

To the Editor:

Carts, horses, and gears—effective planning and vetting for the Obama Center and roads

Misconceptions about Jackson Park planning process were given and refuted at the March 29 federal review meeting. My take is that the several processes are how laws and regulations (some from a long time ago) require government to responsibly determine its projects by balancing vision, expertise, legacy, and public input. It ends up providing a diverse set of eyes and perspectives—checks and balances. As an observer of several complex planning processes, I find that these parallel and tandem studies and reviews have been to a high degree mutually informative.

At key points, the processes have to intersect and give each other a go, no-go, or mitigate signal before driving on with time and money—even though one or another may for the moment assume all parts of the projects will be in the mix. At the present moment, in order for federal reviews to proceed to recommendation, the federal agencies have to have the city define and approve officially what it wants to do and that the projects (in this case in a federally recognized park) fit well into a whole plan for the park. Hence approval of a South Framework Plan that has the Obama Presidential Center, roadway changes, and a consolidated golf course penciled in, and approval by the Chicago Plan Commission of the OPC and roadway general plans. As the processes and the several federal reviews reach conclusions, the Framework Plan and the OPC, road and other plans will be altered in light of required or desired revisions.

It would seem much more wasteful and chaotic if the processes were to go one by one. Which would be done first, second? How long would this take?—until everyone walked away, I suppose, and nothing, beneficial or not, is done, as often happens with park, school, and transportation/mobility needs.

For nearly a year, each of these processes has held a suite of public and stakeholder meetings and opportunities for posting comments. And significant changes or removal of un-favored options have been made—I know I have been heeded, and many others including the critics. The huge public participation in multiple processes has allowed us- even forced us to look at our park as a whole and at each proposal from different angles and from other people's perspectives and needs. The back and forth with engagement with each other and the individual designers and oversight personnel have provided the "many eyes" essential to a "good result."

The critics also say that CDOT's baseline for road and trail projects should have been the current condition, not what might be needed for OPC plus upgrades CDOT wants. CDOT has long had concepts for improving traffic and pedestrian flow and safety in and around Jackson Park – a few such improvements were suggested in the 1999 park framework plan. Given the city's backlog, it is indeed unlikely these would have been placed on the table "but for" a project, the OPC. An "undertaking," not a wish list, is what gets reviewed for a National Register park. Also, the OPC designers proposed a major win-win for the park by replacing Cornell Drive—and its air and noise pollution and unmanaged water runoff-- with a seamless blend between the OPC's landscaped public spaces and the adjacent nature area and trails following Olmsted's that would make a traffic-free, safely accessible museum campus. (No mere narrowing, suggested by the critics, would get the improvement and would cost nearly as much.) In light of the above, we should not be surprised that CDOT's statement of purpose is premised upon the OPC project as well as holistic park and area-wide amelioration. The purpose is subject to public input and federal review just like the elements of the plan. The critics were seen engaged with CDOT at meetings and posting comments like the rest of us.

An additional example of incomplete or misinformation concerns the Urban Parks and Recreation recommended relocation of a displaced Jackson Park baseball field to the Midway. It was explained at the March 29 Section 106 meeting that any active recreation would be acceptable and it need not be in

the Midway. The question of siting a field in the neighborhood and of what should be in the east end of the Midway will have a community planning process this summer in conjunction with the Midway PAC.

It appears that processes now in place have a good chance of reaching a satisfactory solution. The result will be a new park of historical significance and future relevance to and programming for generations to come. And we all had a voice in it.

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