(Re)making the Point: Advocacy and Rehabilitation of Promontory Point

A study of community activism and public parks conducted for the
Promontory Point Conservancy

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INTRODUCTION

For many South Side residents, a mention of the Promontory Point evokes images of warm summer nights sitting by a smoky bonfire looking at the speckled lights of Chicago's skyline, contemplative mornings spent overlooking the natural beauty of Lake Michigan while relaxing on the limestone blocks, or a refreshing swim on a warm summer's day surrounded by fellow Chicagoans cooling down. While to each person the Point evokes its own unique set of memories, collectively, the Point represents an important gathering space in Chicago. For over two decades, the Promontory Point Conservancy has pushed against City and Army Corps plans to replace the historic limestone revetments with concrete—which would close the Point for five years—to preserve this important space. With community support, the Conservancy has effectively delayed redevelopment, but the city still plans to replace the limestone with concrete.

Adding to the research that already supports the Promontory Point Conservancy, this report looks at the prolonged political battle from a novel environmental justice angle. This framing brings the failure of community involvement, disparities between North Side and South Side parks, and the destruction of a diverse community gathering space into focus. Adding to the already exhaustive reports on feasibility and cost of limestone preservation versus concrete paving, this report demonstrates that the Save The Point campaign fights against distributive and procedural injustices inflicted by the City of Chicago and the Army Corps of Engineers. By closing and rebuilding the Point for five years, the city will deprive the South Side community of one of its most important parks, pointing to distributive injustice. Additionally, the City and Army Corps are acting procedurally unjust by not listening to the community voices that overwhelmingly support preserving the Point's limestone. These injustices are environmental injustices because they concern access to a public park that serves a largely underserved part of the city. This environmental justice framing makes clear that the Conservancy's struggle to preserve the Point is about protecting a park that serves diverse racial and economic communities and amplifying those diverse community voices.

This report was conducted by students in Professor Raymond Lodato's two-quarter practicum environmental justice course at the University of Chicago, Environmental Justice in Principle and Practice. A total of sixteen students were part of the class over the two academic terms, some for only one quarter. Students undertook literature reviews on topics relevant to the Point rehabilitation as an environmental justice issue. In the second part of the study, students

developed a questionnaire to administer to key informants. The informants were community members with a connection to the Save the Point campaign, and contributed their personal experience with the Point as well as the long-time effort to preserve the limestone revetments. Students conducted the interviews by phone, Zoom, and in person, and used transcription software to reproduce interviews so that quotes could be directly used in this report. The class began in late September 2024 and concluded in early March 2025. Interviews were conducted in January and February of 2025. The Report will be divided into two separate sections that reflect the two parts of the study: the first section details important findings in the literature review that we believe can be applied to the Point Conservancy's campaign; after a methods section, the report continues to the findings from our qualitative interviews, focusing on respondents' personal reflections on the Point as a place, reflections on the Point rehabilitation project, perceptions of community attitude, and perceptions of the government agencies. Through these interviews, we assembled evidence to show that the Save the Point campaign is an environmental justice issue, and respondents were already treating it as such.

LITERATURE REVIEW

We conducted a literature review to inform our understanding of the environmental justice issues associated with the Promontory Point. This literature review comprises two parts. In the first section, we look at the historical background of urban parks, the Point, and the landscape architect of the Point: Alfred Caldwell. Following this historical background, we analyze the current academic literature on urban parks as an environmental justice issue. This section looks at studies on waterfront rehabilitation, ADA access in parks, health benefits of urban parks, park inequities in the United States broadly, and park inequities in Chicago specifically. This background informs the significance of the Point on Chicago's South Side and why the Save the Point campaign has significant environmental justice implications.

History of Urban Parks

In his book *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, Galen Cranz examines the history of urban parks in the United States as instruments of social policy. Cranz identifies four distinct eras of public park design in the United States: the pleasure ground, the reform park, the recreation facility, and the open space system (Cranz, 1989). Parks created in each era reflect the social values of the moment, from the idea of escaping the city for the

peace of the country to creating heavily structured recreation facilities as a means of protecting youth.

The Pleasure Ground

Cranz argues that the pleasure ground era of public parks took place from 1850 through 1900. Parks built during this era were viewed as improvements to cities "derived not from European urban models but from an anti-urban ideal that dwelt on the traditional prescription for relief from the evils of the city - to escape to the country" (Cranz, 1989, p. 3-5). To achieve the ideals of the countryside and naturalness so important to this era, parks often included meandering roads, meadow and water features, and rich planting (Cranz, 1989, p. 32-33). In Chicago, three agencies undertook the project of creating pleasure grounds throughout the city: the Lincoln Park Commissioners, the West Park Commissioners, and the South Park Commission (Chicago Park District). Notable projects of this period in Chicago included Humboldt Park, the old Lake Shore Drive, the Lincoln Park Zoo, Garfield and Douglas Park, and the South Park System which includes Washington and Jackson Parks and the Midway Plaisance.

The Reform Park

The design of parks shifted in the period between 1900 and 1930, from the idealistic glimpse of the countryside to a mechanism of social reform (Cranz, 1989, p. 61). City planners of the era became concerned with providing structure to working class adult men and children, arguing that the general public was "incapable of undertaking their own recreation, not so much because the city provided no space for it as because it gave them recreational needs for which mere space was insufficient" (Cranz, 1989, p. 61- 62). Parks of this era, such as Pulaski Park in Chicago, were designed around providing intentional, designated spaces for organized sport and play.

The Recreation Facility

Beginning in the 1930s and lasting until 1965, park designers left behind the social reform priorities of the prior era; parks were expected and essential aspects of life in cities (Cranz, 1989, p. 101). During this period, the Chicago Park District pushed aside intentional programming in favor of supporting expansion of facilities and park systems, often focusing on quantity over the quality or purpose of investments. The focus on increasing the quantity of recreation facilities during this period can be attributed to the increase in urban populations as

well as the Great Depression and World War II, during which parks and recreation facilities were used to occupy the unemployed and as venues for war related fundraising and community events (Cranz, 1989, p. 110). Though first pitched during the reform era, design and construction of Promontory Point Park began in the 1930s and better reflects the sentiments of this era.

The Open Space System

In the 1960s, municipal systems and federal programs began characterizing urban parks as open spaces, signifying a turning point away from the prior focus on recreation facilities and more on open green space which was lacking in cities across the country. In Chicago, park space has continued to grow since the 1950s through the transfers of property from the City to the Chicago Park District for the purpose of streamlining park management (Chicago Park District). The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 isolation highlighted the continued need for and lack of accessible urban open space in many areas, as individuals turned more to outdoor recreation. Park districts and urban designers continue to focus on incorporating more open space in urban areas following the pandemic, and the next era of park design remains to be seen.

Caldwell and Point History

Promontory Point was conceived as a part of the *Plan of Chicago,* inspired by growing concerns about the use of urban public space towards the beginning of the 20th century (Preservation Chicago, 2006). The 1909 *Plan of Chicago,* co-authored by Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, proposed a visionary Chicago urban environment that could be achieved by municipalizing 25 out of 29 miles of the lakefront, establishing an urban park system, and improving various transportation systems within the city. The *Plan of Chicago* represents a union of the Progressive Era's environmentalist and urban planning movements, which shared concerns about the provision of public parks during a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization.

The planning of Promontory Point was assigned to Prairie School landscape architect Alfred Caldwell in his first year working for the Chicago Park District in 1936. Caldwell trained under such preeminent figures in the Prairie School movement as Jens Jensen and Frank Lloyd Wright, who helped Caldwell develop a distinct approach to landscape architecture that prioritized indigenous plantings and limestone features. Caldwell envisioned interconnecting green spaces into both urban and rural conditions in a decentralized city scheme, which he believed would relieve the "maladjustments" of the city, and find a way for housing, industry, and transportation to coexist with nature (Caldwell, 2020).

Caldwell's philosophy was revolutionary, influential, and necessary in a time when urban planning was transitioning from an inward-looking, functional-aesthetic discipline to one that aimed to counteract the social and environmental problems faced by city-dwellers, including smoke, poorly designed streets, traffic congestion and distance to work, natureless "slums," and a lack of effectively located parks. While parks had previously mainly been reserved for playgrounds, serving as a recreation area for a largely white, middle-class population by nature of their location, Caldwell's vision of urban parks appreciated the innate value of the natural world. Caldwell wasn't simply designing parks; Caldwell was sparking a more effective, equitable city. When it came to the Point, Caldwell envisioned a thick grove of trees that would form a ring around a central meadow which would slope toward a path. The ring of trees would be open to allow visitors to the park both a view of the downtown skyline to the north and a view of South Chicago to the south. "To Caldwell, the Promontory represented the meeting place of the vast prairie and the Great Lakes, and thus symbolized all that was unique about the landscape of Chicago" (McDermott Jr., n.d.). This also creates two distinct experiences: first, the meadow, from which the limestone revetments cannot be seen, and second, the revetments from which the meadow cannot be seen.

Before Caldwell took charge of the project, Promontory Point was a landfill of sand and garbage. Since no city agency was in charge of the area, resolving these issues began with the creation of the Chicago Park District in 1934 and was accelerated by construction funding from the federal government and well-organized efforts from the New Deal Works Progress Administration. After Caldwell completed Promontory Point, the park opened in 1939 and quickly became a central community space for enjoyment and leisure. In the 1930s and 1940s, the park's fieldhouse became the setting for dances and scout meetings, as well as countless picnics for civic clubs like the YMCA and student organizations from the nearby University of Chicago. However, tensions between the community and the city began to arise in the next few decades as the community's right to access the public land was threatened by the construction of government projects.

In the 1950s, a major threat to public access to the Point was the Nike missile radar site. The U.S. Army installed the Nike missile base C-41 in Jackson Park in 1953, accompanied by the C-41 radar site installed at Promontory Point, leasing land from the Park District at a rate of $1 per year. The radar towers at Promontory Point were surrounded by barbed-wire fencing,

which imposed on public access to the park and were a hostile disruption in the otherwise natural landscape. During the Vietnam War, community members argued that the industrial radar towers did not fit Burnham's aesthetic plans for Chicago, decreased available area for recreation, and burdened taxpayers who paid federal income tax and city taxes to maintain the parks but did not get a say in the construction of the towers (The NPG News, 2001).

The most recent threat to the community's access to the Point is the proposed shoreline reconstruction project. While residents' concerns about the shoreline limestone revetment restoration started to dominate the local news in 2001, the restoration plan dates to the 1980s, when the CPD and the Army Corps of Engineers first developed a plan to restore the limestone revetments along the city's lakefront after observing high water levels. The plan involved removing the original limestone and replacing it with tiers of concrete, which would close the park off from the community for years. Alarmed, community residents and activists formed a group to develop a framework on how to deal with the Chicago Park District, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Chicago Department of Environment, as they decided to reject the city's plan (Lee, 2001).

