



April 17, 2023

Commissioner Maurice Cox
Department of Planning & Development
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, Room 1000
Chicago, IL 60602

RE: **Planned Development 1426 – Part II Approvals (Sub-Area A) / Bally’s Permanent Casino Site**

Dear Commissioner Cox:

On behalf of the River North Residents Association, the Board of Directors is submitting its preliminary feedback on what we understand to be the most current iteration of the design plans for Bally’s permanent casino site. It is our understanding that Bally’s is in the process of preparing for the Part II approval for Sub-Area A as required under the City of Chicago’s Planned Development zoning process.

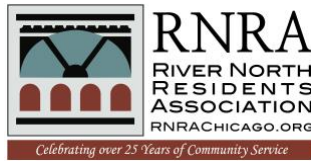
We appreciate the opportunity to review the preliminary design plans as presented to the Casino Community Advisory Council (CCAC) and we are especially thankful to Deputy Mayor Samir Mayekar for previewing the interim design plans with the RNRA’s board leadership in response to our request.

To date, in the presentations to the CCAC and at the various past public meetings, the east side of the river, across from the casino site (Sub-Area A) has been regularly absent from the designs presented for the Bally’s site thereby ignoring the broader urban context of this location and the impact that such a sizeable, high-intensity development will have on the adjacent neighborhood.

As such, we are calling to your attention a few areas of impact on the long-established residential community located directly across the Chicago River from the Bally’s site.

EVENT SPACE

- As PD 1426 points out, “At the time of the [amendment’s] presentation to the Plan Commission [before its approval in December 2022], the proposed development of Sub-Area A **was still in a state of evolving design**. The Applicant is committed to on-going discussions regarding the final design and material finishes of the proposed development and has agreed no Part II approval for proposed work in Sub-Area A shall be granted until a Site Plan Review request is submitted to the Department of Planning and Development and the Site Plan Review has been approved by the Department of Planning and Development.”
- Based on the design concepts presented most recently to the CCAC and reflecting what our Board leadership reviewed in the design preview, we have concerns with the bulk, height, and block-like design being envisioned for the indoor event space, and the proposed building’s dominance of the riverfront site. As presented and currently proposed by Bally’s architects, the building space will be 97’ in height (approximately 10 stories high) from the new Jefferson Street platform, encompassing 65,000 square feet over 5 levels to accommodate 3,000 seats.



- When “viewing” the proposed design from the Ward Park location directly across the river from the event space site, it appears to tower over the main casino building and the adjacent proposed park. It is hard to visualize how this portion of the overall casino development is in harmony with the proximate existing and proposed buildings on both sides of the river.
- We request that these concerns be addressed in the final design for the event space building, and that the proposed final design be presented at a public community meeting in advance of, and in addition to, the public hearings required as part of the Part II approval process. We ask this in the context of the City’s zoning ordinance which lays out general building and urban design standards and guidelines for Planned Developments including, but are not limited to, the following:

Building Design (Section 17-8-0907)

General Guidelines.

- The existing context of a site should be respected in the design of adjacent new construction. This includes the existing general size, shape and scale, site plan and materials of surrounding properties. High- rise buildings or towers should respect the context and scale of surrounding buildings with setbacks at appropriate heights which will also reduce the apparent mass from street level.
- All sides and areas of buildings that are visible to the public should be treated with materials, finishes and architectural details that are of high-quality and appropriate for use on the primary street-facing façade.

Urban Design (Section 17-8-0906)

General Intent. Planned developments should be designed to:

- reinforce desirable urban features found within the surrounding area, such as siting patterns, massing arrangements and streetscape characteristics.
- create seamless or gradual transitions in bulk and scale when high-intensity development occurs in or near areas with a lower- intensity character.

