



Conference Program

7:30 a.m. – Registration & Coffee

8:30 a.m. – Welcome & Opening Plenary Session

Intentionality Through Community Engagement: How a National Gold Medal-Winning Agency is Driving Equity Through Strategy and Policy (KEYNOTE)

Parks matter more than most people realize. Hear how parks affected the life of BREC's Superintendent Corey K. Wilson and how BREC is working to drive park equity through policies and plans that focus on giving a voice to those impacted most by BREC's decisions. Superintendent Wilson will discuss BREC's new Community Engagement policy and how they practiced what they preached when the policy was being created down to their current strategic planning efforts for the next 10 years.

- **Speaker:** Corey Wilson, Superintendent, Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC)

9:55 a.m. – Networking Break

10:20 a.m. – Morning Breakout Sessions

From Intentions to Being Intentional: Parks for the Healthy Future for All

Parks play a critical role in the pursuit of health equity. Presenters will discuss how social determinants of health can guide future intentions for parks across diverse communities, with a focus on green gentrification, equitable development, health promotion and social cohesion.

Speakers:

- Viniece Jennings, Deputy Director, Environmental Center, Florida A&M University
- Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, CoFounder, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- Richard Milligan, Assistant Professor of GeoSciences, Georgia State University
- Darryl Haddock (Moderator), Environmental Education Director, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

The Role of Citywide Parks Advocacy in Getting the Parks We Need

The squeaky wheel often gets the grease, and what gets fixed in the world of city parks often results from the desires of the person who has the loudest voice or the greatest political access. Citywide parks

nonprofits, however, bring their voices and advocacy to systemwide issues and comprehensive solutions. Join us for this engaging discussion with veteran journalist Jocelyn Dorsey and park advocates from Louisville, Austin and Atlanta as they share efforts to raise issues and marshal resources to address issues of park equity, chronic underfunding of park maintenance, stewardship of natural areas and innovative solutions to impacts of climate change.

Speakers:

- Brooke Pardue, President/CEO, Parks Alliance of Louisville
- Joy Casnovsky, Chief Mission Officer, Austin Parks Foundation
- Michael Halicki, Executive Director, Park Pride
- Jocelyn Dorsey (Moderator), veteran journalist

Diverse Ways to Engage the Public

Two metro Atlanta governments have different approaches to listening to park, trail and recreation supporters. DeKalb County has a long history with a citizens advisory panel, and Tucker's new city government grew in part from a very active network of Friends of the park groups. While their processes are different, the desired outcome is the same – to encourage and elevate citizen input to build a genuine collaboration that supports more funding and equity for public parks.

Speakers:

- Chuck Ellis, Director, DeKalb County Dept of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs
- Cara Schroeder (Co-Moderator), City Council Dist. 2 Post 1, City of Tucker
- Rip (Carlton) Robertson, Parks and Recreation Department Director, City of Tucker
- Shawn Stone, President, Friends of Tucker Parks
- Sally Sears (Moderator), Founding Board Member, South Fork Conservancy

Federal to Local: Making Tree Equity a Reality

Despite Atlanta's nickname of the "City in a Forest," Downtown Atlanta has a lower tree count compared to its neighboring areas. Urban forests manage stormwater, reduce urban heat and capture greenhouse gases, and this tree imbalance negatively impacts the local community. To address this issue, the Forest Service has invested funds from the Inflation Reduction Act to improve the nation's tree cover, especially in disinvested communities. This presentation will highlight the importance of urban forestry and tree equity.

Speakers:

- Beattra Wilson, Associate Deputy Chief (Acting), US Forest Service
- Greg Levine, Executive Director, Trees Atlanta
- Steve Sanchez, Principal, HGOR Landscape Architects
- Gaylan Williams (Moderator), AJCF Research Associate, University of Wisconsin – Madison

Inclusively Understood: Leveraging Trail Planning and Parks to Connect and Engage with Diverse Populations

Addressing social vulnerabilities and gaps in cultural needs in any community can be challenging. Learn how the cities of Clarkston and Johns Creek – two of the Southeast's most culturally and ethnically diverse places – engaged with their communities to identify opportunities for greenways, pedestrian and bike connections, and authentic park programming. These panelists will demonstrate how to connect with

residents, understand their needs, and develop approaches to integrate ethnocentric experiences into equitable park infrastructure and programming.

Speakers:

- Adleasia Cameron, Planning & Economic Development Director, City of Clarkston
- Sarah McColley, Urban Designer, Associate, Perkins & Will
- Dilip Tunki, Mayor Pro Tem & City Council member, City of Johns Creek
- Erica Madsen, Recreation & Parks Director, City of Johns Creek
- Bob Mullen (Moderator), Director of Communications, City of Johns Creek

Striving Towards the Beloved Community on Atlanta's Westside

The panel will explore the role of Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park and Rodney Cook Park in promoting equity and community resilience in Atlanta's Westside. Located in the historically marginalized neighborhoods of English Avenue and Vine City, these parks combat systemic racism by providing essential green space. The speakers will explore the transformative impact of these parks and associated environmental challenges that underscore the parks' significance in driving social and environmental change.

Speakers:

- Rosario Hernandez, Executive Director, Historic Westside Gardens
- Carrie Salvary, Board Chair, Alliance for the Activation of Cook Park
- Annie Moore, Director of Operations, Green Team of English Avenue, Inc.
- John Ahmann (Moderator), President/CEO, Westside Future Fund

11:20 a.m. – Lunch

12:30 p.m. – Mid-day Plenary Session

Empathy and the In-Between: Describing the Invitation to Participate (KEYNOTE)

DAVID RUBIN Land Collective practices park design and landscape architecture from a mission of empathy, problem solving on behalf of their clients and constituents. The studio aspires that citizens "see themselves" in the resultant works, empowering constituency through accessibility – the invitation to participate. The landscapes of parks and cities have the capacity to lift everyone, equitably.

