

The Chicago Lakefront

26 Miles of Scenic Lakefront Parks and Public Spaces



31st Street Harbor and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

OVERVIEW

“Forever open, clear and free” aligns with the spirit of a core American ideal, and appears to reflect the words, expressions and thoughts of the Founding Fathers of our Nation.

The full quote reads “Public ground - A common, to remain forever open, clear and free of any buildings, or other obstructions.” To protect the Chicago Lakefront and to insure it remained accessible to the public was an early aspiration and vision of our city’s earliest pioneers and legislators. Dating to one year before the City’s incorporation in 1836, this forward-thinking vision was adopted by our City and State. Land was set aside in Chicago for parkland, greenspace and open space near the early lakeshore, now Grant Park, to be enjoyed by all. In theory, this was and remains a highly democratic ideal.

The Chicago Lakefront

Address: 26 Miles of Scenic Lakefront Parks and Public Spaces

Architects: Olmsted & Vaux, Nelson, Simonds, Burnham, Atwood, Bennett & Others

Date: In Perpetuity Since 1836

Style: Naturalistic

Neighborhood: Shoreline of Lake Michigan—From North to South to the City Limits



31st Street Harbor and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

After more than a century of parkland improvements and additions along the lakeshore, in recent years various changes and proposals introduced to the Chicago Lakefront have raised a new awareness, along with genuine concern for this precious resource. Adverse and harmful ideas and developments include the additions to Soldier Field, along with the proposed relocation of the Children’s Museum to Grant Park, and the Lucas Museum in Burnham Park. The Children’s Museum and Lucas Museum failed to materialize. Additionally, the 2016 proposed Olympic bid package would have adversely impacted many Lakefront sites, along with nearly all of Chicago’s major parks. If realized, these collective plans would have eliminated thousands of old-growth trees, meadows and historic landscapes through the addition of proposed stadiums and other ancillary structures. Despite the potential to be disastrous to our world-class parks and public lands, they were embraced by many politicians and stakeholders at the time.

The proposed 20-acre Obama Presidential Center on the Lakefront in Jackson Park poses a special challenge to this tenet of “forever open, clear and free.” While we welcome the Obama Presidential Center to Chicago’s South Side, the decision to locate a private facility on public parkland is problematic. The Jackson Park proposal for the Obama Presidential Center would result in a clearing of 20 acres of trees, parklands, recreational facilities and ball fields. The expansion and widening of South DuSable Lake Shore Drive and South Stony Island Avenue would result in the loss of 400 additional trees. It’s likely that wildlife habitats and migratory flyways will be impacted by this development from the expansion of roadways and incursions into Jackson Park at both the east and west perimeters of the park. In reality, the roadway closures will negatively impact many areas of the park, where the removal of Cornell and Hayes Drives, will require the widening of South DuSable Lake Shore Drive and South Stony Island Avenue. We question the rationale of removing roadway pavement in one portion of the park, and adding it back in another place in the same park, and at great cost to the taxpayers.



North Lake Shore Drive © Serhii Chrucky

While Preservation Chicago welcomes the Obama Presidential Center to Chicago and to the South Side, we are of the opinion that nearby private lands would be a more appropriate site for these large structures and this new presidential complex. Due to poor leadership, Chicago parks have fallen into terrible disrepair with many buildings needing extensive repair work. In some cases complete reconstruction is necessary to address decades of deferred maintenance. It appears that parkland giveaways have become a strategy for reinvestment where funds are lacking for our poorly maintained parks. This is especially evident in parks on the South and West Sides of the City, and for portions of our Lakefront. The protection, maintenance and stewardship in perpetuity of these assets should be prioritized.

Also of great concern on the Chicago Lakefront are the proposed plans for the revisioning and complete overhaul of North DuSable Lake Shore Drive, one of Chicago's most beautiful thoroughfares. The reconstruction plans would rethink seven miles of the lakefront from Grand Avenue at the south to Hollywood Avenue at its northernmost border. The project is called *Redefine the Drive: North DuSable Lake Shore Drive*, with studies and proposals conducted by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), along with their consultants to bring this roadway up to modern highway standards. This project has the potential to adversely impact many of the unique characteristics of this world-class boulevard and drive, if not carefully considered and protected.

The DuSable Lake Shore Drive redefining proposals have included removing the historic overpasses and beautifully crafted bridges, along with their scenic vistas and expansive viewsheds. These uniquely special features, along with characteristics of the Drive, as it rises and falls over the dramatic and panoramic views of the downtown buildings and the Lakefront, are proposed to be severely impacted, altered and lost. The proposals also extend to a straightening of the gentle curves, while also adding vast areas of landfill, and with the addition of high berms, which will often obscure views of Lake Michigan for motorists. Such plans are in response to closures from time-to-time, when the Lake breaches portions of the Drive, at its narrowest points.



Foster Avenue Bridge over North Lake Shore Drive © Serhii Chrucky

The plans also propose a widening the Lake Shore Drive thoroughfare in certain locations and underground or sub-surface tunneling of extensive areas of the roadway, from Navy Pier to Oak Street Beach, along with some areas to the north. The tunneling and trenching of North DuSable Lake Shore Drive for automobile traffic is more akin to sections of Interstate I-90 and I-94—the Dan Ryan Expressway, and I-290—the Eisenhower Expressway, than a boulevard in the midst of parklands and adjacent to Lake Michigan. There are also flood dangers associated with the creation of subgrade trenches and tunnels so close to Lake Michigan, as recent heavy rains have stranded many motorists, trapping them on the current at-grade Lake Shore Drive roadway. This tunneling concept appears to present a real danger to life-safety during severe weather events. Given that the Oak Street express tunnel regularly floods during moderate rain despite the drainage systems. This is of great concern noting the increasingly unpredictable weather conditions in Chicago, from extraordinary flooding to heavy snowstorms, which have stranded many thousands of people in the past on a surface-grade Lake Shore Drive.

