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CONTACT: Bianca Landry, bianca.landry@berlinrosen.com, 346-493-6893

The Public Theater Breaks Ground on Construction for Revitalized Delacorte Theater

\$150 Million Capital Campaign Announced, Including Fund For Free Theater

Elected Officials and Community Leaders Joined The Public to Celebrate Revitalization of the home of Free Shakespeare in the Park;

Reopening in Spring 2025, the New Delacorte Theater will Enhance Accessibility and Provide Meaningful Infrastructure Improvements

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New York, NY – The Public Theater, in partnership with Central Park Conservancy and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and Cultural Affairs, today broke ground on the final phase of construction for a revitalization of the 61-year-old Delacorte Theater in Central Park. Leaders from The Public were joined by elected officials and community leaders who celebrated this significant milestone.

In addition to breaking ground on the 18-month renovation – the largest in The Delacorte’s history – The Public announced a \$150 million capital campaign. Along with the Delacorte

revitalization, expected to cost \$78 million, The Public's campaign will include The Fund for Free Theater, established to primarily support Free Shakespeare in the Park.

Having hosted thousands of performances over the past six decades – including the recent staging of the widely acclaimed productions of *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It* and *Richard III* – and more than six million tickets given away, The Public's Free Shakespeare in the Park is one of New York City's most iconic cultural experiences. The Delacorte has become one of the nation's most culturally significant venues thanks to its history, the countless luminaries that have graced its stage and its unique placement within Central Park.

“Supporting affordable, accessible cultural programming is a priority for our administration, and thanks to this partnership from the city, New Yorkers will again receive access to a state of the art facility for free and subsidized access at a wide range of cultural organizations,” said **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**. “The historic Delacorte Theater has brought New Yorkers together through the shared love of Shakespeare and the arts, and we're proud of the historic \$150 million capital investment from the city to support cultural life in New York City.”

“For decades, the historic Delacorte Theater, home to the iconic Shakespeare in the Park productions, has been a staple of accessible theater for New Yorkers,” said **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**. “This project will ensure that the Delacorte Theater continues to serve New Yorkers by updating its infrastructure to ensure greater accessibility and sustainability in its operations. I am proud to support the Public Theater in its revitalization of the Delacorte and look forward to seeing the theater expand access to the arts for more community members.”

“The Public Theater Board's commitment to the revitalization of The Delacorte Theater is as heartfelt as it is resolute,” said **Board Chair Luis A. Miranda Jr.** “We have already raised over \$52 million toward our goal. I am heartened by the enthusiasm and motivation I see on display every day in that effort. Thank you to this unprecedented partnership between The Public Theater's Board, our larger Public Theater family, and the city, state, and national elected officials for helping to make the dream of a new more inclusive and accessible Delacorte Theater a reality.”

“The revitalization of the Delacorte Theater is an investment in the future of Central Park and New York City,” said **Betsy Smith, President & CEO, Central Park Conservancy**. “We applaud The Public Theater in reaching this milestone groundbreaking moment, and we look forward to accompanying this with our restoration and expansion of the Delacorte's public restrooms next year. Combined, these improvements will continue to provide an accessible, inviting experience for New Yorkers to enjoy Free Shakespeare in the Park for years to come.”

“Our public parks set the stage for so much of the cultural activity that makes New York City unique, and the Delacorte Theater is a prime example of how our public greenspaces can sustain a vibrant and thriving artistic scene,” said **NYC Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue**. “Thanks to this nearly \$80 million renovation project, the Delacorte Theater will be able to continue welcoming New Yorkers and visitors from around the globe for world-class theater in a

world-famous setting. I am so excited to see the theater reopen in 2025 as a more accessible, dynamic, and resilient artistic space.”

The long-overdue Delacorte revitalization will provide upgraded and more comfortable conditions for staff, artists and audiences alike, modernized back-of-house theatrical operations, and ensure equitable access for people living with disabilities. The Public worked with stakeholders in Central Park and the surrounding neighborhoods as well as design experts to create a design and construction plan that minimizes impact on the Park.

Built in 1962, the theater has not undergone meaningful capital upgrades since 1999. The design comprehensively addresses the theater’s code and life safety needs, makes core improvements to infrastructure and backstage efficiency, and makes substantial upgrades to support its theatrical program. The design maintains The Delacorte’s current form, footprint and views within the Park while protecting the sanctity of the theater-in-the-park experience.

”The Delacorte is the most beautiful theater in New York- beautiful because of its location, beautiful because of its mission, beautiful because of the art that graces its stage,” said **Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director of The Public Theater**. “This long overdue renovation will restore the building itself to match what the people of New York deserve. It will also become the most accessible theater in New York, extending to disabled workers and audience members the dignity and equality that befits a theater devoted to equality.”

