

# In Perpetuity Takes Time



IN 1982, MAYOR JANE BYRNE JOINED 1,000 community members in the North Park community area of Chicago to discuss a development proposal for the North Park Village site that was gaining traction at City Hall. When the former Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium closed, what lay inside its gates was revealed to the community—160-acres of beautiful natural space within the city. The development would erase it all. As Mayor Jane Byrne left the meeting, an innovative and unique plan was set in place: to protect a large portion of the land under a conservation easement.

Parks and preserves had been acquired and protected for years, but the use of a conservation easement to protect publicly owned land was something new. And not everybody was on board. Development interests remained strong and committing future administrations to protect this place was concerning to some administrators. As time went on, North Park Village became an example of the dynamic forces necessary to ensure land protection; a long, arduous, and completely worthwhile endeavor.

Throughout North Park Village's evolution, Openlands was there. In September of this year, the Chicago City Council voted to permanently protect North Park Village, successfully culminating years of community advocacy.

## I. HISTORY.

North Park Village is a sprawling 160-acre campus on Chicago's northwest side. It is the site of the former Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium which operated for nearly 60 years and at its peak served upwards of 1,000 patients. The expansive grounds, fresh air, and natural setting were meant as a treatment for tuberculosis.

New medicines and medical advances changed the way tuberculosis was treated and the Sanitarium closed in 1974 leaving the expansive grounds and stately buildings with an uncertain future. People from the community that grew up around the facility report that they had no idea what lay behind the fence and dense perimeter growth. But as the public gained access, it quickly became clear that this was a very special place and worthy of conservation. The doors opened to an oasis of natural lands, parks, and a peaceful rock garden wrapped around historic buildings—over 140 acres in the midst of the density of Chicago.

Not everyone shared the conservation vision. Throughout the late 1970's and 1980's, numerous development plans were proposed that would have razed the buildings and cleared the grounds.

From high-rise apartment towers to suburban-like malls, there was no shortage of ideas for the City to cash in on the property. Determining the outcome of North Park Village spanned the terms of four mayors: Richard J. Daley, Jane Byrne, Harold Washington, and Eugene Sawyer. In 1982, one development plan made its way to the Chicago Plan Commission but the community's insistence that the buildings and grounds be protected was unwavering. Mayor Byrne attended a community meeting of over 1,000 residents demanding that the City abandon its development agenda and take steps to protect North Park Village. *But how?*

Throughout the effort to preserve the site, Openlands worked with community residents and the Advisory Council. It was Tom Hahn, Former Openlands Associate Director, who proposed the use of a conservation easement. This is a tool that Openlands had previously used to permanently protect private lands, but this was the first time it would be applied over a publicly owned property. The proposal was ingenious. The ownership of the land would remain with the City to operate and maintain as it saw fit within guidelines prescribed by the easement, and Openlands would ensure the open space would be protected.



## What is a conservation easement?

A CONSERVATION EASEMENT IS A VOLUNTARY, legal agreement between a landowner and either a land trust or government agency that limits the uses of the land to protect its conservation values. It is a way to preserve natural and scenic open space for future generations.

City attorneys would have none of it. They argued that the easement would restrict future administrations from doing what they thought best for the land even if that meant development over conservation. Openlands and the community pushed back, noting that whenever land is set aside for park purposes—whether for a national park, forest preserve, or local park—the expectation, sound public policy, and usually the law, is to ensure permanence. Ultimately a compromise was reached: 12½ acres at the southwest corner of the site would be set aside for development and the easement would be for a 75-year term. The deal was approved and in February 1989, Mayor Eugene Sawyer signed the document that granted a 75-year conservation easement over 103 acres of land and associated buildings to Openlands.



## II. THE RESOURCE.

The easement is divided into seven zones, or management areas. In the largest zone, called the Nature Preserve, the Chicago Park District manages a system of trails that winds through 46 acres of healthy woodland, savanna, prairie, and wetlands. Openlands TreeKeepers have worked alongside volunteers to plant trees in the natural areas, and the Park District has secured grants to protect and restore areas to breathtaking quality. The Park District offers educational programs and community meeting space in Chicago's only nature center. The historic structure, which is protected under the easement, provides visitors with a place to interact with and learn about wildlife and natural resources in an urban setting.

Peterson Park occupies the northeast 23-acre corner of the complex, with playgrounds, soccer and baseball fields, and tennis courts. The Chicago Park District offers cultural and recreational programming out of a fieldhouse that was once the lab building for the Sanitarium. The park is named after Pehr Samuel Peterson, a pioneer nurseryman and early inhabitant of the Swedish community known as Peterson Woods, in what is now the North Park neighborhood. After Peterson's death in 1903, his family donated the 160 acres of land to the City of Chicago for what became the Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium.

