



THE PACT:

THE PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL TRIBUTE NEWSLETTER

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PING TOM PARK: 50 YEARS IN THE MAKING



Ping Tom Park, 1700 S. Wentworth Ave. Article submitted by the Ping Tom Park Advisory Council.

The journey of Ping Tom Park is a long one; it's a tale that will enrage you, inspire you and, luckily for the thousands of residents in Chinatown, had a happy ending.

It began in 1962 when the neighborhood's park, Hardin Square Park -- which included a large athletic field, playground, wading pool, library building and field house -- was demolished to make way for the Dan Ryan Expressway. At that time, the city promised to replace this park. For many years the Chinatown community waited.

Finally in 1989, the Chinese American Development Corporation purchased 32 acres that was formerly the Santa Fe Rail Yard. The Chinatown Square development was an ambitious commercial and residential expansion. The community formed the Chinatown Riverside Park Advisory Council. At the same time, Raymond Lee, resident and Chinatown business leader, was appointed to the Chicago Park District by Mayor Eugene Sawyer. There was hope that the park would finally be replaced.

In 1991, the Chicago Park District, with the strong support of Raymond Lee, acquired a 12.26 acres along the Chicago River from 16th Street to about 20th Street for about \$3.5 million. There were numerous obstacles in developing the new park including a pedestrian crossing over a live railroad track, deteriorated river edge that needed to be repaired by the Army Corps of Engineers, environmental remediation as the land was formerly used by the railroad. The development of the south riverfront portion was started in 1998. At the community's recommendation, the Chicago Park District Board named the new park after Ping Tom. Ping Tom was a community leader who advocated for Asian Americans and advised numerous Illinois governors and Chicago mayors. The park was dedicated on October 2, 1999 by Mayor Richard M. Daley. The project cost was \$5 million.

In 2002, the Chicago Park District acquired the last 4.9 acre portion (at the NW corner of Wentworth and

18th Street) of the Ping Tom Park for a future field house. Funding for this acquisition included: \$750,000 from IL Department of Natural Resources, \$350,00 from Chicago Park District and \$350,000 from the City of Chicago.

The Ping Tom Park Advisory Council was expanded to include members of a number of Chinatown organizations: Chinese American Civic Council, Chinese American Service League, Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, St. Therese Catholic Church and Pui Tak Center. These groups advocated for the completion of the second and third

phases of the Ping Tom Park by talking to the alderman and appearing at CPD board meetings. They were told repeatedly that the PAC had to raise about 1/3

of the expected \$10-\$12 million dollar cost for a fieldhouse.

Then in 2004, the athletic fields were built on the future site of the field house. So that the park could extend north of 18th Street, the Chicago Department of Transportation improved the space under the 18th Street Bridge and created two plazas in 2008. It was agreed that the Chicago Park District would maintain the plaza.

To the great surprise of the community, it was learned



Continued from page 1: that the Chinatown Basin TIF (Chinatown Square) was retired with \$8 million remaining in that account. The money was lost, and no one knew until it was too late.

In 2010, two large town hall meetings were convened by the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community that asked elected officials for a new library and a new field house. In 2011, the north riverfront portion of the park between 16th and 18th Street was developed. This included a river retaining wall, natural areas and walking paths that extended into the river. This project was funded through TIF funds (\$2 million), Chicago Park District (\$2.5 million) and \$447,000 from U.S. Housing and Urban Development (earmarked through the efforts of Senator Richard Durbin).

Ping Tom Park was selected to be one of four boat houses through an initiative of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. This boat house was designed by Johnson and Lee and was dedicated on June 9, 2013. Today, Urban Kayak rents kayaks to the public from the boathouse. The estimated cost of the building is \$4 million.

Finally, the field house project was dedicated on October 14, 2013 by Mayor Rahm Emanuel. This 30,000 square foot field house includes a fitness center, basketball court, swimming pool, community meeting rooms and a rooftop garden terrace. The building has the highest level of LEED certification and features geothermal heating and cooling, and low-flow plumbing supplemented by captured rainwater. The project cost was \$15.2 million with \$15 million coming from the River South TIF and \$200,000 from the Chicago Park District.

A year and a half later, the field house was renamed for Leonard M. Louie. For nearly a decade and a half, Mr. Louie served as the PAC Chair and rallied community organizations and residents to the cause of finishing the Ping Tom Park so that children, youth, adults and seniors could again have a field house to enjoy in their community.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE ARCHIVES: A LITTLE HISTORY BEHIND PARK DISTRICT'S "GOVERNANCE" OF PACS

In 2008, Chicago Tribune reporter Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah wrote an article for the paper entitled, "Park District proposals may rein in its volunteers." The following is a synopsis of that article, highlighting and reiterating key points.

- At the time, nearly 100 park advisory councils existed, with some in place since the 1980's, in part because of the federal lawsuit filed by the Department of Justice (which some refer to as "The Consent Decree" - which is a different consent decree than the District's Shakman Consent Decree).
- Park District's proposed guidelines would require volunteers to submit background checks, supply three non-family references, agree to not grant media interviews, and live in Chicago, as a few of the restrictions.
- Council members were concerned that these guidelines might: 1) discourage people from becoming involved; 2) restrict public advocate voices (especially because at this time, the proposed 2016 Olympic venues would be established in multiple parks, Lincoln Park Advisory Council was speaking out against Latin School's proposed athletic field in the park, and Kenwood Park Advisory Council was trying to prevent the expansion of a baseball field while being told by the District that they were not recognized); 3) impede on their

internal group structure; and 4) allow CPD to require so much accountability them, yet CPD was failing to commit that any raised funds would go toward designated projects.

- Park District said: 1) "they want uniformity among the advisory groups;" 2) the guidelines were being developed since 2004 in part to ensure PACs were registered with them.
- Friends of the Parks had been working with the Park District in 2004 on guidelines, "but background checks, volunteer forms and guidelines on codes of conduct weren't part of that discussion," said then Friends' president.
- The article ends with the comments from then Nichols Park Advisory Council president, Stephanie Franklin: "Franklin said she wonders how she'll be able to pay for mailings and other basic costs without collecting dues. She said she hopes the Park District will discard some of the more intrusive rules. 'There would be no volunteers,' she said. 'We would simply not be able to comply with these guidelines. It would continue to be an advisory council, but [the Park District] wouldn't recognize it.'"

Work cited: Ahmed-Ullah, N.S. (2008, March 27). Park District proposals may rein in its volunteers. *The Chicago Tribune*, pp. 1, 5.

NOTEWORTHY DATES

August 6th: 1000 Mile March, MLK memorial walk to Marquette Park, register www.mlkmemorialchicago.org

August 13th-14th: Friends of the Parks' L.A.T.E. Ride fundraiser

September 11th: National Grandparents Day

September 24th: National Public Lands Day

September 27th: Fall PAC Quarterly Networking Meeting, FOTP office @ 5:30

September 30th: Friends' Volunteers in Parks (VIP) nominations due

October 3rd: Child Health Day

October 10th: Indigenous Peoples Day

November 3rd: Friends and The Law Project present 501c3 meeting for PACs (rescheduled from October 27th)

November 17th: Friends' Annual Gala

Keep your eyes peeled: Friends' 20th Annual Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) Award Reception will be announced soon!

Submit VIP Award Nominations: Contact Nicole at machucan@fotp.org



...document everything. Did someone make a commitment verbally? Write them a thank you email following the conversation listing their commitment, for example. Make and keep copies of membership forms before giving them to park district. Request confirmation that emails have been received. Simply, be as diligent about keeping excellent records as possible.