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Friends of the QueensWay Appoints John Surico as Its First-Ever Executive Director

***With Years of Experience As a Public Space Expert, Surico Will Lead the Organization as the Project's
Groundbreaking Commences This Fall***

QUEENS, NEW YORK — Friends of the QueensWay announced today that longtime public space expert, writer, and organizer **John Surico** will become the **new Executive Director** of the grassroots effort to transform the long-abandoned portion of the LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch into a 3.5-mile linear park in Central Queens.

For over a decade, Surico has built a proven track record of innovative public space work, bringing both an extensive breadth of policy knowledge and on-the-ground experience to the position. His past research has sparked meaningful change, including a historic infusion of \$43 million in operations funding for the city's parks system, and he regularly advises on public realm policy. His reporting for major publications like *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, and *Bloomberg* highlights solutions to challenges facing cities everywhere. Surico, whose family hails from the area, is the first to hold this role at the Friends of the QueensWay, which was formed by neighbors in 2011 to bolster community support for the project.

"I couldn't be more thrilled to join the Friends of the QueensWay at this pivotal juncture for one of the city's most innovative new public space projects, especially one that lands in my home borough," said **John Surico, the incoming Executive Director of the Friends of the QueensWay**. "I've cheered on this project from the sidelines since it was first imagined by neighbors, and have deeply admired the passion and determination by the board to make it a reality. Now let's get started."

Since 2022, he has chaired the 31st Ave Open Street Collective, helping to build an all-volunteer organization into a nonprofit with over 100 members that delivers a premium pop-up public space every weekend, from April to December, in Astoria, where he lives. He was recently appointed to the board of the Alliance for Flushing-Meadows Corona Park by the Mamdani administration for his work advocating for public space in Queens.

Surico is excited to work with the board, stakeholders, and most importantly the neighboring communities to help shape the vision and potential of QueensWay as the next premier public space for The World's Borough. He looks forward to strengthening the organization's capacity as Phase 1 of the project—the \$49 million Metropolitan Hub, led by NYC Parks and NYCEDC—breaks ground this fall, while



working closely with neighbors, businesses, schools and other local partners to ensure its successful implementation.

He plans to leverage his citywide network to explore ways in which QueensWay can be linked to and supported by other efforts unfolding across the five boroughs. And he is eager to build upon the immense work done by the Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for the Public Land to introduce more people to the project and plan for future phases.

A number of elected officials and civic leaders weighed in to support John's appointment and the progress being made on the QueensWay:

"The announcement of an Executive Director for the QueensWay project marks a significant step forward in making this project a reality for our district and all Queens residents," said **local Council Member Lynn Schulman**. "I'm thrilled to see the progress of the QueensWay and I look forward to breaking ground soon on a park that will improve our health and quality of life for generations to come. Congratulations to John Surico on his appointment, and I look forward to working with him and Friends of the QueensWay in finally bringing this endeavor to fruition."

"John Surico has been one of my office's most valued partners in the fields of open space, safe streets and so much more. With his immense experience in public policy and urban planning and his strengths as an advocate and community organizer, I know he will make a fantastic executive director at Friends of the QueensWay," said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** "I look forward to working closely with John to achieve the important goal of developing the much-needed QueensWay linear park and cultural greenway in Central Queens."

"Congratulations to John Surico for his appointment as the first ever Executive Director of Friends of the QueensWay!" said **Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi**. "As a longtime supporter of this transformative effort in our community, I look forward to seeing the bold leadership and ideas that John will bring to the role. For years, advocates and organizers have worked alongside community leaders to raise capital funds and build momentum behind an effort to reclaim abandoned infrastructure and space within Queens and return it to the people. John's public policy background, prior successes while working alongside NYC Parks, and his deep commitment to his hometown make him the perfect candidate to take on this challenge. His leadership will strengthen Friends of the QueensWay as they enter a critical phase of bringing this dream to reality."

"I am pleased that Friends of the QueensWay has hired its very first Executive Director and I congratulate John Surico for being appointed to this crucial position," said **U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens)**. "He has a long track record working on parks and public space issues including here in Queens, and I wish him all the best in his new and exciting role. I look forward to working with him and continuing to help move QueensWay forward."

"We are incredibly excited to welcome John as the first Executive Director of the Friends of the QueensWay," said **Travis Terry, Board Member of the Friends of the QueensWay**. "This is a special milestone for our organization and the culmination of more than a decade of extraordinary work by our volunteers, elected and government partners, civic and business leaders, and, most importantly, the communities along the QueensWay who have believed in this vision from the beginning. John's arrival



comes at a pivotal moment as we prepare to break ground on the first phase of the QueensWay, and his leadership will allow us to take the organization to the next level—greatly expanding our programming by building deeper partnerships with schools, cultural institutions, community organizations and others throughout Queens. After so many years of planning, advocacy and community engagement, we are thrilled to enter this exciting new chapter with John leading the way.”

