

Canal Park Advocates' Case Statement For Lincoln Park ("Canal Park")

Updated March 27, 2009

Background

In 2006, the state of Indiana designated as surplus property a one-acre parcel of land along the downtown Central Canal, just east of the Indiana History Center. In 2007, the state requested development proposals and reviewed several proposals for a hotel.

Also in 2007, citizens formed Canal Park Advocates to present an alternative vision for the property, believing the location to be singularly appropriate and synergistic for civic purposes. We have actively presented our proposal to the public and to state and local policy-makers. Our supporters include the Marion County Alliance of Neighborhood Associations, the Abraham Lincoln Association of Indiana, the Canal Society of Indiana, Clarian Health Partners, Citizens Energy Group, the Indiana Alliance for Democracy, the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, individual citizens and visitors.



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In May 2008, the Indiana Finance Authority indicated, *“At this time, the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) is not pursuing a development project on the canal property across from the Indiana Historical Society. The IFA has determined that a partnership with the City is important to the future of this site. The City continues to evaluate the current options for the site...”*

Also in May 2008, Mayor Greg Ballard said in a WTHR-13 news report, *“It has turned into really a nice green space...people listen to the concerts from there...we decided to wait until the fall to make a decision on it...”* In the same news report, Governor Mitch Daniels said, *“... We are blessed with a beautiful downtown...It’s up to the mayor, of course, to call most of these plays, and we’ll support what he and the community think is best. I think we’ve got a great balance right now.”*

In October 2008, we received an e-mail from Indianapolis Department of Metropolitan Development Director Maury Plambeck which stated, *“...the City has decided to leave the hill as it is for the time being. That means we won't pursue development of the site, nor will we work to have it designated a park. The City will, from time to time, monitor the site in an effort to determine its most effective use in the future.”*

We believe the vision statement, rationales and recommended action plan outlined in this document make a strong case for a park on the site. We encouraged the administration of Indy Parks and Recreation to include the proposed park within the 2009-2014 Indianapolis-Marion County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan. In its comprehensive parks plan, **Indy Parks and Recreation recognized the high value of the Canal Park site and identified it as a High Priority acquisition site.** It also recommended a special study of the parkland needs of the Regional Center due to the continued expansion of conventions, hotels, special events, and residential development along with normal day-to-day employment of the public and private sectors. The comprehensive parks plan was adopted by the Board of Parks and Recreation on March 26, 2009. It awaits approval of and adoption by the Metropolitan Development Commission of Marion County and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Current Status

After more than two years of seeking to engage state and local officials in a dialog about this site, on March 12, 2009 we learned by happenstance of the Indiana Commission on Public Records' (ICPR) proposal to build a new state archives building on the site of the proposed Canal Park. The plan was included in House Bill 1001 which had already passed out of the House and is now in the Senate for consideration. **We believe an archives building would be highly inappropriate for the site (see rationale #28 on side 8).** We requested needs-assessment and feasibility information for the proposal from ICPR on March 12, 2009. On March 18, 2009, ICPR informed us that the agency is currently reviewing its files and a response will be provided to us on or before April 30, 2009—the day after the adjournment of both houses of the Indiana General Assembly. As of March 27, 2009—the day after a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing of HB 1001—we have not received the requested information. Unfortunately, ICPR's lack of a constructive response does not enable us to understand or respond to this important legislative issue.

Vision Statement

We envision creation of a vibrant, beautiful public greenspace which capitalizes on several adjoining community assets already in place and which invites use by appropriate visitor amenities and landscape enhancements. We envision trees and greenspace and an oasis that complements dense downtown development.



(Generally, it is located in a Campus setting (typology) according to the Indianapolis Regional Center Plan guidelines adopted by the Metropolitan Development Commission in June, 2008. This reflects the close proximity of IUPUI, which recently underwent a master planning process that will result in significant development and loss of open space, and the Indiana Government Center and Statehouse. The site adjoins the downtown canal and Canal Walk which connects several major institutional cultural uses, and residences and businesses, along its reach. It overlooks the stately east facade and lower terrace of the Indiana History Center, and complements its concerts and movies throughout the summer, also providing free public seating. It is just a few blocks south of the west leg of the planned Indianapolis Cultural Trail. It provides needed open space in a downtown which has given up key acreage in the past several years to private developments. The site has provided for the increasing open space needs of new residents, employees and tourists, particularly in The Canal and White River State Park cultural district within which the land is located).

