



Conference Program

Morning Keynote Presentation (9 - 9:50 a.m.)

Landscape Architects as Catalysts for Multidisciplinary Solutions (Day Hall)

In a world increasingly impacted by natural disasters and environmental challenges, collaboration across disciplines has never been more critical. Torey Carter-Conneen will explore the vital role landscape architects play in bridging the needs of communities, developers, municipalities, and the natural environment. Highlighting the intersection of infrastructure, ecology, and culture, Torey will discuss the economic and environmental benefits of nature-based solutions, supported by ASLA's recent research and white papers.

- **Speaker: Torey Carter-Conneen**, CEO, American Society of Landscape Architects

Networking Break (9:55 - 10:20 a.m.)

Morning Breakout Sessions (10:20 - 11:20 a.m.)

PATHs to Connection: Integrating Parks, Transit, and Community Engagement through the TRAILS ATL Master Plan (Day Hall)

This panel will explore innovative strategies for enhancing park accessibility and connectivity in urban environments, using the TRAILS ATL Master Plan as a case study. Speakers will focus on how trail networks, inclusive design, and public transit integration can transform greenspaces into vital community hubs.

Speakers:

- **Justin Cutler**, Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, City of Atlanta
- **Solomon Caviness, IV**, Commissioner, Dept of Transportation, City of Atlanta

- **Greta deMayo** (Moderator), PATH Foundation Executive Director

Legacy Park: Building Community that Cares (Garden House, Magnolia Room)

When the City of Decatur purchased the 77-acre Legacy Park property in 2017, thousands of residents participated in the public engagement. They converged on the mission areas of environmental preservation and education, recreation, affordable housing, and inclusive community building. Legacy Decatur works to show how neighbors can work together to be better stewards of the natural environment.

Speakers:

- **Allison Ericson**, Urban Naturalist, City of Decatur
- **Madeleine Henner**, Executive Director, Legacy Decatur
- **Greg White** (Moderator), Director of Parks and Recreation, City of Decatur (retired)

Connecting Design, Maintenance & Workforce Development: Building Quality Parks for All (Garden House, Orchid Room)

Connecting the dots between how design, increased maintenance budget and workforce development can help maintain quality landscapes while addressing environmental justice through education and workforce initiatives.

Speakers:

- **Heather Hussey-Coker**, Executive Director, Groundwork Atlanta
- **Walt Ray**, Chattahoochee Program Director, Trust for Public Land
- **Gaylan Williams**, Deputy Commissioner, City of Atlanta
- **Grace Dials** (Moderator), Director of Design Management, SCAPE Landscape Architecture

Youth Leadership for a Just and Resilient Atlanta (Garden House Workshop, lower level)

With a panel of young leaders, this interactive workshop engages youth and adult greenspace advocates in understanding ways that younger generations are learning and leading the way towards a more just and resilient Atlanta.

Speakers:

- **Garrison Andrews**, YES! for Equity Youth Staff, Partnership for Southern Equity
- **Tayten Green**, High School Student, Tapestry Public Charter School
- **Denise Webb**, YES! For Equity Senior Youth Staff, Partnership for Southern Equity
- **Rachel McBride** (Moderator), YES! for Equity Senior Youth Staff, Partnership for Southern Equity

Re-storying the Public Realm (Georgia-Pacific Classroom)

Speakers will explore the purpose of storytelling and its importance in the public realm, how we have traditionally told stories, the importance of holding space for multiple truths, and examples of successful creative storytelling.

Speakers:

- **Shannon Turner**, Founder, StoryMuse
- **Richard Harker**, President & CEO, Historic Oakland Foundation
- **Andrew Kohr** (Moderator), Principal, Pond and Company

Rethinking Invasive - Expanding the Forest Restoration Community (Longleaf Restaurant, rooftop)

The language used to teach about restoring the forests and ecosystems in our parks often has an unintended consequence of alienating park visitors and volunteers. The panel will introduce a new approach to communication that can be immediately implemented. Copies of the Just Language Guide will be distributed.

Speakers:

- **Danielle Bunch**, Conservation Supervisor, CCWA
- **Iris Chen**, Graduate Student, Technical University of Munich
- **Carolyn Keogh**, Associate Teaching Professor, Emory University
- **Jonah McDonald** (Moderator), Park Naturalist, DeKalb County RPCA

Conserving Heritage: Landscape as a Common Ground for Memory and Advocacy (Magnolia Hall, Piedmont Park)

Learn the value of protecting culturally significant spaces, their role in shaping community identity, and how such conservation fosters sustainable economies and vibrant communities. Speakers will explore collaborative descendant-led efforts as well as design strategies that conserve spaces while making them accessible, educational, and emotive for visitors.

