you would like to sign up for LARE study groups, please email Dana at [education@michiganasla.org](mailto:education@michiganasla.org).

## SHARE AN IDEA!

If you would like to contribute to MiSITES, or suggest a topic or project to cover, please email: [SITESpublications@michiganasla.org](mailto:SITESpublications@michiganasla.org)



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**Amanda Nawara**

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Jen Miller sits down with Tom Mroz in his office at SmithGroup.  
(image source: SmithGroup)

# THOMAS L. MROZ, JR. ELEVATED TO ASLA'S COUNCIL OF FELLOWS

Jennifer Miller, SmithGroup

Tom Mroz has had a long and meaningful career—with 35 years of professional practice that included dozens of meaningful projects and scores of professionals who he has coached and mentored. So, it came as no surprise to clients, colleagues and peers to learn that Tom was to be recognized by the American Society of Landscape Architects Council of Fellows for his dedicated leadership and the transformative impact he has had on the profession.

I have had the pleasure of working with Tom at SmithGroup's Ann Arbor office for the last four years. For this very special assignment, I spoke at length to teammates who have enjoyed long careers working alongside Tom – including a few who've known Tom for their entire careers. I also sat down to interview Tom one-on-one about the stories that I'd learned throughout this process. I am excited to share this interview with MiASLA SITES and to shed light on what has shaped and driven Tom to become the admired and influential landscape architect and leader that he is today.

**JM:** *Tom, congratulations! I'm excited to talk with you about how you've gotten here, and to dig into what I have been hearing from some of your other colleagues.*

**TM:** *Thank you, Jen. Becoming a part of the ASLA Council of Fellows has been a huge honor. I am not sure what you have been hearing from others, but I hope it hasn't been too embarrassing.*

**JM:** *Not at all! In fact, our colleagues have offered a great deal of insight regarding why they believe you've earned this Fellowship. One thing that*

*amazes me is that you've spent your entire career dedicated to just one firm, SmithGroup.*

**TM:** *Yes. I've held several positions over the years, all of which have been at SmithGroup and all of which have allowed me to contribute to the firm's amazing growth. Early on, I was a project manager and team leader, getting experience on large and complex projects. Now, as Office Director for the company's Ann Arbor location I'm able to advance a fully integrated, interdisciplinary design culture and support the development of hundreds of landscape architects that spend time, or their entire careers, here.*

**JM:** *The full story is not just about your leadership at SmithGroup though. You have also been very active in ASLA.*

**TM:** *I spent multiple years serving on ASLA's Finance and Investments and Audit Committees, and I am currently a member of ASLA Board of Trustees serving on the Executive Committee as the Vice President of Finance. It has been a rewarding part of my career, allowing me to put my business experience and skills to work in ways that advance the profession and create opportunities for emerging landscape architects.*

**JM:** *I've heard a common thread from individuals I've talked to—you're a passionate advocate and driver of initiatives that support, mentor and develop future landscape architects. That seems to connect your career at SmithGroup and the work you've done with ASLA. In the short time I've worked with you I have seen it clearly as well. The inaugural scholarship you launched last year is a great example.*



Stephanie Onwenu, a recipient of SmithGroup's first Diversity and Inclusivity Scholarship Program, attends Michigan State University. She will earn a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture in December 2018 and is expected to receive a Master of Arts in Environmental Design in May 2019. (image source: SmithGroup)

**TM:** SmithGroup's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Program started here in Ann Arbor as a way of supporting professional development for landscape architecture students from underrepresented populations. Now the program has expanded as a companywide initiative developed to serve students from historically underrepresented demographics in other

disciplines as well. This year's landscape architecture recipient is Stephanie Onwenu. She is a senior at Michigan State University and just completed her second summer as an intern in this office.

**JM:** This isn't the first scholarship you've pioneered. You have a history of investing in the profession on the educational side. Tell me about that.

**TM:** At the University of Michigan I helped to establish the Clarence Roy Endowed Lecture. That was 17 years ago. Seven years ago, I helped to establish the Carl Johnson Endowed Visiting Professorship at Michigan State University.

**JM:** Truly awesome. I hear those are both still going strong. Let's go backwards a bit. How did you get started? What inspired you early on?

**TM:** While I was a student of landscape architecture at the University of Michigan I realized the impact that landscape architects could have on the natural and built environments—and on society at large. This realization was even more tremendous than I had initially thought when I first entered school. I was also always very interested in business and began to focus on the business side of landscape architecture. I saw business and leadership as a way for me to positively leverage those impacts through my work.

