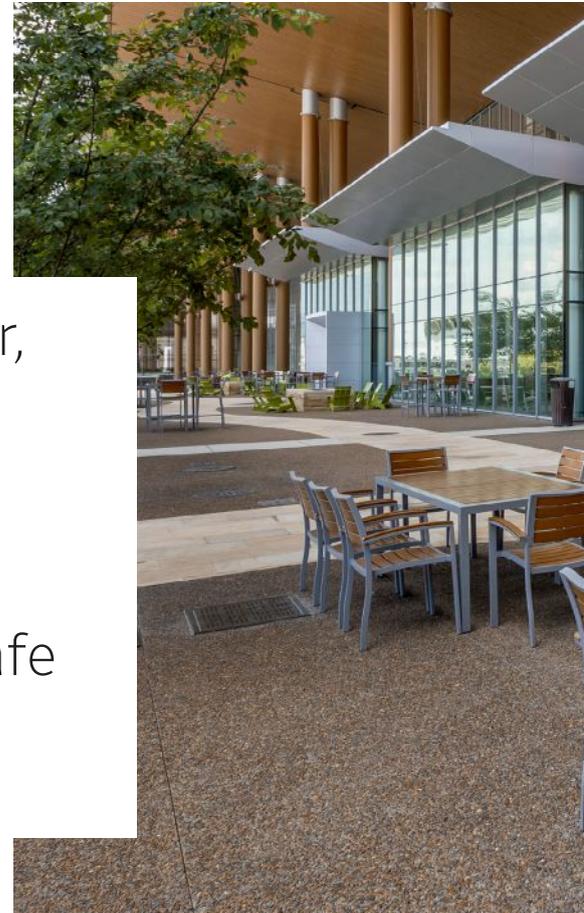


NASHVILLE CONFERENCE PLANS PROGRESSING

A lot could happen by November, but things are looking up. Here are some of the reasons we are confident that the ASLA Conference and EXPO can be safe and successful in 2021.

BY RUSS KLETTKE



Executive Summary

- ▶ **The meetings industry has developed rigorous coronavirus safety protocols**
- ▶ **Music City Center at this moment is a mass vaccination site**
- ▶ **Exhibitors and landscape architects want to convene - in person**

After more than a year of COVID-19, with all of the changes and disruptions and heartache it brought, it may seem a fool's errand to predict the future. But it's also been a year of learning a lot about how the virus is transmitted, and how safe behaviors and the vaccines are effective at slowing its spread. Along the way the meetings industry has learned how to conduct business despite limitations.



And fortunately for everyone looking forward to attending the 2021 ASLA Conference on Landscape Architecture and EXPO in Nashville (November 19-22), a lot of what has been learned translates into planning a safe, productive gathering. Several physical factors of the Music City Center itself will help make this possible. Also, the meetings and travel industry has stepped up biorisk-reduction practices and protocols. Public health systems, with increased vaccine distribution and mask mandates, appear to be diminishing the risks as winter tails off into spring.

"The landscape architecture community at ASLA and the industries that support it are excited by the possibility of gathering in Nashville in November," says **Torey Carter-Conneen, CEO of ASLA**. "We are

committed to making the 2021 Annual Conference and EXPO one of the best ever."

Nashville's Music City Center meets the moment

A big plus is our host venue is in downtown Nashville, a location that earned an 85 (out of 100) Walk Score because it is in close proximity to hotels, parks, restaurants, the Johnny Cash and Frist Art museums - and it's just a few blocks from the Instagram-ready What Lifts You mural (Nashville has a lively street art scene).

With average high temperatures around 60 degrees Fahrenheit in November, travel magazines say that fall is an ideal time to visit the Music City.

The convention center itself, which opened in 2013, was fortuitously designed with large, well-ventilated spaces and windows that allow lots of natural light. A LEED Gold (Design + Construction) structure, its president and CEO, Charles Starks, says several features that were included for sustainability purposes also happen to mitigate virus transmission. Additionally, it meets the criteria of the Global Biorisk Advisory Council, a biological threat prevention accrediting organization, with sanitation protocols that include



the country east of the Mississippi, Nashville is centrally located and within reasonable driving distance for those who wish to avoid air travel.

Meeting in person: It can't happen soon enough

Steve Kirn, sales manager at **Columbia Cascade Company**, is committed to bringing their outdoor furniture and playground equipment to Nashville. "On the EXPO floor landscape architects are not under a project deadline," he says. "They make time to interact and learn about new products in the market. At the EXPO we usually showcase dozens of products simultaneously and our customers can study and react to ones of interest to them. That's not possible if we're limited to a small computer screen."

"Remote meetings are OK," he adds. "But they're somewhat unsatisfying. Rather like a Zoom Happy Hour without the 'clink' of two glasses." ■

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Playing it safe in the Music City

The Music City Center and ASLA conference team will use all recommended safety protocols this November, including the following:

Physical distancing: 10' between all booths or 8' high curtain separators; 6' between individuals standing in queues.

Face coverings: Will be required according to state and local mandates in November.

Hand sanitizers: Available at more than 100 locations throughout meeting and EXPO spaces.

Touch free points: Restroom light switches, toilet flushers, soap dispensers, water faucets, and paper towel dispensers in restrooms; elevator buttons; ADA entry doors; parking equipment.

Convention center food and beverage staff: 18 are ServSafe® certified professionals, and eight are HACCP-certified (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) culinarians.



Health authorities weigh in on conventions and travel

Nashville Mayor John Cooper assembled a hospitality advisory committee last fall to ensure safe openings based on disease and vaccination metrics; Starks himself is emphatic about MCC's adherence to local and state health department mandates. "The city health department expects we will be able to host large events by summer and fall of this year," he says. Smaller events were already permitted at the convention center this winter.

The ASLA meetings department monitors the advisories from Nashville and Tennessee health authorities, in addition to the protocols prescribed by the Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The CDC and WHO both advise event planners to adhere to local health and safety laws, rules, and regulations because coronavirus circulation varies between communities.

As for travel to and from Nashville, the federal government now requires wearing masks on planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation. International travelers must show negative COVID-19 test results or documentation of recovery from the disease. For the portion of

electrostatic spraying, disinfectant cleaning agents, and frequent testing of surfaces in public areas.

At the onset of the pandemic MCC was designated as a hospital overflow site (which fortunately wasn't necessary), and since early 2021 it's been a mass vaccination venue for Tennesseans.

Also, not everything is indoors. The convention center has ten terraces, designed to take meetings and related events outside.

