

Honorary Membership Nomination Narrative

Nominee: Commissioner Adrian Benepe, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Nominee's Address:
The Arsenal
Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue

City/State/Zip: New York, NY 10065

Phone: 212 360 1305

Nominator: Tricia Martin, President NYC ASLA; On behalf of the New York City Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects

One of my first projects in New York City was a planting design for East River Park. During a site visit I struck up a conversation with a Park's Ranger. He said he had heard a rumor that the Parks Commissioner himself had begun his career as a teenager picking up litter and mopping up the locker rooms in East River Park for the Parks Department. This rumor turned out to be true and was only the beginning of a varied, rigorous and dedicated career devoted to protecting and enhancing New York City's natural and historic beauty. A peek into Adrian's thirty-year career is a lens into the many ways he has significantly influenced the profession of landscape architecture.

After graduating from Middlebury College in Vermont, he became a member of the first corps of Parks & Recreation's Urban Park Rangers in 1979 and served in a number of different capacities until 1990. His experiences included his time as a Ranger stationed in Central Park, Director of Natural Resources & Horticulture (overseeing scores of restoration projects in the City's wetlands and forests) to Director of Art & Antiquities (in charge of the City's conservation and interpretation of 1,300 statues and monuments and 23 historic house museums).

From 1990 to 1993, Commissioner Benepe was the Director of the Annual Fund & Major Gifts for the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, where he expanded his knowledge of plants, trees and children's education. From 1993 to 1995, he served as Vice President for Issues & Public Affairs for the Municipal Art Society. In that role, he managed public relations and developed strategies for public advocacy efforts in city planning, historic preservation, and public art, and he curated the "Kid City" exhibition to teach children about the built environment. His experience at the Botanical Garden added another layer to his understanding of Parks and open spaces – the importance of building relationships, promoting great design, and the critical role that children play in the making of great parks.

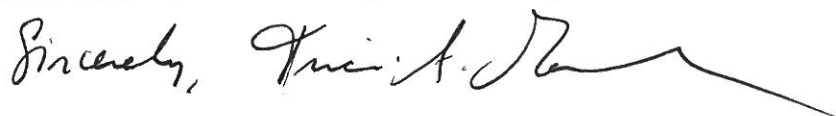
After six years in the non-profit sector, he returned to Parks & Recreation in January 1996 as the Manhattan Borough Commissioner, managing Manhattan's green infrastructure of more than 300 parks, playgrounds, and malls. He served in that position until promoted to Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, where he now oversees the operation of over 29,000 acres and nearly 4,000 properties including almost 1,000 playgrounds, 600 ballfields, 550 tennis courts, 63 swimming pools, 35 recreation centers, 14 miles of beach, five major stadiums, and 2.5 million street and park trees.

Not only is The Parks Department the largest landscape architecture business in the country, perhaps the world, Adrian encourages the department to work with the private sector as well. Five years ago, Adrian spearheaded along with the City Department of Design and Construction an innovative design excellence procurement model pilot. Through this model, they select proposals based on merit and quality, rather than lowest bid. In a recent lecture he said, "good design doesn't have to cost more than bad design, and the rewards are much greater in the long run." The pilot program worked so well that it prompted a revision to the City's procurement rules, which all agencies now follow. The Design Excellence program now enables the Parks Department to build strong partnerships with many talented firms.

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Bloomberg, First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris and the rest of the City administration, as well as the participation of the City Council and other elected officials, Commissioner Benepe is currently managing the largest program of park expansion and renovation since the 1930s. A large part of the construction budget funds PlaNYC and MillionTreesNYC, projects to green the city and develop a more sustainable future. Additionally, a steady rebuilding of the operating budget under Mayor Bloomberg has given the Department its largest workforce in decades, with over 10,000 employees at the height of the summer operating season.

