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COLLEGE OF
BUILT
ENVIRONMENTS

March 2016

Community Service Award Nomination
c/o Carolyn Mitchell
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

re: nomination of **DESIGNJONES**

Dear ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I am delighted to join my colleagues in nominating *DesignJones (Austin Allen and Diane Jones Allen)* for the ASLA Community Service Award. Both Austin Allen and Diane Jones exemplify the leadership qualities recognized by the award. Their empathy, generosity, and commitment to community-led design strategies distinguish them as leaders. They more than most anyone in the profession understand what it means to foster innovation by co-creating sustainable responses with communities for their homes, places, and spaces. And they have taken on the challenging issues of racism and inequities in their work in ways that expand the boundaries of our profession. For this work, a Community Service Award would acknowledge our deepest gratitude to them for their years of service.

The principals of DesignJones, LLC , Diane Jones , RLA, ASLA and Austin Allen, PhD, have over 40 combined years of experience in Landscape Architectural, Site Planning, and Urban Design Projects. The firm addresses projects predominantly in urban areas with a focus on New Orleans, Key West, St. Louis, Baltimore and Cleveland. With decades of practice contributing to the communities of Southern Louisiana as well as across the country and in the Caribbean, Diane and Austin have established a significant legacy in diverse communities. The two landscape architects have pushed community service far beyond any single locale or region and have helped to foster diverse communities near and far.

Diane and Austin through their work in DesignJones see design as a way to build empowerment, to address disaster recovery and catalyze innovative planning and design solutions co-created with communities. In an example of the breadth of the community engagement in 2000 Austin and Diane designed 16 Head Start playgrounds for Total Community Action in New Orleans. The playgrounds were designed for children 3 to 5 and were handicap-accessible and were located throughout the city at various schools and churches which house

Head start centers. They have been leaders in planning and design efforts related to the rebuild and recovery of the Lower Ninth Ward (as noted by Arthur Johnson in his letter of support), the cypress forest restoration in the Bayou Bienvenue Wetlands Triangle, the dismantling of the I-10 freeway and regeneration of Treme within the Claiborne Avenue Corridor and rebuilding and restoring the Historic District, post-earthquake Jacmel, Haiti. With a focus on environmental justice and racial equity, Austin and Diane have contributed as leaders and as landscape architects.

Austin Allen is, in addition to being a principle of DesignJones, an associate professor of landscape architecture at the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture. He came to pro bono and community work early in his career having been a student of Randy Hester FASLA (and last year's winner of the Community Service Award), at UC Berkeley. His teaching at LSU (and previously at UC Denver) is focused on the methods of community engagement that build on the experience and first-hand knowledge of his work. While he is most known for his leadership in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, after the devastating earthquake that ravaged Haiti in 2010, Austin led years of community design studios through Louisiana State University. His efforts leveraged important lessons learned in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He fostered relationships with leaders and those in need, engaged his students in productive interactions with local people, and consistently championed both best practices and equitable practices in the rebuilding process. Within the LSU College of Art and Design Austin's efforts in Jacmel, Haiti became the model for design studios engaged in international projects in underserved communities. The work is catalyzing future generations of landscape architects in the contested fields of disaster recovery and social and environmental justice. In a collaborative studio between graduate programs at Morgan State University and LSU focused on the rebuild of the Lower Ninth Ward and its relationship to the rebuild of New Orleans and to rethinking American urbanism. The St. Maurice Warehouse District Project (2012) eventually influenced the New Orleans Planning Commission and City Council's decision about public recreational access to the Mississippi River Levee and in the zoning of a block adjacent to the Port of New Orleans in the Holy Cross Neighborhood of the Lower Ninth Ward. The books developed by the students has influenced policy and strategic planning decisions among organizations and individuals in this community, particularly because of the collaborative nature of both studios partnering with the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED).

