

**To: 2245 W. Oakdale Development Team**

**From: River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group**

**Date: March 14, 2025**

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force (Rivers Task Force) Development Review Working Group received a presentation about the 2245 W. Oakdale development concept on March 4, 2025. The presentation provided Task Force participants with an overview of the proposed site plan, their existing tree survey, a landscape plan, site furnishing details, existing river edge conditions, and how the team will comply with the City's Chicago River Design Guidelines and Sustainable Development Policy.

Following the development team's presentation there was a 'Question & Answer' session that allowed Task Force participants to ask clarifying questions and provide general feedback verbally and via an online form. The following summary is representative of the group's verbal and written input.

### **Our understanding of the 2245 W. Oakdale site plan proposal**

Planned development No. 1127 is located along the North Branch of the Chicago River and adjacent to the Lathrop Homes development. The development team is proposing an amendment to PD 1127 because the original planned development was approved in 2008 and predated the current Chicago River Design Guidelines. The proposed development will feature 35 residential townhome units, each with attached 2-car garages and a roofdeck. There is a courtyard that will be entered off of Oakdale Avenue with wayfinding signage and a six foot wide public path connecting to the river edge path. The river edge path will connect to the path at Lathrop Homes' and is designed to be extended to the East, to any future developments. The existing river edge has a natural edge with some areas of rip rap (at the toe of the bank) and mature trees, shrubs, and other vegetation. The team plans to maintain as much existing vegetation as possible to stabilize the bank while removing invasive species and adding new perennial native plants. Dark sky rated lighting and other site furnishings are planned as required by the River Guidelines.

### **Project-specific recommendations for the development team from the Rivers Task Force Development Review Working Group**

- **Increase native vegetation and tree usage**

The Working Group recommends having an increased usage of native plants and tree species in the planting plan. There is a lot of the invasive Siberian elm existing on the site, phasing in native trees to replace these trees is desired. A recommendation is to swap out Bald-cypress species with something more bird-friendly like Hackberry. The Working Group also suggests avoiding catmint (*Nepeta cataria*), as this species can spread rapidly and impact adjacent habitat areas. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that the development team work with a landscape contractor to plan for a tree and vegetation

long-term maintenance and continued stewardship strategy to ensure that new plantings reach full growth potential.

This site is already an important river edge habitat for a diverse array of species. Chicago Bird Alliance noted that it is a habitat hotspot for wintering diving ducks and other water loving bird species. Many species of turtles are observed here, including the rare softshell species. Using 100% native plants helps to support these wildlife populations' success into the future. Even dead and fallen trees create woody structures that support fish, insects, and other aquatic species and these should be maintained (*see below photos of turtles near this site, resting at the river edge at Lathrop Homes*).

- **Riverwalk connectivity and welcoming public access**

The goal of the Chicago River Design Guidelines is to provide riverfront access in a way that is welcoming to everyone, without a perception that you have to live, work, or be visiting a commercial business on the property. From the guidelines “*Access points to the multi-use path within the riverfront should be highly visible and strategically located.*”

The proposed site plan showed wayfinding signage near the path starting on Oakdale and near the river’s edge. The Working Group encourages the team to design the signage and courtyard opening on Oakdale to be very visible and welcoming to non-residents, so they feel welcomed to utilize the riverfront connecting pathway. The Working Group encourages the team and the City to continue to coordinate with adjacent property owners to understand the feasibility of connecting the riverfront pathway further west, to Oakdale Avenue. Dead end pathways can create future problems.

- **Bird-friendly lighting and design**

The Working Group appreciated the development team’s plan to use dark sky compliant lighting on site because this area of the river is characterized by less existing light pollution overall (compared to other areas), and it is beneficial to keep that condition. The Working Groups suggests a lighting design approach that uses lower height lighting fixtures and strategies like pathway bollard lights to reduce overall light pollution, especially in areas near the water where light can reflect and exacerbate light pollution effects on people and wildlife.

**Additional comment(s) for the Department of Planning and Development:**

The Working Group understands the below comments are outside of the present Chicago River Design Guidelines, but desires to share this feedback with the Department of Planning and Development.

It was shared by the development team that the required affordable units for this residential development were not located on site, but rather the units will be located in another area. The Working Group participants feel that building affordable housing along the river is closely related to the vision of the riverfront as an inclusive space that is welcoming and accessible to all, and encourages developers including for this property to incorporate affordable units on site as part of their plan.

Additionally, there was a desire to further discuss with DPD the feasibility of providing updates to some of the appendices of the Chicago River Design Guidelines, including the planting palette list. These professional best practices and techniques change often and there may be ways to improve guidance for future developments.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to present to the River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback in the planned development process and look forward to the ongoing coordination as the project moves on to future phases. We hope that implementing the above recommendations can be mutually beneficial for the development team, community residents, and the river itself. We welcome the opportunity for feedback, offer our services in the future, and look forward to your responses and collaboration.

Sincerely,

River Ecology Governance Task Force  
Development Review Working Group



*Photos courtesy of Friends of the Chicago River. 2022.*