

Honorary Membership Nomination Narrative

Nominee: Holly Leicht

Nominee's Address:

Jacob K. Javits Federal Building, 26 Federal Plaza, Room 3541

City/State/Zip: New York, NY 10278-0068

Phone: (212) 264-8000

Nominator: Nette Compton, ASLA NY Chapter President

Holly Leicht has led an extraordinary career dedicated to public service, and the local and now national level. At the root of all of her work is an emphasis on the quality of life in cities, an ethic shared with landscape architects.

Graduating magna cum laude from Yale College and cum laude from Northwestern University School of Law, Ms. Leicht began her career in private law before transitioning to in-house counsel at New York's Municipal Arts Society (MAS). She advanced within MAS to become the Director of Design, Planning and Advocacy, which would inform her future career trajectory. During this time, she directed Imagine New York, a program founded in the aftermath of September 11th, which engaged thousands of community members in the process of envisioning the future of the World Trade Center and its surrounding neighborhoods. From this role, Ms. Leicht transitioned to become the Director of Planning for offsite projects at the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, again playing a pivotal role in the impact of urban design in revitalizing downtown New York City.

In 2004, she began a period of work within city service, joining the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development from 2004 to 2011, first as Assistant Commissioner of Planning and then as Deputy Commissioner for Development. In this capacity, she oversaw Mayor Bloomberg's New Housing Marketplace Plan, which is on track to build and preserve 165,000 units of housing by 2015. She was a driving force in the oversight of an international design competition in partnership with the American Institute of Architects that resulted in Via Verde, a signature affordable housing project that has won multiple awards for its design and sustainability.

In 2011 until the beginning of this year, she served as the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), the leading citywide not-for-profit championing greater access to quality parks for all New Yorkers. In this role, she has drawn from her range of experience within government and non-profits to advocate for improvement of New York City's Parks system. Her unique mixture of past

positions afforded her an informed and well-respected voice within the design and government communities, strengthening the message of her organization.

In this role, she has advocated for positions reverberate far beyond the borders of New York City, as they are relevant to many urban parks nationwide. Under her leadership, NY4P has contributed via advocacy, research and volunteer engagement. The organization has been vocal about broad reaching issues such as how to successfully incorporate public private partnerships within parks, releasing a clear and concise agenda for the new administration in 2013. They have conducted research on the links between open space and public health, as well as the distribution of open space and natural areas, emphasizing council districts where elected officials are strong or weak funders of parks. Their platforms speak to a deep understanding of the inner workings and complexities of public agencies and funding, which make their recommendations and ideas all the more salient. The group is also engaged in specific spaces of need, serving as a voice and resource when a local community may not have the structure to act alone.

Ms. Leicht's insight, intelligence, dedication and background are all displayed in the work of this organization, and it has been strengthened and expanded under her leadership. The impact of her work has not gone unnoticed, as in January 2014, she was nominated by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan to join him as the Regional Director for New York and New Jersey. Among the many important tasks that she will oversee, she will supervise the continued execution of Superstorm Sandy recovery efforts in the region, a testament to her knowledge of urban landscapes and their communities.

While we as landscape architects typically steward urban parks from concept to opening, we rely on voices such as Ms. Leicht's to ensure that new parks continue to be built where they are needed, and that once built, our work is cared for and continues to flourish. Without her efforts, New York might potentially have fewer green spaces, with less care and funding afforded to those that exist. Her messages and work are valuable across all cities, and will hopefully carry great weight in her new national position.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nette Compton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "C".

Nette Compton, ASLA
ASLA-NY Chapter President



Honorary ASLA Nomination
c/o Carolyn Mitchell
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Nomination of Holly Leicht for Honorary ASLA

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

It is my pleasure to nominate Holly Leicht for the title of Honorary ASLA. I have known her for over a decade in several capacities throughout New York, most notably in her thoughtful and decisive leadership at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P).

