



July 25, 2023

Alderman Brendan Reilly, Ward 42
Alderman Walter Burnett, Jr. Ward 27
Alderman Brian Hopkins, Ward 02
Commander Michael Barz, 018th District
Deputy Chief Jon Hein, Central Control Group

Dear Aldermen Reilly, Alderman Burnett, Alderman Hopkins, Commander Barz and Deputy Chief Hein,

Since the City Council voted to proceed with the Bally's casino development in May of 2022, River North Residents Association (RNRA) has endeavored to identify and advocate for adjustments to the plan with the goal of reducing harmful impacts to the surrounding communities, the citizens of Chicago, and the natural environment. The full recommendations can be accessed at rnrachicago.org/casino-improvement-recommendations.

Having met with city officials and members of the Bally's team to discuss the recommendations, RNRA leaders are pleased that some meaningful progress has been made, including elimination of the outdoor music venue and pedestrian bridge to Ward Park, expansion of onsite public green space, addition of a dog run and riverfront wildlife habitat, reduction in overall PD 1426 site density (from the 2022 proposal), and consideration of enhanced offsite security measures.

These are encouraging steps, but more work remains to be done. The purpose of this letter is to focus attention on the next set of recommendations that we feel have the greatest potential to impact quality of life.

Public Safety

Unfortunately, River North and other neighboring communities have experienced unprecedented levels of serious crime over the last few years. Though RNRA understands this is a complex and multi-causal problem for which no quick or simple solution exists, it is imperative that civic leaders and commercial enterprises avoid actions that have the potential to make the situation even worse. While we acknowledge the casino complex itself is unlikely to experience significant criminal activity due to the concentration of onsite surveillance and security personnel, our concern is the impact of thousands of patrons traveling to and from the casino through the surrounding residential neighborhoods and commercial areas at all hours of the day and night.

We believe the following measures, if designed and implemented in coordination with 18th District CPD officials, could help to mitigate such problems as may arise around the temporary and permanent facilities.

- Conduct regular external security patrols for several blocks in every direction from both casino sites to reduce deleterious impacts in the surrounding neighborhoods. Maintain ongoing communication with local CPD Officers and 18th District Command Staff.
- Install license plate readers and exterior surveillance cameras around each facility and connect this equipment to the CPD/Office of Emergency Management and Communications monitoring platforms.
- To prevent patrons of local taverns from moving to the casino at closing time in order to continue drinking, onsite liquor service at both the temporary and permanent facilities should not exceed the latest hours of existing licensed hospitality establishments in the surrounding area.



Public Disruption

Locating a major 24/7 casino and entertainment complex (including 4,000 gaming positions, a 3,000-seat theater, a 500-room hotel, restaurants, an exhibition space, and ancillary amenities) within a densely populated residential neighborhood will unavoidably cause some level of disruption to life in the community. The specific concerns of residents include noise and light pollution; increased congestion due to pedestrian, vehicular, and watercraft traffic; greater strain on already overtaxed infrastructure; and danger to pedestrians and cyclists arising from higher traffic speed and volume.

We urge adoption of the following ameliorative measures.

- RNRA joins 42nd Ward Alderman Brendan Reilly in his call for updated Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) traffic studies for both facilities and independent review of their conclusions and recommendations. The permanent facility study should ignore outdated PD 1426 estimates and project volume changes from present levels, considering the casino complex plus all planned, approved, and under-construction projects within a ½ mile radius of the site. Proposed traffic controls at all entry points should be detailed and volume estimates should reflect the capacity of the improved adjacent arterials and other planned infrastructure changes.
- Ensure that external noise and light emanating from the facility, during the construction and operational phases, remain in strict compliance with all existing codes.
- Prohibit private, recreational, and commercial for-hire boat docking, except for water taxis, and relocate the water taxi stop from 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. In the alternative, RNRA requests the potential water taxi stop be moved closer to the proposed park (similar to the arrangement at Ping Tom Park) so as to reduce disruption to adjacent residents.
- Designate a community liaison who will attend local Beat and Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) Hospitality meetings, interface regularly with local community organizations, and be accessible 24/7 via phone/email to address issues.

During the introduction to each casino community meeting, City officials emphasized that "community engagement is at the center of this process". As a standing member of the Casino Community Advisory Council and a representative of nearly 25,000 residents, RNRA is honored to work with the many other individuals and organizations who hope to improve the design, construction, and operation of this highly impactful project for the good of all stakeholders.

We appreciate the willingness of city officials and the casino developers to engage in substantive dialogue with our association and look forward to continuing the conversation. Please feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely

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