PROPOSED WATER TAXI LOCATION

While the location of a new water taxi stop requires multiple approvals, the RNRA is not supportive if its “proposed” location near Chicago Avenue at the casino entrance given its proximity to the large residential buildings directly across the river. These include 758 N Larrabee, 720 N Larrabee, and 700 N Larrabee, which comprise more than 650 homes and represent nearly 1,000 individual residents. The noise and other impacts of multiple daily water taxi stops at the casino will be disturbing to the adjacent residents. In the alternative, the RNRA requests that the potential water taxi stop be moved closer to the proposed park (similar to the water taxi arrangement at Ping Tom Park) so as to reduce disruption to adjacent residents. An aerial view, attached herewith as Exhibit A, shows both the proposed and preferred locations, as well as the most directly impacted residential properties.

Furthermore, RNRA reiterates its call to prohibit private, recreational, and commercial for-hire boat docking, except for water taxis, and requests the opportunity to view a schedule of proposed casino water taxi stops as soon as it becomes available.



TRAFFIC IMPACTS

Lastly, the RNRA has well-articulated its concerns that traffic will be a great challenge for this part of the city given the many natural and man-made barriers surrounding the casino site (i.e., Chicago River, bridges and viaduct infrastructure, and above grade platforms). We reiterate this concern.

During Construction

The recent experience of gridlocked traffic that has plagued both the western River North neighborhood and the River West neighborhood due to the Kennedy Expressway construction project is a prelude of what is to come. The timing of multiple infrastructure projects will coincide, including the Kennedy Expressway work, the Chicago/Halsted Viaduct infrastructure, and the Chicago Avenue bridge reconstruction project. Given the recent impact of traffic congestion along residential streets and alleys in River North and River West due to the Kennedy project, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that River North and River West neighborhood streets and alleys will continue to bear the brunt of traffic gridlock for years to come. The RNRA would like for the relevant City agencies to better articulate to the public the traffic circulation routing, and methods that can be employed to deter pass-through traffic from neighborhood streets in all residential areas adjacent or in close proximity to the casino site.

After Construction

The Bally's-related traffic studies have touted traffic light synchronization technology as one of the traffic mitigation strategies. However, faster traffic flow resulting from synchronized lights will increase conflicts between pedestrians and cars and/or bikes and cars. According to the National Traffic Safety Board, increased auto speed can kill. A pedestrian struck by a car going 30 MPH has a 55% chance of survival. At 40 MPH, there is an 85% likelihood that the pedestrian will die.

- According to the City's zoning ordinance, some of the general transportation and traffic circulation standards and guidelines for Planned Developments include, but are not limited to, the following:

Transportation, Traffic Circulation, Parking (Section 17-8-0904)

General Intent. Planned developments should:

- promote the safe and efficient circulation of pedestrians, cyclists, and motor vehicles.
- minimize conflict with existing traffic patterns in the vicinity.
- minimize and mitigate traffic congestion associated with the proposed development.
- designate drop off and loading zones for buses and other large vehicles with visitors.

Given the immensity of the proposed 24/7/365 casino development, it is the RNRA's goal to minimize impacts on the adjacent and long-established residential neighborhoods. We are advocates for more public community meetings so that residents have the opportunity to see first-hand the evolving designs for this mega-development site and share their feedback.

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During our review of the plans with Deputy Mayor Samir Mayekar, we also requested additional information as follows:

- More information on whether Bally's retains full or partial control of any portions of PD1426, other than Sub Area A, subsequent to the Oak Street Capital sale.



- An approximate schedule of all remaining and necessary casino-related approvals by the Plan Commission or other city agencies, and a description of the project elements that will be contained in each.
- Any additional details regarding security related initiatives that would enhance public safety beyond the perimeter of the casino site, which may include, but not be limited to exterior patrols, surveillance cameras, license plate readers, etc.
- If RNRA pledges to use them only for internal consultation and not to share them publicly, it would also be nice to receive copies of all presentation decks from CCAC meetings.

We appreciate your consideration of our feedback and recommendations, which may be accessed in their entirety at RNRAChicago.org/casino-improvement-recommendations.

