



December 3, 2021

The Honorable Walter Burnett, Jr.
Alderman, Ward 27
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, Room 300, Office 38
Chicago, IL 60602

The Honorable Brendan Reilly
Alderman, Ward 42
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, Room 200, Office 6
Chicago, IL 60602

The Honorable Brian Hopkins
Alderman, Ward 2
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, Room 200
Chicago, IL 60602

RE: Casino Proposal / Freedom Center Site

Dear Alderman Burnett, Alderman Reilly, and Alderman Hopkins:

River North Residents Association (RNRA) was surprised to learn of the Bally's casino proposal for the Freedom Center site from news reporting. Given the site's direct proximity to the western portion of the River North neighborhood, we are providing our organization's early feedback regarding this location for the proposed development of a casino. We have concerns about the appropriateness of potentially siting a casino and high-rise hotel development at the Freedom Center location.

As you know, RNRA has been a responsible and thoughtful partner in providing feedback related to the continuing development of the River North area. To date, as an organization, we have been supportive of new development projects that are compatible with the neighborhood. However, we have concerns regarding the Freedom Center site as a location for the casino development project given its direct proximity across the Chicago River from the long-established residential neighborhood to the east.

Our concerns include, but are not limited to, the impact on the adjacent residential community and nearby businesses, of a 24/7, destination-oriented, gambling, entertainment, and hotel complex.

- River North is a high-density community. For example, 2020 data for just one River North census tract (adjacent to the Freedom Center site) – 17031081800 – reveals a population of 11,373 and total housing units of 8,096. Density continues to increase with multiple high-rise, mixed-use developments approved or under construction in close

proximity to the Freedom Center site, including the following projects for a combined increase, to date, of over 5,700 residential units, 75,000 s.f. of commercial space, and other mixed-use development.

- The recently approved Halsted Pointe project, located near the intersection of Chicago and Halsted, will include multiple high-rise mixed-use towers, ranging in height from 30- to 46-stories, comprising over 2,600 residential units, and a 300-room hotel tower, among other uses on this site.
 - The 808 N. Cleveland mixed-use residential development at the corner of Cleveland and Chicago is under construction and will add 200 new residential units and 27,000 s.f. of commercial space.
 - The HUGO development at 411 W. Chicago and 751 N. Hudson will be breaking ground shortly. This combined mixed-use residential development will include 227 residential units and over 18,000 s.f. of commercial space.
 - The recently approved zoning changes allowing for the redevelopment of several Moody Bible Institute sites between Chicago and North Avenues along Wells Street to accommodate over 2,600 residential units and 30,000 s.f. of commercial space.
- Thousands of residential units in the neighborhood will experience additional noise impacts from increased tourist-oriented river traffic combined with casino visitors traversing the riverfront promenade, and any outdoor activities.
 - Traffic congestion is already a challenge for the River North community, particularly in the western portion. Illinois Department of Transportation data show the average annual daily traffic volumes for the major streets adjacent and near to the Freedom Center site:
 - Chicago Avenue (from the Chicago River to Halsted) – 24,600
 - Chicago Avenue (from Halsted to Peoria) – 21,700
 - Halsted Street (north of Chicago) – 15,700
 - Halsted Street (south of Chicago) – 15,000
 - Grand Avenue (Orleans to Des Plaines) – 17,100
 - Grand Avenue (Des Plaines to Halsted) – 19,200
 - Ohio feeder ramp (east direction) – 91,200

Traffic congestion on these roadways will be further exacerbated by the impacts from the many high-density residential and mixed-use developments approved or under construction in the vicinity of Chicago Avenue and Halsted Street. Additionally, the scheduled permanent replacement of the Chicago Avenue bridge will disrupt traffic for many months during construction.

- The location of a large-scale, entertainment complex in an already high-density area will make it more challenging from a public safety standpoint for the adjacent neighborhoods. Chicago Police Department 18th District crime data show existing challenges, which may be further exacerbated by a major 24/7 entertainment complex located nearby.
- Negative impacts on home values for residential properties immediately adjacent to the casino site is a likely outcome due to increased noise, traffic, lighting and other impacts resulting from a large-scale casino complex. Studies such as the National Realtor's Association 2013 "Economic Impacts of Casinos on Home Prices Literature Survey and Issue Analysis" (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/151429358/NAR-casino-research>) have explored this impact in other locations.
- Casino-oriented crowds traversing the proposed pedestrian bridge connection across the river is likely to adversely impact to Ward Park and its heavily used playlot.
- Neon and other lighting will directly face hundreds of residential units fronting the Chicago River across from the casino site.
- A large-scale casino development at this site is likely to have a negative impact on local businesses.

While RNRA is supportive of public-oriented riverfront improvements, and compatible development of the Freedom Center site, a destination-oriented, 24/7, large-scale casino development presents a host of land use and quality of life challenges for the residential neighborhoods in River North and beyond. The area adjacent to the proposed development is home to thousands of residents and is a stable and family-oriented neighborhood.

As the City reviews the various casino proposals, on behalf of our 22,000 members, we ask that our earnest concerns be taken into consideration and that a more suitable alternate site be pursued for this large-scale, destination-oriented use.

On behalf of the RNRA Board of Directors,

Mike Riordan

Mike Riordan, President
River North Residents Association

Cc: Samir Mayekar, Deputy Mayor, Economic and Neighborhood Development
Maurice Cox, Commissioner, Department of Planning and Development