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[Obama Foundation, Park District and CDOT present updated plans to city](#)



A view of the Obama Center from the South West, showing how the Museum Building, Forum Building, and Library Building will surround a public plaza. The Obama Foundation submitted its plans for the Obama Center to the City of Chicago on Wednesday, Jan. 10. – Concept model of the Obama Center courtesy of the Obama Foundation.

By TONIA HILL
Staff Writer

The Obama Foundation, Chicago Park District and Chicago Department of Transportation last week submitted separate plans that are necessary to green light the formation of the Barack Obama Presidential in Jackson Park.

All three entities submissions to the city are consistent with what was shared with the public including a few minor changes.

The Obama Foundation has a underground location for on-site parking for the Obama Center and has adjusted the design of the buildings that make up the campus. The Chicago Park District introduced a relocated track and field to replace what will be lost due to the construction of the Obama Center.

Lastly, the Chicago Department of Transportation introduced previously known roadway changes to accompany the design for the Obama Center with the suggestion of two additional pedestrian underpasses.

The Obama Foundation, Park District and Department of Transportation each submitted Lakefront Protection Ordinance plans to the Chicago Plan Commission last Wednesday. The Plan Commission provides recommendations to the city council on development projects, plans and policies. The Obama Foundation also filed a planned development application with the city of Chicago.

On Wednesday, the Chicago Park District introduced for the first time its plan for a new track and field in Jackson Park. The new track and field will replace an already existing track and field that will be lost due to the construction of the Obama Center.

Park District officials in a statement on Wednesday said the proposed site is located north of 63rd Street and East of Stony Island Avenue. A senior baseball and a junior baseball field currently occupies the proposed location.

The new track and field will house many activities including soccer, football, and lacrosse. The new track will be an eight-lane, 400-meter, rubber surface track including a long jump pit and high jump area.

Planning for the updated South Lakefront Framework Plan is in progress “and are necessary to replace the current track and field that will be relocated as part of the establishment of the Obama Presidential Center within another area of Jackson Park,” said the Park District in a written statement.



The Obama Presidential Center concept model, as seen from above and the North West. Depicted here is the Museum, Library, and Forum buildings. According to the Obama Foundation the Museum Building “is meant to represent hope, ascension and what ordinary people have the power to do together. It is designed to be a new landmark for the South Side and an important civic place for the City of Chicago.” The Obama Foundation submitted its plans for the Obama Center to the City of Chicago on Wednesday, Jan. 10. – Concept model for the Obama Center courtesy of the Obama Foundation.

The Department of Transportation application includes “proposed roadway improvements to support the overall vision for Jackson Park and the development of the Obama Presidential Center,” said CDOT in a written statement.

The plan also features a description of roadway closures, such as Cornell Drive, roadway/intersection changes, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, signal and lighting upgrades and an estimated timeline for the work.

Plans outlined by CDOT have not altered much from what was presented to the public during the summer months. Two new elements added in the plans suggest the placement of two additional pedestrian underpasses at the intersection of Hayes Drive/Cornell Drive and 63rd Street and on Hayes Drive between Richards Drive and Lake Shore Drive.

CDOT previously discussed adding two pedestrian underpasses on Jeffrey Avenue and between Marquette Drive and 67th Street and at the intersection of South Shore Drive and 67th Street which remains in the plan.

Construction of the transportation improvements will begin in early 2019 and last through 2020.

“Included in that will be the information that’s necessary to meet the requirements of the Lakefront Protection Ordinance,” said Michael Stratumanis, vice president of Civic Engagement for the Obama Foundation, during a phone interview ahead of the foundation’s announcement last week.

The proposed site location for the OPC is near 60th Street and Stony Island Avenue, which is right on the cusp of the entrance to Midway Plaisance Park at 59th Street, according to design plans released last May.

The Lake Michigan and Chicago Lakefront Protection ordinance requires a review and public hearings on projects within the proximity of the city’s Lake Michigan shoreline, which is coordinated by the Chicago Plan Commission.

The Obama Center falls within the scope of the law because of the area in which it will be constructed.

Each entity is expected to meet the Plan Commission this Spring.

Before meeting with the Chicago Plan Commission this spring, foundation officials said that they would hold public meetings in the coming weeks to discuss the design for the Obama Center.

To the relief of some residents and park advocates, the foundation appeared to slow the process down on its plans to present to the Chicago Plan Commission before the close of 2017.