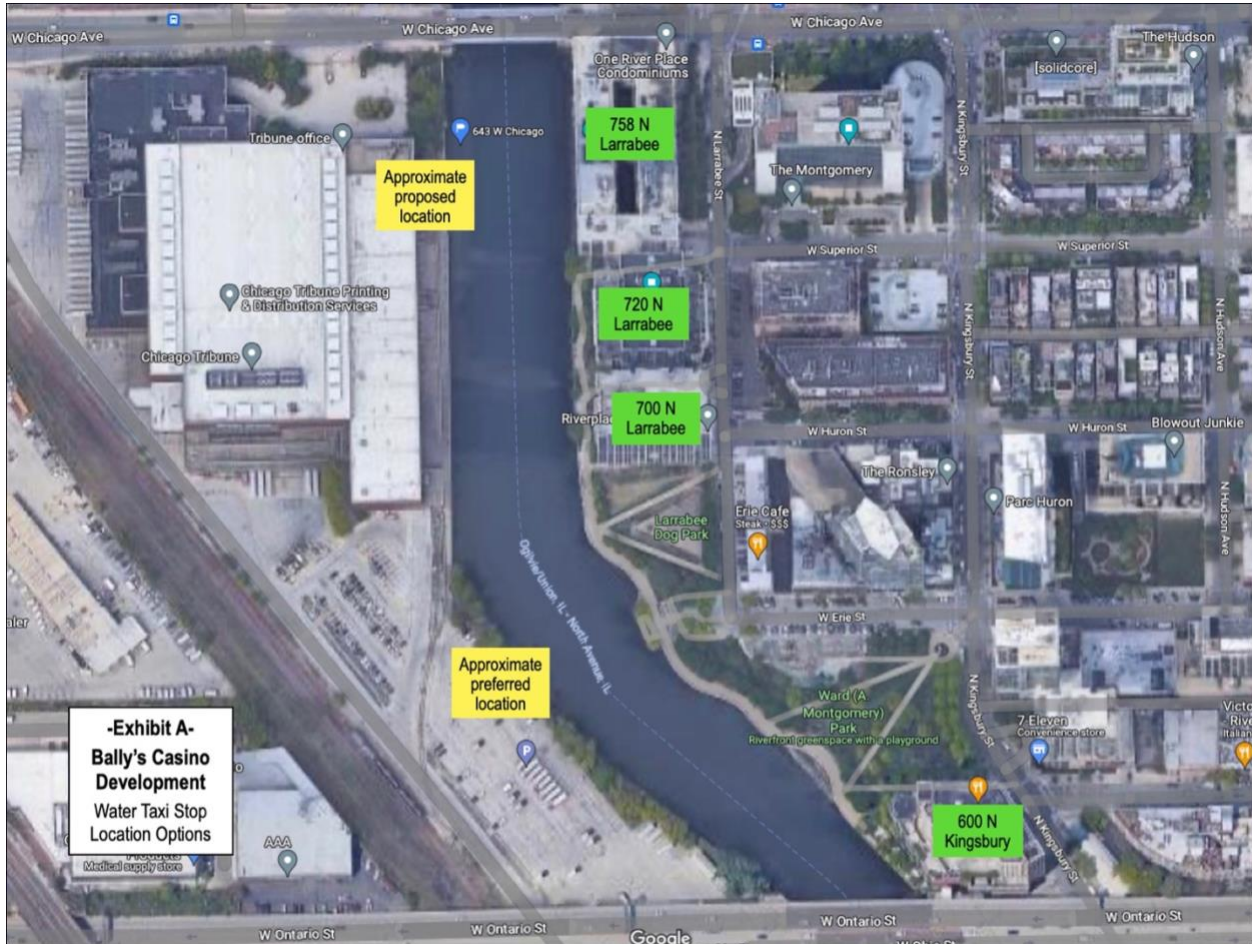
Sincerely,

Eileen Murray, Co-President

Debra Schalk, Co-President

cc: Samir Mayekar, Deputy Mayor for Neighborhood & Economic Development
Alderman Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward
Alderman Walter Burnett, 27th Ward
Alderman Brian Hopkins, 2nd Ward
Laura Flores, Chair, Chicago Plan Commission

Exhibit A



-Exhibit A-
Bally's Casino
Development
 Water Taxi Stop
 Location Options