



February 3, 2020

LaGasse Medal Nominations  
c/o Honors and Awards  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: Tom O'Rourke

Dear Board of Trustees, American Society of Landscape Architects:

I am pleased and honored to submit this nomination for Tom O'Rourke for the LaGasse Medal for a Non-Landscape Architect. Throughout his long and illustrious career, Tom O'Rourke has been concerned with the proper management of the nation's public lands and the judicious use of the country's natural resources for the enjoyment and betterment of society. His life and accomplishments truly embody the spirit of the Medal and its namesake, Alfred B. LaGasse.

Highly respected by his colleagues and peers, Tom O'Rourke has spent a significant amount of time serving as a mentor and an educator in the park and recreation field. His career has had a lasting impact in the Charleston, South Carolina region. Tom's passion for parks and recreation is evident to anyone who spends even a few minutes speaking with him. He is enthusiastic about the future and the role that parks, and recreation, play in the overall health and well-being of a community. Because of Tom's dedication to parks and recreation he is also a tireless advocate for the role of sustainable design in those parks and the importance of the architects and landscape architects who contribute to their creation.

Tom O'Rourke was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Tom was involved in the parks and recreation field from an early age, due to his father's role as a recreation director and coach. As a child he often accompanied his parents to Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society state conferences. This influence led him to study parks and recreation in college, where he graduated from Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania in 1978.

Tom moved to the Charleston, SC area (Mount Pleasant) immediately after graduating from college. He started his career as a high school athletic director and coach. From there he took a position as Director of the Recreation Department for the very fast-growing town of Mount Pleasant. After several years in this position, he left to work for the Landscape Architecture and Engineering firm SeamonWhiteside as Manager of the Sports and Recreation Division. During that time, he worked closely with Kenny Seamon, FASLA and Bill Eubanks, FASLA on several park projects and was instrumental in attracting the Family Circle Tennis Tournament to Charleston. He was heavily involved in both the site selection and design efforts for that facility, which has been named one of the Top 50 Tennis Welcome Centers in the country, among other

awards. The Center features a 10,200-seat stadium, a Grand Lawn, 17 tennis courts, all lighted for night play, and a racquet club featuring a full-service pro shop and locker room facilities.

Tom left Seamon Whiteside to take the position of Executive Director of the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission after their long-time director, Tim Eubanks, retired. CCPRC has been nationally recognized for operating an ever-expanding park system utilizing the enterprise approach, while still holding true to the "Recreation for All" value system.

In that leadership role, Tom had the direct oversight responsibility for over 10,000 acres of parkland consisting of a very diverse offering of parks, programs and services. He served in this capacity for over 25 years, leading the agency through the largest capital project, budget, and attendance growth in the agency's history.

During Tom's tenure at CCPRC the agency grew from 5,000 acres of parkland to over 12,000 acres of protected parkland. CCPRC has been nationally recognized for operating an ever-expanding park system with little reliance on tax subsidies for growth. During that time, Tom worked closely with the landscape architects on staff at CCPRC and the numerous landscape architects who served as consultants for the many park projects complete during his tenure. He retired from that position in March 2018.

Tom O'Rourke was elected to Town Council in the Town of Mount Pleasant in November 2017 where he has been a tireless advocate for responsible growth, parks, open space, trails, and complete streets. Mount Pleasant, across the Cooper River from Charleston, is the fourth largest city in South Carolina and one of the ten fastest growing communities in the country. Through his role on Town Council he has also advocated for the conservation of open space through the East Cooper Land Trust. As a council member, he currently serves as a member of the Recreation Committee and the chair of the Finance Committee, overseeing a \$150 million operating budget.

The Charleston area is rich in natural features with its distinctive "lowcountry" landscape, which is defined to a great extent by our marshes, rivers, and creeks. CCPRC provides public beach access on Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, and Kiawah Island as well as boat and kayak launches on the Folly River, the Wando River, the Stono River, the Edisto River, the Ashley River, the Cooper River and the Intercoastal Waterway, as well as a number of smaller creeks and tributaries.

There are large County Parks, which are primarily passive in nature, on James Island, North Charleston, and Mount Pleasant with other large tracts being preserved and held for future use.

The Caw Caw Nature Preserve is situated among a 654-acre site rich in natural, cultural and historical resources. Once part of a 5,500-acre rice plantation that flourished in the late 1700's and early 1800's, the land was home to enslaved Africans who applied their technology and skills in agriculture to carve a highly successful series of rice fields out of this cypress swamp.