**JM:** So, you graduated as an ambitious and bright-eyed kid, basically. You joined this firm right away – which was Johnson, Johnson and Roy (JJR) at the time. Then what?

**TM:** That was in 1983. My very first project was a national ASLA award-winning transportation and recreation project in Franconia Notch, New Hampshire. It required a high level of multidisciplinary collaboration and really cemented the vital role of strong team leadership into my brain.

**JM:** It must have! Your long-time client Philip Obianwu at the Department of Veteran Affairs said that a lot of the projects you've worked on together over past seven years have been extremely complex, involving numerous

challenges and multi-faceted teams. He recognized that delivering those projects successfully has required superior leadership, management and perseverance on your part.

**TM:** The VA has a mandate for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) participation on many contracts. I've always had a strong commitment to that mandate and have pushed our teams to go beyond the minimal participation requirements and provide tangible training and professional development opportunities for SDVOSB firms alongside our staff as part of a truly integrated project team.

**JM:** You bring up another common thread that I've heard repeatedly, which is your authentic commitment to diversity—in the industry and profession overall; in the role it plays for keeping emerging professionals invested in their career development; and in the value that diversity brings to an integrated team.

**TM:** Absolutely! I have put a conscientious and pretty significant personal investment into ensuring that our recruiting practices, mentorship practices, and staff development activities promote an inclusive culture. I have some stats on how the Ann Arbor office alone has changed over the past seven years.



Leading by example as a trusted “go-to” resource, Tom has instilled in his teams unwavering perseverance amidst contracting constraints to deliver sustainable outcomes that have brought the Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration’s vision to fruition. (image source: SmithGroup)



Tom serves as an ambassador to the profession of landscape architecture. Here, he educates elementary school students on what it means to be a landscape architect by designing a park together. (image source: SmithGroup)

**JM:** You're a numbers guy. Let's have it!

**TM:** Since 2011, the percentage of women serving in professional roles has increased from 26 to 45 percent, while the number of professional staff from underrepresented populations has increased from 2 to 21 percent.

**JM:** That is transformational! What kinds of practices contribute to that success?

**TM:** It's a start. On the recruitment and hiring side, it is important to start with a diverse candidate pool. If our pool of applicants is not diverse we're doing something wrong in our advertising and recruiting for the position. Interview selection teams also need to be diverse. We have also started to conduct interviews in smaller groups comprised of one or two participants to avoid any "group think" that could happen.

In terms of office culture, it is about seeking meaningful ways to advance everyone's contributions. Flexible work schedules and patterns help. We also commit resources that empower staff to enroll in master's degree programs, or teach courses, or even work abroad to pursue research opportunities. As a firm, SmithGroup offers a range of opportunities that allow employees to take advantage of leadership development or seek grants for research opportunities—a process that is application-based. Of course, participating in ASLA at the state level is highly encouraged. In 2017, 33 percent of the MiASLA Executive Committee members and two participants in the ASLA National diversity summit were from our office.

**JM:** Ah, numbers again... That is great. I would like to stay on measurable impacts for a few minutes. One client and colleague that you've worked with for over 30 years, Barry Murray at the City of Dearborn, talked about how you have always shown leadership in organizational strategies and planning for the firm's future. Clearly, a big part of that resides in the approach you've taken to talent recruitment and professional development—something which has enabled our teams to consistently deliver high quality work even as individuals and teams have changed throughout the years. Another key to success has been your business acumen and foresight. SmithGroup has changed quite a bit in the time you have spent here. Tell me about your role in that change.

**TM:** *In the past seven years the firm's revenues have increased by 67 percent. We have been able to grow steadily despite downturns in the economy because we have embraced strategies that keep staff engaged, keep morale up, and enable us to leverage business development efforts.*

**JM:** *What kinds of strategies?*

**TM:** *From a leadership perspective, the key is to guide people to develop their own solutions instead of dictating solutions. It fosters an entrepreneurial mindset and encourages people to take some risks. That kind of mindset is what you need to stay resilient when the business economy is difficult.*

**JM:** *That's a great approach. Has it always been part of your practice?*

**TM:** *As JJR's CFO I worked with three different CEO's from 1995 to 2011, and that was always a part of the firm's culture. Over that span of 16 years we managed to expand the business geographically and in breadth of practice, which meant moving beyond traditional landscape architectural practices and growing to include environmental science and waterfront design. And we won over 150 awards for our work, 80 of which came from ASLA.*

