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LANDSCAPE SERVICES™

FOR HOA BOARDS · COA BOARDS · PROPERTY MANAGERS

The HOA Board's Landscape Contractor Evaluation Checklist

*A practical 5-point review for selecting
(or renewing) your landscape vendor in California.*

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Tri-County Landscape Contractor · Since 2007 · CA Lic #890862 · C-27 / C-61 D49

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INTRODUCTION

Why this checklist exists.

Most HOA boards are made up of volunteers. Most property managers oversee dozens of contracts at once. Both groups are routinely asked to evaluate landscape vendors — without the time, technical background, or industry context to do it confidently.

The wrong landscape vendor costs an HOA in three ways: poor curb appeal that hurts property values, water and material waste that bleeds the budget, and liability exposure when a contractor isn't properly licensed for the work they're doing. The right one is the opposite — they're an extension of the board's stewardship.

This checklist is the document we wish every HOA board had before they sat down with us — or with any competitor. It's not a sales pitch. It's the same questions we'd want our own children's HOA to ask. Print it out, bring it to your next vendor interview, score each contractor against the five questions inside, and the right choice gets clearer.

It takes about 20 minutes to use during a vendor walk-through and can save your association thousands.

HOW TO USE IT

- Print one copy for each candidate vendor. Bring a clipboard.
- Ask each question on a property walk-through, not just in a sales meeting.
- Use the score boxes to compare candidates objectively after the visit.
- A candidate scoring 4 or 5 out of 5 is qualified. A candidate at 3 or below is a risk you'd carry as a board.

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QUESTION 1 OF 5

Are they fully licensed for everything they're proposing?

California requires different contractor classifications for different scopes of work. A C-27 license covers general landscape installation and maintenance. C-61 D49 covers tree work (removal, pruning beyond a certain height, stump grinding). A contractor without both classifications cannot legally perform that work — and if they do it anyway, your association carries the liability when something goes wrong. All California contractors are verifiable in 30 seconds at [cslb.ca.gov](https://www.cslb.ca.gov).

RED FLAGS

- Verbal-only assurance — won't share their license number in writing.
- License number doesn't verify on CSLB, or shows suspended/expired status.
- Performs tree work without the C-61 D49 classification.

ASK THE VENDOR

- Provide your CSLB license number(s) and effective date.
- Confirm classifications cover every service in your proposal.
- Confirm there are no current suspensions, complaints, or board actions.

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QUESTION 2 OF 5

What insurance do they carry, and will they provide a COI?

General liability insurance protects the HOA if a worker damages property or injures a resident. Workers' compensation (legally required in California for anyone with employees) protects the association from liability if a crew member is injured on your property. A reputable contractor will provide a Certificate of Insurance (COI) listing the HOA as additional insured, same-day, no friction. Most associations require \$1M general liability minimum; high-end properties often require \$2M+.

RED FLAGS

- Hesitation or delay when asked for a COI.
- No workers' comp — means the contractor or association is exposed if a worker is hurt.
- Coverage limits below \$1M general liability.

ASK THE VENDOR

- General liability coverage of at least \$1M (\$2M for larger properties).
- Workers' compensation in force, covering all crew on-site.
- Will provide a COI naming the HOA as additional insured before work begins.
- Bonded for the contract amount.

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QUESTION 3 OF 5

Do they provide monthly site reports and regular communication?

Boards rotate. Property managers change. The vendor who 'has been here forever' often becomes the vendor nobody is checking on. Monthly site reports — even short ones — document what was done, what was noticed, and what's coming up. They protect the board (audit trail), help with budget planning, and force the contractor to actually walk the property regularly. A vendor who can't or won't commit to monthly written reports is asking you to trust them blindly.

RED FLAGS

- "We don't really do written reports."
- Reports exist but show no observations, photos, or proactive notes — just task completion.
- Site walks happen quarterly or less rather than monthly.

ASK THE VENDOR

- Monthly written report after each site walk-through.
- Reports include observations, photos, and recommendations — not just a checklist.
- Designated point of contact for the board / property manager.
- Response time commitment for emergencies (target: same-day; ideally 24/7).

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QUESTION 4 OF 5

Do they understand California-specific compliance?

California landscape contractors operate under regulations most other states don't have. PRC 4291 (Public Resources Code) requires defensible space around structures in fire-risk zones — Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Western LA counties are all WUI (Wildland-Urban Interface) zones. Water-efficiency standards (QWEL) affect irrigation design. Local fire departments can issue abatement notices that the HOA is liable to address. A vendor who treats your property like it's in Ohio is not going to keep you in compliance.

RED FLAGS

- Unfamiliar with PRC 4291 / defensible space zoning (0–5, 5–30, 30–100 ft).
- No experience responding to fire department abatement notices.
- Recommends plant palettes that aren't fire-resistant or drought-appropriate.

ASK THE VENDOR

- Familiarity with PRC 4291 defensible-space requirements.
- Experience with annual brush clearance in WUI zones.
- Recommends drought-tolerant and fire-resistant plant choices.
- Knows how to install and maintain water-efficient irrigation (drip, smart controllers, weather-based scheduling).

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QUESTION 5 OF 5

Do they have references from similar properties?

A contractor who maintains 80-unit single-family HOAs is not automatically qualified for a 300-unit condo COA. A contractor whose only references are residential estates may not know how to navigate board meetings, vendor onboarding paperwork, or annual budget cycles. The best predictor of how they'll perform for you is how they've performed for properties exactly like yours, with multi-year continuity to prove it. Three to five active references at comparable properties is reasonable to ask for — and to actually call.

RED FLAGS

- References are personal contacts rather than property managers or board members.
- All references are short-tenure (under 1 year).
- No references from properties of similar size or type to yours.

ASK THE VENDOR

- At least 3 references at properties of similar size, type, and climate zone.
- References include multi-year clients (3+ years), not just new ones.
- Willing to provide references in writing with permission to contact directly.
- References include at least one property manager or HOA board member (not just owner).



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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Universal Landscape Services is a California-licensed landscape contractor based in Oxnard, serving HOAs, commercial properties, estates, and residential clients across Santa Barbara, Ventura, and West LA counties since 2007.

We compete on showing up on time, communicating clearly, and doing the work right — not on being the cheapest bid. That's why we publish checklists like this one: an informed buyer is the kind of client we want.

CREDENTIALS

CA Contractor's License #890862 — C-27 / C-61 D49
Certified Landscape Technician
Certified Green Gardeners
Insured & Bonded — COIs and W-9s available same-day on request

WANT HELP APPLYING THIS CHECKLIST?

We'll come to your property, walk it with you, and give you an honest read on what your current vendor is (or isn't) doing right. No sales pressure.

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