“For more than 60 years, The Delacorte has been a shining beacon for New Yorkers of every walk of life. Today, we celebrate the next chapter of its storied history as we break ground on a new, revitalized, more accessible Delacorte for all,” said **Patrick Willingham, Executive Director of The Public Theater**. “We are grateful for the elected officials, community leaders and audience members who have stood with us and we look forward to welcoming them back to the new Delacorte in 2025.”

Key improvements include:

- ***Accessible and comfortable space for audiences and artists living with disabilities:*** Built before many of the modern accessibility codes, the existing Delacorte possesses only one access point for people living with disabilities and only one row of seating in the front row on house right. The design will maximize accessibility by bringing the entire theater in line with current code,— making two gates accessible for people who use wheelchairs, adding stage accessibility interventions to make the stage accessible for artists with disabilities, and creating an accessible cross aisle to provide people who use wheelchairs a more equitable experience of attending performances at The Delacorte.
- ***Streamlined backstage operations and improved comfort for cast and crew:*** The new design improves inefficiencies across the theater which will decrease time needed for load in, load out and change between productions. Back-of-house investments are

also aimed at improving the staff and artist experience, with purpose-built dressing rooms, bigger hallways, and climate control for enclosed spaces.

- ***Revitalized exterior for a more dynamic aesthetic experience:*** The theater's exterior wall will be canted slightly outward to give The Delacorte a dynamic presence and movement. The textured wood façade plays with light and shadow, complementing the natural setting of trees and overhead foliage. The new covered canopy and widened bluestone pathway will welcome visitors, provide more generous circulation and increased shelter from rain and sun.
- ***A focus on resilience and sustainability:*** The existing decking has sustained significant damage that has caused numerous points of rebuild for each season. As weather fluctuates more wildly and storms get more unpredictable, that level of constant repair is only expected to grow unless serious investments are made. The design contemplates the use of products that have been approved by NYC Parks and used throughout that are more durable and sustainable with the changing elements; improved drainage around the site will help plan for storms of greater strength and unpredictability.
- ***Lighting improvements:*** Newly designed lighting towers will provide improved lighting for the stage and performances, adding to the overall theatrical experience and ambiance. The new towers will also include additional safety features for crew members and increase efficiency for load in and load out of shows.
- ***Improved sprinkler and fire alarm systems***
- ***Improved exterior and interior signage and wayfinding***

The Public is also working with the NYC Parks and CPC to improve and expand the public restrooms that serve the theater during performances.

The Delacorte project team has prioritized diverse hiring, exceeding the City and State's minimum requirements for contracting Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises and Locally-based Business Enterprises (MWBEs and LBEs), including at least 40% MWBE/LBE subcontracting and 30% construction participation from under-resourced communities, in keeping with The Public's anti-racism and cultural transformation plan.

The project is designed by Ennead Architects, who also oversaw the revitalization of the façade and public spaces at The Public's flagship location on Lafayette Street in 2012 and the recent renovation of the Rehearsal Annex, part of a five-phase master plan for The Public Theater. Ennead has led many other marquee cultural revitalization projects in New York, including the Brooklyn Museum entry pavilion and plaza, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Symphony Space, Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, and the Rose Center for Earth and Space at the American Museum of Natural History. This continued relationship is based on shared commitments to creating spaces that center radical welcome and equity.

“We are proud to be a part of the revitalization of the Delacorte Theater,” said **Stephen P-D Chu AIA, Principal at Ennead Architects**. “As we re-envision one of New York’s most iconic cultural experiences to make it more dynamic, welcoming and accessible for all.”

The Delacorte project is expected to cost \$78 million, with over \$41 million contributed by the City of New York through the Office of the Mayor, New York City Council, and Manhattan Borough President's Office; and another \$1 million allocation from New York State Assembly Member O'Donnell. The rest is privately raised. The work is anticipated to conclude in spring of 2025.

The Public’s \$150 million capital campaign will also support the organization’s other free theater initiatives, including The Mobile Unit and Public Works; the recently renovated Public Studios at 440 Lafayette Street; capital upgrades to The Public’s headquarters at 425 Lafayette Street; and more. To date, The Public has raised over \$100 million, including over \$43 million in government funding, towards its goal to solidify the most sustainable and robust future for The Public. To learn more and support the campaign, please visit thepublic.nyc/Delacorte-Revitalization.

Elected officials, City leaders as well as advocates and friends of The Public Theater, cheered this milestone:

“Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacorte Theater is one of New York City’s most beloved summer traditions,” said **Congressman Jerrold Nadler**. “As a steadfast supporter of the arts in Congress, I’m proud to be here today to help break ground on the renovation of the Delacorte Theater. While the renovations will take 18 months, it will be wonderful to have Shakespeare in the Park return modernized and accessible in the summer of 2025 better than ever.”

