



2023 CHICAGO MUNICIPAL ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Jessie Fuentes Candidate for Ward #: 26

Campaign Name: Friends of Jessie Fuentes Campaign Address: 1746 N Kimball Ave, Chicago, IL 60647

Phone: (773) 603- 0236

E-Mail: jessiefor26thward@gmail.com

Campaign Manager Name: Sian I. Du'Prey - Campaign Consultant

A completed questionnaire must be received by Wednesday, January 25, to have answers distributed to our stakeholders before early voting starts. Please return to rachelbr@fotp.org.

ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND PRIORITIES RELATED TO PARKS

A. Briefly describe any accomplishments or projects you have been involved with related to parks.

Response:

I participate yearly with a group of community members in the Earth Day activities. I also participate and assist in organizing the yearly Puerto Rican Day Parade, which includes the Puerto Rican Festival in Humboldt Park.

B. Are you planning to introduce legislation or initiatives to address any environmental justice issues? Do you have particular environmental priorities, park programming priorities, or see connections with other priorities for your community? If so, please identify those here.

Response:

As Alderperson, I would champion better communication and transparency between the Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy and our communities. We must ensure Chicago works to reduce its carbon footprint by implementing a Green New Deal, while fighting to protect the city's water resources and shorelines. I am committed to not accepting any campaign money from fossil fuel agencies and will put together a task force that advises me and assists in protecting our community from fossil fuel projects.

I will also work with the members of the community, which includes homeowners, renters and community organizations when it comes to zoning and permitting, and we will also establish and enforce climate, health, and environmental criteria for any future developments in the ward. In addition, I will also fight for healthy food options in parts of the district that are “food deserts”.

C. Chicago's motto is Urbs in Horto (City in a Garden). In the most recent *We Will Chicago* planning process, park discussions were thinly and inadequately spread across all the pillars and not a central focus of planning. How will you prioritize parks or demonstrate that parks are critical to healthy, thriving communities and the entire city and its residents?

Response:

Our community has a high rate of diabetes and other diet related issues such as heart disease. The park is critical for the health of our residents. I was diagnosed with diabetes and I use the park to help me stay healthy, ensuring I do not need to take insulin. I know how critical parks are to this community and the city.

Since my first exposure to community gardening in my early twenties, I have always thought about how amazing it would be to have a community garden in Humboldt Park and other parks in the neighborhood. I would like to work with the Chicago Park District and the community to establish a program called Gardens in the Park. I believe if we provide our youth with not only physical related activities and complement that with providing a campaign for our residents to get involved with urban gardening, we would have a way to combat disease in our community. I think if we incentivise the benefits of gardening with a month of vegetables after a harvest I believe we can attract the community to this sort of programming. I would work with community gardens such as Monarch Garden and other organizations in the neighborhood to gain support for this initiative. I think we could collaborate to collect surplus from these other gardens to distribute to residents that get involved in gardening in the park at harvest time. I would like to dedicate a location within all of the parks in the 26th ward that includes gardening spaces. We have to be proactive with educating our residents, especially our young population. I wish as a young girl I knew the dangers of not taking care of my body. Having to deal with diabetes, I hope I can educate our citizens about the importance of fresh food and as alderperson, I will collaborate with the park district to make the Gardens of the Park a pilot program locally in the 26th ward and hopefully this can be adopted one day city wide.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Below are 11 topics related to parks. Please share your thoughts and policies on each subject using the list of bulleted questions as a guide.

1) EQUITY PLAN FOR CHICAGO'S PARKS

Forty years ago, On May 13, 1983, the [Chicago Park District entered into a consent decree with the federal government](#), resulting from a three-year investigation and a 1982 federal lawsuit addressing

racial discrimination in the allocation of resources within the park district. The decree sought to promote equal and non-discriminatory treatment of Black and Latino communities by establishing rigorous and detailed systems, procedures and schedules that could assure equity, responsiveness, and transparency for these neighborhoods and their parks. It was in effect for six years, and Friends of the Parks registered our displeasure when the court lifted the order even though the Chicago Park District was not in full compliance with the terms of the Consent Decree.

Many other large cities have a written equity plan or framework to guide work for their park district, but Chicago has no such plan or codified standards despite documented racial inequity in park access and resources per our 2018 State of the Parks report. Public parks on the South and West Sides of Chicago often have less access to building facilities, fewer programs, and less investment in parks.

- What policies do you support to address this inequity and improve the park-going experience in South and West Side neighborhood parks?

Response:

In recent years we still see many inequities in our parks due to racism. These issues are not so prevalent in Humboldt Park due to forces of gentrification. Though there are improvements in Humboldt Park, we still have some work on an expansion of programs and investments. However, parks such as Blackhawk Park and Mozart Park that are still frequented by mostly brown and black families have major inequities in the realm of available programs and activities. I know Simons Park had an extensive boxing program and in my opinion due to some communication breakdown with park district leadership, this program was eliminated. I want to put the spotlight on parks like Blackhawk, Simons and Mozart to establish boxing programs and expand programming. I think this would be a light lift of coordinating between the park, organizations and the community to achieve some momentum. We would have such a huge return on our investment of getting these programs reestablished. The correlation between poverty and lack of programming in the parks is a huge hurdle that I hope I can provide solutions for with collaboration from different groups.

