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December 16, 2025

Colorado State University
Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture
Cover Letter for Department Head

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in the Department Head position in the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture at Colorado State University. I hold a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Botany from the University of North Carolina at Asheville, as well as a terminal degree, the Master of Landscape Architecture, from the University of Georgia. In the spring of 2025, I had the privilege of visiting the Department as chair of the accreditation team for the landscape architecture program. That experience left a lasting impression on me. I was struck by the collegiality of the faculty, the strength and vision of departmental leadership, and the professionalism and dedication of the staff. The facilities reflect a commitment to excellence, and the students demonstrated curiosity, creativity, and a clear passion for their fields. Alumni and industry leaders were equally supportive and engaged, positive indicators of a strong curriculum and a deep commitment to professional development. Beyond the academic environment, I was moved by the natural beauty of the Fort Collins area and its profound connection to landscape and ecology, an ideal setting for innovative scholarship, teaching, and engagement in horticulture and landscape architecture.

With more than twenty years of experience in landscape architecture education at the University of Georgia, and over six years of administrative service as Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Student Affairs, I have dedicated my career to advancing the mission, excellence, and visibility of academic programs in landscape architecture, planning, and historic preservation. My leadership experience also extends nationally. I have served as President of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA) and currently serve as Vice President of Education for the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). These roles have strengthened my leadership skills and deepened my understanding of national professional trends.

As Associate Dean, I have worked closely with program coordinators, faculty, staff, and students to strengthen the College's academic programs and fiscal health through innovative programming and strategic resource management. Over the past five years, our collaborative work in student recruitment and new program development has increased enrollment by more than 35%, while expanded general education offerings have enhanced design literacy across campus and supported UGA's goals for student success and timely degree completion.

This growth in credit hour production has significantly improved the College's financial stability, enabling six new faculty hires, doubling faculty travel funding, expanding student travel opportunities, launching two SEED grant programs for research initiatives, and investing nearly one million dollars in instructional equipment and facilities upgrades. I have also led or co-led the development of several key policies and procedures, including a peer mentoring policy, field

trip funding guidelines, student travel protocols, resource and equipment planning procedures, facilities assignments, recruitment strategies, and a comprehensive Welcome Guide for new faculty and staff. These initiatives reflect my collaborative leadership approach, commitment to transparency, and focus on long-term institutional well-being.

I am deeply committed to fostering opportunities for strategic planning and sustainable growth that ensure responsible stewardship of resources and continued investment in people and programs. I believe strongly in promoting faculty governance, providing clear communication, developing shared expectations for success, and cultivating a culture that builds upon strengths while proactively addressing challenges. My leadership philosophy is grounded in community engagement, program advocacy, accountability, and transparency. As Department Head, I look forward to strengthening partnerships with community organizations, alumni, advisory councils, and industry leaders to support development initiatives, endowed professorships, and ongoing student success. I am eager to learn more about the programs and extension and to foster an inclusive and collaborative environment that promotes well-being, innovation, and excellence among faculty, staff, and students.

My vision for the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture is to build a thriving, collaborative community that advances meaningful scholarship, fosters student success, and strengthens extension through partnerships across Colorado and beyond. Colorado State University's land-grant mission, rooted in access, service, and the creation of knowledge that benefits society, resonates with my values as an educator and leader. I am inspired by the opportunity to contribute to a department that plays a vital role in addressing the state's most pressing landscape, horticultural, and environmental challenges. I would be honored to help guide the department in expanding its impact through innovative research, community engagement, and an unwavering commitment to inclusive excellence.

Sincerely,



Ashley Steffens, FCELA
Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Student Affairs
UGA, College of Environment and Design

Crowley Professor of Urban Planning and Design
American Society of Landscape Architects, Vice President of Education
Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, Past President