

The Last Four Miles

COMPLETING CHICAGO'S LAKEFRONT PARKS

The Dream

No place is more emblematic of Chicago than its majestic lakefront. A feature in any postcard of the city's skyline, the Chicago lakefront is known around the world for its beauty, accessibility, and public ownership.

The dream of a free, public, lakefront open to all has been a compelling one since Chicago's founding. Citizens have tirelessly fought to expand this amenity. Shortsighted politicians, greedy developers, powerful railroads, and even nature itself were no match for the powerful idea that Chicago's lakefront—all of it—belongs to the public.

Lincoln Park, Grant Park, Burnham Park, Jackson Park, Rainbow Beach, and Calumet Park—all were created by the people of Chicago. A vast public parkland stretches for a full 26 miles along Chicago's 30-mile shoreline as the result of the dedicated work of our predecessors.

Today the visionary legacy of Chicago's founders has nearly been completed. Chicago's lakefront park system creates a linear park expanse that is unrivaled in the Great Lakes Basin. When other waterfront communities neglected their shoreline, Chicagoans dedicated themselves to creating a beautiful public lakefront. The result is a legacy—an inheritance—upon which we can build.



This year we celebrate the centennial of Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago*, the inspiration for much of Chicago's remarkable lakefront. We remember Burnham's words, that "a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with evergrowing insistency."

What idea for improving our city could be more compelling than the dream of completing Chicago's public lakefront, of creating, of dedicating, of enjoying the Last Four Miles?



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Friends of the Parks is a 34-year-old park advocacy organization, dedicated to preserving, protecting, and improving Chicago's parks and preserves for all citizens.



The History

Chicago's magnificent public lakefront parks exist today because of the vision of the city's founders and a continuing civic commitment to the value of public open space along Lake Michigan.

Chicago's devotion to its lakefront began even before the city was incorporated in the 1830s. Lots in the original townsite plat designated the land east of Michigan Avenue "forever, open clear and free." When the Ft. Dearborn site was sold a few years later, citizens requested a park "accessible at all times to the people."

A crusade in the 1850s to convert the city's lakefront cemetery into a public park was followed in 1869 by the creation of Lincoln Park. Through lakefill and land purchase, Lincoln Park grew by 1905 to 300 acres along the north lakeshore. Along the south lakefront, Frederick Law

a lengthy fight to clean up the mess. After four lawsuits, in 1911 the Illinois Supreme Court declared that the designation "forever open, clear, and free" prevents the construction of permanent buildings in Grant Park. The decision disappointed civic officials



The lakefront as a dumping ground, circa 1909 (below), and Burnham's vision for Grant Park (above).



Olmsted and Daniel Burnham created the magnificent Jackson Park site for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which boosted civic awareness of the importance of public access to the lake.

Meanwhile, Grant Park downtown had become the site of livery stables, squatters' shacks, railroad tracks, trash dumps, and militia quarters. In 1890, mail-order merchant Montgomery Ward began

More than 2000 acres of new parkland (green areas) were created between 1910 and 1960.

planning new civic buildings for the park, but advanced the vision that the lakefront parks should remain open to all. As Ward said, "I (fight) for the poor people of Chicago not for the millionaires."

The story of Chicago's unique urban shoreline is entwined with the engineering necessary to protect the shoreline from Lake Michigan and its powerful winter storms. To help protect the city, Chicago officials in the mid 19th century allowed the Illinois Central Railroad to build along the south lakefront. However, when the Illinois legislature in 1869 granted ownership of the shoreline to the railroad, Chicagoans protested this "lakefront steal." Litigation followed. Finally in 1892 the U.S. Supreme Court held that the lake and its submerged bottom are held in public trust by the people and cannot be sold to a private party.

The 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, written by Daniel Burnham



Chicago Park District, Special Collections

In the 1920s, new lakefill transformed Chicago's lakefront, including the creation of Burnham Park.

and Edward Bennett, envisioned a city that would not only be efficient and attractive for all its residents, but one whose beauty would draw visitors and commerce. The plan recommended creating lakefront parks stretching from end to end of the city's shoreline. "The Lakefront by right belongs to the people," wrote Burnham. "Not a foot of its shores should be appropriated to the exclusion of the people."

