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Statement of Friends of the Parks on Obama Presidential Center Model Unveiling

We are thrilled that President Obama has decided to bring the Obama Presidential Center to Chicago.

While we agree to disagree with the Obama Foundation about siting the Obama Presidential Center in a park, we are pleased that the Obama Foundation has invited Friends of the Parks' input on the model and the process regarding the OPC.

“Our board has not yet had the opportunity to review the design,” said Lauren Moltz, Friends of the Parks board president and Hyde Park resident. “Additionally, Friends of the Parks maintains that it is premature to weigh in on the content and design of the presidential center itself absent a comprehensive park planning process. We continue to call for a transparent process to bring forth the data and engage the community’s voice in order to make good decisions about all of the ideas that have been floated concerning Jackson Park ‘revitalization.’”

The public has not yet seen the results of the engineering study related to the proposed professional golf course. The local community has not been presented with a thorough analysis of the traffic issues related to the proposed closure of streets in the park. There are still many equity questions about the funding of repairs for other existing park amenities and the replacement of all recreational facilities that are threatened with displacement. And local residents have great concerns about ensuring that benefits accrue to the immediate community.

“Friends of the Parks has encouraged the Obama Foundation to bring to bear leadership that ensures a thorough and transparent comprehensive planning process for this historic park,” said Juanita Irizarry, executive director of Friends of the Parks. “This is a rare opportunity to honor the spirit and design of Jackson Park’s landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted--who believed deeply in parks as democratic spaces--as well as the President’s and Mrs. Obama’s stated desire to establish the Obama Presidential Center as a promoter and convener of citizen participation and engagement.”

Friends of the Parks is a forty-one year old nonprofit 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, community and environmental partnerships.

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