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Jackson Park in the Past and Present: Major Points of Change and their Impact on Local Communities

**Project description**

Jackson Park has been an integral public space in Chicago's South Side for over a century. As the site of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the park began its existence as the place where Chicago introduced itself to the world. Since then, several major changes have disrupted Jackson Park and its public use. The U.S. Army used parkland to store missiles, the City of Chicago attempted to reroute Lake Shore Drive through the Park, and private entity Project 120 has proposed developments of a large-scale music venue. This paper examines the ventures that not only threatened to physically change the park, but also compromised local communities of park users and the way they interact with Jackson Park. Most recently, Jackson Park faces major upheaval due to the forthcoming Obama Presidential Center and golf course renovation. Since Jackson Park has been similarly threatened in the past, I examine both the effect and the response towards park changes in order to inform the best ways for the concerned community members to proceed in relation to upcoming projects. Most notably, these past examples tell us that the community of Jackson Park users is often put behind other concerns such as city finances and politics, which indicates that community action is the best, and often only, way for locals to attempt to keep Jackson Park a usable public space.

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Jackson Park in the Past and Present:  
Major Points of Change and their Impact on Local Communities

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By Emma Scotty

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## **Abstract**

Jackson Park has been an integral public space in Chicago's South Side for over a century. As the site of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the park began its existence as the place where Chicago introduced itself to the world. Since then, several major changes have disrupted Jackson Park and its public use. The U.S. Army used parkland to store missiles, the City of Chicago attempted to reroute Lake Shore Drive through the Park, and private entity Project 120 has proposed developments of a large-scale music venue. Such ventures not only threatened to physically change the park, but they also compromised local communities of park users and the way they interact with Jackson Park. Most recently, Jackson Park faces major upheaval due to the forthcoming Obama Presidential Center and golf course renovation. Since Jackson Park has been similarly threatened in the past, examining both the effect and the response towards park changes can inform the best ways for the concerned community members to proceed in relation to upcoming projects. Most notably, these past examples tell us that the community of Jackson Park users is often put behind other concerns such as city finances and politics, which indicates that community action is the best, and often only, way for locals to attempt to keep Jackson Park a usable public space.

## **Introduction**

On a recent warm winter morning, birds flapped between bare tree limbs across a still and silent lagoon, with only the hum of traffic in the distance. Nearby, children bickered with their parents as they took photos on a small footbridge, and a dog bounded through the steel lotus petals of Skylanding, an art piece by Yoko Ono. Such was the scene at Jackson Park. In the peaceful park that morning, one is hardly aware of the fierce debate raging on about the future of these lands, sculpted by Frederick Law Olmsted almost one hundred and twenty-five years ago.

But the Obama Presidential Center is coming to Jackson Park, and the surrounding community, not for the first time, faces the threat of losing access to their local park.

Jackson Park, located along Lake Michigan on the South Side of Chicago, has long been one of the city's defining large parks. Its five hundred acres of public land borders the Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore community areas. As the site of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Jackson Park became an integral element of Chicago immediately after its creation. From its illustrious beginning through the twentieth century, the park has historically faced its share of threats, most notably the U.S. Army leasing parkland for missile storage and the city administration planning to extend Lake Shore Drive through the park. These changes as well as more recent proposals both threatened to and at times did restrict access to the park, especially for local users. Nearby communities have historically had little say in what happens to their park. Despite this, Jackson Park has managed to remain a key community resource for the South-Side communities of Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore, providing recreational spaces and activities for local residents.<sup>1</sup> However, Jackson Park and its users are still in danger of losing these spaces and uses.

In recent years, Jackson Park has once again risen to citywide and national prominence. A large-scale ecological restoration completed in 2016 not only sought to rehabilitate the park's natural species, but also revive its historical character. A new design for the Jackson Park golf course will create a high-end course within the park. Most notably, plans are now in place for the construction of the Obama Presidential Center (OPC), known colloquially as the Obama library. Because this project will bring so many changes to Jackson Park, such as the loss of open land, increased tourism, and a new focus on the historic park, community members are worried about

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<sup>1</sup> A map of Jackson Park and its facilities can be found at <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/jackson-park#locmap>. "Jackson Park," Chicago Park District, accessed April 4, 2018.

losing their voice in terms of park decisions, access, and changes. This fear is not new to Jackson Park locals. In fact, since the beginning of Jackson Park's existence, park planners and decision-makers have prioritized economic, environmental, or political interests over local community interests, often leaving community residents as the sole proponents of their own concerns. While these decisions are not always purposely antagonistic to local communities, residents tend to have the least amount of influence in park decisions, and are only able to enact change through strong and organized efforts.

It is undeniable that Jackson Park is a site of great change. The demographics of the surrounding communities have shifted dramatically throughout the lifespan of the park. However, the scope of the differences of the communities adjacent to Jackson Park increases the significance of the continuities throughout major points of contention in the park. Before 1893, the residents of modern-day Woodlawn were mainly Dutch farmers. Since then, Woodlawn has shifted to a white middle-class neighborhood until the mid-twentieth century, and is now a predominantly Black, lower-class neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> South Shore housed railroad and steel mill workers since the mid-nineteenth century, until the early 1900s when the white upper-middle class moved in. Today, South Shore is a mainly a Black middle-class residential area.<sup>3</sup> Hyde Park has become a racially and ethnically diverse, but middle- to upper-class neighborhood. All of these areas became part of Chicago when they were annexed in 1889.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the composition of surrounding communities, the metropolitan and national political culture has shifted significantly between the pivotal events in Jackson Park's history, from a culture of cultivating Chicago's global importance, to Cold War paranoia, to a renewed desire to bring

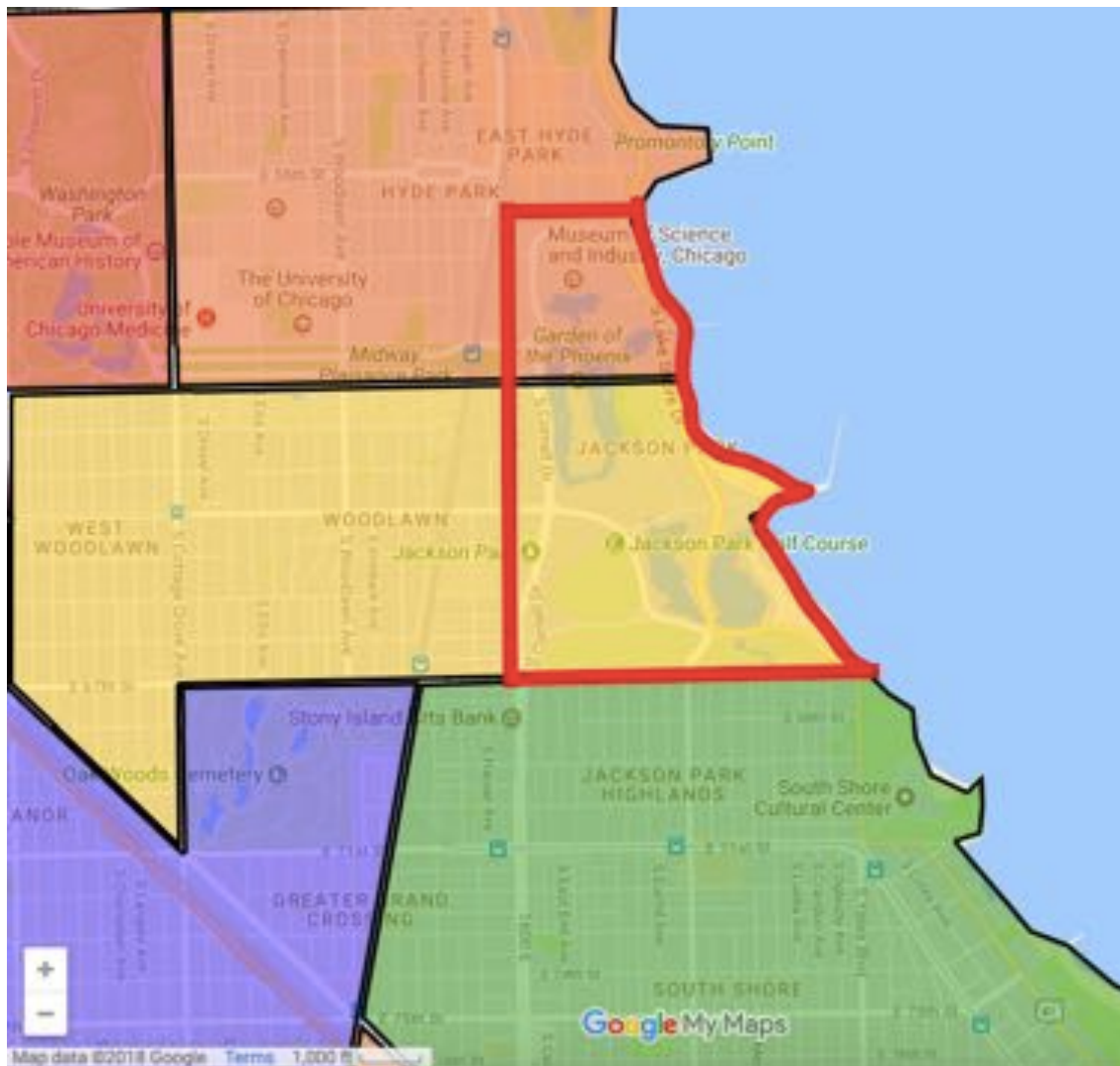
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<sup>2</sup> Amanda Seligman, "Woodlawn," Encyclopedia of Chicago, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1378.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace Best, "South Shore," Encyclopedia of Chicago, accessed December 6, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1176.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Max Grinnell, "Hyde Park," Encyclopedia of Chicago, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/622.html>

prestige back to the South Side as a certain former president’s hometown. The events and changes that have impacted the park and surrounding communities the most are the Columbian Exposition, missile storage, Lake Shore Drive protests, restoration, and Obama library. Despite the seemingly disparate sets of conditions in different time periods, the decisive events in Jackson Park all show continuity in the interests and conflicts that developed, and these commonalities can inform the way we look at present-day conflict in the park.



*Figure 1: Jackson Park (outlined in red) and surrounding Community Areas: Hyde Park (orange), Woodlawn (yellow), and South Shore (green).<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> “Chicago Community Areas,” Google My Maps, accessed April 5, 2018, [https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1O-3Uot4mSetKW-M\\_govahruUjDc](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1O-3Uot4mSetKW-M_govahruUjDc).

Jackson Park is a key natural, recreational, and cultural resource for all three of these neighborhoods. On the website for Choose Chicago, profiles for both Hyde Park and South Shore heavily feature Jackson Park. The Hyde Park page calls Jackson Park and the site of the Chicago World's Fair "a profound hinge point of historical and social importance in Chicago."<sup>6</sup> The South Shore page similarly notes Jackson Park as a place perfect for golf, which reveals the park's recreational capacity.<sup>7</sup> A Curbed Chicago guide to Woodlawn heavily focuses on Jackson Park, calling the neighborhood's park resources "unbelievable."<sup>8</sup> Based on these neighborhood profiles, the park, which geographically connects the three neighborhoods (Figure 1), is clearly a defining feature of Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore. The geographical proximity and richness in amenities of Jackson Park means that the park is a key community resource for these surrounding neighborhoods, but the community members themselves have long struggled to make their voice heard in Jackson Park. This absence of sovereignty denotes a wider problem: "when neighborhoods lack control of their own destinies there can be a severe disjuncture between what residents want in a neighborhood and what governments impose."<sup>9</sup> This disjuncture is acutely evident in Jackson Park. Governmental and powerful private actors consistently made decisions related to the park that were at odds with the desires of local park users. While neighborhood sovereignty is a much larger issue than can be contained in Jackson Park, local residents' lack of control in relation to Jackson Park has contributed to a loss of community access to the park in the face of imposed changes set by other parties.

