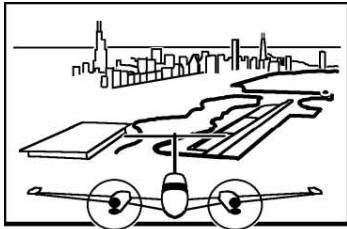


"Dedicated to
Aviation Education
of Chicago's Youth
at Meigs Field"



Friends of Meigs Field

December 1, 2004

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Subject: Planning for Northerly Island

Dear Mr. Randall:

It was a pleasure to meet with you and give you the briefing you requested on our proposal, "Parks and Planes: A Vision for Meigs Field and Northerly Island." We hope you agree that it is an exciting and advantageous approach to the thorny problem of planning for Northerly Island.

Parks and Planes

As we discussed, the proposal is one that the entire city of Chicago could enjoy, while retaining the economic, safety, security, recreation, education, and aviation benefits of a downtown airstrip. By capitalizing on an operating Meigs Field as a public attraction, the centerpiece of an exciting new park complex, the Park District would not only create something exciting, but would also benefit every other park across the city.

The long-term vision of the proposal would actually be a true "win-win" for everyone, in which there would be more and better parkland than the present peninsula offers, a better airport than Meigs Field, and a revenue source to benefit all Chicago parks.

In our discussion, you raised several questions regarding the feasibility of the proposal and also the history of the airport, its economics, and the prevalence of parks co-existing with airports elsewhere, among others. I am attaching an appendix with several documents that, we hope, will answer these questions.

Concerns Over Process

While we appreciate the opportunity to present this information to you, our organization is most deeply concerned over the "planning process" being employed by the Park District for Northerly Island. We would welcome an open and honest process in which all viewpoints were respected, given fair consideration, and the will of the people were to decide. Instead, the process initiated so far is the opposite, and appears designed to reach a pre-determined conclusion. Please consider:

Lack of Public Hearings on the Existence of an Airfield

There has been a total lack of public input into the critical question of whether Meigs Field should have been closed or whether the proposed park should include an airstrip. The only

hearings held on the closure of Meigs Field since it re-opened in 1997 were in the summer of 2001, under then-Governor George Ryan. The result of those hearings was an agreement to preserve Meigs Field until 2026 unless the state legislature voted to close it after 2006. Instead, the airport was demolished in the dead of night, without notice and under false pretenses, specifically to prevent public input into the decision.

The current "Visioning Sessions" are not public hearings, an opportunity to present prepared testimony to public officials, at which individuals and organizations like the National Business Aviation Association, the Air Line Pilots Association, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, the Illinois Association of Air and Critical Care Transport or numerous other groups who testified before Gov. Ryan's hearings could express their views to the appropriate decision makers in full view of the public and media.

Failure to Include Airport Elements in "Visioning Sessions"

Just as importantly, as we discussed in our meeting, we object in the strongest terms to the structure of the sessions that you are holding, especially the portion in which attendees are given green ("like") and yellow ("dislike") dots to apply to photos of possible park elements.

This approach is an invalid way to solicit public opinion in this issue for two reasons:

- 1) You do not include any elements of a possible mixed-use park/airport similar to that proposed in Park and Planes or any other existing airport/park complex. As a result, Meigs Field supporters—fully 1/3 of all present at the first meeting—had nothing to vote "for." Instead, they were constrained to cast their votes for park elements that would not conflict with an airfield, and against those that would.
- 2) Moreover, the results of the "voting" by sticker are so open to your subjective interpretation as to be meaningless. Only two of many examples:
 - a) You yourself had trouble interpreting the large number of yellow dots on a photo of a stand of tall trees, postulating it had something to do with the path beneath. I can tell you that I and many other Meigs supporters put yellow dots on that photo because large groves of tall trees would not be as compatible with an airfield as many of the other elements.
 - b) Likewise, another Park District employee interpreted many green dots on a beach photo as being votes for extending the beach the length of the peninsula. I, myself (and perhaps others) "voted" for that photo not to advocate extending the beach but because the existing 12th St. Beach has proven a compatible use with Meigs Field for over 55 years.

Censorship of Ideas

Just as objectionable is the Park District's outright censorship of ideas that do not conform to its preconceived notions about Meigs Field and Northerly Island.

The Friends of Meigs Field believe that the Chicago public is best served by learning **all** of the facts and hearing **all** of the ideas about the future of Northerly Island, both ours and others'. As you can see from the charts of public opinion on Meigs Field, over time the more the public learned about Meigs the more likely they were to support it.

The Chicago Park District owes a duty to the public to make sure that it learns all of the facts about the airport, its value, its history, and the possibilities for its future in the context of developing Northerly Island.

