

Jackson Park Watch Statement

To the Meeting of the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners

(Expanded Version Distributed at the Meeting)

Wednesday, June 8, 2016

Good afternoon, Commissioners, President Ruiz, and CEO Kelly. I am Margaret Schmid, co-coordinator of Jackson Park Watch, a community initiative created to ensure a robust community voice in decisions concerning the future of Jackson Park, in particular those on proposals put forward by Project 120. Thank you for the opportunity to bring some Jackson Park Watch issues and concerns to your attention.

I am happy to start with some thank yous. Community members appreciated the participation of Park District CEO Mike Kelly and many key Park District staff in the well-attended community meeting on Jackson Park convened by alderman Leslie Hairston on May 31 (see attached newspaper articles). We were especially appreciative when Park District leadership took one key community concern off the table: Project 120 proposal notwithstanding, there will not be a traffic-bearing road running across the Clarence Darrow Bridge (or Columbia Bridge, as it is also known) with parking on both sides, isolating the north end of the Park and creating safety and other problems. We were also appreciative that Mr. Kelly intends to continue dialogue about the future of the Park with the community in conjunction with Alderman Hairston.

That said, there are continuing significant community concerns about Project 120 proposals for Jackson Park. Until the May 31 meeting, the Park District itself had been largely silent while Project 120 forcefully promoted its proposals, leading many to conclude that the Park District was lending tacit support to them all. Mr. Kelly has now told us that Project 120 proposals are ideas and concepts, nothing more, but many in the community are looking for additional assurances. While we are hopeful, the timing and nature of the further community dialogue process will be key to determining community views on this central point.

A centerpiece of the Project 120 proposals is a large, multi-functional, glass walled pavilion that would have an exterior stage for amplified music (see rendering from the Project 120 website

attached). Community concerns about this are numerous: the loss of the picnic area and parking lot on which it was to be situated; the number of trees that would have to be destroyed to make space; threats to birds colliding with the glass walls; the noise from the music venue, among others. It was the loss of the parking lot due to the proposed location of the pavilion that led to the proposal for parking along the road across the Darrow Bridge. Since the road is now off the table, the pavilion concept will need to be revisited. Thus there is an opportunity for a relocated, downsized and simplified design more in keeping with the wooded, open, green nature of the park and the stated preferences of the community.

The loss of trees and natural area overall is another key concern of community members. The redesign of the pavilion offers one opportunity for the Park District to work with Project 120 and the community to achieve a balanced result that preserves the natural setting that has long defined the area surrounding Wooded Island. Another opportunity for collaboration to preserve trees and green space relates to the Project 120 proposal for the Music Court, where all trees would be removed (contrary to the Olmsted design), and for a “Great Lawn.” While many support relocating the well-used golf driving range provided that it is not removed, there are broad concerns about removing numerous healthy trees, including questions about the potential adverse impact on the birds.

Finally, there are concerns about the Yoko Ono “SkyLanding” sculpture that Project 120 wishes to install on Wooded Island this fall (see rendering in attached newspaper article). We were very surprised to discover that, while the City has an established process for soliciting public review on public art, the Park District appears to have none at all. Perhaps you might consider the advisability of establishing – or clarifying - such a process. The rendering suggests that the sculpture may well be a magnet for graffiti, and that it may need to be fenced to discourage climbers. We were also quite surprised that a major sculpture by a well known artist might be installed in a location that, due to the closure of the Darrow Bridge, has access to neither adequate parking nor public restrooms. A review process, requiring some outside input and Park District approval, could take factors such as these into consideration.

We ask that the Park District work with Alderman Hairston to ensure a transparent and inclusive process for community review of a revised Project 120 proposal aligned with community concerns; and that the Park District delay the installation of the Sky Landing sculpture until the Darrow Bridge is reopened. Thank you again for the opportunity to share our concerns. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Margaret Schmid and Brenda Nelms (in absentia)

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