



October 30, 2022

Chicago Park District  
541 N. Fairbanks  
Chicago IL, 60611

To Whom It May Concern:

Únete La Villita is an all-volunteer resident-led organization that engages in grassroots organizing, community engagement, political education, policy advocacy and mutual aid to promote accountable community-driven development and affordable housing in Little Village. We are one of the organizations that has taken the lead in the fight to get for-profit mega festivals out of Douglass Park. We believe that public parks should be accessible to the public.

We are writing to participate in the public comment regarding the proposed amendment to the Chicago Park District code that would give the Park District board the ability to approve or deny applications for events with over 10,000 attendees. We believe that this change would be a step towards increasing transparency, accountability and inclusion of community voices. However, the implementation of this change must be closely monitored in order to ensure that it has the impact that is intended, with a focus on the quality and meaningfulness of community engagement. Information about proposals that trigger this requirement and opportunities to provide feedback about these proposals must be shared widely; it should be posted at field houses, across the park, and at public community hubs like schools and libraries, and shared with park advisory councils and community and regional organizations that are able to disseminate the information to community members. The process of gathering feedback should allow for people to engage in multiple ways - for example, in writing on paper and online, and verbally during community meetings and board meetings - and it should be public so that community members can hear from each other and hold board members accountable to this feedback. Final decisions should be made by the board during a public meeting and should be shared broadly with the communities in question in a timely manner after the decision is made. In addition, board members should be very clear about what they learned during the community engagement process and how it influenced their decision.

While this change is a step in the right direction, we do not believe that it goes as far as it should. More thought should be given to whether 10,000 is an appropriate event size to trigger this requirement; it is possible that this number should be smaller. Large events should have to submit applications with more anticipation than is currently required in order to provide enough time to ensure meaningful community engagement. We also have serious concerns about whether the Park District board will be truly accountable to impacted communities when they make decisions about these applications because board members are not chosen by the community at large and can be beholden to powerful political and corporate interests.

Beyond this specific change, we believe that more thought should be given to ensure that the funds that the Park District receives in connection with large event applications are allocated in a way that is equitable. A portion of the funds should be used to support the parks that host these events, and there should be a community engagement process to decide how these park-specific funds are spent; in low-income communities and communities of color, this portion could be up to 100%. There should also be a limit on the number of applications that can be submitted and approved for any one park. Vendors that lose income, sports leagues that lose access to facilities that they have reserved, and other individuals and groups that are directly impacted by mega festivals should be compensated for their losses. Additionally, festival promoters and associates should not be allowed to donate to Park District board members, local elected officials, or institutions with which these people are affiliated.

Long-term, we believe that the Chicago Park District and the City of Chicago must work with community members across the city to identify a location for large, for-profit events that will not impede the use of public parks or other public spaces, and that does not have an inequitable impact on low-income communities and/or communities of color. Chicago Park District leadership must work with city and state elected officials to ensure that the District has adequate funding and does not feel the need to raise funds by using our parks in ways that contradict its mission. Finally, we would like to have an elected representative Park District Board.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Únete La Villita  
773-231-0664  
unetelavillita@gmail.com  
unetelavillita.wordpress.com  
Facebook: @unetelavillita  
Instagram: @unetelavillita  
Twitter: @unetelavillita