

## Jackson Park Watch Statement

### To the Meeting of the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners

*Wednesday, December 14, 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 again.

At last month's board meeting, President Ruiz assured my colleague Margaret Schmid that the Park District would be responsive to our FOIA requests after she reported our lack of success in securing information about Project 120's installation of a sculpture by Yoko Ono, known as Sky Landing, on Wooded Island in Jackson Park.

I am pleased to report that this past Monday, in response to a new FOIA request submitted November 28, we received a copy of the Construction and Donation Agreement between the Park District and Project 120. We had first inquired about the arrangements for this much publicized installation in a series of FOIA requests submitted between April and August. Those requests yielded several permits issued to vendors in June and July for site preparation and installation, as well as communications relating to fund-raising events, but the only formal agreement between the Park District and Project 120 regarding the sculpture that was provided to us was a wide-ranging Memorandum of Understanding from July 2014. That MOU, which had been signed without public notice or comment and, as far as we can tell, without approval by this Board, contains only the vaguest reference, in an appendix, to commissioning a work by Yoko Ono.

We are pleased then to see at last a formal agreement detailing the issues of ownership and maintenance of the Yoko Ono sculpture, and we will review it carefully in the coming days. However, we note immediately one disturbing feature of the agreement. It is undated (though the initial sentence states it "is made as of August \_\_\_\_, 2016") and the CPD file label for the document identifies it as "Project 120 executed agreement 10152016." This date is after the sculpture had already been installed and only two days before the private unveiling ceremony conducted by Project 120. The agreement thus appears to be an *after-the-fact* action, concluded perhaps because of our persistent requests for such documentation. The apparent pre-arrangement only heightens our concerns regarding the Memorandum of Understanding, which appears to have given Project 120 control of a sizable swath of Jackson Park. Again, we ask the Board of Commissioners to examine the circumstances and the consequences of this originally secret agreement.

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