EQUITY PLAN FOR CHICAGO'S PARKS:

2) GREEN SPACE AND CREATING NEW PARKS

While more than [98% of Chicagoans](#) live within a 10-minute walk of green space or a playground, Chicago lags behind most other high-density cities in park acreage per capita and total city acreage committed to public parkland (9%). Residents' access to recreational amenities and facilities they hope to find in their parks is not equitable across the city. The West Side of the city has the least parks or green space. While most parkland is on the city's South Side, these parks receive less capital investment and programmatic funding than North Side parks and much of it is undeveloped or underdeveloped brownfield sites that do not yet support much or any public use. These facts demonstrate that Chicago continues to experience systemic racial inequity when it comes to accessing or creating new green spaces.

- How will you prioritize the creation of new green spaces and parks in your ward? How will you include the community in the planning and development process?

Response:

I will work with the city to ensure that all of the 22 city owned lots in the 26th Ward are converted to affordable homes for working families. In the interim, while the affordable homes project is being established, I will commit to converting at least two of these lots into neighborhood gardens in the 26th Ward. I will have community meetings and forums to assist prioritizing the locations of the gardens. In addition to this effort, I will consult with the Chicago Park District and other community organizations by means of quarterly meetings to spark ideas on the expansion of green spaces in the 26th Ward.

- What metrics or factors will you use to determine which communities should receive new green space? What equity considerations will you include in your assessment?

Response:

It should depend on the necessity for green space, how far between parks, how densely populated the area is, and the health of the community. Because of the disparities in health care, BIPOC communities face more health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and cancer. We deserve green spaces that are clean, safe, and healthy.

- The 10-minute Trust for Public Land “walk score” mentioned above includes Chicago Park District spaces (parks, playlots, and beaches) and any green space in the city, including Forest Preserves, spaces managed by NeighborSpace, the 19 boulevards managed by the Chicago Department of Transportation, and privately owned public spaces (POPs). With all these various groups stewarding green spaces, coordination and comprehensive planning can be difficult and complex. How will you sort through the different managers to coordinate increasing access to parkland and green spaces in your ward?

Response:

I’ve been involved in this community my whole life, and as an organizer here I’ve gotten to know many of the organizations and community leaders which I have identified and will request a meeting and come to a consensus on what obtainable actions we can commit to.

- The Illinois state standard is 10 acres of green space for every 1000 residents. As urban planning and development occur in your ward, how will you ensure there is adequate green space for the community to thrive?

Response:

The city currently owns 22 lots in the ward. It will be a priority of mine to work with the city and community gardening organizations, to secure funding and access to convert these lots to urban garden centers. I will commit to converting 2 of these lots into gardens in my 1st year in office.

- Developers and the City have often tried to assert that publicly owned private spaces (POPs) will always be accessible to the public, just as if they belonged to the Chicago Park District. Historically POPs have not always been equally accessible to all residents as the private owner ultimately controls the space. What is your vision for ensuring true public access to new green spaces being created in mega-developments and other planned developments?

Response:

First, we need to establish clearer guidelines when negotiating POPs regarding expectations for use and accessibility. Second, public accessibility (hours, amenities, etc) must be clearly marked in multilingual signage, and available online. Third, we need to increase resources to inspect and make sure that private operators are not going back on their commitments. One solution could be clearly providing a map of POPs in each Ward and thus empowering constituents to contact the City if the areas are not available as stipulated.

- As the Chicago Park District plans construction of new facilities (pickleball courts, basketball courts, fieldhouses, etc.), how will you allocate resources to address the realities of racial inequity in Chicago and historic disinvestment and neglect of some communities? How will you include the community in determining what facilities and amenities are needed?

Response:

I grew up in the 26th Ward being acutely aware of the realities of racial inequity, historic disinvestment and neglect here in our communities. Growing up in Humboldt Park, my own life was shaped by these realities. This is why I have dedicated my personal life and professional career to being an activist and educator. I have a strong and proven record of working to empower young people in our communities and will continue to do so as the next 26th Ward Alderperson.

I will allocate resources in our communities to address public safety and crime prevention through the expansion and creation of afterschool programs and other extracurricular opportunities in our parks. These programs not only promote a healthy lifestyle, they provide exposure and outlets for our community they likely would not have access to without the Chicago Park District. I will meet with the community to determine what facilities and amenities they would like to see provided, and work with the Park District to see that these requests are met. The ultimate goal is to utilize our park system to provide healthy, educational and diverse learning opportunities in our communities to advance personal growth, broaden horizons and help bring peace to our streets.

- Golf courses count as green space and as park acres for residents, but the use is restricted to those playing a particular sport and paying a fee for service. What initiative do you support to make such spaces dual purpose or to expand usage to more residents?