In the past year with racial unrest across the nation, Austin used the events to catalyze discussion in class, focused on the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, in particular on how the place, the urban landscape had become unjust and inequitable and what role design had in that reality. He and Diane emphasize the potential for landscape architects to advocate for people and communities having a louder and clearer voice in design and planning efforts. This, as they often note, benefits the specific communities and in the long run everyone.

Diane also engaged early in a community approach having studied as well with Randy Hester, FASLA, and Clare Cooper Marcus, Honorary ASLA. She launched DesignJones with offices in Baltimore and New Orleans working back and forth, two cities that needed citizen leadership. However, it was when watching "the news coming out of her beloved city with horror, she decided to return (to New Orleans where) she began working pro bono on a vision for Claiborne Avenue, one of the city's major cultural thoroughfares..." (Arvidson, LAM) She has been deeply embedded in the community ever since, as well as a contributing leader in Baltimore, Detroit, and elsewhere. Her work with the Backyard Gardner's Network: Restoration Park, Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, LA, 2014-ongoing, is exemplary of her approach to design and to community engagement. Working with and facilitating the BGN, a community based organization located in the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, she is helping them to develop plans for a vacant lot, currently owned by Port of New Orleans, but a part of their everyday lives in the neighborhood. The programming includes public gathering and educational space, innovative sustainable gardening demonstration and food production areas, along with a play space for neighborhood children. The project has the potential to greatly improve the quality of life and health outcomes for residents of the Lower 9th Ward, as well as bolster entrepreneurship opportunities and neighborhood jobs. DesignJones, LLC is not only helping with concept development and community outreach, but assisting the Backyard Gardeners network in developing partnerships with the appropriate governmental agencies, other community organizations, and appropriate funders. DesignJones LLC recently assisted the BGN in applying of 2016 Kresge Creative Place Making Grant.

As Boone writes, "Diane and Austin have shown a patience and persistence that comes from a true passion for the people that they serve and students they teach." The pro bono engaged by DesignJones is remarkable. Probably most recognized for their work after Hurricane Katrina, they have led important community design efforts combining neighborhood and academic resources to co-create responses to the critical challenges facing communities and districts as they rebuild. Austin has served as President of the Board of Directors of **Lower Ninth Ward CSED** for the past eight years. As Adam Regn Arvidson wrote in the cover essay for *Landscape Architecture Magazine* (November 2015) with a focus on environmental justice, every project is important to DesignJones. For the project (pro bono) Backyard Gardner's Network Diane noted "this little square of land is emblematic of the problems lower-income minority communities often face." This attention to the mundane, to the everyday and its real importance in the life of the city and its citizens is at the core of how Diane and Austin have engaged and lead.

Diane and Austin advocate for landscape architects to not only respond to clients but catalyze projects that need to happen to build community. Sometimes you are asked to lead and "Sometimes you have to just make things happen". As Arvidson described "You could call it tactical urbanism, a pop-up park, or trespassing. The fact is that in situations like this, landscape architecture "projects" aren't awarded; they are created. Yes, Jones Allen is calling the port and the city, trying (so far unsuccessfully) to get them to recognize this opportunity in a woefully underserved area, but she is also going right on ahead and designing the space on behalf of the

community—with no municipal contract currently on offer. “If environmental justice is what you want to do as a landscape architect, you have to work with people pro bono,” she says. “Hopefully an RFP will come out of this, and we would go after it, but at least I know that I helped make it happen. You balance it, because you have to eat. So you do some of the paid things and you do some of this.” With this commitment DesignJones is creating a legacy where they have worked, one that positions landscape architecture at the core of productive, creative, and innovate community building.

