

## **Honorary Membership Nomination Narrative**

Nominee: Charles McKinney

Nominee's Address: 830 5th Avenue

City/State/Zip: New York, NY 10065

Phone: 212.360.3485

Nominator: Nette Compton, Past-President, ASLA NY Chapter

It is with great pleasure that I submit Charles McKinney for consideration for Honorary ASLA. I have known and worked with Charles throughout my career, and have seen his passion, dedication, and commitment first-hand on a number of landscape-related efforts. He has had a consistent role in the shaping of New York City's parks over his career, and perhaps more importantly, in shaping the careers of many landscape architects in the process.

As the Principal Urban Designer for NYC Parks, Charles McKinney is leading the master planning process for flagship parks. Under his direction, the Department is exploring responses to the design imperatives of the 21st century, web-based planning tools and communication, as well as the role of planning in stimulating community-based leadership. He completes this work in a thorough and intentional way, engaging the community and design consultants through a detailed process. He has worked collaboratively with many landscape architects through this process.

Previously, as Chief of Design at NYC Parks (overseeing 100+ landscape architects, designers, engineers, and architects within the department), he provided design direction for park projects throughout New York City that strengthened the relationship between architecture, landscape, ecology, community, and park operations. His work occurred under the Bloomberg Administration, recorded as the largest era of park investment in New York City since the WPA.

The award-winning High Performance Landscape Guidelines was prepared under his direction in collaboration with the Design Trust for Public Space, a collaboration of several landscape architects and engineers. This document has been recognized by the ASLA New York Chapter Honor Award in 2011, and is referenced across the country and internationally.

Across his career, his passion for urban design and parks overflows beyond his positions held within the Parks Department. He has been an active member of

our ASLA chapter for many years, participating in programs and serving on the President's Dinner committee. He is an active member of many New York design institutions, including the Architecture League, American Institute of Architects, Forum for Urban Design, and the Institute for Urban Design . He has served on the Loeb Fellowship Alumni Council, ushering in many talented landscape architects and urban designers towards a very fulfilling experience. He has a frequent presence within the City College of New York's Master of Landscape Architecture program, attending presentations, critiques and serving on the certification advisory committee.

McKinney has a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Arkansas, a Masters of Urban Design from The City College of New York; he was a Loeb Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1994.



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ASLA Design Medal Nominations  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: Honorary ASLA Membership Nomination: Charles McKinney

Dear ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I am thrilled to write in support of Charles McKinney to be selected for Honorary ASLA Membership. Charles has not only been an incredible advocate for landscape architecture, he also serves as a leader in one of the largest employers of landscape architects and designers in the country, inspiring designers both emerging and seasoned in their careers.

I have known Charles for over 12 years, working with him as a teammate on the master planning of Southpoint Park on Roosevelt Island, and serving as a design consultant under him while he was Chief of Design at NYC Parks. He regularly attends our chapter events, has volunteered on our committees as well as panel discussions over the years and continues to be involved in elevating a stronger understanding for landscape architecture and urban design.

While working as a consultant to the Trust for Public Land on the Southpoint Park Master Plan, Charles felt it was critical to the design process to have complete understanding of the site and the users of the site. Working with the community and listening to resident's desires at the several workshops he set up were of prime importance. He wanted to "learn what insiders know" and "develop an understanding of the site from the perspective of the people who live and work on Roosevelt Island." The results from these listening sessions became the framework for all of our plans. This project won an ASLA-NY Honor Award in 2005.

Shortly after Southpoint Park I had the opportunity to work with Charles again while he was Chief of Design at NYC Parks. Charles had formulated new standards at the Parks Department for site analysis that directed designers to prepare a full site analysis to not only understand the site but also the context of the site within a neighborhood as well as the users of the site. He developed several updated guidelines for the Parks Department that raised the bar on park design resulting in highly successful urban spaces. The highlight of his passion for complete design is the *High Performance Landscape Guidelines: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parks for NYC*. These guidelines have helped to elevate our profession, not just locally but also nationally.

