



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
April 24, 2024

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### **Friends of the Parks Responds to Unveiling of Chicago Bears Proposed New Stadium on Lakefront**

The "Chicago Way" was on full display at the Chicago Bears news conference today. Once again, Chicago taxpayers are being told what is good for them. We are told that a new domed stadium on protected lakefront land will make Chicago a great city. We are already a great city—in large part due to our protected lakefront. As is so often the case in Chicago, the powerful and wealthy are demanding that our entire city stop and fast track their plans to expand operations on the people's lakefront.

Meanwhile, the communities we work with who are addressing immigrant issues, homelessness, school closures, affordable housing, public safety, equitable transportation, and lack of jobs are fighting for parity—including at our Chicago Park District parks.

We are all being asked to trust the process and accept that it will, in fact, be Bear-a-dice. Yet, Chicago has a long history of, closed-door planning and rushed decision-making that does not end well for taxpayers. Just look at The Lincoln Yards, The 78, a Chicago casino, and the infamous parking meter deal. Each of these was going to make Chicago into a "world class" city and be a "win-win-win" for residents.

The questions everyone needs to ask of the Bears organization and our elected officials are:

1. What is the actual rush? Do rushed processes in Chicago ever end well? Our city takes decades to build a grocery store in a food desert, but we are being asked to jump as high as the Bears tell us to and fast. Yet, Bronzeville, home to the former Ida B. Wells Projects, and other public housing sites that were promised replacement housing after their communities were demolished in the early 2000s, are still empty in 2024.
2. What about the other parks in Chicago that have waited for equitable investment in their communities? Does a rushed process for an NFL team make more sense than, say, rushing the restoration of a South Side field house? Or expansion of programs to meet demands in North Lawndale? Or restoration of obsolete equipment across the city?
3. What other sites were vetted by the Bears and the City of Chicago, and what was the specific decision not to proceed with each of those sites? Violating the public trust doctrine should require a rigorous vetting process for alternatives.
4. What about Soldier Field? First, its history was all but obliterated with public funds, which we are still paying off, but now it is set for demolition? What message are we sending to our veterans and their families?

5. How does this plan demonstrate an investment in the people that Mayor Johnson promised to Chicago when he ran for office? How have the people been engaged in dialogue throughout this process? What is the process? Is it transparent? Is it inclusive? It is honest?
6. Why does it always come down to “we want our playground on the lake, or we will go somewhere else?” Is that fair to the rest of Chicago? It’s business as usual to have wealth and power dictating public policy, but is that a best practice for Chicago to follow?
7. It is a good business practice to trust and verify. It is sound business practice for the city of Chicago to hire independent contractors to objectively assess the economic impact the Bears have had since their bond deal in the early 2000s, which we are still paying off today. And to evaluate the return on investment if we put billions into this project directly or indirectly. What level of permanent jobs will this plan generate? Are they trade jobs with a track for career development?
8. Does it seem reasonable that the Chicago Bears should get their wants satisfied immediately while poor neighborhoods suffer from benign neglect?
9. We have seen no evidence of broad-based community engagement or community-led planning. We look forward to asking our questions about process to the stakeholders who participated with the Bears leadership at today’s news conference.

This is a time for some thoughtful, deliberate and civic engagement. A civil, community-driven conversation should be at the forefront of any action the city of Chicago takes regarding the lakefront.

We did not hear anything at the Bears news conference that could not take place at another Chicago location. We have too many questions to make any decision about the value of these plans. We encourage the Bears and the administration to act with "honor, integrity, transparency, wisdom and to be forward thinking and collaborative" and not repeat past mistakes.

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