

Talking Points for Section 106 Meeting on the Obama Presidential Center

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My name is Jerry Adelman and I am CEO of Openlands. We are a 55-year old non-profit that protects the natural and open spaces of our region to ensure cleaner air and water with the aim of connecting people to nature where they live for both personal balance and enrichment.

- The Purpose and Need is Flawed. The draft purpose and need for road work uses circular logic. The HPI report says that the project team will “evaluate a range of alternatives to meet the purpose and need for the roadway project...” Yet the Draft Report of “OPC Mobility Improvements” in support of the South Lakefront Framework Plan narrows that purpose and need to how road improvements will address impacts caused by road closures.

The purpose and need instead should reflect that the road work and the associated impacts are to accommodate the OPC in Jackson Park.

Why does the recently released purpose and need for the project assume that proposed road closures are part of a baseline “no-action” alternative, when they are in response to building the OPC in the proposed location?

The no-action alternative should only include roads that would otherwise be closed or improved even if the OPC were never built in Jackson Park.

The proposed NEPA study doesn’t acknowledge that the whole road reconfiguration must be considered as one action under NEPA. Since the full scope of road work includes reconfiguring Lake Shore Drive, NEPA should apply to the project. This should be clear when referencing the NEPA process in the different review processes for the OPC.

The scope of the NEPA review should extend to all reasonable road alternatives in the project area, and this project area should be broadened to consider all anticipated direct, indirect and cumulative effects of reconfiguring the roads.

- The Proposed NEPA Process is Fractured and Opaque. We are concerned about the content, order and timing of the different elements of the NEPA review process. NEPA is a procedural umbrella for substantive reviews, such as Section 4(f) impacts, any permitting requirements under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and this Section 106 review process.

The HPI states that the next step in the 106 process is to determine direct and direct effects of Federal Highway Administration and National Park Service actions on historic properties.

Why doesn’t this review also include cumulative impacts?

Running each process in isolation is contrary to the NEPA requirement to take a hard look at all the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of different alternatives to site and operate the OPC.

How will Section 106 and the other substantive review processes be folded into the NEPA study and holistically considered so that the preferred alternative complements and protects the natural and recreational values, historic context and sense of place of Jackson Park?

According to Section 106 documents, scoping for the NEPA review is already occurring. How will the public participate in each stage of the NEPA review process, including scoping, and when will that schedule be publicly available?