“Congratulations to the QueensWay on this exciting milestone, and to John Surico on becoming the organization’s first Executive Director. John has long been a passionate champion for parks and open space, and has done an outstanding job bringing attention to the importance of investing in these critical community resources,” said **Tom Grech, President and CEO of the Queens Chamber of Commerce**. “The QueensWay has the potential to transform a unique piece of Queens into a vibrant public space that connects neighborhoods, expands access to open space and creates new opportunities for residents and local businesses. John’s experience, energy and commitment to our city’s parks make him an excellent choice to lead the QueensWay into this next chapter.”

“Welcoming John Surico as Friends of the QueensWay’s first Executive Director is an important milestone for the organization and for Queens,” said **Rachel Kellner, Chair of Metro Village of Forest Hills**. “His experience and commitment to parks, transportation, and community-centered development will be a tremendous asset as the QueensWay moves into its next chapter. Metro Village of Forest Hills looks forward to working with John and continuing to support efforts that strengthen and connect our Queens communities.”

“Trust for Public Land is thrilled to welcome John as Friends of the QueensWay’s first Executive Director,” said **Tamar Renaud, New York State Director of the Trust for Public Land**. “His leadership comes at a pivotal moment for the QueensWay, with groundbreaking on the first section expected later this year marking a huge milestone toward this becoming a transformative new public space for nearly 245,000 people who live along the corridor. TPL has been proud to work alongside Friends of the QueensWay for more than a decade, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with John and the Friends team to turn the QueensWay vision into reality.”



About John Surico



Surico is a widely recognized writer, researcher and organizer who focuses on issues of mobility and open space. His reporting for over 50 local, national and international publications has established him as a reputable voice in urbanism.

Most recently, he served as the Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity at the Center for an Urban Future, a leading think tank in New York City, where he led the Center's research portfolio on parks and open spaces. His work helped catalyze the Play Fair coalition, the largest collection of parks advocates in a generation, and the single greatest one-year increase in parks maintenance dollars in recent city history. Today, his research continues to spark action around sustainable parks revenue, permitting reform, and investments in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens' signature green space.

A born and raised New Yorker, Surico proudly comes from a long line of parkies, with a mother who cared for the horticulture at The Bronx's Wave Hill and a father who worked in Forest Park; both grew up in Cypress Hills and Ozone Park, respectively. With his history and background, Surico recognizes the growing need for vibrant public space across Queens, where he's resided for over a decade. It inspired his role as the chair of the 31st Ave Open Street Collective, facilitating one of the city's most successful Open Streets every weekend for most of the year. Alongside elected officials, including then-Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, that work has since inspired a redesign of 31st Avenue and livable streets efforts now being replicated citywide.

Surico holds an MSc in Transport and City Planning from University College London, as well as a BA in Journalism and Politics from New York University. He teaches cities-focused writing at both institutions today. He lives in Astoria, Queens, with his partner, Angela, and cat, Kita.

About Friends of the QueensWay

Friends of the QueensWay (FQW) is a grassroots, community-driven organization working to transform 3.5 miles of the long-abandoned LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch into the **QueensWay — a 47-acre linear park and cultural greenway connecting neighborhoods across Central and Southern Queens.**

The effort began in 2011, when local residents living along the abandoned rail corridor came together around a shared vision: turn an overlooked and inaccessible stretch of land into an extraordinary public resource for walkers, runners, cyclists, families, students, and visitors. That grassroots movement grew into Friends of the QueensWay, supported over the years by thousands of residents and community partners through petitions, fundraisers, cleanups, tours, public meetings, and events. FQW soon partnered with Trust for Public Land to undertake extensive community engagement and develop a comprehensive plan shaped by the priorities and aspirations of surrounding neighborhoods.

Over the past 15 years, Friends of the QueensWay has grown from an advocacy campaign into an active community organization committed not only to building the QueensWay, but also to bringing people together around the corridor today. FQW has organized and participated in more than 150 community



engagement events, tours, cleanups, educational programs, races, and informational sessions, while working closely with neighborhood organizations, civic associations, schools, cultural groups, environmental organizations, local businesses, and elected officials. Through partnerships with local schools and community organizations, FQW is expanding educational, cultural, recreational, and environmental programming that connects residents to one another and to the future park.

With the first phase of the QueensWay approaching construction by NYCEDC and NYC Parks in fall 2026, the project is moving from vision to reality. The QueensWay represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reclaim a forgotten piece of Queens and create a transformative public space that connects neighborhoods, expands access to nature and recreation, provides opportunities for community and cultural programming, supports local economic activity, improves sustainable transportation, and strengthens climate resiliency. Friends of the QueensWay will continue to work alongside the communities adjacent to the corridor to ensure that the QueensWay becomes not simply a new park, but a lasting civic, cultural, and environmental asset for Queens.

For more information, visit www.thequeensway.org.