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OF OAK PARK

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## Randolph Tot Lot Site Master Plan

### Community Meeting # 1

Meeting held: Pleasant Home  
217 Home Avenue  
Oak Park, IL 60302  
Date of Meeting: August 5th, 2009

#### Introduction & Overview

Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District, opened the meeting at 7PM thanking everyone for coming to the first Randolph Tot Lot community meeting and for being a part of the park planning process. Gary encouraged everyone present to participate in the process by accessing the online questionnaire on the Park District of Oak Park website and asked those present to let other neighbors know about it. After a brief history of the Park District of Oak Park's park master planning process, Gary noted the current work on the Randolph and Wenonah tot lots. He acknowledged Randolph as a small green space but a very important one; quoting that every inch of the total 80 acres of Park District green space is important to Oak Park, a community of over 50,000 residents.

Gary informed the meeting of the recent acquisition by the Park District from the Village of Oak Park, of the adjacent open space across the alley from the Tot Lot. This addition has doubled the potential size of the public space however the newly acquired lot could only be used as a passive space. \$200,000 has been set aside for improvements to the Tot Lot and the Park District is planning to begin implementing the master plan in 2010. Gary then introduced the design team Josephine Bellalta, John Mac Manus and Mark Jirik of Altamanu Inc., and described some of their previous work on Oak Park parks. Gary asked that everyone contribute feedback and mentioned that the next meeting would be August 26<sup>th</sup> where Altamanu will present several conceptual designs for the Randolph tot lot based on tonight's public input.

#### Altamanu Inc. Presentation and Public Comment

Gary introduced John Mac Manus who said that he was delighted with the great turnout for the planning of this small but important piece of the park system. He mentioned that all three of the Altamanu members present were residents of Oak Park and then began a presentation.

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The presentation showed the lack of green space in the area and emphasized the importance of this lot. The surrounding neighborhood has a density of residential development. The elevated tracks to the north act as a barrier as does Madison Street to the south. The Tot Lot and passive space could be very important for seniors at the nearby Oak Park Arms and for other seniors in the area. The site is also very close to Washington Blvd., a dense area with many multifamily residences.

### **Partially closing the alley and joining the two Park District owned spaces into one park**

The Park District recently acquired the lot on the corner of Randolph St. and Oak Park Ave. just across an alley to the east of the existing Tot Lot. The new site has no trees and currently functions as an entry and front yard into the apartment building to the south. The new site must remain passive by legal agreement as opposed to the existing, active tot lot. Active is like the existing tot lot with structured play and running around while passive constitutes activities like reading, sitting, talking, and so on.

The alley is very long and serves several multifamily residences. There has been a suggestion of closing part of it and uniting the two Park District owned spaces into one long contiguous green space. Though this would be a positive improvement there are issues in doing this. There is a utility pole with power lines in the alley. These would be very costly to move and ComEd would continue to need access even if the alley were partially closed. Garbage trucks would also need access and there is the issue of snow clearance.

An audience member commented

- All of the moving and delivery and utility trucks have to use the alley as well. Oak Park does not allow them to use Oak Park Ave.

#### Alternate solutions to the partial closure of the alley

There are several alternative possible solutions to the partial closure of the alley. A speed bump or set of speed bumps or a raised speed table could slow traffic. The speed table could have permeable pavers with grass growing through them as one option. Another could be removable bollards or a gate or set of gates that could allow restricted access to trucks.

- I like the speed bumps or pavers. Speed bumps in an alley should be fine because no one is supposed to be going fast anyway.

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- There's a popular playground modeled after a street and crossing.
- The original EI went through our site. The station was on our site, so there's a historic aspect as well and the alley was functional. Maybe this could develop into a theme.

### History of the Site

There was a Randolph Street line that connected to downtown Chicago. John showed two slides of the train and a station that was on the current site.

### Existing Trees

Josephine Bellalta of Altamanu presented slides of the trees currently on site. Josephine stated that she had walked the site with an arborist a couple of weeks before. There are two big trees in the Tot Lot, an elm and a catalpa. The elm has Dutch elm disease and will have to be removed. Another elm in the parkway on Oak Park Ave. appears to have the disease as well and it will be removed in time. So there will be much less canopy and shade on both sides of the site. There's one memorial tree towards the corner of Grove of Randolph. There are a couple of ash trees which will also be removed with time due to the Emerald Ash Borer which is now in Oak Park. Josephine stated that approx. 37 ash trees have already been removed by the Village due to borer infestation. There are a couple of buckthorn adjacent to the south fence in the tot lot, though invasive they are acceptable in this location.

