

To: Planning and Development Committee  
From: Southeast Evanston Association  
Date: January 22, 2008  
Re: Revised Draft Consensus Plan for the Evanston Lakefront

My name is Katie Stallcup and I appreciate this opportunity to address the Planning and Development Committee on behalf of the Southeast Evanston Association.

SEA board members have attended every one of the visioning and planning meetings and participated actively in the drafting process. We applaud the fact that strong attendance at the public workshops resulted in a plan for a lakefront that is more natural than developed, more passive than active, and more focused on a sustainable environment than on attracting crowds and generating revenue.

Our lakefront is a remarkable treasure. While nearly every piece of open space in the greater Chicagoland area is being developed into a shopping mall or a subdivision or a McMansion, our primary responsibility is to preserve this amazing asset. Whatever we do, we must take care not to compromise the unique opportunity that our lakefront provides to get away from commerce and traffic, to enjoy the sights and sounds of nature, and to walk, bike, picnic, or enjoy quiet reflection in a beautiful setting.

In particular, we are enthusiastic about

- improved bicycle and pedestrian paths
- more energy-efficient restrooms and increased accessibility overall
- permeable paving in parking areas
- dark-sky lighting
- upgrades to turf and new trees
- the magic hedge and alternative shoreline protection

We are concerned about a couple of aspects of the plan, however, and would like to draw your attention to the following:

**The area east of Calvary Cemetery and along South Boulevard Beach should provide dramatic, unobstructed views of the lake and a safe entryway into Evanston for cars, bicycles, and pedestrians.**

The presentations that launched each phase of the lakefront planning process began with the north end of Evanston and proceeded southward. As a result, discussion of the southernmost section of the plan has been shortchanged and deserves more attention. It is our sense that there is plenty of land available to achieve all of the identified goals: a more beautiful southern entryway into Evanston; safer pathways for both bicycles and pedestrians; and a smooth flow of traffic between the two lanes coming north from Sheridan Road in Rogers Park and proceeding either north or west at South Boulevard. We favor wider pedestrian and bike paths to the east of the traffic lanes and, if necessary, the elimination of the median.

**There should be no further commercialization of the lakefront.**

We ask you to ensure that there is no further commercialization of the lakefront in the form of additional concessions, shops, festivals, or other public activities. The Evanston community previously agreed to limit the number of arts festivals (to two) and to allow only a small number of café tables at the lagoon. The consensus throughout this planning process was consistent with those decisions. We believe that the costs of selling beverages and suntan oil on the lakefront—particularly in terms of increases in the cost of city services and pollution of the beaches and water—will outweigh the benefits.

**Additions to the built environment along the lakefront should be minimal and should harmonize with the historic neighborhood.**

The overwhelming preference of the public during this planning process was for a natural, passive lakefront, and we ask you to hold the line on any further development of the built environment along the lakefront. While the use of old bricks sounds environmentally-friendly, we are opposed to increasing the hardscape around the lagoon for the sake of two annual events. Clarification is needed about the number of paved or bricked paths that will be added and the composition of the surfaces for pedestrians, bicycles, and parking. Any new buildings should harmonize with existing architecture, and thus we suggest that the new restrooms be designed in the style of the iconic building at the lagoon and the Dempster Street Beach Office, two attractive structures that blend well with nearby historic residences.

**The upland prairie areas deserve closer scrutiny, particularly with regard to placement and maintenance.**

We would like to draw your attention to the placement of an upland prairie environment in the park between Clark and Dempster Streets. If tall grasses are placed between parking and picnic areas, they are likely to be trampled, and this area seems too heavily used to be given over to this type of planting. Other places—for example, alongside the snow fences—might be more appropriate. Questions remain about what plants will be used, how attractive they will be in winter months, whether they will present a fire hazard in dry summers, and what maintenance—including periodic burning—is required.

**The proposed changes to traffic flow and parking in the areas between Greenwood Street and Clark Street should be rejected.**

There are a few subtle but important proposals that may be difficult to identify on the consultants' sketches, so I have provided aerial maps of the current configuration of the middle section of the lakefront. The plan calls for profound changes in the area along Sheridan Road between Greenwood and Church Streets. The plan is to close Sheridan Road at the northern end of Patriots Park, to introduce two-way traffic in an area that has been one-way, and to increase the density of parking on Sheridan Road south of Lake Street. These changes have no obvious benefits and are extremely problematic for the following reasons:

1. Sheridan Road between Greenwood and Church Streets is not just a parking lot. It is a residential street as well as an important access/egress route for park traffic. Dawes Park is the busiest area of the lakefront and it is critically important to preserve all possible traffic flow to this area.

2. Closing Sheridan Road along the north part of Patriots Park would remove the best, safest way for traffic to exit the area and force many more cars into two intersections—at Lake and Forest, and at Davis and Forest—that already have serious problems. In addition, closing the north end of Sheridan Road at this point will create a parking lot with a dead-end, and necessitate paving additional parkland to provide a turn-around and to prevent traffic bottlenecks.
3. Parking in this area is filled to capacity on many summer days. The combination of two-way traffic and increased perpendicular parking on both sides of the street will certainly result in frequent gridlock. More importantly, the density and traffic congestion will pose serious dangers to pedestrians, especially the large number of children who use the park and beach.
4. The northern section of parking along Sheridan Road, next to Patriots Park and close to the lagoon and the dog beach, is heavily used, even in cold months. Eliminating it will pose a particular hardship for visitors with walking difficulties.

The consultants have indicated that plans regarding traffic flow and street configurations are dependant on a traffic study. SEA welcomes a careful examination of the challenges in this area, but has *serious* concerns about the wisdom and efficacy of doing a traffic study during the winter, when, of course, the usage of the park is at its lowest point.

We appreciate all of the work that has gone into this plan, the many opportunities that we have had for public input, and this chance to draw your attention to the need for further refinement of the plan.