In other progressive cities, highway systems are being rethought and re-visioned—sometimes being removed, verses being expanded and trenched. Widening the road will only further encourage more vehicles on this boulevard-drive. It would appear that city officials are proposing adverse changes to a historic boulevard-drive, for rush-hour traffic loads, rather than finding smart alternatives and less invasive solutions to transportation needs of Chicagoans.

Other sections of Lake Shore Drive will be widened, with medians and their planted trees cut and removed, shrubbery and perennials lost. Parkland and greenspace incursions in Lincoln Park are proposed for new and expanded entries, exits and bus ramps are envisioned. This has the potential to be disastrous if not handled with the utmost care.

Preservation Chicago is of the opinion that everyone should have the experience of enjoying Chicago's parklands —



Grant Park and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

whether by walking, jogging, bicycling, or even driving in an automobile. These parklands and Lakefront lands are special to all, including all the various ways they are enjoyed and experienced.

Yet these public lands and spaces are often considered by politicians or developers as undeveloped vacant parcels, expendable for private development, when indeed these are developed lands as public places and recreational environments. Some of these lands have been dedicated to the public for more than 150 years, and most all of them for over a century. These are sacred places belonging to all of us as a place of refuge, reflection and recreation. The park lands and shoreline allow for a break from our daily lives, and to once again commune with nature — to refresh and reenergize one's spirits.

Unfortunately, these very same public and sacred grounds, are also subject to political giveaways and viewed as possible gifts by elected officials for pet projects, sometimes to the highest bidder. Instead, we should be considering the conversion of more private lands to expand public parklands. This could include the possibility of using air rights over rail yards, and to consider expanding our parks and lakefront lands, and if necessary, build new museums and facilities on newly created park land sites.

HISTORY

Chicago's Lakefront is world renowned, with its legendary parks, greenspaces, recreational and pastoral spaces, beaches, harbors and waterfront stretching 26 miles, along the coast of Lake Michigan. It is so greatly associated with the City of Chicago that it's often noted as "Chicago's front yard." These seminal Lakefront spaces and lands were designed by some of the most notable individuals in the world of architecture, landscape architecture and design. From architects William LeBaron Jenney, Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett to seminal landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted, Olmsted & Vaux, Olmsted Brothers, Ossian Cole Simonds, Swain Nelson, Jens Jensen, Alfred Caldwell, May McAdams and others.



Rainbow Beach at 77th Street © Eric Allix Rogers

These designers, landscape architects and architects were visionaries. Together, they brought a new series of concepts and ideas to an ever-growing industrial American city in one single vision and idea—The Chicago Lakefront Parks and Boulevard System, which also connect to inner-city parks and greenspaces. The vision was revolutionary in concept and executed on a grand scale, and fashioned like a work of art. These grand plans were published in periodicals around the world. Their impact greatly influenced the planning of other cities across the nation, as part of the City Beautiful Movement, introducing beautification, grandeur and nature to our densely populated metropolitan areas. Other benefits included addressing health and wellness concerns, embracing nature as a health benefit, and as a critical part of the urban environment. In the process, these plans forever changed our city. These plans reimagined Chicago, from its industrial core and backbone, with the challenges of an ever-expanding urban population, continuing into the mid-20th century. These plans merged into a broader vision to benefit the public, while continuing to recover from the ashes and tragedy following the Chicago Fire of 1871, to a new one—a city of world renown.

Created with a vision which has grown tremendously since its initial legislation in 1836, the Chicago Lakefront and its parks have been reimagined and expanded from its earliest years and have become a recreational space second to none. From a time when Michigan Avenue was almost at the water's edge, to numerous reclamations by the Illinois Central Railroad in response to a growing city and the demand for goods and transportation, the Chicago Lakefront has undergone a tremendous metamorphosis and expansion over time.

Chicago's parks have been developed and impacted in their design in part by natural features, along with man-made infills of land. Early museum institutions built on infill land, marshes, deltas, outcroppings, former railroad yards and lands once part of the greater Lake Michigan watershed. From that reclaimed land area grew additional parklands, weaving together such sites and places as the Museum Campus, vast areas of Grant Park, and expanses of lakefront trails. South DuSable Lake Shore Drive developed over time as a recreational boulevard tying together the Chicago Lakefront and its parks, to the inner-city communities that abound to the west. These parklands and much of the shoreline from Calumet Park at the Illinois-Indiana border on the South Side, to Downtown, Lincoln

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Park, Edgewater and to the Evanston border on the far north, unite communities and bring our city together as a whole.

The Lakefront and its park system, continues to be a great vision, which was given credence and acceptance from a broader plan of visionaries at the top of their profession. This influenced not only Chicago, but other major centers and cities, across the nation and elsewhere in other parts of the world. It was the plans of Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1870s, and the planned vision of architect William LeBaron Jenney, regarded as the father of the skyscraper, who also designed much of our Chicago Boulevard System and our inner-connecting-city parks. It was the vision of Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett in the *Plan of Chicago*, of 1909, which dared to stir one's blood—the famous quote by Daniel Burnham in his presentation to the Commercial Club of Chicago.

“Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not themselves be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that will stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.” (Burnham, *Plan of Chicago*, 1909)

Through the decades, and now for over a century, this has been one of the guiding spirits of Chicago to look upon the Lakefront and our waterways beyond industry and transportation properties, and to see a new vision. We see its impact on the human spirit, the health and wellness of its residents. Not too long ago in our history, both Lake Michigan and the Chicago River were associated with waterborne diseases like cholera, dysentery and others. This started to change at the onset of the 20th century when the health benefits and recreational activities, including those associated with our Lakefront, began to emerge. To have a perspective on such ideals, look no further than our views of the Chicago River, which was once treated much like an industrial sewer. Efforts of the late 20th century and that of the past 20 years, have changed so much that we now celebrate the Chicago River and its various branches with the downtown Riverwalk and various recreational trails, both existing and proposed.

These are some of the special qualities that make Chicago more livable, more special, more inviting and a great city renowned the world over. Such ideals provide a place for people, trees, and wildlife to coexist. They make our city richer, and give a place of refuge from the toils of daily life, and a place to allow a space to reflect, to imagine and to once again commune with nature and the environment. The Lakefront and our parks allow a refuge from the noise and distractions of a large world class city like Chicago. We should do everything possible to retain that vision, and not allow it to be whittled-away or “suffer a death by a thousand cuts.” We cannot allow incursions, additional buildings and obstructions in these special places. If we really respect and value our parklands, this should be a priority to upkeep, maintain, while not allow it to be deprived of funding, as these are all of our collective lands.



Lake Shore Drive's North Avenue Bridge Detail © Serhii Chrukky



Museum of Science and Industry overlooking the Jackson Park Lagoons and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

In addition to the physical and adverse harm to the Chicago Lakefront determined by construction of the proposed Obama Presidential Center during the Federal Section 106 Hearings, the cost to the taxpayers for this project is substantial. Closing roadways, like Cornell Drive, along with portions of Hayes Drive and the Midway Plaisance, and the widening of South DuSable Lake Shore Drive and South Stony Island Avenue is tremendous. The estimated figure of this work is \$175 million, which will likely increase. These plans will destroy the historic Olmsted & Vaux roadways, which instead of being closed, should be narrowed to their original proportions.

In the 1960s, these historic boulevard roadways and parkways were greatly widened, over the objections of the community, with hundreds of trees cut and lost to this expansion. Similar plans were executed for South Lake Shore Drive, with more old-growth trees cut for a widening of the Drive. It appears that we as a city are repeating the same missteps and mistakes once again. At a time in which both a city and state in severe financial distress, and needing to make some budget cuts and tough decisions, we should not be taking on an undue burden of removing paved roadway surfaces and relocating them elsewhere nearby. There's also concern about the long-term maintenance of the proposed 230' tower and ancillary buildings of the Obama Presidential Center, and the public's commitment to potentially maintain these structures.

Lincoln Park, from cemetery to parkland with additions is considered to be Chicago's largest park and one of the oldest of the large public parks. It extends more than six miles along the Lakefront from North Avenue to Hollywood Avenue. Lincoln Park has expanded greatly over time, and its designers included Swain Nelson and his firm of Nelson & Benson beginning in the 1860s and continuing into the 1880s. Also, Ossian Cole Simmonds and his firm of Simonds and Company, continuing landscape designs into the early 1900s. Large sections of Lincoln Park were extended almost in line with the ancient ridgeline of the Lake. Lincoln Park has continued to grow over the years, even before the Chicago Fire. Originally named Cemetery Park and later Lake Park, Lincoln Park experienced many expansions and additions over time. It was renamed Lincoln Park after our 16th president



Promontory Point and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, following his assassination in 1865.

One of Lincoln Park's last major expansions in the 1950s occurred when Lakefront lands associated with the Edgewater Beach Hotel and other entities became part of Lincoln Park. Today, it is one of the City's most versatile and visited parks. In addition to Lincoln Park Zoo—one of oldest zoos in the nation, the park contains numerous beaches, harbors and field houses, more than any other Chicago city park.

Jackson Park, Midway Plaisance, and Washington Park were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, with later additions by Olmsted Brothers, Alfred Caldwell, May McAdams and others. These amazing and vast parklands, originally sponsored by the South Parks Commission in 1869 and the years that followed, were long considered the finest of Chicago's parks and designed by the illustrious firm of Olmsted & Vaux. Olmsted-designed landscapes are treasured the world over. The grouping of these three parks as one united vision was one of the first large and formally planned greenspaces of the vast and expansive Lakefront parks. This even occurring in contrast to the beginnings of the North Side's Lincoln Park, which began a decade earlier.

Jackson Park contains approximately 550 acres of land, lagoons, beaches, harbors, islands, nature sanctuaries, recreational spaces and an 18-hole golf course. Jackson Park was linked to its sister park, the equally impressive and expansive Washington Park, also designed by Olmsted and Vaux. Jackson Park and the adjoining Midway Plaisance, was also the site of the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, attracting over 27 million visitors to Chicago.

