

Jackson Park Watch

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April 18, 2018

Eleanor Gorski, Department of Planning and Development

John Sadler, Department of Transportation

City of Chicago

Via Email: eleanor.gorski@cityofchicago.org, john.sadler@cityofchicago.org,
dpd@cityofchicago.org

Re: Section 106 Review of the OPC Mobility Improvements to Support the SLFP Update

Dear Ms. Gorski and Mr. Sadler:

As a consulting party to the Section 106 review of the “OPC Mobility Improvements to Support the SLFP Update,” we write to comment on the draft Historic Properties Identification Report that was posted on March 19 and presented at the second public meeting on March 29. Beyond specific comments about that draft report, we have concerns about the overall process for the Section 106 and related federal reviews and the project definitions that are guiding those reviews. We address some of those concerns here, but have also submitted a separate letter, dated April 18, that focuses on issues relating to the full National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process. The two letters are complementary and concerns expressed in each inform the other

I. Misrepresentations of the nature and import of the South Lakefront Framework Plan

We find fault with the consistent misrepresentations of the origin and timing of the 2018 South Lakefront Framework Plan (SLFP) to create a false narrative used to deflect scrutiny of decisions about proposals that were developed prior to its inception, to wit, the proposals to construct the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) in Jackson Park, to make major changes in the Jackson Park roadway system to accommodate the proposed design of the OPC, and the closely related proposal by the Chicago Parks Golf Alliance (CPGA) to merge and expand the existing golf courses in Jackson Park and South Shore.

Here are the facts:

- The siting of the Obama Presidential Center (“Library” at the time) in Jackson Park was announced 7/27/16.
- The golf course merger project was announced 12/18/16.
- The design of the OPC, including the intent to close Cornell Drive, was announced 5/3/17.
- The full-blown plan for road closures and realignments and the expanded golf course design plan were unveiled 6/22/17.

- It was only on 6/22/17, when the fully developed proposals for all three projects – the OPC, the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) road changes, and the CPGA golf project -- were already in place, that the Park District launched the South Lakefront Framework Plan process, with the stated intent of “updating” the pre-existing 1999-2000 Jackson Park/South Shore Framework Plan, a plan that did not include any of these projects.

This after-the-fact South Lakefront Framework Plan, a plan only presented to the Park District Board as final on April 11, 2018, has consistently been cited in a wide variety of official documents to create the misleading public impression that these three major, costly, and disruptive projects are somehow the result of and required by the SLFP; that is a fiction.

For example:

- In the Section 106 Historic Properties Identification Report dated March 15, 2018, the concluding sentence of paragraph 1 of 1.0, Introduction and Description of Undertaking, says “Specifically, the decision to locate the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, road closures in Jackson Park, and other changes in Jackson Park *identified in the South Lakeshore Framework Plan....*” (Italics added) This phrasing erroneously implies that the South Lakeshore Framework Plan was the driver of decision-making on these projects, while in fact it was premised on their being in place.
- The CDOT application to the Chicago Plan Commission for “Various Roadway and Intersection Modifications,” dated January 10, 2018, states in IV. Brief Description of the Proposal: “Transportation improvements to support the update to the Chicago Park District South Lakefront Framework Plan which includes construction of the Obama Presidential Center along Stony Island Avenue within Jackson Park....” Here again the clear but erroneous implication is that the South Lakefront Framework Plan preceded and somehow required the construction of the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, while in fact the decision to locate the OPC in the Park and to make the road changes included in the CDOT application, preceded the development of the updated SLFP.
- Yet another and very significant example of this misrepresentation can be found in the February 8, 2018 draft “Purpose of and Need for Action - Federal Highway Administration” statement at https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/supp_info/jackson/fha-purpose.pdf. At 1.1 the document states “The City of Chicago (City) is proposing to close roadways within Jackson Park, Chicago, Illinois to meet the planning and development objectives for Jackson Park as described in the 2018 South Lakefront Framework Plan.” Again, the “planning and development objectives” referred to in the document were in place before the 2018 South Lakefront Framework Plan process was launched. This misrepresentation is then used to allege that the baseline for the current federal reviews, rather than the situation that now exists, is instead the situation that would obtain if the proposed OPC had already been built and all of the proposed roadwork already completed.
- Additionally, the City is maintaining two separate but closely related websites as a part of the review by the Chicago Plan Commission and the on-going mandated federal reviews of the OPC and roadway proposals. In very similar terms, text on both sites misleadingly asserts that the South Lakefront Framework Plan requires the construction of the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, the related major road changes, and the golf course

expansion/merger project. See https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/jackson-park-improvements.html and https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/supp_info/obama-presidential-center.html.

