



December 2008

# Canal Park Advocates' Year-End Report

*The initiative to dedicate Lincoln Park in honor of Abraham Lincoln on downtown's Central Canal (across from the Indiana History Center) experienced twists and turns during 2008. Below are highlights of this eventful year for the project.*

## Ongoing Education Efforts

Canal Park Advocates:

- Made presentations throughout the year to community groups, private companies, and agency officials and boards;
- Wrote several letters/op-ed pieces that were published in Indianapolis newspapers;
- Attended related community events to circulate updated flyers and our [27-point case statement](#) justifying why a park is preferable to a commercial use (the statement is available at [www.mcanaindy.org](http://www.mcanaindy.org)); and
- Communicated individually with key opinion-shapers in the community.

Most audiences were supportive of the park proposal. However, others, such as the commercial news media, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and Indianapolis Downtown, Inc., deemed their perceived need for more private development as more important than protecting a prime park site.

## Governor Invites New Mayor to Review Issue

When the Ballard administration took office in early 2008, the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) said it would defer its review of the two developers' hotel proposals for the site until Indianapolis' new mayor had an opportunity to review the issue. On March 4th, in response to a letter from Canal Park Advocates, Mayor Ballard wrote that he liked the park proposal and would approve it if the state, as the principal landowner, approved it.

## State Suspends its Review

In late May, IFA announced that it had suspended its review of the two hotel proposals, but did not offer further explanation other than the importance of a city/state partnership to determine the best use for the site. At that time, the mayor said

the city would make a decision in the fall. Also at that time, Governor Daniels made a statement to the media that, in essence, the city should be the principal decision-maker.

## Mayor Decides Not to Decide

In late October, Mayor Ballard's development director notified us that the city would not make a decision about the property, but "would monitor the site and its use." The city does not appear to be actively working with the state to review site options or park potential.

## Connecting to State's Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

In March, we requested to make a presentation at a meeting of the Indiana Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. Its chair agreed to a presentation but withdrew her acceptance a few days later, citing a full agenda. We believe the governor's office vetoed the presentation and directed the commission not to hear or consider our proposal. A subsequent contact with a rude staff member from the governor's office reinforced that conclusion.

We do not know why the governor's office seems so averse to our park proposal (and so averse to even discussing it), except that perhaps our group has publicly challenged the state's ill-conceived hotel plan which has financial yield as its principal motive. We believe Abraham Lincoln would have been willing to listen to, and would carefully consider, our grassroots-based, pro-public proposal. That has not happened here.

## Participation in New Parks Plan

We participated in the Indy Parks public meetings to provide input for the five-year park plan. We presented our case at the April meeting in Center Township, and reminded the planners of previously designated park sites which have been given over to commercial development in recent years. We advocated for the proposed Lincoln Park to be included in the plan. Indy Parks seems receptive to the idea. It was also receptive to our call for

a more complete analysis of parkland supply and demand in the Regional Center, which, in our view, is substantially underserved, despite the claims of Indianapolis Downtown, Inc. (IDI), which has broadly stated we have ample parkland downtown. We also called for disclosure by IDI, which receives more than \$1 million in taxpayer funds, of its specific rationale for its apparent opposition to the proposed Lincoln Park.

### **IUPUI School of Liberal Arts Students Create Installation at Lincoln Park Site**

In August, students at IUPUI's School of Liberal Arts decided to utilize the Lincoln Park initiative as a project for their sustainable landscapes and live collections class. Their work included a temporary art installation featuring about 70 signs displaying concise positive-value-of-greenspace research findings. These signs were displayed at the site on November 21st. Unfortunately, an Indiana state trooper was dispatched to the site and ordered the staked signs to be pulled up. The students were given police permission to lay the signs on the hillside, which were readable by passers-by. The students also developed a design for the park.

### **Connection to Central Indiana Community Foundation**

In September, we contacted the Central Indiana Community Foundation, (sponsor of the adjacent Cultural Trail and an Inspiring Places Initiative) to provide informal feedback about the Lincoln Park concept. We learned that CICF had engaged in recent discussions with state senator James Merritt about purchasing the (already publicly-owned) property from the state. We've not been able to meet with CICF to learn about its vision for the site. In December, CICF's Brian Payne indicated the current economic recession has caused the foundation to focus on local human-service needs, and that any purchase would have to be deferred until 2010. We'll continue to seek information about CICF's specific vision.

### **Introduction of Lincoln Park Initiative to Lincoln Authors**

On December 6th, we attended the Indiana Authors Fair at the Indiana History Center. Harold Holzer (co-chair of the United States Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission) and William Bartelt (vice-chair of the Indiana Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission) were present with their recent books about Lincoln. We showed our Lincoln Park materials to Mr. Holzer who quickly offered that it looked to be a great idea and that the national commission would likely endorse it. However, he reminded us that any proposal to the U.S commission would need to come from the state commission. We'll continue to try to

persuade the state commission (via our e-mail materials) to endorse our proposal.

### **Grant Proposal to Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Inc. (KIBI)**

On December 8, we received a response from KIBI that it was unable to fund our application for planning and design assistance in 2009 because we don't yet have control of or permission to use the site (a requisite for KIBI funding). Unless the state decides in 2009 to develop the site with a private use, we'll plan on submitting our third application to KIBI next August. Hopefully, by that time, the state and city will have jointly determined that a public space is more desirable than a commercial building for the site.

### **Indiana Historical Society Plans Accessibility Ramp on Canal**

In August 2008, an Indiana Historical Society (IHS) representative said IHS wants to build an accessibility ramp to the canal, but that it will depend on funding. IHS declined to share its site plan. The representative said the ramp would not impact the hillside on the west bank of the canal, just north of IHS' Canal Plaza. In 2009, from late May through early July, IHS will hold a limited Concerts on the Canal series at the American College of Sports Medicine at 401 W. Michigan St. IHS has staunchly declined to endorse our park proposal, likely due to pressure from the state administration. Yet, its past publicity for its concert series has touted the availability of the greenway across the canal for enjoying the music. This further reinforces our contention that the property is valuable for IHS programs and for the public.

### **Looking Forward**

We made progress in educating the public and officials about the issue in 2008. However, we still need to convince city and state officials. We hope to also persuade them about the immediate opportunity to extend Lincoln's legacy, especially considering the state's recent successful bid for the significant collection of the former Abraham Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne.

2009 is the bicentennial year for Lincoln's birth. We remain optimistic the city and state will decide to dedicate this land as Lincoln Park. For more information or to learn how you can help, call Canal Park Advocates at (317) 283-6283.

**"We need to restore an all-but-lost art in America—the art of making good places."**

James Howard Kunstler,  
The Geography of Nowhere, 1993

