



NEWS RELEASE

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Friends of the Parks' Executive Director Steps Down

Friends of the Parks was formed in 1975 in response to the deplorable conditions of the city's parks--specifically, in Black and brown communities. Since then, FOTP has built a reputation for getting into "good trouble" on behalf of all Chicagoans.

Over the past eight years, FOTP Executive Director Juanita Irizarry has been the face of good trouble, which is why her decision to resign at the end of this year is regrettable.

"We have deep appreciation for Juanita's impactful leadership to ensure equitable access to Chicago's parks," says FOTP Board Chair Bronwyn Nichols Lodato. "She's made an indelible impression on the organization and how the city engages parks' policy in service to everyone."

Under Irizarry's leadership, FOTP has taken on movie mogul George Lucas who wanted to build a museum on the people's lakefront, is a co-plaintiff in a lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers to stop the proposed expansion of a pollution dump on the city's far Southeast Side and is serving on the DuSable Park Framework Plan Steering Committee to make the long overdue DuSable Park--which was dedicated in 1987 by Mayor Harold Washington--a reality.

Irizarry describes her eight years at FOTP as two back-to-back marathons run at a sprinter's pace.

"We have seen an extraordinary number and magnitude of battles and wins, and I am so very proud of all that we have accomplished," states Irizarry. "We have made strong progress on many fronts, including protecting Chicago's lakefront, advocating for equity across the Chicago Park District, fighting for environmental justice, and engaging more and diverse neighbors as front-line stewards and ambassadors for the importance of parks and green spaces to healthy, sustainable communities."

Nichols Lodato says FOTP has a strong team and the organization's mission of ensuring an equitable park system will continue. In 2025, FOTP will celebrate its 50th anniversary and is looking forward to an exciting and energized search for the next executive director.

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