As a leader, an advocate, and a colleague, pride, passion and dedication permeate every facet of Tom's work. And it is an honor to see his many years of commitment recognized by the American Society of Landscape Architects. From his role as director of SmithGroup's Ann Arbor office, to his seat on the firm's Board of Directors, and his position as chair of the company's Finance Committee, Tom Mroz has been a consistent and exemplary leader. He has also significantly advanced the profession of landscape architecture through his commitment to cultivating the next generation of landscape architects. And his success in developing and launching initiatives that promote diversity in the firm and throughout the profession sets a new and promising standard of leadership. Tom's elevation to the ASLA Council of Fellows is well earned. Congratulations, Tom.

*Jennifer Miller is the Marketing Manager at SmithGroup's Ann Arbor office. Contact: [jennifer.miller@smithgroup.com](mailto:jennifer.miller@smithgroup.com).*

## EDUCATION

Master of Business Administration, University of Michigan, 1986

Master of Landscape Architecture, University of Michigan, 1982

Bachelor of Science in Horticulture, Cum Laude, Univ. of Maryland, 1980

## EXPERIENCE

2011 – Present Senior Vice President / AA Office Director, SmithGroup

2001 – 2011 Senior Vice President, JJR

1995 – 2011 Principal and CFO, JJR

1990 – 1995 Studio Director and Principal, JJR

1987 – 1990 Project Manager and Associate, JJR

1984 – 1987 Landscape Architect, JJR

1983 – 1984 Site Designer, Johnson, Johnson and Roy (JJR)



SmithGroup's Ann Arbor office participates annually in the Greater Ann Arbor Area Commuter Challenge which encourages sustainable commuting. (image source: SmithGroup)



News coverage of the Chicago Riverwalk project failed to mention the planner and landscape architect, Sasaki. (Image credit: Christian Phillips Photography)

# HOW CAN WE BETTER PROMOTE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE?

Damian Holmes, PLA, World Landscape Architect

*This article is reprinted with permission from the Damian Holmes. The article originally appeared online at [www.worldlandscapearchitect.com](http://www.worldlandscapearchitect.com).*

In a recent World Landscape Architecture (WLA) reader survey, the most common answer to the question What is your biggest problem you face working as a landscape architect? was a lack a recognition of landscape architecture by the allied professionals and clients. What is the solution to our lack of recognition? How do we let people know what landscape architects do and the value that we bring?

Landscape architects are often conflicted as they seek to create better places often thinking of the profession as a vocation and therefore wish to be humble achievers in the background rather than our colleagues in other professions who seek the limelight, we often don't promote our role and also not acknowledged by architects or clients as was recently highlighted by a New York Times feature piece about the Chicago Riverwalk which didn't mention the role of Sasaki – the landscape architect for the project. We need to as a profession need to lose the notion that we are in a vocation and that landscape architecture is a profession like so many others that in an ever-increasing world of noise needs to grow a stronger voice to promote our work beyond that of our own profession. (If you don't have the 5 minutes to read this article skip to the In Summary at the end).

## **Simplify Our Language**

The first step is to change and improve our use of language, landscape architects are known to not write and also when we do we use a blanket of jargon to create a sense of knowledge and academia around our work which in turn often alienates those who wish to learn more. Listen or read any recent

presentation and you will find that there are peppering of jargon including public realm, tactical urbanism, spatial awareness and many others phrases that create a barrier between the profession and those who we seek to engage and acknowledgement.

A great example of using simple everyday language is the Landscape Institute's #ChooseLandscape campaign which discusses places, outdoors, spaces, environment, nature allowing those viewing and reading the message to quickly and easily understand what landscape architects do and the range of careers that landscape architects can choose.

## **Storytelling**

As landscape architects, we need to improve the way we explain our designs, often we are too engrossed in analysis and explaining our response to the site that we forget to create a story about the design and what we have created a space for people and other inhabitants. This could be that we were not educated in our university courses to create stories and narratives but more to justify our designs. We need to become better storytellers through written and visual media, whether it be a display board, presentation or video.

