

**To: 700 West Chicago Avenue Development Team**

**From: River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group**

**Date: October 12, 2023**

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group received a presentation about the 700 West Chicago Avenue development proposal on October 3, 2023. The presentation provided Task Force participants with an overview of the proposal including current river edge landscape concept plans to comply with the Chicago River Design Guidelines and North Branch Framework Plan. Following the development team's presentation there was a 'Question & Answer' session that allowed Task Force participants to ask clarifying questions and provide general feedback verbally and via an online form. The following summary is representative of the group's verbal and written input.

### **Our understanding of the 700 West Chicago Avenue site plan proposal**

Onni Group owns both this site and the site at 901 N Halsted (previously reviewed by the Task Force) and is working on an amended Waterways Planned Development (PD1399), with a goal to create a cohesive master plan across both sides of the river. Goals for this development include a desire to reconnect the surrounding community to the riverfront and to emphasize this area as a river gateway. The proposed development is primarily a residential plan (over 2,400 units), with several towers (the highest reaching 650'), below grade parking, and supporting retail/commercial uses. The riverfront proposal consists of 1.99 acres of open space and amenities, including a variety of terraced landscape features, outdoor seating, potential water taxi stop, amphitheater, a 16-foot multi-use trail, and access points at Halsted Street, Jefferson Street, and Chicago Avenue. Plans for an extensive native planting palette, bird friendly glazing, floating wetlands, and other river edge landscape elements were presented. The development would occur over three phases, with the first phase being at Halsted and the river, on the western side of the site.

### **Questions, comments, and considerations from the Task Force's discussion:**

- **Stormwater Approach:** We acknowledge that the stormwater management plan has not yet been detailed for this project, but we encourage the future plans to incorporate innovative BMPs to capture, filter, and absorb stormwater to protect the river's health. The Task Force participants, aligned with the goals of the Chicago River Design Guidelines and other City standards, emphasize green infrastructure and other nature-based stormwater strategies. These include rain gardens, bioswales, pollinator gardens, and green roofs. Rain gardens can also serve to expand habitat for insects, birds and other river wildlife. We also recommend that the owner have a strategy for securing trash receptacles and collecting litter that can blow or be washed into the river during storms. Floatable plastics and other waterborne pollutants continue to be a challenge for our waterways and can be captured with filtering storm drains and other practices.

- Task Force questions related to the stormwater approach:
  - How will stormwater be captured, filtered, and released on the site?
  - What portions of the site’s run-off will be filtered and discharged to the river?
  - What portions of the site’s run-off will *not* be filtered and discharged to the river? (we know that generally roof water is allowed, but we are unclear what portions of the proposed buildings will be considered “roof area” for example the parking structures with roadways above)
  - The landscape consultant mentioned a desire to use stormwater BMPs where possible. Where will those features be located and how will they be incorporated into the riverfront landscape design?
  - How will floatables, litter, and other waterborne pollutants be captured from the run-off before it reaches the river?
- **Riverfront Programming:** Through past community engagement efforts, we know that residents overwhelmingly prefer the creation of new riverfront passive park spaces, with a naturalized aesthetic, and opportunities for respite and recreation. This is in contrast to all riverfront areas becoming entertainment districts. Many programmed riverfront elements were discussed as part of the development's landscape and we would like to better understand the mix of uses proposed. We recommend a balance between active and passive uses, with an emphasis on welcoming public space that anyone can enjoy without purchasing a product or service. Task Force members do not think that an outdoor music performance venue, in the amphitheater space, would be appropriate for this residential use site. However, if the proposed amphitheater is intended to be more of a passive use space, it could be a great public amenity for conversations and relaxation.
  - Task Force questions related to the riverfront programming approach:
    - Can more details about the programming of the riverfront space be provided to understand the proposed uses of the different areas of the open space?
    - What parts of the riverfront will be open to the public vs. for residents only and/or leased for restaurant outdoor cafe use?
    - How specifically is the amphitheater space intended to be used? Is it more passive (like the South Bank development) or more performance focussed like the downtown riverwalk?
    - Because of the proposed density of the development, will there be studies conducted to understand how the riverfront will be shaded by the towers?
- **Circulation and Access:** We ask that the developer reconsider the strategy for access and circulation of the site for each phase of the development. The underbridge connection to the south at Chicago Avenue will be an excellent new riverfront access connection, but there were a few riverfront access connections that seemed less clear. The goal of the Chicago River Design Guidelines is to provide riverfront access in a way that is

welcoming to everyone, without a perception that you have to live, work, or be visiting a commercial business on the property. From the guidelines “*Access points to the multi-use path within the riverfront should be highly visible and strategically located.*” The connections as shown in the renderings from upper Chicago Avenue to the riverfront seem unclear and hidden under buildings, as is the Halsted Street connection. We do not consider elevator-only access points, particularly those located within the lobby of a building, to be welcoming access. Additionally, the Task Force would like to better understand how bicycle circulation will be coordinated with other modes on the site.

- Task Force questions related to the riverfront access and circulation:
  - How will the riverfront be accessed during each proposed phase of development? How can the riverfront be maintained as accessible during all phases (i.e. no river trail dead ends)?
  - How is bike usage anticipated on the site?
  - Can more information about plans for mitigating conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians on the site be provided?
  - How will bikes circulate the ramps and level changes?
  - What is planned for signage to ensure that travel through the development to access the rivertrail and riverfront amenities is clear?
- **Native Vegetation/River Edge Trail:** The green landscaped buffer along the river with small seating nodes is a design feature that the Task Force thought was very positive. These areas have potential to provide both habitat and the ability to filter runoff before it reaches the river. We encourage the planting scheme in this area and throughout the site to include dense multi-layering of native vegetation, with particular attention paid to understory shrubs that birds and other wildlife need.

### **Greater community engagement about this development**

Lastly, we would also like to emphasize that the REGTF does not represent the perspective of the broader community or other local stakeholders, but rather a vision for improved rivers citywide. In the spirit of transparency, we feel that the Alderperson and/or DPD should engage other relevant stakeholders and community residents about the proposed changes to this site.

### **Concerns that we heard from local neighborhood-based organizations representing River North, Near North, and River West include:**

- Concerns about the collective impact of the high density residential development on this site and neighboring sites in comparison to the planned infrastructure and open space improvements. The Task Force shares this concern. One of the goals of the North Branch Framework Plan is to provide riverfront open space in proportion to the density of the development.

- Concerns about increased traffic related to the densification of this district. A traffic study, that takes into account all the proposed/existing nearby developments, was requested.
- Coordination between bike, car, and pedestrian traffic circulation for the whole district including the planned Bally's Casino to the south.
- Potential for noise disturbances along the river with some of the proposed commercial uses.

Thank you for taking the time to present to the River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback in the planned development process and look forward to the ongoing coordination as the project moves on to future phases. We hope that implementing the above recommendations can be mutually beneficial for the development team, community residents, and the river itself. We welcome the opportunity for feedback, offer our services in the future, and look forward to your responses and collaboration.

Sincerely,

River Ecology Governance Task Force  
Development Review Working Group