

## Bill plants seeds for landscape licensing

by Paul Snyder

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Shawn Kelly's 20-year-old California landscape architect license gives him a competitive advantage landing jobs in Wisconsin.

But he's doing everything he can to sacrifice that advantage.

"My focus goes far beyond Wisconsin," said Kelly, the founder of Williams Bay-based Kelly Design Group LLC and a fellow with the American Society of Landscape Architects. "I'm interested in the health, safety and public welfare, and that's why it's important to make sure there are licenses in Wisconsin."

For 11 years, Kelly has tried to make landscape architecture a licensed profession in Wisconsin. The state in 1994 began certifying landscape architects, but it remains one of only five states that do not offer licenses.

In a way, Kelly said, word choice is the only difference between a certificate and a license. To gain certification, a landscape architect applicant must take a three-day, 24-hour test given by the state's Joint Examining Board of Architects, Landscape Architects and Professional Engineers. The Landscape Architect Accreditation Board then grants or rejects the certification.

The bill would upgrade certified landscape architect in the state to a licensed landscape architect. It would not change the examination or alter the standards by which applicants are certified.

But, fearing they would lose business without a license, landscapers, nursery planners and landscape designers opposed previous versions of the bill.

State Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, who is sponsoring the latest version of the bill, said he was at first nervous about its effect on other professions.

"But there's really so many exceptions," he said. "I don't think it's limiting at all."

The bill exempts licensing requirements for biologists, professional geologists, professional soil scientists, people who work on their own property, and people who plan the selection, placement or use of plants or site features, such as sculptures.

"We didn't have that language in there before," Kelly said. "We needed it. We kept adding all these amendments last year, and it still didn't make it beyond the committee level."

The Senate Committee on Labor, Elections and Urban Affairs on Tuesday will hold an executive session on the [bill](#). Kelly said many previous detractors spoke in support of the bill at hearings earlier this year.

With those protections built in, Kelly said, the difference between a certificate and a license can really be examined.

"If some out-of-state firm comes into town and wants to build a hospital, they're going to be looking for licensed landscape architects to be part of the design team," he said. "All these directives for federal projects are targeted at licensed professionals."

Madison landscape architect Bruce Woods is at a competitive disadvantage to those who are licensed in his field. Woods is certified in Wisconsin and practiced landscape architecture for many years before the state began certification in 1994.

The certification works in Wisconsin, he said, but the odds are low he could get work in any other state.

"Certain states have reciprocity," he said. "But one of the reasons I only work in Wisconsin is because to get that, I'd probably have to take the test somewhere else."

A Wisconsin license would let Woods compete in a broader market.

That license also would render meaningless the 20-year-old piece of paper that gives Kelly his advantage.

"I'm going to have a lot more bidders on projects, aren't I?" he said. "Yeah, how silly for me."

"But this is something that allows all of us to sit at the table and compete on a national level."