

News from Brendan Reilly

Alderman of Chicago's 42nd Ward

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Alderman Reilly
(312) 744-3062

Alderman Reilly: Grant Park to Remain Forever Open, Clear and Free *Allowing Children's Museum to Build in Grant Park Would Set Dangerous Precedent*

Chicago – Alderman Brendan Reilly (42nd Ward) today announced his opposition to a proposal by the Chicago Children's Museum to build a new 100,000 square-foot facility in Grant Park. Reilly made his announcement following a three-month public process structured to allow the Children's Museum to present their plans and to facilitate public input. Recognizing that Grant Park belongs to the residents of the city of Chicago, Alderman Reilly acknowledged that his decision impacts the entire city of Chicago and not just neighborhood residents or his downtown constituents.

"Grant Park belongs to all residents of Chicago and, thanks to Montgomery Ward's vigilance, Grant Park has remained protected open-space for 171 years and is now one of our city's most precious public assets," Reilly said. "There is only one Grant Park and it should remain forever open, clear and free for future generations, from every corner of Chicago, to enjoy for many years to come."

Over the past three months, Alderman Reilly immersed himself in the history behind the long and tumultuous battle to protect Grant Park from buildings and obstructions. Reilly read books regarding the history of the park and spent time researching the four Illinois Supreme Court decisions that conferred special protections on Grant Park as public land. Those court decisions - commonly referred to as the "Montgomery Ward decisions" – affirmed the 1836 decree that designated Grant Park as "Public Ground – a Common to Remain Forever Open, Clear and Free of any Buildings, or other Obstruction Whatever."

"During this process, I dedicated a significant amount of time to studying the 171-year history behind Grant Park, because I know that it is one of Chicago's most precious resources. Many people may not be aware of the fact that the Chicago Children's Museum is not the first worthy organization to pursue a facility in Grant Park. Over the past 150 years, dozens of exciting projects have been proposed for Grant Park. If exceptions had been allowed for those worthy projects, we would not be having this debate today because there would be no open space left on Grant Park."

"My position on this issue has nothing to do with the merits of the Chicago Children's Museum or the designs for their proposed facility. This debate is really about the future of Grant Park and whether or not it would be prudent to abandon 171 years of history that has preserved this open space as a park for all residents of the city of Chicago," Reilly said. "I believe that supporting the Children's Museum proposal to build on Grant Park would set dangerous precedent that would open the flood-gates for other entities to lobby for their own locations on Grant Park. I agreed with the Chicago Tribune's recent editorial against new building in Grant Park when they opined 'saying no to a Children's Museum today empowers Chicago to keep saying no for eons of tomorrows.'"

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Alderman Reilly made it clear that, although he cannot support efforts to build new structures in Grant Park, he is a strong supporter of the Chicago Children's Museum and that he is eager to work with museum officials to help the institution identify alternate locations that will allow the museum to expand. Reilly indicated that he is willing to host a meeting between the Children's Museum and their current landlord, Navy Pier, to facilitate an expansion at their current location.

"It is my understanding that the Children's Museum is seeking to leave Navy Pier because they have outgrown their current facility and desperately need to expand," Reilly said. "I am happy to help the Museum negotiate an expansion with Navy Pier because I think the Pier and the Museum have a mutually beneficial relationship. Navy Pier is the number one tourist destination in Illinois and, I believe, that has a lot to do with the Chicago Children's Museum being located on the Pier. If a Navy Pier expansion does not work, I would support the Museum in considering other, unprotected downtown open-space – such as Northerly Island or the Museum Campus."

According to Reilly, he is prepared take whatever steps are necessary to preserve and protect Grant Park from the Children's Museum proposal and any future building proposals.

"Just as Montgomery Ward fought to protect Grant Park for our generation, I believe it is our generation's responsibility to honor that legacy by working to protect Grant Park for the benefit of future generations to come – for all Chicagoans from every corner of the city," Reilly said. "I will not bow to political pressure in this effort, because I refuse to ignore Grant Park's 171 years of history as a specially protected open space. Back in his day, Montgomery Ward incurred the wrath of an angry Chicago City Council that claimed his fight to preserve public open space and to protect Grant Park was impeding "economic progress" for the city of Chicago. In fact, one alderman - Alderman William Ballard – went so far as to say the "downtown lakefront is no place for a park – it should be used to bring revenue to the city." Thankfully, the Illinois Supreme Court disagreed with Alderman Ballard and now more than a century later, the people of Chicago are still able to enjoy the beautiful open space that is our beloved Grant Park – our most precious asset."

Alderman Reilly encouraged the public to read a brief passage written about Grant Park by world-renowned architect and Chicagoan, Daniel Burnham, the author of the "Plan for Chicago":

"The lakefront by right belongs to the people. It affords their one great unobstructed view, stretching away to the horizon, where water and clouds seem to meet...Not a foot of its shores should be appropriated by individuals to the exclusion of the people. On the contrary, everything possible should be done to enhance its natural beauties, thus fitting it for the part it has to play in the life of the whole city. It should be made so alluring that it will become the fixed habit of the people to seek its restful presence at every opportunity." - **Daniel Burnham, 1909.**

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