



Mayor Rahm Emanuel, City of Chicago
121 N LaSalle St, City Hall, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

February 9, 2015

Dear Mayor Emanuel:

Chicago is in the enviable position of having not just one, but two, proposals for the location of the Obama Presidential Library: the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Chicago. There is and should be tremendous pride in this for all Chicago residents. The **League of Women Voters of Chicago**, like many individuals and organizations, heartily supports the effort to realize that dream in our city, providing a lasting legacy of a presidency that began here.

We, however, do not support the transfer of Chicago Park District land for that purpose, as it is contrary to our position on land use: ***"PARKS: The parks should be used for public recreation only, consistent with and enhancing their aesthetic quality. Buildings should be kept to a minimum. Funds should be distributed equitably for maintenance and development of parks throughout the city."***

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the *Federal Architectural and Design Standards for Presidential Libraries, Revised July 2014*, sets out requirements governing construction of presidential libraries that are extensive and specific.¹ They include:

- 1) Site requirements, including title and encumbrances
- 2) Security
- 3) Space allocation
- 4) Zoning, historic preservation, wetlands
- 5) Parking, public access, and emergency vehicle access
- 6) Landscaping

In the addendum to this letter, we cite NARA requirements that govern these items and summarize concerns that, we believe, will arise in meeting the requirements. The presidential library building that complies with the NARA requirements will be large and isolated from its surroundings by provision for private, public and commercial vehicles. The building must accommodate the intended use for conferences and visits by foreign dignitaries. From the NARA requirements it can be inferred that the Obama Presidential Library, as a practical matter, will create a high level security bunker within the community. The proposed transfer of 20+ acres of park land is equivalent to removing from public use approximately 15-16 football fields of park area.

We appreciate, Mayor Emanuel, that the final decision regarding site selection rests with President and Mrs. Obama. We want Chicago to become the winner among the competitors, but we do not support transferring park land. We urge selection of another site within the city for the presidential library.

Sincerely,

Margaret Herring, President, League of Women Voters of Chicago

cc: -Chicago Park District Commissioners: Mr. Michael Kelly, General Superintendent; Mr. Brian Traubert, President; Ms. Avis LaVelle, Vice President; Mr. Donald Edwards; Ms. Erika Allen; Mr. Juan Salgado; Mr. M. Laird Koldyke; Mr. Tim King; Mr. Michael Simpkins
-Chicago Aldermen
-Editorial Boards: Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Reader, Hyde Park Herald
-WBEZ, WTTW, DNA, Better Government Association, Crain's Business, Friends of the Parks

332 South Michigan Ave., Suite 525 Chicago, IL 60604 312.939.5949 FAX 312.939.6887 www.LWVChicago.org

Rationale for opposition to transfer of land:

1) *“Presidential Libraries are built by private, nonprofit charitable foundations that raise money from non-federal sources. State and local governments and universities may help with construction by providing land, money, and infrastructure improvements for the Library. Upon completion....land, facility, and equipment comprising the Library are either donated, or made available for use in perpetuity as part of the National and Records Administration.”* (Section A: 1.1) *“...survey must include a **boundary survey description of the property and a legal title search...must be free from any encumbrances on title.**”*(Section B: Siting Requirements 3.9.4)

The University of Chicago proposal included land it did not own, contrary to the Architectural and Design Standards for Presidential Libraries, Revised July, 2014 (NARA).² For the U of C to meet the necessary NARA criteria, the result requires public land be transferred from the Chicago Park District to the City of Chicago, followed by a transfer from the city to the private Presidential Library Foundation through the U of C.

2) *“Generally, a new Presidential Library would be classified as a minimum Level IV facility.”* (Section I, Security, includes mandatory mitigation approaches related to FSL IV requirements—see document for details)

The “raison d’être” for a Library is the preservation of documentation, with concomitant specialized facilities. That said, NARA also stresses Presidential Libraries host events for world leaders. Attracting demonstrations and threats are concerns. The design challenge, therefore, is to create a building that is open to the public but essentially a bunker.

3) *“...must be located on one site and in one physical structure”* (Section A: 2.2) *“NARA does not have specific requirement for the amount of acreage...”* (Section B: 3.9.2) *“Acreage must be sized to keep grounds care costs to a reasonable level.”* (Section B: 3.10.1)

The proposed transfer of land (**20-22 acres**) being considered from Washington and Jackson Parks for the Presidential Library would remove **15-16 football fields in area** from available green space in a dense urban location. (1.32 acres = 1 football field) The two parks flanking the University of Chicago are some of the largest green spaces in the city while neighborhoods west and south are deemed “high” in need of green space, according to the National Trust for Public Land. (Median Chicago park size is 2.2 acres.³) There has been no commitment to replace this land at another location.

4) *“State and local requirements to assess and resolve impact on archeological sites and historic preservation must be fulfilled prior to transfer to NARA.”* (Section B: 3.9.6) *“...must include a detailed evaluation of the impact on wetlands.”* (Section B: 3.11.3)

Washington Park, a design by the revered landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux which includes lagoons, was listed in 2004 on the National Park Service list of National Register of Historic Places, record number 352509.⁴ **Landmark designation from the National Park Service** is neither swift nor easy, so projects which affect that status are a loss for the city as well, as evidenced by Soldier Field de-listing on Feb. 17, 2006.

