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Rock Creek Conservancy Welcomes Three Environmental and Community Leaders to its Board of Directors

Mary Cheh, Amanda Leiter, and Sherryl Newman bring strong expertise in policy and public service to Conservancy’s vision of a thriving Rock Creek

Bethesda, MD (January 9, 2023) - Rock Creek Conservancy (“the Conservancy”), a watershed organization protecting Rock Creek and the philanthropic and stewardship partner to the entirety of Rock Creek Park, announced today the appointment of the former DC Councilmember Mary Cheh, environmental attorney Amanda Leiter, and community strategist Sherryl Newman as members of its Board of Directors. Current board member Molly Hill Patten has been named treasurer.

In announcing their appointments, Pavan Khoobchandani, the chair of the Conservancy’s board, said, “We are thrilled to add the formidable talents and experience of Mary, Amanda, and Sherryl at a time of pivotal growth in our ambitions and impact toward creating a healthy, regenerative watershed and forest for Rock Creek Park and the communities around it.”

Khoobchandani noted that their combined accomplishments promise to help expand the capacity of advocacy and people-powered restoration for the Conservancy, now in its 18th year of environmental leadership in DC and Montgomery County: “Our mission has grown only more urgent and complex over the past three years as the public’s use and enjoyment of Rock Creek Park has surged during the pandemic. We could not be more delighted to gain the strong, critical perspectives of our three new directors as we forge ahead with our strategic plan to protect Rock Creek and the watershed - a one-of-a-kind natural treasure that provides climate and social resilience, recreation, and opportunities for community service.”
Jeanne Braha, the Conservancy's executive director, welcomed the service of Cheh, Leiter, and Newman as the organization continues to strengthen its leadership in advocating for the integrity and resilience of both the cultural and natural assets of Rock Creek Park, including a new collaborative campaign to revive the Carter Barron Amphitheater as a beloved performance venue: "As we work towards the revitalization of the Carter Barron, rush to meet the needs of the fragile forests of Rock Creek, and ensure that all Rock Creek neighbors and visitors feel welcome in its parklands, these three community leaders and park champions will add immeasurably to the collective wisdom and commitment of our board and supporters."

The Conservancy thanks departing board members David DeSantis, Stephanie Flack, Gary Guzy, and Danielle Reyes for their dedicated service to Rock Creek.

The year is off to a strong start for the Conservancy. On Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, the organization will host nearly a dozen opportunities to give back to Rock Creek Park in partnership with the National Park Service. Members of the public are welcome to volunteer in removing litter or invasive plant species in the park and throughout the watershed. Learn more at rockcreekconservancy.org/mlk-weekend-of-service.

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About the new Board of Directors members:

Mary Cheh is a tenured constitutional law and criminal procedure professor at the George Washington University Law School, As a member of the Council of the District of Columbia from 2007 to 2022 and, most recently, the Chair of the Committee on Transportation & the Environment. Cheh has championed legislation to protect the environment, improve the health of District residents, and has fought for good government.

Amanda Leiter is a Senior Counsel in the Environment and Natural Resources Division at the US Department of Justice. She is on leave from American University’s Washington College of Law, where she was Senior Associate Dean from 2020 to 2022; taught environmental law, environmental justice, administrative law, and torts; and co-directed the school’s Program on Environmental and Energy Law. From 2015 to 2017, Amanda served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals in the Department of the Interior, advancing priorities related to oil and gas and renewable energy development on public lands onshore and offshore. Amanda is a graduate of Stanford University, the University of Washington School of Oceanography, and Harvard Law School. She clerked for Judge Nancy Gertner of the Federal District Court for the District of Massachusetts; Judge David Tatel of the D.C. Circuit; and Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.
Sherryl Newman serves as Director of Community Engagement at LINK, where she focuses on strategic planning and transformational change, assists with organizational development and assessments, and facilitates community engagements and events of all sizes. Her primary focus has always been on serving and working with the community to build better opportunities for its residents. Her past 35 years of professional work have been primarily in public service in New York City and the District of Columbia, rising from an Office Assistant to Executive or Cabinet-level positions in both cities. Her contributions include full-scale agency-wide transformations in multiple resident service-focused agencies. Sherryl is from the Bronx in New York and earned two undergraduate degrees from Rutgers University—a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, along with minor degrees in African American History and Accounting. Sherryl has a Master of Business Administration degree in Human Resources Development from Pace University, Lubin School of Business, is a graduate of Leadership New York City and Leadership Greater Washington and has a Project Management Certificate from Georgetown. Sherryl has two adult daughters and resides in Ward 4 of Washington, DC with her husband, Robert.

About Rock Creek Conservancy (rockcreekconservancy.org):

Rock Creek Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to restoring Rock Creek and its parklands as a natural oasis for all people to appreciate and protect. As an official philanthropic and stewardship partner to the National Park Service, the Conservancy leverages a unique model of people-powered restoration to restore the forest, ensure clean water throughout the watershed, elevate the park visitor experience, and increase equity of access to this treasured greenspace.