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Trust for Public Land Transfers Key Tract on MLK, Jr. Block to National Park Service

Celebration of Over 30 Years of Support to Preserve the MLK Jr National Historic Site

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –Another slice of Atlanta history will remain intact thanks to the Trust for Public Land’s transfer of one of the last privately owned properties on Auburn Avenue in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site to the National Park Service. In tribute to the era when the community was a thriving residential and commercial magnet, the groups will commemorate with a 1930’s-style neighborhood celebration on October 28.

“This transaction represents TPL’s continued commitment and effort both to preserve the neighborhood’s cultural heritage and to recapture the vitality and distinctiveness the Auburn Avenue area enjoyed during Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life,” said Will Rogers, TPL’s National President.

To celebrate, Rogers will be in attendance from San Francisco to commemorate the ownership transfer of 530 Auburn Avenue and the partnership with NPS. Judy Forte, Superintendent for the MLK, Jr. National Historic Site, will accept the key from Rogers.

“Following Coretta Scott King’s leadership in establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, TPL emerged as an early advocate for preserving the neighborhood that surrounds Dr. King’s Birth Home,” said Forte. “From their purchase of the first five homes in 1980 to the recent acquisition of 530 Auburn Avenue, TPL’s involvement has been critical to the site’s growth and development. This important National Historic Site stands today as an example of the impact of TPL’s conservation work across the U.S.”

“The Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site is terrifically important,” said Helen Tapp, TPL’s Georgia Director. “Visitors from all around the globe come here to witness firsthand the neighborhood that raised a man who led a movement that changed the world; who won a Nobel Peace Prize; and who still inspires.”

Representatives of the King family, the City of Atlanta, the Historic District Development Corporation and Ebenezer Baptist Church will also be recognized for their contributions toward preservation within the historic site. Other key invited guests include U.S. Congressman John Lewis, Art Frederick, Deputy Director for the Southeast Region of the National Park Service and City of Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin. Guests will enjoy old fashioned cakes, Coca-Colas and lemonade and take part in guided tours of the historic buildings and historic activity stations that recall the 1930’s era.

To date, the Trust for Public Land has spent more than two million dollars and has doubled the number of NPS holdings within the MLK, Jr. National Historic Site to ensure that the character of Sweet Auburn and the neighborhood that nurtured Dr. King and his vision will be preserved forever. The historic site is one of the few “livable” national parks, a term coined by The National Park Service signifying that the site offers both historical and cultural importance, as well as a lively and productive neighborhood for private citizens.

Auburn Avenue History

When Dr. King lived on Auburn Avenue in the 1930’s, it was a thriving African American community that defied the confines of social and economic segregation. There was more diversity of profession in the one mile of street than any other African American street in the south. African American civic and political leader, John Wesley Dobbs, described the street at the time as “paved in gold,” and coined the area’s name “Sweet Auburn.”

Auburn Avenue was like a grand lady,” recalled one journalist. “In her prime she was the talk of the town – young, vivacious, and beautiful. Everyone loved her, respected her, and wooed her.”

Integration created the opportunity for African Americans to live and shop anywhere, causing residents to move away. By 1980, Sweet Auburn was mired with vacant lots and dilapidated homes – decrepit and drug ridden. Any semblance of the community in which Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up had largely disappeared.

TPL recognized that the world was in danger of losing a cultural legacy if the properties where Dr. King grew up were not acquired. Shortly after, work began on a long-term stewardship. In the late 1970’s, TPL purchased five rundown homes along Auburn Avenue, the same block as the birthplace and boyhood home of Dr. King.

Those critical purchases became the core of a new site in King’s honor, and in October 1980, Congress created the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. Over the next 20 years, TPL assisted in the purchase of over a dozen other properties.

About the Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit conservation organization, helps communities and government agencies identify and protect land for people. TPL has worked with willing landowners, community groups, and national, state, and local agencies to complete more than 3,900 land conservation projects in 47 states, protecting 2.8 million acres. Since 1994, TPL has helped states and communities craft and pass over 330 ballot measures, generating almost \$25 billion in new conservation-related funding. In Georgia, TPL has conserved more than 20,000 acres since 1991. The Trust for Public Land depends on the support and generosity of individuals, foundations, and businesses to achieve their land for people mission. Through the efforts of the Heritage Lands Initiative, TPL protects places of historic and cultural importance, and for thirty years TPL has closely worked with National Park Service to ensure long-term stewardship of natural and historic lands. For more information, visit www.tpl.org.

About the National Park Service

Since 1916, the American people have entrusted the National Park Service with the care of all national parks. NPS helps tribes, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses and individual citizens to revitalize their communities, preserve local history, celebrate local heritage, and create close to home opportunities for kids and families to get outside, be active, and have fun. With the help of volunteers and park partners, the National Park Service safeguards nearly 400 places covering over 84 million acres. These sites have shared their stories with more than 275 million visitors every year. The National Park Service has one mission: to care for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience, enjoy and be informed by our heritage. For more information, visit www.nps.gov.