5) “...must be large enough to accommodate the building footprint, site access and service roads, sufficient parking and sufficient tour bus or mass transit loading areas.” “...must be sufficient to accommodate a turning radius for a 53-foot delivery truck and provide circulation for trash pickup...” (Section B: 3.9.3) “...turning radius for fire trucks...emergency vehicles...” (Section B: 3.14) Also, per Section B: 3.13, “NARA has found...requires as many as 400 total spaces...” for parking (cars, tour buses, vans, handicapped access).

To meet the aforementioned requirements, there would, of necessity, be a large amount of concrete, asphalt, etc. introduced into a park that represents the lungs of the city. Moreover, a review of recent Presidential Library layouts indicates parking is used at points around the perimeter of the building, indirectly creating a security related mitigation approach.

6) “The landscaping scheme must ensure that trees are planted far enough away from the building so they do not touch or overhang the roof...” (Section B: 3.10.3) “...must be designed such that no potable water use is necessary for maintenance of landscape planting material.” (Section B: 3.10.4)

As a practical matter, another location should be considered, as NARA requirements set a high standard for security around its perimeter, including prescriptives regarding vegetation and foliage. Given that the proposal hinges on the use of parkland, it is almost inevitable that existing century old trees and other vegetation will be sacrificed. This would impact greatly on park use by neighborhood children who rely on public outdoor space for recreation, as do their families. Until more school playgrounds are built, parks, therefore, play an important role in the community.⁵ Currently, there are only 2.4 playgrounds per 10,000 residents.⁶

7) Only five years ago, Chicago hosted the centennial celebration of architects **Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett’s 1909 Plan of Chicago**. Even today placards near “the Bean” promote this plan at Millennium Park. The plan was monumental in that land use was at its center, and parks/public open land were major components. To that end, the 1909 Plan included the famous “**Emerald Necklace**” of parks and connecting boulevards, a concept begun decades earlier by John Wright,⁷ that would provide green space for the growing population, places where hardworking citizens and children could enjoy the outdoors. This early attempt at formal city planning was promoted by the business community through the **Commercial Club**⁸ and approved by the **Chicago Planning Commission**. These parks were part of a system which expanded as the city of Chicago recognized the importance of green space for its citizens. Chicago’s own **Park District** is the legacy agency of the effort started in 1830 to provide open space for recreation, adopting the motto “**Urbs in Horto,**” the “**City in a Garden.**”

8) Over time the way to commemorate a president has moved away from a statue, representing a small footprint in a park. The last century shifted toward a building housing documents--which brings scholars from around the world as well as generating tourism dollars from which a city could benefit. Buildings, however, have a flexibility that people do not have. Buildings can be located in numerous places. Children and families, especially those on limited incomes, do not have that flexibility. **Their needs for free, green, and open space near their homes are, in fact, the same as over 100 years ago.**

9) Chicago is at the **bottom of the list of 24 U.S. cities for green space** per person per square feet.⁹ Chicago park spending is cited as a mere \$153.60 per resident.¹⁰

10) The March, 2015 selection deadline is not mandated by NARA; it is an artificially created deadline about which the public has no information. **Urban revitalization** is a process that demands the input of its citizens, and thoughtful forward progress also requires time.

SELECT ENDNOTE REFERENCES:

¹ Architectural and Design Standards for Presidential Libraries, Revised July 2014 (266 pages)

² Part I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Section A: Introduction

1.1 Historical practice for construction and operation of Presidential Libraries:

Presidential Libraries are built by private, nonprofit charitable foundations that raise money from non-federal sources.

³ <http://parkscore.tpl.org/city.php?city=Chicago>

⁴ <http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/natregsearchresult.do?fullresult=true&recordid=361>

⁵ **Playgrounds**

“Recess is a key component of the Full School Day. Recess provides elementary students with the opportunity to release energy, re-boot and return to the classroom ready to learn. To ensure children have access to a safe place for recess CPS has a five-year, \$18 million plan to invest in playgrounds through 2017. The FY2014 budget proposes spending the second \$3.6 million installment to construct or replace 12 to 15 playgrounds at schools yet to be determined.”

<http://cps.edu/finance/FY14budget/pages/Capital.aspx>

⁶ <http://parkscore.tpl.org/city.php?city=Chicago>

⁷ <http://chicago.curbed.com/archives/2011/06/20/come-join-us-on-a-weeklong-tour-of-the-emerald-necklace.php#more> (a history of the “Emerald Necklace and each of the parks)

⁸ *“The Commercial Club's most striking achievement was its support and publication of Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago (1909). Burnham's plan was a masterpiece of city planning, providing a blueprint for the future growth and development of the entire Chicago region. A longtime member of the club, Burnham was uniquely positioned to link the commercial prosperity of the city with emerging City Beautiful principles to make Chicago both a profitable and pleasurable place to live.”* <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2207.html>

⁹ **New York City Population=8,286,181; Chicago Population=2,731,970**

<http://parkscore.tpl.org/compare2.php?cities=Chicago%2CNew+York&startcity=Chicago&comparecities=New+York;www.parkland-per-person-us.png>

¹⁰ <http://parkscore.tpl.org/city.php?city=Chicago>

The League of Women Voters of Chicago was founded by Carrie Chapman Catt in 1920. It is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate. Membership in the League of Women Voters of Chicago is open to men and women of all ages.