

East Lincoln Park Neighbors  
October 5, 2020

Commissioner Maurice Cox  
Chicago Department of Planning and Development  
City Hall  
121 N. LaSalle St., Room 1000  
Chicago, IL, 60602

Dear Commissioner Cox,

As you may be aware, the East Lincoln Park neighborhood, represented by East Lincoln Park Neighbors (ELPN), has been fighting Francis W. Parker School's acquisition of residential units in multi-family courtyard buildings on Belden Avenue for the past 17 months. Parker's objective in these acquisitions has been to gain full control of these properties. While the potential transactions are private real estate deals, the neighborhood impact of a private institution attempting to expand its planned development into the residential zone of Belden is a matter of public interest and community concern. Under the guiding principles of the "We Will Chicago" initiative, we would welcome the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) taking the lead in discussions about what is right for the neighborhood, adjacent communities and Chicago more broadly.

DPD's leadership is critical to ensuring a transparent, well-governed process, as well as understanding the impact of these proposed changes not only on our neighborhood, but on Chicago as a whole, including establishing a precedent for other private institutional planned developments. Parker's intended expansion involves potentially altering the Belden residential streetscape, as well as introducing its institutional presence on what has historically been a residential street. ELPN is concerned about the physical impact on our historic-built neighborhood fabric and on our residential and commercial streets overall. The following points illustrate why we believe DPD should be leading this analysis:

- The City of Chicago is projecting a \$1.2 billion budget shortfall. Allowing a non-tax paying, wealthy institution to acquire residential properties removes them from the property tax base, in perpetuity. The cumulative impact translates into reduced resources city-wide across our public services, including public schools, libraries, transit and parks. Notably, in the 43<sup>rd</sup> ward we are regularly asked to donate privately to support 43<sup>rd</sup> ward public-school needs. While residents are willing to support local neighborhood schools, reducing property tax revenue that supports those schools to the benefit of a wealthy, private school, further drives inequity in our community. While 43<sup>rd</sup> ward residents may be able to afford private contributions to local schools to make up resource shortfalls, a relatively poorer ward cannot. Taking money out of

the property tax base and promoting a system where private funds flow only to a relatively better-off ward's schools exacerbates resource inequities across the city.

- According to the American Community Survey, East Lincoln Park<sup>1</sup> is more economically diverse than the rest of Lincoln Park. 28% of residents have a median household income below \$50,000 and 16.4% of East Lincoln Park residents live at or below the poverty line. Compare this data to Census Tract 713, just across Clark Street, where only 16.0% of residents have a median household income below \$50,000 and 8.8% of residents live below the poverty line. Multi-unit buildings like the ones Parker is acquiring include units at price points below the median housing cost in the area. Losing multi-unit buildings that provide the basis for more affordable home ownership drives the neighborhood further away from equity and diversity goals.
- East Lincoln Park Neighbors has repeatedly asked Parker for a needs assessment to support their assertion that they cannot adequately accommodate current students or grow within their current planned development footprint. If such an analysis exists, the school has not shared it with the community or other stakeholders.
- The 43<sup>rd</sup> ward has many available alternatives for Parker to expand, assuming that it is truly necessary for a school that houses fewer than a thousand students on six acres of land. Such alternatives do not require destruction or repurposing of multi-unit family homes. Nor do they involve bringing a new physical institutional presence onto a residential street. We would like the opportunity to explore these alternatives with the alderman and Parker, but need DPD's guidance.
- About two-thirds of the school's families live outside the 43<sup>rd</sup> ward, which translates into a significant amount of traffic and congestion, as most commute to the school by car. The situation already creates traffic safety problems during peak drop off and pick-up times. Expanding the campus and student body will only add to this problem.
- Clark Street around the school campus predominantly has empty store fronts, primarily because the school owns and occupies a significant portion of the block. Further reduction in neighborhood family households will impact local businesses.
- The multi-family buildings that the school is targeting were some of the earliest courtyard buildings in the neighborhood after the 1902 Chicago Tenement Ordinance. These buildings are important to understanding the history of the neighborhood. The buildings were clearly designed with reference to each other and the streetscape. The structures are sound, of high

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<sup>1</sup> East Lincoln Park is defined in the Census tract from Clark/Lincoln Park West corner north to Fullerton and Lincoln Park West west to Clark, including a portion of Sedgwick between Grant Place and Armitage. Census Tract 714.

architectural quality and important to the context of the neighborhood. If an historic district was studied for this area, we believe the buildings would be contributing.

- We have over 1,200 petition signatures in support of maintaining East Lincoln Park's and Belden Street's residential composition, preserving the neighborhood's historic character and maintaining the tax base. ELPN delivered this petition to Alderwoman Michele Smith in September 2019. ELPN continues to gather signatures. Most of these signatures were collected from people passing the Parker-targeted buildings on Belden. Notably, about a quarter of petition signers are Chicagoans from outside the 43<sup>rd</sup> ward. In fact, we have signatures from citizens in every ward, which gives perspective on Chicagoans coming to East Lincoln Park and the importance they place on maintaining a welcoming residential neighborhood.

The proposed expansion of the planned development zone has several public/private tradeoffs that are best evaluated within the context of the City's overall planning goals. The resulting gains to Parker would be significant for them, but the physical and financial losses to residents, businesses and the neighborhood at large would be much more significant. Parker has not been able to articulate, nor can we independently discern, any benefits to the public. We request your leadership to independently evaluate and manage this planned development expansion effort based on its anticipated negative impact.

Respectfully,



Stacy Scapino

On behalf of East Lincoln Park Neighbors

Cc:

Samir Mayekar, Deputy Mayor for Economic and Neighborhood Development

Michele Smith, Alderwoman, 43<sup>rd</sup> Ward

Marisa Novara, Commissioner, Department of Housing.

Eleanor Gorski, First Deputy Commissioner, DPD

Kathleen Dickhut, Deputy Commissioner, DPD

Melissa Macek, President, Mid North Association

Deidre Graziano, Coalition for Affordable Housing in Lincoln Park

Lisa DiChiera, Director of Advocacy, Landmark Illinois

Ward Miller, Executive Director, Preservation Chicago

Rika Yoshida, Chair, Francis Parker School