Resolving the shoreline reconstruction conflict will involve both parties responsible for Promontory Point's maintenance: the municipal Chicago Park District and the local Park Advisory Council (PAC) (Hyde Park Herald, 1988). The de facto PAC, also known as the Promontory Point Conservancy, advocates for greater community input in the Park District's decision-making process regarding the restoration of the park's limestone revetments. Over the past 25 years, the Promontory Point Conservancy has symbolized the community's investment in preserving the Point as an irreplaceable urban park through their fundraising and organizing under the Save the Point campaign. The Conservancy also successfully applied to add the Point to the National Register of Historic Places in 2017; though this designation does not ensure the limestone's protection, it does assert that the revetments are integral to the character of the park. Additionally, the independent engineering studies commissioned by the Conservancy concluded that the limestone could be replaced in spots but would not compromise the structural integrity of the park. As the matter remains unresolved despite decades of community organizing, the issue represents a disappointing continuation of the city's disregard for community input in debates over the management of public space.

Waterfront Rehabilitation

Over the past few decades, waterfronts in American cities have undergone intense transformation. Given the pressures of the environmental movement, globalization, and deindustrialization, many of America's waterfronts—once lined with factories from the 19th and 20th centuries—are now being redeveloped for post-industrial realities. These redevelopment projects offer numerous opportunities for cities, states, and the federal government to rethink how our waterfronts should be designed. In Chicago, while most of the waterfront was developed into a public park over 100 years ago, the lakefront requires rehabilitation due to weathering and erosion. Many sections of the lakefront have been rehabilitated, but the Promontory Point remains as one of the few unaltered sections of the original park. Successful waterfront rehabilitation projects in other US cities suggest that designs for the Point ought to consider the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the rehabilitated shoreline. The following section will investigate examples of redesigned shorelines in US cities, highlighting these three dimensions.

Successful waterfront redevelopment schemes across US cities in the past 30 years have followed community planning schemes. New York, San Francisco, and Detroit all had successful redevelopment projects due, in part, to community engagement. In New York City, the plan for Brooklyn Bridge Park was devised in community workshops during the late 1990s and early 2000s that sought to reimagine unused piers on Brooklyn's waterfront (Witty & Krogius, 2016). Likewise, the land use plan that guided San Francisco's waterfront redevelopment was led by local businesses, unions, and community organizations; however, unlike New York, this plan called for private waterfront redevelopment that secured civic needs such as historic preservation, public promenades, and other recreational features (Rubin, 2016). Between the coasts, in Detroit, community voices were engaged in the city's riverfront redevelopment (Hemming, 2005). While all these models that centralized the community proved successful in actualizing a reimagined waterfront, Cleveland's plans proved less successful. Given the city's austerity measures and lack of public engagement, little progress has been made on Cleveland's lakefront redevelopment (Keating et al., 2005). These examples demonstrate that public engagement is essential through all phases of waterfront redevelopment projects. Carrying this lesson to the Point, ensuring a successful waterfront rehabilitation requires close community engagement in the planning and implementation processes.

Desirable waterfront redevelopment attracts investment from developers and new, high-income populations, leading to the process of gentrification. This process was observed in the three successful waterfront redevelopment projects discussed in the previous paragraph. Brooklyn Bridge Park, while designed by the community, was financed through taxes raised on newly constructed, adjacent, and market-rate housing that attracts high-income residents (Witty & Krogius, 2016). Private waterfront developments in San Francisco, driven by profit motives, were geared toward higher-income populations with amenities such as high-end bars, expensive grocery stores, and trendy venues (Rubin, 2016). The Detroit Riverfront Park redevelopment inflated surrounding property values and brought over $1 billion of private investment (Hartig et al., 2022). Waterfront redevelopments—whether private or public projects and whether intentionally or unintentionally—make the surrounding areas more desirable. In so doing, new and wealthy populations descend on the real estate market, opening the gates of gentrification. Thus, as the Point is being rehabilitated, gentrification must be monitored.

Many cities use waterfront redevelopment to attract tourists because of the power waterfronts have in attracting visitors. In New York's *Vision 2020* waterfront plan, the first goal is to "expand public access to the waterfront and waterways on public and private property for all New Yorkers and visitors alike" (New York (N.Y.), n.d.). The emphasis on opening waterfronts to visitors suggests that New York understands that its waterfront will attract tourists. The experience in Duluth indicates that smaller cities also use their waterfronts to attract visitors because in public planning sessions "citizens indicated that tourism is a top priority of the new waterfront," resulting in a plan with hotels, a convention center, and commercial spaces along the city's scenic lakefront park (Duluth (Minn.) & Pei Property Development Corporation, 1985). The role of tourism admits important waterfront design implications, such as the level of commercial development for tourists and the use of interpretive signage to inform visitors about the place. At the Point, these lessons may mean that site activation may enrich visitors' experiences in the park.

Ecological considerations must also be involved in waterfront rehabilitation projects. Hard shorelines—defined by steel or concrete structures that form a vertical interface with the water—are typically seen as bad for shoreline ecology, while soft shorelines—defined as any other man-made interface between land and water—are viewed as environmentally beneficial. Hard shorelines expose shoreline habitats to harsh wave action (Dyson & Yocom, 2015). Those

harsh conditions lead to decreased species diversity (Airoldi et al., 2005). On the other hand, soft shoreline projects along the Detroit River improved shoreline habitats (Hartig & Bennion, 2017). The benefits of soft shoreline engineering stretch beyond ecological impacts. Research on the Great Lakes found that shoreline hardening alters sediment transport by lake currents, intensifying erosion (*The State of the Great Lakes*, 2009). This suggests that soft shorelines have engineering and economic advantages over hard shorelines, in addition to ecological advantages. While the Point's limestone is not soft engineering, it is certainly softer than the concrete and steel in the Army Corps' plans. Thus, limestone preservation also serves environmental benefits.

Other cities have shown that waterfronts present opportunities and challenges for humans and nonhumans alike. Through community planning, waterfront redevelopment can reflect the desires of local communities. Additionally, through careful engineering, these developments can promote ecological rehabilitation. However, it seems that such high-minded visions for our waterfronts also face barriers. Private development on waterfronts has the potential to get in the way of community desires through gentrification and ecological aspirations through shoreline hardening. Still, these other cities show that through proper planning, we can create better waterfronts. Taking these lessons into consideration with the Point will enhance waterfront designs and implementations.

ADA Accessibility in Parkscapes

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law passed in 1990 that prohibits the discrimination of individuals on the premise of disabilities. The historic passage of the ADA laid the groundwork for the passage of the 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (ADASAD) by the Department of Justice. The ADASAD provided specifications for protecting individuals with disabilities specifically regarding public space access and transit locations on the state and local levels (Aldousari, 2021, pg. 59). ADA Standards for Accessible Design cover both new and rehabilitated parkscapes and recreational facilities.

Regulations for ramps ensure equal accessibility and a safe experience, especially for wheelchair users. The Department of Justice classifies any pathway with a slope of more than

1:20 as a ramp. Ramp products should have slopes that fall under the following range: “The maximum slope of a ramp in new construction shall be 1:12. The maximum rise for any run shall be 30 in (760 mm)” (Department of Justice, 1994, pg. 518). Landings must also exist at the start and end of ramps to provide for a flat resting surface. Further, “if a ramp run has a rise greater than 6 in (150 mm) or a horizontal projection greater than 72 in (1830 mm), then it shall have handrails on both sides” (pg. 520). Especially for ramp products with curbs and drop-offs, edges with a height of at least two-inches must be provided—Figure 1 depicts these regulations. While ramps are mainly considerate of wheelchair accessibility, the delineation of handrails also provides safety protocols for travelers that might not use wheelchairs, but are unable to ascend or descend flights of stairs (“ADA Ramp Requirements for 2024”). Besides ramps, ADASAD provides details concerning acceptable signage and parking for people with disabilities. Although decades have passed since the original passage of the law, ADA compliance in parks remains a core facet, or an even more important cornerstone of parkscape management to ensure equitable access today.

The Promontory Point Conservancy has been working to incorporate better accessibility features in its efforts to preserve and improve the region. Under “Destination Point: the Legitimate Community’s Preservation Plan,” the extensive rehabilitation efforts to preserve the original characteristics of the location attempt to minimize concrete usage by utilizing limestone. One of the key facets of the plan notes “creative, innovative, safe and generous access (ADA compliance) for all to both the revetment promenade and the water” (*Promontory Point Conservancy*). These efforts to rehabilitate Promontory Point by retaining limestone highlight how design updates can serve historically conscious purposes while simultaneously pursuing ADA goals. The illustrations below date back to 2003 when ADA architects and the Promontory Point Conservancy united in order to create different limestone designs that were considered for adoption. Most notably, the inclusion of ramps would enable visitors on wheelchairs to access waterfront locations with ease (*Promontory Point Conservancy)*. Despite the many years that have passed since the formulation of the original limestone designs of the Point, ADA

compliance and accessibility remain pillars that continue to drive rehabilitation efforts at Promontory Point today.

The complexity of the 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and 2010 revisions can propel confusion in implementation and further hinder progress. The American Research Journal of Humanities Social Science notes that "the complexity of the law and its diverse requirements make it challenging for the concerned entities to comply" (Aldousari, 2021, pg. 61). Especially given that all parkscapes are characterized by unique topographies, climates, and engagement with different people, the application of a singular law often requires extensive planning.

Health Benefits of Urban Greenspaces

Although it may seem intuitive that greenspaces are naturally good for human health, city planners and policymakers often require concrete evidence and economic proof to justify costly investments for the maintenance and construction of new urban parks. Without robust research, the full benefits of green spaces may not be realized. General consensus may already exist on the perceived positive effects of greenspaces; however, the specific nuisances and mechanisms through which greenspaces impact health are less understood. This report will adopt the framework proposed by Markevych et al. (2017), which identifies three pathways linking greenspaces to positive health outcomes such as reducing harm, restoring capacities, and building capacities. Using this framework, this section aims to accurately pinpoint the status quo of this field. Since Promontory Point serves as a vital greenspace for the surrounding South Side community, this section highlights the paramount ways in which greenspaces positively affect the area and its inhabitants.

