



May 4, 2023

Mayor-elect Johnson
121 N LaSalle Street, Room 500
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: RNRA statement and concerns regarding Clark Street closure for outdoor dining

Dear Mayor-elect Johnson,

We understand there is once again the prospect of a proposed ordinance to close Clark Street between Grand and Kinzie to allow outdoor dining.

The River North Residents Association (RNRA), a non-profit neighborhood advocacy organization with approximately 24,000 area member residents, fully supported the original intent of Chicago's Expanded Outdoor Dining Program, which protected consumers by providing safer dining options during the pandemic, and benefited some businesses that were struggling to keep their staff employed and their doors open during the lockdowns. Thankfully, the public health emergency has passed and it's time to revisit policies enacted during that challenging period. We are not opposed to all street closures for outdoor dining but have concerns about closures on major arterial roads like Clark Street, even on a temporary 2-3 month basis.

As a general principal, RNRA believes any permanent or semi-permanent use of the public way for private commercial purposes must carefully consider its impact on the entire community, including public safety; emergency vehicle access; public transit; vehicular traffic; pedestrian and bike traffic; and all area businesses. This commonsense approach applies to all neighborhoods, but particularly to River North, which is already experiencing increasing traffic congestion as commerce and tourism gradually return toward pre-pandemic levels. This is exacerbated by the construction on the Kennedy Expressway, the Dearborn Street Bridge and DuSable Lake Shore Drive, coupled with traffic from NASCAR reroutes and closures, the Halsted Pointe development, the impending opening of the temporary casino at Medinah Temple, and the coming permanent facility at the Tribune Publishing site. In view of these aggravating factors, and continuing concerns over increased levels of serious crime, this feels like the wrong time to contemplate closing major arterial streets. The closure of throughfares like Clark Street have a significant impact on traffic flow throughout the entire downtown area, for private transportation as well as CTA transportation corridors. We are especially concerned about slow movement and access prevention to police, fire, and other emergency vehicles.

In the interest of protecting overall quality of life in our community, we ask the administration thoroughly consider the significant impact on traffic flow throughout the entire downtown area that such a closure would create.

On behalf of the River North Residents Association Board,

Eileen Murray & Debra Schalk

Eileen Murray, Co-President
Debra Schalk, Co-President

Cc: Alderman Brendan Reilly 42nd Ward
Alderman Brian Hopkins, 2nd Ward
Alderman Howard Brookins, Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Public Way
Deputy Mayor Samir Mayekar
Chief of Staff, Richard Guidice
Deputy Chief, Cristina Pacione-Zayas
Commissioner Gia Biagi, Chicago Department of Transportation
Commander Jon Hein, 18th District
RNRA Executive Director, Mickie Gordon
RNRA Board of Directors