Holly has always been a very effective public spokeswoman, addressing major issues including park finances, public-private partnerships, the condition of parks, and how parks should be part of the dialogue in the city's elections, including the mayoral election. She also did an effective job cultivating relationships with the media in New York City, and NY4P under her leadership became a leading source of commendatory and advocacy for parks both in New York and across the country. Her work with the board leadership expanded the board and provided a solid foundation of charitable support for the organization.

Under Holly's leadership, New Yorkers for Parks promoted the many roles that parks and landscapes can play in addressing the environmental, ecological, social, and economic needs of New Yorkers and NYC. She greatly expanded the reach of the organization, and by extension the realm of urban park advocacy. For her dedication and contributions to this cause, she is very much deserving of the Honorary ASLA designation.

Sincerely,

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

Former Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

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March 4, 2014

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

Re: Nomination of Holly Leicht for Honorary ASLA

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I am honored to nominate Holly Leicht for the title of Honorary ASLA. I have known her for over a decade in several capacities throughout New York, most notably working with her as a board member for New Yorkers for Parks while she served as its Executive Director.

Holly Leicht is a terrific person and professional public servant who has contributed a great deal to the public landscape, specifically in New York City, but with a reach far beyond its borders. As the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, her advocacy work surrounding parks had great reach and impact. It was a job she was incredibly well-suited for in all regards, and I believe these skills will also serve her well in her new role at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. I trust that she will apply her understanding of the importance of parks and public open space in this capacity, expanding her contributions to the national scale. I nominate her to become an honorary ASLA member with great enthusiasm.

Sincerely,



Lynden B. Miller
Public Garden Designer
Board Member, New Yorkers for Parks
Director of The Conservatory Garden in Central Park



**NEW YORKERS
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March 5, 2014

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

Members of the ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees:

I am writing on behalf of the staff of New Yorkers for Parks to nominate Holly Leicht for an honorary ASLA membership. Holly is the former Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, the city's premier park and open space research and advocacy organization. Below is a tribute to her from the staff, which serves as our letter of recommendation.

2014 is off to a bittersweet start for New Yorkers for Parks. We write with news that Holly Leicht, our Executive Director for nearly three years, will be leaving us on January 10 for a job at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where she'll serve as director of the agency's New York/New Jersey office. She'll play a leading role in the federal government's ongoing Hurricane Sandy recovery efforts. As far as we're concerned, HUD couldn't have asked for a better person to oversee such a critically important job.

But we'll really miss her.

Thanks to her leadership – a blend of passionate idealism and strategic pragmatism – NY4P has had a hugely successful run over the past three years, and we've tackled a range of issues, both citywide and local, and with broad implications.

That blend of leadership was apparent throughout our victories, whether she was leading a rally of advocates on the steps of City Hall to demand – and help deliver – more money for park maintenance, or cultivating a partnership with the New York City Housing Authority that would lead to Daffodil Project planting opportunities for hundreds of NYCHA children and our forthcoming open space assessment of Mott Haven in the South Bronx.

Her thoughtful advocacy helped secure more than \$25 million for Flushing Meadows Corona Park without the loss of any publicly usable parkland, and the creation of a new nonprofit Alliance for the park. And it added a respected citywide voice to the broad coalition of local groups that opposed building a stadium in the middle of that park. She played a crucial role in improving NYU's expansion plans, ensuring that the open spaces there will be more broadly accessible and better maintained than the area's current public areas. She has, with much success, combatted misperceptions about the negative effects of park conservancies, and helped highlight their overall value for the city. She added a spark of exuberance to our academic reports, and made it fun for advocates to read them and reporters to write about them. And we're hopeful that our Parks Platform 2013, a project that she spearheaded, will play a central role in determining the course of the de Blasio Administration's park policy.

She was successful in each of these situations because she understands what it means to be an effective advocate. She insists on evaluating issues based on the facts. She talks to people in the affected communities. She takes stock of political realities. She doesn't



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scream in opposition. She rolls up her sleeves and delivers.