Other zones include a 12-acre nature study area aptly named "Walking Stick Woods" where trails and nodes provide areas for nature play, a community garden, an impressive rock garden, and general open spaces for public use. The variety of public open spaces make this site an anchor for the community and Chicagoans at large. North Park Village sits less than a mile from the North Branch of the Chicago River where along its course, parks and forest preserves provide biking and hiking trails that lead as far north as the Chicago Botanic Garden and east to the confluence with the North Shore Channel.

## III. NOT DONE YET.

With the huge victory to protect this resource until 2064 in hand, it would have been easy for local advocates to leave the future fate of the property to generations to come. But the community never wavered in its drive to permanently protect the open space in North Park Village.

In 2017, during its routine monitoring, Openlands discovered the City had permitted a driveway to be extended for emergency service access through a



grassy area that was protected under the easement. Openlands contacted the City and began discussions as to how to resolve the issue.

One of the working principals in conservation easements is that if the easement is going to be amended (which would be required if the driveway were to remain), then the conservation values lost by the driveway must be negligible, and conservation value for the land must be strengthened to uphold the integrity of the easement. Basically, you need to lose little and gain much with an amendment.

Openlands proposed that the only way to amend the easement to substantially increase the protected conservation values and allow the extended driveway to remain was to make the easement permanent. With half of the easement already tolled, Openlands and many on the North Park Village Advisory Council agreed this was an essential step to ensure these critical protections would not be lost. With persistence and in time, the City agreed. In September 2020, with the support of the community, Alderman Samantha Nugent, and Mayor Lori Lightfoot's administration, the City Council approved amending the conservation easement to make the land permanently protected.

## IV. OPENLANDS COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION.

From the closure of the Sanitarium and the beginning of community activism to protect this property in 1974, to the granting of a term easement in 1989, it has taken 45 years to permanently protect North Park Village. No one has ever questioned the importance of this property culturally or ecologically, but the willingness to afford the same permanent protection that we expect our parks and preserves to have took nearly half a century. This is what conservation looks like for Openlands—persistence, ingenuity, and credibility. Openlands was the conservation organization willing to work side-by-side with the community and engage the City to protect this land no matter how long it took. Openlands was the conservation organization willing to shape and hold the conservation easement and all the responsibilities that that commitment entails. And Openlands was the conservation organization that the City and Chicago Park District trusted to reach a fair conclusion and take on forever, ensuring the conservation values of North Park Village.

This is what Openlands does: protect land and water, restore and steward habitats for wildlife and people, listen and engage with communities, and defend what we protect.



Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium historic photos, cover: Group of Adult Patients' Cottages; inside left: The children's "preventorium". All contemporary photos, cover and inside spread: North Park Village Nature Center.

## Board Member Welcome, and a Thank You



**MATT DOBRY** is an independent contractor and Senior Vice President with CBRE, Inc., the world's largest commercial real estate firm. For the past two decades, Matt has built a practice in the representation of tenants and buyers of commercial space across a diverse set of industries, including accounting, banking, healthcare, higher education, law, nonprofit, and technology. With his experience of more than 300 transactions, millions of square feet leased and purchased, and several billion in economic consideration, CBRE named Matt a "Top Producer in the Americas" in 2019.

### Why is Openlands' work important?

I believe that the human spirit benefits from prolonged exposure to the outdoors and outdoor activities. I also am a believer in climate change, and the need to keep spaces wild and open for the benefit of humans and animals as well as the flora and fauna. So I think that it is mutually beneficial in this dense urban environment, the third largest in the country, that we maintain some connectivity to nature.

### Why did you decide to get involved with Openlands?

I have been a Midwest Leadership Council Member of the National Parks Conservation Association for nearly ten years, which is a board of similar interests to Openlands, but more so on a national scale. And so, I saw this as an opportunity to participate in my own backyard. I also am a believer that people don't need to get on an airplane in order to experience the great outdoors, that they should be open to opportunities within their neighborhoods, and be able to take a short car ride to experience the beauty and benefits of nature.

### What is your favorite place to get outside?

Well, truth be told, I'm an avid golfer. I'm outside once or twice a week if I'm lucky, and that would probably be my favorite recreation activity. I have visited close to 20 units of the National Park System and spent some serious outdoor time backpacking through the Boundary Waters up in northern Minnesota. My son and I share an affinity for camping and now my daughter is starting to get in that habit, as well.