Response:

Models for multi-functional golf courses are prevalent across the world. Golf course spaces can be used for multiple kinds of public recreation and activities - athletics, walk paths, film evenings, concerts and even community flea markets. I would propose public private partnerships for golf courses to develop capacity to share the golf course so that it can be publicly accessible for other activities concurrently with golfers.

- As Chicago deindustrialized and closed former industrial sites, like General Iron and Damen Silos, large swaths of land and former buildings can be re-imagined and re-developed. For example, with the recent closing of General Iron in Lincoln Park and the development of Lincoln Yards, neighborhood advocates have asked for the site to be used as part of a new North Branch Park and Preserve. The preserve could expand access to the river for the whole city and decrease the green space deficit the community currently experiences and will get worse with the added residential density proposed for Lincoln Yards. How do you think comprehensively about the opportunity these sites and the transition across the city offers? How will you coordinate a vision across the city using these spaces to increase green space for all communities? How will you prioritize which neighborhoods or communities should experience development of these new de-industrialized green spaces first?

Response:

Chicago's green space is one of the city's greatest assets. Representing the 26th Ward, I would work to ensure that communities of color are prioritized when it comes to the transition and development of industrial sites to green space. These communities are the most at-risk and would benefit the most from recreational opportunities.

How do you think comprehensively about the opportunity these sites and the transition across the city offers?

I am acutely aware that it is by design that a lot of these former manufacturing sites are surrounding communities of color. Unfortunately, we have not been creative over how we think about how to re-purpose these large, once thriving, developments. It is my desire to create community driven zoning processes when thinking about how we re-purpose these sites. We need to think outside the box when redeveloping them, especially when we know there is a huge need in our city for affordable housing and recreational space and opportunities. When you involve more stakeholders in the process of redevelopment, we can be more intentional and creative about how we use these sites.

How will you coordinate a vision across the city using these spaces to increase green space for all communities?

I will work with elected officials on every level for a vision across the city using green spaces that all of the families of Chicago can enjoy. I am a bit concerned with the new South Loop Development 78 Chicago. If elected alderperson, I will ensure that locations that are abandoned industrial areas do not get converted to areas of housing contributing to residential density, for the rich. If developments are enacted, 85% of the units must be available for median income working families. In addition to that, I believe the 78 Chicago would have been a great opportunity to expand upon the Ping Tom Memorial Park, a place that all families throughout the city can enjoy.

RESPONSE GREEN SPACE AND CREATING NEW PARKS:

3) LAKEFRONT

Chicago's lakefront is a gem of the city and our city is unique in preserving the lake for all people. Currently, 26 of the 30 miles are publicly available for use and protected for the public, but two miles to the north and south remain cut off from public parks, beaches, and paths.

- What policies do you support to ensure the lakefront remains free and clear for all Chicagoans to enjoy? Please consider both the preservation of space (such as the Lakefront Protection Ordinance and Public Trust Doctrine) and practices that affect use (such as facilities and policing).

Response:

I believe we should work with Federal Agencies such as the Army Corp of Engineers and private entities to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of the infrastructure of the lakefront. As we see more extreme weather due to climate change, we see our lakefront getting battered year after year. We have to make sure that we have sound access to the lakefront for all citizens and we have to ensure we take action today so that we can still enjoy these amenities in the future. I also think that the areas from Hollywood Drive to North Shore beach need a plan to provide public access to the beach. Also, I would like to work with our neighbors to the north and south to expand resources that should have been reserved for public use. I know this is a monumental task, but we must utilize the Lakefront Protection Ordinance and the Public Trust Doctrine to make an argument that the lack of accessibility to the public, and the dangers of the current conditions, threaten the private citizens in this region. I believe we should be able to receive federal funding based on this argument.

- What efforts do you support to increase access to the city's lakefront by pedestrians, transit riders, cyclists, and people using wheelchairs and other mobility supports?

Response:

I would support increased bike locations such as Divy. I would also like to consult with experts about whether a four lane path on the lakefront would be feasible. Two of the lanes should be dedicated solely for handicap priority.

RESPONSE LAKEFRONT:

4) ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

In February 2020, Chicago declared a climate change emergency in response to severe storms and lakeshore erosion. Lakefront parks and beaches across the city suffer a battering of lake waves and the loss of sand and erosion at alarming rates. It is estimated that the storms of 2020 caused [\\$37 million in damages](#) to beaches and parks. Erosion, intense storms, and the failing of concrete revetments, metal girders and rock barriers installed by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have caused [4 beaches in Roger Park](#) to be washed away and closed; revealed infill at Rainbow Beach as sand was lost; resulted lake water levels reached the top of the stairs at Calumet Park Beach House; and led to the permanent closing of a third of the [Northerly Island walking path](#)—merely a year after it was opened in 2015.

The threat is only going to continue. Concrete, metal and rock barriers push higher water to unprotected places. Lake levels have always fluctuated, but scientists believe lake levels will continue to trend higher. Regardless of lake level, the increased severity of storm surges due to climate change place our [shoreline communities at greater risk](#) of flooding and damage.