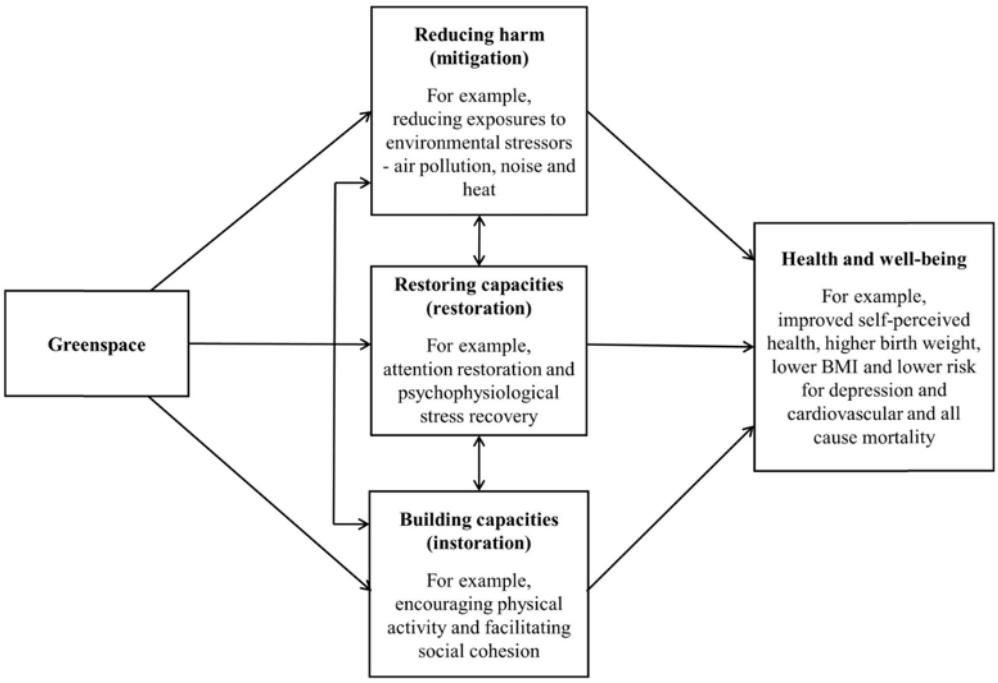

Figure 1: Greenspaces and potential pathways to beneficial health outcomes (Markevych 2017)

Reducing Harm

In general, the presence of greenspace is associated with improved health outcomes, often by reducing the negative impacts of urbanization. For example, greenspaces lower air pollution levels in the surrounding area. Trees permanently process and dissolve gaseous compounds such as ozone and sulfur dioxide. They also serve as temporary spaces for fine particulate matter to cling onto, instead of occupying the open air. In a study conducted by the US Forest Service, pollution removal by trees in both rural and urban areas contributed to an annual average of a one percent reduction in pollution concentration (Nowak, 2014). The study found the health and economic benefits of greenery were most concentrated in urban greenspaces in particular. In 2010, urban greenery was estimated to save approximately $4.7 billion dollars in pollution related complications (*ibid*.). In addition, trees and other greenery can reduce harm by cooling surrounding areas by several degrees Celsius, depending on the foliage and density (Chang et al. 2007). As global temperatures are on a trajectory to increase from pre-industrial levels by 2.5-2.9°C in 2100, urban greenery may be life-saving (UN, 2023). These couple of degrees can drastically change temperature outcomes, and urban metropolises are projected to face extreme temperatures of greater than 35°C for more than half a year (Mackres, 2023). The effects of

global warming will disproportionately affect the urban poor and cities in the Global South, further exacerbated by the urban island effect. The cooling effects of urban canopies serve as a place of respite from the sun's rays or the scalding hot asphalt. These spaces may be vital, especially to populations who lack air conditioning.

Restorative Capacities

The power of nature and greenspaces to restore physical and mental capacities has gained recent attention after many found these spaces to be vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. An experiment assigned a group of young adults difficult tasks, and then directed them to walk through an urban park. There was a general self-reported increase in mood and emotion and participants exhibited lower blood pressure (Hartig et al., 2003). An observational study in the UK tracked participants for five years and showed that those who moved to greener areas had reported better mental health (Alcock, 2013). The current body of research suggests that greenspace does have a positive association with mental health, although more scholarship will need to fully account for the effects of greenspaces that incorporate regimented exercise on a long term basis (Markevych, 2017).

Building Capacities

The option to exercise in a nearby, safe, and accessible space makes physical activity in greenspaces particularly attractive. In almost all of the key informant interviews, respondents mentioned the Point as a significant place where they went to swim, run or take a walk. Physical exercise in greenspaces, compared to other settings, have been found to be particularly powerful (Duncan et al., 2014,). A study of children in California found that exposure to greenness was associated with higher odds of moderate to vigorous physical activity (Almanza, 2011). Additionally, a study in New Zealand found that neighborhood greenspace availability was associated with improved cardiovascular and mental health, although this relationship could not be fully attributed to physical activity alone due to various confounding factors such as the size, purpose, and quality of greenspaces (Richardson et al., 2013). Given that urbanization has greatly decreased the presence of large and natural greenspaces, greater access to free and nearby opportunities to exercise is vital.

In addition to increasing levels of physical activity, the presence of an accessible, local gathering spot may foster neighborhood cohesion. Greater levels of social cohesion are linked with higher levels of fulfillment and better mental health outcomes in both adults and adolescents

(Kingsbury, 2019; Zahnow, 2024). In general, studies have found positive social experiences associated with local parks. A study of neighborhood parks in Jamaica Bay, New York found urban parks fostered greater social resilience and interactions (Campbell et al., 2016). Community gardens in St. Louis, Missouri have been found to improve feelings of belonging in interracial neighborhoods (Shinew, 2004). This is particularly relevant to the Point, as it has been recognized as a social third space for the community. Several key informants have discussed the importance of the Park as a "safe place" for spending time with their friends and family.

Although the benefits of urban greenspaces on human health are widely acknowledged, specific mechanisms and pathways have not always been clear. This literature review highlights three frameworks—reducing harm, restoring capacities, and building capacities—that provide insights into how greenspaces directly influence and improve health outcomes. These studies clearly highlight the benefits of greenspaces, providing a foundation for further economic and policy justification.

Park Inequities and Disparities

Park equity is a public health issue. Park distribution in cities across urban environments serves as a reflection and physical reminder of America's deep-rooted infrastructural issues surrounding equity, redlining, and segregation, though according to the father of environmental justice, these inequities continue to be felt in our current moment (Bullard). According to the Prevention Institute, "park equity is the fair and just distribution of parks and green spaces, such that all communities have access to these health-promoting resources" (Prevention Institute). Utilizing the robust catalog of data and national environmental justice reports, this review identifies community trends via three case studies highlighting existing patterns and contributing factors to trends within park inequities. From this analysis, we can then identify a path toward equitable park distribution on the local and national scale.

Quantitative approaches to equity measurements provide the opportunity to give objective, data-driven insights that policy informants and agents tend to prioritize. One aspect is the physical proximity to parks based on data on race and class. There is not currently a standardized unit of measurement for park proximity, but the Access to Parks indicator is most used. "Access to Parks Indicator (API) focuses on one major access component, residential proximity to parks. The API uses a commercial parks database and U.S. Census data to estimate the number and percentage of individuals in the U.S. that live within a half mile of a park

boundary, a measure commonly used to represent park proximity" (Ussery et al.). This analysis utilized park scores in supplement with other research into why these scores came about, to provide a more descriptive narrative picture of the reasons behind park inequity in each studied region.

According to census data, New York City has the highest population of any city in America- currently sitting at about 8 million (U.S Census Bureau, 2024). In the Public Land Trust report, New York City received an average score of 70.2 out of 100 and is the 12th-ranked city in the nation based on the park index report conducted by the organization. Parks make up 22% of the city area, meaning that the likelihood of someone being within a 10-minute walk of parkland is quite high in proportion to other cities (2024 ParkScore Index- New York, 1). Despite this proportion of parks in the area, residents of color and low-income residents have respectively 29% and 19% less park space than their white and affluent counterparts, giving NYC an equity score of 75 (2). This is also shown in data collected by one of New York's largest park advocacy groups, *New Yorkers for Parks*. Their findings claim, "Parks in low-income communities are two times smaller than parks in more affluent areas of NYC, and parks in majority Black communities are nearly four times smaller than in majority white communities" (New Yorkers for Parks).

According to the most recent census report, Los Angeles has a population of about 3.8 million, (U.S Census Bureau, 2023). LA's 2023-2024 Department of Recreation and Parks budget was approximately $338 million (Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation). The area is mostly characterized by its status as an entertainment hub, and more specifically, in this case, its historic parkland. LA is only ranked the 88th city overall based on urban park rankings provided by the Trust Land Public Report [RL1]. It received a score of 39.1 points on the 100-point scale. Despite its large surface area, Parkland makes up only about 13.4% of the city area. The city received a 34 in equity reporting, as residents of color and low-income residents have 66% and 73% less park space, respectively, compared to white and affluent residents (2024 ParkScore Index - Los Angeles, 1).

The smallest of the 3 cities, St. Louis has a population of only about 281,000 (U.S Census Bureau, 2023). The Park Division's 2024 budget was set at about $12 million, however, the reported total expenditure was only about $10.5 million" (City of St. Louis, 2024). About 10% of the city area is designated as parkland as stated by the Trust Land Public [RL2] (2024 ParkScore

Index- St. Louis, 2). The green spaces in the city primarily serve as venues for various gatherings and social events. In the 2024 ParkScore ranking, the city was placed 28th, with an overall score of 60.5 out of 100 (2). In terms of equity scoring, St. Louis received an average score of 74, on par with higher-ranked cities like NYC. Approximately 97% of people of color in the area live within a 10-minute walk of a park. However, residents of color have 7% less park space, and low-income residents have 35% less park space compared to their white and affluent counterparts (3).

The data from the three case studies highlights a common trend: poor communities and communities of color in major cities with large populations face significant barriers to park access. This underscores a national and systemic injustice regarding access to green spaces. The issue is also influenced by city density in relation to land area. The conclusions drawn by the previous comparative analysis are also reflected in the limited national data on park inequity. Data from the National Park Conservation Association finds that 77% percent of park visitors across the U.S. are white (National Parks Conservation Association). Another report on environmental justice across the states supports these findings. The study analyzed the 99 most populated cities, looking at population density and racial inequality ratios. The report reached two key conclusions: 1) Park inequity is more common in areas with higher percentages of car commuters, and 2) certain park amenities were less likely to be found in parks serving Black and Latinx communities, meaning these communities were less likely to have access to specific facilities across the country (Rigolon et al.).

Generally, data produced on park inequity directly by the federal government is sparse. One study exists, entitled “Unequal Access to Social, Environmental, and Health Amenities in U.S Urban Parks.” Their findings indicate, “Across most of the US, the racial/ethnic compositions of park walksheds (neighborhoods surrounding parks) are whiter than other parts of the city” (Winkler et al., 3). Overall, the presented data supports the findings of this literature review’s case study and reiterates the prevalence of Environmental Justice Issues on the National Scale.

Urban Parks Inequity in Chicago

Parks disparity has a long history in Chicago. In 1983, the Chicago Park District agreed to a six year consent decree after a three year long lawsuit brought by the Department of Justice. The key components of the consent decree were a 32% increase in work hours for park personnel

in minority communities, faster maintenance, and $10 million in capital expenditure of which 65% must be directed to minority communities (Malcolm, 1983). It is left to determine whether the Chicago Park District has continued to make changes in the ethos of the consent decree and what changes can be delivered in the wake of the consent decree's end in 1989.

