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Mark Carroll  
Rowing Group  
Chicago, IL 60646

**Rowing Group Report on North Branch Rowing Locations**  
By the request of the Clark Park Advisory Council

This is a summary of potential boathouse locations for the sport of rowing on the North Branch of the Chicago River. The area covered in this report spans from Bryn Mawr Avenue on the north and the end of Goose Island, just north of Chicago Avenue on the south. Each potential boathouse location listed was selected either because it already was considered a suitable location for rowing development by the Chicago Park District, it had been suggested for consideration by members of the Chicago River Boathouse Advisory Committee, or inquired about by the Clark Park Advisory Council.

Each potential boathouse location was judged for its ability to support the construction of a 20,000 square foot rowing facility, its proximity to potential on-water hazards on a daily basis and during extreme weather conditions, how quickly the location can be utilized for rowing, how potentially expensive the location would be to convert for boathouse development, as well as local community support around each location for a rowing boathouse. Current ownership of the potential boathouse location was not considered in this report.

**Clark Park**

Clark Park was selected by the Chicago Park District as one of the original four locations for new boathouse development on the Chicago River. Clark Park is approximately ten acres of green space in which two acres would be developed for the construction of the proposed 20,000 sq ft rowing boathouse, according to several Clark Park advocacy groups. At first glance, this spot does seem like an excellent location for a boathouse. However, there are a number of outstanding issues that cause concern regarding the development of a boathouse at Clark Park. Because of these issues, which some would consider substantial, are the main reasons the Rowing Group concludes that the Clark Park location is not well suited for rowing boathouse development. In our opinion, there are other more appropriate locations on the North Branch of the Chicago River that should be considered for rowing boathouse development before Clark Park.

The first and most significant issue is the high level of displeasure from local community members, especially the Clark Park Advisory Council (CPAC) and the Chicago Area Mountain Bikers (CAMBr). The Rowing Group has learned that communication from the Chicago Park District to these advocacy groups, as well as other individuals who use Clark Park, has been unsatisfactory at best and not transparent in anyway. According to the CPAC, the boathouse plans have changed three times, requests by the CPAC for the addition of non-rowing amenities have not been included, and the amount of green space that will have to be removed to accommodate the rowing boathouse has grown to demand 1/5th of the current green space at Clark Park. The Rowing Group concludes that this is an unfair request to be borne by the citizens who already utilize Clark Park for non-rowing activities, especially when you consider the limited amount of usable, public, uncontaminated green space on the North Branch of the Chicago River.

In addition to these issues of transparency voiced by the CPAC, there are a number of planning issues that have been overlooked by the Chicago Park District that should prove to be quite problematic. These would need to be addressed well before committing Clark Park to boathouse development.

These issues are summarized and listed below:

- The amount of green space that would need to be removed to build the rowing boathouse has been estimated at 1/5th the current green space at Clark Park. That would mean approximately

two acres of grassy playfields and recreational areas would need to be removed to develop the rowing boathouse as it is presented today. This is the primary reason why selecting Clark Park to build a rowing boathouse is an improper decision. Removing green space is counter to the purpose of the entire boathouse development concept in the first place. Mayor Emanuel's boathouse announcement in September 2011 represented an optimistic vision of the transformation of the Chicago River into Chicago's backyard. Removing green space to accommodate this goal is inappropriate and surely not the intention of the Mayor. Nonetheless, this is a significant issue that would need to be properly addressed.

The Rowing Group wants to highlight the inappropriateness of taking one recreational area away from one group only to give that same area to another group. There are a significant amount of alternative locations on the North Branch that are far better suited for rowing than the Clark Park location. These other possible locations for a rowing boathouse on the North Branch will be detailed later in this report.

- Barge traffic on the North Branch is less frequent than on the South Branch; however the constant threat of collision from barges is an extremely high concern of all rowing and paddling programs currently operating on the Chicago River. The Clark Park location on the North Branch of the Chicago River is a decent distance from the majority of riverside sites that utilize barge transport; however there is no 100% protected area close to Clark Park.

In comparison, the back channel of Goose Island on the North Branch of the Chicago River is an ideal protected location away from all barge traffic. The outstanding protection that the back channel of Goose Island offers and the lack of reliable protection the area around Clark Park offers, mainly from commercial barges, is another significant reason why the Rowing Group concludes the Clark Park location is suited poorly for the construction of a permanent rowing boathouse.