Washington Park is known for its vast spaces, lagoons, expansive meadows and refectory buildings on 380 acres of



Promontory Point at 55th Street and the Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

land and was completed as the first phase of the South Parks Commission's plans by Olmsted & Vaux. Noting the regrading of its marshy lands would be more expensive and challenging, Olmsted and the South Park Commissioners delayed construction of Jackson Park until additional funding was secured in 1871. Portions of Jackson Park continued to be redesigned in part to 1895, under the direction of both Frederick Law Olmsted and Olmsted Brothers, following the Columbian Exposition. Both Jackson and Washington Parks are linked by the Midway Plaisance, a linear park, spanning east to west, also created by Olmsted and Vaux in 1870. The Midway is a recessed grassy parkway and knolls of approximately 90 acres—and approximately one-mile in length. It was originally designed as part of a system of canals linking the two parks with Lake Michigan. Even as a recessed feature, it exhibits many of the same qualities envisioned by Olmsted & Vaux. To this day, these South Side parks are among Chicago's greatest greenspaces and public assets along the Chicago Lakefront.

Land giveaways and politics, including the plans for the proposed Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, will severely and adversely impact more than the 20 acres of public parkland in an Olmsted-designed park. The City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District and the State of Illinois have gifted this historic 20-acre-greenspace to a private venture, which is to include a 230-foot tower and several ancillary buildings. Debate over the proposal and the potential adverse impacts have been ongoing for almost five years, with determinations that the adverse impacts are indeed recognized by a wide group of entities, individuals and governmental organizations. If this much-welcomed presidential center was constructed on available nearby private lands, in lieu of public parklands, the Presidential Center would have most likely have been completed and open at this time.

Promontory Point, at 55th Street and Lake Michigan at the southern end of Burnham Park, is in the Hyde Park neighborhood and part of Chicago's lakefront park system. "The Point" was created as a WPA project in the 1930s.



Northerly Island and the Chicago Skyline © Eric Allix Rogers

What had been Lake Michigan was filled with soil and infill retained by a limestone revetment. The Prairie School landscape design was executed by Jens Jensen's disciple Alfred Caldwell and included signature council rings, a meadow and native plant material. The peninsula-style park has always welcomed the diverse communities of the South Side and allowed an unusual degree of open water lake swimming. On January 19, 2018, Promontory Point was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Since 2000 the Promontory Point Conservancy, a community organization representing the Hyde Park community, has been working to prevent the demolition of the historic and beautiful limestone step-stone revetment that surrounds and protects the Point. Governmental agencies had proposed replacing the limestone with a massive concrete structure that was forbidding and prevented citizens from entering the water, but this plan has been suspended. Fifty years ago, there were more than sixteen miles of this naturalistic limestone revetment at the water's edge of Chicago's lakefront parks. Nearly all the City's historic limestone revetments have been replaced by industrial-style concrete, except for what remains at Promontory Point. The Conservancy, with the support of Preservation Chicago, other preservation groups and 5th Ward Alderman Hairston, continues to work with government agencies to ensure that the limestone revetment is restored to its historic character and function.

The South Shore Cultural Center, formerly the South Shore Country Club, joins Jackson Park at its southernmost border at 67th Street. While the South Shore Cultural Center was once a private club, it is now part of the holdings of the Chicago Park District, with vast expansive lands, containing a magnificent series of structures which include a former clubhouse with grand spaces, a colonnade, gatehouse, a nature preserve, and a nine-hole golf course. These former club grounds, designed by architects Marshall & Fox with Thomas Hawkes as the landscape architect, are an integral part of the Chicago Lakefront. Efforts to save the buildings of this amazing former club and develop an extraordinary and evolving nature sanctuary have been a lengthy and substantive community effort.

Rainbow Beach is a 60-acre park fronting Lake Michigan located in the South Chicago community on the southeast side. It was named for the United States Army's 42nd Rainbow Division following World War I, and parts of the park and beach dated to 1908 when it was known as Rocky Ledge Beach. This larger area of lakefront was united under the Rainbow Beach name in 1959.



