

Jackson Park Watch Statement

To the Meeting of the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners

Wednesday, August 10, 2016

Brenda Nelms, JPW co-coordinator

Good afternoon Commissioners, President Ruiz, and Superintendent Kelly. I am Brenda Nelms, co-coordinator of Jackson Park Watch. Thank you for the opportunity to address you.

Jackson Park Watch is dedicated to ensuring that plans and decisions about Jackson Park are developed through an inclusive and transparent process grounded in robust community engagement. Jackson Park Watch was formed in response to the proposals emanating from the Park District's public-private partnership with Project 120, proposals which were developed, as Project 120 President Robert Karr has acknowledged, with insufficient community input.

From its inception Jackson Park Watch has been concerned with the short-sightedness of the Park District and Project 120 in making plans for new structures and installations in the northern end of Jackson Park without regard for their impact on the character of park as a whole and without regard for the possibility that the Obama Presidential Center would be situated in the park, with far-reaching consequences. Now that that possibility is a reality, a new era has begun for Jackson Park. It seems self-evident that planning for Jackson Park needs to be approached carefully and holistically. Project 120's proposals should be set aside and the conversation should begin with a clean slate, looking at the whole of Jackson Park as it is now configured and will be used. The need for an inclusive and transparent process grounded in robust community engagement has never been greater.

Much of the public discussion to date has focused on the role of the Obama Center as a tourist destination, an anchor for a south museum campus that will spur economic development. Amid the hope and frenzy generated by that vision, Jackson Park Watch asks that the Park District, the Obama Foundation, and other responsible parties not lose sight of the importance of Jackson Park as a park -- a place to enjoy nature, to play, to gather with family and friends; a place with a community of users who live in the surrounding neighborhoods and whose voices should be heard as the future of Jackson Park is discussed. We urge you, Mr. Kelly and Commissioners, to remember that your primary commitment is not to tourists nor to developers nor to politicians, but to the children and families who use the park on a regular basis and depend on it for recreation and renewal.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you.

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