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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 Friends of the High Line for the Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence

Dear Trustees,

It is with enthusiasm that I nominate Friends of the High Line for the ASLA Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence. It would be hard to overstate just how important the High Line has proven to be for the profession of landscape architecture. Not only has the now iconic project shown the world what landscape architects are capable of and created new opportunities for us in cities across the country, it has rewritten the rules about what parks in cities can look like, and forever raised the bar defining how we view, and what we expect from, our urban landscapes. ASLA has previously honored designers of the High Line with well-deserved design awards, and I believe it is now time for us to also recognize the ongoing work of those people in Friends of the High Line – the visionaries, advocates, grassroots supporters, donors, and fundraisers – without whose commitment the High Line would not even exist.

It was in 1980 that the last train ran along the rails of the High Line – a 1.5-mile-long railroad viaduct elevated above the streets on the west side of Manhattan. Nearly two decades later, when the City of New York planned to tear down the remaining structure, the idea for Friends of the High Line was born out of the shared vision of Robert Hammond and Joshua David, two neighbors concerned about losing this reflection of their neighborhood's industrial past. They saw potential where others saw eyesore and organized the group with the intention of not only saving the High Line, but also transforming it into something beautiful.

Friends of the High Line was formalized as a 503(c) non-profit organization in 1999. It then successfully worked with the administration of mayor Michael Bloomberg and the New York City Council to reverse a City policy favoring demolition to one ensuring the High Line's preservation through the federal Railbanking program. The group spearheaded the planning and design process set up to transform the structure, and partnered with the City on the subsequent international design competition – won by the team headed by James Corner Field Operations – and the eventual construction of the project. This is a story we are all familiar with by now.

The High Line is undoubtedly a great feat of design and construction. For me, however, what is even more remarkable than its built form is the vision out of which it was born. I have little doubt that we would still be talking about the transformative power of the project had any of the finalists in the design competition won. But without the original idea – and the will to make that a reality – we would likely still be sitting around wondering what the next big thing is going to be. Luckily, Hammond, David and the rest of Friends of the High Line successfully maneuvered through the complex world of politics, real estate, big money, preservation, community and design in order to create what has become a new kind of public space – one designed by landscape architects.

After years of relentless work to save the High Line from demolition, and then create the park we see today, Friends of the High Line is now settled into the less frantic life as a conservancy working with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, to make sure the High Line is maintained as a great public space for all New Yorkers and visitors to enjoy. In addition to overseeing the maintenance, operations, and public programming for the park, Friends of the High Line works to raise the essential private funding to complete construction of all phases, support more than 70 percent of the park's annual operating budget, and create an endowment for its future operations and maintenance.

In addition to everything else, the High Line has, since its first section opened in 2009, served as a catalyst for the re-development of Manhattan's West Side and has prompted more than \$2 billion in investment in the neighborhood. I can think of no clearer example of the value brought by well-planned and designed urban landscapes than that of the High Line – a value that we, as landscape architects, continue to benefit from.

Thanks to the efforts of Friends of the High Line – in particular Hammond and David – the park has become a model for other reuse projects around the world. Philadelphia and Chicago, for instance, have both engaged the expertise of landscape architecture firms to pursue similar projects for themselves. More importantly, the High Line has provided to the world a crystal clear example of how groundbreaking and beautiful places can be created out of strong vision, passion and community activism.

It is important to note that Robert Hammond recently stepped down from his position as president of Friends of the High Line after 15 years of involvement with the project. Throughout that time, he, Joshua David and the rest of the organization have been great friends and supporters of landscape architects. By helping to create one of the most celebrated and beloved landscapes in the world, they have made countless people more aware of the value we provide. Because of their accomplishments and ongoing service to their community, I believe that now is the time for us to recognize and reward the contributions of Friends of the High Line with the Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence.

Sincerely,

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

Mark Hough, ASLA
Campus Landscape Architect



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ASLA Board of Trustees
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Re: Medal of Excellence
Letter of Support
Friends of the High Line

Dear Trustees,

It is with great pleasure that I provide a letter in strong support of the Friends of the High Line for the ASLA Medal of Excellence.

Most landscape architects are familiar with the imaginative and elegant design. Many may realize how transformative this project has been – to Chelsea (my neighborhood), to the city at large, to every city, and to the public's understanding of what is possible.

What many may not realize is just how – and who – made this extraordinary project happen. Projects face many challenges in the process of formation. The silent force behind many is the determination of advocates and supporters. The Friends of the High Line rose to the occasion to deal with, among many obstacles, the hurdles of politics, finance and long-term stewardship.

Design is a social art best practiced in dialog – not only with a talented design team, but also with an enlightened and resolute client. I urge you to honor the Friends of the High Line's vision and commitment with the Medal of Excellence.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Kamp, FASLA, LF, NA
President



February 24, 2014

Medal of Excellence Nominations
c/o Carolyn Mitchell
American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye St. NW
Washington DC 2000-3736

Re: Medal of Excellence Nomination: Friends of the High Line

Dear Trustees,

It is a privilege to support Friends of the High Line's nomination for the ASLA Medal of Excellence.

I have been associated with Friends of the High Line (The Friends), since 2006, and I can attest to their sole interest in creating an urban oasis through innovative project planning and design. Most of the world knows the story of two founders meeting at a community meeting and wanting to save the elevated railroad. What is often lost in this account is the commitment and imagination embodied by the non-profit organization as it moved to save the "line". By understanding the need to work with the NYC Planning Commission, and seizing the opportunity presented by PlaNYC, they were able to tap into a world of resources not previously seen.