“There are few New York events more iconic than free Shakespeare in the Park,” said **State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal**. “At the Delacorte, the Public Theater has brought world-class theater to over five million audience members and staged over 150 productions. Today, we break ground to make the theater more accessible for audiences, comfortable for cast and crew, and aesthetic for passersby. I’m proud to represent and support the Delacorte, including by contributing \$500,000 to renovate the nearby restrooms, and I look forward to attending performances in the newly renovated space soon. I thank the Public Theater, Central Park Conservancy, and the NYC Departments of Parks & Recreation and Cultural Affairs for overseeing this important renovation of a New York cultural institution.”

“The Delacorte Theater in Central Park is an iconic New York City institution that has offered access to live theater, free-of-charge, for decades,” said **State Senator Jose M. Serrano, 29th Senate District**. “I am happy that this important revitalization project will improve safety, comfort, and overall experience for audience members, the cast, and the crew. Upon reopening, the Delacorte Theater will continue to serve as a unique and cherished beacon for the arts and culture for New Yorkers and visitors for years to come.”

"As the Chair of the NYS Art Committee, I am thrilled to be able to support the Delacorte Theater revitalization project," said **Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell**. "This historic venue has been a cornerstone of New York City's cultural life and it's crucial that we invest in its preservation and modernization. I look forward to seeing the final result which will undoubtedly make it a shining jewel in the heart of Central Park for many more generations to come."

"For all of us who love Shakespeare in the Park and the millions who have seen their many beloved productions, the Delacorte Theater is a gem to protect and preserve," said **Comptroller Brad Lander**. "Revitalizing the Delacorte will enrich the city's artistic spirit and cultural heritage, by ensuring this treasure can be enjoyed by generations to come."

"New Yorkers and visitors from all over the world visit the Delacorte Theater for a unique theatre experience at the heart of Central Park," said **Speaker Adrienne Adams**. "The Council is proud to have allocated \$22.15 million over the past five years to revitalize this beloved venue, which has become the epicenter for the iconic summer staple, Shakespeare in the Park, and so many other notable plays and productions. This renovation will support necessary infrastructure and safety improvements to help expand equitable access to the theater. The Council is proud to have contributed to this significant renovation of one of New York's greatest cultural assets."

"In New York, live theater plays such an important role in our civic life and conversation, in bringing us together and fostering the creative energy and dynamism that makes our city great," said **NYC Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**. "The Public Theater's Free Shakespeare in the Park, which was started right here in New York and has called the Delacorte home for generations, is a cornerstone of this idea that theater is something that should be free, accessible, and open to all. We're proud of the City's major investment in this project to reimagine how the Delacorte can continue to welcome and engage all New Yorkers for generations to come."

"The Public's Delacorte Theater has been a beloved cultural venue for generations of New Yorkers and visitors alike, drawing theater lovers each summer to enjoy performances set against the backdrop of scenic landmark Central Park," said **Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair Sarah Carroll**. "The work kicking off today will increase the Delacorte's accessibility and enhance its overall visitor experience, welcoming a broader audience to enjoy the unparalleled productions staged here, and ensuring that the Delacorte continues to contribute to the artistic and economic vitality of our City for years to come."

"Congratulations to The Public Theater, Central Park Conservatory and City partners on today's extraordinary groundbreaking to revitalize the Delacorte, a true symbol of why NYC is a global creative capital," said **Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Commissioner, Pat Swinney Kaufman**. "The Public Theater has a long history of advocacy for theater as an essential cultural force in NYC. We are so proud to have them on our recently announced Theatre and Live Entertainment Industry Council which, like the Delacorte renovation, will look to identify ways to improve accessibility in NYC's live performance industry."

“For over 60 years, the Delacorte’s stage has been home to one of New York’s most treasured traditions. These renovations will bring the iconic Delacorte into the 21st century, ensuring all New Yorkers can enjoy Shakespeare in the Park for generations to come,” said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. “The Public has been a fantastic steward of the Delacorte for decades, and I’m confident that the revitalized theater will enhance every future Shakespeare in the Park performance.”

“Today’s groundbreaking to revitalize the Delacorte Theater is a major milestone for the Public Theater, Central Park, and cultural institutions in New York City,” said **City Council Majority Leader Keith Powers**. “The renovations will set the stage for the theater to continue dazzling New Yorkers with memorable performances for decades to come. I look forward to attending a show in Summer 2025.”

“The Delacorte Theater is home to Central Park’s rich history in public space, architecture, and the performing arts,” said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer**. “It has embraced free performances for over half a century. This concerted effort to renovate the theater will speak volumes of the importance of cultural preservation. The emphasis on programmatic and structural sustainability, through the use of durable and changing elements, will set a strong precedent for future projects. Furthermore, the theater’s commitment to equity by introducing ADA compliancy will provide accessibility for all New Yorkers.”

