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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ribbon Cutting Celebrates New Park in English Avenue Community

Atlanta, GA, November 21, 2019 – Today, Atlanta City Council Member Antonio Brown, Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner John Dargle, Chief Equity Officer William Hawthorne, III, Park Pride, The Conservation Fund, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, and representatives from the English Avenue community, held a ribbon cutting celebration for the long-anticipated English Avenue greenspace, Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park.

English Avenue, situated within the Proctor Creek Watershed, has long suffered from damaging combined sewer overflows related to stormwater runoff, economic disinvestment, social and educational challenges, and lack of greenspace. Since 2009, Park Pride and The Conservation Fund have worked collaboratively with English Avenue neighbors and stakeholders to transform neglected spaces into vibrant public parks that benefit the community, the environment, and the economy.

“We were thrilled to be a part of today’s event,” stated John Dargle, Jr., Commissioner of the City of Atlanta’s Department of Parks and Recreation. “Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park is a special and significant place that is an example of the values of our parks and recreation system in social equity, environmental stewardship, and health and wellness.”

Through an eight-month, community-directed process facilitated by Park Pride, a park masterplan was created with a community steering committee and the input of hundreds of area residents.

“It was really important to us—the members of the steering committee, Park Pride, and The Conservation Fund—to make sure we received as much input from the community as possible,” said Andrew White, Park Pride’s Director of Park Visioning. “While this park will mitigate flooding in the neighborhood, it more importantly has the potential to become the heart of the English Avenue community. The visioning process helps to ensure that the park will meet the needs of the people who live here and will become a beloved greenspace.”

This new community park is part of The Conservation Fund’s national Parks with Purpose program, centered on equitable development ideals. These new parks provide more than just a safe place for kids to play and families to gather; they also provide workforce training and employment for area residents, reduce flooding by capturing and absorbing stormwater, support environmental education opportunities, and even grow healthy food by incorporating edible landscaping.

“It’s truly amazing to see how this place has been transformed through the vision, passion and hard work of the community and dedicated partners,” said Shannon Lee, The Conservation Fund’s Urban Conservation Manager. “The creation of the Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park is the perfect example of a successful Park with Purpose, providing a safe place for neighbors to gather, reducing stormwater flooding, employing local residents, building community capacity, and providing natural habitat in a highly urbanized neighborhood.”

Several partner organizations played key roles in bringing Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park to fruition, including the City of Atlanta’s Departments of Parks and Recreation and Watershed Management, the City of Atlanta’s Office of Resilience, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, ECO-Action, Community Improvement Association, The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, Greening Youth Foundation, English Avenue Neighborhood Association, and University Community Development Corporation.

Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park is the third in a series of parks proposed in the [Proctor Creek North Avenue Green Infrastructure Vision](#) (Park Pride, 2010) to address stormwater runoff. The park is expected to help manage up to 3.5 million gallons of stormwater per year by capturing runoff from adjacent streets and routing the water into a series of rain gardens, stormwater swales, and underground chambers. These features will clean and detain the stormwater, helping to mitigate combined sewer overflow events and reduce local flooding.

“We are very excited to see the Green Infrastructure vision at Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park come to fruition,” said Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, Jason Ulseth. “These innovative stormwater controls will help alleviate local flooding and will reduce pollution in nearby Proctor Creek. This park will also serve as a demonstration project for local developers to visit and see Green Infrastructure in action.”

Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park will serve as a valuable amenity to the community, providing residents of English Avenue with a place to relax, exercise, play with their families, and meet their neighbors. The park will also restore natural habitat and increase the health of the neighborhood’s biodiversity.

“Community residents have been engaged every step of the way in developing the plans for this new park,” stated Tony Torrence, founder of the Community Improvement Association and Co-Chair of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council. “For a project to truly be community-supported, residents must be at the table as full participants to address our challenges head on and find sustainable solutions that meet the needs of our community.” Torrence is also an English Avenue neighborhood resident.

However, the significance of Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park goes beyond the physical improvements to infrastructure and the quality of life benefits provided by a park as it preserves the legacy of English Avenue resident, Kathryn Johnston, in perpetuity. On November 21, 2006, Johnston, a 92-year-old grandmother, was tragically killed by members of the Atlanta Police Department who executed an illegal “no knock warrant” to her home on Neal Street, just one block away from the park that now bears her name. Johnston’s sacrifice, which resulted in the repeal of a law that allowed for the arrest of any citizen without “probable cause,” will be memorialized within Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park and will serve as a constant reminder of the ongoing efforts to ensure that Atlantans not only remember her contributions to her community, but also continue to work towards the prevention of future tragedies.

“Kathryn Johnson was known by many as “Mother”, and even though she never bared children, it was her nurturing spirit and courage that inspired a community,” said District 3 Council Member, Antonio Brown. “This park is a reflection of what we can achieve when we choose to work together for the betterment of our community, especially with dynamic partners such as Park Pride, along with the

tireless work of Council Member Young and his staff, Garfield Peart, State Representative Mable Thomas and everyone else who fought to make such an incredible place like Kathryn Johnson Memorial Park possible.”

Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park would not be possible without the significant contributions from generous donors, including: The AEC Trust, The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation, Atlanta Mayor’s Office of Resilience, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, The Coca-Cola Company, The Coca-Cola Foundation, Dorothy & Charlie Yates Family Fund, Environmental Protection Agency, Georgia-Pacific Foundation, The Home Depot Foundation, The Imlay Foundation, Invest Atlanta, National Recreation & Parks Association, Park Pride, Pisces Foundation, PNC Bank, Project Reinvest, Renew Atlanta, SunTrust Foundation, Turner Foundation, U-Haul, U.S. Forest Service, The Vasser Woolley Foundation, and the David, Helen and Marian Woodward Fund.

“We are proud to have partnered with Parks & Recreation to bring this improved facility to the residents of the English Avenue neighborhood,” stated Josh Rowan, City of Atlanta’s Commissioner of Transportation. “This park and other Renew Atlanta infrastructure improvements are enhancing the quality of life and vibrancy of Atlanta communities. We hope the new playground equipment can be enjoyed in this community for years to come.”

About Park Pride

In 2019, Park Pride celebrates 30 years of engaging communities to activate the power of parks. Working with over 150 local Friends of the Park groups, Park Pride provides leadership, services, and funding to help communities realize their dreams for neighborhood parks that support healthy people, strong neighborhoods, vibrant business districts, a robust economy and a healthy environment. Park Pride is active in greenspace advocacy and educating both civic leaders and the public about the benefits of parks, and annually hosts the Parks and Greenspace Conference. Learn more about Park Pride at parkpride.org.

About The Conservation Fund

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect more than 8 million acres of land. www.conservationfund.org

About Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

CRK’s mission is to protect and preserve the Chattahoochee River, its lakes and tributaries for the people, fish and wildlife that depend upon it. For more information about Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, call Melanie Baird, Communications and Marketing Manager, at 404.352.9828, or visit chattahoochee.org