Nature-based solutions are a resilient, long-term, cost-effective method to manage the impact of climate change along the lake and across the city. This approach uses natural ecosystems to provide protection such as wetlands for flood mitigation; trees and prairie spaces to combat the heat island effect; and mangroves to reduce the impact of waves, storm surge, and coastal erosion. These ecosystems also soften climate impacts, such as extreme weather, and reduce climate pollution by capturing carbon dioxide from the air and sequestering it in plants and soils.

Parkland and beaches are already a nature-based solution. The sand, soil, and plantings provide buffering and absorption that helps manage the fluctuation in lake levels and more frequent and severe storms. These green spaces furnish the lakefront with recreational or contemplative areas and habitats for humans and wildlife to enjoy.

- How will you support the preservation or expansion of parkland, native plants, and healthy, mature trees and new tree planting across the city to combat climate change impacts that affect the shoreline and inland communities?

Response:

I am not an expert in this field at all, however, I think it may be beneficial to replicate areas such as the preservation at Montrose Beach. With the presence of trees and shrubs, Montrose beach has seemed to fight off erosion. Montrose is unique, but it has been successful from the land not being consumed by the lake.

RESPONSE ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE:

5) COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARK ADVISORY COUNCILS

About 200 of Chicago's over 600 parks, beaches, playlots, and playgrounds have recognized Park Advisory Councils (PACs), resident groups of committed volunteers who support their parks through volunteerism, fundraising and other activities. Many PACs want influence over programs and maintenance and decisions about how parks will be used, but in reality, many feel left out of those decisions. At times, new permits are handed out for large events or art installations and PAC members or leadership don't find out until the event is underway or changes are being made to the park.

- Across the city there is no required or standard process around public notice and community input for park projects. How will you make sure that the public is informed and engaged in development, capital improvements, urban planning, large event or space rentals, and park planning decisions in your ward?

Response:

Response: In addition to public notices, I will utilize our office email list and social media channels to ensure the community is aware and informed. I will also work with community groups, social service agencies and other networks to broadcast issues of significance so our residents are aware and involved in important community matters and decisions.

- How will you engage with Park Advisory Councils in urban planning, budgeting, funding decisions, considering capital improvement, determining park programming, and deciding what events or installations are placed in parks in your ward?

Response:

I will work tirelessly to protect our parks, and I will coordinate Park Advisory Councils on all levels to ensure our parks are active. Right now we have a Park Advisory Council that was shut down by the Park District. My priority will be to make sure we have reestablished councils with leaders that can make sound and ethical decisions.

- How will you support the formation or the rebuilding of Park Advisory Councils in your ward?

Response:

We will work with the Park District to ensure that we are facilitating a fair and transparent election. Once electing a full advisory council in Humboldt Park, I will work alongside the leadership of the Park District to provide proper training and support. As Alderperson, I will also advocate for more programmatic funds. I will also make sure that there is community involvement beyond the folks elected to the council to encourage more participation.

RESPONSE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARK ADVISORY COUNCILS:

6) PARK PRIVATIZATION AND REVENUE

The Park District generates most of its income from property taxes, and over the last decade, its share of those taxes has declined from 6.1% to 4.7%. The average property tax unit pays \$260 towards the Park District's budget.

To supplement income, the Chicago Park District has increased revenue generating activity – raising fees for harbor and golf courses; issuing permits and renting out parks for private festivals; contracting with more concessionaires or other vendors; adding billboard or advertising; renting space for Amazon lockers; increased renting out park buildings and facilities as special event spaces. Some of these activities close off parkland and public facilities for weeks during the summer and over popular weekends, damage park facilities, and create a distraction for park users who seek tranquility or a natural oasis. While some renters and permit holders repair park damage, it takes months for vegetation to regrow or capital improvements to be finished, impeding park use far beyond the closures.

Some of the most notable examples of these revenue generating activities have been new contracts with Lollapalooza, the NASCAR race planned for 2023, and mega-festivals in Douglass Park. Residents across the city cite a feeling that parks have been commercialized and are no longer public, community spaces for people.

- As park district spaces have refocused on revenue-generating outside events, many community partners and programs have been booted from park district buildings and grounds, or can no longer afford to use the space. What policies do you support to prioritize the use of park space for residents and community groups over revenue generating activities and improve community engagement by private groups seeking to operate for profit in public parks?

Response:

Revenue-generating events come in all shapes and sizes and ensuring that they harmonize with community use is the ultimate goal. The benefit of these events is their aid in more progressively funding the Park District. These events raise funds only from those who have the means to contribute, thus raising Park District resources without adding on to property taxes. The challenge is ensuring that community programming is not unduly displaced. No one policy can ensure this balance, but some places to start are:

- Prioritizing certain important weeks for community programming and thus unavailable for private or disconnected revenue-generating events.
- Planning any revenue-generating events with enough time in advance and giving community meetings different potential dates so that people can provide input on the least inconvenient times.

- The income from these events does not go to a specific park, but rather to the Park District budget as a whole, leaving some residents to feel their park bears the brunt of the burden without reaping benefits. How do we ensure the impact and benefits of these rental events or fees are spread equitably?

