



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 29, 2024

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Friends of the Parks Announces Interim Executive Director

Friends of the Parks' interim executive director is a bicycle activist, transportation planner, educator, mental health advocate and proud product of the Chicago Public Schools. Chicago's parks also have played important roles in all chapters of Gin Kilgore's life—from cutting through Nichols Park on the way to high school, to getting married in Humboldt Park, to building sand castles with her child at North Avenue Beach and training for the marathon by running along Daniel Burnham's "emerald necklace" of boulevards. All of the assets Kilgore believes will serve her well as she steps into this new position at the venerable organization known for protecting Chicago's lakefront, advocating for equity across the Chicago Park District and fighting for environmental justice.

Kilgore was hired at FOTP in 2022 as deputy director. Since being at the organization, the former Hyde Park resident says she has learned a lot about "grass tops" advocacy.

She came to the position thinking she would draw most heavily on her grassroots and policy backgrounds, but quickly discovered that the listening and facilitation skills gained from her time in classrooms have been equally valuable.

"We can't do ground level work in each of the over 600 parks across Chicago. Instead, we support and amplify the efforts of local "parktivists"—Park Advisory Councils and other stakeholders. The trends we see from across the city then guide our advocacy work at the policy level."

Kilgore also appreciates the way FOTP holds space for complex, often messy conversations "When I first read about our Parks as Democracy? conferences, the English teacher in me raised an eyebrow. I now think our public discourse would greatly benefit if people used more question marks than exclamation points."

Before working at FOTP, Kilgore was a bicycle/pedestrian planner at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and program director at Ride Illinois. She co-founded Bike Winter to show that cycling is a year-round form of transportation and was instrumental in the development of the Bloomingdale Trail, also known as the 606. She also served on the board of Break the Gridlock, an organization that was dedicated to reducing automobile dependence. When wearing her educator hat, Kilgore was a lead literacy teacher at a Chicago public elementary school, where she served on the Local School Counsel during a principal transition, served as LSC president at her child's elementary school, and taught composition at Malcolm X College.

"We're happy to have Gin step into this new role. In addition to working with communities to protect our parks and ensure Chicagoans of all ages have access, equitable programming and funding, we continue to work on our signature projects, Nature Along the Lake and Earth Day. FOTP will play an active role in the Chicago Park District's strategic planning process this year and we are looking forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2025 with park lovers across the city," says FOTP Board Chair Bronwyn Nichols Lodato.

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