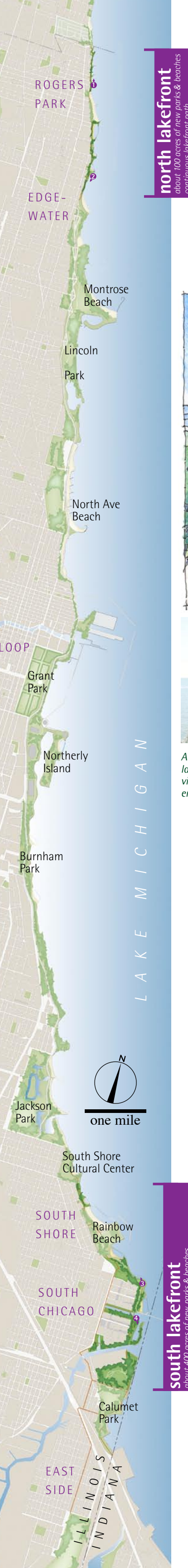
Generations of Chicagoans have enjoyed the benefits of this bold idea. Between 1920 and 1953, some 2,000 acres of new lakefront parkland were carefully engineered and shaped, stretching south to create Burnham Park and beyond to include Rainbow Beach, and north to Hollywood Ave., the northern boundary of Lincoln Park.

Burnham's vision of a public lakefront soon became part of the city's unique character. The 1973 Lake Michigan and Chicago Lakefront Protection Ordinance sets as a municipal goal to "complete the publicly owned and locally controlled park system along the entire Chicago Lakefront."

The rescue of Chicago's lakefront from rail and commercial development was a remarkable accomplishment. Most Great Lakes and coastal cities have devoted their waterfronts mainly to commercial and industrial uses. Thanks to our visionary and courageous predecessors, Chicago's open and accessible lakefront, with its many beaches, harbors, walkways, sanctuaries, and playing fields, constitutes a haven for millions of people throughout the region, greatly enhancing our quality of life and the international image of Chicago. Now, it's up to us to finish the job.

The Last Four Miles

FRIENDS OF THE PARKS



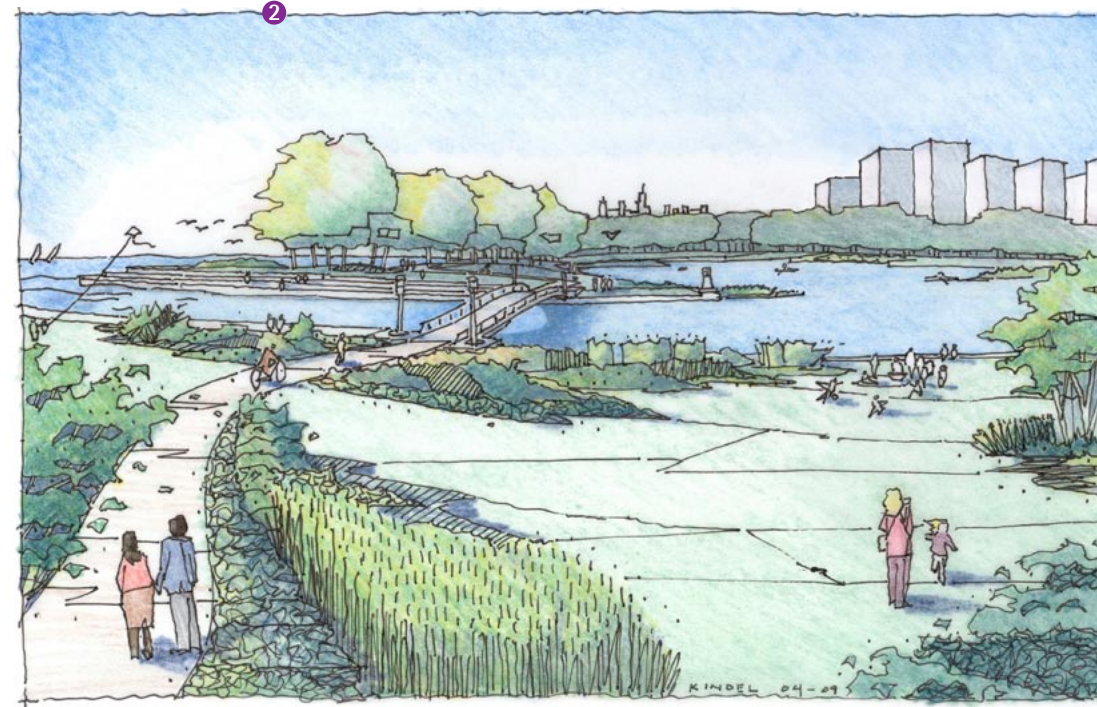
north lakefront
about 100 acres of new parks & beaches
continuous lakefront path

south lakefront
about 400 acres of new parks & beaches
continuous lakefront path



The Vision

Today Chicago enjoys 26 miles of lakefront parkland, from 71st Street on the south to Hollywood Avenue on the north. But four miles of the city's shoreline—two on the south and two on the north lakefront—are not yet part of this uninterrupted chain of shoreline parks. The lack of public access to the lake particularly impoverishes the city's northernmost and southernmost neighborhoods.



