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Dear Inaugural Class,

Welcome to the start of your Fellowship Year. All of us who have made it to this inaugural day deeply believe that there is more potential in your generation than mere energy and a desire to do good, and that our cities are the crucibles of considerably more than style and fashion. From this point forward we are going to be putting this belief to the test. We are all now in this together.

Each of you who have joined us are beginning a professional program that is about more than career development, a local government program that is about more than cities, and a leadership program that is about more than becoming the president of something. This will be a year of minutia and grandeur, of tedious memoranda and uplifting oratory, of labyrinthine politics and peoples' movements. You will be learning how a city works, in gritty practice and lofty theory. Both are intimately entwined. And understanding them both is essential in order for each of you to truly fulfill the aspirations of this program.

It may appear that we are asking you to lead a double life for the next twelve months: One of a willing apprentice desiring to learn the most intricate details of city government, and one of an eager student seeking to study the ethereal city of ideas. And, in effect, we are.

The point of this double life is to train you to begin to see the connections between the tiniest of communities you are acting on in your jobs and the broader systems of the world you are reading about in your weekly classes. Through attaining an understanding of these connections you will gain the ability to not only work for city governments *and* study urban issues, but, more importantly, engage entire landscapes – the physical places where whole societies, economies, environments, and power structures manifest themselves in road networks, electrical grids, water systems, and buildings.

It is in our landscapes, in all of the earth that has been shaped by humanity from the mountains to the seas, that we find all that burdens, challenges, and threatens our future. From inequality, injustice, and poverty to environmental degradation, decaying schools, and corruption, if there is something that darkens the figurative horizon it can be found in tangible form upon the land. But it is also in these same landscapes that all of our hopes and dreams reside, and we can find all that can make the future a bright dawn rather than a shadowy sunset.

While a well-honed skepticism may keep many of you from appreciating it now, we live in a country where the very earth itself is believed to be a canvas upon which each human being can paint a future as full of as much promise as the mind can conjure, where each settlement can be a new Jerusalem, where every metropolis can be the next capital of the world, and where the entire nation is collectively conceived of, generation after generation, as a city on a hill.

In engaging the landscape you will not only be acting on a greater physical scale, but also on a vaster human scale. The historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto has argued that the very definition of civilization is the “relationship to the natural environment, recrafted ... to meet

human demands.” As hard as it may be to appreciate now, this can be the human scale of your results when you act upon the landscape: civilization itself.

One of the greatest lessons of history is that it is in the everyday acts of countless communities that entire civilizations, step by step, truly confront their challenges and begin to embody their dreams. In knowing how your daily actions as a city employee mesh with the larger forces at work in the world we hope you will learn how to direct and uplift humanity from where your job rests at the meeting point of the natural environment, society, and the human-created physical world. This is where leadership begins. This is the aspiration we have for each of you.

So, the endeavor begins today. This is the journey we are all about to take together: To learn how to be useful contributors to our local communities, scholars of the city, and leaders who understand how to change the world with everyday actions guided by well-honed wisdom. I know none of you will let us down.

Sincerely,

Jason Alexander Hayter
Director of Curriculum Development
City Hall Fellows