Charles is a landscape architect at heart whom designers in NYC welcome with open arms. He is dedicated to providing the highest quality of urban parks that unify the site and users of the site. He has also been an Affiliate ASLA Member for over nine years, according to our member roster. In my eyes, he is already an honorary member and I sincerely hope he will receive your highest consideration for Honorary ASLA Membership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer L. Nitzky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Jennifer Nitzky, RLA, ASLA, ISA  
ASLA-NY President

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To the Board of Trustees,

I write to support the nomination of Charles McKinney for Honorary ASLA. As a prior recipient of this honor, I am able to describe the profound impact that Mr. McKinney has had on parks and landscapes in New York City and around the country.

I have known and worked with Charles for more than 30 years. I first met him when he was preparing a restoration master plan for the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed Riverside Park in New York City. Soon thereafter, he became the first Park Administrator for Riverside Park, and began its restoration, later working in partnership with the Riverside Park Fund. Much later I became his supervisor, when I served as Manhattan Parks Commissioner, and we continued a working relationship 6 years later, when I was appointed NYC Parks Commissioner, and put Charles in charge of all the landscape design. In that capacity he oversaw the work of 60 in-house landscape architects, as well as engineers, estimators, and consultant designers, in a program that at its peak churned out \$500 million in projects a year.

Most significantly, Charles didn't just manage a production shop. He pushed the envelope on innovative design, insisting on the highest level of quality both for renovations of historic parks and for new designs, and in particular advocating for and insisting on the use of sustainable design principles.

Though he was not trained as a landscape architect, Mr. McKinney was more responsible than anyone else in the Parks Department for teaching me to understand and appreciate the historic and contemporary park landscape designs, and how to work with and respect landscape architects and landscape architecture. It was not by accident that more great new park designs and restorations of existing parks happened under his direction as Chief of Design than under any of his predecessors or successors.

Later, I asked Charles to oversee all of the master planning for *new* parks, as well as restoration and management planning for major existing parks in a different role as Principal Urban Designer in the Planning division of NYC Parks. In that role he led a number of very creative collaborations with non-profit, design-focused entities, including the Design Trust for Public Space and the Parsons New School, leading to significant accomplishments including the publication of the first-ever "Sustainable Design Guidelines for NYC Parks" and the redesign and reconstruction of several WPA-vintage parks and facilities.

With the training of an architect and urban designer, the achievements of a very senior public manager, and the soul and accomplishments of a landscape architect, no one has ever more deserving of the designation, "Honorary ASLA."

Sincerely,

Adrian Benepe  
Senior Vice President  
Director of City Park Development  
The Trust for Public Land



**Monday, February 23, 2015**  
**Re: Charles McKinney, Honorary ASLA**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am delighted to submit this letter of support for the candidacy of Charles McKinney for Honorary ASLA.

I have had the pleasure of working with Charles during my twelve years with NYC Parks; first as the Deputy Director of the Planning Division and then in my capacity as the Administrator for Northern Manhattan Parks.

When Charles was Chief of Design for NYC Parks, I collaborated with him on the High Line project, Sherman Creek and other park developments and witnessed his incredible ability to unite often disparate design ideas among diverse designers and stakeholders. Charles is a collaborative, encouraging, persuasive and compelling player in a design process and effectively brings about better outcomes for projects.

As the Principal Urban Planner for NYC Parks, Charles spearheaded NYC Parks' shift to executing Master Plans for many of its flagship parks. The parks I oversee – Northern Manhattan Parks – were the first to benefit from the Master Planning Process led by Charles. Charles effectively engaged with the diverse immigrant communities and user groups to ensure they helped inform how spaces and landscapes would be redeveloped to better serve their context.

