

Duke University
Office of the University Architect
BOX 90149
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
27708-0149

300 FULLER STREET, SUITE 300
DURHAM, NC 27701

TELEPHONE (919) 682-6066
FAX (919) 683-5354

ASLA Board of Trustees
c/o Carolyn Mitchell, Honors and Awards Coordinator
American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye St., NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Nomination of Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, for the Olmsted Medal

Dear Trustees:

It is truly an honor for me to nominate Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, and Director of Urban Parks for the Trust for Public Land, to be the deserving recipient of ASLA's 2014 Olmsted Medal. Benepe is probably best known for his phenomenally successful tenure as the New York City Parks Commissioner, where he left behind a legacy that has not only transformed NYC, but also showed the world the inherent potential that exists in the urban landscape. In a decade of growth under his leadership, 800 acres of spectacular new parks were added to the existing 28,000 acres spread across the five boroughs, all of which were under his purview. Given that this award recognizes environmental leadership, vision, and stewardship – three things epitomized by Benepe's career – I would say the Olmsted Medal is custom made for him.

Benepe's history with the NYC parks department – his start as a 16 year old seasonal employee selling food in Central Park, cleaning locker rooms at a city pool in the East Village and picking up litter in East River Park; his subsequent steady climb through the ranks to an eventual appointment as Parks Commissioner by then-mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2002 – has become an urban legend of sorts. It is a story that reads more like fictional propaganda for the American Dream than a real bio, but it is true; and it speaks volumes to his character. He has a deeply rooted passion for NYC and its parks, and has devoted his career to promoting the value that parks and open space bring to the urban realm, the people and families that inhabit it, and the environment as a whole.

Consider the parks that were created, planned, restored and improved while he was in charge in NYC: The High Line, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Teardrop Park, the continued transformation of the Hudson River Park and the entire West Side waterfront in Manhattan, Lakeside in Prospect Park, the restoration of Fort Totten Park in Queens, the genesis and development of the innovative Fresh Kills Park on Staten Island, the Shoelace Park Master Plan for the Bronx River, Riverside Park South, and the list goes on. It is an astonishing record – unparalleled going back to the mid-20th century days of "master builder" Robert Moses. For a solid decade, Benepe was perhaps the single largest employer of consulting landscape architects in the country – a relationship that continues with the 2000 acres of additional parkland planned under his leadership still in the works. Our profile as a profession has risen exponentially due directly to his leadership and vision.

It is not just built work that defines his career in NYC. Benepe has played an instrumental role in making people understand that even the densest cities are, in fact, vital functioning landscapes. His promotion of green infrastructure strategies, tree-planting programs, and other sustainable planning initiatives has changed the way people think about the urban landscape and serves as a model for other cities.

Even with all he accomplished in NYC, Benepe's impact reaches far beyond its boundaries. He has, to a large extent, redefined what the rest of the world expects from their urban parks. His leadership has set a new standard of excellence in urban design and raised the bar for what all other cities can now aspire to achieve. It is no exaggeration to say the entire profession of landscape architecture has been elevated to new heights directly due to his efforts. Upon leaving his position, Benepe laid out in a New York Times op-ed what he sees still needing be done in NYC:

"Opportunities remain to convert brownfields and abandoned structures, like a railroad in Queens, into parks and greenways. New flood control systems will allow for ecological and recreational space. The natural infrastructure will also require attention: trees play a huge role in cleaning the air and cooling the city, but they require more inspection and maintenance. The 10,000 acres of forests, meadows and wetlands that comprise the natural areas of city parks must be monitored and maintained, so that they thrive as habitat for animals and respite for humans. Most important, the people of New York must engage in the lives of their parks with a fierce passion - ensuring the future of the city for our children and theirs."

Idealism based in practicality - exactly what is needed in transformative leaders. While his words may seem to be specific to NYC, they speak to urban areas everywhere. His wisdom and passion certainly influences his work at the Trust for Public Land, where he promotes environmentally minded infrastructure and wider access to parks to cities across the country. Just think what will be accomplished now that his leadership and abilities are beginning to be applied on a national level.

He is not a landscape architect, but Benepe certainly speaks our language and has been a strong and vocal advocate for what we do. His work and example in NYC have led to the creation of opportunities for all landscape architects, while changing how we are perceived by a public made increasingly aware of the value we provide. New York City, cities around the world and the profession of landscape architecture owe a debt of gratitude to Adrian Benepe for all he has done so far in his career. I believe the time is right for ASLA to acknowledge his accomplishments and show our thanks by awarding him the Olmsted Medal this year. I hope you agree.