By analyzing the continuities in the roots of the many contentions that have developed in Jackson Park, this paper will demonstrate the ways in which the interests of the community have

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<sup>6</sup> "Hyde Park | Chicago Neighborhoods," Choose Chicago, accessed April 5, 2018, <https://www.choosechicago.com/neighborhoods/south/hyde-park/>.

<sup>7</sup> "South Shore | Chicago Neighborhoods," Choose Chicago, accessed April 5, 2018, <https://www.choosechicago.com/neighborhoods/south/south-shore/>.

<sup>8</sup> A.J. LaTrace, "Your Guide to Woodlawn, the 2016 Neighborhood of the Year," Curbed Chicago, January 11, 2017, <https://chicago.curbed.com/2017/1/11/14215428/woodlawn-chicago-neighborhood-guide>.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Talen, "The Self-Governed Neighborhood," in *Neighborhood* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 13.

been repeatedly pushed aside in order to create economic, political, and even environmental benefits for the city and nation. Recognizing that the park has seldom sought to serve local communities without the public explicitly making demands creates a framework for thinking about future solutions and strategies to protect community interest in Jackson Park. Local actors need more representation in park decisions so that Jackson Park can serve its surrounding communities, but so far this is almost solely possible through activism.

### **Literature Review**

Jackson Park, like many other public parks, is used to fulfill certain economic, political, and community objectives. By analyzing the literature of general park theory, we can better understand the ideas behind decisions of the Park District and City of Chicago. Different scholars present different goals of public parks. The objectives for parks with the most scholarly focus are 1. to fulfill local neighborhood needs; 2. to spur economic development and elevate the city as a whole; 3. to protect natural areas; and 4. to find a balance between any combinations of these goals. These varied objectives are not always entirely at odds. For instance, a park that brings economic development could help revitalize nearby neighborhoods, with investments. However, such development could also be harmful when it comes to gentrification. Historically in Jackson Park, decisions serving the city, the environment, or non-local visitors have taken precedence over the interests of community members. The writings that explain why parks are important to their local communities demonstrate the danger of restricting community access to such parks. Some scholars also make a case for how such interests can be reconciled in parks to benefit multiple groups. Since many groups and actors have long held a stake in Jackson Park, these strategies might offer a vision of how Jackson Park can overcome its conflicts of interest so that groups such as local park users are not consistently left out.



## Community Benefits of Public Parks

Parks are important to urban residents because they offer a physical and mental respite from the rest of the city, which is so often crowded, dirty, and industrial. According to urban planners Alexander Garvin and Ronda Brands, parks are invaluable pieces of urban infrastructure that should enhance well-being and incubate civil society in a way that fulfills users' needs. City residents need places to relax and be social, and parks, as natural spaces, provide such services<sup>10</sup> Parks are especially valuable to residents of less prosperous neighborhoods. Peter Harnik claims that poorer neighborhoods, with higher population density, and fewer cars have a greater need for public parks because there is little open space, and residents are less able to travel to more distant parks.<sup>11</sup> Especially for Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore, Jackson Park is an integral community amenity within walking distance of most residents, making it easy to regularly use the space. As an urban planner focusing on parks, Harnik focuses on how a park fits in to its surrounding urban community. The consideration of a park's place in its surrounding community is important for Jackson Park because it is such a prominent park on the largely low-income South Side.

Another benefit of parks is that they can bring people together. Garvin and Brands argue that in good public parks, people of all races, classes, and social groups come together, which does not often happen in other urban locations. In order for this to occur, a park must provide a sufficient variety of resources and amenities to attract different types of users.<sup>12</sup> According to Harnik, it is also important for the park to attract the most local users so that it can best serve the community it is a part of. The park therefore must cater to local residents based on the

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Garvin and Ronda Brands, *Public Parks: The Key to Livable Communities*, (1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011): 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Harnik, *Urban Green: Innovative Parks for Resurgent Cities* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010): 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Garvin and Brands, 38.

demographics and social character of the area.<sup>13</sup> Because park planners cannot always accurately infer the needs and wants of local residents, the best way to shape a successful park, according to Liz Greenhalgh and Ken Worpole, is to foster community involvement in park decisions. When communities work with local authorities they can communicate what certain parks do best and how the park can be even better.<sup>14</sup> Jackson Park is missing a mechanism wherein community members can have a say in what happens to the park, which in part explains why their access to the park has been consistently threatened. Greenhalgh and Worpole studied partnerships between local administrators and community members and discovered that the most successful and popular parks heavily depended on an open, honest relationship and free information flow between community groups and park managers and developers. Also, in the successful cases, effort and commitment from various local residents and groups were integral to an effective partnership<sup>15</sup> This reiterates the importance of community involvement in the various conflicts of interest in Jackson Park's history, including the current strife between the Obama Foundation and the Community Benefits Agreement Coalition that is trying to be the voice of local communities in the future of Jackson Park. However, since Greenhalgh and Worpole wrote their study as government workers, they may be biased on what actions are most likely to produce benefit to the community. To see success, the Coalition may have to go beyond the seemingly simple communication tactics that the authors endorse.

### City Interests in Urban Parks

In addition to benefits to local communities, parks also have the potential to positively impact cities as a whole, which some theories posit to be the primary purpose of parks. One potential city-wide benefit is economic gain. Claudiu Cicea and Clorina Pîrlogea detail how

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<sup>13</sup> Harnik, 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Liz Greenhalgh, Ken Worpole, and Great Britain Dept. of the Environment, *People, Parks & Cities: A Guide to Current Good Practice in Urban Parks: A Report for the Department of the Environment* (London: HMSO, 1996): 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

property value, tourism, public health, and environmental protection translate to municipal economic value. For example, if more city residents use parks to exercise and spend time outdoors, the government experiences savings on a health budget due to these positive health effects.<sup>16</sup> In this case, the park benefits both its users and the city. Daniel Burnham, a major player involved in Chicago's early parks, including Jackson Park, wanted to create beautiful parks in order to appeal to and attract wealthy residents in order to bring new money to Chicago and retain rich taxpayers, spenders, and investors. This way of thought is part of the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth century, which sought to create a more functional city through aesthetics.<sup>17</sup> This use of parks to cultivate a sense of prestige for the city reflects the way in which the Obama library is seeking to make Jackson Park and Chicago a cultural destination.

Although parks can be beneficial to the economy of a city, focusing primarily on this aspect can be harmful to the park and its surrounding communities. Increased economic activity in certain areas, especially minority and low-income neighborhoods like Woodlawn and South Shore, can lead to gentrification and the displacement of residents. Major development in Jackson Park, especially projects like the Obama Presidential Center that are meant to bring in outside visitors and financing, puts local residents in an especially precarious situation. For Cicea and Pîrlogea, both economists, focusing on monetary impacts makes it much easier to ignore the ways in which prioritizing the economic value of parks can actually harm their surrounding communities. They claim that increased property values near green spaces denote a positive economic impact of public parks, which reveals their bias towards the city as a whole instead of local communities. Increased property values in a neighborhood can be extremely harmful to its

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<sup>16</sup> Claudiu Cicea and Corina Pîrlogea, "Green Spaces and Public Health in Urban Areas," *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management* 6, no. 1 (2011): 87.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Smith, *The Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 32.

residents, especially if it is a lower-income area, like Woodlawn by Jackson Park.<sup>18</sup> In Woodlawn, sixty to ninety-five percent of occupied housing units are renter-occupied, and rent increases may force locals who cannot afford higher rents to leave the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup> This is already a trend that local residents are worried about; in anticipation of the Obama Presidential Center, home values in Woodlawn already rose twenty-three percent in the beginning of 2017, which is currently a key concern of community advocates.<sup>20</sup>

### Environmental Impacts of Urban Parks

More science-based theories emphasize the environmental importance of urban parks. Diane Pataki et al describe how parks in cities can provide ecosystem services by offsetting greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating water pollution, and improving air quality.<sup>21</sup> A large urban park such as Jackson Park has the opportunity to deliver many such services. Urban parks can also specifically combat the effects of climate change. Ines Hrdalo, Dora Tomić, and Petra Pereković conducted a study in Croatia that provides potential conceptual solutions for climate change strategies. They claim that green areas in cities can mitigate the effects of urban heat by reducing the amount of black and grey groundcover, as well as alleviate flooding because green areas absorb a lot of rainwater.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of urban green spaces that these studies demonstrate underlines the environmental importance of Jackson Park, especially because of its key location between Lake Michigan and the city. However, parks can sometimes also be harmful to the environment.

Cicea and Pirlogea describe “ecosystem disservices” that parks have the potential to produce,

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<sup>18</sup> Cicea and Pirlogea, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Emma Scotty, “Jackson Park and Surrounding Areas,” map, Social Explorer, October 19, 2017, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/bb6b057416/edit>.

<sup>20</sup> Sam Cholke “Woodlawn Home Values Soar As Obama Library Draws New Interest To Area,” *DNAinfo Chicago*, September 12, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Pataki et al., “Coupling Biogeochemical Cycles in Urban Environments,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 9, no.1 (2011): 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ines Hrdalo, Dora Tomić, and Petra Pereković, “Implementation of Green Infrastructure Principles in Dubrovnik, Croatia to Minimize Climate Change Problems,” *Urbani Izziv* 26, (2015): S44.

such as the possibility of invasive species and increased greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>23</sup> Parks, especially in urban areas, are not always completely natural. Many have been constructed using unnatural materials and non-native species. In Jackson Park, the original design created ecosystem disservices, because it removed native plants, a problem that the recent restoration attempted to resolve. The fact that both these groups of authors are ecologists indicates that they are less likely to consider other urban and community issues that are often the priorities of park planners and other scholars. Environmental concerns related to public parks are not always the primary interest in terms of parks, but as climate change continues to affect parks and cities, preserving healthy natural spaces becomes more important in order to protect species and keep urban areas livable.

#### Reconciling Opposing Park Interests

Because so many park theories favor one interest or another, there is also a body of work that focuses on ways to reconcile competing interests when it comes to public parks. Patricia O'Donnell and Gregory De Vries, two of the landscape managers involved in the Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Restoration project, analyze how the project attempted to create a balance between community uses, the environment, and historical significance of Jackson Park.<sup>24</sup> Although their analysis slightly idealizes the harmony of Jackson Park, (which makes sense as they were active in the restoration) their theory that keeping several varied park interests in mind when making park decisions is valuable for evaluating Jackson Park's evolution in terms of conflicts of interest. Especially in Jackson Park, it is important to consider the park's many objectives so that the park can serve multiple interests. Also, O'Donnell and De Vries' claim that interdisciplinary collaboration allowed for Jackson Park to successfully function as an

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<sup>23</sup> Pataki et al., 28.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Marie O'Donnell and Gregory Wade De Vries, "Entangled Culture and Nature: Toward a Sustainable Jackson Park in the Twenty-First Century," *Change Over Time* 5, no. 2 (2015): 250.

entanglement of varied interests can provide guidance for methods to create agreements regarding the park. In order for such collaboration to fully succeed, however, the restoration would have had to include direct input from community users of Jackson Park. Without community input, decision-makers are not guaranteed to understand the park user's needs, leading to a park that does not fully serve the community.

