

DATE: October 3, 2007
TO: Greg Weykamp, Consultant Project Manager, EDAW, Inc.
Patricia Natke, Consultant, UrbanWorks
Stefanie Levine, Landscape Architect/Project Manager, City of Evanston
FROM: Southeast Evanston Association Board of Directors
SUBJECT: Evanston Lakefront Master Plan Design Alternative Feedback

As an organization whose eastern border is formed by Lake Michigan, the Southeast Evanston Association (SEA) 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, 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.

Several of our board members and members at large attended your design presentations on September 19 and 20. We were encouraged by the overarching consideration of the natural environment, and we applaud all concerned in general for the innovative, sustainable solutions proposed.

Some of the proposed elements we favor are:

- **More natural space.** Any increase in natural dunes, native plantings and bird/animal/fish habitat would be a plus for our lakeshore. It would mitigate increasing noise, air and water pollution and create thriving ecosystems that would offer education and enjoyment for all Evanston residents. We particularly like the proposed enhancements at Clark Square, at the end of Main Street (creating bird habitat, more trees/plantings, walking paths, etc.) and at the south end of Evanston (creating a wider lakefront park east of Calvary Cemetery and linking it with the South Blvd. beach and Garden Park).
- **Green restroom buildings.** The proposed design for the restroom renovations, with sustainable materials and an environmental aesthetic, fits well with the overall natural vision for the lakefront and Evanston's commitment to be a leading green community.
- **Water trail.** A few places along the shoreline (near Lighthouse and South Blvd. beaches, for example) where kayakers, canoers and small craft sailors could pull up and rest briefly would enhance their experience and also promote these kinds of low-impact activities.
- **Removing the motorized boat launch.** The cost of maintaining this facility is far greater than the benefit derived by the few residents who use it. It also adds to noise, air and water pollution.

- **Enhancements to the Dempster Street sailing facilities.** Creating a more enjoyable, convenient experience for nonmotorized boaters encourages this low-impact recreational use of the lake. Investments in this area, rather than the boat launch, would benefit a greater number of residents.

- **Reducing Sheridan Road to two lanes** along Calvary Cemetery and increasing the green space to the east of it. This corridor is currently not accessible or enjoyable for bikers and walkers; widening the path and adding more parkland would be a huge improvement. We'd like to see this gateway to Evanston become more environmentally dynamic and aesthetically pleasing.

- **Removing the rocks.** We support the idea of opening up the views along the lake by removing the rocks. We favor the submerged reef option.

- **Minimizing “sky glow.”** While not a significant focus of your public presentations, we were pleased to hear you espouse in conversation the use of full cutoff or fully shielded and passive lighting systems that are designed to minimize sky glow, reduce electricity expenditures, and create an environment more friendly to migrating birds and less friendly to criminal activity.

Some of the proposed elements that concern us are:

- **A bandshell/music venue or promenade** along the lagoon at Clark Street—or anywhere along the lakefront. Not only would this detract from the lakefront visually, but adding pavement and built structures seems to contradict the natural emphasis in the proposed overall plan. We have a lovely grassy setting and low-lying, more natural “stage” along the lagoon now; adding more built environment and paving over grass would increase runoff and decrease green space.

The other factor to consider here is that the first phases of the downtown planning process include plans for enhancing alleyways, closing streets, and redesigning the Fountain Square area to accommodate concerts, festivals and other events. For several reasons, this plan makes more economic sense than to build infrastructure along the lakefront for these events: 1) lakefront festivals and events have been capped at a certain number per year by the city with input from citizens, 2) the lakefront can be utilized for only a few months a year, and 3) if held downtown, these events would be more likely to bring an influx of business to Evanston’s shops and restaurants.

- **Picnic shelters or other built structures.** While the proposed shelter/vista near the water treatment facility makes sense, we are afraid adding picnic shelters or other facilities elsewhere would diminish the lovely, open views of the lake that we are trying to achieve—as well as add an overwhelming amount of activity to particular areas of the lakefront. We are also opposed to a restaurant or any commercial enterprise along the lake.

The addition of any built structures along the lake would also mean increased costs for maintenance and security, which would add to the pressure for revenue generation. By contrast, creating more natural, passive spaces—as you stated in your presentation—would likely lower the cost of upkeep (e.g., native plantings that are more self-maintaining vs. a large turf area that requires mowing).

Overall, we favor an environmentally sensitive plan that stresses quiet contemplation; encourages unstructured, low-impact activity; and avoids overcrowding and commercialization. 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 do 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.

Thank you for the work you have done toward 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.