The Chicago Lakefront © Eric Allix Rogers

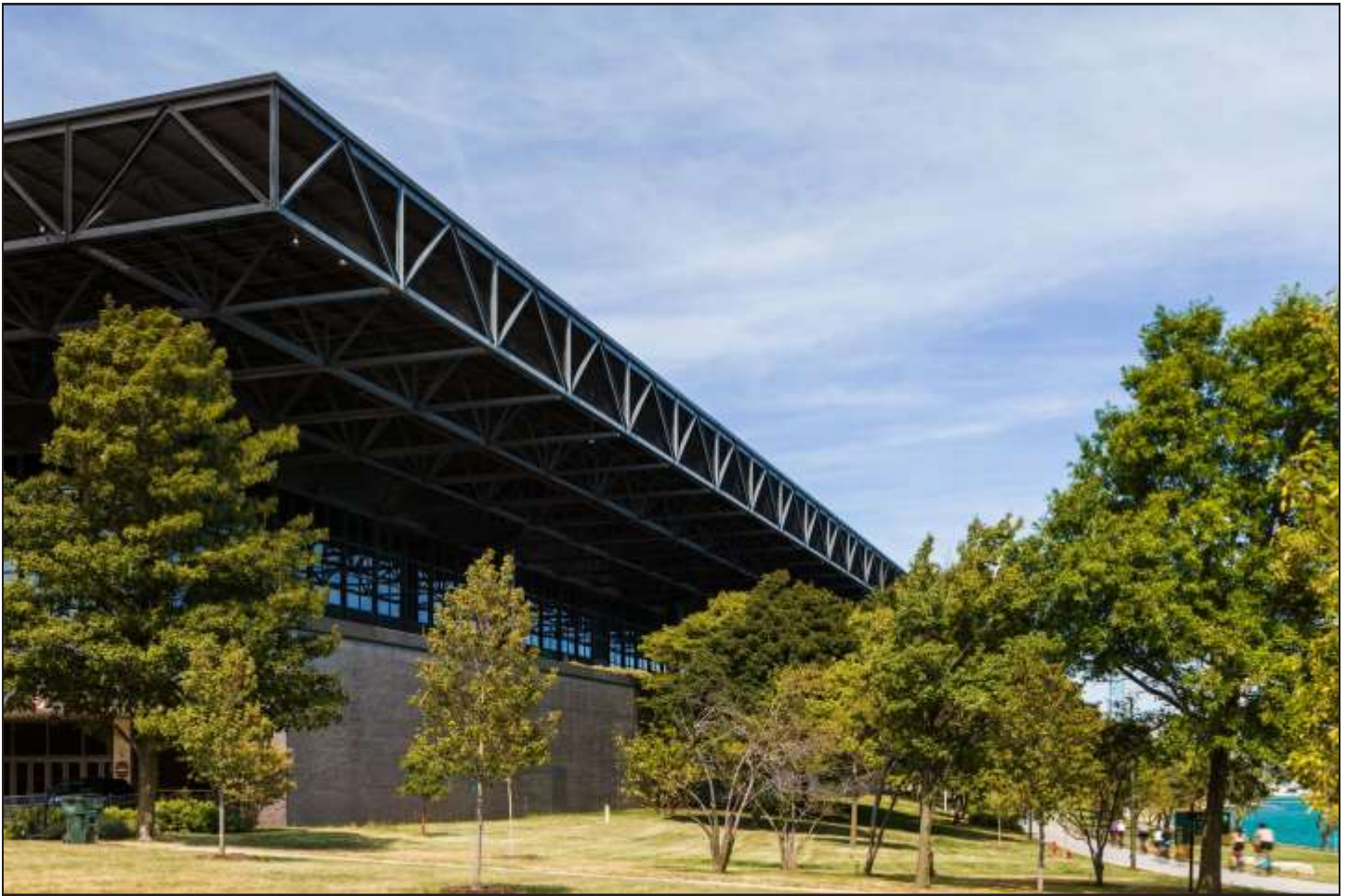
Other South Side parks linked to the Lake Michigan shoreline include Calumet Park, on the far Southeast Side or East Side of the City. It was originally planned and developed in 1904 by the Olmsted Brothers and continued to grow to its current size of 198 acres in the 1930s. The southernmost border of Calumet Park extends to the Illinois-Indiana State Line.

The Last Four Miles is a plan that was developed by Friends of the Parks to envision a continuation of lakefront parklands two miles in each direction at the furthestmost sections of the city. This plan would extend the public parks to both the Far-North Side, to include Rogers Park to the Evanston border and to the Far-South Side and Indiana border with Chicago. This plan is a continuation of the larger vision combined and interwoven with those captured in Burnham & Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*. This widely published document has been a guiding principle for Chicago for over a century. Part of the Friends of the Park vision is to convert the brownfields of the former U. S. Steel and Illinois Steel Mills and plants into additional Lakefront recreational lands and facilities. It is a bold plan, but it has not been fully embraced and funded as it should be since all of our City's agencies appear strapped for capital project improvement monies. Still, such projects could be a transformational investment in former industrial areas of Chicago's South Side, and help to provide more protections from an ever-changing Lake Michigan. These parks not only serve as a recreational aspect for the enjoyment of all, but also as a buffer and sometimes floodplain from the severe waves and actions of Lake Michigan.

Climate change is a reality globally and in Chicago. Rising Lake Michigan waters and those of nearby rivers and waterways, coupled with an increase in precipitation, is a reality that we must make accommodations for in the near future. Such issues impact our Chicago Lakefront and parklands, and we should not be building structures upon these areas with a high-water table that often flood, as seen in many of our parks.

Where there is little-to-no-parkland or land barriers separating the built environment from Lake Michigan, as seen in areas of South Shore and Rogers Park, and portions of Edgewater, the impacts are both financial and emotional. The impact to both buildings and their residents are substantial and a reality. We must collectively plan for the future, noting both rising earth temperatures and lake water levels.

On the Mid-South Lakefront is the remarkable Lakeside Center at McCormick Place. A revisioning and repurposing