The McLeod Plantation, preserved and maintained by CCPRC, has borne witness to some of the most significant periods of Charleston's - and our nation's - history. Today McLeod Plantation is an important 37-acre Gullah/Geechee heritage site that has been carefully preserved in recognition of its cultural and historical significance. The grounds include a riverside outdoor pavilion, a sweeping oak allée, and the McLeod Oak, which is thought to be more than 600 years old.

Other CCPRC facilities include campgrounds, dog parks, skate parks, climbing walls, and challenge courses.

Currently Tom serves as a Professor of Practice at Clemson University in the Department of Parks Recreation and Tourism Management. He is responsible for teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels and working with other faculty to assist communities, agencies, and practitioners in a variety of capacities.

Tom's focus at Clemson is in creating innovative and entrepreneurial models and solutions to issues facing the parks and recreation field.

Tom is also the Executive Director of the Parklands Foundation of Charleston County, a non-profit organization that provides access to parks for the underserved communities in Charleston County.

Helping other Park and Recreation professionals and their agencies become their very best is the current foundation of Tom's work. He is a frequent Keynote Speaker at State Recreation Conferences and his reach has extended to Canada and Mexico. Tom has taught at the NRPA Supervisor Management School, The Revenue School, and the Directors School. Tom previously served as the Director of the NRPA Directors School. Tom is still very active in professional development of park and recreation practitioners.

Currently Tom spends a significant amount of time educating park and recreation professionals. In the past few years he has spoken at 11 different State Association Conferences and has presented sessions at the NRPA Congress for the past 12 years. He is on the Board of Regents at the NRPA Revenue School, The NRPA Directors School and a past member of the Supervisors Managements School Board.

Tom has served on the Board of Trustees of the National Recreation and Parks Association. The National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials, The South Carolina Recreation and Parks Association, and is currently on the Advisory Board for the Clemson University and NC State University School of Parks Recreation and Tourism Management.

Tom was recently honored with the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management (PRTM) at NC State University. According to a letter from NC State Department Head Myron Floyd, "in view of your career - long dedication to the field of public parks and recreation, your stature as a national leader in the profession, and as a true innovator in leisure services delivery, the faculty and staff found it fitting that you receive the award this year."

Tom taught at the NRPA Supervisors' Management School and served on the Board of Regents at the NRPA Revenue Development and Management School. O'Rourke has presented more than 10 education sessions at the NRPA Annual Conference and spoken at numerous state association conferences on the topic of park and recreation management.

He is also chair of the Clemson University Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management Advisory Board; chair of the Charleston Area Conventions and Visitors Center Board of Directors; and chair of the Charleston Area Sports Commission Board of Directors.

Tom has also been distinguished as a "Legend in the Field" of park and recreation administration by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA). For the honor, AAPRA selects individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the field of parks and recreation. The organization also interviews those individuals to share their professional insight, advice and philosophical beliefs on the field, through video posts on their website, [aapra.org](http://aapra.org). As part of the honor, a video presentation created of O'Rourke's reflection on his years in the field and his ideas for the future is now among the archives at the University of Utah.

Tom's real desire is to spend the rest of his life, using his 40 years of experience in the parks, recreation and sports field, to make the parks and recreation industry, and those that work within it, more productive.

Tom and his wife still volunteer their time and still are active coaches in track and field. In addition, Tom, regularly competes in local runs, races and triathlons. He and his wife are avid cyclists and love to scuba dive.

Tom's life (so far) has been exemplified by enthusiasm, passion, and dedication for the parks and recreation field. The goal of all this has been to create healthy communities and to teach valuable life skills to children. Tom recognized early in his career that having a good park system also meant being good stewards of the land. His work to conserve land and open space for human enjoyment has been at a cornerstone of his efforts.

Because of his dedication to conserving and responsibly using open space he is very deserving of the LaGasse Medal. I have known Tom for many years and have worked with him as a colleague and as his consultant, as well as a Board member of the East Cooper Land Trust. Scores of other landscape architects have worked with him as well. In every work session for every park Tom constantly reminds us of our responsibility to get it right – both in providing good parks that enrich people's lives and in being good stewards of our lowcountry landscapes.

So, I heartily nominate him for this honor and urge you to cast your vote in support of this nomination.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William T. Eubanks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small flourish at the end.

