



December 14, 2022

Ms. Rosa Escareño  
General Superintendent & CEO  
Chicago Park District  
541 N. Fairbanks  
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Ms. Escareño and Commissioners:

Friends of the Parks wants to make it abundantly clear that we oppose the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture's illegal construction in Humboldt Park of a building that they refer to as an archives. We understand from Chicago Park District staff that this also came as a surprise to you and was not authorized by you. So far, we have not found any written communications to discredit what the park district has told us.

We are very glad that the construction they started without building permits has been temporarily stopped. Now we are hoping that you will step up and use your authority as the landowner to completely rectify the situation, as this act represents a bold and egregious affront to all of us—the idea that they can start building illegally in a park as a dare to make them take it down. We ask the Chicago Park District to conduct a full investigation into the matter with public input to determine appropriate action to protect our public parkland from inappropriate encroachments.

We value the reutilization of existing park structures for use as museums in public parks. But new buildings constructed with no public review and out of scope and scale with the surroundings are simply unacceptable. The precedent established by allowing this work to progress could have profound implications for future Chicago Park District activity.

In consultation with Preservation Chicago and our own investigation, we have determined the following:

1. The tenant, the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture, renting the Humboldt Park Stable illegally began construction of a private building on public land.
2. The tenant violated its lease agreement with the Chicago Park District by planning and implementing a new building construction without prior approval by the Chicago Park District.
3. The tenant did not follow Chicago Park District procedures related to the procurements process to secure contracts for this construction work, or best practices related to community input and hosting community meeting before construction can begin.
4. The tenant did not secure proper permits from the Chicago Department of Buildings or other entity to begin construction.

5. The contractor (Enterprise Builders) and architect (Luis A. Martinez) secured by the tenant were okay proceeding with this project without proper building permits, City, or Park District approval.

6. The tenant did not amend a state grant agreement despite drastic changes to the scope of work on the project.

7. The tenant oversaw radical disruption of public lands without public input.

8. Despite noting in all its grant applications and post-construction-start permitting application that it is building an archival storage facility to help it reach museum accreditation, the plans submitted do not include details of the floor plans or information about temperature/light/moisture control.

9. The drawings, when originally submitted to the state in 2020, included a sketch of what was described as a 1,500-square-foot archival space. A new application from 2022 notes that the building will be 5,000 square feet. The drawings submitted with that application indicate a building that exceeds 7,000 square feet.

10. Humboldt Park is on the National Register of Historic Places, and the stable is a Chicago Landmark. Both of these designations are a high honor for the City of Chicago, and planning on these sites requires public input and careful consideration of any possible negative impacts.

The construction in Humboldt Park appears to have circumvented a transparent and accountable public process. While I am a Puerto Rican from the Humboldt Park community who has spent years collaborating with museum director Billy Ocasio and in support of the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture, we believe that this action is inappropriate and harmful to the park, the community, and the city. It must not be allowed to move forward.

We look forward to the Chicago Park District taking the proper measures to protect its assets and the public access to same.

Sincerely,



Juanita Irizarry  
Executive Director

Cc: Myetie H. Hamilton, President  
Modesto Valle, Vice President  
Donald J. Edwards, Commissioner  
Jose M. Muñoz, Commissioner  
Ashley Hemphill Netzky, Commissioner  
Andrea Telli, Commissioner  
Sharif Walker, Commissioner