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Questionable Olympics plan

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The League of Women Voters of Chicago opposes the selection of Chicago as the site of the 2016 Summer Olympics. We do so in reliance on the principle of our organization that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the people's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

Preparation of the Chicago bid to host the 2016 Olympics did not provide us with adequate notice of the proposal as it developed, and we had no opportunity to comment or question aspects of the proposal.

Many questions exist; the bid proposal, ostensibly a privately developed plan, relies on substantial public funding and facilities. With declining revenue to fund existing city and Park District costs, what sources exist to fund construction of the Olympics facilities? Will TIF funds be used? And from which TIF districts? On what basis does the Olympics planning committee believe that the federal government will provide the funds for transit repair and extension or the security costs?

Our organization believes that the parks should be used for public recreation only, consistent with and enhancing their aesthetic quality. Buildings should be kept to a minimum. Funds should be distributed equitably for maintenance and development of parks throughout the city. Construction of the venues in the parks will eliminate open space for residents' use. This is space in which an individual can walk, children can play games and families can gather.

A separate concern is the lengthy withdrawal of park facilities from public use. Areas of Washington, Douglas and Jackson Parks will be closed to the public during construction and the post-Olympics facilities will eliminate residents' unstructured use of open space. Also, will park maintenance and programs continue unaffected by the Olympics preparations? Or will these decline to provide funds for the construction? The preparation of the Chicago Olympics bid occupied years and the plan relies on public money from all levels of government. Yet only recently have public meetings been held throughout the city. The people can comment, but we cannot influence either the proposal or the decision to seek selection as the site of the 2016 Olympics. The Chicago bid to host the 2016 Olympics was undemocratic and unworthy of the great city in which we live.

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-- *Esta Kallen, president,*

-- *Margaret Herring, board member,*

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