

## **Honorary Membership Nomination Narrative**

Nominee: Mr. Robert D. Yaro

Nominee's Address: Regional Plan Association, 4 Irving Place, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor

City/State/Zip: New York, New York 10003

Phone: 212.253.2245

Nominator: Jane Simoni Cooke ASLA

Robert D. Yaro is President Emeritus of the Regional Plan Association and a senior advisor to the organization. RPA promotes the livability, vitality and sustainability of the New York metropolitan region. It has a track record for extraordinary success that includes advocacy for projects that currently total more than \$100 billion dollars of infrastructure improvements and the protection of over a million acres of open space in the region. During his tenure, RPA began both national and international initiatives to advocate for regional planning across the country and around the world and to that end he has worked tirelessly and compassionately with landscape architects everywhere.

Yaro led development of and co-authored RPA's Third Regional Plan, [A Region at Risk](#), and has authored and co-authored numerous papers and articles on planning and infrastructure for the five boroughs and the metropolitan region. He founded and co-chairs America 2050, RPA's initiative to create a national development and infrastructure plan. He has worked for more than forty years to protect important landscapes and develop parks and public spaces in New York and New England. Thanks to his insatiable appetite for sustainable planning and his advocacy efforts for public outdoor space, he has promoted the Global Lab at RPA to aid and abet the smart growth of cities and regions at risk around the world—both inland and coastal.

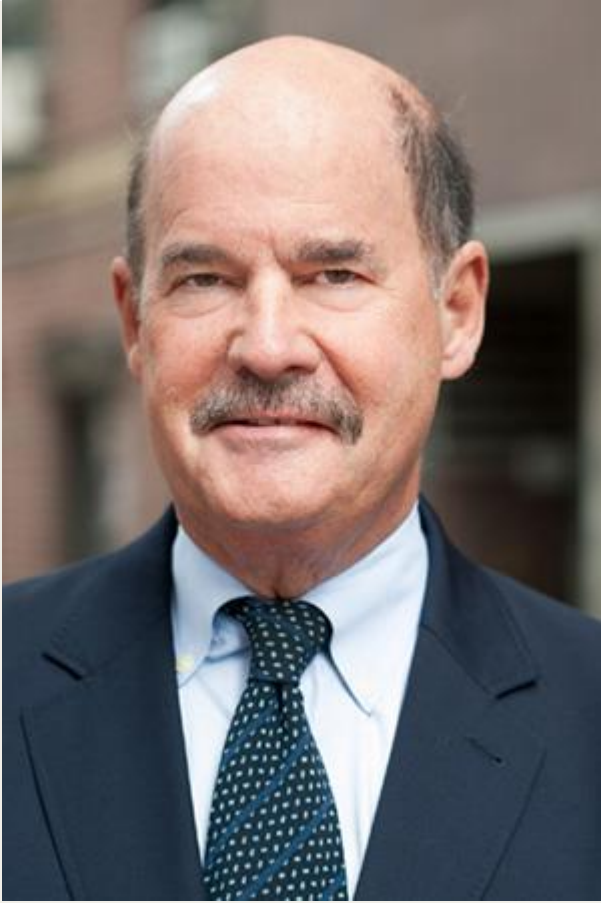
Yaro is a member of NYC's Sustainability Advisory Board, which helped prepare PlaNYC 2030, and of New York City's Waterfront Advisory Committee. Governor Andrew Cuomo appointed him to the New York Works Task Force, which is developing a long-range infrastructure investment strategy for New York State. He is co-chair of the Empire State Transportation Alliance, on the board of the Forum for Urban Design, and an honorary member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. Yaro holds a Master's in City and Regional Planning from Harvard University and a Bachelor's in Urban Studies from Wesleyan University. In addition to leading RPA for 25 years, Yaro is Professor of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania and has consulted on city and regional planning issues across the U.S. and in Europe, China, Japan, Turkey, and North Africa.

Yaro has played a fundamental role in developing significant teams of professionals that have addressed some of the most pressing issues in urban planning and landscape development. The redevelopment of Governor's Island was a milestone in his career—culminating in the current project implementation by landscape architects, architects, artists and policy makers in Albany, New York City and the National Parks Service in Washington DC. Likewise Yaro has been instrumental in protecting thousands of acres on Long Island with the help of landscape architects there. Governor Cuomo appointed him to a blue ribbon panel to research the physical and financial impact of a new Tappan Zee Bridge on the Hudson River and the region overall. While there, Yaro nominated New York developer and philanthropist Howard Milstein to chair the commission; Mr. Milstein in turn saved taxpayers \$2 billion by implementing a speedy schedule. That project is moving swiftly ahead now, thanks to the efforts of the many landscape architects and engineers employed there.

Of particular pride for Yaro, is the immediate effort he spearheaded to revitalize downtown New York after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Within two days of the attacks he convened the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York—a broad coalition of professionals including many landscape architects—whose mission was to open the dialogue for the sustainable and psychically healthy redevelopment of open and built space in that traumatized neighborhood. The alliance organized many public forums culminating in “Listening to the City” at the Jacob Javits Center where 5,000 New York residents and design professionals gathered to debate the rebuilding plans. Today Lower Manhattan is thriving as a mixed-use community centered around the public park designed by Peter Walker FASLA. The project is imbued with international significance even while the overall site is undergoing construction according to the plans discussed by Yaro and his original team of dedicated designers.

