



5529 South Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637 + 773.493.1893

February 26, 2018

Ms. Abby Monroe  
Coordinating Planner  
City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development  
121 N. LaSalle, Room 1000  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

RE: Historic Preservation in Jackson Park and the Current Section 106 Review

Dear Ms. Monroe:

The Hyde Park Historical Society takes very seriously the preservation of the important historic resources in Jackson Park. Society members as well as board members have a variety of opinions about the Obama Presidential Center (OPC). The Society does not object to the OPC itself, but the Society has already taken a public position against building the OPC on public parkland. We hope the OPC succeeds in fulfilling an important mission in Chicago. However, if it is built in Jackson Park, we expect the Section 106 Review to clearly limit damage to the historic fabric of the park. We believe this is the intention of the current 106 Review.

As an organization that pays special attention to history and its preservation, we do wish to call your notice to two historic elements of Jackson Park that are currently threatened by the OPC project:

- Cornell Drive from 59<sup>th</sup> Street going south to 67<sup>h</sup> Street
- the Women's Perennial Garden opposite the east end of the Midway Plaisance

*Cornell Drive*

Background: Cornell Drive was part of the original 1895 Olmsted plan for Jackson Park but it was then a narrow two-lane carriage drive that allowed for leisurely travel through the park. In the mid-1960s, the City of Chicago proposed to create the six-lane highway we have today. The announcement of this project and the intention to cut down 300 trees, was so threatening to the original character of the park, so preferential to cars over people, and so shocking to the community that seven citizens, including parks advocate Kay Clement, chained themselves to trees and were arrested in protest. Olmsted's forty-foot wide roadway, designed for pleasure carriages, gave way to a wider highway for speeding automobiles.

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Issue: The current intention of the City to remove Cornell Drive entirely to create the OPC is equally insensitive to the historic character of Jackson Park and clearly not the only alternative. A narrower two-lane road with protected bike lanes and pedestrian paths would restore Olmsted's safe, leisurely passage through the park for all – cars, bicycles and pedestrians while still providing access to the OPC. And, even if this restored park road were paved in historic brick, it would be considerably less expensive than what is being proposed.

### *Women's Perennial Garden*

Background: The current garden was created in 1937 by May E. McAdam, Chicago Park District landscape architect. A sunken 300-foot-diameter circular and serene lawn surrounded by low flagstone walls is flanked by a 20-foot-wide perennial flower and ornamental tree border. After many years of neglect, the garden was fully restored in 1996 using McAdam's original blueprints. Her garden offers a peacefulness in the midst of city bustle that has always been the spirit of Jackson Park. It has long been a point of pride for the Park District and for the community.

Also, this was the site of the World's Columbia Exposition's (WCE) Women's building of 1893. That monumental building was dedicated to celebrating the worldwide achievements of women and to serving women's needs while they visited the fair. This was the single building at the fair designed by a woman, architect Sophia Hayden, her first and only commission.

In the post-WCE 1895 Olmsted plan, the recessed circular lawn of today's park was intended to be a turning basin for small boats, part of the waterway connecting the Jackson and Washington Park lagoons. This project was never completed, and our current perennial garden was created in 1937 as a tribute to women.

Issue: The current OPC plan for this site ignores its history. This site should celebrate and respect the remarkable history of women, especially the women designers McAdam and Hayden. Instead of destroying this garden and important historic site, parts of the actual outline of the WCE Women's Building could easily be marked, and the building and its architect could be depicted. The present garden should be preserved, as it is, and its designer honored.

The Hyde Park Historical Society urges the City's Department of Planning and Development in its 106 Review to limit the potential adverse effects of the OPC project to historic Jackson Park by restoring Cornell Drive to its original 2-lane roadway and by preserving the Women's Perennial Garden as it is. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

*Michal Safar*

Michal Safar, President  
Hyde Park Historical Society

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