

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Athens Land Trust Announces Departure of Executive Director Heather Benham After 20 Years of Service

Athens, GA - June 7, 2024 - Athens Land Trust, an Athens-based leading nonprofit in community development and environmental stewardship, today announces the departure of Executive Director Heather Benham, effective June 28, 2024, after two decades of exemplary leadership and service.

Heather has been an integral part of Athens Land Trust since 2003 when she transitioned from her role as a summer intern to the organization's first full-time employee. Under her guidance Athens Land Trust has become a national model for holistic community development, and Heather has played a pivotal role in advancing the organization's mission to improve quality of life for all and strengthen the community through the stewardship of land for affordable housing, conservation, agriculture, and economic development. Major milestones during Heather's leadership include:

- Developing a network of partnerships that have generated \$5 in additional funding for every local dollar invested in affordable housing, community agriculture, and place-based development.
- The meticulous restoration of the historic Mack Burney house into permanently affordable housing.
- The creation of the serene in-town Williams Farm - setting aside over 12 acres inside the loop for community trails, urban farming, and affordable housing.
- More than 75 low-to-moderate income first-time homebuyers moving into their first homes.
- Growth of the organization from five staff to more than 25 and from an annual budget of \$100,000 to over \$3 million annually.
- Creation of work-based youth development programming to give young people access to jobs that invest in and improve their community.

"It is with mixed emotions that we announce Heather's departure," said Lara Mathes, Board of Directors President. "Her leadership has had a tremendous impact in both expanding the capacity of the organization and advancing its vision to center programming around land justice and the pursuit of equity. She has guided [Athens Land Trust] through numerous challenges with creative thinking, thoughtful strategy, and sheer determination, and as a result will be leaving the organization as a highly regarded model among national conservation and community land trust peers. While her shoes will be challenging to fill, to say the least, we are excited for her next chapter and will embrace the opportunity, as Heather would, for Athens Land Trust to reflect and continue to evolve."

Heather expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve Athens Land Trust and the community, stating, "The innovative nature of this organization has made it a perfect vehicle to respond to community needs in a holistic way that creates spaces and places that will benefit Athens for generations. I feel so honored to have had the opportunity to work in a role where I can truly see the fruits of my labor. I am excited to join Burlington Associates, a national consulting cooperative with more than 30 years of commitment to working with organizations and communities engaged

in the production and stewardship of permanently affordable housing, where I'll continue to support the development of community land trusts around the Southeast.”

The Board of Directors will commence a search for a new Executive Director to lead Athens Land Trust into its next chapter of growth and impact and expects to announce shortly the plans for interim leadership through the end of 2024. It is the priority of the board to maintain a stable and effective organization as we search for a dynamic leader with a true passion for Athens Land Trust’s mission.

We are looking forward to celebrating Heather’s contributions to Athens Land Trust with her colleagues, the community, and our partners on Tuesday, June 25th at Saucehouse BBQ (830 W. Broad St. in Athens) from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. We cannot thank Heather enough for the dedication, passion, enthusiasm and motivation she has given Athens Land Trust over the last 20 years. Heather’s vision and leadership will be greatly missed by the staff, Board, community members and partners alike. We look forward to following the success of her career and are hopeful and excited for the next chapter of Athens Land Trust as we continue to work toward a stronger, healthier, more equitable future.

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About Athens Land Trust:

Athens Land Trust, a nonprofit organization founded in 1994, develops permanently affordable homeownership opportunities, a healthy, sustainable local food system, and economic opportunities for low-income Athenians; and protects farmland, forests, and greenspace in Georgia. More information is available at www.athenslandtrust.org.

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