

Session Descriptions | WI ASLA Spring Conference 2026

General Session A

Title: *Landscape Architecture*

Presenter: Torey Carter-Coneen, CEO, ASLA

Education Session: 1A

Title: *Can Landscape Architects Better Inform General Contractors?*

Presenters: Tom Mortensen & Sarah McDonald

Description: As landscape architects, there are times when our designs are not executed and installed as we envisioned or intended. No matter how tight the specs are written, or how many notes and details are on the plan sheets, the end result can be disappointing. Construction administration and oversight is not always in our contracts, but as Landscape Architects, we can inform and engage with general contractors and owners at the beginning of a project to set expectations and achieve better results.

Education Session: 1B

Title: *The Cooling Effect of Trees From Parcel to City Scales*

Presenter: Bob Smail, WDNR - Division of Forestry

Description: This course will describe the physiological process by which trees directly cool the environment around them. It will also demonstrate how trees can be selected and strategically placed to maximize their cooling benefit at the parcel scale. This course will then demonstrate how these cooling processes scale up to the urban forest canopy and provide microclimate refugia from urban heat islands. Examples will show how this information can be used in project design.

Education Session: 2A

Title: *Two Micro Projects: Opportunities and More Opportunities*

Presenter: Shawn T. Kelly, PLA, FASLA

Description: Two projects will be illustrated from the perspective of ADA access considerations within stormwater challenged sites. Both projects are small scale, but with great potential for benefit to the local environment with proper consideration of aggressive stormwater management options.

Education Session: 2B

Title: *The Case for Longevity in the Tree Selection Criteria*

Presenter: Jay Weiss, Executive Director, Cambridge Tree Project

Description: Forestry professionals often select species for urban tolerance yet overlook those with genetic strength for true longevity. This presentation will examine Wisconsin's most frequently planted trees and contrast them with overlooked, resilient species capable of thriving for generations, challenging conventional choices and highlighting the trees with enduring value for our landscapes.

Education Session: 3A

Title: *Walter Bubbert: Wisconsin's Mid-Century Modern Man*

Presenter: Therese Gripentrog, PLA

Description: Walter Bubbert was a Landscape Architect, Cultural Historian, and Socialist. He was a 1931 graduate of the UW-Madison and, in addition to designing many residential estates, he was co-founder of the WI ASLA, a WPA employee and advocate for protecting important state landscapes, the first Chairman of the WI State Centennial Committee, and the long-time colleague and friend of Jens Jensen/Landscape Architect; Charles Brown/State Archaeologist; and Frank Zeidler/Milwaukee's last Socialist Mayor.

Education Session: 3B

Title: *AI and the New Era of Park Planning*

Presenter: Ryan Peterson, PLA

Description: Is traditional park planning broken? Growing demands, aging infrastructure and limited resources suggest it might be. In this session, we'll introduce a smarter way forward; one that uses automation, GIS and artificial intelligence to guide planning and investment. We'll explore how, by weaving together applied science, community voices and thoughtful design, cities can build park systems that are smarter and more sustainable, and that provide lasting value for generations to come.

Education Session: 4A

Title: *Heads Above Water: Interactive Mapping Tools for Coastal Resilience Planning*

Presenters: Ben Yahr, PLA and Janet Silbernagel, PhD, SITES AP

Description: Planning resilient Great Lakes shorelines is a complex endeavor! Extreme storms, changing lake levels, eroding shorelines, and heightened development pressures present unique design challenges. The ability to communicate and collaborate across diverse teams and stakeholders calls for novel approaches. We will share projects in Milwaukee and Door Counties that leverage web-based GIS tools in new ways to efficiently create public facing platforms for collaborative design support, allowing users to

Education Session: 4B

Title: *Nature Playspaces: Learning From the Past, Planning for the Future*

Presenter: Suzanne Quinn, PhD

Description: We are seeing a trend toward nature-based play and play in nature in parks and outdoor spaces. We will discuss the history of dedicated play spaces for play in nature and play with natural elements, review current research on the benefits of nature and nature play for health and wellness and share ideas on designing a built environment that works with nature to support the benefits of active outdoor play.

General Session B / Keynote

Title: *Unfinished Landscapes: The Endless Bloom of Potential*

Presenter: Nahid Afsari, PE

Description: Nahid will share her story of transforming an entry-level structural engineer position into a dream of founding her own business, effectively turning blueprints into reality. She leads teams, builds trusted relationships, sets strategic plans, serves as a mentor, and is known for her creative approach to solving challenging problems. Her presentation promises to challenge your mindset, attempt to define potential, urge you to reflect on your past, and pro-actively plan for your future.

Education Session: 5

Title: *The Plants You Choose Matters: Genetics, Maintenance, and Function*

Presenters: Ben French and Eric Magnes, Johnson's Nursery

Description: There's a hidden cost when selecting the wrong plant for a landscape. If you're not considering where that plant came from, how it survives in our soils, and changes over time then you're thinking too short term. The reality is at some point your masterpiece design will no longer get the care it needs to sustain its form. Will your plant selections lead to an ecological nightmare that future land owners have to fight or will it turn into a haven of biodiversity? They don't have to!

General Session C / Ethics

Title: *Ethics: Professional, Social, and Environmental Considerations*

Presenter: Andrew McAnich, PhD

Description: This course guides participants through a discussion of timely topics in professional ethics, with a focus on the social and environmental context in which individuals face ethically significant decisions. Topics may include the ethics of professional conscientious objection, the use of public resources for private enterprise, the environmental impacts of emerging technologies, and the challenge of resolving collective action problems.

Optional Off-site Tour

Title: *Firefly Park - Wauwatosa*

Presenter: Alex Krutsch and Stephanie Wilson, PLA, ASLA, CPSI

Description: This walking tour explores Firefly Grove Park, a 100% grant-funded project emphasizing ecological resilience and inclusive play. Participants will examine features including a permeable-pavement, solar arrays, and regional stormwater management. We will also discuss the integration of Thomas Dambo's "Mama Rosa" troll as a tool for environmental stewardship and community engagement within a sustainable landscape framework.