Response:

On the one hand, this policy makes a great deal of sense. If we're talking about big events like Lollapalooza, it would be quite harmful to all other parks if only Grant Park took the revenues from that contract. This policy allows bigger parks in more affluent areas to, through their events, ensure funding that more equitably supports public park resources across the city. Ultimately, that's where the needs are.

On the other hand, some might suggest that allowing individual parks to keep a larger share of money from their events would encourage them to plan more events and thus increase revenue for upkeep and amenities.

Ultimately, I would consider looking into if a policy of revenue sharing might seem more equitable. Perhaps allowing a certain small percentage of event revenues to remain with the park itself might yield some benefits. It is important in this matter to note that these revenues present [a very modest part](#) of CPD revenues. Taxes, Harbor fees, Golf course fees and the rental of Soldier Field made up about 87% of the Park District's revenues in 2021.

- In the need to find new funding sources or expand programming, the Park District often balances private or non-profit partners and community programming, users, or needs. At times the interests of these different park users can be at odds. One example is a private baseball program that would like to pay for and install new lights at [Welles Park](#), but some community members are opposed. How will you manage the competing interests of various stakeholders when money is involved?

Response:

As part of my various roles in community organizing, I have led numerous processes to ensure community interests are put front and center when it has come to infrastructure changes, private developments in construction, and community public-private investments. I see no further difficulty providing a mediating and uplifting force through my work as an Alderperson. I will work closely with the District to make sure my constituents are heard and to make sure that community investments are congruous with a holistic development of park amenities.

- When permits are issued for large music festivals or events, like the NASCAR race, the Park District does not have to consult alderpeople, but the event requires resources and time from multiple city departments, such as the police department to manage crowds, CDOT to reorganize traffic, and Streets and Sanitation to clean up. What policies do you support to increase

coordination between city agencies, community members, and the Park District when determining what large events happen in parks?

Response:

Large corporate event organizers should contribute the resources necessary to develop a continuing task force to manage these large events that have representation from all relevant departments, aldermanic offices and the community so that event planning and community input are given an equal forum. This way, the experience and knowledge of prior year's planning can overlap and save departments from reinventing the wheel every couple of years.

- To what extent should the Park District's budget rely on private, revenue generating events, vendors and concession stands, fees for service, advertisements (i.e. billboards), and renting the parks to for-profit groups?

Response:

As stated in a prior answer, items like concessions and fees are already a small percentage of overall revenues. The fees that brought in the most revenue in 2021 were Harbor fees (17.8M) and renting out Soldier Field (35M). Additionally, Golf Course Fees brought in about 8M. It's hard to parse out "revenue generating events" from the financial report - for example Permits brought in 14.6M, but it's such a broad category.

I don't think it's so much a question of how much money should depend on revenue-generating events, so much as if our parks are providing communities with the needed resources. Given the pros and cons, I think there will always be a balance to strike between providing more resources - for better parks - and disrupting community-led programming and use. I think my role as an Alderperson is to communicate to the District my Ward's commitments and preferences on that balance - as should every Alderperson.

RESPONSE PARK PRIVATIZATION AND REVENUE:

7) BUDGET PROCESS AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The Chicago Park District's annual budget process offers a public hearing, an online forum for input, and a vote at an open board meeting. It is questionable whether there is adequate space for resident input or sufficient power and influence ascribed to their input. Many park activists are unaware that the online forums exist or how they would have access them and they face barriers to attending the public meetings.

- The Chicago Park District should actively engage park stakeholders across the city in the budgeting process, particularly with the Capital Improvement Projects. Efforts should be made to understand and address any barriers to participation from historically disenfranchised populations. What will you do to

help the Chicago Park District find ways to extend more budgetary control to the public and incorporate community participation into their annual budgets?

- Each year, the Park District accepts submissions for capital improvement requests from a variety of sources. More than one in three requests from elected officials are approved, while only about one in five requests from the public are approved. As an Alderman, how would you use your influence to support capital improvement requests for parks in your ward and across the city?

Response: As Alderperson, it is my job to represent the interests of the 26th Ward residents who elected me to office. It's unfortunate to hear that the majority of resident requests are not approved. To rectify this problem, I would strongly consider creating a 26th Ward Parks Advisory Committee in conjunction with my office.

This committee would include members of the community, Park Advisory Council members, local Park District staff, and other interested parties. I would assign a staff member to oversee this committee. This committee can make recommendations which I will relay directly to the Park District and City Council to make sure we have the greatest chance of our interests being addressed and implemented.

- Park Advisory Councils have advocated for Menu Money, Tax Increment Financing District Funding, Capital Improvement Programs, Open Space Impact Fees, and Special Service Area Program Funding as resources to supplement Park District funding. As Alderman you have access to and influence over a variety of city funding streams to support projects in your ward. How will you use your influence to support investment and improvement of parks in your ward and the city? What funding priorities would you promote?