A continuous path, instead of barriers to lakefront access, would greet lakefront visitors. New natural areas (right) would enhance the Rogers Park area.



The Last Four Miles Initiative

To advance Chicago's tradition of an entirely public lakefront, Friends of the Parks began the Last Four Miles initiative in 2006, bringing citizens together to outline their vision and discuss the exciting possibility of completing the lakefront parks. Two years of meetings, charrettes and dialogues, with the assistance of Friends of the Parks' professional design team, produced the concept plans shown on the other side.

South Lakefront Planning

At a 2006 community design charrette at Calumet Park, architects and planners worked with citizens, park advisory councils, and community organizations to develop concept plans for the South Side. The concept plan reflects limited park expansion between 71st and 75th Streets to connect South Shore Cultural Center with Rainbow Beach Park, and additional park and beach development at the former U.S. Steel South Works. The South Side plan also envisions the northward expansion of Calumet Park on land that is not used by the Illinois International Port District Authority for its maritime activities.

The concept plan includes completion of the lakefront path from 71st Street to the Indiana State Line, with connections to neighborhoods and bike trails in South Chicago and the Calumet region. Based on engineering and environmental studies, the design includes almost 400 acres of new parkland, with new beaches, recreational fields, greenways, and nature areas for South Chicago neighborhoods, which urgently need additional parkland.



Park plans were developed by the residents of adjacent communities.



North Lakefront Planning

Visioning sessions and design charrettes for both Edgewater and Rogers Park were held in 2008. The ideas generated were translated into sketches and underwent environmental and engineering studies. What resulted was a visionary concept for new lakefront parks with *no* extension of Lake Shore Drive, *no* marinas, and *no* commercial development.

Both Rogers Park and Edgewater are "park poor," with less than two acres of park per thousand persons. Besides Loyola Park, the Rogers Park lakefront has only small street-end beaches and parks. Gaps between these beaches and parks prevent people from walking or biking along the entire lakefront.

The Last Four Miles initiative offers an opportunity to create additional parkland, by expanding Berger Park and creating connections between the small parks and beaches. It envisions limited lakefill from the Evanston border to Hollywood Ave. on the North Side, in response to neighborhood preference for a minimalist, sustainable design that connects the current small parks and beaches.

Creating new parkland

Filling from the shoreline is an efficient and cost-effective way to create new parks in a dense metropolis. The contours and geology of the lake bottom adjacent to Chicago are favorable for placement of well-designed fill that meets environmental requirements and creates wildlife habitat.

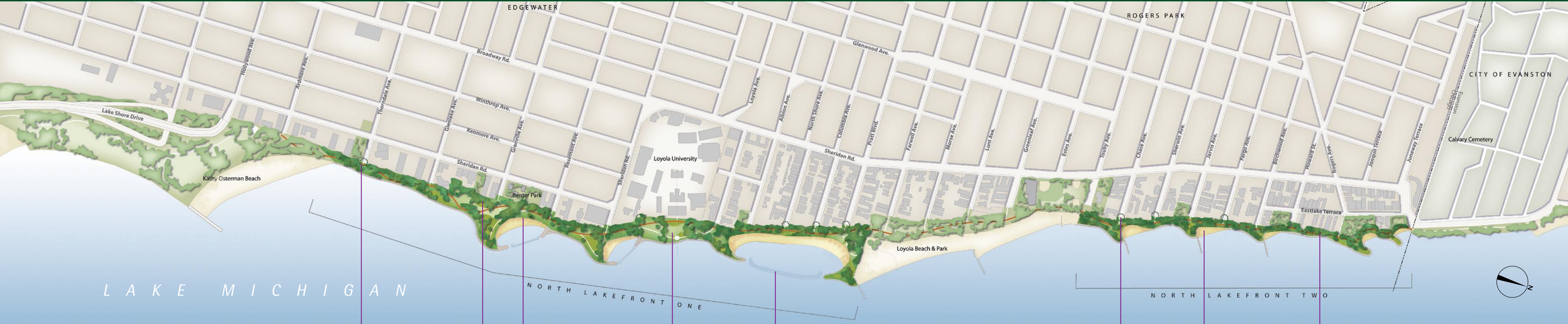
It is also a cost-effective way to protect lakefront neighborhoods. Lake Michigan water levels periodically rise and fall by several feet. When the lake is low, as it is now, it can be hard to remember the fury of the winter storms that caused enormous damage in the 1980s. As the lake returns to higher water levels, winter storms will again require enormous expenditures by public agencies, condo associations, and individual homeowners. Extending the parkland would prevent this costly damage.