Sincerely,



Mark Hough, ASLA
Campus Landscape Architect

MICHAEL
VAN
VALKENBURGH
ASSOCIATES
INC

Dear ASLA Olmsted Medal Committee,

I have known Adrian Benepe throughout his tenure as New York City Parks Commissioner and I have a long-standing admiration for his leadership and vision for the stewardship and advancement of public landscapes in urban settings. Right after he was appointed as Commissioner, I heard him give a talk to a group of park supporters where he stood up and said: "I have the best job in the world, and the one that I have wanted my whole life." This passion for his job, the city, and urban parks translated into amazing decade for the landscape of New York City. I strongly support awarding him the ASLA Olmsted Medal.

Working his way up through the Parks Department, Adrian has dedicated years of his life to improving New York City and its parks. His era's legacy of 730 acres of new park land for New York City, plus countless rehabilitations and improvements, has allowed landscape to become an even more significant contributor to the daily lives of millions of people. He is uncompromising in his idea that great parks are an indispensable part of a great city, but he has also been very strategic and visionary in understanding that the conditions for park-making are very different in this era, and that we need to take a serious look at the underutilized areas of the city (waterfronts, abandoned rail lines, etc.) as the next frontier for large public open spaces. He has worked to make parks a complement to the typical conditions of urban density, providing a unique setting for a coming together of ecological and social diversity.

Adrian was a transformative head of NYCDPR, able to build on the momentum of larger forces in play, including preliminary planning and design of The High Line, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Hudson River Park, all of which were in the early stages of development when he took command, and largely completed by the time he left. Although each of these parks was born of grassroots initiatives, and supported by elected officials, it was Benepe's leadership and dedication to his work, that ensured that each of these highly complex parks were realized as envisioned, and that the level of excellence was so universally high. At the same time he worked diligently to maintain and improve the quality of countless existing parks, both big and small, throughout the city. He once told me that his was a seven day a week job, and often requiring nearly that many nights as well. I'm not sure if every parks commissioner brings this level of dedication to what they do, but Adrian did and New York City has reaped the long-term benefits.

I believe that the only NYC Park Commissioner who served longer than Adrian was Robert Moses, and although both were highly influential, their styles could not be more different. Adrian's passion for parks is based very much in ideas of inclusiveness and community. In this way, he is similar to Frederick Law Olmsted, for whom this medal is named. Like Olmsted, Adrian is a fabulous advocate for parks through his writing, and he can back up the love of landscape architecture he has in his heart with a thorough knowledge of the history of the discipline. Furthermore, he is an astute design critic, who, as I learned in the course of designing Brooklyn Bridge Park, could be equally facile in the language of design, (encouraging us to push the

envelope with respect to ecology and experience), and the language of landscape pragmatics (offering advice with respect to issues such as truck access and dog runs).

I can think of countless people who are committed to the landscape, but very few with Adrian Benepe's ability to realize their vision in such lasting and far-reaching ways. Although he is not a member of our profession, he has already made innumerable contributions to the advancement of the public landscape, and is likely to continue to do so in the years to come, through his new position as senior vice president and director of city park development at the Trust for Public Land. I very much hope that you will honor his tremendous achievements with the award of the Olmsted Medal.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Van Valkenburgh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'V' in 'Van' and a 'k' with a flourish in 'Valkenburgh'. The name is written in a single continuous line.

Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA

thomas**balsley**associates

March 7, 2014

ASLA Board of Trustees
c/o Carolyn Mitchell, Honors and Awards Coordinator
American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye St., NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Nomination of Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, for the Olmsted Medal

Dear Trustees,

Allow me to take this opportunity to nominate Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, to receive the ASLA's 2014 Olmsted Medal. Though he is not a landscape architect, he is and has been an extraordinary advocate of the profession and its role in re-shaping our urban environment and the quality of life millions have come to enjoy. His leadership as NYC's Parks Commissioner for 12 years and now with the Trust for Public Land Urban Parks Department has had more impact on NYC's parks than any other Commissioner since the legendary Robert Moses. Equally important has been Benepe's impact far beyond the boundaries of NYC. He has raised the bar for what other cities, large and small, can aspire to for their urban parks, and in doing so, raised the profile of the landscape architectural profession throughout the US and far away places who look to NYC for inspiration.

Hudson River Park, the High Line, Riverside Park South, and Brooklyn Bridge Park are but a few new high-profile parks that have blossomed in their respective communities and now touch the daily lives of millions of New Yorkers as well as the city's visitors. The design excellence and environmental sustainability standards for them all were achieved through Benepe's dogged commitment and are the very ideals that the Olmsted Medal recognizes.

Just this month LAM featured Hunter's Point South Park, a new waterfront park across the East River from the United Nations. It is the centerpiece of what will be NYC's largest affordable housing development in the last 5 years. His passion for this park's working-class constituency is a reflection of his own roots; a personal arc from park field worker to Commissioner. It also reflects his commitment to the City's outer-borough parks and a strongly held belief that parks and open spaces can enrich the quality of our lives and the environment in which we live.

Benepe has also played an instrumental role in helping everyone understand that through parks and infrastructure, habitats and natural lands, sustainable design and planning, our densest cities can be remade into some of the world's most sustainable communities.