## **Go Where They Are**

As landscape architects, we often attend or present at our own industry meetings which are great for sharing knowledge but all too often we are “preaching to the converted” and offer a chance to showcase the industry, however, we need to increase the wider recognition of the profession. Instead, we should strive to present at events to increase our recognition whether it be a cities conference, design event, industry event to let architects, engineers, planners, real estate professionals and others learn about landscape

architecture and the role we play and the value we provide.

### **Education Sessions**

Often architects, engineers, clients have regular training sessions (informal and formal) where someone from the team or a guest comes and provides some insight and learnings. As landscape architects, we can take advantage of this and offer to present on a topic and some learnings. It is important to understand the value of their time and that these sessions are not your chance to present the company profile or advertorial, but it is better to create a presentation that provides 2-4 key learnings that showcase how as landscape architects you can add value to a project.

### **Provide Good Examples or Offer a Meeting**

We often come face to face with the lack of recognition when we go to a party or meeting just listening to the usual comments about landscape architects just adding trees to a design or changing the topic, we should instead talk about the most recent, widely publicised project and explain how a landscape architect was responsible for designing it. Or alternatively, pull out your business card or calendar and offer to have a meeting with them and their colleagues about their next project and how landscape architects could assist and add value to their project.

### **Adding Value**

We often struggle with showing the public and clients the value of landscape, whether it is in dollars or in improved living and health benefits. Landscape architects are often too close to our own profession and forget to remind people of the benefits of trees, the benefits of water and green spaces as we feel that it is common knowledge, however in a world that is consistently bombarded with information, many people forget the simple facts and value that nature provides on a daily basis.

### **Advocate for Professional Recognition**

Not all countries have professional landscape architecture organisations such as ASLA, Landscape Institute, SILA or legislation recognising the profession.

Landscape architects and universities in these countries need to advocate for government to recognise the profession and have the ability to set up professional organisations freely.

### **Stop Asking Permission**

The media world has changed immensely in the last ten years, landscape architects have access to the internet and can publish their message through websites, blogs, videos, social media. The gatekeepers of the printing press are no longer restricting you from publishing your message. You are freely able to get the message out to the world whether in short tweets or posts on Instagram. You have the power to publish and the ability to spread your message and story about your work and landscape architecture.

### **Start with Social Media**

To get your message out you can learn about social media through publishing and see what works. There are many landscape architects on social media who are currently promoting landscape architecture, however, there could be many more. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are visual and highly suited to the publication of landscape architecture. The images do not have to be professional looking photos of finished projects, they can be a day to day life of a landscape architect or process of design, there are no set rules for social media, you can choose the message and stories you wish to tell. You may think you haven't got the time but all it takes is the spare 2-3 minutes per day or week to consistently publish an image with an explanation or story. Joining platforms is as easy, just set up an account and starting to publish about landscape architecture (using tags such as #landarch) whether its daily or weekly, the key is to start and be consistent. Also, remember social media is social so respond to questions or statements.

### **Join a Campaign**

Joining social media campaigns to increase awareness whether it is World Landscape Architecture Month #WLAM or #ChooseLandscape or getting behind your local landscape architecture organisation, city or non-profit campaign to improve the liveability of your city or country.

### Call It Out

If you see an article like the New York Times article about Chicago Times be like Gina Ford and call it out on twitter or through email/phone call. Or if you don't like publically calling out newspapers, organisations or companies then just add a retweet or repost with note or hashtag like #designedbylandscapearchitect or #thisislandscapearchitecture.

### Celebrate Everyone

The best way to get responses to your press releases, tweets, instagram posts is to celebrate everyone on a project. When publishing a project on your website or an industry blog request that they list the landscape architect and associated consultants and builders such as the engineers, lighting designers, etc. This not only honours their work but also shows that as a profession we collaborate with many people. It is also highly important to coordinated your press releases and social media to generate more buzz around your work.

**In Summary** landscape architects should do the following to increase recognition:

- Simplify your language
- Discuss the way [landscape architects] add value
- Tell stories
- Educate through example
- Present to other professions
- Advocate for professional recognition
- Publish when and wherever you can
- Use the power of social media
- Call out those who don't acknowledge the roll of landscape architects
- Celebrate everyone on your project team (client, consultants, etc).

*Damian Holmes is the Founder and Editor of WLA. He is also a registered Landscape Architect and has extensive experience as a landscape architect in Australia, Canada, and China. Contact: damian@damianholmes.com.*



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## Congratulations to the following landscape designers in Michigan who recently passed the LARE exam!

