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***Friends of the Parks Steps Up the Fight for Green Space in Jackson Park
in Light of the Obama Foundation's Proposed Above-Ground Parking Garage
on the Historic Midway Plaisance***

Formalizes Alliances with South Side Residents on Community-based Campaigns

With the proposals for the Obama Presidential Center poised to move forward toward the city's Plan Commission yet this year, Friends of the Parks will oppose the Obama Foundation's proposal to build an above-ground parking garage on the eastern edge of the Midway Plaisance. Friends of the Parks will support a new community-based effort which last week launched the "Save the Midway" campaign. It includes a petition drive and other organizing activities to challenge the construction of an above-ground garage on this key element of Frederick Law Olmsted's highly-revered South Parks system linking Jackson Park to Washington Park, part of Chicago's green boulevard system and an area that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Since the beginning, Friends of the Parks has welcomed the Obama Presidential Center to Chicago but has vociferously maintained that it should not be in a park, suggesting that it be located instead on vacant land across the street from Washington Park. Friends of the Parks has strongly spoken out for the need for comprehensive park planning which takes into consideration community views and ensures an integrated approach in the spirit of Olmsted's vision that "every part must be planned subordinate to and dependent on every other part." We have appreciated the Obama Foundation's role in ensuring the initiation of the South Lakefront Framework Plan process by the Chicago Park District and in engaging our organization and others in discussions about various elements of the Obama Presidential Center.

At an August invitation-only meeting at the Obama Foundation at which Friends of the Parks' executive director was in attendance, the Foundation announced their plans for the above-ground parking structure on the Midway and pitched it as a hill that would disguise the garage as a park. But the images that were revealed at a subsequent Chicago Department of Transportation-hosted public meeting depicted a square, cement garage with a green roof. The proposed parking structure has since become a topic of significant debate.

Friends of the Parks adamantly rejects the Obama Foundation's characterization of such as the addition of parkland and calls upon the Obama Presidential Center to revisit previous discussions about underground parking garage options. An above-ground garage further erodes existing green space.

"This would be a further reduction in park acreage and marks an unacceptable usurpation of parkland," stated Friends of the Parks Board Chair Lauren Moltz, a Hyde Park resident. **"As part of community meetings**

toward the development of the South Lakefront Framework Plan, community members have noted the need for additional parking to facilitate their access to various park amenities. The parking garage should be built underground and closer to these amenities so as to enhance rather than detract from the park.”

Also, while we are pleased that the Chicago Park District launched a planning process in response to our call for such and has recently also heeded our call to slow down the South Lakefront Framework Plan planning process, we are now concerned that the Obama Presidential Center is moving forward on a separate track and is expected to go before Plan Commission in November. Such a move is reminiscent of the piecemeal approach that we critiqued earlier in the process and threatens the ability of the community to consider and respond to all elements of the proposed revitalization plan as a whole.

To further promote an emphasis on the interrelatedness of the many issues that the Obama Presidential Center-inspired revitalization proposals represent and to bolster efforts to protect green space, Friends of the Parks is formalizing its role with the South Side groups that comprise the Obama Library CBA (Community Benefits Agreement) Coalition. Having already provided some insight and capacity to the CBA Coalition regarding its sustainability pillar, Friends of the Parks is now joining as an “Ally” to further strengthen the call for the replacement of all green space taken up by the Obama Presidential Center and the replacement of all recreational facilities that are threatened with displacement by any and all Jackson Park revitalization proposals.

“Supporting the ‘Sustainability and Transportation’ platform of the CBA Coalition’s proposed Community Benefits Agreement is consistent with our mission and speaks to Friends of the Parks’ active engagement with many voices in the community impacted by the Obama Presidential Center,” said Juanita Irizarry, Executive Director of Friends of the Parks. **“We continue to use our position to call for transparency around a host of park-related issues and the engagement of local voices in order to make good decisions concerning Jackson Park and South Shore Park ‘revitalization.’ We also call on the Obama Foundation to fully live up to its stated mission of promoting civic engagement in public conversations such as these.”**

Finally, Friends of the Parks recently has formalized its relationship with Jackson Park Watch. Having previously welcomed this unincorporated park partner organization to its networking meetings and trainings, Friends of the Parks recently approved Jackson Park Watch’s application to operate under Friends of the Parks fiscal sponsorship. However, some of the details of this relationship have been reported erroneously in recent weeks. As one of 40-plus park partner organizations for which Friends of the Parks provides fiscal sponsorship, Jackson Park Watch functions under our 501(c)3 status so that they can raise tax-deductible donations. As with all of our fiscally-sponsored entities and in accordance with the law, Jackson Park Watch operates under the umbrella of the Friends of the Parks mission. They manage their own operations and strategies day-to-day, some of which may align directly with Friends of the Parks’ priorities and strategies and some of which may not. Jackson Park Watch’s current pursuit of potential legal strategies to address Obama Presidential Center-related issues is neither directed by Friends of the Parks nor necessarily objectionable to Friends of the Parks.

Friends of the Parks is a forty-two year old non-profit parks advocacy group whose mission is to preserve, protect, improve, and promote the use of parks and open space in Chicago for the enjoyment of all residents and visitors. We advance our programmatic, educational, and advocacy work with the support of our members, donors and volunteers, and through our governmental, corporate, community, and environmental partnerships.

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