The failure to meaningfully incorporate environmental protection and social park use can lead to the failure of the park itself. Urban planners David Saurí, Marc Parés, and Elena Domene focus on the coexistence of environmental sustainability and social justice in public green spaces. Comparing two parks that had opposite approaches in terms of integration of interests, they demonstrate the danger of focusing too heavily on the environmental aspect of a park and not considering local use. The Parc Joan Miró incorporated natural space while also providing activities and amenities for many different types of park users, whereas the Parc de Diagonal Mar focused on sustainability, but did not include many elements catered towards actual park users.<sup>25</sup> Parc de Diagonal Mar, which attracted few visitors and did not facilitate social interaction, was criticized by the public and considered a social failure by urban planners. Such criticism made its success in sustainability much less relevant.<sup>26</sup> This comparison demonstrates that acting on a single interest does not always create a successful park, and ignoring park users' needs can have very negative impacts. By heeding the authors' advice, we can better determine how Jackson Park can be successful by integrating multiple interests.

## **The Conception and Design of Jackson Park**

### **Olmsted and the South Park Commission**

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<sup>25</sup> David Saurí, Marc Parés, and Elena Domene, "Changing Conceptions of Sustainability in Barcelona's Public Parks," *Geographical Review* 99, no. 1 (2009): 30-32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Part of the reason that Jackson Park was established was, in accordance with the City Beautiful movement, to attract wealthy residents to the South Side of Chicago. This started a tradition of the park catering to the wealthy that continued for decades. The land that would become Jackson Park was originally designated by a bill passed in 1869, which established the North, West, and South Park Commissions in and around Chicago. At the time, most of the area on the present-day South Side of the city consisted of suburbs and townships, including Hyde Park. The bill establishing the commissions had a strong supporter in Paul Cornell, a prominent Hyde Park real estate developer, since a robust park system would have brought many investors to Hyde Park. Cornell's support reveals that one of the very first interests in Jackson Park was to use the park for economic purposes. As an important investor, he was able to vouch for his own interests, at least in establishing a large park in his area. In 1870, the South Park Commission hired Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux to design South Park, which included the present-day Jackson Park, Washington Park, and Midway.<sup>27</sup>

The land that they were working with was not ideal; the ground was swampy and ill-suited for the type of towering trees that Olmsted wanted to include, winds off the lake swept over the landscape, and the prairie ecosystem was not Olmsted's idea of picturesque. This did not stop the pair from creating an impressive design. Laid out in 1871, the South Park plan included dredging the lakefront swamp and creating a lagoon that flowed from Lake Michigan through the Midway Plaisance and into Washington Park, areas of open meadow and shaded forest, and imported animals like bison and bears to roam the park.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, Olmsted was unable to carry out his plan in its entirety because the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 destroyed the South Park Commissioners' office and all of their

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<sup>27</sup> Victoria Post Ranney, *Olmsted in Chicago* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley: [sold by Kroch & Bretano], 1972): 16-26.

<sup>28</sup> Olmsted and Vaux Firm., *Report Accompanying Plan for Laying out the South Park* (Chicago: Evening Journal, Book and Job Printing House, 46 Dearborn St., 1871).

documents. When the office had recovered, they set an abridged plan into construction, avoiding “extensive alterations of the natural surface,” which constituted the core of Olmsted’s plan.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the South Park system began its life as a public park. During the 1870s and 1880s, crowds flocked to Washington and Jackson Parks. The wealthy traversed the parks’ boulevards in their carriages, and lower-class workers and immigrants walked to the parks or took streetcars from other areas of the city.<sup>30</sup> In these days, Jackson Park was a popular and inclusive park, bringing together Chicagoans of all classes and nationalities. However, the future of Jackson Park was about to experience a dramatic change, one that would change the fate of the park for years to come.

### The World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893

The World’s Columbian Exposition, probably the most well known part of Jackson Park’s history, was also Chicago’s original use of Jackson Park to bring prestige to the city as a whole. The event, which showed off Chicago’s progress since the Great Fire two decades earlier, co-opted the site of Jackson Park as the stage for the World’s Fair.<sup>31</sup> When preparing for the Exposition, which was to be held in Chicago for the anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the New World, Expo commissioners turned to Olmsted to design the fairgrounds. The proposed sites for the Exposition consisted of most of Chicago’s major North, West, and South parks, including present-day Grant Park, Lincoln Park, and Jackson Park. Olmsted was initially opposed to Jackson Park as the fairground site, noting the swampy land and lack of a view of the lake. However, Jackson Park was eventually chosen due in part to its easy access to public

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<sup>29</sup> Ranney, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 33-35.

<sup>31</sup> Robert W. Rydell, “World’s Columbian Exposition,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1386.html>.



transport to the rest of the city. This decision leaves little question that commissioners sought visitors from all over the city and world. In 1890, Olmsted began his design for the fairgrounds.<sup>32</sup>

Most of Jackson Park, by 1890, had not been altered or improved from its original state. Olmsted turned back to his original plan of lagoons and tall, grand trees, and he set about creating an immersive, full-experience park for the Exposition. Work began on dredging the lagoons and using the excess earth to build the Wooded Island, which would be a fourteen-acre respite from the surrounding fair buildings.<sup>33</sup> The winding lagoons and paths would create a contemplative sense of nature, which is somewhat ironic because of how much the natural landscape of the park had to be altered.

An 1893 article from *Science* describes “Some Geological Features of Jackson Park” and how different they are from surrounding natural landscapes. The author, D. E. Willard, calls the old Jackson Park a “wild and unimproved morass,” quite different from the meticulously designed “natural” space Olmsted finished with. Willard also describes a grove of large oaks and a “complicated series of ridges and lagoons” in Jackson Park that differ significantly from native Lake Michigan landscapes.<sup>34</sup> These distinctions demonstrate how, after only three years of work on the site, Olmsted and his team were able to almost completely transform the landscape of Jackson Park in order to deliberately craft an environment that fit their purposes. The well being of local flora and fauna, therefore, was not Olmsted’s priority when designing this park, something that the Jackson Park restoration project will attempt to reconcile with over a century later.

The Columbian Exposition of 1893 was a significant milestone in the development of Chicago as a major urban center. Having recovered from the Great Chicago Fire, the city was

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<sup>32</sup> David Schuyler, “Frederick Law Olmsted and the World’s Columbian Exposition,” *Journal of Planning History* 15, no. 1 (February 2016): 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 7-9.

<sup>34</sup> D. E. Willard, “Some Geological Features of Jackson Park, Chicago,” *Science* 22, no. 566 (1893): 309.

marking its place as an influential metropolis. The Exposition, therefore, was intended to showcase Chicago's greatness in arts, culture, and science.<sup>35</sup> Olmsted's landscape then, showed the world the greatness of America's, and especially Chicago's parks. The purpose of Jackson Park, in this moment, was to elevate Chicago's status. Olmsted himself noted "the conviction is coming to be prevalent that [a park] practically affects the prestige of a city."<sup>36</sup> Knowing the key role parks would play in Chicago's prestige, Olmsted designed the fairgrounds to be especially striking. The Wooded Island, the defining feature of the site, was purposely designed with a certain aesthetic that would inform visitors' experiences. Olmsted was adamant that no structures be built on the island so that it would be a natural contrast to the large, white, Beaux-Arts fair buildings. He brought in countless species of plants to create a varied environment that exuded "mystery and poetry."<sup>37</sup>

Olmsted also sought to enliven attendees' experience by creating opportunities for recreation, such as boating on the lagoons. He had gondolas built in Venice, commissioned replicas of Columbus' ships, and even hired musicians to wander and perform throughout the crowds. He also demanded that no unsightly steamers and advertising boats traverse the lake during the fair.<sup>38</sup> The total environment of the "White City," as the fairgrounds were called, succeeded in Olmsted's vision as a landscape that is "essential to the physical health and psychological well-being of residents of cities."<sup>39</sup>

The Columbian Exposition attracted millions of visitors, including many working-class Chicagoans, but the purpose of the fair—to showcase Chicago as a global city—meant that the

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<sup>35</sup> Rydell, "World's Columbian Exposition."

<sup>36</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Last Great Projects*, vol. 9 of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 125.

<sup>37</sup> David Schuyler, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the World's Columbian Exposition," *Journal of Planning History* 15, no. 1 (February 2016): 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ranney, 37-38.

<sup>39</sup> Schuyler, 22.

fair largely sought to attract foreign, wealthy, and important visitors.<sup>40</sup> This meant that Olmsted's designs and flourishes were mainly meant to impress the well-to-do, not provide an open space for ordinary local residents. The fair took up the entire park space, as seen in Figure 1, and admission cost 50 cents, which would have restricted access, and especially daily use, of the park.<sup>41</sup> This created a precedent for lack of community access in Jackson Park.

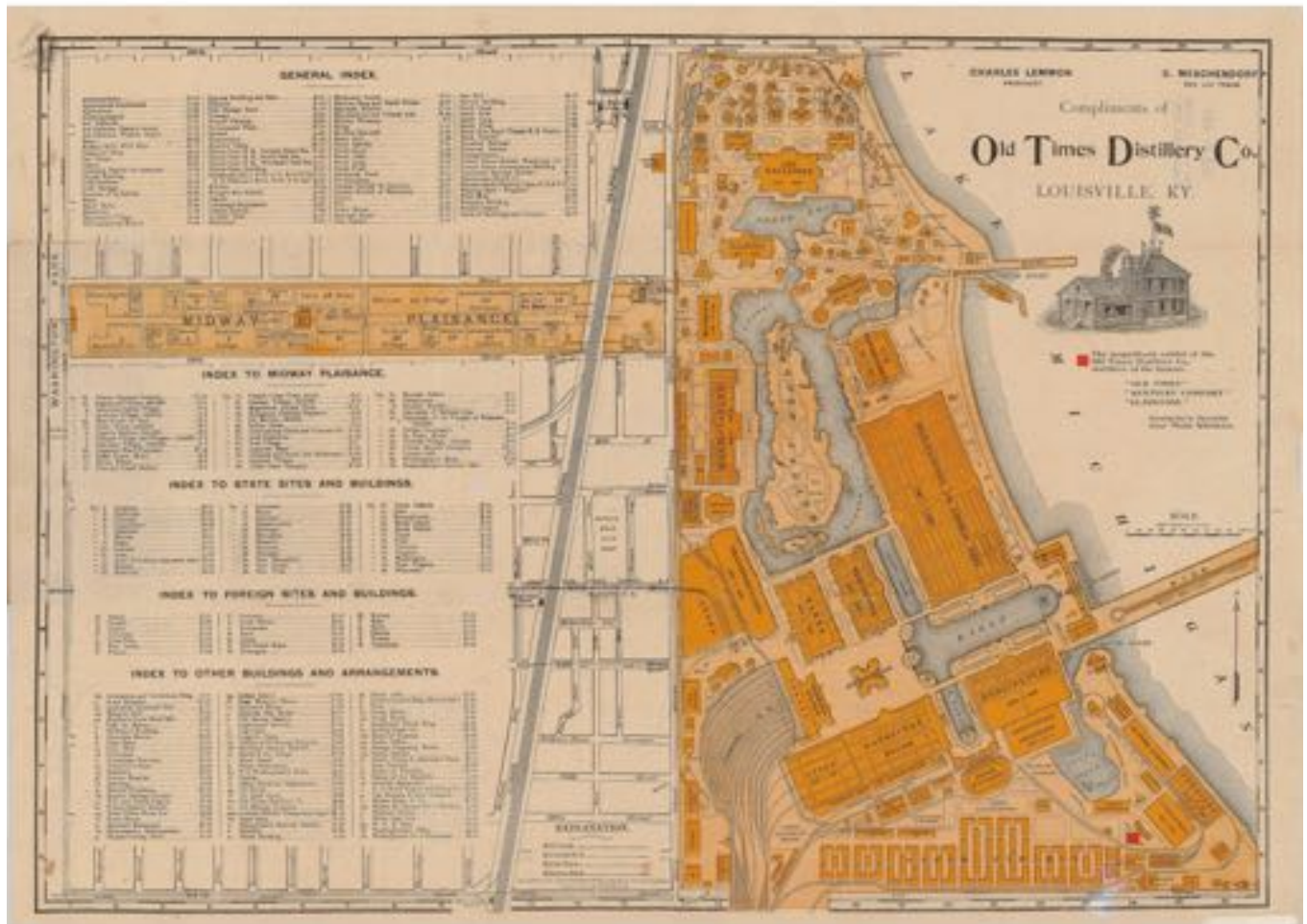


Figure 2: Rand McNally Map of World's Columbian Fairgrounds, 1892<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Rydell, "World's Columbian Exposition."

