

DATE: January 9, 2007 (for presentation at the Public Meeting and Workshop)
TO: Douglas Gaynor, Director of Parks/Forestry and Recreation
Paul D'Agostino, Superintendent of Parks/Forestry
Bob Dorneker, Superintendent of Recreation
Stefanie Levine, Landscape Architect
FROM: Southeast Evanston Association Board of Directors
SUBJECT: Evanston Lakefront Visioning Process
CC: Mayor Lorraine Morton; Aldermen Cheryl Wollin, Lionel Jean-Baptiste,
Melissa Wynne, Steve Bernstein, Delores Holmes, Ed Moran, Elizabeth Tisdahl,
Ann Rainey, Anjana Hansen

As an organization whose eastern border is formed by Lake Michigan, the Southeast Evanston Association places great value on our beaches and lakefront. Running the entire length of Evanston, this swath of natural, open shoreline provides a unique oasis enjoyed by few other Chicagoland communities—one that requires special care and consideration by residents and government alike. That is why we are encouraged by the opportunity to provide input in the creation of a Lakefront Master Plan.

With a mission of preserving the essentially residential nature of Evanston, the Southeast Evanston Association (SEA) has a long history of advocating for planning and development that maintains our city's livability, upholds its architectural and historical integrity, and minimizes environmental impact. One of our major areas of focus has been the lakefront, where we have primarily supported environmentally sensitive, low-impact pursuits.

After one of our board members attended your focus groups, we met to discuss what we see as the most important issues when it comes to Evanston's lakefront.

It is our position that any Lakefront Master Plan—to be environmentally sound, socially inclusive and civically responsible—must consider the following six points:

1. All of Evanston's lakefront should be included in the plan. It would be a serious oversight to not include the entire Evanston shoreline in this plan, from the border of Chicago to border of Wilmette. The areas to the far south and north are part of the Evanston community, and although the land in some of those areas may be private and/or managed by another entity, what happens there impacts the rest of the lakefront, ecologically and socially. And the lake bottom in all areas is public domain.

2. The plan should be designed to protect and enhance the environment and ecology of the lake and adjoining parkland.

In Chicago, protecting the lakefront is the law, and this should be the case in Evanston. Written into the plan should be language stating that any proposed construction or modifications to the shoreline must affirmatively and proactively benefit the ecology of the coast—including water quality, which is of particular concern in light of the growing number of beach closings in recent years. Chicago's Lake Michigan and Chicago Lakefront Protection Ordinance has similar language and provides a good model of important

environmental considerations, including protecting and supporting fish, migratory birds and other fauna.

3. The plan should encourage preservation and expansion of dune habitats. Natural dunes and dune plants at Lighthouse Beach, the south end of the Northwestern landfill, Lee Street Beach and South Boulevard Beach promote native species and keep erosion in check. Prevailing ecological philosophy today promotes not only protecting nature, but returning environments to a more natural state. This is an opportunity for Evanston to take a leading role in this area, in keeping with Evanston’s vision in its new strategic plan to be known as “The Green City.”

4. A strong consideration of public safety issues should be inherent in the plan. For example, any modifications/improvements to the lakefront path should be made with the recreational needs and safety concerns of all users in mind, including seniors, parents with strollers, walkers, joggers and cyclists.

5. The plan should encourage distribution of large organized events across all city parks. Holding cultural events at parks and other venues throughout the city leaves the lakefront more open for passive, low-impact use and ensures access by a broader range of residents.

6. The plan should stress quiet contemplation and avoid overcrowding and commercialization. This is perhaps the most important consideration in the lakefront planning process. The lakefront is one of the last bastions of peaceful respite and natural beauty that are so essential in our rapidly growing and developing community. Residents of many other Chicago suburbs can easily retreat to forest preserves or open countryside; in Evanston we do not have that luxury. But we have our lake. And we must do all we can to preserve it for the quiet enjoyment of all residents—a use we feel is ultimately the most powerful and valuable.

SEA is pleased that the city is taking this important step in protecting and enhancing one of our community’s greatest natural assets. We are glad to be able to play a role in the process and look forward to continued opportunities to participate.