



Connecting People and Parks and Conserving the Emerald Necklace

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**EMERALD NECKLACE CONSERVANCY HIRES ARTS LEADER
TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
AHEAD OF BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

**Art Curator Jen Mergel appointed as
Director of Experience and Cultural Partnerships**

Boston, MA November 16, 2021—As the [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#) prepares to mark the bicentennial of Frederick Law Olmsted in 2022, the non-profit looks to deepen and broaden its community impact with the hire of Jen Mergel in the newly created senior leadership role of Director of Experience and Cultural Partnerships.

To expand the Conservancy's foundational commitment to connect people to and through parks, Mergel will integrate work across the teams in visitor welcome, education and programs. In addition, she will build the organization's capacity and trajectory to invite more inclusive and impactful park experiences through a diverse mix of partnerships that honor the intersecting wisdom of local elders, the know-how of passionate community organizers and the bold vision of cultural luminaries.

Mergel is a nationally respected contemporary arts leader and curator dedicated to exploring Boston's histories and collaboratively reimagining its futures. As a guest curator, she organized for the Conservancy's 20th anniversary the landmark award-winning project [Fog x FLO: Fujiko Nakaya on the Emerald Necklace](#) in 2018. Since then she has been working with the Conservancy to steer next year's [Olmsted Now: Greater Boston's Olmsted Bicentennial](#). Named "Olmsted Now" to honor Olmsted's legacy and 21st-century relevance with, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "the fierce urgency of now," the 2022 bicentennial planning has been an important practice field for a growing multidisciplinary coalition to question what park experience is and should be.

In her Conservancy position, Mergel is fully committed to building on groundwork laid with thought leaders in [park equity](#), [public-making and spatial justice](#) to pilot neighborhood-led initiatives and cross-city collaborations for Olmsted Now. This will be a first step toward deeper learning and investment ahead: to face inequities in access to greenspace, to engage more voices in park decision-making, and to test trust-based models of collective partnership, empowerment, fundraising and community-driven programming. The goal is to identify new models of nurturing and stewarding collective park relationships, responsibilities and care that have lasting impacts for the Conservancy, the Emerald Necklace park system and the broader social ecosystem of Greater Boston.

“Now is the time to rethink and recommit to the Conservancy's role as an innovator in park experience and models of partnership. We are delighted to welcome Jen to guide our collaborations with history keepers, change agents and thought leaders in public-making,” said Karen Mauney-Brodek, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. “Jen is bringing her deep knowledge of Boston, experience across disciplines and highly collaborative approach to further our mission to improve the Emerald Necklace for all.”

Reflecting on her new role, Mergel shared: “Since 2017, I have seen directly how the Conservancy tackles big challenges with both expansive vision and grassroots solutions. The team is driven by a passionate care for generational impacts, much like Olmsted was in designing these connective healing spaces two centuries ago. ‘Care’ is by definition the root of what curators do, and I have loved catalyzing curiosity and conversation through projects these past two decades. So, I could not be more excited to advance that urgent work—beyond saying to doing, beyond concept to action—with an organization so ideally positioned for this moment of transformational change and citywide impact in my hometown. In her historic election victory, Mayor Michelle Wu said, ‘We are ready to become a Boston for everyone.’ With the creation of this new role, the Conservancy asks *all of us* to reaffirm that our open spaces are truly ‘for everyone.’ Olmsted Now is our opportunity to vote ‘yes’ to break down silos, take a few risks, stake different paths, and make places more public, more shared, for all.”

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About Jen Mergel

Mergel has organized more than 50 exhibitions for museum, academic and citywide audiences and has proudly served on several boards and committees, including for the [Association of Art Museum Curators](#) and [Voices in Contemporary Art](#) among others. From 2010-2017, she was the Senior Curator of the Contemporary Art Department at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She held previous curatorial roles at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, MA, and organized presentations in New York at The Armory Show and Whitney Museum of American Art. During the pandemic, Mergel was guest curator of many community-affirming collaborative projects locally—including with [Area Code Art Fair](#), the [School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts](#) and [Boston Center for the Arts](#). Growing up in Dorchester near Franklin Park, Mergel earned her A.B. from Harvard University and M.A. from Bard College, is a Center for Curatorial Leadership Fellow and continues her studies through the Racial Equity Institute. More at www.jenmergel.com

About the Emerald Necklace Conservancy

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is a non-profit organization founded in 1998 to steward and champion the Emerald Necklace, Boston’s largest park system. The Conservancy protects, restores, helps maintain and promotes the Emerald Necklace’s seven distinct parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, and comprises 1,100 acres of meadows, woodlands and paths. In collaboration with its public partners, the Conservancy provides maintenance of the parks and capital restoration projects, free cultural events, visitor services and environmental education. The parks serve as a respite from the city, a valuable

commuting connector and a community convener for more than one million residents and tourists each year and have taken on a special significance over the past 20 months as a safe and socially distanced destination for local residents and regional visitors. www.emeraldnecklace.org

About the Land Stewarded by the Conservancy

The park system the Conservancy now stewards sits within the ancestral and unceded territory of [the Massachusetts people](#). For millennia before and in the centuries since Olmsted designed a park system for a rapidly industrializing city, these lands and waters have served as a site of exchange among communities including the Massachusetts, Wampanoag and Nipmuc peoples. The Conservancy announces this truth as a first step in a commitment toward right relations with local Indigenous leaders to re-center our stewardship of shared spaces and honor their living wisdom. This acknowledgement will evolve with ongoing learning and action. Please contact us with questions, comments and recommendations.

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