

# 'Protect Our Parks' Calls Talk of Imminent OPC Groundbreaking in Jackson Park 'Grossly Premature'

*Points to New South Side Alternative Plan and Federal Law Favoring such Alternatives*

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February 16, 2021 10:00 AM Eastern Standard Time

CHICAGO--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--With Chicago news outlets now quoting Mayor Lori Lightfoot and others who suggest that groundbreaking in Jackson Park for the Obama Presidential Center will commence this spring, Protect Our Parks (POP) president Herb Caplan called Mayor Lightfoot's talk "grossly premature," pointing to "critical parts of federal law that have been misread and misapplied" and a "far superior South Side site" adjacent to Washington Park, for which a detailed alternative plan has been developed.

Caplan cited Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, [49 U.S.C. § 303](#), which provides that any major transportation project on public parklands needs express federal approval, which can be provided only if "there is no prudent and feasible alternative to the use of that land" and "the program includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the park . . . or historic site resulting from the use." The statute then refers to an analytical framework set out under the National Environmental Policy Act ([NEPA](#)) that also requires reviews of alternatives.

He also cited Justice Thurgood Marshall's majority opinion in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1971 [Citizens to Preserve Overton Park v. Volpe](#) decision, wherein the court obligated the Secretary of Transportation to reexamine a decision to put a major freeway through a Tennessee park. The freeway was ultimately rerouted outside the park, and this high court precedent has since required federal officials to make the protection of parkland of "paramount importance" as they conduct "a thorough, probing, in-depth review" of such matters.

"The rubber-stamping of the highly destructive Jackson Park plan that's occurred thus far doesn't come anywhere near fulfilling the law's requirement for such a 'probing, in-depth review,'" explained Caplan. "And litigation led by POP and others will continue to challenge the federal reviews and raise other issues all the way to the Supreme Court, if necessary."

"Furthermore," Caplan added, "POP is poised to unveil alternative plans for a wonderful site development near Washington Park that will be far less destructive to the environment, historic resources, and existing traffic patterns while, just as important, being more beneficial by way of economic stimulus and job creation. And even though many in the local political establishment and some of its friends are slow to admit it, the law plainly favors such an alternative to the Jackson Park plan."

POP intends to schedule a formal rollout of the architectural plans it has developed for the area near Washington Park soon.

*Protect Our Parks is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable corporation initially founded in 2007, working to ensure that the public's interest is understood and considered by government authorities when decisions about Chicago's parks are made. Learn more about our history and our advocacy efforts at [www.protectourparks.org](http://www.protectourparks.org)*

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