

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

HOLLY LEICHT APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

New York, NY | August 9, 2022 — The Board of Trustees of Madison Square Park Conservancy today announced the appointment of Holly Leicht as the organization's next Executive Director. Leicht brings 25 years of experience leading urban planning, open space, and development initiatives, most recently serving as the Executive Vice President of Real Estate Development & Planning at Empire State Development, New York State's economic development agency, and having previously held prominent leadership roles at federal and municipal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, as well as at leading urban planning and advocacy nonprofits, including New Yorkers for Parks and the Municipal Art Society. As the Conservancy's next Executive Director, she will implement a strategic vision for the organization and its resources, supporting its public art commissioning program, horticulture programs, and recently launched sustainability initiatives. Leicht succeeds current Executive Director Keats Myer, who concludes a nearly decade-long tenure with the Conservancy at the end of the summer. Leicht will join the Conservancy on September 6, 2022.

"From Holly's experience at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where she worked diligently to chart a more resilient path forward in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, to her work overseeing, implementing, and advocating for pivotal development projects here in New York City, Holly has demonstrated an innovative, people-centered approach in everything she does. Beyond all of her achievements—which are many—it is this care and attention she devotes to the people and places she serves that make her a perfect fit to lead the Conservancy, an organization that is very much rooted in serving and bettering its community," said Sheila Kearney Davidson, Chair of Madison Square Park Conservancy's Board of Trustees. "Though it is bittersweet to say goodbye to Keats after almost ten impactful years, we know the Conservancy couldn't be in better hands and look forward to the organization's continued growth and development under Holly's leadership."

"I couldn't be more excited to join Madison Square Park Conservancy and step into a position that is a culmination of my personal and professional interests in parks and the environment and building more resilient systems and communities," said Leicht. "I'm looking forward to working alongside the Conservancy's board and staff to deepen its commitment to sustainability as a major pillar of its mission and to forging new, meaningful connections with parkgoers, local residents, and businesses. The park's horticulture and art programs provide endless opportunities not just to create a sustainable 6.2-acre oasis in the middle of New York City, but also to provide real-life lessons in how all of us can make a difference, how we are all accountable for doing our part for our green spaces, for our city, and for our planet."

Madison Square Park Conservancy has undergone several periods of transformation over the past decade under the leadership of Keats Myer, including the growth of its operating budget from \$3.3M to \$5M and the launch and implementation of a strategic planning process that led to an institutional focus on the art and horticulture programs. The Conservancy has been awarded several honors for these programs, including being one of the first parks in the country certified as both an Arboretum and an American Public Garden and being selected as the commissioning institution for the 2019 Venice Biennale. The Conservancy recently redoubled its environmental sustainability efforts, including creating its first sustainability department and launching initiatives to promote sustainability both within the park and its

operations as well as in the surrounding community. In 2019, under Myer's leadership, the Conservancy launched an ongoing \$8-million campaign designed to restore, upgrade, and maintain the historic Park's majestic tree canopy and built environment, while also upgrading visitor amenities and resources.

"It has been an honor and a joy to devote this part of my life to an organization that touches the lives of so many people, New Yorkers and otherwise, who get to experience Madison Square Park for all that it is—an urban oasis, art destination, community convener, environmental advocate," said Keats Myer, current Executive Director of Madison Square Park Conservancy. "The last ten years have been exciting ones for the Conservancy as we've grown, evolved, and launched new initiatives aimed at preserving, protecting, and beautifying the park and our broader community. With all of this achieved and more recent efforts underway, it feels like an opportune moment to hand over the reins to someone who will bring the fresh vision needed to propel the Conservancy into its next era of evolution. I feel confident that Holly is just the right person for the job and look forward to seeing what comes next."

Leicht joins the Conservancy from Empire State Development (ESD) where she served as Executive Vice President of Real Estate Development & Planning since 2017. During her tenure, Leicht has overseen New York State's signature real estate projects, including the extension of the High Line, the revitalization plan for the Penn Station Area, the transformation of Farley Post Office into Moynihan Train Hall, and the National Urban League's new national headquarters and civil rights museum, among other key projects. She oversaw ESD's development subsidiaries as well as the team responsible for repurposing State-owned properties, helping to determine re-use feasibility of surplus properties in coordination with local stakeholders, managing community outreach and engagement, as well as public approvals and entitlement processes.

"Holly was the indispensable force behind some of Empire State Development's most significant achievements over the last half-decade," said Empire State Development President, CEO and Commissioner Hope Knight. "From Buffalo to Belmont, Holly's leadership, civic-mindedness, and complete commitment to developing a community-driven approach to critical real estate and infrastructure projects has yielded an impressive array of successes including the completion of Moynihan Train Hall, the redevelopment of Belmont Park, and, as Lower Manhattan Development Corporation chair, the stewardship of the World Trade Center site, including adding affordable housing to its ongoing development. Holly is creative, collaborative, and committed, and Madison Square Park Conservancy will be very well served with her at its helm."

Prior to joining ESD, Leicht served in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from 2014 to 2017. Appointed by President Obama, Leicht oversaw four field offices in New York and New Jersey that administered \$6 billion in housing and urban development programs as well as over \$15 billion in disaster recovery funds. Among her achievements in the office was her leadership of the regional Superstorm Sandy recovery efforts, including helping to coordinate and expedite infrastructure projects and recommending long-term process and procedural improvements for disaster recovery.

As Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks from 2011 to 2014, she championed the significance of parks and open space for all New Yorkers through an integrated approach of research, advocacy, and strategic partnerships. Under her leadership she reestablished the nonprofit's prominence as the leading voice in the field on issues related to parks and shored up the organization's finances, transforming a budget deficit into a surplus during her tenure

through the development and growth of the organization's donor base, refocusing mission and program, and reorganizing and building staff.

Previously, Leicht worked at Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, where she directed planning studies for the revitalization of Lower Manhattan, and at the Municipal Art Society of New York managing urban planning, design, and historic preservation advocacy work, including championing the preservation of community gardens throughout New York City. Leicht earned her J.D. from Northwestern University School of Law and her B.A. from Yale University.

ABOUT MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

Madison Square Park Conservancy cultivates and enlivens Madison Square Park, a dynamic seven-acre public park in New York City's Flatiron District and one of the city's most treasured greenspaces. Through its public art commissions, horticultural stewardship, and engaging programming, the nonprofit creates an urban oasis that welcomes a diverse community of over 60,000 visitors each day. Keats Myer is the Conservancy's Executive Director.

Since 2004, the Conservancy has become a leader in commissioning new works of public art, curating and presenting over 40 major site-specific installations and solo exhibitions through its art programming. Led by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Deputy Director and Martin Friedman Chief Curator, the program invites leading artists to push the boundaries of their practice and create risk-taking new works that experiment with materiality, scale, and theme in response to the park's unique environment. The ambition of the commissioning program expands each year alongside the diverse range of innovative artists including Diana Al-Hadid, Tony Cragg, Abigail DeVille, Leonardo Drew, Maya Lin, Iván Navarro, Martin Puryear, Arlene Shechet, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

In 2019, the Conservancy served as the commissioning institution for the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, marking the first time that an organization whose visual art program focuses exclusively on public art has received this honor. With Rapaport serving as Commissioner, the Conservancy presented new work by Martin Puryear.

For more information, contact

Resnicow and Associates

Juliet Sorce, 212.671.5158 or jsorce@resnicow.com

Delaney Smith, 212.671.5160 or dsmith@resnicow.com

Jenny Levine, 212.671.5189 or jlevine@resnicow.com