Additionally, Austin has been engaged as a film maker and is recognized for his groundbreaking film, “Claiming Open Space” (first showed on PBS in 1996, recently reshown in 2016). This was the work that caught my attention and made me realize I needed to get to know Austin. In fact, it was where Diane, in 1991, met Austin as well He connected her into his Lower Ninth recovery efforts in 2009, the same year she initially founded DesignJones. As an extended case studies of American public open spaces, their uses and perceptions as seen through the eyes of their African American communities. Stories are told by community members who use city parks in cities from Columbus, New Orleans, Detroit, and Oakland, to Montgomery, Alabama. All critical places for African American culture and community. The underlining theme is how official planning policies often conflict with the use of public parks by African Americans. As noted by Walter Hood commenting on the film "the cultural makeup of the communities that use city parks is often left out of planning and programming, which can alienate the people meant to use them. This lapse comes up in interviews with residents who fondly remember a neighborhood park before it was redesigned and with kids who wonder why they are constantly hounded by police for simply enjoying time in the park." The narratives are those of individuals that reveal Austin's deep understanding of the cultural dynamics and place-based frameworks that comprise urban neighborhoods across the nation. This is one of the many ways that Austin, and Diane, give generously to their community, as landscape architects and as a engaged artists.

Beyond their own contributions, Austin and Diane understand the need to engage a broader community of professional as well as civic leaders. They seek to share methods of engagement with cities and community leaders because they know it works better than what is so often done- as Diane explains “We were trying to get [the lead consultants and the city] to do smaller, kitchen-table meetings, where you get people to invite their friends, talk in smaller groups, really find out what the community wants,” ... “But mostly they ended up going with three big public meetings.” They lead as contributors and as models for others. Randy Hester writes DesignJones' " Kitchen Table Workshop is one of the most interactive techniques I know. It allows people to design their communities in their communities and gain the confidence to confront the forces of status quo politics. Such techniques allow communities to make a difference for themselves, with a little help, often a big help, from the landscape architects." In this work DesignJones has advanced the profession by positioning landscape architecture as the catalyst for resilient and just communities.

Environmental justice is a complex challenge, one compounded by history and by contemporary challenges of climate change, economic disparities, and population health inequities. But now is a critical moment for landscape architects to take a leadership role around issues of justice as they have around environmentalism. As Austin writes "landscape architects have not shied away from other big topics such as climate change, and have not feared taking on massive landscape urbanism projects. In fact, landscape architects have advocated over the past decades for a more prominent role in environmental projects and have regularly pushed projects in a more environmentally sound direction. The profession prides itself now on its environmental advocacy. Why should community engagement and environmental justice be any different?"

Or as Randy Hester notes in his support letter, DesignJones "exemplify what can be achieved when landscape architects focus on deep environmental justice. They employ their design skills in ways most never imagine. There is no superficial beauty in their work, only meaningful beauty. They work in the toughest places and make a difference."

Please join us in honoring DesignJones for their leadership and engagement in serving our communities.

Yours kindly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thaisa Way". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Thaisa Way Ph.D., ASLA
Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture
Adjunct Associate Professor, Architecture/ Associate Professor, History

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March 1, 2016

Dear Awards Committee;

This is a letter expressing my *strong support for DesignJones (Austin Allen and Diane Jones Allen) nomination for the ASLA Community Service Award*. Both Austin and Diane exemplify the leadership qualities recognized by the award. Their empathy, passion, and commitment to community-led design strategies separate them from many engaged in pro bono work. For them, this type of work offers opportunities for innovate and empower their clients to co-create sustainable solutions.

I was introduced to Austin's work through viewing his groundbreaking film, "Reclaiming Open Space". I saw the film a decade before meeting Austin. The film was the first of its kind; extended case studies of American public open spaces and the African American communities that came to use and become connected to them. Featuring community-oriented narratives in spaces ranging from Congo Square in New Orleans, to Belle Isle Park in my hometown Detroit, the film revealed a deep understanding of the cultural dynamics present in the unsung communities that enrich our cities. This film would serve as foreshadowing of the clarity and eloquence of their design and planning work.