In 2018, Friends of the Park issued their monumental *State of the Parks* report. Friends of the Park is a community organization with the mission "to inspire, equip, and mobilize a diverse Chicago to ensure an equitable park system for a healthy Chicago" (La Spata et al., 2018). The goal of the report itself was to create a foundation for education and organizing across the city. Using secondary qualitative and quantitative research, this review expands upon the specific issues raised by Friends of the Park in attempting to understand what historic inequities persist in Chicago's parks.

External empirical analysis provides a means to work through data interpretation questions. A 2021 study by Liu et al. found significant disparities in access to urban green space (UGS) between minority-dominant communities as compared to white-majority communities (Liu et al., 2021). The study found white-majority census tracts were 71.92% higher, black-majority census tracts were 33.33% lower, and Hispanic-majority census tracts were 68.62% lower than the benchmark based on UGS accessibility of all census tracts. In addition, they found that income-based inequity was more significant among minority-dominated tracts than white-majority tracts (Liu et al., 2021). The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) in 2022 found a disparity between economically disadvantaged regions and the rest of Chicago using data taken from the 2010 Census and 2013 CMAP. While 52.2% of the rest of Chicago had four or more acres per 1,000 people, only 24.9% of economically disadvantaged areas did (CMAP, 2024). Within the framework of the Promontory Point, these findings hold substantial significance for park users from the Hyde Park, Kenwood, and Woodlawn neighborhoods, where the black population constitutes 26.3%, 65.1%, and 77.2%, respectively (CMAP, 2024). A correlation between economic disadvantage and access to urban park acreage also appears in these communities, where 23.6%, 27.4%, and 44.5% of the population earn less than $25,000 in Hyde Park, Kenwood, and Woodlawn, respectively (CMAP, 2024). These empirical discontinuities emphasize the need for more comprehensive and recent data analysis on inequity in park accessibility.

The question of access must be examined not just through quantity, but also through quality. Differences in the parks themselves are a critical dimension of the inequities observed throughout the city. Friends of the Parks identified many park facility differences between North Side parks compared to South and West Side parks in historically minority areas: dog parks, playgrounds, swimming pools and fitness centers. A 2013 study conducted by Allen et al. found that during the study period 2009 to 2011, neighborhoods which had larger below poverty percentages had more failing playgrounds and fewer playgrounds. Neighborhoods with greater percentages of Black children had more failing playgrounds and with greater percentages of Hispanic children had fewer playgrounds (Allen, 2013).

Where capital is directed also plays an important role in creating disparities between communities. Based on 2018 budget appropriations, Friends of the Park found that the average South Side budget was lower than both North and Central regions across regional, community, and neighborhood parks (La Spata et al., 2018). Funding requests in predominantly black neighborhoods were approved at half the rate of those from white communities. Areas that had a poverty rate below 10% were nearly twice as likely to have funding requests approved than areas with a poverty rate above 20% (La Spata et al., 2018). Latino communities had the least access to parkland of any racial group and had only 8 approvals for funding (La Spata et al., 2018). The Park District argues that the data used in this examination was flawed because the database was not comprehensive and thus does not accurately represent all capital projects (Richardson, 2014). Journalists have corroborated the findings of inequity in funding allocation. Over half of the $500 million spent on parks under Mayor Emmanuel went to only 10 of the city's 77 parks, of which seven were located in affluent white areas (Richardson, 2014). Because park funding relies on funds directed for aldermen and special tax districts, neighborhoods with less money, such as the South Side communities who often visit the Promontory Park, also find it harder to fund their parks (Richardson, 2014).

Racial disparities in parks issues also intersect with racial disparities in policing. For example, Friends of the Parks identified a police mandate for breaking up large crowds or unplanned gatherings, which could be ripe for misuse by officers (La Spata et al., 2018). A 2001 survey study of Lincoln Park conducted by Paul Gobster of the Forest Service found racial breakdowns in the problems identified in the park. Asian respondents most identified parking and access, Latino respondents mentioned restrooms and other facilities, and white respondents

were concerned with crowding, conflicts, and homelessness. Black respondents, by contrast, were most concerned with prejudicial behavior from other park users, staff and the police (Gobster, 2002). Physical access to green space in the city is also mediated by psychological access, and prejudice can be a method of inhibiting access along racial lines even within neighborhoods.

The Park District report repeatedly emphasizes the notion that there is no discrimination in their organization because decisions are not made within the Park District *based on* race or class. Carly Graf of Northwestern argues that this discontinuity between the claims made by the Park District and Friends of the Park are based on the different goals of equity versus equality (Graf, 2019). Equity diverts more resources into communities that have been historically harmed, while equality maintains proportional allocations.

A comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative studies was used to capture the existence of inequity across Chicago's parks. Both the neighborhood data and the individual experiences of their residents demonstrate the ways in which historic inequities manifest in parks. These findings demonstrate that while the 1983 consent decree was an essential move towards alleviating the historic discrimination in Chicago, there is still work left to do to make urban parks a space for all.

METHODS

Study Population

Nine key informants with varying community expertise were chosen based on recommendations from the Promontory Point Conservancy (PPC). The individuals in the informant list were invited to participate in the study via email, which included an explanation of the study. The individuals were then contacted by email to schedule interviews, which could be conducted via phone call, video call, or in face-to-face format. All of the participants were presented with a confidentiality statement and granted verbal consent.

Preparation of Key Informant Questionnaire

A key informant interview questionnaire was prepared to ensure consistency between interviews. The questionnaire involved 15 open-ended questions in which the interviewees were asked about their personal reflections about the Point, community perspectives regarding the Point and the Save the Point campaign, as well as their views on the involvement of government agencies

and other stakeholders in the rehabilitation issue. The interviewers followed the questionnaire while also offering flexibility for the participants to expand on certain topics based on their personal experiences and expertise. The key informant interviews were conducted in a period of five weeks. The interview duration ranged between 35 and 60 minutes. All of the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. (Appendix A)

Treatment of Data

Each transcript was reviewed and corrected by a designated researcher. The researchers also summarized the key findings in each interview. Qualitative analysis of the data involved creating a code list of common emergent themes across all the open-ended questions. The main constructs determined were i) the background of the key informants, ii) reflections on the Save the Point campaign, iii) community perspectives, and iv) the involvement of government officials and other stakeholders in the rehabilitation plan. Major themes and subthemes were categorized among these constructs using open, emergent, and axial coding methods (Glaser, 2002).

CONSTRUCTS

I. Background of Key Informants

Length of Community Involvement, Parks Advocacy, and Point Advocacy

The majority of informants are community leaders who either grew up or have resided in Hyde Park or surrounding communities such as Kenwood and Woodlawn for more than a decade. For many in the Hyde Park and Kenwood communities, their connection to Promontory Point and local parks runs deep, shaping both their personal histories and their commitment to advocacy. Some have spent their entire lives in the area, while others moved away for periods but remained engaged in local issues. In the interviews, key informants identified numerous benefits to the usage of the Promontory Point, including physical and mental health, passive recreation, ecology, community development, accessibility, and safety. Some also mentioned their professional careers and the different ways they intersect with the Save the Point Project, with some respondents listing their work as writers and community activists. Another interviewee mentioned that they have been a community engagement consultant. Informants explained the sentimental and communal value of the Point:

> Another part of my involvement in the Point Conservancy is that it's one of our family parks too. We absolutely adore the Point—our kids have grown up going there. It's a family and community touchstone.

Another informant stated:

> Some of my youngest and earliest memories have happened at the Point. That was always a safe place where me and my friends could just hang out without needing supervision.

Community Changes

Many informants noted that they observed significant changes over the years, particularly in relation to gentrification, urban renewal, and shifting cultural dynamics. The expansion of the University of Chicago has played a major role in reshaping the neighborhood, influencing real estate development, commercial spaces, and the overall character of 53rd Street, which has become more student-oriented. The replacement of local businesses with corporate chains reflects broader concerns about affordability and the loss of neighborhood identity. Some note the increasing privatization of public spaces, including the redevelopment of Harper Court and the construction of the Obama Presidential Center, raising concerns about displacement and the accessibility of these spaces for longtime residents:

> I would say specifically in Hyde Park, there has been a lot of business closure, honestly. I think of a lot of the local and emerging businesses that were even up and down 53rd Street that in the past couple of years, especially following the pandemic, have been swapped out for more corporate chains.

Another informant stated:

> But from a physical, architectural, spatial standpoint, obviously, there's a lot of construction that's happened over the past 10 years or so that's really changed the landscape of the community and as a result, I think walking around the streets of Hyde Park walking down 53rd St. the demographic has gotten more visibly college normative if that makes any kind of sense.

Additionally, others reflect on the persistence of racial and economic boundaries despite Hyde Park's reputation for diversity. While the community has long been considered an integrated space, some argue that structural barriers continue to limit interactions with the broader South Side. Political engagement has also shifted, with a decline in grassroots organizing and local political participation, making it more challenging for residents to ensure their voices

are heard by elected officials. Despite these concerns, many see Hyde Park as a resilient and active community, where advocacy and civic engagement remain essential in shaping its future:

> I think the cultural resilience of Hyde Park will never be lost, but I do think as a self-proclaimed entrepreneurial ecosystem builder, there is definitely something to be said and something to be observed around how there's been entrepreneurial loss that's replaced with more corporate chains.

One informant stated:

> I saw the university tear down Harper court and rebuild it so that now there's like the Chipotle and the high rises and stuff. But Harper court used to be amazing, like a public square almost, and now that's gone, and it's restaurants and a hotel.

Another informant stated:

> And, I recall [in the past] elected officials, particularly at the local level, who really paid attention to community voices. It didn't mean that you got what you wanted, but you knew you could get a fair hearing. There were open lines of communication, and elected officials really worked hard to embed themselves in the community. Now it's more that they look for cues on what they should do, and so it takes longer to penetrate. The case has to be made multiple times.

Benefits of the Point

Physical and Mental Health. Informants discussed how they have historically and presently utilized the Point for physical health by engaging in activities such as biking, climbing, walking, running, swimming, and sports. Informants also discussed how they have incorporated a daily routine at the Point involving multiple recreational activities such as walking, running, swimming, biking, and reading, with one informant saying, "I swim in the summer. I go often unless it's two degrees out. I would ride my bike out there at various points all year long, and sometimes just sit and read." Another recounted, "Every day in the summer I swim at the Point. …You know, as soon as I am done with work, every day, I go to the Point to go swimming. And so, the Point is where I spend most of my summers, and then in the winter, it's where I go walking." One informant reminisced, "You know, for much of my life, I was a competitive runner. I ran competitively in high school and college, and then, for many, many years after that I would train on the lakefront. So there was probably hardly a day for many, many years when I didn't run around the Point en route to somewhere else in the course of a long run."

