

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/site/premium/access-registered.intercept>

## New vision for Grant Park

### Museum, sculptures, dog park among plans for city's `front yard'

By Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah  
Tribune staff reporter

February 5, 2006

Grant Park, the lakefront gem that languished while Millennium Park grabbed headlines, is poised for a makeover of its own.

Driven by a small group of longtime enthusiasts and growing legions of newcomers to the booming South Loop--and boosted by the acclaim that greeted the new park to the north--plans are under way for a series of new features.

Construction in Grant Park will begin soon for the city's most expensive dog park yet, gussied up with a doggy fountain and a canine refreshment stand.

The city's "front yard" also will become a new testing ground for skateboarders. An artist whose sculptures elsewhere in the city have become targets for skateboarders has been commissioned to create a skate park to lure boarders away from downtown plazas.

A private group hopes to install a "Walk of Stars" honoring local celebrities, while Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz is casting 100 9-foot-tall sculptures--towering, headless bodies--for the southwest end of the park.

More eye-catching still, at least from a financial point of view, the Chicago Children's Museum is pondering construction of a glassy four-level wonderland that could bring more than half a million people to the park annually.

It's all part of an effort by the city and Grant Park boosters to activate parts of the historic centerpiece that long have sat empty and overlooked.

The price tag?

Officials say they still are totaling up the figures, which likely will run into the hundreds of thousands, minus the much heftier cost of the museum.

As was the case with Millennium Park, a public-private partnership will pay for the cosmetic transformation, with the private sector picking up most of the bill. It's one of the things Grant Park Conservancy President Bob O'Neill picked up from the park to the north.

While public and private dollars flowed into Millennium Park, Grant Park got little more than the occasional fixer-upper:

Advertisement

SAFETY IS  
A BEAUTIFUL THING,  
ESPECIALLY WHEN  
IT'S BEAUTIFUL.

For a Limited Time  
**COMPLIMENTARY  
PREMIUM  
PACKAGE  
ON XC70**

**VOLVO**  
for life

trees planted, gardens improved.

"Even though a lot of funds went into that as opposed to Grant Park, we looked at it as an inspiration," O'Neill said. "We wanted to spread that standard to more areas of Grant Park."

The Park District will spend public funds on the dog park, the skate park and on replanting and landscaping work on the south end of the park.

On the private side, the Motion Picture Hall of Fame Foundation hopes to raise \$7.5 million for the Chicago Walk of Stars. The Polish and arts communities hope to raise \$500,000 for the transport of Abakanowicz's pieces from Poland to Chicago. The sculptures themselves are \$3.5-million gifts to the city from the artist and the Polish Ministry of Culture.

The Children's Museum, if it decides to move from its current home on Navy Pier, could raise money to pay not only for its building, but also for a new fieldhouse for Grant Park--a project that O'Neill thinks likely would run upward of \$40 million. Museum officials declined to comment.

Bringing rooms back to life

Grant Park, originally named Lake Park, was designed in the French Renaissance style of formal outdoor rooms. The park is the legacy of architects Daniel H. Burnham and Edward Bennett and civic-minded businessmen Aaron Montgomery Ward, who sought to keep views of the lake open.

Construction on Grant Park, once an eyesore of swampy landfill and railroad tracks, began in 1915, but it came in spurts of activity and delays.

Parts of the park remain incomplete, while other plans changed radically: The Field Museum, for instance, was intended to sit where Buckingham Fountain now stands.

In his 1909 plan, Burnham envisioned the park as the civic and cultural heart of the city, but it remains empty much of the year, fully alive only during summer festivals.

The new plans are designed to bring life to different parts of the park by creating attractions in various outdoor rooms.

In the summer, the Park District hopes to have an urban garden show in Butler Field. A Solti Garden featuring a bust of Sir Georg Solti, the renowned Chicago Symphony conductor, will be created in one room along Michigan Avenue.

Another room will feature the Abakanowicz sculptures to bring pedestrians to the southwest corner of the park, portions of which were added only recently.

For years, Grant Park "drizzled to an end" at 12th Place and Michigan Avenue. About a decade ago, Central Station developer Gerald Fogelson donated Illinois Central Railroad property he purchased to Chicago, helping the city connect Roosevelt Road from Columbus Drive to Michigan Avenue and allowing Grant Park to square off its south end.

Abakanowicz's cast-iron figures, each weighing 1,100 pounds, will be assembled in a forest-like display by the artist in a space along Michigan, between Roosevelt Road and 11th Street. Pedestrians are meant to interact with the pieces.

Abakanowicz's outdoor installations, most of them groupings of similar beings, are located in Poland, New York, Paris and Israel. Recently, the artist was given the lifetime achievement award in contemporary sculpture by the International Sculpture Center.

The Walk of Stars also could pull tourists south.

The Motion Picture Hall of Fame Foundation is planning to install as many as 500 red stars, each one 3 feet by 3 feet, along a four-block promenade between Harrison and 11th Streets.

Costing \$15,000 apiece, the stars would honor civic leaders, pioneers, humanitarians, congressional medal recipients, literary heavyweights, athletes and celebrities such as Harrison Ford and Quincy Jones. Notorious Chicagoans such as Al Capone need not apply.

The south end is also where the new dog park and skate park will be located.

A neighborhood park

For more than a decade, developers have been building residential complexes such as Central Station on the south end of the park and converting office buildings on South Michigan Avenue to luxury condominiums. Empty nesters from the suburbs and former Gold Coast residents are filling up the more than eight new developments under construction along the park's borders.

Grant Park has become their neighborhood park.

Their calls for more trimmings will result this spring in the construction of the \$300,000 dog park, to be one of the largest in Chicago.

As is the case with other dog parks, a neighborhood group raised \$75,000; the Park District will match that and seek the remaining funding from donations. The dog park may even have a gazebo devoted to selling doggie treats.

Nearby, three old tennis courts will be converted into a skate park. Vache Kodjavakian, the director of Grant Park's skateboarding committee, said fellow boarders liked skating on the "benches" designed by artist Dan Peterman that sit outside the Museum of Contemporary Art. They suggested that the district ask Peterman to create new sculptures with wheels in mind.

There are also plans to replant flowering trees and elms around Hutchinson Field, using a portion of the money generated last year by the Lollapalooza festival. There also has been talk of bringing artist Dale Chihuly's trademark glasswork to Congress Plaza.

Beyond those plans, some backers want to see the city cover the remaining Metra railroad tracks on the park's south end.

But what has park conservancy president O'Neill most excited these days is talk that the Children's Museum may move to Daley Bicentennial Plaza.

The museum unveiled a plan last month for a subterranean building with a glass atrium. The new site would lie on the other side of the BP bridge, which currently leads visitors east from Millennium Park--and sends many of them back when they realize there is nothing on the other end.

The museum's plans also call for a new fieldhouse in the east wing, almost doubling the size of the existing building, which is in dire need of replacement. If the museum decides to move ahead, Park District approval also would be needed.

At a recent meeting, museum officials unveiled their preliminary plan to area residents to gauge their interest. Neighbors expressed concern that a favorite ice skating rink would be removed and that fieldhouse programming would be displaced temporarily.

But when museum President and Chief Executive Officer Peter England asked the crowd of 50 what they thought of the museum moving into "a sacred site," resounding claps filled the room.

Copyright © 2006, [Chicago Tribune](#)