“This groundbreaking marks a new chapter in the storied history of The Delacorte Theater that will ensure quality public performances for future generations,” said **Council Member Erik Bottcher**. “The Public Theater and The Delacorte are vital institutions to the artist fabric of our great city who the entire world looks to as the capital for theatrical performance. I want to thank the leadership of The Public Theater and my colleagues in government for their commitment to realizing a new Delacorte and their unwavering commitment to New York’s theatrical contributions. The culture of New York is forever linked to the success of these performance venues, and I can’t wait to attend the first opening night at the brand new Delacorte.”

“For decades, the Delacorte Theater has made arts and culture available for millions of residents and visitors with world-class performances,” said **Council Member Carlina Rivera (D-02)**. “The investments to renovate and make this fantastic free outdoor theater more accessible, sustainable, and inviting will serve as a model and ensure that New York City remains at the forefront of creativity and expression. My first experience at Shakespeare in the Park in 1995 was transformative, and I look forward to returning to the new iconic Delacorte Theater to enjoy more productions.”

"Our parks aren't just home to ballfields, pools, and trees, they are also important venues for public art," said **Council Member Shekar Krishnan, Chair of the Committee on Parks & Recreation**. "The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, marrying world-class performances and world-class public space, is the best example of this. While New Yorkers will miss Free Shakespeare in the Park and the theater during its renovation, we're excited to see its rebirth in 18 months."

“The Delacorte is a cultural gem and architectural delight, which the city is lucky to have,” said **Council Member Chi Ossé, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.** “I am thrilled to see the groundbreaking of its revitalization, and that the project is moving forward with public support. With improvements to staff conditions and guest comfort, as well as accessibility enhancements, it’s clear that this process has been rigorous and forward thinking. I join our whole city in excitement and anticipation to see and experience the final result.”

About The Public Theater

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both onstage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation’s first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public’s wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City’s five boroughs, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe’s Pub. Since premiering HAIR in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 60 Tony Awards, 190 Obie Awards, 57 Drama Desk Awards, 61 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards, 62 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. publictheater.org

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first people and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

About The Delacorte Theater

Conceived by founder Joseph Papp as a way to make great theater accessible to all, The Delacorte Theater officially opened in Central Park on June 18, 1962, with *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Papp and Gladys Vaughan and featuring George C. Scott as Shylock. *The Merchant of Venice* was followed that summer by a production of *The Tempest*, directed by Gerald Freedman and featuring Paul Stevens as Prospero and James Earl Jones as Caliban. The first Delacorte summer season concluded with *King Lear*, directed by Papp and Vaughan and featuring Frank Silvera as Lear. Since then, more than 150 productions have been presented for free at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park. Highlights of past Delacorte productions include *Othello* in 1964 with James Earl Jones; *Hamlet* in 1975 with Sam Waterston; *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1978 with Raul Julia and Meryl Streep; *The Pirates of Penzance* in 1980 with Kevin Kline and Linda Ronstadt; *Henry V* in 1984 with Kevin Kline; *Much*

Ado About Nothing in 1988 with Kevin Kline and Blythe Danner; *Richard III* in 1990 with Denzel Washington; *Othello* in 1991 with Raul Julia and Christopher Walken; *The Tempest* in 1995 with Patrick Stewart; *The Seagull* in 2001 with Natalie Portman, Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, and Philip Seymour Hoffman; *Mother Courage* in 2006 with Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline; *Macbeth* in 2006 with Liev Schreiber; *HAIR* in 2008 with Jonathan Groff and Will Swenson; *Twelfth Night* in 2009 with Anne Hathaway; *The Merchant of Venice* in 2010 with Al Pacino and Lily Rabe; Stephen Sondheim's *Into The Woods* in 2012 with Amy Adams, Denis O'Hare, and Donna Murphy; *The Comedy of Errors* in 2013 with Jesse Tyler Ferguson and Hamish Linklater; Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman's musical adaptation of *Love's Labour's Lost* in 2013; *King Lear* in 2014 with John Lithgow as Lear; *The Tempest* in 2015 with Sam Waterston; an all-female *Taming of the Shrew* in 2016 with Janet McTeer; and *Julius Caesar* directed by Oskar Eustis and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Phylicia Rashad in 2017; Chukwudi Iwuji and Corey Stoll appeared in Ruben Santiago-Hudson's *Othello* in 2018; Danielle Brooks appeared in a production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Kenny Leon in 2019; and most recently in 2021, *Merry Wives*, directed by Saheem Ali and adapted by Jocelyn Bioh.

For additional information on The Public, visit www.publictheater.org.

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