- Parking in the area around Clark Park cannot accommodate the influx of rowers on a daily basis. North Rockwell Street and surrounding streets are already in high demand from the Cook County Circuit Court on Belmont, the Chicago Police Department station house on Belmont, Lane Tech High School on Addison, DeVry University across from Clark Park, as well the high demand for parking from everyone who utilizes Clark Park on a daily basis. Add in a new Chicago Cubs youth baseball diamond and a 20,000 square foot boathouse, you now have a substantial parking burden that would need to be addressed.

The Rowing Group believes developing more parking features like multi-level car-parks in this area would lead to a blighted condition at Clark Park, detracting from the current pleasing appearance of the area. The cost of building a multi-level car-park also would be unnecessarily high for the purposes of a rowing boathouse.

- Rowing teams need to use specially designed rowing trailers to transport their boats to regattas. These trailers range in length from 27 feet to 41 feet, have tandem axles, and stand about 12.5 feet high. Each rowing team needs to own their own trailer to transport boats to regattas. Sharing trailers is not feasible when you consider the variety of rowing competitions in the US and the wide range of programs that will likely utilize the rowing boathouse.

The rowing boathouse in Skokie is about 1/4 the size of the proposed boathouse at Clark Park. Skokie currently stores five 39-41 foot trailers for rowing teams and one 30 foot trailer for a paddling vendor, all which take up the entire eastern side of the Skokie parking lot. Using the Skokie boathouse as an example, the Rowing Group would estimate that the Clark Park boathouse parking lot would have to conservatively accommodate at least 10 - 12 rowing trailers and corresponding tow vehicles, which are typically purchased and maintained by rowing teams as well. The current Clark Park tarmac parking lot would be unable to accommodate these trailers and trucks. Chicago Park District plans omit this significant space requirement.

- The dock location at Clark Park may need to be reviewed for safety. The curve of the Chicago River on the eastern shore at the proposed dock location could prove to be problematic with the flow of traffic on the river. The dock is shown to be extended into the “traffic” area of the river which, in the opinion of the Rowing Group, frequently could generate conditions where collisions would be likely. Establishing safe procedures would be needed in order to reduce the conditions that would lead to a collision. There are other locations on the North Branch of the Chicago River that are sheltered from conditions like this and will be detailed later in the report.
- The Chicago Area Mountain Bikers’ (CAMBr) “Garden” trail is directly next to the proposed rowing boathouse at Clark Park. The members of CAMBr are concerned about any encroachment toward their well established competition grounds that have been in constant use for more than a decade. They fear that the boathouse will be built in a way that directly will have a negative impact on their space along the Chicago River.

After reviewing the information that was available regarding the development of a rowing boathouse at Clark Park, the Rowing Group has concluded that the Clark Park location is a suitable location for a rowing boathouse, but feels there are far better potential locations that would serve the rowing community far better. Building a boathouse at Clark Park requires the elimination of riverfront green space, the water around the proposed boathouse location does not offer any protected water from commercial barge traffic, and the members of the local community are against the construction of a large-scale rowing boathouse.

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#### **West Division and North Kingsbury vacant lot on back channel of Goose Island, eastern shore**

There is an extremely well suited vacant space near the corner of West Division and North Kingsbury on the eastern shore of the back channel of Goose Island. This location is the ideal location for a rowing boathouse on the North Branch of the Chicago River.

The location is on the back channel, which is arguably the only protected length of water in Chicago. The space is currently a large cement parking lot and offers absolutely nothing to the neighborhood and the local community. This location is ideal for a rowing boathouse.

Rowing already has established itself on this length of water and it has proven to be an extremely convenient and safe area for rowing. No other location on the Chicago River offers such protection from large commercial barge traffic. In addition, this length of water is perfect for a Philadelphia style “Boathouse Row” to be developed, something that the City of Chicago and the Chicago Park District have never imagined. This would create a safe zone for people who access the rowing boathouse.

This location also is perfect because of its proximity to Lincoln Park Juniors, who would most likely utilize the new North Branch rowing boathouse. In addition, programs like the British School of Chicago, Lincoln Park Boat Club, and Robert Morris University, who already have rowing programs, are far closer to this location than any other location. Catering to the organizations that will most likely be using the North Branch rowing boathouse is a prudent thing to do in order to ensure full utilization of the new rowing boathouse.

In addition, reduced distance between the North Branch rowing boathouse and the South Branch rowing boathouse allows for more dual races between clubs in common waters between boathouses, cutting down on travel expenses in the long-term for rowing programs. A reduced distance between the North Branch rowing boathouse and the South Branch rowing boathouse also would allow one vendor the ability to create “one-way” options for rowing tours, expanding options for one-time use rowing participants like tourists.