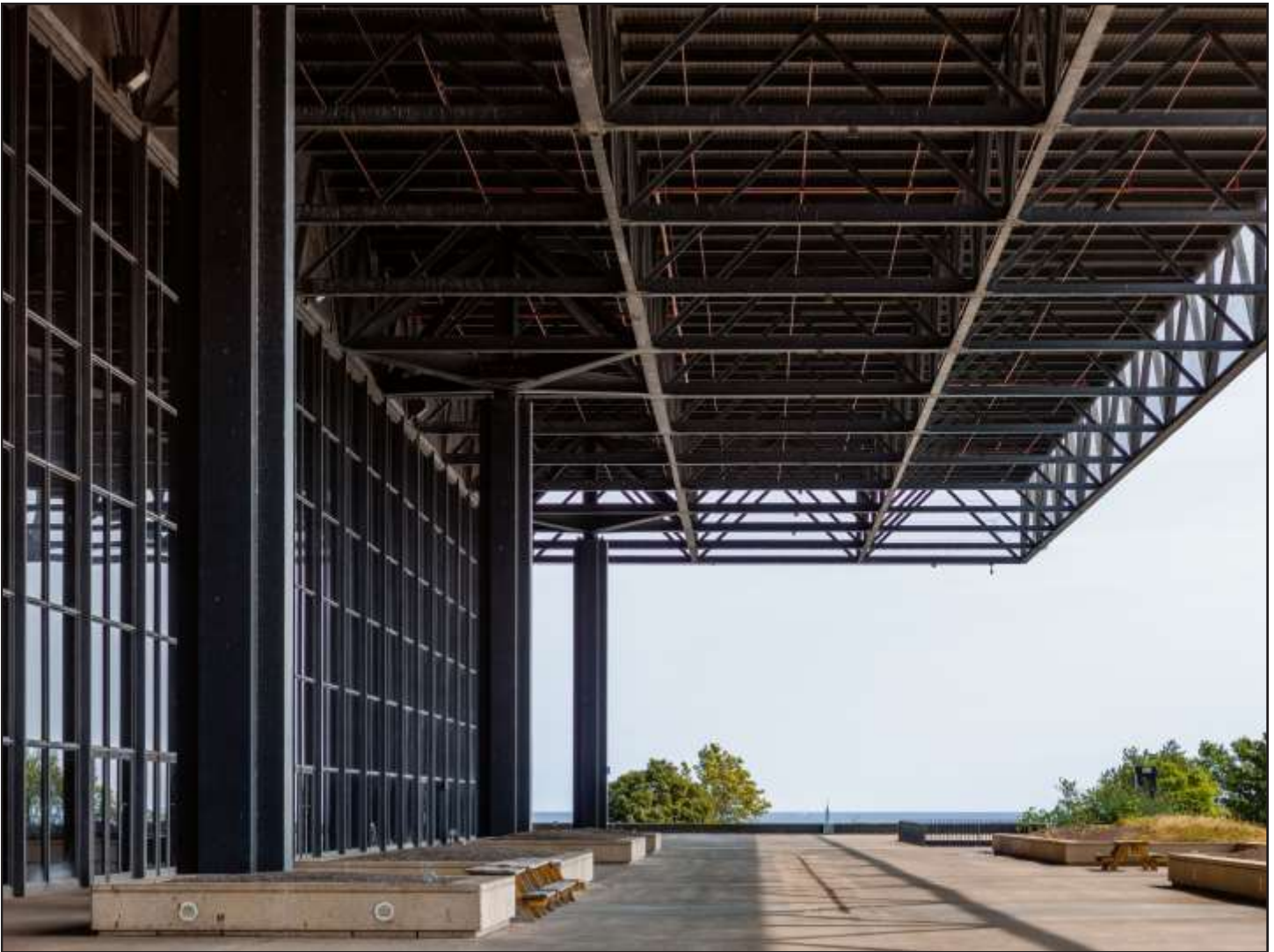


Lakeside Center © Serhii Chrukky

of the building—a former convention center, with grand halls, has the potential to return to an extraordinary Lakefront asset as a year-round fieldhouse and recreational center. The elegant and widely acclaimed mid-century glass and steel structure replaced a former windowless convention hall, constructed of reinforced concrete, which burned in 1967 and was known as “the mistake on the Lake.”

The Lakeside Center is recognized as an engineering marvel. It was the largest convention hall in the world, holding that title for several decades. The building’s engineering and sheer size pushed the limits of space frame systems—its roof structure and its cantilevers. The size and vastness of its structure, supported by huge cruciform columns were some of the largest spans and components of the era for a building of its type. Its vision was developed by the architectural firm C. F. Murphy and its principal, Gene Summers assisted by Helmut Jahn. The building’s design extended from early graduate thesis projects at the Illinois Institute of Technology-IIT, and the concepts and ideals of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. It was considered a perfect glass box with a portal to Lake Michigan, separating it from the Arie Crown Theater, the largest theater in the city and one of the largest in America, which anchored its south end.

McCormick Place’s Lakeside Center pushed the outer limits of what was possible at the time of its construction. It was widely considered as important for its architectural and engineering strides as the city’s other superstructures unveiled at the time including The John Hancock, Sears Tower/Willis Tower and Standard Oil/Aon Buildings. The vast convention hall, once seen by its burned predecessor as an obstacle to the Chicago lakefront park system when originally constructed in 1960, was rebuilt as a new vision in 1967 and has the potential to be Chicago’s largest indoor fieldhouse and cultural center. This could be a remarkable asset for the Bronzeville and Near South Side Communities, and yet benefiting the entire Lakefront and City. Perhaps this building can be rethought as the “Mid-



Lakeside Center © Serhii Chrukky

South Cultural Center and Fieldhouse,” and could be the largest indoor recreational facility and open year-round as an enclosed or indoor extension of our lakefront parks. It could be free to all Chicago residents. With parking and City’s largest theater, Arie Crown, it could once again be a cultural hub and not just limited just to special engagements and conventions.

The approximately 25-acre Millennium Park and 25-acre Maggie Daley Park are two of the newest amenities to Chicago’s Lakefront and downtown area. The parks, opened in 2004 and 2012 respectively, were constructed above former and active railroad lands, once part of reclaimed lands from Lake Michigan. Both parks are interactive and wildly popular destinations for both residents and tourists alike. Millennium Park has many artistic as well as passive recreational and cultural aspects like the Pritzker Pavilion (bandshell) and the Harris Theater. They are credited in part with a renaissance of Chicago’s East Loop area and Grant Park, helping to further embellish Chicago’s Cultural Mile. Parks can have a tremendous impact on communities, even when their offerings vary widely in their uses and qualities. For instance, the pastoral qualities of Jackson Park and Washington Park are distinct from the interactive features of Millennium Park and Maggie Daley Park.