Response: I will advocate for a city budget that is inclusive of increased funding to Chicago's Park District so that the park district can continue to provide programming for young people, families and children. Should there be any additional city funding streams available to fund Park District projects, I will make sure to advocate and uplift the priorities assessed by Park Advisory Councils.

RESPONSE BUDGET PROCESS AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION:

8) PARK ACCESSIBILITY, FACILITIES, & AMENITIES

In the South and West sides of the city, larger parks or natural areas are not easily accessible by public transportation. Many parks and natural areas typically lack accessibility for people with disabilities, or only a portion are accessible. While some heavily-trafficked areas like the Lakefront trail may tend to have open and clean bathrooms, many other parks have dirty, locked, or no bathroom facilities. Without

access to a bathroom, the time residents can spend or activities they can engage in at a park are limited. Some parks lack lights, clear parking spaces, signs at the entrance, multilingual signage or signage throughout to identify elements of the park. In some cases, roads leading into parks are blocked with gates and barricades at all hours.

- What steps will you take to ensure our parks, playlots, beaches, and trails are welcoming and accessible places for everyone?

Response:

I propose that alongside Park staff we engage in a series of community meetings to gauge and measure what 26th Ward residents feel are the biggest obstacles to accessibility. Through community meetings we can create a priority list of potential policy changes or investments that my office and Commissioners can work to advocate for.

At base level we should make sure that parks are clean, accessible for those with any mobility impairments, have clear multilingual signage, and clearly marked resources. Another big part of accessibility and making parks welcome is ensuring resources, amenities, and rules are clearly marked out online. People planning to come to the park, especially in this cold weather, will want some way to check from home if our parks have certain amenities or programs to accommodate their visit.

- Pet owners bring their dogs to parks, playlots, paths, and beaches across the city. Dogs can also be a barrier to other residents' enjoyment or a threat to wildlife. How will you engage with various points of views about dogs in parks?

Response:

In my ward, as in many others, people are going to disagree on the use of park spaces, the same way drivers and bikers will have differing perspectives on the proper use of roadways. I'm committed to promoting the necessary infrastructure so that all residents using our parks can enjoy their experience. As just one example, if dog waste is the barrier then we should fund more signage and resources like waste bags and proper receptacles.

- As the Chicago Park District plans improvement and maintenance of fieldhouses, playgrounds, and other recreation facilities, how will you prioritize resources based on historic disinvestment faced by some parks and communities? How will you include the community in the decision-making process? How will a commitment to racial equity impact your actions?

Response:

I grew up in the 26th Ward being acutely aware of the realities of racial inequity, historic disinvestment and neglect here in our communities. Growing up in Humboldt Park, my own life was shaped by these realities. This is why I have dedicated my personal life and professional career to being an activist and

educator. I have a strong and proven record of working to empower young people in our communities and will continue to do so as the next 26th Ward Alderperson.

I will allocate resources in our communities to address public safety and crime prevention through the expansion and creation of afterschool programs and other extracurricular opportunities in our parks. These programs not only promote a healthy lifestyle, they provide exposure and outlets for our community they likely would not have access to without the Chicago Park District. I will meet with the community to determine what facilities and amenities they would like to see provided, and work with the Park District to see that these requests are met. The ultimate goal is to utilize our park system to provide healthy, educational and diverse learning opportunities in our communities to advance personal growth, broaden horizons and help bring peace to our streets.

- Field houses across the city are often closed on weekends and evenings. These closures mean people lack access to bathrooms, staff assistance or programming. Similarly, park bathrooms outside field houses are often locked, or many parks have no bathroom. What will you do to make sure park field houses and the resources they provide can reach more residents?

Response:

We should make sure park staff are readily available and properly compensated. Often, bathrooms will remain closed or fences/barriers will stay up due to fear that lack of supervision will lead people to abuse resources or potentially get hurt. Having adequately staffed parks would help ameliorate that concern and ensure resources are available for use so that people can dependably plan their visits to the different parks in our ward.

- Often, new construction developments are allowed to use developer-owned "publicly accessible" green spaces to satisfy open space requirements rather than Chicago Park District-controlled land. When private corporations dictate the development, management, and public access to green spaces, it seldom leads to park spaces desired by Chicago. These privately administered spaces are subject to different operating hours and rules than local parks. Additionally, when departments in the City government collaborate for new development or capital improvement to be "shared," the park users miss out on access or design of the space. An example is Whitney Young's Sports Complex, funded entirely with tax-increment financing. What is your vision to ensure true public access to new green spaces, facilities, or amenities that are funded with public dollars or promise public access during construction? How will you use your position to support that vision?

Response:

Whenever private corporations want to use their resources to partner towards community goals, I am more than happy to mediate. However, open space requirements are meant to preserve cultural and recreational opportunities, as well as offer refuge from the urban environment for all people. Any restrictions or rules that are contrary to these goals runs against the very purpose of the requirements. I

will facilitate and ensure that community input is front and center to make clear the requirements our community has for open spaces in any development. As an activist and community organizer, I have a long history of gathering community input and standing up for ward priorities.