His passion for the 600 plus acres that comprise Northern Manhattan Parks was catalytic and resulted in several spillover projects. Charles engaged Parsons/New School to collaborate with NYC Parks to make the previously seasonal High Bridge Recreation Center a year round amenity and destination for the Manhattan and Bronx communities that would be reconnected to it with the reopening of the historic High Bridge. He also engaged designers outside of NYC Parks to develop design solutions for the multiple obstructions to pedestrian connectivity to some of our waterfront sites, and lured a private landscape architect to collaborate with planners and gardeners to develop an in-depth landscape plan for the century old Isham Park.



NYC Parks

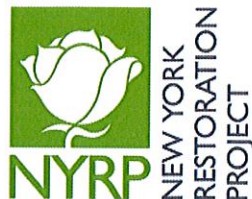
## Northern Manhattan Parks

I enthusiastically write on behalf of Charles McKinney's candidacy for Honorary ASLA. His creativity, design solutions, ability to create synergies and collaborations in design projects and effectively engage diverse stakeholders has been an incredible gift to numerous projects and people in and outside of Northern Manhattan Parks.

Sincerely,

Jennifer M. Hoppa  
Administrator, Northern Manhattan Parks  
Executive Director, Fort Tryon Park Trust





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Deborah Marton

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 Charles McKinney for Honorary ASLA

Dear Trustees:

With great pleasure I nominate Charles McKinney to receive ASLA's Honorary Designation. While not trained as a landscape architect, Charles consistently articulates and implements a holistic, comprehensive, ecologically sound and graceful approach to landscape planning and design. The work he has planned, executed, and well, inspired has changed the face of New York City.

I have known Charles for at least 10 years, and always valued and learned from his consistent advocacy for design excellence, sustainability and public participation in the creation of park landscapes. We had the opportunity to work closely when I served as Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space, and our organizations partnered to create the *High Performance Landscape Guidelines*. Charles' understanding of complexity – technical, infrastructural, social, horticultural, even political – was invaluable and frankly, impressive.

Always an enormously generous colleague, I have to note that Charles is also a lovely, kind, and elegant man, who leads naturally, by example. He exemplifies the best in our profession. Please give him your strongest consideration, and award him your highest honorary designation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah Marton", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Deborah Marton

Executive Director



## Spitzer School of Architecture

### Denise Hoffman Brandt

Director of Landscape Architecture and Associate Professor  
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#### Honorary Membership Nomination

ASLA

636 Eye Street, NW,  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

I am writing to support Charles McKinney's nomination for Honorary Membership to the American Society of Landscape Architects. I have known Charles for the last seven years during which time he has contributed greatly to the City of New York's Parks as Chief of Design and Principal Urban Designer. In fact, my first encounter with Charles McKinney was at a symposium on Green Infrastructure at the Center for Architecture. I had just presented a fairly critical assessment of then-current street tree planting practices and he responded with an array of thorough questions during the formal Q and A. At the break, he pursued the questioning, with several of NYCDPR's tree installers and managers in tow. It was clear Charles planned to resolve any misguided practices right then and there if possible! Charles' forthright approach and open mind have been of calculable benefit in the evolution of City parks.

In addition to professional encounters, I have been fortunate to enjoy Charles McKinney's contribution to the Landscape Architecture Program at the City College of New York. Charles has been generous with his time above and beyond the call of duty. In addition to sitting on reviews regularly, he has opened his office to our students with Internships, and participated in Program administration as a member of our Advisory Committee. He is always enthusiastic, insightful, and ready with follow up on any issue.

The CCNY MLA program is unique in its focus on urban landscape and Charles has been a vocal supporter of that initiative as well as an important agent on our behalf. As the students grapple with issues of urban landscape research, design, and planning, they benefit from his input on current practices and thoughts for future change. It is not surprising that many have chosen careers in public service at the Parks Department. I hope you will honor Charles McKinney with an Honorary Membership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denise Hoffman Brandt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denise" being more prominent.

Denise Hoffman Brandt