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Residents oppose Edgewater lakefront park plan

Privacy and safety top concerns for condo owners

By Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Tribune Reporter

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When Friends of the Parks revived an idea for expanding Chicago's string of lakefront parks further north, they thought they had a way around the objections—enlist residents to design their own vision of beaches, an extension of the bike path and off-shore islands. But it's turning out to be not so easy. Residents living in high rises abutting the shoreline north of Hollywood Avenue are putting up a fight.

"I bought my property simply because of the location it was in," said Philip Bernstein, 60, who owns a two-bedroom unit in East Point Condominium. "I'm worried that any development on the lake side of my building would have a negative impact on my property values." Extending [Lincoln Park](#) north of Hollywood, close to where it now ends, is not a new idea. About three dozen mid-rise to high-rise condominium buildings lining Sheridan Road end at the shore, and past proposals, including a shoreline-protection study in 1987, have called for expanding the shore east of these private properties. Six years ago, [Mayor Richard Daley](#) called for lakefront parks to be stretched north. The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts sponsored a design competition two years later that elicited ideas for a new North Side lakefront.

None of the proposals materialized. Activists further north in the [Rogers Park](#) neighborhood opposed efforts expanding the shore. They fought attempts to build marinas and helped pass an advisory referendum opposing an extension of [Lake Shore Drive](#).

But with the centennial anniversary of [Daniel Burnham's](#) 1909 plan approaching, Friends of the Parks last year set out to revisit ways to complete public access to the city's lake front. Four of the city's 30 miles of shoreline remain in private hands despite Burnham's vision of a public lakeshore stretching from [Indiana](#) to [Winnetka](#).

The park advocacy group soon found that the idea remains a hard sell. The group's proposal last spring to create an archipelago of islands along the South Shore from 71st to 75th streets and extend the bike path south met with opposition from property owners near the lake. Last month, the residents successfully passed a non-binding referendum against the plan.

In the fall, Friends of the Parks began meeting with residents of the [Edgewater](#) neighborhood. People living west of Sheridan Road seemed enthusiastic about greater access to the lake. The president of an association representing 33 buildings along Sheridan supported the idea of offshore islands.

Workshops organized with residents and pro-bono architects came up with five designs of how Lincoln Park could be extended north. Some drawings proposed a modest expansion of the existing shoreline to create parks and stretch the bike path to Berger Park, just south of [Devon Avenue](#). Others proposed an offshore island connected by bridge to an expanded Berger Park, beefed up with new beaches and parks.

Friends of the Parks officials said they don't know how much the Edgewater proposals would cost. They are hoping residents will first agree on one of the designs by June. But several residents living in high rises next to the lake say they were not consulted. They say they were not aware that Friends of the Parks was developing ideas for a park extension until it was too late.

They worry about privacy and security concerns should public parks be built behind their buildings. They fear clogged traffic on Sheridan Road will become even worse. "It's noisy enough with Sheridan Road," said Susan Shaffer, 52, whose one-bedroom condo in the [Malibu](#) faces the lake. "It would get even noisier if Lake Shore Drive is extended."

City officials said they have no existing plans for a lake-front extension, but it's an idea worth exploring. Pete Scales, spokesman for the Department of Planning, said the Friends of the Parks study is a way to gauge public opinion. "Maybe from there when we see the level of interest, then we can move forward," he said.

In the meantime, Friends of the Parks officials are starting efforts to engage more resistant residents in Rogers Park. They foresee a citywide referendum at some point.

"If you could question Chicagoans, in general they would be supportive," Friends of the Parks President Erma Tranter said. "It's important that this generation consider what previous generations have gifted us: a lake front that belongs to everyone."

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