

January 8, 2018



Dear Review Committee,

It is my distinct honor to provide this letter of support for Leslie Berckes' nomination to 40 under 40. Leslie's many achievements and involvement in community enriching activities are deserving of this recognition and I am pleased to share her merits. Her work and creativity have benefitted the City of Des Moines through her leadership and stewardship to our neighborhoods and the environment. Leslie cares about this community – professionally and personally.

I have known Ms. Berckes through her role as Trees Forever's Program Development and Innovation Director. Leslie developed a partnership with the Des Moines Public Works department to create a volunteer program called "Tree Keepers." The Tree Keepers program aims to train a volunteer workforce of passionate private citizens in proper tree planting and tree care. She has trained over 150 of our Des Moines residents through Tree Keepers on how to plant, prune, and maintain our urban forest. I have witnessed the work of our volunteers and can attest to the value this program brings to our community and why it has become a model for the Trees Forever program across its service area. Leslie is currently working to expand this effort with our city staff to establish a watering brigade to reduce tree mortality and protect our urban forest.

The City was also fortunate to have worked with Ms. Berckes in the capacity of President of the Waveland Park Neighborhood Association. During her tenure, she partnered with the City of Des Moines to procure a stormwater infrastructure improvement grant from the State of Iowa. It was a rare win for the City to receive this grant as traditionally funds have been awarded to small and medium sized communities. Leslie was able to demonstrate how worthy the project was and established effective partnerships with city officials in the process. Additionally, Leslie navigated through a difficult situation when a murder was committed in the neighborhood by proactively reaching out to the police detective on the case and communicating with city council members before relaying accurate information back to the membership.

Leslie is an asset to the Des Moines Community for her continued passion and commitment to making this City a better place. Thank you for allowing me to share my support for Ms. Berckes' nomination for the Forty Under 40 program. Des Moines is lucky to have such an incredible cohort of young leaders. I am confident each of those selected this year will be for tremendously important to the future of our community. As you piece together a class of deserving leaders, I urge you to consider the steady diligence, creativity, and passion of Leslie, who works every day to make Des Moines a better place for all of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "T.M. Franklin Cownie". The signature is fluid and cursive.

T.M. Franklin Cownie
Mayor