We ask that the Section 106 draft reports, City websites, and all other documents related to the federal reviews of the proposals to construct the Obama Presidential Center and the related roadway changes be corrected to reflect the fact that the South Lakefront Framework Plan did not and does not authorize or require the projects under review.

II. Section 106 Review – Scope and Terminology

The proposed definitions of the Area of Potential Effects and the Period of Significance for the Section 106 review as presented in the Draft Historic Properties Identification Report (March 15, 2018) and at the March 29, 2018 Public Meeting raise concerns as do descriptions of specific features of the park.

- Area of Potential Effects (APE)

According to the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) materials distributed at the March 29 meeting, the definition of the APE for the architecture/landscape review was based on “the study area used in the South Lakefront Framework Plan Update with the addition of buildings fronting Jackson Park and properties within a ½ mile radius viewshed of the proposed OPC museum tower.” In addition, it was explained that, in response to consulting party input, the APE was expanded to include the entire Midway Plaisance to reflect the area included in the 1972 nomination of Jackson Park and the Midway Plaisance for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Executive Summary for the draft Historic Properties Identification (HPI) Report provides a slightly different rationale for the definition of the APE: “Areas of Potential Effects (APEs) were delineated to include any direct or indirect impacts to historic properties that may occur as a result of the federal undertakings” (p. i), and the report notes that requests to modify the APE “were considered and evaluated based on three criteria: consideration of the development history that could be linked to Jackson Park, the likelihood of direct impacts as a result of potential construction, and the likelihood of indirect visual impact as a result of the construction of the OPC Tower” (p. ii).

Each of these rationales presents some problems of interpretation and application. The reliance on the study area being used in the South Lakefront Framework Plan Update (which is basically defined by the boundaries of Jackson and South Shore Parks) yields an APE that does not recognize that the road construction and reconfiguration within the park will have major impacts far beyond the park boundaries. The neighborhoods of South Shore (including the historic district of the Jackson Park Highlands) and of Hyde Park north of 56th Street will be particularly affected as a result of the proposed road configurations (closure of Cornell, Marquette, and EB Midway Plaisance east of Stony Island; rerouting of traffic via Lake Shore Drive, Stony Island and Hayes). The traffic study on which CDOT has based its plans has several issues, including but not limited to the fact that it does not adequately account for how drivers may divert from CDOT-preferred routes by exiting Lake Shore Drive north of 57th Drive to cut through Hyde Park. Similarly, there is not sufficient attention in the CDOT plans to address the impact on South Shore of the likely additional traffic

diversions on Jeffrey Blvd. or on 67th Street or on other cross streets as drivers cut through to and from Stony Island.

There also seems to be inconsistency in applying the three criteria defined in the draft HPI report. During the March 29 meeting, Eleanor Gorski responded to a question about why the South Shore neighborhood or at least the Jackson Park Highlands was not added to the APE by saying that it had been determined that these areas were beyond the limit for visual impact of the OPC tower. But she did not address the other two criteria, both of which certainly apply to South Shore and the Highlands, and which fully support their inclusion in the APE. The symbiotic relationship between the Park and the development of these neighborhoods is obvious. As noted in the preceding paragraph, these areas (among others) will be impacted directly as a result of the potential road construction. The changes in traffic flow in the park will directly affect traffic movement through these neighborhoods – particularly along Jeffrey Blvd. and 67th Street but also along South Shore Drive and Stony Island and smaller cross streets.

It seems particularly appropriate and important to expand the APE to include South Shore at least to 71st Street and all of Hyde Park in the APE because, as also noted in the draft HPI report (p. 2), determinations made during the Section 106 review feed into and inform the subsequent federal reviews. The proposed road work will have potentially adverse effects in a broad swath of the south side beyond the park proper that should be considered as part of the NEPA and Section 4(f) reviews.