Community Development. Some informants who grew up in Hyde Park discussed how these regular activities in the park helped them bond with their friends and family. One informant said, “I'll say early on, when I was young, the Point was where I learned how to ride a bike. The Point was going climbing on the limestone rocks on all fours with my dad, [it] was a way that we used to bond every weekend.” Another recalled, “You know, I often would take one or another succession of dogs to the Point, to swim, jump up the Point, went to weddings there, you know, took walks with friends when I was a boy. Used to take walks on the lakefront with my father, and we would go around the Point.”

The majority of informants referenced the value of passive recreation, the ecological benefits, and community development that they have experienced at the Point. Examples of passive recreation discussed include picnics, bonfires, reading, sightseeing the lakefront, dog walking, and spending time with friends and family. The Point was often described as Hyde Park’s concurred gathering space. One informant explained, “I usually spend pretty much all evening [in the Point] hanging out, because you just run into a million people. Like, it's the closest to having a public square, like the Agora.” Another said, “If you go to the Point on a Sunday, you see everybody—multiple generations, races, ethnicities—all there for one reason: to be outside, enjoy nature, commune, and just be. And that affirms one’s humanity in such a deep, important way.”

For many informants, the historical, structural, and natural aspects of the Point often provide them with restorative capacities. One informant shared how their appreciation for the Point as a greenspace has changed during their lifetime in Hyde Park:

> A lot of times out there these days honestly, the fire pits are a big part of it for us–the fire pits and the revetment themselves as me and my friends have gotten older. I think we've developed more of an appreciation for just kind of the physical feel of being out there at night with a fire or laying on the limestone, you know, in the sun or just spending time sitting in kind of a peaceful natural, seemingly unique place after many hours of living our relatively sterile lives wherever we're working, wherever we are we.

Safety. The theme of safety was raised by many informants either directly, or alluded to via adjacent themes such as peacefulness and relaxation. With safety concerns historically tied to the negative perceptions and rhetoric of the South Side Chicago neighborhoods, key informants considered the lack of vigilance they often experienced at the Point, with one saying, “You've

got to figure Chicago's rough. But we're used to that, but it's good to go somewhere where you don't have to be watching your back." Another informant recalled:

> [The Point] was always a safe place where we can go and ride our bikes or where me and my friends could just hang out without needing supervision, because as you know, on the South Side, there is a lot to be mindful of. So, my parents had a short list of places where I can go and hang out where they feel safe for me to go, and the Point was on that.

One informant described the effects that urban renewal and community reconstitution had in the Hyde Park and neighboring communities, and how that has created a natural resistance for community members to venture out to the broader South Side, saying, "...[The Point] is such a remarkable place, because people come from all over to this little spit of land, and, you know, I think by and large, feel safe there."

An informant also indicated how the Point became a safe space in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, stating, "I think the Point has been over-utilized in all the best ways since the pandemic, because when a lot of our spaces and places were closed down, the Point was still a space of health, of safety, of refuge, of community, of safely gathering in a time in which we had to be more apart than ever."

Public Space Availability. A few informants recognized how the Point has served as a spatially and financially accessible public place of gathering through the years:

> It's always been a really deeply familial space, and it's always been accessible to where if you don't know exactly what to do or you don't know where to go or if times are hard financially, let's just go to the Point. It's always that spot that you can lean on, whether it's blazing hot, whether it's a little cold, it's always just easy to gather there, right? And it's really accessible in a way where all you need is… nothing, actually, or maybe a blanket, or a bottle of water, or a little wood for the fire, it's always a space that you can lean on.

Another informant stated:

> It's served more or less the same function for me as long as I can remember, which is simply as a gathering space, as a place to be. You know, there are swimming pools around the South Side that we can go to—they're unfortunately very limited and also far away, especially in this part of town.

But other informants address that other dimensions of accessibility need to be improved, specifically for park users with mobility issues in accessing the lakefront.

Conclusion

The Point is viewed not only as a public space but also as an integral part of Hyde Park's character and identity. The narratives reported by the respondents highlight tensions between preserving one of the few open greenspaces available to the broader South Side Chicago neighborhoods and urban development. Hyde Park's historical and ongoing changes, especially driven by the expansion of the University of Chicago, raise concerns about the displacement of longtime residents, the magnification of racial and economic boundaries, and the accessibility of greenspaces. With the Point providing several dimensions of health and social benefits to South Side Chicago communities, there is consensus that it should be preserved as a place of continuity and refuge.

II. Reflections on Save the Point

Key informants have a unique perspective as community experts in the Save the Point campaign. Respondents were asked to comment on their relationship to Promontory Point and the Save the Point campaign, and they were invited to share their opinions about the rehabilitation project. Their statements remark on the systemic and physical issues that threaten Promontory Point's rehabilitation and reveal strong desires to preserve the Point's unique character and its essential role in sustaining the South Side community.

Systemic Issues

Governmental Shortcomings. Key informants commented on the recurrent conflicts between the community and city government over the Point rehabilitation project, citing frustrations over the city's continuous neglect of the South Side. The primary governmental shortcomings discussed by key informants were a lack of transparency regarding the city's rehabilitation plan, use of federal funds, and disregard for community preferences. Key informants noted that these trends are unsurprising, given the city's systemic disregard for the South Side. Like other poor communities of color across the United States, residents of Chicago's South Side already have limited access to quality parks. Though South Side community members are invested in preserving the Point, key informants noted that governmental shortcomings only maintain existing inequalities.

Besides systemic neglect, key informants commented on the dangerous precedent set by use of federal funds in public service projects like the rehabilitation of Promontory Point. While the Chicago Park District often receives grants from the federal government, they also rely on

funding from the taxpayers they serve. In the case of Promontory Point, use of federal funds could decrease the influence local taxpayers have on the Park District's decisions. One informant worried that this could become a trend, saying it could empower officials to argue, "'Well, they did it at the Point, so we can do it everywhere, right?'"

Community-Led Processes. Key informants emphasized the importance of a community-led process with regards to the Point rehabilitation project. In one sense, respondents highlighted the importance of community agency in maintaining open, free, and clear public space. For example, one key informant said, "it can't be understated enough how important us being able to make choices [is]...how to engage with nature in a way that isn't just cement." Community members are the primary users of the park, meaning community-led processes are also a democratic necessity. To this effect, one respondent shared that preserving the limestone blocks "seems to be the choice of the community" while another said, "[t]he entire process...should be led by the needs and the desires of the community itself, which doesn't seem to be happening." Thus, the community-led process to protect the Point is about preserving the physical space and community members' democratic participation.

With this understanding of the Save the Point campaign, informants were empowered to see more results from their political involvement than just protecting the limestone blocks. Respondents also stressed the importance of increasing community events at the Point's fieldhouse, which currently serves as a popular rental space for private events like weddings, that temporarily restrict public access to the park. Another informant also suggested park programming centered on environmental education, which could strengthen the sense of community ownership. Informants' advocacy for park programming—in addition to advocacy protecting the limestone—reveals that the Point campaign is just as much about physical protection as it is about community leadership.

Infrastructural Issues

Accessibility. Improved accessibility was a major concern among the key informants, who stressed that there must be suitable transportation to the park and that the Point itself should be ADA-compliant to best serve the entire community. Issues of accessibility are an environmental justice concern because equal access promotes a just distribution of the park's social and health benefits. Key informants would like to see more ways to access the Point, with one informant stating, "I think coming up with ways to make traveling to the Point less onerous

and more environmentally sound is good." With the closest bus stop over two blocks away at 55th and Hyde Park Boulevard, respondents pointed to a real transit accessibility issue. Without a car, traveling to the Point is difficult. Other key informants mentioned the lack of entrances to the Point, and advocated for "more entry points into the park itself beyond 55th St. essentially, or the bridges over on 57th or 51st St." Respondents would like to see physical changes that make the park more physically integrated into the city, and hence more accessible.

In terms of ADA compliance, informants stressed the importance of installations that allow wheelchair users to access the water and better connect with nature. One informant discussed the importance of a rehabilitation effort that prioritizes accessibility as a way for all people to connect to nature and as an issue of representative community organizing:

> Everyone should be able to sit down and you know kick their feet in the lakefront, cool off a little bit, or lay down in the sun on any of the limestone rocks. And that is, as much as I do love the Point in its current state, that is simply not possible along the majority of the revetments, so that's a pretty important issue to me because if we're gonna have the community-led process then we need to include all parts of the community and that is a significant community that's not necessarily being accommodated right now.

As a social gathering space for all people in Chicago, respondents recognized the importance of disability access to the Point. To that effect, another informant shared a story of two individuals who use wheelchairs—one of whom the informant knew to be a veteran—and the trials they endure to access the lakefront. Currently, the two individuals must "leave their wheelchairs at the top of the limestone" and "use their arms to get down" to simply swim at the Point. The informant added that they would like to see a way for these individuals to make it to the water without resorting to abandoning their wheelchairs.

Economic Considerations. Key informants were concerned with the cost-benefit of the proposed Point rehabilitation. Informants stressed the quality of the rehabilitation in comparison to its cost, arguing that concrete is a "sub-grade" material and that restoring the limestone would be more economically viable in the long run. Another informant emphasized the cost that the proposed installment of concrete would have on the community—that, in this cost-benefit analysis, it is important to consider the toll this impractical and unnecessary closure of the Point would have on the broader community. When discussing the Promontory Point Conservancy's support of replacing the limestone, as opposed to installing concrete, one informant said,

“They've been able to show that it's—that it looks better, that it's cheaper, that it will last longer. So the whole thing, the whole thing with the edge, just seems like a no-brainer, like, fix it, make it so there aren't rats, make it so that it's safe.” Overall, informants illustrated the economic, sustainability, and quality-of-life benefits of refurbishing the limestone, acknowledging small, achievable changes that must be made, but also highlighted the devastating impact the closure necessitated by the Army Corps’ plan would have on the community.

Environmental Concerns. Respondents were concerned about the environmental implications of the Point rehabilitation in addition to the human dimensions of the project. Key informants acknowledged shoreline protection as an important consideration in the rehabilitation of the Point, with one informant stating, “The Point simply needs to be preserved as a reality. I mean, just in terms of the wear and tear of the lake on the landscape, there are, I think everybody would agree, issues that need to be addressed.” While shoreline protection is often an argument against restoring the limestone revetments, informants believed that it was possible to preserve the limestone and its aesthetics while preserving the shoreline. In fact, as mentioned in the waterfront rehabilitation section of the literature review, limestone rehabilitation would lead to less erosion than the city’s plan because limestone is a softer material than steel and concrete. One informant also stressed the importance of the rehabilitation effort itself being environmentally sound, stating, “I know this is part of the planning, but having consideration for the rehab and renovation approach, including conducting environmental impact assessments, is crucial. This ensures that the lakefront and the waters around the point are protected from any kind of contamination from the process.” With an environmental lens, respondents view the city’s rehabilitation plan as worse for the environment. This assessment is backed up by scientific evidence, and hence, there is a purely environmental justification for the Conservancy’s plan.