Speakers:

- **Yamona Pierce**, President and Founder, The Hamilton Hood Foundation
- **Phillip Howard**, Program Manager, The Conservation Fund
- **Corrin Breeding**, President & CEO, Jackson-Breeding Consultant Group
- **Abra Lee** (Moderator), public horticulturist, historian and writer

Olmsted Now: Creating Parks for All People (Mershon Hall Classroom, lower level)

Parks for all people was one of Frederick Law Olmsted's guiding principles. This panel will look at parks as democratic spaces today, with three speakers from across the country examining some of the most exciting programmatic efforts underway to ensure diverse communities feel "ownership" of their parks.

Speakers:

- **Sandra Kruger**, Executive Director, Olmsted Linear Park Alliance
- **Anita Morson Matra**, Director of Community Partnerships, Emerald Necklace Conservancy
- **Mia Rubin**, Director of Programs, Fort Greene Park Conservancy
- **Victoria Vanhuss** (Moderator), Director of Communications and Outreach, Olmsted Network

Reclaiming the Outdoors: Collective Action for Environmental Justice (Outdoor Kitchen)

Explore the power of collective action through storytelling, listening, collaborating, and mobilizing communities to address environmental inequities. Speakers will inspire action and equip participants with tools to unite communities around shared goals, building resilience and deeper connections to nature for future generations.

Speakers:

- **IvoRi Schley**, Fiber Artist, Farmer & Geographer, Afro Agriculture LLC
- **Opal Baker**, Community Activist, Forward Together East Point

- **Yvonne Cole Boone**, Educator and Community Activist, SouthSide Environmental Justice Alliance
- **Niya Randall** (Moderator), Strategist, Gold Green Collectives

Tree Unions- Utilizing the Urban Forest for Making Community Connections (Outdoor Tour meeting at Chihuly Fountain on Levy Parterre)

Greenspaces within our urban forest provide an opportunity to build deep connections with the community. Explore how to apply observations of this forest to other greenspaces through tree identification, tree health and tree ecology.

Speakers:

- **Edward Morrow**, Independent Arborist
- **Annie O'Neill**, Program Coordinator, Woodlands Garden of Decatur
- **Rebecca Gilbert** (Moderator), Director of Education, Trees Atlanta

Midday Keynote Presentation (12:47 - 1:37 p.m.)

Who Gets to Enjoy Urban Waters? (Day Hall)

Investigating Atlanta's abundant but hidden creeks led Hannah Palmer to deeper questions about the lack of access to water for recreation, for relief from the heat, and for basic sanitation for the people who need it most. How is it that some creeks form the centerpiece of beloved parks and nature preserves, while others are lost in underground pipes or littered margins of the city? In this talk, Hannah explores how radical accessibility to our urban waters might make our public spaces not just greener and cooler, but kinder and more just.

- **Speaker: Hannah S. Palmer**, writer and artist

Networking Break (2 - 2:30 p.m.)

Afternoon Breakout Sessions (2:30 - 3:30 p.m.)

Balancing Recreation, Ecology & Resilience on the Chattahoochee (Day Hall)

As the Atlanta region renews its focus on the Chattahoochee River as a cultural, recreational, and natural resource, a central question emerges: How can governments, communities, and designers balance recreational access with the pressing needs of ecology and resilience? This panel will present two case studies that take different approaches to this balance.

Speakers:

- **Ann Honious**, Superintendent, NPS, Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area
- **Steven Malone**, Director, Roswell Recreation, Parks, Historic & Cultural Affairs Department
- **Aubrey Sabba**, Senior Associate, Starr Whitehouse
- **Jacob Lange** (Moderator), Partner

PATHs to Parks: Enhancing Accessibility and Connectivity in Atlanta (Garden House, Magnolia Room)

Learn about the PATH Foundation mission to transform Metro Atlanta through over 320 miles of multi-use trails that connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, and business districts. This session includes a case study from Access 2 Independence.

Speakers:

- **Renato Espinel**: PATH Foundation Project Manager
- **O'Ree Crittenden**, Access 2 Independence Assistant Director
- **Seth Bollinger** (Moderator), PATH Foundation Project Manager

Proactively Protecting Atlanta's Forests: A Collaborative Approach (Garden House, Orchid Room)

Panelists will share their partnership in preserving forested land, including a discussion on raising funds, working with landowners and land acquisition litigation, city purchase of land through the Tree Protection Ordinance and the Tree Trust Fund, as well as the method the City uses to prioritize spaces, all through the case study of Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve.