Most important of all, it creates places that all city residents can enjoy: new places to walk, bike, wade, explore nature or just gaze out over the expanse of Lake Michigan. A century after the Plan of Chicago, Daniel Burnham's exhortation that "not a foot of its shores should be appropriated by individuals to the exclusion of the people" still offers compelling logic to complete the Last Four Miles.



Parks at the former U.S. Steel South Works site (below) will offer new vistas of the lakefront and skyline. New peninsulas (bottom) can protect lakeside buildings from lake storms (above, South Shore in 1987), and shelter quiet lagoons, providing new places to safely enjoy kayaks and canoes.





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Walkers and bicyclists can continue on the lakefront path all the way to Evanston, without unsafe and confusing detours onto neighborhood streets.

Additional parkland to the east of Loyola University provides new places for recreation or to just gaze out over the lake in quiet contemplation.

Submerged breakwaters or reefs create new aquatic habitat while protecting the beach sand from being carried away by winter storms.

Isolated street-end beaches will be integrated into a continuous shoreline park.

Continuous shoreline paths offer expanded opportunities for exercise, or to just stroll along the lake.

The Concept Plan

Based on community visioning sessions and charrettes, the Last Four Miles professional design team—after review with ecological and engineering experts—produced this concept plan. Guiding the effort were:

The Last Four Miles Planning Principles

- Public access along Lake Michigan from Evanston to Indiana
- More parkland and beaches
- Community-based planning effort
- Completion of a continuous lakefront path
- Greenway corridors to the lake
- Creation of habitat and improvement of Lake Michigan coastal ecosystem
- Preservation of cultural history
- Attention to previous and current open-space and greenway planning efforts



An alternate Edgewater proposal creates two peninsulas enclosing a new lagoon, with a bridge for the lakefront path.

Benefits of the Last Four Miles

- Adds almost 500 acres of new parks and beaches for neighborhoods that don't have enough parkland.
- Completes a single lakefront-long park to knit the city together.
- Increases property values along the newly created parks.
- Encourages new small businesses in the vicinity.
- Extends the lakefront trail for walkers, runners, and cyclists—to Evanston on the north and to the Indiana border on the south.
- Creates new construction jobs to build the parks.
- Protects the shoreline from storms and erosion.
- Establishes new aquatic and wildlife habitat.

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New parkland and beach edges use naturalistic landscaping to create wildlife and aquatic habitat and provide educational opportunities.



An alternate proposal for the area between 71st and 75th places lakefill offshore to create two peninsulas, with a bridge for the lakefront path across the new lagoon.

A new park fills the gap between the South Shore Cultural Center and Rainbow Beach Park, allowing a continuous lakefront path from 71st to 75th.

Calumet Park is expanded with 140 additional acres, offering more places to run and to play. Quieter, more contemplative areas would be created adjacent to the lake.

A sheltered lagoon provides calm water for kayaking and canoeing. A more naturalistic shoreline edge is designed to offer great places for fishing.

The lakefront path (in red) curves along the shoreline, crosses the old U.S. Steel slip, and continues along the Calumet River to connect with Calumet area trails.

To increase parkland and improve lake access from the former U.S. Steel site, new beach and lagoon areas will be created between 79th and the Calumet River. The existing site, elevated several feet above the water, offers no lake access.

A promontory at the north end of the U.S. Steel site offers new recreational areas and vistas of the lakefront and downtown skyline.

Innovative landscaping creates wildlife habitat and benefits the Lake Michigan ecosystem. Some 400 new acres of new parkland along the south lakefront will attract migrating birds following the shoreline.



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