Now, just three weeks into the New Year, the foundation is ready to start the next phase for the Obama Center “We have a sense of urgency...even though we talked about looking to submit this by the end of the year, we weren’t ready. There were still some design decisions that needed to be made [parking was one of those decisions]. We’re at the stage now where we are ready to move forward,” Strautmanis said.

The sense of urgency, Strautmanis added does not just come from the foundation it also comes from the community “we know people want to get this project moving.”

All the while, a formal federal environmental review process is just beginning to take shape.



Rendering of the updated site design plans for the Obama Center. The Obama Foundation submitted its plans for the Obama Center to the City of Chicago on Wednesday, Jan. 10. – Rendering courtesy of the Obama Foundation.

Projects in the pipeline in Jackson Park such as the Obama Center, accompanying roadway changes, and related South Lakefront Framework Plan updates call for a federal level environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act as well as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

One aspect of the National Environmental Policy Act process includes a review of historic resources under “Section 106” of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The section 106 review process requires government agencies and other stakeholders to take a closer look at the impact of proposed plans on historic sites, buildings, and other cultural resources while also taking into account the cultural landscape features, architectural and ecological resources.

The first in a series of section 106 meetings were held last month at the South Side YMCA.

“The review processes inform each other and give the opportunity for robust public participation,” Strautmanis said.

The city’s Department of Planning and Development and the Department of Transportation are facilitating the Section 106 review in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration.

The city has asked consulting parties as well as the public to comment on the process by identifying areas of potential effects.

Some in the community want to know what the outcome will be if there are too many “adverse effects” for the placement of Obama Center in Jackson Park. ‘Will the foundation move on and select another site,’ is a question that has been posed by some residents.

Strautmanis said the President and Mrs. Obama considered other sites before they chose Jackson Park. “We’re very confident that this is the best site for the Obama Presidential Center and we’ve heard overwhelmingly positive input about that,” Strautmanis said. “Of course this [section] 106 process is necessary for us to get the approvals to move forward. Whatever comes out of it we will be sure to work with the city. We’re going to see how it unfolds.”

The city approval process and the federal review process will occur alongside one another.

“We consider this project a giving process because we’re trying to improve wherever the building is built,” said Dina Griffin, president of Interactive Design Architects. “We feel that the best benefit and the best improvement will happen at that location.”

Initial site design plans for the Obama Center were released in May since then little tweaks have been made, according to Griffin, who is one of the members of the design team for the Obama Center that includes Tod Williams, Billie Tsien, and Michael Van Valkenburgh.



Screenshot from “Obama Presidential Center: Where We are Now” a video from the Obama Foundation. Former U.S. President Barack Obama and Mrs. Michelle Obama examine a model of the Obama Center while Tod Williams, a lead architect for the project looks on. – Courtesy of the Obama Foundation.

The Obama Center campus includes a museum, a library building, an athletic center plaza and a forum. The museum will be tallest of the buildings and is planned to be 235-feet-high. It will have eight floors with multiple mezzanine floors about half of the building will be occupied by the Obama Center’s museum.

The biggest of the changes in design for the Obama Center occurred just this week. The foundation cut its plans to have an above ground-parking garage on the Midway.

Instead, the parking garage will be located underground in Jackson Park. In updated site design plans released on Wednesday, the parking garage is situated under the southern portion of the campus between the Library Building and proposed Athletic Center.

The entry and exit from the garage will be on the east side of Stony Island Avenue aligned with 61st Street.

Other changes to the design plan include: refinement to the museum building, retaining the Women’s Garden, removing the pedestrian bridge to Wooded Island and Lagoon, and spread out play areas across the site.

“The museum tower itself we’ve made some minor changes to the shape of the building, Griffin said. “We have also reconsidered the flow of the building,” Griffin added that the foundation is hopeful for a partnership with Chicago Public Library.

A CPL branch might house Obama's digital archives.

Groundbreaking for the Obama Center is expected to begin in late 2018. The Obama Center will open its doors in 2021.

Meanwhile, foundation representatives spent the weekend speaking with church groups on the south and west sides of the city to discuss the Presidential Center. Brian Sleet, a spokesman for the Obama Foundation, told those that support the Obama Center being built to "speak up."

At Wednesday's city council meeting plans for Obama Foundation are expected to be formally introduced to the body.

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