In response to the devastating earthquake that ravaged Haiti in 2010, Austin led years of community design studios through Louisiana State University. He cultivated partnerships on the ground, engaged his students in meaningful interactions with local people, and consistently championed best practices in the rebuilding process. His efforts leveraged important lessons learned in New Orleans in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. There too he has led important community design efforts combining neighborhood and academic resources to address the pressing challenges facing that important landscape.

I have been of Diane's important work in transportation equity since her work in Baltimore and at Morgan State University. Most recently, we both served in a pro bono effort on the Southside of Chicago. The community leader was searching for strategies to address vacant lots in the community, and unbeknownst to us all, Diane had already served as a research fellow in the community, and was able to connect community concerns with potential resources on the spot. Her knowledge of the community even

impressed the area leadership, and engendered her to the group in profound ways. Diane and I both serve on the ASLA Environmental Justice Professional Practice Network. While there, she tirelessly champions the need for our profession to listen to and work with the people that actually live in the places we engage. Her ethic is captured in her recent cover story in *Landscape Architecture Magazine*.

Austin and Diane occupy an important era in the history of community service and landscape architecture. For the first time in our nation's history, people of color will soon represent the majority in America. Although the diversity of the profession of landscape architecture lags behind this national trend, the demand for the understanding and expertise to empower the rising majority to engage in sustainable land stewardship has never been higher. Recognizing DesignJones for the ASLA Community Service Award is one step in our profession announcing to the rapidly changing public that the ethics and skills of landscape architecture are not just for some but available to all. And I can think of no better ambassadors of this message than Austin and Diane. For these reasons, I am honored to have the opportunity to support their nomination.

Sincerely,

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

Kofi Boone, ASLA

Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture

Email

from: Randolph Hester, Professor Emeritus Of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning, University of California, Berkeley

to: Thaisa Way

date: 3-23-16

Thaisa:

I am honored to write in support of Diane Jones Allen and Austin Allen, DesignJones, for the ASLA Community Service Award. They exemplify what can be achieved when landscape architects focus on deep environmental justice. They employ their design skills in ways most never imagine. There is no superficial beauty in their work, only meaningful beauty. They work in the toughest places and make a difference. The Lower Ninth Ward is home base. It is better for their efforts. Their work spans many of the most desperate communities we know and they have made differences everywhere they work.

Their process to empower communities is exceptional. They constantly innovate with techniques to transact design with diverse communities. Their Kitchen Table Workshop is one of the most interactive techniques I know. It allows people to design their communities in their communities and gain the confidence to confront the forces of status quo politics. Such techniques allow communities to make a difference for themselves, with a little help, often a big help, from the landscape architects.

Austin and Diane have been innovating in this work for a long time. They never seem to tire. They maintain eyes on the prize of justice. They deserve our recognition.

Best

Randy



River to Bayou

March 15, 2016

Dear ASLA Officials,

On behalf of the Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED), I fully recommend Design/Jones for the ASLA Community Service Award. The Design/Jones Company in the Lower 9th Ward community of New Orleans has exhibited a mission of community building, neighborhood revitalization and cultural preservation represented in their design work. Through the efforts and dedication displayed by Austin Allen and Diane Allen, Design/Jones and CSED have partnered together to strive for sustainable neighborhoods that has strengthen the proudly self-sufficient and deeply rooted community of the Lower 9th Ward.

Revitalizing our devastated neighborhood and preserve our cultural heritage since the horror of Hurricane Katrina, has been the underlining core of Design/Jones. They have collaborated and partnered with the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development since 2009. Design/Jones has remained a strong community presence, working to rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood with sustainability in mind. Austin Allen has lead operations and engagements for the Lower Ninth Ward community relating to three mission areas (built environment, natural environment and food security). He also guides, designs and conducts operations focused around cultural sensitivity, urban and coastal planning, and sustainable strategies for the Lower Ninth Ward. Mr. Allen successfully manages a design company that relates to community based organizations that is focused heavily on creativity in green building of communities as well as developing ways to plan, design, build and evaluate sustainable infrastructure within the Greater New Orleans area.