Josephine then let the audience through the site using photographs.

The elements include:

- Concrete path
- Picnic table
- Two swings
- One large piece of play equipment
- A sand pit and frog
- A drinking fountain
- Hedges and wooden fence on the south and eastern sides

Because of ADA requirements and larger required fall zones, it will be a tight fit putting a lot of new play pieces in the tot lot.

The elements in the new space east of the alley:

- Grassy Lawn

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Hedges

Foundation plantings at the base of the apartment. These may have to move in order to create a new 3' easement/entry

Four lights

That concluded the formal presentation and John Mac Manus opened the meeting to public comment.

### Sand and Wasp Infestation

I like the convenience and my four grandsons used to use it. It's not being used anymore because of bees. It's not being used by anyone – that's our main issue.

I moved here 5 years ago and the bees are an annual problem. I don't know if it's the crabapple's fruit but the crabapple houses about 75 mother wasps. Every year they (the Park District) try to exterminate them and they aren't bees – its wasps. From July to frost my children can't play at the park and we have to go to other parks.

Mike Grandy of the Park District – We've hired a professional exterminator and used a couple of different methods to get rid of the wasps. We don't want to use an insecticide due to the fact that children are playing here.

You need to look for the wasps deeper. They're using the sand as a place to nest.

The sand also is a problem with cats – it is like a litter box.

The wasps burrow 45" – 70" deep and lay eggs below the frost line.

The sand is a place to live and eat for them.

Get rid of the sand

We use the park and it's not just the wasps, it's also the sand. There's also so much wasted space like that massive concrete sidewalk leading to the sand pit.

I feel like a raised speed table is a good idea. It works well on Marion. I also like the idea of increasing use of the park because that makes it safer. What other surfaces would be available for the playground? The sand is not working.

Gary: I think I'm hearing no sand. Will anyone be offended if Altamanu shows a scheme with no sand?

(No raised hands)

### Potential Partial Closure of the Alley

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All of the moving and delivery and utility trucks have to use the alley. Oak Park does not allow them to use Oak Park Ave.

I like the speed bumps or pavers. Speed bumps in an alley should be fine because no one is supposed to be going fast anyway.

You could put a gate/entry at the tot lot that when open would trigger flashing yellow lights in the alley. You could also setback the gate so it's safer and a driver could have a better line of sight. You could also use speed bumps. I also like the fountain idea – it would create an atmosphere. I think there could be a little more lighting and you could bring the sidewalk into the park.

Could the whole alley be redone if this speed table was added? The whole thing is in shambles. Probably not, that would cost more than the entire \$200,000 budget.

The Lindberg Park alley has gates at either end.

All of the houses along that alley are single family though. There aren't any multifamily residences there.

I've been blocked in the alley because of ComEd trucks or construction.

Can we barricade the alley for a week and see the result?

We've talked to the village and one solution is a gate where all the residents along the block get a key in addition to garbage men, etc.

That is a lot of keys

That I could agree with. If all the neighbors had a key I could access my garage from the north at the gate if the southern end of the alley was blocked.

But there are 4 condominiums on that alley – every resident would have to have a key?

The gate could have a keypad or combo lock.

Washington Blvd. is terrible to turn onto from that alley and you'd be forcing more traffic onto Washington.

I like the recessed entries in the park from the alley and a speed table. It could look like a big crosswalk.

The whole crossing could be a theme.

The alley could look more like a private driveway that way and discourage other thru traffic.

Maybe we could rename the park after the old station that was there. Kids could appreciate what was there and you could provide plaques and so on. That was the first time I've seen that picture (picture of train in main p-presentation).

## Passive Area at Oak Park and Randolph

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There's a park at 57<sup>th</sup> and Kimbark in Hyde Park where there is a tot lot and passive area. The passive area has a wonderful fountain that the kids play in and the U of C students sunbathe on the side. There's an iron wrought gate with an entry for kids to enter.

Are you thinking of eliminating those sidewalks on the passive side or will it continued to look like we're maintaining the apartment's front lawn? Would the easement be fenced off or not?

We should not make it feel claustrophobic for the people in the condo building

We want it to feel park-like.

We want to clearly define public versus private. A fence enclosing the whole space might be too claustrophobic. We will need to find a balance between what looks public and what looks private.

I live in a condo with a small courtyard so sometimes I will come to the park and read. There needs to be more seating for seniors to come and read.