<sup>41</sup> Stuart C. Wade and Walter S. Wrenn, *The Nut Shell: The Ideal Pocket Guide to the World's Fair and What to See There: Every Important Exhibit or Sight Accurately Located with Ground Plans* (Chicago: The Merchants' World's Fair Bureau of Information Company, 1893) *Smithsonian Collections Online* (accessed February 2, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Rand McNally and Company, *World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1892).

## The Legacy of the White City

Although almost all of the fair buildings from the Columbian Exposition were destroyed after the fair was over, the Exposition left a lasting impact on Jackson Park. Olmsted's landscape has persisted and makes Jackson Park a historical artifact. The Museum of Science and Industry, housed in a remaining fair building, is a major factor of attraction to the park. The use of Jackson Park to bring attention and prestige to Chicago also did not end with the Columbian Exposition; the future of the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park mirrors the intentions of the Exposition, and has the potential to completely change the fate of the park. For example, Olmsted himself noted that most Chicagoans saw Jackson Park not as a "park for the whole future people of Chicago," but instead as "promoting the interests of the owners of certain real estate in a particular part of the present city."<sup>43</sup> Olmsted's quote reveals that economic interests eclipsed those of park users when it came to Jackson Park, over a century before economic development and local park use would butt heads at the site of the OPC.

## Jackson Park in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Major points of contestation in Jackson Park in the twentieth century involved proposed changes that threatened to decrease park land and park access for the community. Two disputed proposals are the storage of Nike Missiles on parkland and the reconstruction of Lake Shore Drive within the park. The city and nation wanted to use Jackson Park as a tool to increase the political and economic prowess of Chicago, instead of using the park as a community resource. Both examples featured strong dissent from the public, and through protests they were able to protect at least some of the park.

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<sup>43</sup> Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 773.

## Nike Missile Storage in Jackson Park

During the Cold War, the U.S. Army leased parkland from the Chicago Park District on several sites throughout the city, especially on the lakefront. These missiles, some of which were equipped to carry nuclear warheads, were meant to defend Chicago, as a major industrial city, from possible nuclear attack. In 1956, there were three sites set aside for missiles in Jackson Park, totaling 22.4 acres of parkland.<sup>44</sup> One of the leased sites was Jackson Park's Wooded Island, which caused mass uproar within the community, including a protest of the Park District and U.S. Army.<sup>45</sup> The appropriation of a historical and locally significant natural space, without the community's consent, for national defense purposes demonstrates a clear violation of the community's interest in Jackson Park. The missiles were declared obsolete by 1958, and according to the Hyde Park Herald, they were never viable as civil defense, but instead merely served as Cold-War fear-mongering tools.<sup>46</sup> With the decision to sell parkland to the Army, the Chicago Park District compromised the park and the community in favor of a display of military power that restricted local access to Jackson Park.



*Figure 3: Primary location of missile sites in and near Jackson Park.*<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Park District Backs Nike Transfer: Background of Army-Park Arrangement," *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), May 29, 1956.

<sup>45</sup> Charlotte Des Jardins, "Another battle for park land that was lost," *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), July 13, 1966.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Ed Thelen, "Nike Missile Site C-41 - Promontory Point - Jackson Park, Chicago IL - Michael Epperson," June 27, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090627031850/http://m-epperson.home.comcast.net:80/~m-epperson/nike/>.

Faced with the threat of losing a key part of their local park, community members led by the wife of Alderman Leon Despres enacted mass protest, writing letters to and negotiating with both the Park District and the Army. After a month of protests, the Park District and Army announced that the missiles would be relocated off of the Wooded Island.<sup>48</sup> While this was lauded as a victory, the celebrations were short-lived when the missiles were set to move to Promontory Point, another popular public space. A new round of protests, which included suggestions of alternate sites and campaigns. Alderman Robert Merriam led a press for change in City Council and Representative Barratt O'Hara did the same in Congress. However, these movements were unsuccessful, and the missiles were installed at Promontory Point.<sup>49</sup> Along with the construction of the missiles, many trees within the park had to be cut down to create a clear line of site for the missiles and the radar tower. According to the Hyde Park Herald, the "couple hundred" trees removed were mainly "mature and stately elms and poplar," so the trees could have been the same that Olmsted planted for the Columbian Exposition, which further exacerbates the Army's intrusion into the park.<sup>50</sup> The missile towers took up a substantial amount of the parkland, and constant Army presence restricted the free traffic of park visitors. The maintenance of the site contributed to continual environmental damage. Debris and vehicle tracks constantly marked parkland, and vehicles put park visitors' lives in danger.<sup>51</sup>

By 1969, the missiles were still located on Promontory Point. Community members worried about the potential for a nuclear accident within the park. An editorial in the Hyde Park Herald in the same year demanded that the U.S. government remove the missiles, saying, "the

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<sup>48</sup> Des Jardins, "Another battle for park land that was lost."

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Harvey S. Perloff, "Park Trees Felled in Nike Deal," *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), October 19, 1955.

<sup>51</sup> Des Jardins, "Another battle for park land that was lost."

people of this community have shouted long and loud to have the missiles as well as the radar site, removed and no action has been taken.”<sup>52</sup>

The long-term use of parkland for national defense purposes marks a notable instance when the community’s interests in Jackson Park were pushed aside in favor of broader interests. Community members were explicit about what they wanted to happen with Jackson Park, but the Park District ignored their interests in favor of those of the U.S. Army. This in part reflects the political climate of the time. Cold War-era fears of nuclear attack might make defense missiles seem like a valuable use of parkland. Alternately, the almost one hundred thousand dollars that the Army paid for the land in Jackson Park could have been a sufficient incentive despite community outrage.<sup>53</sup> Either way, the end result was damage to the natural environment of Jackson Park, restricted public use of parklands, and community anger and disappointment. This example is a demonstration of how ignoring community interests in Jackson Park led to negative impacts not only for the community, but for the natural environment of the park as a whole.

However, the community did gain one small victory in the fight to have their interests represented during this saga. Public protest succeeded in preventing the missiles from being installed on the Wooded Island. This indicates that organized and energized community action can be successful in making the community voice heard during decisions about Jackson Park. Because similar organized protests are currently going on surrounding the Obama library, this could be a good sign for the future of community interests in today’s Jackson Park.

### The Expansion of Lake Shore Drive

Another conflict between community members and the city administration came during the 1960s, when the Mayor Richard J. Daley announced highway construction running straight

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<sup>52</sup> “Missiles must go,” *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), February 19, 1969.

<sup>53</sup> “Park District Backs Nike Transfer.”

through Jackson Park. The planned expansion of Lake Shore Drive (Figure 4) would have widened the road from 47<sup>th</sup> to 67<sup>th</sup> Streets, with part of the eight-lane highway cutting across Jackson Park near the Museum of Science and Industry.<sup>54</sup> By running a major thoroughfare through the park, the city threatened to drastically reduce community access to the park. Not only would parkland and flora be removed, but the traffic from a 200-foot wide road in the middle of the park would make it much more dangerous and more difficult for people to enter the park, especially on foot.<sup>55</sup>

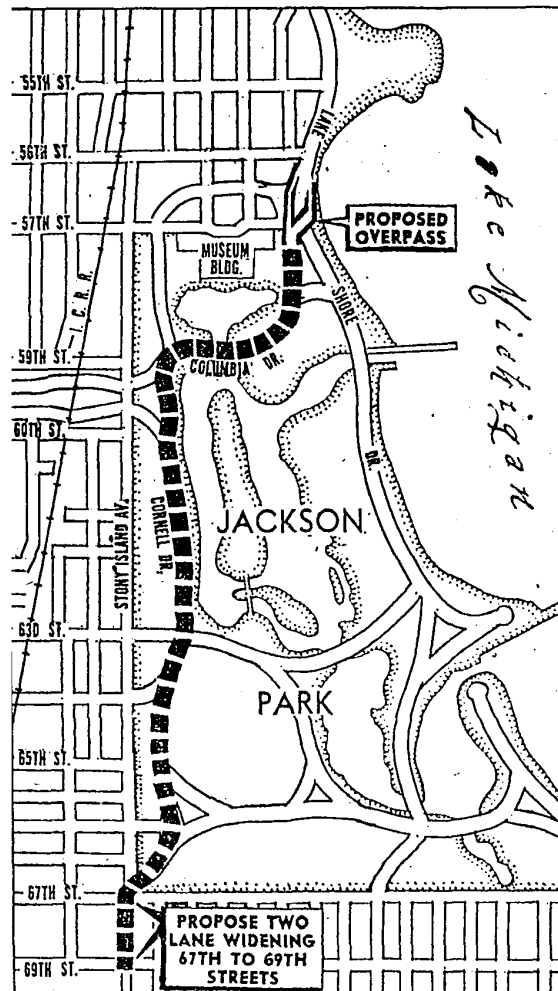


Figure 4: Original Lake Shore Drive Proposal<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Lois Wille, *Forever Open, Clear, and Free: The Struggle for Chicago's Lakefront* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 121.

<sup>55</sup> "The Burnham Committee's battle of the trees," *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), July 13, 1966.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Kotulak, "See New Lake Shore Overpass on S. Side: Lake Shore Dr. Proposal to Go Before Council," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 21, 1960.



As Figure 4 shows, with six lanes of traffic on the north and west borders of Jackson Park and no easy way for pedestrians to cross over, the only safe way for park users to enter was from the south, which severely limited local access to Jackson Park.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the busy overpass and six-lane expansion of Cornell Drive would also disrupt the peace and quiet of Jackson Park. Mayor Daley's decision jeopardized the community's access to Jackson Park, instead prioritizing drivers in and around Chicago. The proposed changes would have altered Lake Shore Drive in order to reduce traffic and service greater numbers of cars. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, over 25,000 cars per day used 57<sup>th</sup> Street to exit Lake Shore Drive, creating congestion within Hyde Park.<sup>58</sup> Although it was important for the city to address these traffic problems, the *Hyde Park Herald* pointed out in 1965 that there were alternate solutions that would not affect Jackson Park, such as diverting traffic onto Stony Island Avenue.<sup>59</sup> By choosing to expand Lake Shore Drive, the city administration made a decision that would have strongly decreased local access to Jackson Park. However, the community of Jackson Park users and activists was not complacent with this proposal, and engaged in a dedicated protest effort that did eventually change the fate of the park.