His wisdom and passion certainly influences his work at the Trust for Public Land, where he promotes environmentally minded infrastructure and wider access to parks to cities across the country. Just think what will be accomplished now that his leadership and abilities are beginning to be applied on a national level. His leadership has set a new standard of excellence in urban design and raised the bar for what all other cities can now aspire to achieve. It is no exaggeration to say the entire profession of landscape architecture has been elevated to new heights directly due to his efforts.

31 W 27TH
NY, NY 10001
P 212.684.9230
F 212.684.9232
INFO@TBANY.COM

LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE
PLANNING
URBAN
DESIGN

I believe in the Olmsted Medal and the individuals it has set out to recognize. I also believe that even though Adrian Benepe is not a landscape architect, he is deserving of this extraordinary honor and the gratitude our profession can offer. His immeasurably important support from the other side of the table is what our profession needs as we dedicate ourselves to improving the environment and the quality of urban life everywhere.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Balsley".

Thomas Balsley, FASLA
Principal

March 7, 2014

Selection Committee
Olmsted Medal
American Society of Landscape Architect
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

A few years back when I was Trustee of the New York Chapter of the ASLA we nominated Adrian Benepe for Honorary Membership in the ASLA. At the time we recognized the tremendous contributions that he made to Landscape architecture through his strong leadership and advocacy for the profession.

As Parks Commissioner in charge of one of the largest and most populous urban park systems in the world, Benepe led the development of new models of sustainable, ecologically productive urban parks. Not only did he ensure the creation of more park space, but as Commissioner he also developed new models for financing long term maintenance and stewardship. Brooklyn Bridge Park, Hudson River Park, Cadman Plaza Park, Concrete Plant Park, The Highline and Fresh Kills Park were all designed and built during his tenure.

Since moving on to the Trust for Public Land taking a position as the Senior Vice President in charge of urban park development he has become an influential force in the creation of new city parks nation-wide. Through his work he is sharing models of green infrastructure design, public private partnerships and green-way design to communities small and large. In public lectures around the world he advocates for the critical role of landscape architects in urban design.

I cannot imagine a more ideal candidate and recommend him whole-heartedly for this award.

Sincerely,



Susannah C. Drake, FASLA, AIA
Principal
Dlandstudio PLLC Architecture & Landscape Architecture

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American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye St., NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Nomination of Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, for the Olmsted Medal

Dear Trustees:

It is a pleasure to wholeheartedly support the nomination of Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, and Director of Urban Parks for the Trust for Public Land, to be the deserving recipient of ASLA's 2014 Olmsted Medal.

As the organization responsible for Central Park's management, restoration and care, as well as raising the majority of the Park's funding through private support, the Central Park Conservancy has benefitted immensely from Adrian's outstanding personal commitment and passion for urban parks.

Under Adrian's leadership, the New York City Department of Parks raised the level of parks throughout New York and supported the Conservancy as it worked to end the cycles of decline and restore and helped to establish Central Park as a shining example for urban parks worldwide. .

I'm immeasurably grateful for Adrian's expertise and extraordinary level of commitment to the Conservancy's important work, the essential purpose of which is to provide a green, safe, respite from hectic urban life that will endure for ourselves and the generations to come.

Warm regards,

Douglas Blonsky
President & CEO, Central Park Conservancy
and Central Park Administrator



Mark Hough ASLA, PL

Duke University

Campus Landscape Architect

7 March 2014

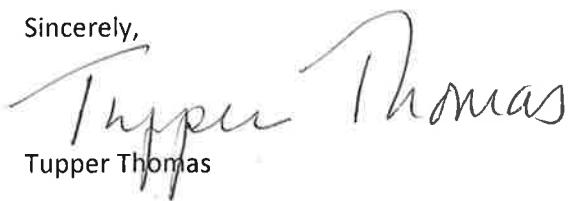
Dear Mark;

I am so pleased to write in support of the nomination of Adrian Benepe for the Olmsted Award. Adrian's career has been focused on all the issues that are addressed by this award. He started his career as a Park Ranger, preserving nature thru education. He later became the Director of Natural Resources for the New York City Parks Department where he further developed his passion for preserving the natural areas of our great park system. As Park Commissioner for 11 years, he strengthened the commitment to our natural areas but also worked to preserve the huge Olmsted Legacy parks in New York City: Central, Prospect, Riverside, the Parkways, Ft Greene, and Morningside. He has continued his efforts to preserve open space and parks in our cities in his position at the Trust for Public Lands and as a Board member of the City Parks Alliance.

Adrian has championed great design and the parks of New York are proof of that. He has worked with many other agencies to be certain that the parks of the City and the other open spaces are well maintained and available to the public. He added more parkland to New York than any Parks Commissioner since Moses. I am sure that in his new national role he will do the same in cities across the country.

Thank you for this opportunity to commend Adrian for this award!!

Sincerely,


Tupper Thomas