



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION *for*  
OLMSTED  
PARKS

April 10, 2009

Lori Healey  
President  
Chicago 2016  
200 East Randolph Street, Suite 2016  
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Ms. Healey:

We are writing to express our opposition to the proposed Olympic venue in Washington Park. As you may know, Washington Park is considered one of the four greatest park designs by Frederick Law Olmsted, along with Central and Prospect Parks in New York and Franklin Park in Boston's Emerald Necklace. These parks are recognized by their expansive open meadows, massing of trees to provide shade and places for rest, multi-purpose circulation systems and accommodation for a variety of uses by a broad range of people.

Your bid to bring the world's attention to the "greenest" American city provides an opportunity to showcase a masterpiece of America's preeminent landscape architect and American values. An Olmsted landscape embodies the democratic, egalitarian principles upon which this country was founded. Recognizing the need for open spaces in the overcrowded cities of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Olmsted created publicly accessible parks for all people, regardless of class or ethnic background, places that were the "heart and lungs" of a community where citizens could come together to celebrate their diversity. We are excited that through your mayor's leadership Olmsted's vision for healthy, vibrant cities centered on parks and green infrastructure has been sustained.

However, proposed plans to place a massive, state-of-the-art Olympic Stadium and Aquatics Center in Washington Park—a potential National Historic Landmark—now threaten that park's signature public open spaces and sweeping vistas, jeopardizing its integrity, significance, and public use.

Plans to "tear down the stadium" following the Olympics are unrealistic. It is our understanding that the temporary stadium is to be disassembled and sold to another venue. Although the stadium is being designed for such a plan, this may very well not happen. Even if the stadium is removed, the current plan leaves the 4 foot deep depressed track (250 feet in diameter) and below grade seating, in addition to retaining the track and field facility, Aquatic Center and an Olympic monument. Such alterations and intrusions are incompatible with preserving the Olmsted legacy, and incompatible with democratic use of public open space.

The remaining track and field takes a major public open space and restricts its use to specific activities, and a more limited user population. The 4' grade depresses a once-welcoming greensward with a very different result for the neighboring community.

Chicago's magnificent historic park system is indisputably world-class. Few—if any—cities have such an extraordinary public resource developed by the world's best park designers. We urge *Chicago 2016* to recognize the significance of this historic landscape which has served Chicago's public for over 100 years.

The original South Park, which encompasses Jackson and Washington Parks and the Midway Plaisance, deserves to be restored. It should be made the most impressive place possible to welcome visitors to the center of Olympic activity. We encourage you to review the Chicago Park District's *South Lakefront Framework Master Plan* for Washington Park and Jackson Park as a basis for how restoration could be accomplished. Indeed, a fitting legacy of the Olympics would be a system-wide restoration of Chicago's parks to meet the needs of the next generation and provide places for both active and passive recreation. London's plan for its Olympics is an exemplary approach, taking brownfields and adding new parks in lieu of damaging historic existing park resources.

The 3,500 masterful landscape works carried out by the Olmsted firm are a national treasure of artistic and cultural importance worthy of protection and pride. The National Association for Olmsted Parks works to advance the Olmsted principles and legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people's lives. We would be pleased to serve in an advisory capacity as your plans unfold. The Olympics offer a unique opportunity to respect Olmsted's democratic ideals, and to celebrate and honor Chicago's great historic parks in the process.

Sincerely,

Caroline Loughlin  
Co-Chair, Board of Trustees

M. Eliza Davidson  
Advocacy Committee Chair

cc: Mayor Richard Daley  
Gery Chico, President, Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners  
Alderman Willie Cochran  
Timothy Mitchell, General Superintendent & CEO, Chicago Park District  
Alderman Toni Preckwinkle  
Pat Ryan, Chairman and CEO, Chicago 2016