Both pastoral and interactive parks are unique in their planning, vision and design. And both often have different types of visitors flocking to them, yet they each offer vastly differing experiences. One variation is a naturalistic vision for both humans and nature, offering a migratory flyway and to give one the sense and visualization of Chicago in a more natural state, and the others being more activity and entertainment focused, constructed mostly on air rights, with a host of activities, services and amenities located below. These amenities extend from underground passages and walkways, to below-grade parking facilities and commuter train lines, which can also serve a downtown working population, as well as residents and visitors.



Crumbling Burnham-Designed Comfort Station in Jackson Park © Eric Allix Rogers

THREAT

The Chicago parks are themselves very special and highly celebrated with revered environments containing a variety of grand panoramic spaces, outdoor rooms and vast stretches of Lakefront lands. Some of these parks and spaces contain rigid formal gardens and arrangements with fountains and other features like Grant Park. While others include more naturalistic settings and contain an abundance of extraordinary features including lagoons, islands and native plant species and reflect the once abundant prairies and meadows of our region. Among these artistically arranged settings are open prairies and meadows, beautiful and expansive beaches, and harbors and nature preserves. Historic built environment features of the highest quality, including beautifully crafted museum buildings, conservatories, pavilions, a historic zoo, artistic sculptures, golf courses, pastoral roadways and recreational spaces, frame our panoramic City and skyline in the distance.

The Lakefront parks have experienced issues in recent years associated with Chicago's elected officials and leadership periodically offering park space as vacant land for development, which they are not. These areas were created as greenspaces and parklands, and have served Chicagoans for more than 100 years.

Lack of funding has resulted in our parks starving for resources and in need of substantial repairs. Long-deferred maintenance and straight-up neglect of many aspects of these special features has taken their toll on some of this land. The list of needs through the park system include repairs and, in some situations, total reconstruction of collapsing buildings, disintegrating paths and often pockmarked trails, underpasses and bridges. Yet, even with a shortage of funds for maintenance and improvement, our City and State offers millions of dollars and incentives for what could be described as pork projects. This is disappointing, as we as a city we are not always taking into account that these greenspaces, parklands, lakefront spaces and trails, and all of the features of the parks and Lakefront have really all been developed and maintained for more than a century and half by the citizens of Chicago—the taxpayers, residents and visitors.

These parks, regardless of their location, are for all of Chicago and its visitors. The Chicago Lakefront is a remarkable asset for residents and tourists alike. They are not to be squandered. If the desire is to build new structures, additional properties adjacent to these greenspaces should be considered and made to be extensions of

this lakefront land. Rather than taking land from the people and these parks, we should be creating new parklands and new campuses of buildings, surrounded by greenspaces. The broad vision should be expanded, not reduced or cast aside as vacant, undeveloped sites.

It was Aaron Montgomery Ward, the famous proprietor of the catalog and retail company Montgomery Ward and Company, who understood this grander vision of protecting the Lakefront lands from development. Ward, in his wisdom, challenged even the Field Museum in its plans to construct its new museum, relocated from Jackson Park within the former Palace of Fine Arts (now the Museum of Science and Industry) to Grant Park, where it was proposed in the middle of the park, now the site of Buckingham Fountain.



Former South Works-United States Steel Site on former submerged Lake Michigan lands © Eric Allix Rogers

His court challenges were lengthy and costly, and he often questioned if the general public appreciated his efforts. Yet we celebrate this victory today, as it reaffirmed “forever open, clear and free...” This legislation is assumed by many residents to apply to the entire Chicago lakefront, yet that does not hold true. We need additional legislation to apply those principles more broadly from the city limits on the far South Side to the far North Side, and to protect this extraordinary natural resource.

The Field Museum of Natural History was built on former railroad lands, constructed by the Illinois Central Railroad, in exchange for protecting the young City of Chicago from the sometimes-unpredictable forces of Lake Michigan. Early photos of the Field Museum show railroad tracks crisscrossing the site, which would later become the southernmost portions of Grant Park and the beginnings of Burnham Park and later portions of the Museum Campus. Other museums and buildings were constructed on the footprint of buildings that predated them. Examples include The Art Institute of Chicago, built upon the footprint of the Interstate Exhibition Building from 1871, to our more modern buildings in the park like the Museum of Contemporary Art, constructed on the site of the old Chicago Avenue Armory. Another example is The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum was constructed on the site of the old North Shops building in Lincoln Park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preservation Chicago supports a commitment to the Chicago Lakefront and its many parks, realizing that this is a very special feature of Chicago and a gift to its citizens which is to last in perpetuity. We continue to be grateful for these amazing parks and the great asset of Lake Michigan, its shoreline mostly “forever open, clear and free for all.”

In the future, the laws protecting the parklands with the “forever open, clear and free to all, without obstruction” regulations in downtown Chicago, specifically Grant Park and elsewhere, should be extended to include protections in perpetuity to the entire Lakefront and Lakefront parks system.

We realize the challenges in managing the vast Lakefront lands, and we want to encourage partnerships realizing the costs associated with this massive endeavor. To that end, we want to encourage the City of Chicago and the

Chicago 7: The Chicago Lakefront

Chicago Park District to pursue a national park designation for the entire Chicago Lakefront. Chicago can partner with the National Park Services to continue the legacy of protecting this precious resource for the enjoyment of all. Such an idea could lift and share the burden of maintenance of these sacred grounds, providing much-needed repairs to many of the park buildings and structures.

