



**Landscape Architects SWA Group collaborate on Living Tribute to late Congressman John Lewis at his namesake Plaza in Atlanta's Freedom Park**

*300 Flowering Trees planted in bleak February symbolize the promise of spring and the power of public space*



*"Flowering Forest Tribute" Procession along John Lewis Freedom Parkway. Rendering courtesy SWA Group.*

**(Atlanta, Georgia) February 23, 2021**– Through its master planning effort for Atlanta's Freedom Park, [SWA Group](#) is participating in "Flowering Forest – A Tree Tribute to Civil Rights Leader John Lewis", a collaborative, living memorial to the late Congressman and Civil Rights leader, to be located in the park. John Lewis was instrumental in establishing Freedom Park, which is located at the heart of where the national Civil Rights movement was born.

The living memorial to Lewis is the culmination of a three-day volunteer planting project that took place on February 19, 20, and 21, in which 300 blooming trees were installed at his namesake plaza. From Sunday, February 21--what would have been John Lewis's 81st birthday, and on --the plaza ablaze with bloom in the winter.

The event involved the Freedom Park Conservancy, Trees Atlanta, and The National Center for Civil and

Human Rights to bring together their commitments to community stewardship, urban tree cover, and civic storytelling. Months in the planning, the tribute to Lewis on the anniversary of his birthday is both tangible and symbolic. It asserts the newest chapter in Freedom Park, manifesting an important gesture in SWA's master plan for the park.



*Freedom Park Master Plan. 1. John Lewis Plaza; 2. Lake Lewis; 3. "Flowering Forest" Tree Tribute; 4. John Lewis Freedom Parkway Garden. Courtesy SWA Group.*

SWA Group assisted with the overall vision for this dynamic tribute, including the development of commemorative planting enhancements along Congressman John Lewis Freedom Parkway, and the redevelopment of John Lewis Plaza and Lake Lewis. Landscape architects at SWA also assisted with the selection of 300 trees – mostly native varieties of redbuds, magnolias, dogwoods, yellowwoods, buckeyes, fringe trees, and other flowering species – with each species symbolically representing a different stage of Lewis' life and legacy.

"Sometimes it takes 300 trees to make a statement. It's exciting that the public is so engaged and that landscape architecture can contribute so meaningfully to the civic discourse. A vision for the future of cities does not necessarily come from the eye of a designer but can emerge from public dialogue," said SWA principal [Natalia Beard](#). "Freedom Park is a great example. It has a promising future of transforming the city by being even more connected to its communities." The landmark and landlocked community park, whose footprint formed in the struggle of the surrounding communities who banded together, with Lewis' leadership, to assert their collective resistance to the eminent domain- imposed freeway infrastructure.

Symbolically, the living tribute to Lewis gives dynamic expression to the enduring presence of the park, and the power of public space. The 130+ acre park taps into a greater civil rights narrative that extend beyond the struggle of a local community, offering stories of both national and international relevance – from the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr. to the foothills of Stone Mountain. The park's connection to national and international leaders, historic events, demonstrations of civic action and cultural iconography form an urban palimpsest unique to the land on which it sits. John Lewis advocated for public greenspace and better design practices in city planning for the city of Atlanta and was instrumental in making Freedom

Park possible.

An exercise in civic storytelling, the planting will transform the John Lewis Plaza along Ponce de Leon Ave and John Lewis Freedom Pkwy—celebrating Lewis and signaling the park’s newest chapter as guided by its new master plan. In the spring of 2020, Freedom Park Conservancy commissioned SWA Group’s Houston studio to create a master plan that would position the park to live up to its full potential in the growth of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Atlanta.

Over a five-year period, the Freedom Park Conservancy will lead the effort to extend the project with additional hundreds of blooming trees through the park along the length of John Lewis Freedom Parkway. A stunning landmark corridor of blooming trees will link John Lewis Plaza, The Carter Presidential Center, and The King Center and National Historic Park.

### **About Freedom Park Conservancy**

Freedom Park Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the improvement and preservation of the park for the benefit of a diverse public. Born out of formidable citizen activism linking the movements of environmentalism, urbanism, historic preservationism and more, Freedom Park is now one of Atlanta’s largest public green spaces. Our vision is for Freedom Park to be Atlanta’s most innovative green space, celebrated for its inspiring origin and beauty. Learn more about us at [www.freedompark.org](http://www.freedompark.org)

### **About SWA Group**

SWA is a world-renowned landscape architecture, planning, and urban design firm celebrated for its creativity, responsiveness, and design excellence. Our work gives new life to outdoor spaces at multiple scales – from public plazas to waterfronts to entire city districts – harnessing natural systems while enhancing the unique characteristics of each setting. SWA has studios in Dallas, Houston, Laguna Beach, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Sausalito and Shanghai. For more information, please visit [www.swagroup.com](http://www.swagroup.com).

A selection of visuals can be accessed [here](#).

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