To: **Sterling Bay, Lincoln Yards Development Team**
From: **River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group**
Date: **11.08.21**

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force development review working group is thankful for the opportunity to review and provide input on the master plan for Lincoln Yards South as presented October 5, 2021. The presentation provided Task Force members with an overview of the proposed master plan, site programming and uses, and intent to hold future stakeholder meetings as the plan evolves. The development team explained ongoing efforts to meet The Chicago River Design Guidelines menu of improvements criteria.

Following the development team's presentation there was a 'Q & A' session that allowed Task Force members to highlight specific areas of the plan, ask clarifying questions, and provide general feedback. The following comments are representative of the group's feedback and include verbal input from meeting participants and post-meeting written responses.

Lincoln Yards and River Edge Development on the North Branch
The proposed development has included preliminary reviews with the Department of Planning and Development, the Community Advisory Council, and other stakeholder groups. Additional public outreach and a presentation to the Chicago Plan Commission are planned for future dates. The Lincoln Yards development is expansive, with the Task Force having previously provided feedback on an adjacent subarea. This response includes feedback on Subarea B and a portion of Subarea C only. The former industrial and fleet management site is prominently located along the North Branch, at a bend in the river, and includes significant river frontage spanning from Concord Place to Throop Street. Currently the site has a combination of decayed seawall, naturally sloped, gravel, and vegetated edges. Lincoln Yards South represents an opportunity to make bold statements about how new development, recreation, and robust riverine habitats can coexist along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

The Task Force acknowledges that the October 5th presentation's primary purpose is to serve as an introduction to the Lincoln Yards *conceptual* master plan, with a focus on the park concept. It does not include specific design decisions regarding the River Design Guidelines menu of improvements or subarea site/landscaping plans for portions of the site adjacent to the river's edge. The following is a *non-exhaustive* list of broad items for the development team to consider and incorporate as they continue to move through their design and planning for the publicly accessible park space. We encourage them to refer to the River Edge Design Guidelines for direction and continue to interact, present and receive feedback from the Task Force's development review group as they move forward with the project.

- **Balance Passive and Active Uses**
  The programming for Lincoln Yards South publicly accessible park space is primarily focused on active uses over passive uses, with a significant amount of space reserved for hardscape and artificial turf athletic fields. It is the Task Force's understanding that this design is based on community feedback and that Lincoln Yards North will incorporate open space oriented towards passive uses and natural spaces. Acknowledging this, there remain opportunities to balance passive and active uses throughout the Lincoln Yards South site, and create green space that activates the riverfront to the benefit of all users. Highly prescribed active uses restrict accessibility for non-conforming users, limit flexibility, and tend to reduce opportunities for natural habitat creation and stormwater management. One strategy for addressing these concerns would be to replace artificial turf with natural grass for the athletic fields. Grass is more inviting for passive activity when the fields are not in use, avoids the significant heat island effects and uncomfortable surface temperatures of artificial turf, and provides additional flexibility, while still providing for athletic fields.

As the design evolves, the development team should maximize opportunities for implementing best practices in stormwater management. In conjunction with the bullet points below, the northern portion of the park space currently labeled 'stormwater detention' could be enlarged to maximize bioinfiltration and expand the naturalized river edge. Refer to The Chicago River Design Guidelines for additional information on stormwater management best practices, including minimizing hardscape, installing permeable pavement, and long term maintenance of bioswales.

- **Improve Public Space Accessibility**
  An often overlooked aspect for public space accessibility is perception. The design should incorporate wayfinding and signage to ensure that the public spaces are clearly delineated and avoid confusion for visitors. Multi-use paths should be clearly marked with signage to designate and welcome people into publicly available areas and paths, and should clearly state public access in accordance with the Planned Development Requirements, Chicago River Brand Standards and Guidelines, and Chicago Park District Standards. Signage should also encourage accessibility for all use types and not restrict activities (for example banning skateboarding/rollerblading, or loitering).