RESPONSE PARK ACCESSIBILITY, FACILITIES, & AMENITIES:

9) PARK PROGRAMMING

Annually, more than 350,000 people participate through the Chicago Park District in thousands of sports, recreational, cultural, and environmental programs across the city. Yet the distribution of programs is often inequitable and mismatched, failing to meet the needs of local communities effectively. Even preliminary research indicates dramatic inequities across the city in the amount of programs and services offered. At times, programs feel dropped into a community without community input or research. In addition, the programs families are looking to for their health, cultural, and recreation may also be financially out of reach.

Where processes existed under the 1983 Consent Decree to ensure equitably distributed and responsive programming, many parks now lack the programs that are culturally relevant and affordable.

- Parks can be essential resources for people of all ages in a community, especially because they offer classes, camps, pools, exercise equipment and facilities, and chances to socialize. What resources will you invest in parks to prioritize use by diverse populations – seniors, families and children, people with disabilities, and teenagers? How will you ensure park programming is culturally relevant to BIPOC communities that have experienced exclusion and disinvestment?

Response: Based on available resources, I would request community input to determine what programming and opportunities residents would like offered in our parks.

- What will you do to support residents and community groups to have access to park space and programming for no or low cost?

Response:

I will advocate for Park Districts to receive programmatic funding from the City's department of family support services so that afterschool programs, weekend activities and summer camps are at low or no cost to the youth and families of the ward. In addition, I will be interested in partnering with local non-profits who might be interested in providing free programming for residents in exchange for the subsidized rental use of park facilities.

- Parks across Chicago do not have the same access to sufficient, culturally relevant, and affordable programs or have space maintained to meet the needs of the community. What will you do to ensure equity in park programming and resources (facilities, maintenance, etc.) for

parks in your ward and across Chicago, keeping in mind the historic underinvestment in West and South Side parks?

Response:

Community engagement and strong Park Advisory Councils are essential to addressing these inequities. We must work together to create a voice that ensures our parks have the programming and resources needed to meet the needs of our communities. I will also encourage the park district to conduct a racial equity assessment across the city to identify parks in need of equitable resources.

- How will you include the community in program design and program offering in their parks to make sure it is sufficient, relevant, and affordable and to proactively account for external community problems related to public safety and violence?

Response: The purpose of park programming is to serve the needs of the community, so again community engagement and strong Park Advisory Councils are essential to developing park offerings. Working with outside organizations to help identify additional funding sources is one way to make sure park offerings are affordable. Working together with community residents, local schools and organizations with expertise in public safety and violence-prevention is a proactive way to ensure park programming is a safe space that promotes safer communities.

RESPONSE PARK PROGRAMMING:

10) SAFETY

Feelings of safety and security greatly shape how park spaces are experienced. While some park users feel vulnerable when parks are too empty, others want quiet, wide-open, empty spaces. Some fear gun violence, and others fear oppressive police presence. Some are worried about playground conditions, and others are worried about vandalism. Some want more lights or call boxes. All of these are important considerations as we address safety concerns.

In the summer of 2022, as a response to the death of a Chicago teenager, a curfew was enacted at Millennium Park to restrict event access to the park for young residents not accompanied by an adult or attending a ticketed event. In multiple Listening Tour sessions in different parts of Chicago, we heard similar statements that represent a specific loss of access to park amenities after violence occurred in their parks. If the response to select instances of violence in parks is to close, restrict, or remove certain amenities, this seems like the beginning of a very dangerous trend of the Chicago Park District punishing entire communities for the actions of a few.

- How will you approach safety in a way that does not unfairly punish entire communities for the behavior of the few?

Response: Park programming and access to park amenities is vital to the development of our youth by offering them a safe space to meet, exercise, socialize, and explore new recreational and educational

opportunities. Limiting these opportunities is detrimental to their growth. Creating a coordinated effort between the community, park advisory council, police department and park district to ensure our youth are not unfairly punished is a good first step in addressing this problem.

- How would you ensure residents of all ages can access public amenities while balancing concerns for public safety?

Response:

Basic safety infrastructure must include resources to keep areas well-lit, keep people from potentially falling into pond areas, and ensure walkways are clear. Second, communities will protect and value their resources. If we leave our parks in disrepair, it signals to local communities that we don't care what happens in our public spaces. Parks must be part of broader holistic investments in community programming to ensure we have spaces of dialogue and neighborhood programming.

- What steps will you take or policies will you support to increase the public safety of Chicago's parks, playlots, playgrounds, paths, and beaches beyond increasing police presence?

Response: I will advocate for organizations that specialize in street intervention and violence prevention to facilitate programming in the park that will build visibility and increase measures for safety. Also, an active park is always a safer park and therefore, we must increase funding for our park district as a whole.

RESPONSE SAFETY:

11) PARK DISTRICT OVERSIGHT

- The Chicago Park District is not a department of the city government, but a separate governmental entity. However, the Chicago Park District's Board of Commissioners' members are nominated by the mayor and must be approved by the Committee on Special Events, Cultural Affairs and Recreation. What policies do you support to make sure nominees have demonstrated relevant experience, background and skills sets related to parks?