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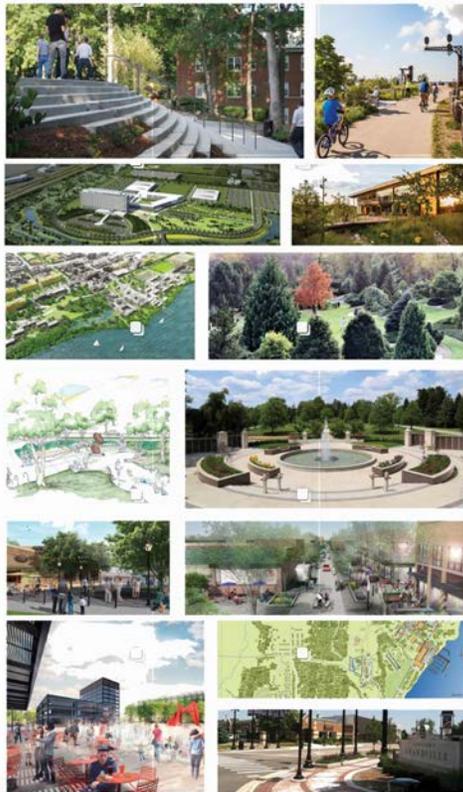


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# @MICHIGANASLA TAKES OFF

## Meghan Diecchio, PLA, ASLA, and Dana Hernalsteen, ASLA

In spring 2017 Michigan ASLA launched its Instagram account with the goal of promoting landscape architecture in the state of Michigan and better connecting chapter members through social media.

Now, with over 730 followers and 1700 impressions each week, the recently-formed Social Media Committee manages content updates. New content is posted at least three times a week and highlights members; projects from across Michigan, the country and world; state and national events and educational opportunities; products and sponsors; and design inspiration. The Michigan State University ASLA Club and University of Michigan SASLA post each month as well.

Last April, as part of the annual World Landscape Architecture Month, the Social Media Committee posted on a near-daily basis, with student chapters each “taking over” for a week. See a snapshot of the WLAM feed at left.

The current Social Media Committee members are:

- Ariana Zannetti, chair, City of Detroit P&R
- Allie Pearson, Grissim Metz
- Britta L. Gregorski, Mannik Smith Group
- Dana Hernalsteen, HamiltonAnderson

If you'd like to get involved in the committee, contact: [education@michiganasla.org](mailto:education@michiganasla.org).

Instagram posts are also shared on Facebook and Twitter. Follow along by searching for the handles to the right in your preferred platform.



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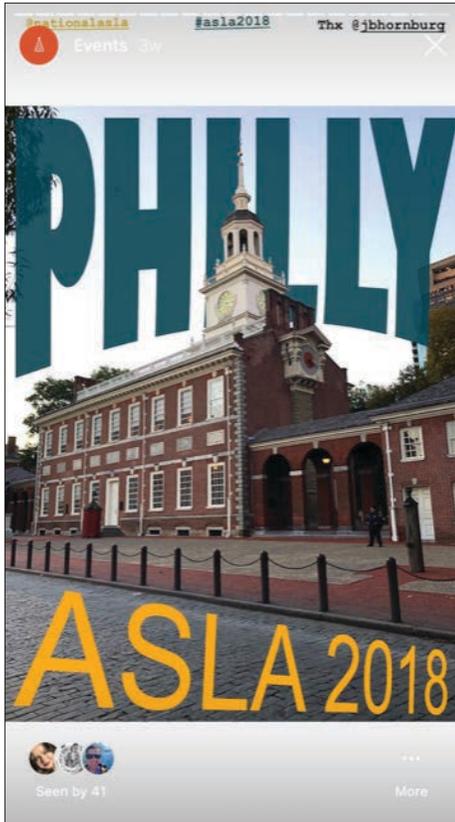
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Recent Instagram highlight story from ASLA Convention.



Snapshot of the @michiganasla Instagram feed.



Recent Member Spotlight featuring Wes Landon.



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### MiSITES Editorial Board

Meghan Diecchio, ASLA

Kelly Burks, ASLA

sitespublications@michiganasla.org

### VP of Membership

Adam Fercho, ASLA

### Sponsorship & Advertising Sales

Wesley Landon, ASLA

sitespublications@michiganasla.org

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Want to get involved? MiASLA is always looking for chapter members to participate at a greater level. Please feel free to reach out to the Executive Committee or staff members: [manager@michiganasla.org](mailto:manager@michiganasla.org).

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