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<sup>57</sup> Kotulak, "See New Lake Shore Overpass"

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

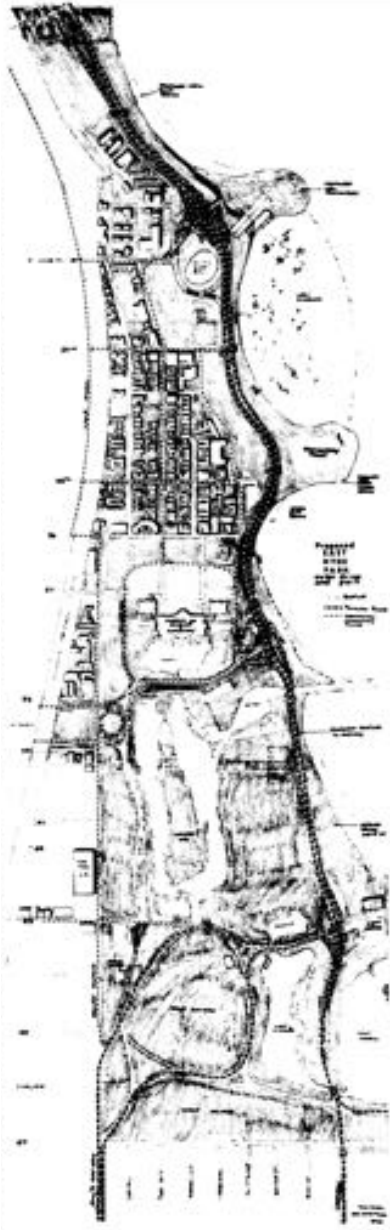


Figure 5: *Alternate plan for Lake Shore Drive expansion, proposed by the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference*<sup>61</sup>



Figure 6: *Lake Shore Drive and Jackson Park Today*<sup>60</sup>

Backlash to the city’s plan for Lake Shore Drive was immediate and widespread. The alderman of the 5th ward, Leon Despres, according to the Hyde Park Herald, called the proposal

<sup>60</sup> “Jackson Park,” Google Maps, accessed April 4, 2018, <https://www.google.com/maps/@41.7930655,-87.5869036,14.04z>.

<sup>61</sup> “Alternate proposals offered for Outer Drive changes,” *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), March 4, 1964.

“civicide.”<sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup> Because Jackson Park is such an important part of public life for surrounding communities, reducing people’s ability to use the park threatened the civic environment of the area. This condemnation indicates that the community saw the Drive plan as a threat to Chicago and its residents, especially those near Jackson Park. Several community groups took action to prevent the destruction of parkland, including the conservation group the Daniel Burnham Committee and the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference. In 1964, Ezra Gordon of the Hyde-Park Kenwood Conference drafted an alternate plan for street alterations. Gordon’s proposal (Figure 5) kept heavy traffic on the eastern border of Jackson Park, without a major overpass onto Cornell Drive.<sup>64</sup> As Figure 6 shows, the current configuration of Jackson Park and its roadways remains similar to the Conference’s proposal.<sup>65</sup> The persistent action of such community groups eventually resulted in a plan somewhat consistent with what the community wanted.

However, this result required months of action to be realized. When construction began in 1965 and city workers began to zone trees within Jackson Park for removal, Burnham Committee members and other activists started counter-action by tying bedsheets around trees “to call attention to the vastness of the destruction.”<sup>66</sup> The Burnham Committee also led a 100-person march on Mayor Daley’s and Senator Paul Douglas’ homes.<sup>67</sup> In addition to conspicuous protests, community members made thousands of phone calls to city officials to voice their opposition to the road expansion.<sup>68</sup> The way that protesters appealed to both individual authorities and broader community action made the protest movement against Lake Shore Drive expansion impactful. According to Emily Talen, this duality is key to community sovereignty.

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<sup>62</sup> The 5th ward contains a wide swath of the neighborhoods surrounding Jackson Park, including much of Hyde Park and South Shore.

<sup>63</sup> “New Drive Plan Due,” *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), November 10, 1965.

<sup>64</sup> “Alternate proposals offered for Outer Drive changes.”

<sup>65</sup> Google Maps.

<sup>66</sup> “The Burnham Committee’s battle of the trees.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> “The Burnham Committee’s battle of the trees.”

Neighborhood organizers like the Lake Shore Drive protesters needed to be able to work within the administration system of the city and the Park District. The activists, like most residents unable to make the decisions about their own communities, “were caught between grass-roots organizing and bureaucratic maneuvering—and they needed to be good at both.”<sup>69</sup> Fortunately for Jackson Park, these organizers were good at both. The eye-catching protest mechanisms that activists organized attracted public attention, while incessant pressure on lawmakers eventually pushed the city to backtrack on construction plans.

Another such dramatic protest occurred in September of 1965, when several activists were arrested for refusing to move away from trees that were about to be cut down. More were arrested for “banding” trees in protest.<sup>70</sup> The Burnham Committee and other community members continued to pressure the city and the mayor until October, when Daley agreed to have an outside team of architects re-review Lake Shore Drive and Jackson Park.<sup>71</sup> The fact that the mayor did eventually concede to community demand speaks to the efficacy of persistent and prolonged protest effort when it comes to Jackson Park. This was not an outright victory for the community, however. By the time Daley halted work to review the proposal, over one thousand mature trees had already been removed from the park.<sup>72</sup> The city’s final decision was to widen and redirect Cornell Drive instead of constructing eight lanes of Lake Shore Drive, a plan which the Burnham Committee approved, since the new road would not disrupt the park as much as a major highway through park land.<sup>73</sup> In the end, Jackson Park was not completely protected. The city had destroyed swaths of trees and introduced more traffic into the park. However, through

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<sup>69</sup> Talen, 8.

<sup>70</sup> “The Burnham Committee’s battle of the trees.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “The Burnham Committee’s battle of the trees.”

sustained community action, local residents were able to walk back some of the threats that the park had faced and change the city's plan for Jackson Park development.

The Lake Shore Drive incident can provide both hope and strategy for threats that Jackson Park and its community faces currently. With the Obama Presidential Center soon landing in the middle of Jackson Park just as Lake Shore Drive would have, community members are currently engaged in similar types of activism. The protests surrounding the Lake Shore Drive expansion called attention to their cause through conspicuous demonstrations and also made their demands clear to the city and park authorities. If activists protesting the effects of the OPC continue demonstrating and perhaps emulate the methods of the Lake Shore Drive protesters, it is possible that today's protesters could experience a similar level of success in making sure that Jackson Park remains a place for the people.

### **The Present and Future of Jackson Park**

#### **Ecological Restoration**

In 2014 work began on the Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Restoration of Jackson Park. The restoration attempted to reconcile the park's opposing interests while returning the state of the park to Olmsted's original vision. However, the restoration focused largely on environmental impacts, sometimes disregarding community interests and concerns. The restoration study conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (who oversaw the restoration) identified the "main problems at Jackson Park," which were entirely about plant and animal life.<sup>74</sup> The study was based on the main goal of "restoring self-sustaining native plant communities within Jackson Park."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The problems listed were "unnatural hydrogeomorphic conditions that promote invasive species success, fragmentation of inter and intra site habitat patches, absence of submergent aquatic beds (macrophytes/hydrophytes), absence of species rich coastal plant communities, absence of rare and sensitive coastal plant and animal species, lack of critical habitat for locally endangered and rare fauna, and lack of migratory bird resting and forage habitats," U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Jackson Park Section 506 Great Lakes Fishery & Ecosystem Restoration Study," Chicago District UCACE (Chicago, IL), 2014, i,

The fact that the project focused so heavily on the natural environment does not automatically signify that the community was being left out; maintaining natural environments is often beneficial to human populations. However, the community did voice concerns that changes to the park would exclude users. Jackson Park Watch, an organization of concerned community members, questioned whether or not the changes would restrict community access to the park and recreational facilities.<sup>76</sup> The project did restrict access to the park while underway. Figure 7 shows the areas of Jackson Park that were restored, which gives an idea of the extent of park land that was off-limits from 2014 through 2016. In 2015, the Army Corps of Engineers indicated that the Wooded Island in Jackson Park could remain closed for up to five more years.<sup>77</sup> While the Wooded Island eventually reopened in fall 2016, the local park users did face a significant restriction to their access to the park. Additionally, the removal of invasive fish species, which the project report stressed as an important part of the restoration, had the unintended effect of removing a popular mode of recreation. Many locals enjoyed fishing these invasive species that the restoration completely killed off. A *Hyde Park Herald* editorial questioned the decision to remove fish species that are “happily fished by families throughout the season.”<sup>78</sup> The restoration project did not reach out to the community for input in the project because the restoration focused largely on the park’s ecology. However, Jackson Park exists as a community resource as well as a natural area, and the inadvertent disruption of recreational fishing marks yet another instance where outside entities shaped the park with little regard to the needs of the community.

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[http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/Portals/36/docs/projects/Jackson%20Park/Jackson\\_Park\\_2014\\_04\\_10\\_Draft%20Project%20Report%20and%20Environmental%20Assessment.pdf](http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/Portals/36/docs/projects/Jackson%20Park/Jackson_Park_2014_04_10_Draft%20Project%20Report%20and%20Environmental%20Assessment.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Jackson Park Watch, “Community Concerns,” Jackson Park Watch, August 7, 2016,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160807045516/http://jacksonparkwatch.org/community-concerns/>.

<sup>77</sup> Sam Cholke, “Jackson Park’s Wooded Island Could Stay Closed for Up to Five Years,” *DNAinfo Chicago* (Chicago, IL), April 22, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> “Considering the Jackson Park Fishkill,” editorial, *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), August 26, 2014.



Figure 7: “Vicinity Map of the Jackson Park Showing Study Area”<sup>79</sup>

Although the restoration did impede recreational use of the park, it also sought to create a balance between nature and culture. O’Donnell and De Vries, who both worked as head architects and planners with Heritage Landscapes, LLC as part of the restoration project, acknowledge the difficulties encountered by community and social users of Jackson Park when faced with environmental interests. Their study notes “in previous projects addressing historically valuable landscapes, the tension between values of nature/ecology and those of cultural/historic assets often yields an unbalanced outcome, with one aspect dominant over another.”<sup>80</sup> We have already seen cultural uses of Jackson Park jeopardized in the past, so this difficulty in balancing aspects of the park is clearly an issue with the park. Because Jackson Park

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, “Jackson Park Section 506 Great Lakes Fishery & Ecosystem Restoration Study,” 5.

<sup>80</sup> O’Donnell and De Vries, 249.

is so important in a historical and ecological sense, it can be easy for park decisions to disregard actual community interests. O'Donnell and De Vries are correct in noting that aspects of Jackson Park often emerge dominant over others. Particularly, the aspect that has most often been dominated is the community's stake in the park. "Values of nature/ecology" represents only one of many opposing interests that are vying for a say in Jackson Park, which puts local park users at risk.

O'Donnell and De Vries attribute the success of the restoration to interdisciplinary efforts involving "the expertise of a state agency, municipal government departments, a nongovernmental organization, and a private sector firm."<sup>81</sup> These groups were the Chicago Park District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Project 120, and Heritage Landscapes.<sup>82</sup> While the different backgrounds of these groups likely allowed the project to integrate the interests of sustainability, the city, and the history of the park, none of these groups included community members or input. Even when attempting to reconcile all of Jackson Park's interests, this project failed to include community input, leaving the community yet again in danger of relinquishing their interests in the park.

The ecological restoration of Jackson Park demonstrates how many entities have been pushing for changes to the park, often overpowering local interests. Although the restoration project was completed with community use in mind and did not ultimately result in many permanent limitations, this period of change and uncertainty heightens concern towards upcoming changes because the community has been unsure of their ability to use Jackson Park. Local park users were nearly powerless during the restoration process. The fact that the community for months did not know if the park would be closed for several years demonstrates

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<sup>81</sup> O'Donnell and De Vries, 251.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 250.



their lack of inclusion in recent Jackson Park projects and decisions. This sense of powerlessness helps explain the aura of doubt around Jackson Park, especially considering upcoming projects. After a few years of uncertainty and restriction to the park, more proposals currently threaten the community's access to Jackson Park.