Historic Preservation

Respondents expressed anxiety over both the erasure of the Point as an historic place and the disruption of social networks the park promotes. Informants expressed support for physical preservation in the Point rehabilitation project, with one informant stating, “I think sustaining the original design—both in intent and in reality—is really, really important.” By using concrete in the proposed rehabilitation, informants believed that much of the cultural and aesthetic values of the Point would be lost. This is because “[the Point] is now pretty much the last stretch of the

lakefront that has not been rebuilt. So this is the last remaining stretch of the limestone revetment that's still in Chicago." Preservation of the Promontory Point is the last chance to preserve the City of Chicago's historic lakefront. However, acknowledging that the rehabilitation still must be successful in preserving the shoreline, another informant stated that there must be a way to protect the shoreline without "eras[ing] the character of the Point for…the people who are so deeply, deeply attached to it." These sentiments reveal that anxieties over physical erasure inform their support of historic preservation.

Many respondents mentioned gaining a greater understanding of the social role of the Point since getting involved in the issue. One respondent described how gentrification in neighborhoods surrounding Hyde Park is already working to disrupt social networks built around the Point, saying, "The populations I would privilege in my own service have been pushed out of the area. The rapid increase in property values, which has impacted rents, means that those people who I would think of coming to the park — like from Woodlawn, South Shore, or elsewhere — are no longer able to do so." While gentrification has forced residents out of the neighborhoods that the Point serves, this respondent shared that former residents still come to the Point, revealing that "the power of place at the Promontory Point remains." Viewed this way, the community shares a collective memory of the Point that has the power to preserve community relationships to a time before gentrification. To this point, informants shared that they observe the Point fostering social cohesion as a community gathering space:

> Here's this public space where you scarcely ever see a police presence, where people of different generations, races coming from different communities in the city, not just Hyde Park, feel at home and feel themselves to be neighbors, to others who are there. Well, that's an extraordinary, extraordinary asset, you know, in our divided society and with the larger racial geography of the city and the South Side. And so I think that should be treasured. And I think you know to think about how, without interfering with those dynamics, to support them, reinforce them, value them, would make a lot of sense for the city.

Respondents view the Point as a reprieve from forces of division in our society, as a place where a diverse collection of people come together to socialize. In this sense, protecting the Point is part of a bigger project to halt the overall loss of gathering spaces. Some respondents formalized

this idea by referring to the Point as a third place, and claiming that it is one of the only third places left in the neighborhood:

> There are so few third spaces left…. We hardly even have coffee shops anymore. They don't […] let you sit in Starbucks on 55th anymore. So that, I think, is the biggest shift that I have seen in my mindset since I started becoming more involved: is understanding how this is really an important place not just for me personally, not just for my friends, not just for Hyde Park, not just for the individual users out there on any given day.

While community change is about gentrification, it is also about losing one of the last remaining third places that foster a sense of community. This will intensify the effects of gentrification and division that are already socially straining the neighborhood. Since getting involved, people seem to view the Point campaign as a project that is trying to preserve memories that inform a sense of place and community that are otherwise being erased.

Recommendations

Personal reflections on the Save the Point campaign point to systemic and physical issues with the park. Overall, respondents thought that the city needed to be more responsive to community desires by letting these voices lead planning. Additionally, respondents thought that the Point needs to be accessible to those with disabilities and that rehabilitation must be environmentally conscious. These personal concerns were all rooted in the key informants' desire to preserve the Point's physical landscape and social networks. With these findings in mind, we offer the following recommendations:

(1) *Continue fighting against the City's plans in the name of Environmental Justice*.

(2) *Engage community-led planning processes to develop park programming*. To further invest the community in the Save the Point campaign, promote community-led events in the park. Moreover, push against the use of the Fieldhouse as a rental space and promote community stewardship by using the space for community-led events.

(3) *Promote transportation and disability access to the Point.* Given the distance between the Point and CTA stops, it is difficult to get to the park without a car. With this in mind, the Conservancy should focus on transportation access (in addition to disability access) to the Point so that the park can become accessible to more people.

(4) *Focus on the social elements of historic preservation*. Historical preservation of the Point is not just about preserving the physical space, but also about preserving the social networks at the Point that are otherwise being erased from surrounding neighborhoods.

III. Key Events and Ongoing Challenges

Throughout the decades-long history of the fight over the rehabilitation of Promontory Point, several key events have punctuated a general background of community organization, public meetings, protests, and private deliberations.

Key Events

Historical and Landmark Designations. One such critical event was the declaration of the Point on the National Register of Historic Places in 2018 followed by designation as a Chicago landmark in 2023. These decisions marked a major success for the Conservancy and demonstrated the political power of the community, but key informants attribute variable levels of importance to the declarations. On the one hand, there was significant controversy over the nomination and pushback from city agencies because there was a sense that it would give the Conservancy "ammunition" to pursue their other goals. By overcoming the opposition and the general lack of care for landmark designation, the victory proved the group's effectiveness and organizational capacity. As one informant explained, "the only reason it got listed was because… there was so much public pressure for it."

However, several respondents explained that the historic declaration is more symbolic than practical. For example, one interviewee elaborated: "The National Register of Historic Places is an important designation in the way that people understand a space because… they understand it as being in the same level of importance as the White House or the Washington Monument, but it doesn't actually confer a lot of protection. It doesn't prevent it from being torn down." Many community members thought that this was the end of the fight, but the substantive benefit of the landmark status is only a delay in the process of getting a demolition permit in Chicago. A landmark can still be removed for a variety of reasons including safety, it just requires more deliberation and justification. Another informant responded that the decision made them less optimistic about the possibility that something could "happen that will outright protect the Point–cause it's already a landmark, it's already protected in the ways in which legally we can protect it," but the uncertainty about the Point's future continues. Rather than specific procedural

achievements, they believe that “it's really about the resiliency of the people that love it to continue the struggle… cause there is no solution…it’s gonna continue.”

Community Meetings. In addition to these two events, the movement is kept alive by the continuous series of town halls and community meetings that involve a wide cast of characters. These, at times raucous, contentious, gatherings include elected officials, community members, leaders, hydrologists and engineers from the university, and representatives from the Army Corps. One informant remarked that they knew “the local voices that are looking to save the Point, but it was really cool to see the Alderman's office and state representatives and senators that are also really avidly in support of protecting the Point.” Since the early days of the movement, these events have increased the visibility of the coalition, including the involvement of then-Senator Barack Obama. Obama’s connection to the park is personal; it is central to his first visit to Chicago when he decided he wanted to move to the city, and it became a park for his whole family. Another interviewee recalled that Obama “helped negotiate an agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers that is supposed to hold the Army Corps of Engineers into a community agreement with the Promontory Point Conservancy,” though there now seems to be confusion about what happened to this deal, with some feeling like the Army Corps is trying to “weasel out” of it. There have been several independent mediations and third party evaluations performed for the community and the city agencies, Army Corps, and Park District, but there seems to be confusion about the results of these efforts as well.

The Conservancy has been so successful in part because “they both know how to do the community activism and to bring in the professional experts,” which is unusual in the respondent’s experience. Being able to draw on the benefits of both of these paths helps to handle both the technical issues and the passion of the neighborhood. A key informant notes that, periodically, there are breakthroughs in the issue, “moments when it seemed like there was a process that could be pursued that would lead to agreement about how best to proceed.” However, these apparent breakthroughs never end in lasting change, even when the parties are operating in “good faith,” because “there seems to be this recurrent way in which the processes that start with some promise then derail.” The key informant admits that this constant “looping back to what you thought was the point of departure and not building the sort of common factual basis, the common evidentiary basis, to have more productive back and forth” is “disheartening” and “alarming.”

Organizational Challenges

Several specific internal challenges with regard to the Conservancy originate from and contribute to this repetitive failure in recent years.

Activist Fatigue. For example, one challenge internal to the community organization is a lack of urgency and a difficulty in retaining consistent support, interest, and energy due to the protracted nature of the fight and the repetitiveness of the topics. Key informants highlighted that the debate around the restoration of Promontory Point is decades old and a resolution is likely not imminent, potentially contributing to activist fatigue. Several members pointed to the length of time that the issue has been debated and considered, with some members saying the iterative nature of constantly "saving" the Promontory Point creates confusion for the public. Community members may believe that there is already a solution or that the advocacy campaign has lost momentum. The key informants recognize that activists continue to face new challenges despite having "saved" the Point multiple times, which taxes their energy and time as they pursue the same goals yet "keep coming back to square one." Some longtime community members discussed how the messaging of the campaign has not changed over the decades, making it tiring to continuously engage with the same issue.

Several members point to the importance of resilience and perseverance given the lack of a simple solution to the rehab issue. Continued persistence is absolutely essential, but difficult to maintain. For example, some respondents interpret deliberate delays on the part of city officials, mentioning that they are "dragging [their] feet" and that "there was a lot of avoidance before a response happened." Informants describe how time is "weaponized" in environmental justice issues, saying that "the amount of time it takes to fully advocate might cause many people to give up," it's "disheartening," and there's a risk of "demoralization that defeats human solidarity and action." As one interviewee lamented, "With any movement, they wear down as the same issues are re-brought up, right? I mean, that's how you slow movements down, right? You just continue to beat them down." This has led to a decline in political participation, a rise in complacency, and a reliance on a very active core of people for the movement's survival. This is especially important to overcome now as construction on Promontory Point presses nearer. However, the length and the passion of the conservancy campaign signaled to all key informants that this issue is still pertinent to the community.

Despite acknowledging the consequences of the campaign's longevity, key informants also praised the Conservancy's advocacy work, saying, "I sort of trust the folks in the Conservancy to get the best, least invasive, most appropriate thing to deal with the issue," and "I think what's extraordinary and should be held up is the sustained effort of a community to make otherwise dysfunctional processes work in a democratic way." Generally, it appears that the community trusts the Promontory Point Conservancy to prioritize community input, pursue inclusive solutions, and to constantly advocate for the community's needs.

Turnover. These dynamics of a long term activist movement are related to turnover at the Conservancy, which causes a lack of shared institutional memory. At least half of the respondents clarified that they lacked knowledge on certain topics or on parts of the history of the advocacy because they had not been involved when they occurred. Combined with new mayoral administrations and bureaucratic change, the parties keep "approaching it as a new question" which "loses[s] a lot of the history and the clarity that could be gained from an understanding of history." One respondent emphasized, "[I]t's important to continue arming communities with information so they don't have to recreate the wheel." An informant stressed the importance of creating and sharing accessible, comprehensive information among local advocacy organizations to lower any barriers to participation, and to make organizing more efficient.

