

September 9, 2022

CHA Board of Commissioners
James E. Matanky
Meghan Harte
Dr. Mildred Harris
Luis Gutierrez
Angela Hurlock

Dear Board of Commissioners,

The Near North Unity Program (NNUP) and River North Residents Association (RNRA) are writing today to recap public safety concerns regarding the improper use of Chicago Park District and Chicago Housing Authority land surrounding Stanton and Seward Parks in the Near North community.

During the NNUP community meeting on Monday August 29, 2022, and at recent CAPS 1822 and 1823 Beat meetings, issues involving the misuse of our open lands were discussed. Our objective here is to clearly document these concerns for the Chicago Housing Authority.

Areas surrounding Stanton and Seward Parks have become regular gathering places for large, unruly, and unpermitted parties. Attendees often park as many as 50 vehicles on unsecured and unfenced park and vacant CHA land, where they then place loudspeakers and play music at high volumes. Party goers begin congregating in the afternoon and frequently remain until 5 a.m. the following morning.

Residents participating in the August 29 NNUP community meeting, described witnessing a variety of crimes being committed during these unauthorized events, including trespassing on Chicago Housing Authority land; illegal driving; drifting; parking vehicles on park and CHA land; playing amplified music without permits; being in the park after 11 p.m.; and consuming alcohol on park property without a permit.

Residents who live nearby have shared stories of music being played so loud that their walls vibrate, and they cannot hear their own TVs inside their homes. We are aware that such parties at Stanton Park have sometimes preceded shootings, the most recent of which occurred on July 9th.

Our parks lack perimeter fencing and most CHA land is open and unsecured, which creates the opportunity for people to drive cars between the adjacent houses and next to Chicago Public Schools like Ogden-Jenner. These vehicles are being driven on the sidewalk and present a real danger to pedestrians and residents of the nearby townhomes on Hobbie Street. Concerned citizens have submitted photographic evidence of this irresponsible and illegal use of open lands that NNUP, in turn, has shared with CPD, Chicago Park District, CHA, and CPS.

NNUP and RNRA wish to continue working with the 18th District CAPS office to resolve the concerns presented at the August 29 meeting and in many other forums. We understand that several actions have

been taken to address these issues over the years, including the installation of “No Trespassing” signs by CHA on their unsecured land, and “No Parking” signs by the Park District near the baseball fields. Stanton Park has installed bollards that can be used to prevent cars from driving on the basketball courts by Skinner North, though the gates are rarely closed. Ogden-Jenner School secured their playground area by installing new perimeter fencing, Skinner North is working to secure their school playground property, and the Noble Academy, near Stanton Park, has installed many additional security cameras. Attendees at NNUP’s community meeting recommended that CHA secure their land without delay, and that both Stanton and Seward Parks install full perimeter fencing or barriers to prevent automobiles from unlawfully entering the property. It was also suggested that cars should be ticketed and towed immediately.

While we always encourage residents to call 911 without hesitation to report public safety issues, a consistent challenge is the requirement that callers specify the address at which the incident occurred. Residents often do not know the address of the vacant property where inappropriate or unlawful behavior is taking place and therefore are unable to complete an incident report. It would be helpful if the official street addresses of all the parcels in this area could be identified, along with the entities (CHA, CPS, Park District, or other parties) that own or manage them.

We appreciate the efforts of the 18th District Police Officers to ensure public safety and protect quality of life for the members of our associations, which together, include roughly 30,000 residents. We understand the Police can’t possibly monitor all open space on the Near North side, nor prevent all reckless, irresponsible, or unlawful activity, but we believe that stricter enforcement, along with the installation of additional fencing, bollards, and security cameras, will help to reduce disruptive and potentially dangerous behavior.

NNUP, RNRA, area HOA Boards, and residents of apartment buildings and single-family homes, pledge to work together to support the efforts of the CPD and elected officials to improve public safety in Near North side neighborhoods. Thank you for your service, and please let us know what else we can do to help.

Submitted on behalf of the respective Boards of NNUP and RNRA,

Michele Dreczynski

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NNUP Program Manager

Brian Israel

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CC:

Walter Burnett, 27th Ward Alderman
Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward Alderman
Jon Hein, 18th District Commander