This proposed location also would be an excellent cornerstone for the development of small businesses along the West Division and North Kingsbury corridor. With the elimination of the Chicago Housing Authority structures, the area around this proposed rowing boathouse location

The Rowing Group recommends this location as the most ideal for the development of a rowing boathouse on the North Branch of the Chicago River.

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### **City property behind Northside College Prep campus**

There is a very large space behind Northside College Prep that is perfect for a rowing boathouse. The location recently was developed through the help of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF). The project helped to fund the development of the river shore around Northside College Prep, which resulted in a very attractive, yet underutilized, feature to the river shore.

The shores are now perfectly graded with a long walkway already built that can accommodate rowing boats. There are also lights and other park amenities located near this TIF funded redevelopment of the river shore on the North Branch. All one would need is a dock and a space to store boats. It would be a very, very easy location to get up and running.

This location is good also because of the connection to Northside College Prep. Northside is promoted as a model high school for Chicago, but it lacks a lot of the infrastructure that are common among high performance high schools, specifically a rowing boathouse. North Park University is also right down the block, so this location would be ideal for their NCAA Division III women's rowing program.

In addition, this potential rowing boathouse location is far enough away from both the Skokie boathouse and large commercial barge traffic to make it a safe and ideal location for the development of a rowing boathouse. Using this location to build a rowing boathouse also would help to reduce the overall costs of boathouse construction by maximizing already spent TIF dollars.

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### **Belmont St - 33rd Ward Streets and Sanitation Office Space**

Located at Fletcher Avenue and Rockwell Avenue, west bank of river just south of Belmont Avenue

This location was suggested by community members, who advocate for a reduced rowing boathouse impact on Clark Park. This potential location is the current home of the 33rd Aldermanic Ward Office for Streets and Sanitation. This location previously was used to store piles of road salt during the winter months that were brought up the North Branch of the Chicago River by barge, but has since been converted to an office space with a small amount of parking and interior space for maintenance work on vehicles. There is also a prefabricated office space placed on part of the parking lot. The neighboring building is the Redbox DVDs maintenance shop on the south side, an unfinished and seemingly abandoned condo development on the west side, and the Belmont bridge on the north side.

The Rowing Group feels this location is an excellent space for a rowing boathouse. The location on the Chicago River is more ideal because the curve of the river is gradual when compared to other locations like the proposed Clark Park dock. In addition, the width of the river at the 33rd Ward location directly south of the Belmont bridge is wider than most locations on the North Branch, allowing more space for a large number of boats to pass the dock while it is being utilized.

Experience has shown a narrow river alongside an active dock limits the ability for multiple crews to pass in opposite directions while a crew is utilizing the dock. Take for example the Skokie boathouse. Two

crews cannot pass side-by-side while another crew passes going in the opposite direction with an active crew on the dock. In other words, there is not enough room for three boats to pass at one time with a crew on the dock. These conditions are very common in rowing and this location at the Belmont 33rd Ward Streets and Sanitation yard would allow three crews to pass safely side-by-side with enough room to accommodate crews on the dock. This is a very important consideration for rowing safety.

The cost of construction and development at this location would be far lower compared the cost of building a new boathouse at another location. Converting an existing warehouse or garage space instead of fabricating a brand new structure surely would keep overall costs on the project down. Saved funds could be redirected to help fund programming at the boathouse. Using an existing structure is also a demonstrated "best practice" as shown by other rowing programs in the US, specifically the Cleveland Rowing Foundation (CRF). CRF was able to keep their overall costs down by purchasing a disused commercial warehouse to be converted into a community rowing boathouse. Rowing does not demand a new boathouse and would be just as well suited in a converted warehouse as they would in a new bespoke rowing boathouse.

This location already has a large amount of work done to it in the past as well. The 33rd Ward office already has manicured walkways around the water with a shoreline that was very well groomed and graded. This location would demand no major change to existing shoreline and looks only to need a dock installed. This location is ready to go into service as a rowing boathouse right away and support rowing programs in a matter of weeks.

The Rowing Group wants to highlight that along with a lower overall project cost and the extreme ease of converting the location to rowing use, picking the 33rd Ward office location would reduce the environmental impact a rowing boathouse would have on existing green spaces like Clark Park. Replacing green space with a building is counter to the reasoning behind the construction of a boathouse. Removing green space does not add to the development of "Chicago's backyard" along the Chicago River, rather it runs against that way of thinking.