Awareness and Information Gap. Along with the challenge of sustained commitment is the lack of awareness of the nuances of the proposed renovations, the details of the political situation, and what can be done to help, despite widespread passion for the Point. While informants largely agreed that the community cared about the preservation of the Point and opposed large-scale destruction, a basis of common understanding beyond surface level knowledge seemed absent. Key informants also discussed how the information gap between highly involved activists and general community members limits Save the Point's reach and impact. While long-standing community members have extensive memories of Save the Point, its history, and its goals, newer or less-involved community members lack specific knowledge about the City's plan for rehabilitating the Point and the Conservancy's response. Several members pointed to the fact that many community members seemed unaware of the stakes of the proposed renovations by the Army Corps of Engineers, such as the five-year closure of the Park:

> I don't think there's a lot of understanding that…they wanna wreck the Point somehow and that it needs saving. I feel like everyone wants to save the Point, but nobody knows that they want to close the park for five years…

One informant stated:

> I don't think that people are aware... And this was what changed for me too. I knew that the Save the Point Conservancy were actively working to preserve and uplift the Point, but I don't think before joining this movement that I knew that there was actually another side to what's happening that could put access to the Point at risk.

Another informant stated:

> [W]hat people don't know is that the proposed renovations that the alternative design studies is aiming to counter will have the Point shut down for five years, and with the Point being shut down for five years, that would just disrupt like half of Chicago's mental health and wellness.

Informants cited some reasons as to why this might be the case, such as the confusing and complex nature of the rehab due to multiple government and community stakeholders involved. For instance, community members may not fully understand the process behind large-scale park rehabilitation projects, making it difficult for them to determine when and how to effectively contribute their time and opinions. Respondents pointed to the "layers of legislative legal and regulatory frameworks" and "machinations of four different agencies" that created a confusing atmosphere for even the most dedicated community members. Many of the respondents did not understand the opposition to the Conservancy's recommendations or the stakes of the situation before becoming involved in the advocacy themselves.

Some informants called for the Conservancy to provide more guidance to the community members on how to get meaningfully involved. Community meetings and alarm raising need to be accompanied by calls to specific actions that can provide purpose. As one interviewee notes, when the campaign raised a clear call-to-action during the process of historic landmark designation, community support was intense and successful. Another interviewee agreed that "people are primed to do whatever is necessary" to keep the Point preserved, but that they just needed "their energy guided towards something." However, when this guidance is missing, community members express confusion: "I don't really know what the Conservancy is or how it's structured. Or it's an email list, but I rarely open them. They all say, 'That's the Point.'" Another

interviewee questioned what constitutes a community in this issue, such as whether it involved just the Hyde Park community or the surrounding South Side region. The informant shared concerns about the lack of public outreach in the past, especially as the Point services a multitude of different communities beyond Hyde Park. Specifically, they questioned the Conservancy's ability to identify their audience: "[The Conservancy] put out a public notice to all the community groups. And it's like, well, who are all? Who will you send it to?"

Though key informants were frustrated by the systemic barriers blocking local political organization, many of them remained optimistic about the power of the Save the Point campaign and trusting of the Conservancy's ability. This suggests that while Save the Point has faced setbacks, it can remain an influential campaign as long as it continues to persuade local officials, remain relevant and compelling, and provide open information to the concerned community.

Park Closure. There is a specific lack of knowledge about the proposed park closure and the extent of the disruption, and there is a feeling that this understanding would galvanize people. Some individuals called the closure "grievous" and "traumatic," stating that the Point serves as a community vessel that many interact with in their day to day lives. Others cited the importance of third spaces and green spaces, especially from an intergenerational perspective, as the park serves as a shared gathering ground for many different age ranges. A closure of the park could have a drastic impact on social workings of Hyde Park: "No matter what social sphere of Hyde Park you come from, I think it would be very bad for the social cohesion of the neighborhood." Another long term resident added, "it really is terrifying to think about not having the Point because not only will I lose access to a space where I can meet and gather with my personal community, but I think the intergenerational connections that a natural space provides will get lost and that can't be replaced."

Another frequently mentioned concern was the economic impact the point closure would have on the surrounding community. The event space at the Point is utilized throughout the year, and would have the impact that closing any popular park would have for five years. Another highlighted economic concern was the impact the closure would have on local businesses, especially with a portion of customers coming post-visit to the Point, saying, "I would have to imagine there would be a pretty noticeable effect on surrounding stores, bars, and businesses. I mean, I can only imagine how much business the Cove gets in the summertime from people walking or just to use the bathroom!"

While one individual said five years would not be a significant closure in the grand scheme of things with the city's plan, respondents generally agreed that it made more sense to do a phase plan to keep at least part of the park open. Others see the closure aspect of the plan as unnecessary altogether. Several informants see a more sinister side to the closure, suggesting that the move grants officials the ability remake the park and who has access:

> When that access is restored, those that shut it down are now in control of the rules, the restrictions, and some of the guidelines that can be reshaped from it being closed… when they open the space back up, that gives them the autonomy to say, "hey, actually, you can do this, but you can't do this," or "hey, here's the rules. Hey, here's when it's shut down." It's able to stop the natural momentum and organizing that the community has informed and then impose new restrictions and norms on that, which I fear will be restrictive and discriminatory, honestly.

They place the proposed renovation in a wider context of environmental justice, policing, and gentrification that changes the fundamental character of the Point and surrounding neighborhood. One interviewee compares it to the Ship of Theseus. In this Greek myth, each part of the ship is replaced one by one until none of the original parts remain. The story asks whether it is still the Ship of Theseus. Similarly, the informant asserts, "If the Point is closed for five years, and they completely change how it looks, it isn't going to be Promontory Point as the way that people wanted it and have used it for nearly 90 years, and it's going to be just something completely different, something much closer to Millennium Park downtown." To the respondents, this is a purposeful design to alter the intended audience of the space. One respondent calls it "a broad-based perversion of the South Lakefront plan, serving to push out access and restrict access to communities that have historically been able to access it" and another recognizes a "soft kind of signal of the types of changes and the types of crowds and groups that are allowed to be there and that are gonna be encouraged to be there."

Overall, the general trend appears to be that community members abhor the idea of closure for various reasons, including economic impacts, concerns surrounding environmental justice, and a communal importance of the Point. One informant profoundly summarizes the issue by asking "will it come back? You know, will it ever be what it was?"

Recommendations

The key informants gave critical insight into a community perspective on the history of the Point rehabilitation. They suggested that the most visible and important events in the Conservancy's efforts were the historic and landmark declarations, a series of negotiations and mediations including Obama's support, and town halls and community meetings. While some respondents were optimistic about the successful designations and the opportunity for compromise, there was also confusion about outcomes and concern about symbolic victories. Respondents agreed that continued resiliency and energy among community members is necessary for progress. Unfortunately, activist fatigue, turnover, and awareness gaps pose organizational challenges to this persistence. Repetitive issues and messaging, perceived intentional delays from the city, and issue complexity contribute to the challenges. Finally, informants described the devastating effects that a sustained closure of the Point would have on the community, and fear about how the character of the park would change. Based on these findings, we suggest the following recommendations:

(1) *Continue encouraging collaboration between subject matter experts and community members at public events.*
(2) *Create an accessible primer for newcomers to the movement that outlines the history, key players, conflict, and lessons.*
(3) *Galvanize further support by educating the wider community about the potential for long-term closure.*
(4) *Organize clear action items for participants to pursue.*
(5) *Define who the community and stakeholders are to promote cohesive activism.*

IV. Involvement of Government Agencies and Other Stakeholders

This theme aims to elucidate the respondents' perception of the relationship between the various stakeholders involved in evaluating plans to modify Promontory Point. Respondents were asked to consider the behavior of both the Park District and Army Corp of Engineers and determine whether this behavior indicated receptiveness to community desires. Respondents were also asked to comment on the motivations behind the actions of these stakeholders which, while potentially not demonstrative of those motivations, is a useful bellwether of community perceptions of institutional stakeholders.

Prior Interactions with Government Officials

Respondents were first asked to comment on their prior involvement with government officials overseeing the Point including the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District and the Army Corps of Engineers. Most of the respondents had not had direct interactions with government officials in either the Park District or the Army Corp of Engineers. However, many of the respondents who reported minimal interaction with the Park District and the Army Corps had had interactions with elected officials, with respondents reporting talking to elected officials from city, state and federal government. Some respondents had worked with the Park District directly. Those respondents noted that the Park District has some employees genuinely interested in developing the best outcome for all stakeholders but that these employees are in some cases overwhelmed by more cynical employees who view the community organizations as obstructionist.

Political Challenges

In addition to the internal organizational barriers facing the Conservancy mentioned above, other challenges arise from the nature of interactions with government.

Unresponsiveness. The foremost barrier is a perceived unresponsiveness to the desires and demands of the community and a power imbalance between the community and decision makers. There is an apparent lack of effort from the Park District and the Army Corps to engage the community, and a "disregard" for the opinions that are voiced, which frustrates community members. One informant observed "that there is polite listening. Sometimes there's listening and acknowledgment of hearing what we're saying, but a lot of wordsmithing and choosing words carefully."

Various interviewees point out bureaucratic ego and inertia where government agencies "love to feel like they know best" and that they "own it." The organizations have a set way they do infrastructure projects, and they do not have the flexibility to be creative. In particular, the Army Corps has an institutional tendency to think about extreme contingencies and overengineer. When programs require community feedback, there is a feeling that "they don't really want public input," and opposition to what the government already wants to do is treated as a challenge or a threat, which causes more intractability instead of an opportunity for a partnership. One respondent noted that they felt that the Army Corps was noticeably uninvolved in interacting with the public: "I haven't been seeing that same energy from the Army Corps to

say, ‘Hey, we'd love to hear from the people directly affected before we pose these plans.’” That respondent also spoke to this lack of involvement as a broader symptom of the Army Corps status as a federal agency which has limited both their knowledge of and relationship with the South Side community.

Several respondents also criticized the secretive nature of decision making, referring to the city as “sneaky” or a “Trojan horse.” This hasn’t always been the case. In the past, community members felt like elected officials paid more attention to the community, but the barrier to access has risen and the relationship is weaker now. Community members also point out the potential for a commercial incentive, where decisions are being influenced by politically powerful contractors. All this has contributed to a multidirectional environment of animosity, with several specific theories of rivalries proposed to explain the intransigence.

The advocacy process is also prolonged by the election of new officials, whom activists must convince to advocate for long-standing community wants. The volatility in the federal funding that would be needed for the restoration and Chicago’s current “revolving door of mayors” after the regime of Mayor Daley complicates negotiations and planning as the Conservancy has “dealt with a succession of different government folks.” The “powerful mayor and alderman system in Chicago” has the potential for harnessing progress, but also poses a challenge in negotiating with the involved parties.