At the ASLA New Jersey Chapter Annual Conference in Atlantic City this past January, Adrian gave a presentation titled: "New York City Parks: A Tradition in Innovation." One of the important messages from the presentation was that "park design is not just about responding to the current needs of a community – it's also about planning for the future needs of a community." Communities around the world are experiencing aging infrastructures, extreme weather events; and urban centers are experiencing exponential growth patterns. This visionary philosophy in regards to great community-making will be a critical test to how the designs we build today can hold up to the challenges of the future.

In my short term as President, I have already had direct experience with Adrian's commitment to assisting our chapter in multiple capacities. In January, Adrian volunteered to host an event on Restorative Landscapes at the Arsenal Building in Central Park at no charge. A couple of weeks ago he mentioned to me that he loved our organization and that he would become a member if he could. Well, I can't think of a better opportunity or time for awarding Commissioner Benepe this wish than with an Honorary Membership Medal.

Sincerely,


AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

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Ms. Carolyn Mitchell
Honorary Membership Nomination
ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Letter of Reference - Honorary Membership Award Medal - Adrian Benepe

Dear Carolyn,

I hope all is well there. I fondly remember being part of your jury a couple of years ago, but that was at a non-snowy time of year. It must be quite a drama this week!

Today I write to endorse the nomination of Adrian Benepe for the ASLA Honorary Membership Award Medal. He has had an amazing career that began when he was a teenager. This early start has given him an opportunity to serve at every conceivable level in the Parks & Recreation department of New York. It would be difficult to find another individual who is as thoroughly versed in the issues associated with building, maintaining and managing public parks, nor a person who is as thoroughly committed to the many great landscapes and facilities of New York. Because of his more than 30 years at this, always with increasing responsibilities, his contributions have been literally incalculable. I cannot imagine anyone with more authority, perspective, or tenacity.

It is incredibly important that we recognize persons such as Adrian Benepe, with careers such as his, especially in a city like New York, which comes with so many needs and challenges. It has many rewards as well, but the parks here are so important, so crucial to the civilization of the city, that we would be lost without the right leadership. We owe him a great deal.

I therefore recommend with the greatest possible enthusiasm that you recognize him for his achievements, truly of national and international significance for the example he has set, and the great service to the profession of landscape architecture he has provided for protecting and sustaining the parks of New York. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,


Adele Chatfield-Taylor, FAAR '84, Hon. ASLA
President

12 February 2010



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner

The Arsenal
Central Park
New York, New York 10065

Capital Projects

Olmsted Center
Flushing Meadows – Corona Park
Flushing, NY 11368

Thérèse Braddick
Deputy Commissioner

718) 760-6602/therese.braddick@parks.nyc.gov

Feb. 11, 2010

Honorary Membership Nomination
ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Nomination Committee:

It is my great pleasure to recommend Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of NYC Parks & Recreation to be an honorary ASLA member. I have been a landscape architect in the NYC Parks Department since 1987. By contrast with other commissioners with whom I have worked, Adrian is by far the most interested in landscape architecture, the most knowledgeable about the profession and the most vigorous supporter of good design. He has been extraordinarily generous and cooperative with NYASLA, from letting us use Park spaces for meetings and presentations, to introducing award recipients at our President's Award ceremony, to joining our dinner committee last year and meeting with us to brainstorm how to do raise funds better, to making himself available to speak informally with students and professionals at events. Over the years, he has been increasingly enthusiastic about ASLA; in his keynote talk at the NJ ASLA conference at the end of January, he emphasized how much respect and affection he has for our profession.

Adrian Benepe's role at the NYC Parks Department includes setting an agenda for park design that is more sustainable, innovative and varied than ever. Current programs which he has initiated in coordination with Mayor Bloomberg's ideas to "green" New York include 1) a series of large sustainable green space projects jointly to showcase "PlaNYC smart growth," 2) planting a million trees, 3) adding thousands of new flowering plants in each borough every year, 4) adding "greeting gardens" of colorful seasonal planting at the entrances to major parks, 5) reaching out to communities of disabled people and hiring a wheelchair athlete to advise us on accessibility issues, 5) converting asphalt schoolyards to public to parks open after hours to everyone and 6) supporting excellence, creative solutions and new ideas throughout our in-house and consultant design programs.