Rationale

Canal Park Advocates believe the following rationales justify the ultimate use of this one-acre property as a public park. Some of the rationales respond to or refute opinions of some agency officials and development interests that this public property should be developed with a commercial use.

NOTE: These rationales were developed over the course of two years and thus include the earlier, hotel-related information pertinent to the state’s initial plan. We will make updates as new information becomes available.

1. The one-acre grassy hillside on the canal between the Indiana History Center and the state employees’ parking garage (which was designed for aesthetic appearance) is one of the city’s best examples of an “outdoor room” and an ideally-located civic space. It offers the sense of enclosed space, yet it also features great vistas—of water (the Central Canal), of a splendid building facade (Indiana History Center) and terrace, of trees (and flower beds along Ohio and New York Streets), and of the dome of the State Capitol. It also provides visual and physical access to the Canal Walk with its continuous procession



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of pedestrians. The hillside functions as a semi-natural amphitheater for performances (concerts and films) at the History Center, and is thus a cultural destination. With additional improvements, it could be a jewel in the heart of one of our Cultural Districts. According to Thomas Hylton (in his book Save Our Lands, Save Our Towns), one of the “ten rules for livable communities” is the provision of “Outdoor Rooms.” Hylton presented his work at the Indianapolis Spirit and Place Civic Festival several years ago.

2. The site is located in The Canal and White River State Park cultural district and is very near the planned west corridor of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. The Cultural Trail is the centerpiece of the Central Indiana Community Foundation’s Inspiring Places Initiative, which focuses on fostering development of public spaces, including parks and other green space, into high quality community amenities. “...At their best, these unique resources break down economic, physical, and cultural barriers between people, act as economic and cultural anchors to their surrounding neighborhoods, catalyze community energy and build a sense of community identity and mutual ownership, encourage healthy lifestyles and civic engagement, inspire and aid tourism and economic development, and lead to national recognition for central Indiana’s quality of life...” (CICF’s *2006 Annual Report*). Civic and park space is an integral part of our culture—as George Kessler and other visionary planners so well demonstrated many years ago. Their civic and aesthetic legacy endures.
3. Center Township is highly deficient in park land. The City parks planning staff has identified a 744 acre deficiency based on the 2000 Census and on an arguably too-low per capita guideline target of 17.3 acres per 1,000 population. (The National Recreation and Parks Association recommends from 20 to 24 acres per 1,000 population.) Undercounted as it already is, this 744-acre deficiency also completely ignores the additional demand created by the regional employment center and by cultural tourism and conventions in the downtown area.
4. The downtown canal is now almost fully developed. Open space is virtually non-existent in the corridor of continuous building facades. This site is virtually the last undeveloped site remaining. It is integral to the aesthetic success of the Canal Walk. The site could be a community asset and serve the public better if it were transformed into a landscaped pocket park with enhanced public access. Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Inc., (KIBI) in partnership with Indianapolis Power & Light Company (IPL), recognizes the need for public spaces through its IPL Project Greenspace program. Canal Park Advocates believes a “pocket park” is essential amongst the building facades and submitted a 2008 IPL Project Greenspace grant application for a pocket park in August 2007. (KIBI later advised that it could not approve the

application because Canal Park Advocates did not have control of the property). An application for 2009 funding was also submitted. As Bertrand Delanoe, a popular mayor of Paris, France who was quoted in *National Geographic* magazine, said, “A modern city needs areas free from density, noise, and the frenzied urban pace. We must re-create the kinds of spaces that lend themselves to talking, walking, discovering, relaxing.”