Political Will. Even when officials are nominally supportive, several key informants note that this seldom translates into meaningful action. This gap is attributed either to a lack of real political will and commitment, or to a dearth of influence. Aldermen and other elected officials have their own political priorities and concerns, and certain promises have gone unfulfilled. One respondent remarked that “everybody had their own little way of playing politics,” while another said “I think our elected officials aren’t as willing to take up a charge and stand up to be counted.” The Conservancy has often been most successful when it organizes people to directly pressure candidates while on the campaign trail. Even then, community members expect that backing from congressmen and aldermen should yield more results than it has. At times, it appears as though specific groups only care about the PR consequences or reelection, but for others, the Point remains a personal issue. One respondent noted that while many of these elected officials were willing to make strong rhetorical claims about support for the Conservancy, those same elected officials appear to be unwilling or unable to galvanize material policy support for

the Conservancy: “support verbally has been very effusive. It seems like there has not quite been as much of a legislative or political push as we would like to see from those officials”.

The most frustrating part of this unresponsiveness to the community is the unanimity among the vital stakeholders about the ideal path forward. Key informants agreed that, despite the Campaign’s twenty-year tenure, the community maintained “virtually unanimous” support for keeping the limestone. Two members pointed to community opposition in the past, including a blog run by Hyde Park residents that supported the Army Corps of Engineers' plan. Opposition from this small contingent of community members that might’ve been visible in the beginning of the Conservancy campaign has dissipated, leaving a unified community arrayed against City Hall. An informant explained:

> You have the people that live there, and then you have the people that don't live there and love it, and then you have the representatives of the area. So you have all of the most critical voices there saying, “Hey, let's protect this space,” yet there's still an opposition that has the upper hand that needs to be appealed to… So it's just this imbalance of external forces making decisions on behalf of the folks that are most directly impacted, without considering the voices of those that are most directly impacted… if everybody's voice who matters most is in this room right now with the same energy, urgency, and worry, then what is going on and why is this fight such a fight?

Unclear Motivations. Multiple informants describe a lack of understanding of the motivations of the Army Corps and City Hall because the Conservancy’s plans for restored limestone address aesthetics, accessibility, cost, and durability, making it seem like a “no-brainer” and remarking that “it just doesn’t add up.” There has not been a satisfactory response from the city addressing any reason for preferring concrete; rather, it comes across as an assumption that is now stuck. In addition, the respondents disagree on where they think the concrete plan is coming from. Some suggest that the city is just following the Army Corps’ plan, while others feel as though the Army Corps is indifferent and the plan is coming from the city. One interviewee argued that the Army Corps, from their perspective, appears to be neutral to the proposed plans but has been unwilling to intervene to mediate disagreement due to the status as the federal sponsor of the plan. This appears consistent with another respondent’s observation that the Army Corps has seemed disconnected from the decision making process and particularly insulated from community perspective.

Government Actors and the Concrete Plan

Respondents were asked to discuss why they believed that institutional actors were advocating for the concrete revetments. The interviews provided information about the informants' perception for why the Park District and Army Corps have historically advocated for concrete replacement of the limestone revetments. Plausible motives mentioned include bureaucratic inertia, commercial incentives, and financial sponsorship. These motives are strongly aligned with the broader challenges to Point political advocacy noted above.

Informants also noted the history of the Park District, CDOT, and the Army Corps of Engineers to hire contractors with inflexible and uncreative architectural designs:

> I think that they have an understanding of how to do infrastructure projects where they hire Smith Group, which is probably the people that they highly like, the people that they're going to hire—that's the ones that they hired for Morgan Shoals. Smith Group comes in with their McDonald's-like menu of items that they like to include, and then they say, "well, do you want this water feature, or do you want this?" And then, you're like, "well, we want, actually, neither of those things. We would like you to sit down and listen to us." And the Smith Group says: "water feature or dune grass?"

One informant mentioned the possibility for expansion and future commercialization of the Point if the concrete replacements take place, and how these commercial incentives could play a role in the Park District's decision making:

> I wouldn't be surprised if the first five year plan is to make it concrete, but then the next five year plan is to take out all the grass in the center and put up shopping centers...I wouldn't be surprised if that's people's sentiments because there's two stark sides to the environmental justice movement, and there's that of capitalism and consumerism, and there is the side of preservation and yeah, it's tough, given the state of the world that making a dollar is more important than protecting the few spaces that we have left that remind us that this is a planet of natural things.

The Army Corps dependency on the City, based on their local sponsorship of the rehabilitation project, was mentioned as another plausible reason they have advocated for the concrete replacement plan:

> The city is the local sponsor, and the city as local sponsor has to pay for some of the costs. The local sponsor has a matching requirement… I think the Corps is deferring to

the city because the city's going to put some skin in the game, whereas the community advocates aren't going to be putting any skin in the game. They're not putting millions of dollars in the construction costs. They're not cost-sharing it with the Army Corps. So, the Corps recognizes that the city is the official local sponsor.

Improving the Partnership with Government

As noted above, in general, respondents have not felt like government officials have been responsive to the concerns of their community. Most respondents also discussed sources of this disconnect and potential resolutions to it.

One respondent proposed that it would be useful for a third-party organization to be introduced to evaluate both the Conservancy's plan and the City's and make a determination about which plan is better, thereby resolving the need for more direct communication between the stakeholders. Notably, that same respondent expressed that they would be comfortable with the Army Corps serving that role so long as the Army Corps Historic Preservation Office was integrated into that decision making. They acknowledged that the Army Corps is not completely independent due to their role in developing the city plan but said, "I would trust them to do the right thing. Because… it would not be the local Chicago office of the Army Corps that would be making that decision." Another respondent, while noting that most actors were acting in good faith, was more skeptical of independent mediation as an effective process in these circumstances, noting that some participants failed to seriously consider the possibility of an agreement during previous negotiations.

One respondent also noted that other parallel fights in other communities with the Park District, such as in Wicker Park and in Lincoln Park have seen more responsiveness from the Park District. When asked a follow up question about why they suspected that those communities had had more direct engagement with the Park District, that respondent noted that those communities had already developed positive relationships with the Park District to draw on when conflict emerged. In contrast, this respondent argued that Hyde Park has perennially been in conflict with the Park District, with the Promontory Point fight only being the most recent.

Recommendations

Respondents were clear that their primary concern about the relationship between the government and the community is that the government is not engaging in good faith efforts to listen to and learn from the community. Unfortunately, there is little the Conservancy can do to

resolve this problem directly. However, some respondents did express interest in a return to 3rd party mediation. Particularly with the publication of the new plan from the Conservancy, the Conservancy now has a document to compare against Park District plans to make it clearer that arbitration is the ideal way to move forward. In being able to propose a positive solution rather than working as a veto of the Park District's plan, the Conservancy may have an advantage in a new mediation that it has not had previously.

CONCLUSION

The Conservancy's campaign represents a decades-long struggle to protect the Promontory Point, a treasured public space that holds deep cultural, historical, and ecological significance to the broader South Side community of Chicago. Beyond its historical significance, the Point not only serves as a place for recreation, but also as a necessary facet of the city that provides invaluable green spaces for the South Side community—allowing community members to escape the city and connect with nature. Through the testimonies of key informants, these findings underscore the meaningfulness of a place that is deeply rooted in the community and the collective memory of its inhabitants. They highlight the benefits of the Park as a space for mental and physical rehabilitation, a social space and a place to connect with nature. Accordingly, the proposed five-year closure of the Point, coupled with the loss of its limestone revetments, would cause an insurmountable loss to the community. Key informant testimonies describe how the community has put up a united front to protect the Point and demonstrate how this issue has been singled out as an issue that is worthy of consideration and protection. The Point's role as a communal space of joy and bonding is irreplaceable, particularly in a community facing mounting issues of gentrification, racial division, and privatization of public spaces. In recent years, the University of Chicago's continuous encroachment onto broader Hyde Park and Woodlawn and the commercialization of Jackson Park through the Obama Presidential Center has signaled a troubling trend of community erasure. Despite these issues, the Point represents a stable and—quite literally—unchanging place for the community members to enjoy year after year. This report's findings show how this issue exemplifies principles of environmental justice and the importance of equitable access to public green spaces. Removing access to the Point would represent a revocation of community agency and a democratic loss to a community that has expressed near unanimous sentiment to protect it.

Moving forward, the campaign should address challenges such as activist fatigue and information gaps in the community while continuing to forge relationships with government agencies. As one key informant points out, the Chicago Park District's willingness to work alongside communities in Lincoln Park and Wicker Park with similar issues demonstrates that collaboration may be possible and should be extended to the South Side as well. By listening to the voices of the community and the Conservancy, the Park District and other stakeholders have an opportunity to set a precedent for equitable development on the South Side.

APPENDIX A:

Key Informant Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your participation with Promontory Point. As you know, our discussion is part of a research project for a course, Environmental Justice in Principle and Practice, at the University of Chicago. The project is geared to providing our partner organization, the Promontory Point Conservancy, with an overview of community perspectives on the proposed renovation of the Point and the restoration of the limestone revetments. Your input will be used to generate a report to the Conservancy that will offer grass-roots insights to aid in their advocacy. We expect to deliver the report to them in early March, and we are happy to provide you with an electronic copy if you wish. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question.

Your responses will be anonymized in the final report, but I would appreciate the opportunity to record our discussion for accurate transcription. Do I have your permission?

(IF YES) PROCEED TO QUESTIONNAIRE
(IF NO) I understand your concern. Please know that I would like to be able to accurately recall your responses, and transcribing the interview will make that much easier for me. As I mentioned, your responses will be anonymous in the final report.
(IF NO AGAIN) Okay, I will take notes to the best of my ability and try to accurately transcribe your responses.

1. I would like to start by talking about you. How long have you lived here, and how have you been involved in the community?
2. How have you seen the community change since you've lived here?
3. Tell me about your experience with the Point—how do you typically use the Point? (biking, barbecuing, jogging, relaxing with friends, quiet space). What meaning does it have for you?
4. How and when did you get involved with the Point rehab issue? What would you like to see in the Point rehab?
5. What do you think are the most important considerations to account for in the Point rehab?
6. Has your perspective on the Point changed since you became involved in the issue?
7. How do you think the larger community feels about the rehab of the Point?
8. The Park District and the Army Corps of Engineers want to close the Point off from public access for five (5) years to implement their rehab plan. What impact do you think such a long-term closure of the Point will have upon the surrounding communities?

9. What are some of the key events that you feel have been most important over the years with regard to the Point rehab?
10. What have been some of the key challenges with regard to the issue in recent years?
11. How do you feel community sentiment has changed over time?
12. Have you had any involvement with any of the government officials who are overseeing the Point (READ: City of Chicago, Chicago Park District, Army Corps of Engineers)?
13. Do you feel that these officials have been responsive to the concerns of the community?
14. Why do you think that the Park District and the Army Corps have historically advocated for concrete replacement of the limestone revetments?
15. Finally, are there any other changes that you think would benefit the Point beyond the Conservancy's renovation plans to enhance environmental justice?

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate your insights and responses. We will forward you a copy of our final report when it is finished in March.

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