We object just as strongly to the censorship of other proposals that may either support or be in conflict with those we have developed. The correct approach to gathering public input is to welcome and display as many ideas as possible, not to cut off those developed and paid for by organizations other than the Park District, whether by the Friends of Meigs Field, the Lake Michigan Federation, Purdue University, the Baird firm, the Chicago Marine Historical Society or any other group.

Disrespectful, Divisive and Factually Incorrect Statements by the Chicago Park District

As we discussed in our meeting, the Friends of Meigs Field object in the strongest terms to official attempts by officials of the Park District to characterize Meigs Field users and supporters as “elite” and “elitist” (see the Chicago Park District official press release from the October press conference regarding the planning process for Northerly Island.) The fact of the matter is that we are far more egalitarian and inclusive than those who would exclude aviation from Chicago’s lakefront. Meigs Field has been used by every segment of society, has provided safety, security, transportation, entertainment, excitement, education and recreation available to all Chicagoans since its opening in 1948. The fact that more individuals have not experienced it firsthand is a direct result of the exclusionary practices of the city government and not the airport’s supporters and users.

Our organization’s mission, adopted in 1997, is three-fold:

- “1) Educate Chicagoans regarding aviation at Meigs Field,
- 2) Preserve and improve Meigs Field as an integral part of Chicago’s lakefront,
- 3) Increase and share the benefits of Meigs Field with as wide a public as possible.”

It is for this exact reason that we have put the bulk of our remaining resources into developing and publicizing a plan that is inclusive of all Chicagoans, and benefits not only Northerly Island, the Museum Campus, and the lakefront park system, but every single park in the city.

Likewise, we object strongly to continued use of phrases like “returning” the peninsula to “park land” or the concept that somehow Daniel Burnham would certainly have objected to its use as an airport. Fully 1/3 of the airport property was landfill started in 1946, permitted specifically for an airport, and never existed before it was an airport. The rest of the airport property was never—or at most only shortly—used as a park. After the Century of Progress closed in 1934, the land stood as vacant rubble until construction began on the airport in 1946.

Burnham’s thoughts on the use of Northerly Island as an airport will likely never be known. The Plan of Chicago was published a year before the first aircraft flew over Chicago (from Chicago’s first airport, in Grant Park, incidentally), and he died in 1912, before the potential of flight was understood. Yet, Burnham’s co-author of the Plan of Chicago, Edward Bennett, first proposed putting an airport at Meigs’ location in 1916, years before the landfill existed. Burnham’s son, Daniel Burnham Jr., included Meigs Field in his 1956 book, “Planning the Region of Chicago.”

Moreover, Burnham and Bennett—understanding the need for both commerce and commons—wrote in the Plan of Chicago:

“The fine arts of traffic management should be studied no less than the fine arts of parks and boulevards; for unless Chicago keeps ahead of her rivals in commercial matters, the parks will become pastures, and the boulevards will be deserted.”

We likewise object to such statements as “there are no parks where airstrips are a compatible use.” (your own quotation in the Chicago Tribune, 11/14/2004) This is absolutely untrue, as documented in this appendix by just a few of the hundreds of examples in the U.S. of parks co-existing alongside airports. Some of the examples are no farther than the suburbs of Chicago. In fact, FAA publications suggest using “locating and programming

Requests

Despite our misgivings over the lack of fairness, openness, and public input into the fate of Meigs Field to date, our organization has attempted to work in good faith to affect Park District policy on Northerly Island. However, because of the specific issues identified above, we cannot agree to continue to do so without specific changes in the planning process.

We therefore have five specific requests of the Chicago Park District for our organization to continue to support the planning process for Northerly Island.

1. A meeting with Superintendent Mitchell to present and explain our proposal, as was promised to Mr. Levy.
2. One or more public hearings before the Park District Board of Commissioners on the question of the whether Northerly Island should include an operating airfield; hearings with adequate notice, open public attendance and media coverage, recorded and published proceedings, and an opportunity for interested organizations and individuals to submit oral and written testimony.
3. Display of our—and all other interested organizations' proposals—prior to and during every "visioning session," with reasonable restrictions on number of easels, respectfulness of content, etc.
4. Either elimination of the "visioning" sticker exercise, or inclusion of images that represent mixed-use park/airstrip/museum elements similar to those proposed in "Parks and Planes."
5. A commitment to cease disrespectful, divisive, and knowingly false statements, and to make public corrections when factual errors are identified.

We also strongly urge the Chicago Park District to consider putting the question before the voters in the form of a referendum on whether Northerly Island should include an operating airstrip in the park and whether to expand the landfill to accommodate both a larger park and a larger airstrip. We understand that this is a more difficult request, but believe that it would serve all Chicagoans by legitimizing the public policy decision process, given the perversion of and lack of public input into the process to date.

We sincerely hope that you will recognize that—as long as basic fairness and openness are stifled—the legitimacy of any plan for Northerly Island will be forever compromised.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Steven G. Whitney

Steven G. Whitney
President

enc.

cc: Josh Levy
Christopher M. Gent