### THIS NOVEMBER, CARRIE C. MCNALLY COMPLETED HER TERM AS CHAIR OF THE OPENLANDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

after four years leading the organization's governing body. Her contributions to Openlands' success were significant—from launching its strategic planning process to instituting important governing structures with the Board and shepherding the merger of Conserve Lake County in 2018. "Carrie's contributions as Openlands' Board Chair are enduring and have lasting impact for our region. Her involvement began when she interned with us before attending law school and followed in her mother Jeanine's footsteps joining the board in 2005," said Openlands President & CEO, Jerry Adelman. "Carrie's strategic and steadfast leadership has meant a great deal to me and I'm so grateful she will continue to serve as an active member of the Board of Directors."

This spring Openlands will dedicate our 7,000th tree planted to Carrie, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of TreeKeepers, planting a group of trees in honor of her contributions as Board Chair.



### OPENLANDS IS THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THAT JOANN SEAGREN WILL TAKE UP THE HELM AS CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

beginning in December. JoAnn is a Wealth Advisor and Managing Director of JA Glynn Private Wealth/JAG Capital Management and has served on the Openlands Board since 2012. She currently serves on the development and executive committee and was past co-chair of the governance committee and 2019 Annual Luncheon. She brings a deep passion for conservation that began with a backpacking trip with some family friends and her sister on the John Muir Trail in high school and continues to this day. She is a cofounder of Smartfarm in Barrington, has served as a stewardship and restoration volunteer and board member of Citizens for Conservation and was previously President of the Barrington Area Conservation Trust. In addition to JoAnn's new role on the Board, she volunteers with Openlands Birds in my Neighborhood program.

OPENLANDS GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES LEAD SUPPORT FROM:



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# Openlands Virtual Journey from the Amazon to Chicago Celebrates Large Landscape Preservation Globally and Locally

WHILE THE EXPERIENCE OF THE OPENLANDS ANNUAL LUNCHEON CHANGED THIS YEAR, the spirit and community of the event was stronger than ever. "A Virtual Journey from the Amazon to Chicago" underscored the importance of land conservation at this critical time, and engaged over 1,800 people in the multimedia journey from October 13–15, raising more than \$375,000 for Openlands programs and work.

The conservation leadership award was presented to Dr. Debra Moskovits, whose work has yielded lasting results for conservation and the well-being of people in the Amazon and Chicago. Over 20 million acres teeming with biodiversity and cultural diversity in the Amazon have been protected because of her commitment to conservation. She joined the Field Museum in 1985, where she found ways for the Museum to put its science to work for conservation. She launched what is now the Keller Science Action Center, and today conservation is integral to the Museum's mission. Dr. Moskovits's contributions to Chicago are just as significant, having founded the Chicago Wilderness in 1995. Dr. Moskovits's legacy is a testament to her understanding of the deep interconnectedness of people and nature no matter where a person lives.

The Journey's Keynote, Dr. AVECITA Chicchón, who has collaborated closely with Dr. Moskovits throughout her career and now leads the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's Andes-Amazon Initiative, spoke to the interconnectedness between the Amazon and Chicago in regards to climate change: "What happens in this great tropical forest has an impact on the global climate as well... Nearly fifty percent of the Amazon is under some sort of protection now. But we need to protect the Amazon in a way where we must avoid a tipping point, and we must have at least seventy percent of the forest protected. We still have a lot of work to do." She was joined by Dr. John Fitzpatrick of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Openlands Board Member Wendy Paulson for a podcast discussion about our region's connections to the Amazon and their hope for conservation in the future.

On the final day of the Journey, Openlands President and CEO Jerry Adelman summed it up best, "The land and water of our region — this tapestry of green and blue at all these different scales — it connects us to the Amazon, it connects us to the globe. We are all citizens of the world and the challenges we face are global, but they play out here at the local level. The lessons learned and the challenges we face are so common and we need to learn from each other about how best to address them."

Openlands extends its deepest gratitude to all who supported and participated in this year's Luncheon and especially event co-chairs Connie Keller and Michael Keiser.

Thanks to our Premier Sponsor:



PICTURED (top left to bottom right) : Dinesh Goburdhun, Jeff Sunderburg, Dr. Debra Moskovits, Danielle Russell, Ed Collins, Arnold Randall, Dr. AVECITA Chicchón, Michael Taylor, Jerry Adelman, Deloris Lucas, Dan Kane, all part of our Journey from the Amazon to Chicago virtual experience.



## Become an Openlander. Donate Today!

Landscape preservation takes imagination, persistence, and YOU.

Support Openlands today and join in conserving another 55,000 acres for our region's future. Visit [openlands.org/donate](https://openlands.org/donate) to learn more.

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