

Jackson Park Watch Statement

Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners Meeting, 12/14/2016

Margaret Schmid, JPW co-coordinator

Good afternoon CEO Kelly, President Ruiz, and Commissioners. I appreciate the chance to address you today.

A new sign recently posted at the north and south entrances to the reopened Wooded Island includes a lengthy list of rules, some brand new, some newly applied from elsewhere, all negative. (For your reference, they appear at the bottom of this statement.) While we question both the wisdom and enforceability of much of the list, most importantly we believe the signs raise basic questions about these key issues:

- **Transparency:** Who established these new rules? What was the process?
- **Community input:** Who was consulted?
- **What is the overall vision of the future of Jackson Park that these rules embody?**
With the Obama Library coming, talk of converting the existing golf course to a PGA-class course, and with Project 120 plans still somewhere on the table, the need for a single comprehensive vision and plan for the entire Park is pressing.

There are multiple problems with the new rules, especially those related to fishing and dog-walking. Both attempt to ban long-time, much loved uses, but time does not allow a proper discussion. Instead, I append the more detailed statement we presented to the December 12 meeting of Jackson Park Advisory Council, and hope you will find time to review it. We want to emphasize that this top-down, piece-meal approach to Jackson Park ill-serves not only the public but also the Park itself. With major new projects with moneyed backers jostling for space and attention, it is critical that the Park District, as steward of the Park, take leadership in ensuring a proper planning process including decisive community input. Mr. Kelly, you committed to such a process at the May 31 meeting at LaRabida, and are now participating in the meetings initiated by Rev. Byron Brazier of the Apostolic Church of God. We urge you to take the next step by spearheading a proper planning process that culminates in a result that all stakeholders can own.

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Here are the newly posted rules:

Please respect Jackson Park by following these rules:

- Remain in pathways at all times
- Do not feed the wildlife
- Littering, drinking alcohol, smoking, and use of all tobacco products are strictly prohibited
- Parties or large groups, etc. require a permit
- Dogs disturb wildlife and are not allowed on Wooded Island
- Unauthorized vehicles are prohibited on the island
- Fishing is prohibited in Wooded Island lagoons
- Bicycles must remain outside of the Garden of the Phoenix
- Do not touch or climb on the Sky Landing artwork
- Wooded Island closes at sunset. Violators are subject to arrest.

Here is a key portion of the statement we presented at the December 12 JPAC meeting:

Immediate concerns

Since some of the new rules concern existing common uses of Wooded Island, we will ask the Park District Board to take a closer look at the signage and its implications:

#1 No fishing in the lagoons?

Fishing in the lagoons (albeit not the Japanese Garden pond) has been a beloved pastime for Southside residents for years. Early discussion of the planned GLFER environmental restoration project (Great Lakes **Fishery** and Ecosystem **Restoration**) featured affirmations that fishing would be better than ever after the restoration work. Consider these quotes from among the many in relevant articles in the *Hyde Park Herald* (*italics added*):

Army Corps eyes Jackson Park

JEFFREY BISHKU-AYKUL Staff Writer DATE: April 23, 2014

... JPAC met with the USACE and Chicago Park District to discuss its vision for the park's restoration twice, said council president Louise McCurry. *The restoration would benefit the area in several ways, according to McCurry, including exposing city children to a native habitat and restoring its original fish population.... Bringing back native fish, she added, "will make it a great recreational area for those fishing clubs that are still there."*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DATE: August 27, 2014

... *It [USACE's restoration process] produces an abundant fish population which fishermen, women and children can catch and use to feed their families, or simply catch and release as practiced by many fishermen. The restoration plan is about producing more safe areas for fishing....*
Louise McCurry, President Jackson Park Advisory Council

Questions to consider:

- After all the promises of enhanced fishing, where did this rule come from? Does this suggest a sea change in the Park District's thinking about the purposes of the GLFER project?

- ***Most importantly, once again, what kind of future does this imply for Jackson Park?*** One where long-time local uses and local users are marginalized or prohibited, or one that respects the wide range of uses and users that has characterized the Park up until now?

#2 No dogs on Wooded Island?

Dogs and “wildlife” (that is, birds, chipmunks, etc.) have coexisted on Wooded Island for many years with few problems. During that time there has been a variety of signs posted on the Island: signs banning dogs, signs allowing dogs on leashes only, and no signs at all. Inconsistent signage and inconsistent enforcement on the Island and its environs has been and continues to be a problem.

Questions to consider:

- If dog-walking on Jackson Park is actually banned and enforced, where *should* people walk their dogs in Jackson Park? When the golf course, MSI grounds, and soon-to-be Obama Center are taken into account, along with all the new planting, precious little space is left for generic dog-walking-in-the-park, an activity one might have supposed would be a park standard.
- ***Most importantly, what kind of future does this imply for Jackson Park?*** One where dog-walking is barely tolerated? Or one where people and their dogs (preferably on leashes, at least in some areas) are free to enjoy the grass, trees, and vegetation?

Other quick questions:

- **Why is there no reference to the Paul H. Douglas Nature Sanctuary** on the new signs noting GLFER’s ecological restoration project? Why has it disappeared from the description of Jackson Park (newly revised) on the Park District’s website? Has the Park District made another major change without notice, community input, or transparency?
- **How did Osaka Japanese Garden come to be known as the “Garden of the Phoenix”** without following the process outlined in Chapter 7.E.1. of the CPD Code for naming or renaming parks? We understand that the Park District CEO can unilaterally change park names in cases that are noncontroversial, but this is hardly the case.