### Phoenix Pavilion and Music Court



*Figure 8: Bird's eye view of the new Phoenix Pavilion & Music Court Area.*<sup>83</sup>

Jackson Park faced more turmoil with proposals from a group called Project 120. Project 120 is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that seeks to revitalize the South Parks (Jackson Park, Washington Park, and the Midway Plaisance). The organization is made up of philanthropists, landscape architects, and construction planners.<sup>84</sup> Project 120 has caused community controversy with their proposal for the Phoenix Music Pavilion and Great Lawn. Since the announcement of the Obama Presidential Center, Project 120 has not made any advancements with this plan, but

<sup>83</sup> "The Phoenix Pavilion & Music Court," Project 120 Chicago, accessed February 23, 2018, [http://www.project120chicago.org/plans\\_projects/pavilion-music-court](http://www.project120chicago.org/plans_projects/pavilion-music-court).

<sup>84</sup> "FAQs-Project 120," Project 120 Chicago, accessed April 4, 2018, <http://www.project120chicago.org/p120/frequently-asked-questions>.

the original proposal (Figure 8), would have included exhibit space, a café, meeting room, and outdoor amphitheater.<sup>85</sup> The pavilion, as seen in Figure 8, would be located on one of Jackson Park's lagoons and its harbor. The addition of a large venue in the middle of Jackson Park would have greatly altered the current use of the park, which has caused community concern.

Jackson Park Watch, which was founded by two Hyde Park residents in order to protect Jackson Park from development that they considered detrimental to the park and the surrounding community.<sup>86</sup> JPW expressed concerns over the environmental impact of the Phoenix Pavilion, noise pollution for local residents, and the removal of existing recreational facilities.<sup>87</sup> Local users of Jackson Park had not asked for a music venue, and construction of the Phoenix Pavilion would have taken away ways that people currently interact with the park. Although this project was not and perhaps will not be realized, the most troubling element of this story is the fact that Project 120 was granted permission to move to advanced planning stages without any public input. JPW discovered in 2016 that in 2014 the Chicago Park District CEO Michael Kelly and Project 120's president Robert Karr had signed a secret agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing a partnership between the two bodies.<sup>88</sup> The MOU determined that "Project 120 and the Park District are working together in a civic public-private partnership to develop and implement plans with the community to revitalize and celebrate Jackson Park" in order to "more efficiently and effectively partner on projects to revitalize Jackson Park."<sup>89</sup> Notably, this partnership does not include any community input or even public

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<sup>85</sup> <sup>85</sup> "FAQs-Project 120," Project 120 Chicago.

<sup>86</sup> "Pavilion Music Venue," Jackson Park Watch, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://jacksonparkwatch.org/pavilionmusic-venue/>.

<sup>87</sup> "Community Concerns," Jackson Park Watch, August 7, 2016, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160807045516/http://jacksonparkwatch.org/community-concerns/>.

<sup>88</sup> "Pavilion Music Venue," Jackson Park Watch.

<sup>89</sup> Chicago Park District and Project 120 Chicago, "Memorandum of Understanding," June 10, 2014, <http://jacksonparkwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MOU-Project-120-Jackson-Park-Final.pdf>.

knowledge. The two parties made the agreement without approval from the appointed Park District Board and without notifying the public.<sup>90</sup>

The Park District's secret partnership with Project 120 reveals that they are more dedicated to seeing through projects, like the Phoenix Pavilion, that would bring prestige and increased visitors to Jackson Park and Chicago. Project 120 intends to emulate an original Phoenix Pavilion from the 1893 Columbian Exposition. The Japanese Phoenix Pavilion, according to Project 120, inspired many fair visitors.<sup>91</sup> By recreating the glory days of Jackson Park, Project 120 hopes to attract "Chicagoans and visitors alike," which indicates that the park would be meant to attract wider ranges of visitors, thus increasing Jackson Park's prominence in Chicago. The prioritization of outside visitors largely leaves out the interests of the community of local park users. The Park District and Project 120 might have known that the public would not be entirely on board with its proposed projects, so they concealed their partnership in order to facilitate their venture. Unlike other examples, in this case major decision-makers such as the Park District purposely silenced the public, an action which backfired due to Jackson Park Watch. In this instance, the public's interests were clearly and deliberately put behind those of the city and Project 120. While these actors wanted to elevate the status of Jackson Park to attract more visitors and prestige, the future of the Phoenix Pavilion project is currently on hold. With the decision to build the OPC in Jackson Park, Project 120's endeavors seemed to cease. However, the projects that the group was planning showed intent to disregard the interests of local Jackson Park users, which by now has become an ongoing theme in Jackson Park.

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<sup>90</sup> Pavilion Music Venue," Jackson Park Watch.

<sup>91</sup> "The Phoenix Pavilion & Music Court," Project 120 Chicago.

## Proposed Updates to Jackson Park's Golf Course

Jackson Park, of late, is so entwined with competing actors and dramatic proposals that it is almost no longer possible to be surprised, even when the next proposal in Jackson Park comes from Tiger Woods. Along with Project 120 and the Obama Presidential Center developments is a prestigious plan for an updated golf course within the park. Golf is a major recreational opportunity in Jackson Park and nearby South Shore. Jackson Park has an eighteen-hole golf course in its south end, but the course is currently facing major changes at the hands of TGR Design, Tiger Woods' golf course design firm. The thirty million-dollar project was announced in 2016 when the Chicago Park District created the Chicago Parks Golf Alliance. This group's intended purpose is to "promote affordable and accessible public golf," which it does by promoting the new Jackson Park-South Shore golf course plan.<sup>92</sup> Despite its aspirations, this plan is another way in which park authorities are using Jackson Park as a way to bring money to the city and increase prestige instead of as a resource for local residents.

In July of 2017, Jackson Park Watch released a fact sheet about the ways in which the golf course proposal threatened Jackson Park. A main concern is that the new golf course would extend beyond the current footprint of both golf courses, eliminating both natural and recreational areas, including "a nature sanctuary adjacent to the South Shore Cultural Center, the Jackson Bark dog park, the only one on the South Side, and two basketball courts, two sets of tennis courts, a soccer field, a baseball diamond, two playlots, and the riding arena at the SSCC."<sup>93</sup> This wide array of recreational facilities is a high price to pay for a golf course, especially considering that Chicagoans are already able to golf in Jackson Park. JPW urged supporters to call and email the Mayor's office, Park District CEO Mike Kelly, and local

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<sup>92</sup> "Our Mission," *Chicago Parks Golf Alliance*, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://chicagoparksgolfalliance.org/about/>.

<sup>93</sup> Jackson Park Watch, "Jackson Park Threatened: The Golf Course Proposal," July 1, 2017, <http://jacksonparkwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/JPW-Fact-Sheet-on-Golf-Course-Proposal-07-01-2017.pdf>.

aldermen.<sup>94</sup> This movement of community action, which is still ongoing, has managed to influence more inclusive alterations to golf course project, which include pedestrian paths that make the golf course areas less restricted to non-golfer parkgoers and a central clubhouse that makes playing nine holes of golf easier, for those who may not have the time or money for eighteen holes.<sup>95</sup> Community action also played a role in slowing down the project so that current park users could make themselves heard before construction began.

JPW, as well as others, were also worried about the speed and secrecy at which the project seemed to be moving forward. In September, the *Chicago Tribune*'s editorial board urged Mayor Rahm Emanuel to slow the project down, concerned that the team was moving too quickly when it was set to unveil its plan in October, less than a year after the project was announced.<sup>96</sup> Their letter noted concerns about how the Park District had not explained any changes in fares, and the editors asked the Park District and Mayor's office to take a step back and explain the local impact of the new golf course to South-Side residents.<sup>97</sup> JPW also called for an explanation of fare structure, as well as the release of the number of trees to be cut down, plans for moving and constructing earth and water areas, and a commitment to replace recreational facilities that will be removed.<sup>98</sup> Whether in response to these urges or due to their own internal delays, the Park District and the Golf Alliance pushed back the plan release from October 2017 to January 2018. The plan released in January, however, has not satisfied community activists like JPW.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Blair Kamin, "Revised Tiger Woods Golf Course Design for South Lakefront: Practice Rounds Still Needed," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 3, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> "The Jackson Park Golf Project? Slow Your Swing, Mayor," editorial, *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), September 1, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> "The Jackson Park Golf Project? Slow Your Swing, Mayor."

<sup>98</sup> Jackson Park Watch, "Jackson Park Threatened: The Golf Course Proposal."



Figure 9: Course Rendering<sup>99</sup>

In response to community concerns, TGR and the Park District did make a few changes to the original plan in order to accommodate local users of Jackson Park and the South Shore golf course. A new plan of the course layout (Figure 9) illustrates that will combine the two existing courses. Park District CEO Kelly announced in January that the cost of a round of golf for Chicago residents would be fifty dollars on the weekends and thirty to thirty-five on weekdays.<sup>100</sup> However, this is still a significant price increase from the maximum weekend price of thirty-five dollars at the Jackson Park Course.<sup>101</sup> The nine-hole South Shore course costs as

<sup>99</sup> “South Shore & Jackson Park Golf Course Restoration,” TGR Design, accessed November 18, 2017, <http://tgrdesign.tigerwoods.com/courses/south-shore-jackson-park-golf-course-restoration/>.

<sup>100</sup> Kamin, “Revised Tiger Woods Golf Course Design for South Lakefront: Practice Rounds Still Needed.”

<sup>101</sup> “Chicago Park District Golf: Jackson Park Golf Course,” Chicago Park District, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://jacksonpark.cpdgolf.com/golf>.

little as ten to twenty dollars.<sup>102</sup> By reconfiguring the driving range, the new plan covers less ground than the original while also maintaining more natural landscape within the course.<sup>103</sup> However, the course still would extend beyond the current courses' footprints, a major cause of concern.<sup>104</sup> The fact that TGR and the Park District altered their plans after backlash from local communities indicates that they are at least somewhat aware of community concerns. By continuing to voice demands, it seems that groups like JPW have an opportunity to influence the planning process, even if there is no official mechanism for community involvement. Even with responses to park users' concerns, though, the new golf course still puts the community's use of Jackson Park at risk by reducing the accessibility of golf and removing other recreational opportunities.

### The Obama Presidential Center

In 2016, former President Barack Obama announced his decision to build his presidential library in Jackson Park. Obama had chosen to build the center on the South Side of Chicago and after a yearlong debate and decision process on its location, the Obama Foundation chose Jackson Park over Washington Park.<sup>105</sup> While the site of the presidential center has been lauded by many as a way to celebrate Obama's roots in Chicago and bring much-needed development to the city's South Side, there is no doubt that the project will drastically and permanently change the way that people from both near and far use Jackson Park.

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<sup>102</sup> "Chicago Park District Golf: South Shore Golf Course," Chicago Park District, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://southshore.cpdgolf.com/golf>.

<sup>103</sup> South Lakefront Framework Plan, "Jackson Park and South Shore Golf Course Design Update," Draft Conceptual Layouts, January 31, 2018, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4364177/South-lakefront-framework-plan.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> Jackson Park Watch, "Jackson Park Threatened: The Golf Course Proposal."

<sup>105</sup> Katherine Skiba, "Obama Foundation Makes It Official: Presidential Library Will Go up in Jackson Park," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 29, 2016.



