

# Preservation Chicago

Citizens advocating for the preservation of Chicago's historic architecture

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Ms. Abby Monroe, Coordinating Planner, Department of Planning and Development

Ms. Eleanor Gorski, Department of Planning and Development

John Sadler, Chicago Department of Transportation

City of Chicago

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Re: Jackson Park -Section 106 Process relating to the proposed park and mobility changes for the Obama Presidential Center-OPC, the South Lakefront Plans (SLFP) and proposed changes to the Jackson Park and South Shore Cultural Center Golf Courses.

Dear Abby Monroe, Eleanor Gorski and John Sadler,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment as part of the Section 106 Hearings on the many proposed changes to Jackson Park and the South Shore Cultural Center, as a Consulting Party to the process and plans.

We at Preservation Chicago are concerned about many aspects of the plans, which will impact the look, feel, and appearance of this amazing civic resource. It is in a sense difficult to separate all of the many components of these several legacy parks, relating to historic buildings and

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structures, features, vistas, trees and their relationship to this park, as the park is “a whole idea” and “a work of art,” by the very best of the best in landscape architecture and design. Jackson Park is perhaps unparalleled in its vision as an urban park space and its relationship to the Lakefront and neighboring communities. It is both a Chicago and world treasure that should not be harmed.

Preservation Chicago feels strongly that the impact of the proposed changes to Jackson Park is significant and detrimental to the Frederick Law Olmsted and Alfred Caldwell landscapes, features of the park and its overall design. These plans as proposed will without a doubt, create a negative and adverse effect to these historic parks.

Designed by some of the country's most notable landscape architects, known the world over for their work, the proposed destruction of this 20-acre western section of Jackson Park has the potential to be both a long-term embarrassment to the City of Chicago and to the institution proposed for this site. Jackson Park and some of the adjoining areas within the APE-Area of Potential Effect, has the potential to be irrevocably harmed and mostly destroyed by these heavy-handed plans.

Jackson Park is a remarkable park, greenspace and open space, which is among Chicago's most important legacy parks and while some of its smaller structures and pathways have fallen into disrepair, it is far from being a distressed or needing to be “rediscovered” or reinvigorated as implied in some of the documents and presentations. Realizing this is a first-class city park, and far from an amusement and entertainment venue, we are concerned about the overall impact of all of the proposed plans on this significant park and its landscape features, including the following components:

1. The removal of Cornell Drive, an original Olmsted feature of Jackson Park, which should be considered for restoration to its original narrower proportions, verses a complete removal and a regrading of the 20-acre site. We are of the opinion that this is a significant feature of the park, which created an important north-south transverse access roadway and

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- pathway through the park, winding through tree-lined spaces, alongside lagoons, meadows, with long vista views of the park and other wooded spaces.
2. A proposed tower in excess of 200' tall-which amounts to a 20-plus story building in height, even if the building contains about 10-12 floors. This visually tall and disturbing feature of the complex will also visually impact the park, its view sheds, and overall visual features from many directions, both from the Midway, within the park, and at the park's borders and formal entries. This larger feature and monumental building belongs on another nearby site, if this height is desired, as it would be by far, the tallest building ever constructed in a Chicago park, which is generally known for more human-scaled and formally proportioned buildings, employing Classical guidelines and not to overwhelm the naturalistic features. Also, the potential harm or loss and adverse effect on Alfred Caldwell's plantings at the park's western perimeter, with approximately 300 trees to be cut and destroyed, along with a raised berm, extending from about 60<sup>th</sup> Street southward. This green feature was added by Caldwell in the 1930s and meant to shelter the park and its visitors from the noise, traffic and bustle of busy Stony Island Avenue, and to create a calming and restful park experience. Alfred Caldwell's Lily Pool, also known as the Lincoln Park Lily Pool, on Chicago's North Side, has been a Designated Chicago Landmark, since 2002, signifying the importance of Caldwell's work in the Chicago Park system.
  3. The impact on the golf course at Jackson Park, said to be the oldest course west of the Allegany Mountains, with its pastoral settings and landscapes. Also, the potential loss of thousands of trees, many of them old growth, for the golf course fairway realignments between Jackson Park and the South Shore Cultural Center. Also the impact several fairways, ponds, plantings and greens designed by Alfred Caldwell and noted in drawings forwarded to Eleanor Gorski from the Chicago Park District archives and dating to the late 1930s. Some of these features are not addressed in the historic documents reports.

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4. The loss of a fabulously large archeological site, tied to the World's Columbian Exposition-Chicago World's Fair of 1893, with thousands of artifacts uncovered in seven coring sites. Certainly this site contains many foundations of World's Fair Buildings, including architect Sophia Hayden's Woman's Building and the nearby Children's Building, in addition to a host of building materials, fragments and ephemera from the Fair, which could lead to more insightful information and research on one of Chicago's most famous hosted events of all time, drawing 27.5 million people or 43% of the nation's population in 1893. Construction of new buildings on this site, with regrading and new foundations will destroy these features and objects forever.
5. The removal and or destruction of the principal western gateway and symmetrical roadways into Jackson Park at the Midway Plaisance, along with the Woman's Garden, which are significant features of the park

We ask that the City of Chicago reconsider all of these plans and encourage the Obama Foundation to relocate to another nearby site, where all of these features can be implemented in a way that would truly benefit a community and neighborhood, or a university. The site as proposed is essentially an extension of the University of Chicago Campus into Jackson Park and situated in Hyde Park, as the campus and community has grown southward in the past decade.

Respectfully, we cannot overlook the time and resources spent within the City's many departments, including but not limited to DPD-Department of Planning and Development, CDOT-Chicago Department of Transportation and the Chicago Park District, which must equate to thousands of hours of time and perhaps millions of dollars worth of expenditures on this project by the City and passed onto its citizens. All of that in addition to consultant's time, also perhaps absorbed by taxpayers for what will become a private museum in one of our historic parks—essentially on public parkland, which is free of cost. That is a tremendous price to pay and this could have all been avoided by locating this center across the street from Jackson Park or Washington Park, or near the Midway, on at least five other fine-quality nearby locations. This is an additional burden to consider when also including the potential costs of the proposed

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roadway reconfigurations, estimated to be perhaps far beyond the estimated \$175 million dollars and yet the project continues to grow in cost with each passing day.

The current site selected in Jackson Park has so much history, dating from the 1870s to today and perhaps this would be better suited to the west. Perhaps integrated into the South Side YMCA complex in the Woodlawn Community, with its many large parking lots, its vast green grass surfaces and areas around the building, as so many functions of the community buildings may already be part of other nearby institutions in Hyde Park. Please let us know how we can assist in such efforts if desired to pursue alternative sites.

Sincerely,

*Ward Miller*

Ward Miller, Executive Director