5. The canal currently enjoys a park-like atmosphere a few steps away from the city's hustle and bustle, and that park-like quality is one of its principal allures. As an Indianapolis Star editorial put it, "The downtown canal is normally a tranquil and romantic spot for strolling or jogging..." (*Time to wage war on nasty water*, May 16, 2006). This atmosphere of relative tranquility should be preserved and protected from inappropriate commercial intrusion.
6. Indianapolis's former sustainability initiative, *Indy GreenPrint* strongly supported increasing greenspace (see Land Conservation and Stewardship: “taking steps to continue adding public and private greenspace” Report - Action Agenda, Phase 1, 2008-2009” December, 2007). The City's *Indy GreenPrint* Web page stated, “...City parks, greenways, and open space shape the character of Indianapolis. They help keep our children, neighborhoods, and environment healthy. They raise property values and are important in attracting new residents and business. They give us a beautiful place to relax, reconnect, and recharge. Natural open spaces have extremely high public value in a rapidly urbanizing environment...”

Lincoln Park (“Canal Park”) would be a notable addition to the City's current *SustainIndy* program (which replaced *Indy GreenPrint*). It would constitute a key new element of “green infrastructure community projects” and enhance the appeal of downtown, and thus fortify its competitive ability to attract new development. It would also improve community quality of life at little or no new cost to the taxpayers.

7. The site *now functions* as a public park, providing a recreational setting on an irrigated lawn maintained by the City. It should be dedicated as such, and remain under public control.
8. Despite its relatively small size and the singular value of its location, the site draws people from a wide area. It has been referred to as a pocket park because it exists in a fully developed area. However, it is properly classified, according to an Indy Parks and Recreation specialist, as a Special Use Park due to its distinct historic, cultural and social attributes (per the widely accepted guidelines of the National Recreation and Parks Association). Its draw/appeal is much wider than that of a neighborhood- or even community-scale park. Conversations with attendees at the summer concert series reveal that many people travel from throughout the central Indiana region, and beyond, to attend the concerts from the vantage of this “greenway” site.



9. Marketers of downtown Indianapolis frequently extol the “family-friendly” character of the area's events and venues. However, most of these events are accessible only by paid-admission, often preceded by required paid-parking. But culture is more than commerce. Our heavily publicly-subsidized downtown should be more accessible to all citizens, including families and those of limited means. With

increasing costs of fuel, food, and other necessities, it has become difficult for low- and middle-income parents to pay for cultural and civic enrichment for their children.

The proposed Lincoln Park site provides a gathering place for many people, including families which visit as a destination for various events. It's currently appreciated for its rare civic gratuity in an increasingly commercialized downtown. This was evident during this summer's concerts—blankets, strollers, wheelchairs, and picnic baskets dotted the grassy hillside as thousands of peaceful, happy citizens relaxed and interacted. It's a welcoming place for persons of limited means and for all who are challenged by increasing costs of living.

10. The site now provides a “public good,” a term used by economists to describe freely accessible public benefits that are available whether we personally pay for them or not. Preserving this site as a park is compatible with the greatest public good.

11. The site adds significant value and interest to the Indiana History Center, including its outdoor films and concerts on the canal terrace. This amenity would be lost with a commercial or government building and the aesthetic value of the area would be greatly diminished. The Indiana Historical Society (operator of the History Center) has avoided taking a public position about the property. The Society is a lessee of the State which owns the land under the History Center.



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12. Even with about 95 percent of the canal now developed, the Canal Walk is used primarily for strolling or running (exercise). Thus the ambitious commercial visions of the City's former development officials haven't proven attainable or realistic. The two 2004 canal marketing studies conducted by IUPUI for the City's Department of Metropolitan Development (which repeatedly declined to disclose them) acknowledge the major limitations of the area as a commercial attractor. These limitations will not be eliminated or significantly ameliorated by putting a commercial building on the site.

13. There is a continuing loss of downtown public lands and parks to private commercial uses, including the Simon Property Group's headquarters building on the former Capitol Commons Plaza, the Conrad Hotel and Condominiums on the publicly-owned tract at Illinois and Washington Streets, Pan Am Plaza, and Jefferson Plaza. Unfortunately, these losses are usually uncompensated and unmitigated.

A new memorial for the submarine USS Indianapolis has been proposed by the Indiana War Memorials Commission for the only other significant open space remaining along the north leg of the canal. It would occupy a large portion of city-owned land next to the existing USS Indianapolis memorial, eliminating greenspace currently used by neighborhood residents. It is unclear whether a new memorial would generate commercial activity.