- **Speaker:** David Rubin, PLA, FASLA, FAAR, Founding Principal, DAVID RUBIN Land Collective

2 p.m. – Networking Break

2:30 p.m. – Afternoon Breakout Sessions

ARC's Regional Trail Vision – A Path to Action

This panel discussion highlights various approaches to advance trail concepts through construction, integrating equity into planning, and creating support for programs and projects.

Speakers:

- Clyde Higgs, CEO, Atlanta Beltline Inc.
- Greta deMayo, Executive Director, PATH Foundation
- Denise Starling, Executive Director, Livable Buckhead
- Eric Meyer (Moderator), Planning Coordinator, Atlanta Regional Commission

Be a Beloved Naturalist

How do we build more diversity into environmental organizations? A group of DeKalb County activists launched an education program to expand Master Naturalist training, dropping the word 'Master.' The Beloved Naturalists gather two dozen adults for a nine-month class of monthly field trips, each exploring a new topic with a focus on justice and activism. Hear from a scientist, a student, a parks partner who will explore how the classes are changing their views of the outdoors.

Speakers:

- Revonda Cosby, Executive Director, Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area
- Dr. Chris Kodani, Ph.D. Biologist, Clayton State University
- Tasha Messer, High School Teacher, Beloved Class of 2023
- Tixie Fowler (Moderator), Professional Environmental Educator

Preserving and Promoting Nature Preserves for Today's Challenges and Tomorrow's Opportunities

Nature preserves are invaluable for municipalities, offering diverse environmental and community benefits. They support biodiversity, education, and recreation while bolstering climate resilience and enhancing health. Despite their value, these preserves confront challenges demanding joint action from government bodies, conservation groups, local communities, and individuals to ensure residents all enjoy equitable access to high-quality and well-maintained nature spaces. Speakers will highlight the importance of conserving and advocating for these spaces, discussing benefits, obstacles and future prospects.

Speakers:

- Melody Harclerode, Executive Director, Blue Heron Nature Preserve
- David Lloyd Davis, Executive Director, Cascade Springs Nature Conservancy
- Shirley Nichols, President, South River Gardens Community Association
- Molly Samuel (Moderator), Deputy Managing Editor, WABE Atlanta

Action Today for Equity and Resilience Tomorrow

Parks and greenspaces are the heart and lungs of our communities. Join representatives from local environmental and equity-focused organizations for an interactive workshop session that asks participants to explore how their actions can ensure that today's investments can catalyze the equitable and resilient future we want to see, particularly in our historically disinvested and under-served communities of color.

Speakers:

- Suzanne Burnes, Director, Just Growth Portfolio, Partnership for Southern Equity
- Tony Richardson, Director, Urban Conservation Initiatives, The Conservation Fund
- Abiodun Charlotte Henderson, Founder/Co-Director, Gangstas to Growers
- Carla Lewis, Executive Director, ECO-Action
- Janelle Wright, Environmental Justice Programs Manager, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- Sterling Johnson, Director, Just Opportunity Portfolio, Partnership for Southern Equity

Public Space and Homelessness: Providing Place-Based Care

In 2022, 6 out of 10 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness were in an urban area and some individuals relied on public spaces for their daily survival. The session will explore ways that urban public areas can become inclusive spaces of care for vulnerable individuals. Speakers will highlight two examples, including the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District's outreach services in Woodruff Park and downtown, and Downtown DC's inclusive programming in Franklin Park.

Speakers:

- Nakasha Shoyinka, Director of Support Services, Homeless Outreach Team, ADID
- Cecily Mendie, Franklin Park Manager, Downtown DC Business Improvement District
- Helen Beck (Moderator), PhD candidate and social researcher, University of Washington

It Takes a Village: Collaborative Action for Urban Greenspace in Baltimore

Originating from the Port of Baltimore's dredged material management needs, this panel of nonprofit, government and community organizers will explore Masonville Cove's unprecedented history of restorative justice and collaborative action towards creating greenspace equity in South Baltimore. Speakers will share how their collaboration resulted in equitable access to land and water and included co-designed community programs and shared use paths.

Speakers:

- Danielle Fisher, Outreach Coordinator, Maryland Port Administration
- Matias Orrego, Environmental Specialist, Maryland Environmental Service
- Ralinda Wimbush, Environmental Justice Organizer
- Gregory Atkin, Conservation Project Coordinator, The National Aquarium

3:30 p.m. – Networking Break

4 p.m. – Closing Plenary Session

Our Parks, Our Stories: Considering the Roots That Connect People and Place (KEYNOTE)

Parks at all scales are themselves stories – of people, events and culture. All of these roots live beneath the lands where parks are designated, but not all of them have been allowed to grow above the surface. In the past, many stories were told from single perspectives, while full stories were purposefully obscured or avoided. Recent efforts are tending to and cultivating these roots to allow full stories to grow and bloom, with much work left to do. With intention, we can ensure that we seek the full stories of the lands that Parks signify, from the beginning, and we can create space for the stories still untold as well as those being written today.

- **Speaker:** Priya Nanjappa, VP of Conservation Programs, National Parks Conservation Association

5 p.m. – Closing Reception