Speakers:

- **Roberta Moore**, Field Representative, The Conservation Fund
- **Taryn Heidel**, Arboricultural Manager, City of Atlanta
- **Shirley Nichols**, Community Advocate, South River Gardens Community Association
- **Madison Cummiskey** (Moderator), Forest Restoration Manager, Trees Atlanta

Water for All: Addressing Water Equity Challenges in Atlanta (Garden House Workshop, lower level)

Learn how community-based organizations are empowering residents to address water equity issues in their backyards through programs such as the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network and projects like the Hunter Hills Refuge.

Speakers:

- **Na'Taki Osborne-Jelks**, Co-Founder & ED, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- **Carla Lewis**, Executive Director, Environmental Community Action
- **Ben Emanuel**, Director, Southeast Conservation, American Rivers
- **Erich Melville** (Moderator), Urban Projects Planner, The Conservation Fund

Atlanta Hates Us: How Skateboarding Connects Communities (Georgia-Pacific Classroom)

This presentation explores Atlanta's skateboarding history and future, highlighting the transformative impact of DIY projects on local communities. Atlanta has embraced the DIY skate scene, collaborating with residents, officials, and Park Pride to revitalize underutilized spaces.

Speakers:

- **Pat McLain**, Skateboarder, Builder, Sculptor, Stratosphere Skate Team, Chihuahua Custom Concrete, Thrasher Magazine
- **Julie Gannon**, Owner, Ria's Bluebird
- **Marlon Garcia**, Skateboarding Advocate & Community Activist
- **Aaron Wiener** (Moderator), Outdoor Recreation Planner, NPS

Community Orchards in Historic Parks (Mershon Classroom, lower level)

Panelists will explore three case studies of active orchards planted on historic sites tapping into Georgia's agricultural roots, provide food for the community, and develop innovative partnerships between community groups and management agencies.

Speakers:

- **Rhonda Wildman**, Chair, Friends of Decatur Cemetery
- **Charlie Monroe**, Natural Resource Manager, Cobb County Parks & Recreation

- **Fred Conrad** (Moderator), Senior Manager of Community Services, Food Well Alliance

Activating Black History in Urban Parks (Magnolia Hall, Piedmont Park)

Building on the knowledge gained from Chattahoochee Brick—a historical site slated to become Atlanta's newest waterfront park—panelists will investigate the importance of community involvement and ways to make urban greenspaces more culturally relevant for a broader set of communities, particularly those of color, which are often under-represented in outdoor spaces.

Speakers:

- **Donna Stephens**, Founder and Chair, Chattahoochee Brick Company Descendants Coalition
- **Ann Hill-Bond**, Community Engagement Manager, Capital B
- **Tony Richardson**, Director, Urban Conservation Initiatives, The Conservation Fund
- **Isabelle Lyon** (Moderator), Urban Conservation Associate, The Conservation Fund

People, Parks & Purpose: Role of Naturalists (Outdoor Tour meeting at Chihuly Fountain on Levy Parterre)

DeKalb Parks Naturalists will take participants on an educational stroll through the lens of three diverse park environments, each with its own ecological and cultural landscape. Join the speakers in reimagining what's possible when nature education becomes a cornerstone of park programming.

Speakers:

- **Shaundon Moore**, Parks Naturalist, DeKalb County RPCA
- **Jennifer McLaurin**, Parks Naturalist, DeKalb County RPCA
- **Tasha Messer**, Parks Naturalist, DeKalb County RPCA
- **Robby Astrove** (Moderator), Natural Resource Manager, DeKalb County RPCA

Networking Break (3:30 - 4 p.m.)

Closing Keynote Session (4 - 5 p.m.)

Build First, Ask Later: Citizen-Led Change and Tactical Urbanism (Day Hall)

Parks are more than just green spaces—they are a proving ground for how cities function. Yet too often, we wait for perfect plans, ideal funding, or official approvals before making the changes our communities need. But what if we flipped the script? What if the first step toward a better city was simply meeting real needs—right now?

This talk explores the power of tactical urbanism and citizen-led change—how small, scrappy interventions can pave the way for larger, lasting transformation. From pop-up bike lanes to DIY bus stops, Jon Jon will dive into real-world examples of how cities are improved not by waiting, but by doing. With humor, storytelling, and a bit of “good trouble,” he’ll unpack why making the first move—before everything is perfect—is the key to creating places that truly serve everyone.

- **Speaker: Jon Jon Wesolowski**, “The Happy Urbanist”, content creator and educator