Adrian graciously helped ASLANY get better publicity for one of our events in 2002. The NY Chapter wanted to award the ASLA Centennial Medallion to NYC Parks and NY State Department of Transportation, to commemorate the innovative historic parkways still vital to our regional transportation network, and also make the point that these pioneering designs of beautiful roads with well integrated landscapes should be conserved. Because Adrian rearranged his schedule to meet the ASLA Board at a scenic spot overlooking the Henry Hudson Parkway, we were able to convince the regional commissioner for DOT to join us, too. Despite heavy rain that morning, we all walked from the park edge to the scenic overlook; as if on cue, the sun came out briefly, and we got a couple wonderful photos of the two commissioners accepting the bronze medallion, which we sent out with our press release.

In his role as Parks Commissioner, Adrian reviews and approves the proposed design or redesign of every park in our capital program. Landscape architects present their work directly to him on a bi-weekly basis. In a typical scenario, Adrian is not only well versed in the needs for the park and community, but eager to engage in a discussion of the design which reveals a surprisingly wide-ranging understanding of the design process and appreciation of good ideas.

Creating new partnerships with the commissioners of other departments has revolutionized the way NYC works. For example, the Greenstreets program which was begun before Adrian Benepe's time has been vastly expanded during his administration through a cooperative effort with the Dept. of Transportation, replacing excessive pavement at intersections with planted triangles. Times Square has been converted to pedestrian space, an unthinkable idea before this current era of interdepartmental cooperation. Adrian's ability to forge new alliances has greatly benefitted this city and resulted in many new opportunities for landscape architects.

I already think of Adrian as an honorary landscape architect, and I suspect he feels that way about himself! On behalf of the NY Chapter ASLA, I urge you to award him this well-deserved honor. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,



Marcha Johnson, PhD, ASLA (718) 760-6646
Landscape Architect and Ecological Restorationist
NYC Parks & Recreation
NYASLA Board Member since 1990, and past Officer and Trustee

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Honorary Membership Nomination
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February 10, 2010

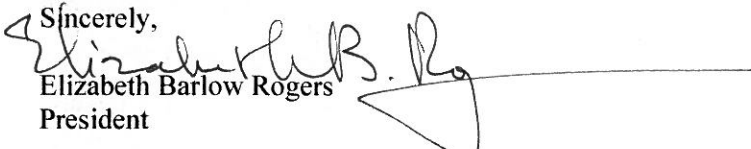
Dear Members of the Honorary Membership Committee:

I write with great enthusiasm to endorse Adrian Benepe's candidacy for honorary membership in the ASLA.

I have known Adrian since 1979 when I suggested that he might apply for a job with the newly formed New York City Urban Park Rangers. I have followed his entire career with what you might call sisterly interest—if that doesn't make me sound overly partial. I saw how, after serving as director of the ranger program, he used his journalistic background to direct the park department's public relations department and later how he took charge of the newly formed Natural Resources group within the agency. Subsequently, as director of Arts & Antiquities division, I watched the skill with which he oversaw the care of the city's monuments and initiated the Historic House Trust to restore and maintain landmark structures on parks property. He then exercised the capabilities he had learned in this endeavor at the New York Botanic Garden before turning to park and landmark advocacy with the Municipal Art Society. After this five-year stint in the not-for-profit private sector, he returned to public service, learning the operations side of park administration as Manhattan Borough Commissioner. I was proud to be on the sidelines cheering when Mayor Bloomberg decided to make the commissioner of New York City Parks a merit, rather than a patronage, appointment. To say that the mayor, his staff, and the tribe of "parkies" in New York have been impressed with Adrian's performance in this capacity is an understatement.