An additional concern about inconsistencies regarding the APE defined for the Section 106 review relates to the South Shore Cultural Center (SSCC) and to proposed changes linked to the proposed golf course merger and expansion. As explained on p. 2 of the draft HPI report, the SSCC is included in the APE only “to accommodate potential improvements for pedestrian underpasses.” However, these “potential improvements for pedestrian underpasses” are prompted only by the proposed golf course project, and not by the plans for the OPC. Likewise, the proposed closure of Marquette Drive between Stony Island Avenue and Richards Drive is an “improvement” related only to the golf course project and not to “OPC mobility” issues. Either these golf project-specific changes should not be included in the proposed work to be evaluated by the Section 106 review and other federal reviews (and commensurately that proposed work should be removed from consideration of performance at this time) or the South Shore Cultural Center and the golf course project should be *fully* integrated into the review, with an expanded list of contributing resources and an expanded APE.

- Period of Significance

The discussion of the definition of 1871-1953 as the Period of Significance for this review (draft HPI report, p. 54) references the National Register nomination form submitted in 1972 for Jackson Park and the Midway Plaisance, which checked only the “19th Century.” As the proposed time period indicates, however, the significant dates for Jackson Park extend well beyond the 19th century. Yet, the proposed end date to guide the current review seems an arbitrary demarcation: it is not a neat 50 years ago such as is the minimum standard for inclusion in the National Register, and it is not a true divide between a pristine Olmsted design and one where changes have occurred. A more or equally appropriate and obvious end date for the Period of Significance would be 1968,, consistent with the minimum standard for inclusion in the National Register.. Certainly there were

important happenings in Jackson Park between 1953 and 1968. Why, for instance, is not the installation of the Nike missile base itself a notable, if lamentable, event, worthy of recognition as a marker of its time just as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was a reflection and achievement of its particular historic moment. The puzzlement created by the 1953 date leads to concerns about the accuracy and completeness of the Section 106 review generally, as noted below in our discussion of the Jackson Park Landscape Integrity Analysis.

We note that the 1972 National Register nomination, in responding to the instruction to “Describe the present and original physical appearance,” stated: “Except for minor changes here and there, and a few major ones such as the filling-in of part of the lake along the south pier, the Park and the Midway still conform to the essentials of both the 1895 and 1871 plans.” [We would also note that the National Register nomination presented in two places on the City's website <http://www.tinyURL.com/JPimprovements> is only the initial version, submitted on July 17, 1972; the revised version submitted on November 9, 1972 presents a fuller statement of the importance and description of Jackson Park and Midway Plaisance and includes the assessment quoted above.]

- Jackson Park Landscape Integrity Analysis

Undue Focus on Roadways

In its Jackson Park Landscape Integrity Analysis, the draft Historic Properties Identification report states that “Overall, Jackson Park generally possesses a high level of integrity” (p. 59). It concludes (p. 60) by repeating that “Jackson Park generally retains a high level of integrity.” This assessment is buttressed by the December 10, 2012 letter from Anne E. Haaker, then Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, to Peter Bullock of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with regard to the USACE plans for an ecological restoration project in Jackson Park, which said in part:

“As currently designed, the park retains a great deal of its integrity. While some of the original features have been modified, or removed, the remaining defining characteristics such as the overall plan developed by Olmstead, Olmstead, and Elliot (*sic*) as depicted on the 1905 map must be respected. These include, but are not limited to, the Golden Lady statue, the Osaka Garden, the current roadway configuration, the beach house, and the configuration of the lagoons.”

Notwithstanding this very positive assessment, the draft HPI report goes on to single out the impact of roadway alterations as requiring particular attention. We question some critical aspects of this analysis of landscape integrity. At the March 29th meeting, it was candidly admitted by the City that the 1953 date in many respects was arbitrary, at a minimum subject to significant debate. We agree that the 1953 date is both arbitrary and wrong. It is not consistent with any applicable guidelines or prior reviews of Jackson Park, whether for the National Register nomination or subsequent reviews by others such as the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Instead, it appears to have chosen as way of providing justification to the proposed road closures, which it fails to do. By choosing 1953 as the end of its proposed period of significance, the draft report excludes the impact of the Nike base and the permanent changes it created in the landforms and water features of the Park from its analysis of landscape integrity. At the same time, in contrast, its analysis of road changes includes all changes from 1895 through to the present, regardless of when they occurred (see the chart on p. 63). Consideration of the dates of the various changes in conjunction with the map depicting those

changes (p. 62) shows that many changes in road design now presented as having a negative effect on landscape integrity occurred well before 1953; the change in the intersection between Cornell Drive and Hayes Drive (1935) is a case in point. We question why the significant changes to the integrity of the landscape in the Park that occurred due to the Nike base are excluded from this analysis while all roadway changes, regardless of date, appear to be included.