For these reasons, I believe that Design/Jones is an excellent candidate for ASLA's Community Service Award. I would hope that you will join me in recognizing Design/Jones as an exceptional entity that is making a significant difference for New Orleans, Louisiana and the Country!

Best,


Arthur Johnson
CEO

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SPACKMAN MOSSOP ^{AND} MICHAELS

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DATE MARCH 1, 2016
REFERENCE DIANE JONES ALLEN
REFERENCE LETTER
PAGE 1 OF 1

Professional Awards Jury
American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington DC 20001-3736

RE: DIANE JONES ALLEN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

It gives me great pleasure to write in support of Diane Jones' record of community service. Through her practice and her academic work Diane has sustained a commitment to community service and the public interest. I am most familiar with her work in New Orleans and Louisiana and also in Haiti.

Diane uses her teaching as a vehicle for engaging students in community service projects, connecting them with real clients and making significant contributions to projects in the public interest. She has a sophisticated grasp of the issues around substantive engagement of communities in planning and design processes and broadly educates clients, professionals and participants in the issues.

She is tireless in her work to support the ambitions of communities through providing strategic guidance, professional services and funding support.

In New Orleans, Jones has worked extensively with community groups in the Lower Ninth Ward to facilitate capacity building, empowering residents and influencing decision-makers across a range of projects. These include the Backyard Gardener's Network, Streetscape proposals, and an ongoing role in advising the Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development.

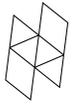
In Haiti, Jones has worked for a number of years with local collaborators in a series of urban projects for the center of historic town of Jacmel a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Should you wish to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Mossop
Principal



Harvard University
Graduate School of Design

ASLA Community Service Award Nominations
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 2001-3736

Members of the Executive Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I am writing to recommend the firm DesignJones, LLC for the American Society of Landscape Architects Community Service Award. The firm, led by Austin Allen and Diane Jones, has worked tirelessly to address community engagement and social justice in urban environments. I have worked closely with Austin Allen during my tenure as the Director of the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University and have had the opportunity to witness the impact that DesignJones has made within Southern Louisiana through community engagement, pedagogy, and advocacy.

DesignJones has built an impressive portfolio of projects throughout the city of New Orleans and southern Louisiana that have helped communities recover from an inequitable distribution of recovery efforts after the 2005 hurricane season. These projects have directly addressed community needs such as their work in the “Connecting the Lower Ninth Ward” project. This work has taken shape through a collaboration between LSU design studios and relentless efforts to engage the community and greater city. The project provides a framework for the Lower Ninth to envision a robust and resilient transportation network, both in terms of current needs and future speculation.

It is possible to list nearly fifteen years of active projects that have engaged Southern Louisiana but even more impressive is that DesignJones has also found ways to engage communities across the nation and Caribbean. This includes assisting in and organizing efforts in Haiti, Baltimore, Detroit, and Cleveland. Austin Allen and Diane Jones have projected their passion for community service beyond a single locale and have learned from and given back to a diverse group of people. The firm’s work advances the profession through their concerted efforts to position landscape architecture as the catalyst for resilient and just communities.

DesignJones has also integrated their work into the principals’ roles as educators in design studios they have conducted at LSU that focus on methods of community engagement. Within the LSU College of Art and Design Austin Allen’s efforts in Jacmel, Haiti became the model for design studios that took on international projects in underserved regions of the world. The work is helping to educate a future generation of landscape architects in the contentious areas of disaster recovery and social justice. Diane and Austin have shown a patience and persistence that comes from a true passion for the people that they serve and students they teach.

I would recommend DesignJones, LLC for the ASLA Community Service Award without hesitation. If there are any further questions regarding their viability for this recognition, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Bradley E. Cantrell

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