Figure 10: Obama Center Campus<sup>106</sup>



Figure 11: Obama Center Location (red outline) on current-day Jackson Park<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Blair Kamin, "Revised Obama Center Design Seeks Better Fit with Park and Answer to Critics," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 10, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Google Maps, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.google.com/maps/@41.7828226,-87.5870274,1806m/data=!3m1!1e3>.



The proposal for the Obama Presidential Center (OPC), as it stands in March 2018, consists of several buildings (mapped in Figure 10), which will dramatically change Jackson Park's largely natural landscape. The Forum Building, Museum Building, Library Building, and Athletic Center will all stand in Jackson Park, along with a public plaza.<sup>108</sup> These buildings, if they are truly completely accessible to the public, will provide many new uses for the space of Jackson Park. Their planned features include meeting places, a broadcast studio, gardens, exhibits, athletic facilities, and performance venues.<sup>109</sup> However, it is important not to ignore what the Obama Center will be removing: elements of Jackson Park that people already use and that do not have planned replacements.

Figure 10 is the Obama Foundation's rendering of the site of the center. The "campus" will extend from the Midway Plaisance to 62<sup>nd</sup> Street, between Stony Island Avenue and Cornell Drive, an area of about twenty-one acres.<sup>110</sup> This section of Jackson Park today (Figure 11) contains a football field, baseball field, playgrounds, open field space, and walking paths. Construction will also remove existing trees and other vegetation. A rendering of the center's campus (Figure 12) indicates that many of the large trees that currently exist on the site will be removed, and much of the grass and vegetation will be paved over. The construction of the tower itself would disturb many plants that currently grow on the site, and the resulting environment would be much less natural. The elements of Jackson Park that the Obama Presidential Center will replace comprise only one area of concern that many community members have voiced in recent years and months.

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<sup>108</sup> "The Obama Presidential Center" Obama Foundation, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.obama.org/the-center/>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> "Background," Community Benefits Agreement for the Obama Library, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.obamacba.org/background.html>.



*Figure 12: Rendering of Obama Presidential Center<sup>111</sup>*

Many community groups in Woodlawn, Hyde Park, and South Shore have come together to raise concerns about how the Obama Center will affect local communities and their access to Jackson Park. Friends of the Parks, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors, Southside Together Organizing for Power, and Black Youth Project 100 are only a few of the groups who have formed a coalition for a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) for the Obama Library.<sup>112</sup> The sheer number of community-based organizations that are concerned enough with the future of Jackson Park indicates that the current project is creating yet another moment where the community interests in the park are threatened.<sup>113</sup> However, the magnitude of the Obama Presidential Center means that the project will likely change Jackson Park more than anything has before, in ways that could be either harmful or beneficial to local residents.

The main categories of concern that community members and organizations have raised are focused on Jackson Park users and how use of the park will change, environmental impacts, and economic changes to the surrounding neighborhoods. Jackson Park Watch has concerns

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<sup>111</sup> The Obama Presidential Center,” Obama Foundation.

<sup>112</sup> “Coalition,” Community Benefits Agreement for the Obama Library, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.obamacba.org/coalition.html>.

<sup>113</sup> A full list of the organizations involved in the Coalition can be found here: <http://www.obamacba.org/coalition.html>.

about how the park itself will change: cutting down mature trees that would take decades to regrow, the transformation of an open natural area to a constructed and busy venue, road closures that would restrict parkgoers' access to certain parts of the park, such as 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Beach.<sup>114</sup> These changes would place restrictions on how people use Jackson Park and eliminate some uses altogether. As the Community Benefits Agreement Coalition notes, the OPC will replace the free public space that Jackson Park currently offers local residents with more regulated, less open spaces. The CBA Coalition notes that most presidential libraries charge admission, and even if the resources are free, they will likely be much more regulated than open park spaces, perhaps contributing to exclusion.<sup>115</sup> Since Jackson Park is such a prominent community resource and public space on the South Side, losing free recreational areas would be detrimental to locals, especially low-income residents who could rely on the free amenities of Jackson Park for recreation and interaction with nature.

Organizations are also worried about the environmental impacts of the Obama Presidential Center, which could harm not only flora and fauna, but by doing so alter the naturalistic environment of Jackson Park that many visitors enjoy. For example, Jackson Park birdwatchers have expressed concern over the loss of bird habitat that both the new golf course and the Obama Center will cause. Over one hundred species of birds pass through the shores of Lake Michigan every year during their migration, and Jackson Park is an important lakefront natural area where birds can stop.<sup>116</sup> Development within Jackson Park, especially tree removal, paved areas, and buildings, would both harm and deter migrating and native birds. This would not only be detrimental to bird species, but it also reduces recreational activities, such as the

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<sup>114</sup> "Obama Presidential Center," Jackson Park Watch, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://jacksonparkwatch.org/obama-presidential-center/>.

<sup>115</sup> "Background," Community Benefits Agreement.

<sup>116</sup> Manya Brachear Pashman, "Birders fear loss of habitat to Obama Center, Jackson Park golf course development," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 5, 2017.

Wooded Island Bird Walk that Hyde Park “birder” Jennie Strable leads every Saturday.<sup>117</sup>

Environmental impacts, which are inevitable with large-scale construction for the Obama Center, also may affect park users in addition to direct impacts to park space.

The Obama Presidential Center is also posed to impact local communities beyond the borders of Jackson Park. Because the center will serve as a hub of tourism and development, adjacent neighborhoods, especially Woodlawn and South Shore, are in danger of gentrification and other economic issues. Many of these concerns are expressed in the Community Benefits Agreement Coalition’s list of demands. A community benefits agreement is a legal document that obligates a developer to provide benefits for or guarantee protection of community members that will be impacted by the development project.<sup>118</sup> The CBA coalition for the Obama library notes that “the old ways of redeveloping black communities have not created community wealth,” while noting that the center has the opportunity to positively affect the neighborhoods.<sup>119</sup> The investment, opportunities, and resources that the OPC will provide could be a boon for Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore, but those in charge must take careful steps to secure the inclusion of local groups instead of leaving communities behind. A CBA is an important part of ensuring that OPC-related development is positive and not harmful to the surrounding communities.

The Coalition’s demands include safeguards for employment, economic development, education, housing, transportation, and sustainability. The CBA would ensure that jobs created by the construction and upkeep of the center would go to local residents, especially populations that are often hard to employ, such as ex-convicts, youth, and long-time-unemployed.<sup>120</sup> These

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<sup>117</sup> Pashman, “Birders fear loss of habitat.”

<sup>118</sup> “Background,” Community Benefits Agreement.

<sup>119</sup> “Development Principles,” Community Benefits Agreement for the Obama Library, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.obamacba.org/principles.html>.

<sup>120</sup> “Development Principles,” Community Benefits Agreement.

provisions would create opportunities for community members, and allow the most under-privileged groups to reap the benefits of such major development. While development of the OPC has the possibility of providing benefits to nearby neighborhoods, negative impacts are also possible, which is why some CBA demands are more centered on protection from potential detrimental effects of the center.

Because rent in neighborhoods like Woodlawn is projected to rise due to the attraction of the Obama Center, some residents are in danger of being priced out of their homes and businesses. The Obama Foundation estimates that the center will have an economic impact of \$3.1 billion during the next ten years.<sup>121</sup> While this revenue will likely have a tremendous impact on Chicago and could be invested into South Side neighborhoods, it could also lead to gentrification. The Foundation also estimates the annual number of visitors to reach seven hundred thousand.<sup>122</sup> With an influx of such large amounts of money and visitors (and the money that visitors bring), the areas surrounding Jackson Park will become more desirable, which would cause rent increases that could price some residents out of their own neighborhoods. To prevent such displacement, the CBA asks for the Obama Foundation to set aside low-income housing surrounding Jackson Park, to create an emergency rental assistance program, and to invest in locally- and black-owned businesses.<sup>123</sup> The Obama Center poses very real danger to local residents and their neighborhoods, against which the CBA intends to protect. However, the partners in the Obama Center project—the Obama Foundation, the City of Chicago, and the University of Chicago—have not accepted the CBA. While this inaction leaves the community

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<sup>121</sup> Kate Berner, “Obama Presidential Center is Estimated to Support Thousands of Jobs in City of Chicago and the South Side during Construction and Ten Years of Operations,” Obama Foundation, May 11, 2017, <https://www.obama.org/updates/obama-presidential-center-estimated-support-thousands-jobs-city-chicago-south-side-construction-ten-years-operations/>.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> “Development Principles,” Community Benefits Agreement.

and Jackson Park users vulnerable, the Obama Foundation has not been completely indifferent to community concerns.

The Obama Foundation has held several open meetings to hear community concerns about the OPC proposal, which is somewhat promising for the final outcome of Jackson Park's community of users. Obama himself spoke at large meetings in September 2017 and February 2018 to explain the Foundation's actions. In September, he stated that he and the Foundation did not want to sign a CBA because they do not want to permanently align themselves with specific activist organizations, leaving out others that are not part of the CBA coalition.<sup>124</sup> This decision indicates that the Obama Foundation is more concerned with politics rather than serving actual community members who are asking for a CBA. Since the Coalition includes a wide range of community and activist organizations, the Foundation seems to be afraid that involvement with some of these organizations would hurt the Foundation's future prospects for working with other, potentially disparate, political entities. However, this politically tinged stance could hurt local communities. The Foundation has promised that they will hire workers from local areas and protect small businesses, but without anything in writing, residents cannot be sure how they will benefit or even if they will be protected at all.

The community's continued frustration was evident at the Obama Foundation's February meeting about the center, which a group of activists protested.<sup>125</sup> However, by this time the Foundation announced several measures that they are taking to accommodate community concerns. The Foundation chose its construction managers for the OPC, announcing a partnership called the Lakeside Alliance that brings together several South-Side, minority-owned

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<sup>124</sup> Lolly Bovean, "Obama personally answers questions at Chicago presidential library forum," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), September 18, 2017.

<sup>125</sup> Lolly Bovean and Blair Kamin, "Obama makes pitch for his center in Jackson Park: 'Too much development' has not been the problem for South Side," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 28, 2018.

construction firms for the construction of the center itself.<sup>126</sup> This project will be a boon for these construction companies and their workers, and the partnership falls somewhat in line with one of the requests from the CBA, that “a majority of jobs should go to residents from the communities surrounding the library.”<sup>127</sup> Four of the firms chosen (Powers & Sons Construction, UJAMAA Construction, Brown & Momen, and Safeway Construction) are small, Chicago-based firms owned by African Americans.<sup>128</sup> Local (meaning South-Side) workers have the most prominent leadership roles in the project, which could be a good indicator of local hiring for laborers. The fact that the Obama Foundation addressed the specific community concern about hiring local workers and made an effort to satisfy the request indicates that community demands can have an impact on the course of the OPC project.

Just as residents were able to alter the plans for the expanded Lake Shore Drive, community members are influencing the Obama Foundation’s decisions by making their voice heard through sustained activism. Concerned community members are also more able than before to share opinions about Jackson Park and how changes can best serve them. While Lake Shore Drive protesters only had activism to push change, the Obama Foundation has provided opportunities for park users and local residents to bring concerns and make demands, and it seems as if the Foundation has listened to some requests. Therefore, the community has the opportunity to protect at least some of their rights as users of Jackson Park.

Not all of the changes that the OPC are bringing to Jackson Park will be negative for the park and its users. A plan to close parts of Cornell Drive within the park near the center would regain public space lost to the 1965 expansion of Cornell, making it easier for visitors to access

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<sup>126</sup> “Obama Foundation Announces Lakeside Alliance as Construction Manager for Obama Presidential Center,” Obama Foundation, January 5, 2018, <https://www.obama.org/updates/construction-manager/>.