14. The Indianapolis Regional Center Plan 2020 recognizes the value of the site as park land. The Plan states, "...Residential development in the...historic Central Canal Area...will require resident-oriented parks. The growth of IUPUI and development of BioCrossroads-Central Indiana Life Sciences Network will require worker-oriented parks. The growth of the convention and tourism business will require

visitor-oriented parks...” (When park land is affected, officials too frequently fail to adhere to the recommendations of the adopted Regional Center Plan because they usually support proposed rezonings for commercial use.)

15. The City’s new Regional Center Design Guidelines, adopted by the Metropolitan Development Commission on June 18, 2008, assign the “Campus” typology to this area of the Regional Center. The proposed Lincoln Park would be highly compatible with, and indeed compliment, the adjoining Campus uses, including the Indiana Government Center, the Canal, and the Indiana History Center.
16. Some hotel industry consultants consider the site as marginal for a hotel (April 2007 *Indianapolis Business Journal* report).
17. A prospective developer would likely seek property tax abatement, infrastructure, and other public subsidies. Flaherty & Collins, the developer that received approval to build a four-story apartment and retail complex on the grassy hill along the canal just north of Michigan Street, received a 10-year \$2.7 million tax abatement (July 2007 *Indianapolis Business Journal* report).
18. A glut of planned hotels exists (per several 2007 *Indianapolis Business Journal* and *Indianapolis Star* reports). And recent new hotel approvals (e.g., the 1500 room J.W. Marriott) will substantially add to the inventory which will be sufficient to satisfy the peak demand created by the planned Super Bowl game.
19. Considering the current national financial collapse, caused largely by the lack of regulatory oversight and risky, and in many cases fraudulent, lending practices, it’s difficult to envision that lenders will be likely to finance new projects with marginal or speculative revenue projections.
20. A hotel or condo with a restaurant would not, as some city officials contend, substantially “activate” the low-visibility, below-street-level canal with money-spending visitors. The many buildings between New York and Michigan Streets with canal-level space originally intended for retail have been unable to attract retail uses.
21. New developments on the canal (e.g., Buggs Temple’s restaurant and café; Flaherty and Collins’ “The Cosmopolitan,” an apartment and retail development with planned canal-front storefronts (e.g., for a café or pub); and the Indiana University Health Information and Translational Sciences Building’s 3,810 square feet of retail space for a café and other specialty shops) provide ample additional opportunities for restaurants and public facilities if the demand can be verified.
22. A private development on this prime public land would fly in the face of the *publicly-funded* canal redevelopment (via a federal Urban Development Action Grant and also via Senator Richard Lugar’s U.S. Code amendment making historic waterways eligible for, and subsequent receipt of, an Urban Mass Transit Administration grant), the city’s previous use of eminent domain condemnation proceedings to take private property from some canal property owners, and the creation of a *public trust* by the Indianapolis Water Company when it was persuaded by the City to donate its canal property.
23. Community groups have often urged officials to create a city that is “as attractive and desirable for its *residents* as it is for visitors,” via the many tax-supported tourism promotion programs. A public park would help to fulfill that need, especially considering the current downtown residential building boom.
24. The Trust for Public Land has produced numerous studies confirming the high value of public open and green space. We will not attempt to cite the many other authoritative studies confirming the value of open space to quality of life, increased property values, and economic well being.

25. The site could be dedicated as Lincoln Park to perpetuate Abraham Lincoln’s legacy with its Hoosier roots. In 1861, Lincoln spoke to the citizenry less than two blocks away from the site while enroute to Washington for his inauguration. The 2008-2009 Lincoln Bicentennial celebration would provide a timely opportunity to dedicate the park in his honor. The recent closing of Ft. Wayne’s Lincoln Museum provides additional reason. Lincoln recognized the importance of preservation, having helped save the land containing the famous Mariposa Redwoods which was later designated as Yosemite National Park.

26. Some have suggested that nearby Military Park might obviate the need for the proposed Lincoln Park. However, the claim that Military Park provides sufficient green space for residents, employees and visitors fails to acknowledge the unique and wide range of functional, cultural, and aesthetic benefits that the proposed park provides.