We would observe that, whatever there is to say about challenges to the integrity of the Jackson Park Landscape to date, the current proposed undertaking to close Cornell Drive between 59th and 63rd Streets and to make a series of significant road changes in order to accommodate the resulting traffic dislocations is far and away the most intrusive, destructive, and harmful challenge to the integrity of the Jackson Park of anything to date save the installation of the Nike base in the Park.

- Analysis of Western Perimeter

We notice in the treatment of the Western Perimeter, a particularly important topic given the proposal to erect the Obama Presidential Center in this area, some surprising use of language that create misleading impressions and inaccurate statements. We provide several examples of such text and ask that the final report present a more accurate and balanced assessment of these important points.

- On p. 64 the draft HPI report asserts: “It [Cornell Drive] was widened and realigned several times between the 1930s and early 1970 in a manner that *severely diminished* the historic integrity of the Western Perimeter. Other roadway alterations were made in a *more sympathetic manner*.” (Italics added for emphasis) This paragraph goes on to claim that the recent Hayes Drive realignment adjacent to S. Lake Shore Drive “... mirrors the historic alignment” and “has had a much less dramatic impact on the park’s integrity,” a claim which appears arbitrary, since the new alignment departs substantially from the original (see map, p. 62). This description is both inaccurate and inconsistent with earlier assessments.
- On p. 69, the draft HPI report asserts: “Between the early 1960s and 1980s both S. Cornell Drive and S. Stony Island Avenue were widened substantially to handle much heavier loads of traffic. ... Other roadways were moderately widened, but generally following their historic alignments.” In fact, both Cornell Drive and Stony Island Ave. continue to follow their historic alignments quite closely. Further, the Traffic Impact Study prepared by Sam Schwartz as the basis for the CDOT roads proposal presents an assessment of Stony Island Avenue that differs substantially from that of the heavily traveled road the draft HPI report suggests: “Stony Island Avenue is a two-lane, minor arterial roadway, with on-street, unregulated parking provided on both sides of the street south of 60th Street and north of 59th Street.” Again, the juxtaposition of “substantially” and “moderately” above also sets up a false contrast between what has occurred with roadways adjacent to the Western Perimeter in comparison to road changes in the rest of Jackson Park.
- On p. 70, paragraph 2, it is a significant exaggeration to assert that “...Cornell Drive was altered to become a much straighter and wider roadway.” It is inaccurate to say that “S. Stony Island Avenue was also widened to provide two northbound lanes and three southbound lanes along the west edge of the park.” This configuration occurs only at the far southern end of the Park.
- On p. 70, in paragraph 3, it seems an obvious overstatement and surprising use of terms to assert that “The western edge of Jackson Park, previously characterized by a wide lawn and

double row of trees, gave way to traffic lanes edged by *a paltry parkway and sidewalk.*”[Italics added]

- On pp. 70-71, the language creates the impression that Olmsted’s berms, a signature design feature, no longer exist. “While some of these historic landforms remain today, many have been substantially altered. The entire S. Stony Island landscape edge was lopped off as a result of major roadway work conducted in the last 50 years.” In actuality, the western side of Jackson Park from 60th Street virtually all of the way to 67th Street still features berms that differentiate the park within from the sidewalk and traffic on the park’s exterior. These berms define the western edge of the site for the OPC, but would be “lopped off” to accommodate the proposed widening of Stony Island under the CDOT proposal. We note as well that the proposed Obama Presidential Center site would eliminate all signs of the original Olmsted design on that acreage, significantly altering the character of the Park not only in that immediate area but beyond.

Overall landscape integrity of Jackson Park: The central assessment presented in the draft HPI report is that Jackson Park today continues to have a high level of integrity. However, there are repeated references to the damage resulting from widening of the roadways and in particular Cornell Drive. The logical solution to the situation would be to narrow Cornell Drive and add traffic calming features as was proposed by the Park District itself as recently as 2016. It is not the logical solution to close the roadway completely and thereby trigger a wave of new road widenings and new loss of parkland, not only along Lake Shore Drive on the eastern edge of the park but in particular on the western edges of the Park, the very Western Perimeter itself.