But this is just a biographical sketch, and you know his ample credentials for honorary ASLA membership from reading his resumé. I therefore want to close by saying that Adrian is a remarkable man: a loyal friend, a good husband and father, and an always a delightful companion. Further, I know that he will be as deeply gratified as I was to become a honorary member of the professional association that has played such an important part in both our careers and lives.

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Barlow Rogers
President



February 9, 2010

Honorary Membership Nomination
ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20001-3736

To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to offer my support to Mr. Adrian Benepe, New York City Parks Commissioner, as he is nominated for Honorary Membership with the American Society of Landscape Architects.

I am President of the Majora Carter Group LLC, a pioneering consulting firm that works to unlock the potential of every place. In my work with Mr. Benepe, we have journeyed together toward the common understanding that access to green spaces unify our urban communities as much as they beautify them. Adrian is a leader who not only sees the importance of green spaces in our cities, but more importantly, the powerfully positive effect they have on the people. One thing I always trusted completely about Adrian is his ability to look at challenges and move forward in partnership. He understands the power of information from all perspectives and then dares to act. It was during on of my first encounters with Adrian that this became beautifully clear.

As founder of Sustainable South Bronx, I helped galvanize the citizens of our South Bronx community to call for the creation of Concrete Plant Park; a new park that would provide a green space bridging two underserved South Bronx communities. Unfortunately, the park's initial design lacked access that would allow all to benefit from this new gem. Despite political pressures, dissenting views and the temptation to step down from these challenges, Adrian Benepe chose to step up. He knew we wanted to build paths to reconnect communities torn apart by the highway; he knew that the park's purpose was compromised without the physical connection that would bond these neighborhoods with its bike paths, riverwalks and open space. Benepe heard me out and helped our neighborhood get the green paths it deserved.

Recommendation for Adrian Benepe
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In our long professional relationship, we evolved over the years into a great respect and even greater understanding. I lend my support to Adrian Benepe for always listening for new ways to walk the walk for environmental justice and his dedication to take the steps to do achieve it.

Please feel free to reach out to my offices for further information regarding my support at (718) 874-7313.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Carter', written in a cursive style.

Majora Carter
President



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

PATRICIA E. HARRIS
FIRST DEPUTY MAYOR

February 12, 2010

Honorary Membership Nomination
American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Adrian Benepe, Commissioner, New York City Parks & Recreation Department

Dear Members of the Executive Committee:

I am delighted to write in support of Adrian Benepe's nomination for an Honorary Membership award from the New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Since Adrian's appointment as the Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation in 2002, he has helped to make New York City a leader in landscape development and design. Over the past eight years, the Department has added over 500 acres of parkland—the largest program of park expansion and renovation in decades. Whether developing new parks along the Bronx waterfront or expanding greenways throughout the five boroughs, the Department has put New York City at the forefront of landscape design and environmental sustainability by building new green spaces and furthering *PlaNYC*, Mayor Bloomberg's initiative to reduce New York City's carbon footprint. In addition, the Department helped to develop the High Line, converting an abandoned, elevated rail structure into one of our City's most beloved green spaces. With an array of wild plants integrated among existing tracks, movable seating overlooking the Hudson River, and tremendous views of the City, the High Line is a remarkable example of the innovative landscape architecture that has flourished under Adrian's leadership.

Even before taking on the role of Commissioner, Adrian has long been dedicated to expanding and improving our City's landscapes and parklands. From his early days as a teenage seasonal helper in East River Park; to his tenure as the Director of Natural Resources & Horticulture, where he implemented a range of restoration projects in our City's wetlands and forests; to his work as the Parks & Recreation Manhattan Borough Commissioner, where he oversaw more than 300 parks, playgrounds, and malls, Adrian has done outstanding work to beautify, enhance, and promote New York City's green space.

I wholeheartedly and without reservation recommend Adrian Benepe for this prestigious award, and hope that you will review his nomination favorably. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 212-788-2990. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia E. Harris



City of New York
Parks & Recreation