Many of you have perhaps seen Holly at a City Council hearing, or speaking at an event. She may have impressed you. But to really understand why Holly is so effective, you'd need to see her in her true element: eagerly trekking through NYCHA playgrounds in Brownsville, Brooklyn or along nature trails in the Northeast Bronx, and insisting that our staff stop at local restaurants in every neighborhood we visit. You'd need to join her at a NYCHA daffodil bulb distribution, where she spends hours chatting with residents, and it's not just small talk. You'd need to attend one of our rollicking staff meetings, which in many offices are the bane of employees' existence. Here, we look forward to them.

And you'd have needed to see her just weeks after Hurricane Sandy, leading our staff through assessments of damaged stretches of Staten Island beaches (and to Goodfella's Pizza on Hylan Boulevard afterwards) and across the Coney Island peninsula in the wake of the storm.

This is the Holly we have been fortunate to get to know over the past three years. It's why she's not only been enormously effective here – and why our staff likes working for her so much – but why she's a perfect fit for her next job. She's a park-lover, yes. But even more so, she is, with warmth and good-natured humor, a lover of New York City: its neighborhoods and its institutions, its people and its spirit.

We wish her all the best.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

James Yolles

Director of Communications

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Honorary ASLA Nominations
c/o Carolyn Mitchell
636 Eye Street, NW
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Re: Nomination of Holly Leicht for Honorary ASLA

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

It is my pleasure to nominate Holly Leicht for the title of Honorary ASLA. She has had an impact on public spaces in New York in a range of impressive capacities, and I look forward to seeing her continue to play a role in public open space on a larger stage in her new role at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

While working for the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, she oversaw the design competition for public housing, the New Housing New York (NHNY) Legacy Competition. This competition was unique in many ways, partnering with the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter to encourage quality design in the public realm. This challenging process ultimately resulted in Via Verde, an award-winning affordable housing complex in the Bronx. At the heart of the project is a dynamic garden and series of green roofs that serve as the organizing architectural element and identity for the community. I had the pleasure of being the landscape architect for this dynamic project.

While I have never personally worked with Holly, I have seen the impact of her dedication as a public servant and advocate of public spaces. Her impressive body of work is very much in keeping with the title of Honorary ASLA, and for this I nominate her for this distinction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'L' followed by a long horizontal line.

Lee Weintraub



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March 5, 2014

Honorary Membership Nomination ASLA

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Dear ASLA Nominating Committee,

I am thrilled to write in support of Holly Leicht as a nominee for Honorary ASLA designation. Holly has been an incredible advocate for landscape architectural and urban design issues and genuinely cares about providing a higher quality of life for all people. She tirelessly promotes many aspects of our profession on all scales and leader that we all look up to.

Holly's ambition and dedication to increasing open space led to the creation of Via Verde, a signature affordable housing project that has won awards for its design and sustainability. She was actively involved in finding a balance between affordable housing and community gardens on City-owned land, including creating three new urban farms in an unlikely location which provides food for residents.

Recently, Holly served on the jury for Far Roc [For a Resilient Rockaway] competition, a two-phase design competition that explored innovative strategies for the planning, design and construction of a resilient and sustainable development on an 80+ acre site on the Rockaway Peninsula. This design completion worked very closely with the community and brought about many conversations about resiliency that went much deeper than just design.

Holly demonstrates a clear passion for creating open space for all people and preserving the quality of life that parks and public spaces provide in the urban environment. She is a true steward of landscape architecture and urban planning and an effective voice to promote important issues and bring about appropriate resolutions. Holly is looked very favorably upon as a leader in our city – and beyond. ASLA would benefit greatly by bringing her into our circle as an honorary member as she continues to be a strong advocate for landscape architecture and I highly recommend her for this position.

Thank you kindly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer L. Nitzky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer L. Nitzky, RLA, ASLA, ISA
ASLA-NY President-Elect