More recently, Yaro stood up to major developers who were intent on building a stadium on Manhattan's West Side above the rail yard there. Fiercely defending New York's need for open public space, transit options, housing, schools, hotels, jobs and quality retail experiences, Yaro forfeited connections with otherwise dedicated supporters of RPA. The risk-reward ratio was right: New York will have a first-class mixed-use community at the Midtown West site and the work of legions of landscape architects are generating some of the most elegant and cutting edge outdoor public spaces in the city.

Bob Yaro paves the way for landscape architects by advocating for sound planning principles that cannot be implemented without our unique skill set. He includes landscape architects in his original assessments; we are not an after-thought but an essential voice in the original problem-solving process. Bob believes in the beautiful construction of outdoor spaces and believes that landscape architects are the best qualified design professionals to address them.



Robert Yaro

# Bloomberg Associates

ASLA Board of Trustees  
C/O Carolyn Mitchell, Honors & Awards Coordinator  
636 Eye St. NW, Washington, DC 20001  
cmitchell@asla.org

Dear ASLA Board of Trustees,

It is with great pleasure that I am writing to support the nomination of Bob Yaro to Honorary Membership at the American Society of Landscape Architects. Bob is an outstanding professional whose service and achievements have broadened the scope of work for landscape architects, planners and all design and engineering professionals who practice in the New York metropolitan region. While he and I are colleagues, having worked side-by-side on many planning issues in New York, Bob has also been a mentor to me and many other city officials both on and off the record. His dedication to planning knows no boundaries in government or politics, work or recreation; he tirelessly supports sound planning principles that always engage his audience wherever and whenever he finds one and I am fortunate to have often been in those audiences often over the years.

As the Director of the New York City Department of City Planning and the Chair of the City Planning Commission under Mayor Michael Bloomberg (from 2002-2013), I had the good fortune of working with Bob from concept to implementation on some of the most contested sites in the world. As the former President of the Regional Plan Association, Bob was a "go-to" resource for me and my staff on projects ranging from the economics of large developments like Jamaica, Queens to specific plan details for waterfront restoration Vision 2020-waterfronts were always of particular interest to us both. He and I also shared a passion for the preservation, reclamation and restoration of the High Line-a project he spearheaded at RPA in a report he published there in 1999-which is engaging many talented landscape architects as Phase Three approaches the Hudson Yards project. As an author of the Third Regional Plan, Bob provided many of us with a road map for institutionalizing the topics of social inequity and environmental sustainability in planning; this Plan is still an invaluable resource from which all designers and advocates for infrastructure improvements are learning now.

Bob truly epitomizes the non-partisan leader of a non-for-profit "think tank" and I, again, encourage you to accept his nomination. "All boats rise" when Bob is at the helm: all typologies, all professions, all cities, regions and micro-regions. I understand that RPA received Honorary Membership from you in 2005 but this opportunity to honor this individual who has served as an agent of change in tumultuous times in and around New York deserves this wonderful prize himself. I hope you will agree and elect Bob Yaro to your prestigious roster of honorees.

Amanda Burden, FAICP  
Principal, Bloomberg Associates

Carolyn Mitchell, Honors and Awards Coordinator,  
ASLA Board of Trustees  
636 Eye Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Ms. Mitchell,

I would like to enthusiastically support the nomination of Bob Yaro for Honorary Membership in ASLA.

I have worked with Bob for 35 years and know of few people who have done more for public landscapes and the profession of landscape architecture. Since Bob's landscape-related achievements at Regional Plan are well documented I would like to focus on his earlier work in Massachusetts and New England.

Throughout his career Bob has been inspired by and has inspired others about landscapes and the profession of landscape architecture. He has initiated and funded countless successful landscape preservation and enhancement measures described below. He has been a leader and inspirer of a great many young landscape architects and planners who have carried his energy and enthusiasm across the country and the world.

While deputy commissioner at the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Bob initiated and implemented a wide range of ambitious and successful projects benefitting public landscapes. His accomplishments at DEM include:

- **Scenic Rivers** Program which designated and protected visually unique rivers in the Bay State including the North and Parker Rivers.
- **Heritage State Parks** Program which created nine urban state parks throughout the Commonwealth; a first for the mainly rural oriented agency.
- **Olmsted Parks** Program: Bob initiated and obtained funding from the legislature for the restoration and protection of Massachusetts' Olmsted Parks.
- **Bay Circuit** Program, based on a concept originally proposed by Charles Eliot II, developed and continues to create a greenway system encircling the Boston metropolitan area.
- **Fund Raising:** Bob's fund raising skills are legendary, fueled by his personal appeal and his dedication to finding money to back his planning and landscape

preservation projects. The largest state appropriation for open space preservation in Massachusetts history, nicknamed the “Big Bang Bond” funded the acquisition of threatened landscapes including South Cape Beach on Cape Cod, Mount Greylock and the Maudesley Estate on the Merrimack River. Large open space preservation bonds have continued over the years thanks to the success of the original Big Bang Bond.