Military Park prior to the 2007 Irish Festival

Military Park is located outside the Mile Square just west of West Street. There is no screening or buffering from the high-volume vehicle traffic on West and New York Streets. It suffers from a lack of people-friendly amenities such as benches in shaded, quieter locations away from main sidewalks. Public access to Military Park is limited. It’s regularly leased (by the White River State Park Development Commission via its entertainment/event contractor Live Nation, Inc.) for private commercial events and is fenced-off to prevent public use for many days at a time, sometimes for a full week at a time (e.g., 2008 Rib America Fest).

The park is in relatively poor condition due to wear from the many, large paid-admission events throughout the summer. The need for open space to set up tents and fencing may actually deter park managers from enhancing the park with additional trees, benches and perimeter landscaping.

Military Park offers little of the aesthetic appeal of the “outdoor room” formed by the urban and natural elements present at the proposed Lincoln Park site. It is not maintained as a public park space, but more so as a venue for commercial events. Apart from the obvious differences in scale and location, the two spaces serve much different purposes.

By its location and site attributes, the proposed Lincoln Park helps provide a distinct diversity of green spaces—topographically, architecturally, culturally, and recreationally. This is desirable for dense urban areas and downtowns.

27. As to process, agency deliberations about this publicly-owned property should meaningfully involve the public. The public wants a *listened-to* voice in this decision and in the public decision-making process. An accessible and fair public policy-making process in Indianapolis must be more than just the pronouncements of development agency officials and politically-favored institutional “stakeholders” which do not necessarily represent the broader public interest.

There’s a regrettable trend toward non-participation in public affairs. Only 26 percent of Marion County’s registered voters voted in the 2007 mayoral election. The public has become apathetic and is often critical about governance and policy-making because they don’t feel their voice is heard above the inside lobbying of the special interests. The Lincoln Park proposal presents a good opportunity for city and state officials to hear their constituents and the vox populi.

In his 1996 *The Peirce Report*, Neal Peirce urged us in part to “democratize development decisions” and “end the monopoly of planners and developers in deciding the physical appearance of our communities.” And in 2006, former mayor William Hudnut, now senior policy adviser at the Urban Land Institute, deplored “greenspace-gobbling, promiscuous development” in an article about *The Civil City* in the Indiana University’s *Indiana Magazine of History*. He also lamented that he didn’t do enough to provide for needed greenspace in his 16 years as mayor.

28. A recently discovered (3-12-09) plan by the Indiana Commission on Public Records for a new building to store the state archives would constitute a highly inappropriate use for the site. Paper files don’t need a “water view” and certainly don’t warrant an expensive new state building—especially during trying fiscal and economic times. Retrofitting an alternative, adaptable site such as the historic former Indianapolis City Hall building (which is currently undergoing a reuse study) should be explored. A public records request has been made to ICPR officials to gain access to the plan documents. The lack of disclosure and secrecy surrounding the new archives building plan is disturbing and not in the public interest.

Action Plan

- The land is now publicly-owned, and should remain as public property. It is not advisable to take the ownership out of direct public ownership and control. The state of Indiana owns most of the land.
- It would presumably be desirable to vest control of the entire site in *local* government because it is closest to most of the people who use the property. However, local parks are sometimes susceptible to operating budget pressures including proposals to monetize (sell) parkland considered to be under-utilized or otherwise not cost-effective.
- The state should deed the property to the Indianapolis Department of Parks & Recreation in order to vest the citizens of Indianapolis with control and stewardship. The deed should contain a restrictive covenant providing that the City of Indianapolis shall not sell the land or develop it for commercial use and shall protect the land as a city park in perpetuity.
- The Metropolitan Development Commission should rezone the property to Park, rather than the current CBD-2, to reflect its highest and best public use.
- The City of Indianapolis should conduct a park master planning process for the site with emphasis on passive and informal features and sustainable landscaping.
- The City of Indianapolis should research grant opportunities and prepare applications for grant funds and seek on-going partnerships that would fund planning, park construction and maintenance of the land. Design assistance could be provided if Canal Park Advocates is awarded a Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Inc. IPL Project Greenspace pocket park grant in a future grant round.
- The park should be named Lincoln Park in honor of Abraham Lincoln, who spoke nearby in 1861 while enroute to his inauguration. A dedication ceremony and gala celebration for Lincoln Park should be planned and held in conjunction with the upcoming 2009 bicentennial celebration.

For More Information

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