The Friends worked tirelessly to raise funds and implement their vision, by working with the City agencies to enhance the corridor and provide a tax base that could support the long-term maintenance of the design. The Friends' commitment to the health and well-being of the Chelsea neighborhood and New York City is evident by the overwhelming success of the High Line. Their commitment to excellence has been consistent since the design process and has continued through construction and maintenance of Sections I and II, and now as Section III nears its completion and scheduled opening this summer.

I sincerely encourage you to vote for this monumental and historical organization that embodies excellence in planning, design and continued maintenance.

Sincerely,

Annette P. Wilkus FASLA, LEED AP
Founding Principal





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Medal of Excellence Nominations

c/o Carolyn Mitchell

636 Eye Street, NW

Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Nomination of the Friends of the High Line for the Medal of Excellence

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

As a practicing landscape architect and current President of the New York Chapter of the ASLA, the High Line has had an enormously positive effect on New York City and the landscape architecture community at large. It has elevated the profile of our profession within the general public in ways that few works can. It is a new paradigm in the public's understanding of landscape and urban public space, as well as the power of parks to reinvigorate an entire neighborhood. This understanding has spread to other cities, many of which recognize its many values and now desire to recreate its effects within their city. There are many projects now referred to as "the High Line of _____," which illustrates in short hand the fact that the High Line provides a full suite of benefits that the ASLA touts for all urban parks. Its broad reach was brought home to me when my family, while visiting New York, requested to visit the High Line rather than the classic choice of Central Park. And even during their January visit, it was busy, delightful and engaging.

In hindsight, the value of the High Line is clear. However, this was not always the case, and without the long term tenacity and dedication of the Friends of the High Line, none of it would have come to fruition. Fifteen years ago, Joshua David and Robert Hammond had the vision to begin a campaign to convert an abandoned and inaccessible elevated railway in a portion of the city lacking parks. They catalyzed the involvement of other non-profits in this effort, partnering with the Design Trust for Public Space on feasibility studies to test the idea, as well as garnering local governmental support. They proved that the economic benefits were real, advancing their own plans as well as proving this concept for other cities to consider. In partnership with the city, selected an excellent design team, with the lead as a landscape architect, James Corner Field Operations. This selection of a landscape architect lead shows incredible trust, appreciation and due respect to our profession. Four years after this, the first section opened, thanks to amazing efforts on the part of the Friends and City. Since the first section opening in 2009, the popularity and size of the park have continued to grow and flourish, only possible due to the herculean efforts of fundraising and maintaining provided by the Friends. It is with great pleasure that I nominate the Friends of the High Line for this much deserved Medal of Excellence.

Sincerely,



Nette Compton
ASLA NY Chapter President

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for LANDSCAPE STUDIES

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American Society of Landscape Architects Trustees
c/o Carolyn Mitchell, Honors and Awards Coordinator
American Society of Landscape Architects
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It gives me great pleasure to know that the American Society is considering awarding the Friends of the High Line its 2014 Medal of Honor.

I first walked the High Line with Robert Hammond in 2001 when the tracks were still covered with the same grasses and wildflowers one sees in Joel Sternfeld's pre-construction photographs. I had been interested in the project from the time when it was, in Hammond's words, "just two guys with a logo." Nevertheless, I secretly harbored reservations about how it would turn out. Wasn't the small miracle of spontaneous revegetation in the most starkly industrial kind of landscape—a humbling reminder of nature's enduring fecundity—something precious that would be lost?

My walk on the new High Line in the fall of 2009, shortly after section 1, the stretch that runs from Gansevoort to Twentieth Street, opened to the public, was a revelation. I was pleased to see how the remnant tracks, paving planks, and slim, backless wood benches pay homage to the fact that the High Line is still really a *line*. Its flow is reinforced by the planting beds, which are defined by raised bands approximately the same width as the old railroad tracks. The plants growing in the narrow strips of soil in between have an air of spontaneity that evokes the vegetation that was there before. The contained bed built to accommodate the roots of the grove of birches next to Gansevoort Overlook has been given thin walls of COR-TEN steel, whose rust color harks back to the defunct trestle's decaying beams.

That this elegantly designed, hugely popular aerial promenade exists today is witness to the importance of not giving up on an improbable but highly imaginative vision. When Hammond and Joshua David met at a community planning board hearing on the proposed demolition of the High Line and decided to form Friends of the High Line, no one could have predicted that they would succeed in turning an defunct industrial relic into a world-renowned twenty-first-century park.

Good decisions, good luck, and hard work along the way made it possible. The Bloomberg administration's commitment to the project was key. Strategic community outreach and creative publicity plus the simple and thoughtful rationale behind the design by landscape architect James Corner of Field Operations, architects Diller + Scofidio, and garden designer Piet Oudolf were equally important.

FOUNDATION
for LANDSCAPE STUDIES

As Corner's "scripted" design-as-choreography envisioned, the High Line's intensely urban context was dramatized. And yet, the overall impression that the visitor has is one of amiable tranquility. The notion of a park as promenade, a place purely for strolling, reinforces this. Because of its success, other cities now seek to build their own versions of the High Line. Few will succeed in capturing the ineffable qualities that make the original something much more than a prototype: a truly unique work of landscape architecture worthy of the American Society of Landscape Architecture's Medal of Excellence.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Barlow Rogers
President, Foundation for Landscape Studies