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City Council

City of Chicago

Council Chamber

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August 18, 2023

Mayor Brandon Johnson
Office of the Mayor City Hall
121 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Johnson:

I am writing to ask you to exert your leadership and engage to stop the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from moving forward with its plan to build a 25-foot-high toxic dredge waste dump tower on 45 acres along the Lake Michigan shoreline on the Southeast Side of Chicago. My community is already suffering the burdens of excessive pollution and dump sites. We ask that you join me and publicly demand that the Army Corps look to alternatives, including both finding disposal sites outside of the 10th Ward on the Southeast Side, and reducing the number of dredged materials to be disposed.

This site was submerged land within Lake Michigan until 1984 following the State of Illinois' enactment of a law allowing the Army Corps to build an in-water Confined Disposal Facility (CDF). The law attached a condition: after the CDF became full, the reclaimed land would then be handed over to the Chicago Park District for conversion into a new public park at the mouth of the Calumet River. The Corps has already delayed the creation of a new public park for over two decades. Now that the CDF is full and available for conversion into the long-promised park, the Corps is renegeing on its public park commitment and, instead, is proposing to build an expanded new vertical Dredged Material Disposal Facility (DMDF), including toxic dredge wastes. This new DMDF toxic dumpsite would be on top of the old CDF and would be a tower rising 25 feet above the CDF.

The location for the expanded toxic dredged waste dump would add even more pollution to the Southeast Side neighborhood in Chicago's 10th Ward, which is already an Environmental Justice community experiencing an unfair and overburdened amount of pollution that poses health risks to residents. Concentrated contaminated dredged material at the CDF poses health risks to the local communities. Contaminants identified in the sediment from the dredged materials include mercury, PCBs, arsenic, barium, cadmium, manganese, chromium, copper, lead, and more. These contaminants sit right next to Calumet Park and near Steelworkers Park and are just a few hundred feet from Calumet Beach.

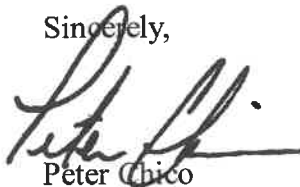
The Corps did not rigorously explore and objectively evaluate alternative sites outside the 10th Ward for dredged materials, thereby effectively forcing choices between a menu of bad options. The Corps also failed to adequately evaluate the significant environmental risks of this vertically expanded lakeshore dump. The Army Corps' proposal is contrary to the Biden's administration's EJ guidelines and goals, is contrary to the Biden administration's Justice40 guidelines and goals and is contrary to sound environmental policy and the realities of higher lake water levels combined with more intense storm wind and waves.

Climate change is causing the overall mid- and longer-term trend of higher Lake Michigan water levels with more intense storm winds whipping up high waves that batter the Chicago shoreline. Building a new vertical DMDF on top of the CDF with toxic dredged waste materials defies common sense in light of the realities of higher Lake Michigan water levels and more intense storm impacts. A toxic release from the proposed waste dump and existing CDF at this site that spewed contaminated materials into Lake Michigan and drinking water supplies would be potentially disastrous. An ongoing lawsuit contends that the Corps does not have authority to build this new toxic dredge materials dumpsite and has not fully and fairly explored and evaluated all reasonable alternatives, thereby violating federal environmental and state laws.

As the Alderman representing this area, I am asking you to: (1) Oppose the Army Corps' plans to expand upon the current CDF dumpsite by building on top a 25-foot high toxic dredge waste dumpsite on the Southeast Side along the Lake Michigan shoreline; (2) Require the Army Corps to find another site outside of the 10th Ward, and not in an environmental justice community; and (3) Work with my office, the Army Corps, the Chicago Park District and community and environmental stakeholders to turn the CDF site into the long-promised lakeshore park for neighborhood residents and all Chicagoans to use and enjoy.

Thank you for your consideration and engagement on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Chico". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and "C".

Peter Chico
Alderman 10th