



The Jackson Park Campaign Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION: I thought the Obama Presidential Center was supposed to be the Obama Presidential Library. Why the name change?

ANSWER: A Presidential Library is part of the thirteen presidential libraries system operated by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). NARA regulates and controls the storage and public access to all the records of past presidential administrations and controls the size, design, and use of the building holding these records. When the Obama Foundation realized that its initial plans would block their ability to construct a 235-foot tower and limit its politically related activities, the Foundation immediately sought a work-around. The Foundation withdrew its proposal for a Presidential Library and forged ahead with its revised plan of building the Obama Presidential Center – a wholly private operation with no official status. Protect Our Parks believes this is a classic bait and switch to maneuver around federal and state statutes.

QUESTION: Would this proposed Obama Presidential Center in historic Jackson Park be like any other existing private building in the Chicago Public Park System?

ANSWER: No. There is no existing building that remotely resembles the proposed OPC. The Aquarium and Museum Act specifies that the only kind of buildings allowed in a public park include "aquariums (Shedd Aquarium), museums of art (Art Institute), museum of industry (Museum of Science and Industry), museum of science (Adler Planetarium), or museum of natural history (Field Museum). The names on those buildings - Shedd, Adler, and Field - appear to identify the donors, not elevate them as subjects of the buildings' contents. Protect Our Parks calls out the proposed Obama Presidential Center as a violation of law and a breach of public trust.

QUESTION: Wouldn't this proposed Obama Presidential Center in historic Jackson Park be like a gift to the City?

ANSWER: No, the only gift-giving is from the Chicago Park District and the cash-strapped city of Chicago to the Obama Foundation. This gift includes the following items: First, a gift of over twenty acres of priceless and irreplaceable lakefront public property for 99 years to a private entity for \$10. Second, the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) would not pay real estate taxes to the Park District or City for its upkeep as do other Chicago residents, nor will it pay a subvention in place of taxes for general services rendered. Third, the City has obligated

itself to pay all the remediation costs of the development and make the existing unstable groundwork suitable for the construction of a 235-foot high tower in Jackson Park. It will also foot the bill for setting up public utility connections to the OPC. Moreover, the Park District will pay all the costs of keeping the park in condition to accommodate the needs of the proposed OPC. The City will pay the entire cost of relocating roads to serve the needs of the OPC, which was estimated, back in 2018, to be well over \$200,000,000!

QUESTION: Why is the proposed Obama Presidential Center (OPC) to be sited in historic Jackson Park, and whose idea was it to enter such a sweetheart deal?

ANSWER: Former Mayor Rahm Emanuel arranged this deal. Moreover, Emmanuel was the Chief of Staff for the first term of former President Barack Obama. He led the way to delegate decision-making regarding the project to the Foundation and paved the way that allowed the City Council to delegate all decision-making regarding the OPC project to the Foundation. Protect Our Parks insists that this conflict of interest constitutes a clear breach of the City's obligations under the public trust doctrine.

QUESTION: I see news articles reporting that the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) will be a tourist attraction, spur economic growth, create jobs, and bring lots of benefits to residents. Is this true?

ANSWER: No one has put forth any credible economic study to substantiate these claims and there are no independent sources to support these claims. The fact is there was never a convincing reason for building the OPC in historic Jackson Park. Putting the OPC outside of Washington Park, for example, would do far more to help neighborhood businesses than the Jackson Park site. It is more likely that the goal of the Foundation is to piggyback on the established attraction of historic Jackson Park as a unique local gem and tourist destination. The current risk is that higher land values will drive out or negatively impact current residents in the neighborhoods near Jackson Park. That risk of undue gentrification does not exist in the more sparsely populated areas in need of investment throughout the South Side.

Question: Is there a superior and legal alternative site for the proposed Obama Presidential Center (OPC)?

Answer: There are other superior sites all over the South Side that could help anchor economic opportunity for underserved parts of the city. A long-time resident of the South Side, an accomplished architect, and committed preservationist has prepared a set of detailed plans for an area adjacent to Washington Park. This site would alleviate many of the substantive concerns with destroying the historical and environmental resources in Jackson Park and this alternative site affords real economic opportunity to build back better the

broader South Side community by positioning the OPC as an anchor for growth and opportunity while fulfilling the stated mission of the Obama Foundation.

Question: I have heard the Obama Foundation says that building an Obama Presidential Center (OPC) in historic Jackson Park is a done deal, and that in September, they plan to start breaking ground in the park to make room for the OPC and start construction. Is this true?

Answer: The litigation, with Protect Our Parks and six other individuals and organizations is ongoing. Our legal team will take all necessary steps to prevent alterations to the environmental and historic fabric of Jackson Park. A federal judge will decide the path forward. It is important to denote that the second lawsuit raises legal issues that are unique from and not included in the recent Supreme Court Petition for Certiorari. More importantly, federal law precludes the destruction of parks that have historical and environmental resources. Moreover, Protect Our Parks supports an alternative site in the Washington Park neighborhood to demonstrate that the base issue of identifying a feasible alternative was not sought by the Obama Foundation or the City. Additionally, the alternate site plan demonstrates how the concerns outlined in the Protect Our Parks lawsuit can be removed.