- **Political and Administrative Skills:** Bob’s legendary fund raising and program development skills are based on his ability to infuse a land conservation and smart growth planning ethic in the political system. His promotion of innovative programs for planning and landscape preservation initiatives in the political and administrative branches of government has infused conservation and sound planning in the political system in Massachusetts, the New York region and in locations throughout the US and the world.
- **City and Town Commons Program:** Bob conceived and implemented this imaginative program to use state funds to assist communities in the preservation and revitalization of Massachusetts town commons and city squares.
- **New State Park Acquisitions:** As Deputy Commissioner for Planning at DEM Bob led successful efforts to preserve scenic, historic and ecologically significant threatened landscapes throughout Massachusetts.
- **Massachusetts Landscape Inventory:** Modeled on the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty programs in the UK, the Landscape Inventory was the first comprehensive statewide assessment of scenic landscapes in the US and is still in use today.
- **Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program:** Bob started one of the nation’s first rare and endangered species protection programs at DEM in the early 1980’s.
- **Teaching:** Bob is a born teacher inspired by his vision of better and more effective planning and landscape preservation. He began his formal teaching career at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst where he founded the Center for Rural Massachusetts. He has continued his teaching as a full professor of planning at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.
- **US/UK Exchange:** In the late 1980s Bob initiated exchanges between American and British planners and landscape architects. Motivated in part by a desire to expose American planners and designers to policies and programs

in the UK, the exchanges became an annual tradition that continues to this day at the Glynwood Institute in Cold Spring, NY.

- **Author:** While a professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the UMass from 1984 to 1989, Bob co-authored two ground breaking publications that promoted what eventually became known as “Smart Growth”. *Dealing with Change in the Connecticut Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development* and *Rural by Design*. The books presented a new vision for blending new development with the preservation of rural and agricultural landscapes on a large scale. This vision was inspired in part by his admiration for countryside preservation in the UK and other parts of Europe.

As he has with so many others, Bob has inspired and guided my career as a landscape architect. He taught me to never be afraid to think big and to inspire others to preserve and enhance our common landscape heritage. In addition to his many tangible achievements, one of Bob’s most fundamental and lasting legacies has been his ability to lead and inspire others.

I encourage the ASLA Board of Trustees to recognize Bob Yaro’s achievements in the field of landscape architecture and physical planning by granting him honorary membership in American Society of Landscape Architects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harry L. Dodson".

Harry L. Dodson, FASLA

March 4, 2015

Re: Nomination of Robert D. Yaro for Honorary ASLA membership

I have been asked by Jane Simoni Cooke ASLA to write in support of Bob Yaro's nomination for honorary membership. Having known Bob for more than thirty years as both colleague and friend, it is a pleasure to do so. Given that his work in the New York region is well known and has already been described by Ms. Cooke, I will focus on some of the other contexts in which I have worked with Bob, beginning in Massachusetts.

Bob was a visionary Deputy Commissioner in the Department of Environmental Management responsible for some of the most significant open space acquisitions in the Commonwealth, in particular South Cape Beach, which was a controversial and hotly contested project, exactly Bob's cup of tea. He went on to found the Center for Rural Massachusetts in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where he taught and was responsible for such seminal works as *Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development* (which happens to be a Lincoln Institute publication).

I really got to know Bob well during his push for statewide land use reform in Massachusetts, initiated by a major conference on *Growth and Change* in 1986, followed by the establishment of a state commission of that name by the legislature. This coincided with the period during which I was working to establish the Cape Cod Commission, an effort which Bob helped immeasurably. We later co-founded 1,000 Friends of Massachusetts with former Senator Paul Tsongas to carry on the statewide movement. Somehow during this period, Bob and I were also able to start a side venture, Ecologia, which, with the help of Landscape Architects Julius Fabos and Harry Dodson, successfully averted the construction of the Nagymaros Dam on the Danube River in Hungary, saving a historic landscape and protecting Budapest's water supply. More recently, Bob and I were part of the Thompson Design Group team that produced the Master Plan for Buffalo Bayou (Houston), again with longtime collaborator Harry Dodson, which won the ASLA's Editor's Choice Award in 2003.

Since arriving at the Lincoln Institute in 1999, I have worked closely with Bob in his capacity as President of Regional Plan Association in a joint program that has dealt with a wide range of metropolitan and megaregional issues including large landscape conservation and climate resilience. Throughout this association, we have had many opportunities to collaborate successfully with Landscape Architects and benefit from their design skills, ecological ethic, and esthetic sensibilities. Indeed, thinking back to the days of Frederick Law Olmsted, I do not think it would be possible to distinguish a great deal of this work from that of Landscape Architecture in its earlier incarnation. I know that Bob would be very pleased were you to recognize his long and deep association with the field of Landscape Architecture through this most significant honor.

Sincerely,

Armando Carbonell  
Chair, Department of Planning and Urban Form  
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy  
Cambridge, MA