Some structures in Jackson Park, like the Daniel Burnham-designed Comfort Station on South Lake Shore Drive near 67th Street, are in a state of near total collapse. The Comfort Station's roof is buckling and partially collapsed, with its concrete columns delaminating. Another Comfort Station, to the immediate south of the Museum of Science and Industry, is without a roof. Its massive fieldstone walls have been covered in blue tarps for more than two years. This is a sign of a lack of funding and resources to the parks, the long-term impacts of Tax Increment Financing projects and their unintended consequences to both our schools and our public lands and Lakefront.



Lakeside Center and view of Chicago Lakefront south of 22nd Street © Eric Allix Rogers

The idea of a national park partnership and shared responsibilities for these vast Lakefront parklands would allow for improved maintenance, less privatization of recreational lands and facilities, and access to more funds for new parklands in communities across Chicago. This concept would also free up funds for park programming and services for people of all ages.

The concept of a national park designation within the city limits of Chicago could be a huge asset, much like the Pullman National Monument on the City's South Side potentially drawing additional tourism dollars to our city, which in turn supports both small and large businesses alike. National parks have a tremendous volume of visitors each year to different sites across the nation. The Pullman National Monument—a planned industrial development and community important for its links to architecture, planning, labor history, African American history and Civil Rights, along with railroad history—is expected to draw 300,000 annual visitors when the former Administration and Clock Tower Building opens as a Visitor Center in the coming year. It would be a tremendous resource for Chicago to have two national parks within its borders, recognizing the significance of these public lands fronting one of the world's largest freshwater resources, Lake Michigan.

Recently, the Indiana Dunes State Park and the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore became one of our most recent national parks. After years of talk and discussion by numerous politicians and scholars, — including United States Senator Paul Douglas, United States Senator Paul Simon, University of Chicago botanist Henry Cowles, and local resident Dorothy R. Buell of the Indiana Dunes Preservation Council — the Indiana Dunes National Park was realized. This national park stretches along 15 miles of the southern shore of Lake Michigan and includes 15,000 acres of beaches, lakefront, dunes and forested area, just 25 miles from Downtown Chicago.

Such ideas should be embraced for the Chicago Lakefront National Park. This could also encourage the former South Works-United States Steel Sites, now a vacant brownfield site, to be transformed into an extension of Chicago's legendary Lakefront parks. It would fulfill a great obligation and long-term vision with the National Park Service and the Federal Government to assist in the clean-up of this former steel mill and industrial site. It would return these now-toxic land into a public amenity for the people of Chicago and its visitors.

Similarly, another toxic site exists near the mouth of the Chicago River, where it meets Lake Michigan, located close to Navy Pier in Downtown Chicago. This area of land has been promised to be developed into parkland for many years, and named in honor of Chicago's first non-native settler, Jean Baptiste DuSable whose home was once located



Lakeside Center from Northerly Island © Eric Allix Rogers

nearby. Recently, developers of several large high-rise building projects, near this site have been tasked with making this toxic brownfield a public park. However, to date those plans have not materialized. However, a U.S. National Park designation may provide the funds required to realize this vision honoring DuSable.

Preservation Chicago embraces the idea of converting, rather than demolishing, the Lakeside Center at McCormick Place into a Mid-South Side Fieldhouse and Cultural Center. Such a concept would engage this little-used convention center into an indoor extension of the Chicago Lakefront recreational areas and part of the Lakefront Trail. The large glass-walled halls could serve a variety of recreational programs, from indoor running tracks, basketball and tennis courts, and include both indoor and outdoor cafés and restaurant service.

As an alternative option, the large glass-walled convention halls with views of the Lakefront and Chicago skyline could also be used for large cultural exhibits, much like the aviation museums of a similar scale in Europe. The lower-level convention halls of the base plinth structure of the Lakeside Center could be repurposed for aquatics, perhaps containing Olympic-sized swimming pools, that could overlook Lake Michigan. Adding windows in the brick walls could transform spaces into additional training facilities, gymnasiums, and community rooms.

All of this could be coupled with a reactivated Arie Crown Theater—the City’s largest theater space—to join the building together as a “Mid-South Bronzeville Cultural Center.” The rooftop of the Lakeside Center, measuring the size of three football fields, could contain a running track, outdoor recreational facilities, a green roof and perhaps a solar-cell network to provide power for the facility. The same could also hold true for the plinth and outdoor platform area, adjacent to the large glass-walled convention rooms, and hold cafes and restaurants, health and wellness classes and be considered an extension of the Lakefront parks. Such ideas would foresee this building as perhaps the world’s largest fieldhouse and cultural center, all under one roof, in a building of great architectural significance.

Lakeside Center at McCormick Place, when constructed, was comparable in both its architectural and engineering achievements to the City’s tallest superstructures like the Sears Tower and John Hancock Building. It was designed by the seminal firm of C. F. Murphy, notable for many large buildings including the Chicago Landmark Richard J. Daley Center and Plaza, and under the direction of architect Gene Sommers and Helmut Jahn.

It is a remarkable structure, which has the possibility to be one of Chicago’s greatest Lakefront assets and turning what was a building on the Lakefront for conventions into a year-round fieldhouse and cultural facility—an extension of the Lakefront parks under roof. Such ideas would be revolutionary for the Mid-South/Bronzeville/Douglas Community and perhaps even more popular than Millennium Park. It would be in the vein of the famous Daniel Burnham quote: “Make no little plans!”