Utilizing an already existing structure like the 33rd Ward office could be an example for other businesses and programs to follow suit by working to convert available warehouse space left fallow by the economy rather than building new structures on green grassy spaces. The Rowing Group feels the Chicago Park District should opt to be creative with their approach to boathouses and should not feel obligated to build new structures. The already existing infrastructure of readily available warehouse space along the Chicago River is sufficient totally to meet the needs of the Chicago rowing community.

The only possible negative feature of this location is its proximity to what looks to be a Metropolitan Water Reclamation combined sewage overflow (CSO) exit pipe. The small area of the Chicago River just south of the Belmont bridge potentially could be an area of high water volume and movement after a significant rain. However these conditions are common along the river and should not be a concern. In addition, this specific exit pipe is quite small compared to the significant amount of water that comes down Bubbly Creek during a CSO. The mouth of Bubbly Creek is the proposed location of the south side rowing boathouse. The dock at that location previously was destroyed completely during a CSO event. Those types of conditions are highly improbably at the 33rd Ward office location.

The Rowing Group feels the 33rd Ward office location would be protected by this high volume of water in the case of a CSO if the dock was positioned at the south end of the property far away from the exit pipe. By doing this one virtually would eliminate any concerns about a high volume of water damaging the dock during a CSO event.

In review, the Rowing Group feels that the 33rd Aldermanic Ward Office for Streets and Sanitation at Belmont would be an excellent location for a Chicago River rowing boathouse and should be considered because of its ability to accommodate a large scale rowing boathouse, the structure and shoreline at the

location already is ideal for rowing, and this location would demand a far lower amount of funding to be required to fully convert the space for rowing use. The Chicago Park District should investigate this option more before deciding to remove an estimated 1/5th of the green space at Clark Park to build the new rowing boathouse.

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### **Horner Park**

Between Irving Park Road and Montrose Avenue on the western shore of the Chicago River

Horner Park is a significantly large park along the Chicago River, spanning all the way from Irving Park to Montrose. This park would be perfectly suited for the North Branch rowing boathouse and should be considered as a direct alternative to Clark Park. Conditions at Horner Park are similar to that at Clark Park; however, Horner Park has a significantly larger amount of available green space. The impact of a rowing boathouse would be felt far more sharply at Clark Park, whereas a rowing boathouse could be far better absorbed by Horner Park.

The Rowing Group wonders why Horner Park was not selected instead of Clark Park by the Chicago Park District. We would like there to be more clarity and transparency regarding the Chicago Park District's park selection process for a boathouse before a final decision is made to develop a rowing boathouse at Clark Park.

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### **Warehouse space along the North Branch of the Chicago River**

There is a large amount of already existing warehouse space along the Chicago River that easily could be converted into a rowing boathouse. Rowing does not demand a specialized building, rather rowing can easily adapt to any location as long as it has a good dock, safe water conditions, and a covered area to store boats. Nationally, this is a common practice since it helps immediately to reduce overall costs when compared to building a new structure.

The Chicago rowing community always has been a resourceful group and would like the Chicago Park District to be equally resourceful when developing a rowing boathouse.

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### **Vacant space at Gunnison Avenue and Sacramento Avenue**

There is a large space north of Lawrence near the river that seems like a good location, but it is too close to the large scale Metropolitan Water Reclamation pumping station across river. This is not an ideal location for a rowing boathouse.

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The Rowing Group hopes this summary of potential rowing boathouse locations will be a useful tool to help make an informed decision that is in the best interests of all Chicagoans. We would like to highlight the significant need for 100% transparency on the part of the Chicago Park District which is lacking significantly at this point in the rowing boathouse development process. We feel that a publicly funded government body like the Chicago Park District should be more responsive to the concerns of the people of Chicago, especially to local community advocacy groups like the Clark Park Advisory Council. Striving to include everyone in this process is imperative in order to develop a healthy and friendly atmosphere along the Chicago River.

The Chicago Park District needs to make every possible effort to include the community in boathouse development which sadly has not been the case in any way to date. This process has been opaque and non-transparent from the start.

The Rowing Group can be contacted at 773.354.6311 or [contact@rowinggroup.com](mailto:contact@rowinggroup.com) if you have any questions or comments on this summary.

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This summary was compiled by Mark Carroll of the Rowing Group. Mark is arguably Chicago's top expert on the sport of rowing and his perspective is unique. More information is available at <http://rowinggroup.com/contact.htm>.