



August 10, 2020

Matt Fuller, Environmental Programs Engineer
Federal Highway Administration
3250 Executive Park Drive
Springfield, IL 62703

RE: Draft MOA for Section 106 review of Obama Presidential Center

Dear Mr. Fuller:

Friends of the Parks (FOTP) has participated as a consulting party to the Section 106 compliance review for the proposed Obama Presidential Center (OPC) in Jackson Park. FOTP is an Illinois not-for-profit organization founded in 1975 and dedicated to promoting healthy parks in the City of Chicago. Our mission includes ensuring park lands are equitably distributed and managed across the city to support healthy communities and a healthy environment.

Since 2014, FOTP has been in support of Chicago having a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to host President Obama's legacy on the city's South Side where he and the first lady, Michelle Obama, have a deep connection to the community. Nonetheless, FOTP has also strongly maintained that we object to the use of utilizing existing parkland for the center; we repeatedly have suggested the alternative use of available vacant land across the street from Washington Park. Since this option has not been considered seriously, we have since maintained the position that the Obama Presidential Center should replace in surrounding communities any parkland acreage that gets taken up by the library.

Unfortunately, compared to other Section 106 processes that FOTP has participated in, it is apparent that this process was set up to move forward a done deal. Suggestions to avoid confiscation of the historic Jackson Park have not been considered; there has not been a process in place by the Federal Highway Administration to appropriately minimize adverse effects or consider any methods whatsoever to avoid adverse effects, which is required in a Section 106 review process. We have heard other consulting parties' express similar concerns regarding the review process and the loss of parkland, and we reiterate their concerns about the process.

We also reiterate comments made in public meetings by Blacks in Green that there must be an agreement to replace the parkland in surrounding communities such as West Woodlawn, Washington Park, and South Shore because park space is essential to city-goers health and environment. Unfortunately, the process has not addressed or discussed such options.

The Section 106 review process of the OPC has been deeply troubling to FOTP. As such, we cannot in confidence sign the draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) as it is written.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juanita Irizarry".

Juanita Irizarry
Executive Director

CC: Arlene Kocher (Department of Transportation); David Clarke (Department of Transportation); Lee Terzis (National Park Service), Morgan Elmer (National Park Service); Jamie Loichinger (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation); Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot; Maurice Cox (City of Chicago); Eleanor Gorski (City of Chicago); Nathan Roseberry (City of Chicago); Brad Koldehoff (Illinois Department of Transportation); Colleen Callahan (Illinois SHPO); Robert Appleman (Illinois SHPO); Carol Dyson (Illinois SHPO); Anthony Rubano (Illinois SHPO); Michael Kelly (Chicago Park District); Heather Gleason (Chicago Park District); Juanita Irizarry (Friends of the Parks); Lauren Moltz (Friends of the Parks); Fred Bates (Friends of the Parks); Jerry Adelman (Openlands Project); Ted Haffner (Openlands Project); Bonnie McDonald (Landmarks Illinois); Lisa DiChiera (Landmarks Illinois); Brenda Nelms (Jackson Park Watch); Jack Spicer (Jackson Park Watch); Margaret Schmid (Jackson Park Watch); Charles Birnbaum (The Cultural Landscape Foundation); Nord Wennerstrom (The Cultural Landscape Foundation); Dan Marriott (National Association of Olmsted Parks); Michael Rachlis; Betsy Merritt (National Trust for Historic Preservation); Stephanie Franklin (Nichols Park Advisory Council); Jawanza Malone (Kenwood Oakland Community Organization); Naomi Davis (Blacks in Green); Michal Safar (Hyde Park Historical Society); Bronwyn Nichols-Lodato (Midway Plaisance Advisory Council); Michael McNamee (Save the Midway)