Response:

I will meet with Park Advisory Councils in my ward to solicit feedback around the nominees to the Board of Commissioners. This will allow me to develop a set of questions to vet and ask of nominees as part of their appointment process through the City Council. If I am not on the Committee on Special Events, Cultural Affairs and Recreation, I will make sure that one of my colleagues asks these questions. More directly, I will have my office connect me to potential nominees so that we can have one on one dialogues to discuss their background, experience and what philosophy they bring to their role. Urban infrastructure, of course, does not exist in a technocratic vacuum. How one perceives systemic

inequities, the racial lines of pollution and community displacement will all play a central role in how they govern the Park District.

- How will you use your role to provide oversight to the parks, playlots and beaches in your ward?

Response:

I'll make sure my office has very close ties to all Park staff and administration in our Ward. I will encourage constituents to lift up any concerns they have so that I can work together with park administrators to pool resources and address constituent concerns.

RESPONSE PARK DISTRICT OVERSIGHT:

WARD SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR WARD 5, 7 AND 10

- In 2022, a [community ballot referendum](#) in the 5th, 7th and 10th Wards asked the city to stop cutting down trees in Jackson Park and the area surrounding the South Shore Cultural Center passed by 82%. The trees are at risk due to the construction of the Obama Presidential Center and the proposals to merge Jackson Park and the South Shore Cultural Center golf courses into a new PGA golf course. As Alderman, how will you work to support the community's preference to save the trees in Jackson Park, the South Shore Cultural Center, South Shore Nature Sanctuary, and the surrounding community areas?

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR WARD 10

A toxic dump occupies 50 acres of shoreline on one of the last critical pieces of land on the South Side to complete Daniel Burnham's vision of a park system spanning the entire Chicago lakefront. The [Chicago Area Confined Disposal Facility \(CDF\)](#) sits on Lake Michigan between the Calumet River and Calumet Park in the 10th ward. The land is owned by the Chicago Park District but leased to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to store dredge until full. In 2022, the CDF maxed out the storage space and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has asked to expand the facility 25 feet vertically to keep it open.

The site, built in the 1980s, is a legacy of previous industrial uses of the river, the only industrial or toxic site on Chicago's shoreline, and is leaking into the Calumet River and Lake Michigan--leaking that could worsen with rising water levels and storm surges fueled by climate change.

- Chicago residents have waited almost 40 years for the land to be returned and created into a public park. As Alderman, what next steps do you support related to the CDF?

PARK PRIVATIZATION AND REVENUE ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR WARD 24, 25, and 28

- What will you do to increase community engagement about the decision to hold festivals in parks, how will you respond to stakeholder feedback, and what will you do to ensure the impact and benefits of these rental events or fees return to Douglass park?

NEW BUILDINGS IN PARKS WARD 26

In 2022 an unpermitted, unapproved building project was undertaken in a non-democratic process with state funds by the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture in historic Humboldt Park next to the landmarked former stables building (and office of Jens Jensen).

- Please disclose any formal or informal leadership roles in the community that you have held or currently hold that relate to the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture and their plan to develop structures on public parkland.

Response:

Throughout my career as an educator, community organizer and Puerto Rican activist I've worked with the museum and take pride in having the National Puerto Rican Museum located in our community. Our community has faced gentrification and our cultural institutions are important. I am currently a full time candidate and do not have any formal ties to the National Puerto Rican Museum. I have only worked with the museum in joint ventures that the museum incurred with my employer at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. I am not and was not part of any planning meetings involving the new structure or negotiated any approach.

- What did you know about or how were you involved with this project before construction was halted in September 2022?

Response:

I did not know anything about this project until I saw the structure being built.

- How will you offer leadership to remedy this situation?

Response:

As a leader and organizer in the community, I have met with the National Museum for Puerto Rican Arts and Culture's leadership to raise the concerns we have received from 26th Ward residents in relation to the recent construction on park land. The meeting sought to also understand what has happened in the process of building this archive center up until this point. I believe I am the only candidate for 26th Ward Alderperson to have requested and have met with NMPRAC to engage in a dialogue that is rooted in transparency. If elected to city council, I want to ensure we are all engaging in a process of transparency.

The leadership of NMPRAC were open to listening to the concerns and will be participating in a process that the park district has set forth to remedy the situation. My current stance on the new structure is that in order to resolve the concerns, we must participate in a process that centers community voice, and allows for the community to raise concerns and questions. As 26th Ward Alderperson, I will facilitate in partnership with the Chicago Park District a community forum that will assist in moving forward the appropriate next steps based on community and park district input.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR WARD 48 & 49

- What will you do to support vulnerable shoreline communities from the threat of flooding, erosion, and the impact of climate change?

PARK ACCESSIBILITY, FACILITIES, & AMENITIES ADDITIONAL QUESTION WARD 49

- [Touhy Park](#) has seen an encampment in the park for almost 2 years. The Park District has moved some activities to neighboring parks. The Police Department and the City have a policy not to evict people staying on public land. What policies and actions do you support to address this encampment that will manage the needs of the various people involved?