

## HOW DO I HIRE A LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR?

I have written this article from my perspective as a Landscape Contractor who through the years has been asked this very question many times.

There are three basic steps:

1. Creating a Scope of Work
2. Capital Improvement Plan
3. Company Qualifications

### 1. CREATING A SCOPE OF WORK

Property management people often ask for bids from contractors with little or no idea as to what they want done. Be prepared, do your homework and create a scope of work specific to the property in question. If you do not feel confident creating a thorough scope of work, hire a consultant.

- Create or obtain a map of the community that is clear and large enough to read. Detail the exact areas of the property that are to be serviced.
- Clearly spell out what duties are to be performed in what areas. For example, determine how often the grass will be mowed and which areas, if any, will be overseeded with winter grass. Determine how often the shrubs and hedges need pruning based on plant type and location. Trees along the pool patio or in high traffic areas may require pruning at least twice a year. Perimeter trees may only need annual pruning.
- Determine a monthly water budget based on the plant water requirements.
- Specify if there are certain hours that the irrigation is not allowed to operate in order to minimize evaporation and/or liability.
- Specify if the contractor will be using on site trash dumpsters or be required to haul away debris.
- It is important to be specific about how extra work such as storm damage, vandalism or accidents will be handled. Will there be additional billing charges?
- Communicate to the contractor the Homeowners Association's rules, which may include that the Contractor and employees wear uniforms and name badges, check in with the onsite manager, and possible special operating times of noisy equipment.
- Know what the residents are expecting their community to look like. Would they like the shrubs to be manicured or natural looking?

An on site pre-bid meeting is an ideal way to distribute your scope of work to all the contractors interested in bidding on your property. This is a good time to answer questions that may arise.

### 2. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Consideration for capital improvements is often overlooked in landscaping. Plants, irrigation systems, walls and patios need to be factored in for renovations and upgrades. Associations make plans or provisions to paint the units, resurface the drives and parking lots, but are totally unprepared when the 10 or 15 year old sprinkler system starts failing. It may be important that the company you hire have a design staff and construction crew to assist you in these upgrades or possible remodels.

### 3. COMPANY QUALIFICATIONS

The company must be licensed, bonded and insured to work in the State of Arizona. Ask for proof. The company must hold a current contractors' license, not just a business license.

It is a good idea to ask for a company profile. This tells how long the company has been in business, how many employees it has and the structure of the company. Ask for and call references. Call the Registrar of Contractors to find out if the contractor has had any complaints filed against him or her.

It is important that a member of the onsite staff have an industry certification such as a Arizona Certified Landscape Professional or from the International Society of Arborists.

The more information you have up front, the more comfortable you will feel working with the contractor. Be prepared, and every thing should work out fine.

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