William T. Eubanks, FASLA  
Creative Director  
SeamonWhiteside

(Immediate Past Trustee, South Carolina Chapter, ASLA)



February 6, 2020

LaGasse Medal Nominations  
c/o Honors and Awards  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: Tom O'Rourke LaGasse Medal Nomination

Dear Board of Trustees, American Society of Landscape Architects:

I am writing to you today to support the nomination of Tom O'Rourke for the LaGasse Medal.

Throughout the course of his distinguished career, Tom O'Rourke has established himself as one of the most recognizable names in the field of park and recreation administration. Tom's path has been rooted in his intention of making parks and recreation facilities and programs accessible to all. Although Tom continues to stay active in the fields of parks, recreation, fitness/ well-being, non-profit management, government administration, education, and athletic coaching, I was privileged to work under his leadership during his tenure as Executive Director at Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC) (2001 – 2018).

As Executive Director of CCPRC, Tom led the agency toward many goals, special projects, and initiatives in support of the agency's overarching mission. It was under Tom's leadership that the Planning arm of the agency was temporarily separated from its Development arm. This re-structuring afforded the Planning Division the opportunity to pursue land acquisition during a time when (a) CCPRC had a substantial amount of dedicated acquisition funding, and (b) the economy was in a recession, allowing CCPRC to leverage all available local, state, federal, and private funding resources to further land acquisition efforts. As a result, CCPRC now owns, leases, and/or operates more than 11,000-acres of parkland, including approximately 2,686 acres (24.4%) protected by conservation easements; 2,645 acres (24.0%) protected by deed restrictions; and 3,127 acres (28.4%) protected through local governmental agreements. In summary, more than 75% of CCPRC parklands enjoy protection by at least one enforceable mechanism. The remaining 2,560 acres (23.2%) have no known enforceable protections, yet remain under the ongoing stewardship of CCPRC.

Under Tom's leadership at CCPRC thousands of acres of undeveloped parkland began to receive regular attention through the practice of natural resource management – including wildlife habitat enhancement, timber harvests for forest health, prescribed fire, and incremental re-establishment of longleaf pine communities...such as at the future McClellanville and Edisto Island county parks.

Tom raised the bar locally by involving CCPRC in cultural resource preservation. Culturally significant park properties brought under CCPRC's management during his tenure include: Tea Farm Creek property (Caw Caw Interpretive Center expansion), Lighthouse Inlet Heritage Preserve [former Coast Guard base], Laurel Hill Plantation County Park, Rifle Range Road Town/County Park, Old Towne Creek County Park (Ashem Farm), Meggett County Park (Harmony Hall), Bulow County Park (Long Savannah Plantation and Bulow Phosphate Mines). Development of most of these cultural sites is still in the planning stages, but

of CCPRC's cultural resource sites, McLeod Plantation Historic Site is known to be among Tom's proudest achievements. Here, CCPRC's interpretive programming provides an intensive chronological cross-section of the history of this site and area, while also being the only intact plantation within 10 minutes of downtown Charleston.

Other parks and facilities opened during Tom's tenure include the award-winning Sk8 Charleston skate park, whose design team included some of the best in the industry. "Preliminary public access" projects included expanding and improving access to Laurel Hill County Park, the Wannamaker North Mountain Bike Trail, and Johns Island County Park. Such access to undeveloped parklands would satisfy basic public demand for increased access to nature.

In addition to working with CCPRC Planning staff to leverage local, state, and federal public grant dollars for acquisition, the agency was gifted several park properties. This includes two properties donated by a local foundation: Stono River County Park at the terminus of the City of Charleston's West Ashley Greenway (on the East Coast Greenway), and "Baker Park" at a former hospital and brownfield site on the Ashley River on the Charleston Peninsula, in close proximity to many of Charleston's underserved communities. Lastly, through coordination with local conservation groups, CCPRC received Spring Grove County Park in rural western Charleston County, and three marsh "hammock" islands on Rantowles Creek within paddling distance of CCPRC's future Bulow County Park property.

Along with the Commission, Tom encouraged staff to pursue professional certifications and licenses, and to pursue excellence across all divisions of the agency. As a result, under Tom, CCPRC and its staff had been recognized at state and national levels for supporting quality park programs, park planning and resource management, and various other categories. While Tom (now retired from CCPRC) continues to establish himself as a leader nationally in the park and recreation industry, the Charleston region will be thankful in perpetuity for his dedication to natural and cultural resource conservation.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and its intent. I wholeheartedly support Tom's nomination for the LaGasse Medal.