  Design decisions that may lead to public spaces that are 'public' in name only should also be avoided. The development team should carefully consider how public spaces throughout the site interface with one another: e.g., programmed areas with the river path, the river path with the river edge and river itself, the river path with existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure, etc. The Chicago River Design Guidelines state that a combined path can be used when spatial limitations must be considered. Because of the scale and depth of this site, its adjacency to the 606, and its programming as a public park (instead of a 30' setback) further evaluation of separate paths, or a widened multi-use path is needed. This would resolve conflicting uses, reduce the potential for dangerous collisions, and further align Lincoln Yards with the spirit of the river design guidelines. If accommodating a separated trail, care should be given to not reduce the limited habitat and passive use spaces already within the design. Reductions should only occur to strictly programmed recreation spaces, while allocating additional space for paths, habitat, and passive/restorative use.

- **Maximize Habitat Creation and True Naturalized Shoreline**
  In conjunction with balancing use types, and with an understanding that other portions of Lincoln Yards may contain additional natural habitat, the development team should think creatively about new habitat creation within the limitations of these subareas. Under the current design, minimal space is designated for natural habitat and that space is fragmented, restricting the benefits of *connected* habitat corridors. A consideration to improve the limited space available for natural habitat on this site could include shifting the pedestrian path(s) away from the river edge, either vertically (boardwalk/elevated path), or horizontally (within the park space). The water taxi stop and river launch would need direct access, but moving other portions of the path, paired with the site's scale and depth would retain views and allow for maximized natural areas and shoreline habitat. Natural areas should include microhabitats throughout the site, such as dense clusters of multi-layered vegetation, incorporating trees of a variety of species. This is also a valuable opportunity to develop habitats that support birds at a key point along the river. Chicago is used extensively by migratory birds and priority habitats are located along the lakefront and rivers. This site should incorporate effective migratory landbird habitat into its riverfront designs as well as protect migratory birds from harm by implementing bird-friendly facade and lighting treatments.

The proposal's lowering of some portions of the seawall is an invaluable first step, but this is "naturalized shoreline" only visually and in fact does not allow for the creation of valuable aquatic and river edge habitat as seen in true riparian edges Additional strategies could include two options:

1. Cutting the seawall 3' below the typical water level creating a gradual slope from 3' deep to the riverbank. This strategy could incorporate submergent plantings and other river restoration techniques to mitigate erosion (geotextiles, buried logs, etc.).
2. Installing linear shallows and backwaters by cutting the seawall 1' higher than normal water level and digging a 3' deep "backwater" behind the cut seawall which would gradually become more shallow and eventually meet the riverbank. This option would incorporate 3' wide inlets and outlets and would mitigate erosion from wave action while also sheltering the biota.

As the landscape design evolves it should seek to create a more naturalized layout and plant selection in accordance with the River Edge Design Guidelines. Ensure that best practices are followed with regard to plant installation, care and maintenance, with sufficient soil volumes to support mature tree growth and a comprehensive maintenance plan. The Task Force membership includes experts on the topics above who are willing to collaborate further with the development team in future meetings as needed.

As noted, the site's striking location at a turn in the Chicago River and long river frontage make for optimal sightlines and showcasing from multiple sightlines: from on and across the river, from multiple existing and planned bridges, and from the site itself. Care should be taken to maximize a length of riparian edge and restorative passive uses at this special site.

- **Confirm Long-term Open Space Management and Program Funding**
  A frequently overlooked but key element to sustainable public open space development is securing a long term stewardship agreement during the development phase. This ensures the design, including stormwater and ecosystem service delivery, as well as habitat and climate mitigation, are achieved and maintained. 1,3,5,7, and 10 year milestones can help ensure a quantifiable quality is delivered. A landscape warranty period of three years may be required per a typical establishment in a newly converted post-industrial zone. Public education/engagement signage may be managed through on site programming as well as engagement of public gardening stewards (e.g. Millennnium Park Lurie Garden-Master Gardener program) Responsible stewardship should delineate minimal and responsible use of salt melt, herbicides, and pesticides at this site, which drains to the river.

Again, thank you for taking the time to present to the River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group. Your proposal is a meaningful step towards enhancing the riverfront from both a land and river perspective. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback early in the conceptual design process and look forward to the ongoing coordination as the project moves on to future phases. Your consideration of the spirit of the Riverfront Design Guidelines is admirable, and we hope that implementing the above recommendations can be mutually beneficial for the development team, community residents, and the river itself. We welcome the opportunity for feedback, offer our services in the future, and look forward to your responses and future collaboration.

Thank you,

River Ecology Governance Task Force
Development Review Group