The passive space could have seating by the corner of Oak Park Ave. and Randolph St. so that it's more visible.

Could you curve the sidewalks into the space to make it seem more public?

### **Safety, Lighting and Use of the Tot Lot at Night**

With the Tot Lot teens come in at night and can be noisy and I'm worried about what they do.

They've been loud at 2 AM and I've called the non-emergency police and sometimes there is a problem with the police not coming.

I think that having a sign saying that the park is closed at this time would be nice for residents so that they'd be able to point at it if someone was in the park after hours.

Mike Grandy – You are going to get people coming into the parks at night. You need to call the police, call the police, call the police and call the Park District.

And what about the lighting?

Mike Grandy – Lighting can be a two edged sword. Sometimes lighting discourages people but sometimes when it's too well it can encourage people to go into a space at night. The parks close at 9 or 10 PM.

It's supposed to close earlier because it's a tot lot though.

Call your local beat cop, they want you to call

We need lights

Yes but not shinning into my house

We need lights close to Oak Park Avenue as well

Isn't there enough light spilling from the Avenue

No

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There was a terrible problem with muggings at Barrie Park. We decided to take back the park so every night we had 15-20 adults with cell phones who weren't afraid to call. The police were active with what we were doing and would respond. Since that the park has cleared up after dark.

### Community Gardens

We could do something like Michelle Obama is proposing and have small raised vegetable gardening in the passive area.

When the original enthusiasm dies down or people involved move away, the maintenance becomes the Park District's problem. There is a question online as part of the questionnaire – Are you willing to maintain it (the raised vegetable beds)?

Yes (one person)

### Play Surfaces

Josephine: There are limited materials for playground surfacing. The two most common are rubber surfacing and fiber mulch. Sand is not used as much. Manufacturers are starting to become more green-minded, their pieces have less PVC and so on

At Fox Park the rubber surfacing is working well.

I agree.

Some people complain because it's not as natural or sustainable – but it is also safe and colorful though. What's safer? The rubber or the sand?

Well the sand is not accessible. We typically use rubber surfacing or fiber mulch. The rubber surface is preferred but it is very expensive

### Tot Lot

There needs to be more play equipment in the tot lot. There should be more integrated space.

The mound is not integrated and the whole park is not integrated.

I agree with more equipment. We use the park often with two children and if someone is on the swing you have to wait.

The new equipment should be for the same age group. Don't put in equipment for older age groups.

Can the sidewalk move out to be by the street to create more room in the tot lot?

There is a large AT&T box and power line and the existing trees but we will look at it.

At the Oak Park Temple at Harlem and Berkshire there is a great new area that is a similar long strip of park where they've put new musical toys. The kids really enjoy the musical pieces.

I live next to the park – the noise!

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There should certainly be more play equipment for little kids. Also, the fence should be nicer than the chain link. Maybe it could be wrought iron.

Yes but wrought iron or decorative steel is expensive

There should be more elements for kids, I don't like the sand, and the existing picnic table is not for kids.

People use the picnic tables, maybe not kids though.

The small picnic tables at Brookfield Zoo are very nice.

The kids need places to meet each other as well, but they have to be scaled for them not adults

The sand is too much and nobody plays by the berm. It's unused space.

Could the active part and the passive part of the tot lot switch places to slow the energy down of the kids as they'd approach the alley?

Yes and it could be a good idea and provide shade where we need it.

More berms could maybe be more interesting if they were between pieces. They could tie both lots together.

Could we see the train crossing as a possible theme?

There's a train theme at a playground in Chicago on Racine and Wrightwood.

It works well

We could have educational signage about the history of the site

The crossing of the alley reminds me of the train

At Stevenson there are also a couple of pieces that are train or locomotive themed.

Brookfield also has a nice train theme.

They spent a small fortune on that playground. It's an enclosed space and is therefore very secure. We have to work with a low budget and there is total open access.

Sometimes we don't go to the park because there's no shade. Shade would be nice. We don't go there in the hot part of the day.

There's an area in Downer's Grove called Safetytown which serves as a playground and as an interactive tool to teach kids how to cross the street and so on. It's interactive which is great and not as noise polluting.

Gary Balling then closed the meeting asking everyone to sign in if they hadn't already and noted that the next community meeting would be August 26<sup>th</sup>. He also mentioned that the online questionnaire was on the website and requested the attendees to fill it out and to encourage other residents to do so as well. He then thanked everyone for coming.

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