

Public Questions and Comments about the Obama Library and U of C Bid at the January 12, 2015 Jackson Park Advisory Council

Edited by Gary Ossewaarde

Questions were answered mostly by Derek Douglas, U of C President for Civic Engagement, some by Sonya Malunda, Senior Associate Vice President for Civic Engagement.

Two minutes were allowed for each question and each answer. Time was kept by JPAC treasurer Dwight Powell.

Nearly everyone who spoke prefaced that they would welcome the Library to the South Side, and several told what they believe and hope it will bring or mean to communities and the city.

Q. Could you use the U of C land outside Washington Park rather than the park?

A. We need to ensure there is enough room for a campus to ensure a strong bid.

Q. How much land is available owned by UC, the city and agencies west of Washington Park?

A. About 11 acres, of which 6 1/2 is owned by the University. How to assemble it is an issue, especially since some is spoken for. A major objective is to not displace.

C. The Washington Park Conservancy supports the Obama Library on Chicago's south side, but NOT in the park. (The suggested site for the Library in Washington Park is the site of the Washington Park Arboretum, the largest arboretum in Chicago.)

C. Use the land west of King including going over roads and Green Line and nearby to north.

A. The former Robert Taylor Homes land is spoken for, including for XT Tennis.

Q. What are the organizations by the Washington Park site that support this? I don't know anyone who wants to give up our parks.

A. Washington Park Advisory Council, KLEO, DuSable Museum, Museum Campus South, businesses- a total of 89 letters. Also, there are several sites the Foundation would not accept. Accessibility is another point the Foundation insists upon. We would enhance the park.

C. The King Dr. site is ideal. The bar should be high for taking parkland for institutions-- this fits the bar. And it is Obama. And lots of museums and other facilities are in parks. Such opportunities are the only way to get resources for parks.

C. The letters you cite are for the Library, but how many of those sending knew that, support it will be in a park? Some organizations have moved to rescind or revise their letters since they found out.

C. We need to think creatively to renew our parks and communities. This has many possibilities. It will require lots of talking.

Q. Will this be done to bring real resources to communities rather than gentrify? Cited a conspiracy to clear certain populations out of the South Side.

A. Columbia is using land that displaced and was contentious; we are not. We are intentional from the start to redevelop with affordable options-- there's so much vacant land. Cited Mattie Butler of WECAN that displacement won't happen. This is not UC driven and the city has control of lots of empty land and will set the rules. We will plan and collaborate together. The Library will be transformative.

Q. Parks are an irreplaceable resource for people that can never be reassembled- once gone, it's gone for good. (Applause). Find a spot not in parks. Organizations like JPAC should carry out their responsibility and stop frittering away our parks (last remark drew a repost from the president of JPAC).

A. We will improve the park and return more than is lost. The Library is not cannibalizing. And it's not UC, we are just providing options.

Q. Can we not revisit Lakeside or Michael Reese, [which were subjects of separate bids] where there will be neither park loss or displacement of people/businesses?

A. Not our choice.

Q. How much good will just a new building do? We need something spectacular to turn communities around.

A. We won't abandon communities- will partner to do a lot of other things.

Q. We are still hurt by how land west of Washington Park was acquired. What is your plan for it?

A. For future growth. Ald. Dowell made it plain we can't just landbank it. We've been building, such as the Incubator. Lots of charettes have been going on.

C. Displacing trees is not better than displacing people. Parks aren't land banks either.

Cassandra Francis, president of Friends of the Parks, was invited at this point to read a prepared statement (pre-ask). They are thrilled about the Library and against building in parks and especially in heritage parks intentionally designed and irreplaceable. The acres west of the Washington Park would be ideal, as would the UIC bid and the design should be "urban". 25 acres is too much in any case. It's the University's responsibility to listen, Chicago's to decide.

A. Lots want it in the parks and our responsibility is to all voices. (Back and forth: Does the Foundation understand, including how parks are bridges between communities? A. The Library will bridge communities, and the University is going to take all the input back to the Foundation.)

C. (disagreement about the stance of a community organization).

Q. Who in the Foundation represents the communities?

A. Marty Nesbitt, who has all the letters and input and has a Facebook page on the Library. They also talk a lot with the Obama's.

Q. Will a Library bring an increase in policing, maybe also harassing our youth? While the University does not have a trauma center for the community or for the President.

A. Disputed the implications-- we all swim or sink together in shared interest. The University is doing much for South Side healthcare.

C. The library is important and huge including to the future of kids and would be a major asset in one of the parks; the problems would be worked out.

JPAC president Louise McCurry made closing statement, thankful for the many voices that have come to be heard.