III. Section 106 Review – Historic Properties Identification

Contributing Resources

According to the draft Historic Properties Identification report dated March 15, 2018, a contributing resource is a building site, structure, or object that:

“adds to the historic associations, historic architectural qualities, or archaeological values for which a property is significant because it was present during the period of significance, relates to the documented significance of the property, and possesses historic integrity or is capable of yielding important information about the period.” (p. 54)

In accordance with that, we ask for consideration or reconsideration of the decisions made regarding the inclusion of the following properties in the list of Contributing Resources:

- Cornell Drive and the terminus of the Midway Plaisance. Given the proposed determination that the 1895 Olmsted plan is the standard for the Section 106 evaluation, it seems appropriate and important to recognize and review all of the elements of the 1895 roadway design that are now in the park. The draft report states that in general “Roads, drives, and paths” are contributing resources (p. 55). However, we request specific recognition of Cornell Drive and the terminus of the Midway Plaisance between Stony Island Avenue and Cornell Drive in Jackson Park as contributing resources. They were central elements of the 1895 design and remain major features to the present day. The fact that Cornell Drive was widened and somewhat realigned in the 20th century does not obliterate its importance or

diminish its value as a reminder of Olmsted's design, and its altered state rather calls for an opportunity to restore, in full or in part, the roadway to its original purpose as the key to circulation through the park. Such an opportunity is now at hand to correct CDOT's prior mistake in widening the roadway beyond what was needed. Midway Plaisance, in contrast, has not suffered the same kind of alterations as Cornell Drive and retains the Olmsted imprint in full. To obliterate east-bound Midway Plaisance is a violation of the underlying principles of this Section 106 review.

- The Frederick Douglass Boulder. While the Frederick Douglass Boulder itself does not date back to the period of significance, it satisfies the criteria for designation as a contributing resource because it both "relates to the documented significance of the property" and "is capable of yielding important information about the period" in its reference to Frederick Douglass' historic appearance at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.
- The Great Auto Race Boulder. While the Great Auto Race Boulder itself does not date back to the period of significance, it satisfies the criteria for designation as a contributing resource because it both "relates to the documented significance of the property" and "is capable of yielding important information about the period," in its recollection of this important historic event.
- The Paul Douglas Nature Sanctuary. While designation of the Paul Douglas Nature Sanctuary on Wooded Island took place in 1977 and does not itself date back to the period of significance, it satisfies the criteria for designation as a contributing resource because it both "relates to the documented significance of the property" and "is capable of yielding important information about the period," in its reference to Olmsted's desire and determination to maintain the Wooded Island in a relatively natural state during and after the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The nature sanctuary on Wooded Island has been a feature of Jackson Park throughout the period of significance though it was not given its current designation until 1977. Given that the Wooded Island is not itself designated a contributing resource, it seems appropriate that the Paul Douglas Nature Sanctuary be so recognized, just as the current Japanese Garden, also located on the Wooded Island, is recognized as a contributing resource to recall the existence of the original garden.
- Lorado Taft's "Fountain of Time" (1920). The 1972 nomination of Jackson Park and Midway Plaisance to the National Register included the "Fountain of Time" as one of the key features of the Midway, the western terminus of the mile-long vista with the monument to Thomas Masaryk at the eastern end. As the nomination form noted, Taft's studio, a Chicago and National Historic Landmark, is located along the southern edge of the Midway. It seems appropriate and important to recognize the statue as a contributing resource to the Midway Plaisance and to assess the visual impact of the proposed OPC tower from that perspective.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and questions and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Brenda Nelms and Margaret Schmid
Co-presidents
Jackson Park Watch

cc: Matt Fuller, Federal Highway Administration; Abby Monroe, Chicago Department of Planning and Development; Rachel Leibowitz, Illinois State Historic Preservation Office; Bonnie McDonald and Lisa DiChiera, Landmarks Illinois; Jerry Adelman, Ted Haffner, and Stacy Meyers, Openlands; Ward Miller, Preservation Chicago; Juanita Irizarry, Lauren Moltz and Fred Bates, Friends of the Parks; Charles Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Dan Marriott, NAOP; Betsy Merritt, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Michael McNamee and Karen Rechtschaffen, Save the Midway; Bronwyn Nichols Lodato, Midway Plaisance Advisory Council; Walter Kindred, SSCC Advisory Council; Naomi Davis, BIG; Jawanza Malone, Kenwood-Oakland Community Association; Jack Spicer, Promontory Point Conservancy