<sup>127</sup> “Development Principles.” Community Benefits Agreement.

<sup>128</sup> “Obama Foundation Announces Lakeside Alliance,” Obama Foundation.

and traverse the park.<sup>129</sup> For some residents, the OPC will bring unprecedented opportunity. “WE TRUST OBAMA” declare several large signs near the edge of Jackson Park in Woodlawn erected by the Coalition for the Obama Presidential Center, who hopes that development will bring jobs, growth, and tourism.<sup>130</sup> The OPC does present an unprecedented opportunity for the Jackson Park area, but dangers still exist for the park and its neighbors.

Jackson Park and especially surrounding neighborhoods are still at risk, which activists emphasized during their prayer vigil before the Obama Foundation’s open meeting. A group of local residents gathered to draw attention to those who may be in danger of losing their homes due to rising rent prices. Because they face losing so much, these low-income residents are not willing to trust the Foundation’s effort without a written CBA. Reverend Finley Campbell, who led the prayer vigil, reflected this fear: “We want our homes, guaranteed. We want jobs, guaranteed.”<sup>131</sup> Without a CBA, homes and jobs are not necessarily guaranteed for some residents of Woodlawn and South Shore, where home values are already rising.<sup>132</sup> Obama deflected this fear of gentrification, saying that the South Side would benefit, not suffer from new development.<sup>133</sup> The billions of dollars that the OPC expects to generate would benefit local communities, if used correctly. The CBA would require that five percent of revenue would be invested in a community trust fund, thus ensuring that some of the economic benefits of the center went straight into local neighborhoods.<sup>134</sup> Since the Foundation has not agreed to these provisions, there is no guarantee that money would be invested back into local communities. Additionally, any new development in Jackson Park will come with a price.

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<sup>129</sup> Lynn Sweet and Fran Spielman, “Closing Cornell Drive for Obama Center advances with Park District vote,” *Chicago Sun-Times* (Chicago, IL), February 16, 2018.

<sup>130</sup> “We Trust Obama,” Coalition for the Obama Presidential Center, seen March 21, 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Bowean and Kamin. “Obama makes pitch for his center in Jackson Park.”

<sup>132</sup> Home values in Woodlawn rose 23% in the first six months of 2017. Sam Cholke, “Woodlawn Home Values Soar.”

<sup>133</sup> Bowean and Kamin. “Obama makes pitch for his center in Jackson Park.”

<sup>134</sup> “Ordinance,” Community Benefits Agreement, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://www.obamacba.org/ordinance.html>.



The issue of who is paying for the Obama Presidential Center and how this will affect Jackson Park is still up in the air and causing backlash. The development of the center itself is slated to cost \$300 million, but an additional \$175 million for roadwork will be charged to taxpayers.<sup>135</sup> While Jackson Park Watch has noted this figure as a dire burden to taxpayers, it is also valuable to ask how private money is shaping Jackson Park.<sup>136</sup> If private entities are paying for new developments in Jackson Park (the OPC, of course, being the most notable), then the community has even less of a say about how the park changes. Privately financed projects are not always the best options for the public. Juanita Irizarry of Friends of the Park asks, “just because someone brings a lot of money to the table, does that mean we must accept that it is the right project?”<sup>137</sup> Since these projects often do not take community input, privately funded developments such as the OPC have the possibility of threatening community access to Jackson Park, a public space. Now is not the first time that private financing has drastically changed Jackson Park.

The funds raised to host the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago came from donations from Chicago’s notable cast of millionaires, including Lyman Gage, Marshall Field, Philip Armour, Gustavus Swift, and Cyrus McCormick.<sup>138</sup> In both of these instances, the private money went into attracting a public larger than current users of Jackson Park. The OPC will be big, and fact that it is privately funded contributes to the community’s limited opportunities for input. Just as Olmsted realized that Jackson Park was working for private investors more than present and future generations of local park users, the park is largely controlled by well-financed

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<sup>135</sup> Mary Wisniewski and Blair Kamin, “Obama Center’s Roadwork Costs Will Total \$175 Million, City Says,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 23, 2018.

<sup>136</sup> “Obama Presidential Center,” Jackson Park Watch.

<sup>137</sup> Kathy Bergen, “In Jackson Park, Private Money Begins to Reshape a Public Jewel,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), November 29, 2016.

<sup>138</sup> Rydell, “World’s Columbian Exposition.”

entities like Project 120, TGR Designs, and the Obama Foundation.<sup>139</sup> With such powerful groups at the helm, it is difficult for local park users, especially those from minority, low-income communities, to make their voices heard.

*Who has the ability to enact changes in Jackson Park?*

As local activists and the Obama Foundation have gone back and forth with demands and compromises, the Foundation has granted concessions on some issues but not others. Community organizers have noticed that the identity of community groups advocating for change often influences their level of success. One example of this is the “Save the Midway” movement. The OPC was originally going to include a parking garage on the Midway Plaisance across from the OPC site. Hyde Park residents organized a campaign called “Save the Midway” to protest the development of such a structure.<sup>140</sup> Their demands noted many of the same issues that the OPC will cause in Jackson Park—public land as private development, the loss of green space and a historical landmark, and a restriction of how people can use free park space.<sup>141</sup> Unlike the OPC development, however, the Foundation quickly abandoned all plans for a Midway parking garage.

Because of opposition from Save the Midway! the Obama Foundation decided to move the parking garage to under the OPC campus in Jackson Park.<sup>142</sup> The change of plans was clearly motivated by community outcry. A spokesman for the Foundation made a statement saying “after numerous meetings with the community and other valued stakeholders over the past months, the Foundation understands that many of those voices feel strongly that the parking for the OPC should be located within the OPC campus in Jackson Park. The Foundation has heard

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<sup>139</sup> Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 125.

<sup>140</sup> Tonia Hill, “Residents Launch Campaign to Save the Midway,” *Hyde Park Herald* (Chicago, IL), October 12, 2017.

<sup>141</sup> “Save the Midway!: A Natural Treasure on the National Register,” Save the Midway!, accessed October 22, 2017, <https://www.savethemidway.org/>.

<sup>142</sup> Lynn Sweet, “Controversial Obama Center Garage Moved: To Be Underground in Jackson Park,” *Chicago Sun-Times* (Chicago, IL), January 8, 2018.

those voices.”<sup>143</sup> The fact that the Foundation acknowledged and accommodated the organization’s demands is a positive example of the community successfully making their voice heard, but it also reveals that certain groups have more ability to enact change than others. Save the Midway! is an organization of Hyde Park residents, who are statistically wealthier and whiter than residents of Woodlawn and South Shore.<sup>144</sup> Compared to the efforts of the CBA coalition, which have largely gone unfulfilled, it is notable that Save the Midway! caused the Obama Foundation to change their plan so quickly. An open letter signed by almost two hundred members of the University of Chicago faculty also noted a concern with preserving the Midway.<sup>145</sup> The prominence of this group may have also contributed the Foundation’s action.

The relative effectiveness of Save the Midway! and other groups like the CBA coalition does not mean that underrepresented community groups have no voice when it comes to Jackson Park and the OPC. As the Foundation’s openness to input has indicated, the community has an opportunity to secure at least some of the protections that they need for Jackson Park as long as they continue to advocate for themselves. The Obama Presidential Center will undoubtedly change Jackson Park more than ever before, which means that the community needs to be on guard and continue pushing for what they want so that current Jackson Park users do not lose out on the park that they love.

## Conclusion

There is no better time than right now to look back at the history of Jackson Park and examine the ways that local communities have engaged with the park over time. A striking

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<sup>143</sup> Sweet, “Controversial Obama Center Garage Moved.”

<sup>144</sup> MetroPulse, “Community Data Snapshot: Hyde Park,” Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, June 2017, <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/Hyde+Park.pdf>; MetroPulse, “Community Data Snapshot: South Shore,” Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, June 2017, <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/South+Chicago.pdf>; MetroPulse, “Community Data Snapshot: Woodlawn,” Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, June 2017, <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/126764/Woodlawn.pdf>.

<sup>145</sup> University of Chicago Faculty, “Letter from Faculty Concerning the Obama Center,” <https://facultyobamaletter.wufoo.com/forms/z3524m71bfuyo8/>.

pattern emerges, one of denied access and a struggle for local park users to have a voice in park decisions. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition set this precedent when the city took over Jackson Park in order to showcase Chicago to the world. The sacrifice of parkland for non-community purposes continued as the Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago, and other government agencies authorized the use of Jackson Park as a site for missile storage and for highway construction. The mid-twentieth century controversies surrounding Nike missile storage and Lake Shore Drive Expansion also introduced community activism as a way for local park users to express opposition towards park changes that negatively impacted them. This type of activism remains integral to communities surrounding Jackson Park, because local park use now faces a slew of threats in the form of new developments. Projects that would bring prestige, revenue, and tourists to Jackson Park, from the Phoenix music pavilion to the professional golf course to the Obama Presidential Center, will change the park so drastically that local community members who currently use the park will face losing access to the park as they experience it now.

Jackson Park is such a rich asset on the historically under-resourced South Side, so these attempts to appropriate the park in ways that do not benefit local communities are especially harmful. While residents of nearby neighborhoods rarely have official opportunities to be a part of park decisions, examining both recent and historical examples of activism reveals that community organizing has been an effective way for locals to oppose threatening changes. Until residents of Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore have control over the destiny of Jackson Park, community action is necessary to ensure that Jackson Park works for the people.

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## EDUCATION

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**The University of Chicago** Chicago, IL  
*Bachelor of Arts Environmental and Urban Studies and History* Expected, June 2018  
Cumulative GPA: 3.7/4.00

- *Honors Included:* Dean's List 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17

## EXPERIENCE

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**University of Chicago Physical Sciences Division** Chicago, IL  
*Student Administrative Assistant* October 2015-Present

- Manage multiple projects, including organizing and running events such as receptions, meetings, and speaker panels for graduate students
- Organize and analyze application data to compile reports about applicants from different countries, undergraduate institutions, and genders to inform recruiting and admission decisions
- Compile annual application review for 13 programs
- Field questions from applicants and prospective students
- Run Facebook and Twitter accounts for the department

**Gateway to the Great Outdoors** Chicago, IL  
*Fellow/University of Chicago Chapter President* July 2017-Present

- Helped start a chapter in Chicago, which meant recruiting volunteers and communicating with elementary schools to establish and schedule our program during the school day
- Actively recruit volunteers and organize fundraisers at local restaurants
- Write lesson plans and prepare lessons each week, and along with a small group of volunteers, lead weekly environmental science lessons and monthly field trips for 6<sup>th</sup>-graders in Chicago Public Schools

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

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**Friends of Washington Park Tutoring** Chicago, IL  
*Volunteer Program Coordinator* October 2014-Present

- Tutor third-graders one-on-one with homework in all subjects and work on supplemental concept packets
- Serve as a leader for a group of about 10 tutors and 20 to 30 students and

**Phoenix Sustainability Initiative** Chicago, IL  
*Member, Community Service Project Group* April 2015-March 2017

- Created and taught a five-week supplemental lesson plan on science and sustainability to local students

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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**Appalachian Service Project** West Virginia and Kentucky  
*Volunteer* July 2012-July 2017

- Spent one week of each summer repairing houses of Appalachian families
- Serve as a mentor and leader for the younger high-school volunteers

## SKILLS

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Microsoft Office, basic Photoshop, R, Matlab  
Proficient in Spanish