Matthew C. Moldenhauer, ASLA



Senior Planner  
Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission

February 4, 2020

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**RE: Tom O'Rourke**

Dear Board of Trustees, American Society of Landscape Architects:

I am pleased to support the nomination of Tom O'Rourke for the ASLA LaGasse Medal. I have known Tom for many years and worked with him as we sought to preserve and protect the valued and rapidly disappearing Lowcountry landscapes of Charleston County.

One of the reasons I believe that Tom is so deserving of this award is because of the risks that he took to champion the cause for landscape stewardship, conservation and preservation. It was never easy to be out front, leading these efforts. South Carolina is a strong private property rights region and landowners don't appreciate being told what they can and cannot do with their land. Particularly when it is someone from the "government" who is making the request.

Tom always kept his cool and professional demeanor. He fought emotion with measured response and facts. He communicated effectively the need for conserved parks, open space and greenways. He celebrated the lifestyle of Lowcountry residents and persuaded them that conservation was in their best interests. He has been an effective leader in that regard.

Finally, the joint efforts for land conservation in Charleston County, that were led in part by Tom, have yielded one of the nation's most successful land and water conservation programs. Tom has been instrumental in this success. Without his leadership and dedication to the cause, this program would not have been as successful.

I am thrilled to support his nomination for the LaGasse Medal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles A. Flink". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles A. Flink, FASLA  
Greenways Incorporated  
31 Woodgate Court  
Durham, NC 27713

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**South Carolina**  
**Chapter of the American Society**  
**of Landscape Architects**

**P.O. Box 3523**  
**Bluffton, SC 29910**

[scasla.org](http://scasla.org)

RE: Tom O'Rourke

Dear Board of Trustees, American Society of Landscape Architects:

I am writing this letter, on behalf of the ASLA South Carolina Chapter, to support Tom O'Rourke's nomination for the LaGasse Medal, non-landscape professional. This nomination is being submitted by one of our chapter members, William T. 'Bill' Eubanks, FASLA and has been endorsed by our chapter's Executive Committee.

Tom O'Rourke has ardently accrued 40 years of experience in parks, recreation, and sports field and continues to be active with the professional development of parks and recreation practitioners with his presentations, leadership, and mentoring. His teaching focuses on investigating innovative and entrepreneurial tactics to address issues and challenges of the parks and recreation field.

Tom is well respected and acknowledged by his peers. His enthusiasm and passion for the proper management and judicious use of public lands has resulted in the successful growth and increased use of public lands and recreation facilities throughout the region and especially during his 25+ years as Executive Director of Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission.

Tom's career has been devoted to the sustainable stewardship of thousands of acres of parkland, resulting in the preservation of pristine lowcountry places with both scenic and cultural value as well as providing access to waterways, usable parks, and recreational opportunities for over 400,000 Charleston County residents, not to mention thousands of visitors, tourists, and residents of surrounding counties. His work has not only conserved land in the lowcountry but improved the quality of lives of its people, myself included.

For these contributions made over decades of dedicated service to his community, the ASLA South Carolina Chapter heartily endorses this nomination for the LaGasse Medal.

Sincerely,



Kristina Harvey, ASLA  
ASLA South Carolina Chapter President

**Executive Committee (voting)**  
**President** · Kristina Harvey (-2021)  
**Past President** · Clint Rigsby  
**Secretary** · Blake Thomas (-2020)  
**Treasurer** · Maria Drawdy (-2021)  
**Trustee** · Holley Owings (-2021)  
**At-Large Members**  
Christa Jordan (-2020)  
Drew Cheatham (-2020)  
Sarah Marrs (-2021)  
Michael Ethridge (-2021)

**Regional Leaders**  
Chris Lambka (upstate)  
Patrick Livingston (midlands)  
Mary Martinich (lowcountry)

**Government Affairs/Advocacy**  
Drew Cheatham

**Membership**  
Bill Eubanks

**PR · Public Awareness**  
Clint McHenry

**Sponsorship**  
Sarah Marrs

**Student & Emerging Professionals**  
Christa Jordan

**Continuing Edu./Programming**  
Michael Ethridge

**Awards**  
Barrett Armstrong

**Fellows/Honors**  
David Lycke · Bill Eubanks

**HALS Chapter Liaison**  
Rebekah Lawrence

**Clemson University**  
Matt Powers (CU Liaison/faculty)  
Robbie Levey (CUASLA Pres)  
Derek Bussey (CUASLA VP)  
Gabe Jenkins (CUASLA Trs)  
Caitlyn Van de Meulebroecke  
(CUASLA Sec)













## Contact Information:

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