



Chicago Park District

Legislation Text

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**REQUEST TO INITIATE 45-DAY NOTICE PERIOD
TO NAME CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT PROPERTY
LOCATED AT 140-412 WEST CHICAGO AVENUE
PARK NO. 560 FIELDHOUSE**

To the Honorable Board of Commissioners of the Chicago Park District

I. Recommendation

It is recommended that an order be entered authorizing the General Superintendent or his designee to initiate a 45-day notice period to solicit public input to name the newly constructed field house at Park No. 560, developed in collaboration with the Jesse White Foundation, in honor of Jesse White.

Proposed Park Feature: The Park No. 560 Field House

Location: 410-412 W. Chicago Avenue

Community Area: Near North Side

Ward: #27

Proposed Name: Jesse White Community Center and Field House

II. Explanation

Pursuant to Chapter VII, Section E of the Code of the Chicago Park District, (the Naming Ordinance), which governs the naming and renaming of parks and park features, states that if a proposed name honors a person, the (i) person shall have been deceased for a least one (1) year prior to consideration; and (ii) the person shall have demonstrated a continued commitment and made an extraordinary contribution to civic betterment, locally, nationally or internationally.

Exceptions to the above criteria may be made upon a finding of an extraordinary circumstance by the General Superintendent. In this case, the General Superintendent has recognized just such an extraordinary circumstance in the proposed recommendation to name the newly built fieldhouse at Park No. 560 after Jesse White non-posthumously.

Jesse White is extraordinary not just because he was an accomplished athlete, scholar, visionary, teacher, mentor, coach, war hero, public servant, community leader and public official at the highest levels of government. Jesse White is extraordinary because he has made it his life's work caring about young people in a way that profoundly emphasizes the ethos of the Park District's "Children First" outlook.

Jesse White has provided a tremendous example of civic commitment, engagement and dedication for more than half a century. In 1959, White founded the internationally known Jesse White Tumbling Team to serve as a positive alternative for children residing in Chicago's Cabrini-Green and Henry Horner public housing communities. The organization has guided thousands of youngsters to a path of athleticism and scholarship. Since the team's inception, over 13,000 young men and women have performed with the team. White has worked for over 52 years as a volunteer with the team to help kids stay away from gangs, drugs, alcohol and smoking, and to help set at-risk youth on the path to success.

Jesse White served our country as a paratrooper in the United States Army's 101st Airborne Division, Army Reserves and a member of the Illinois National Guard. He played professional baseball with the Chicago Cubs organization, which was followed by a 33-year career with the Chicago public school system as a teacher and administrator.

He was a gymnast as a kid, taught gymnastics in college and worked as a gymnastics coach and teacher for the Chicago Park District and YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. He was an all-city baseball and basketball star at Chicago's Waller High School (now Lincoln Park Academy) and was inducted into the Chicago Public League Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in June 1995.

Jesse White is the Illinois Secretary of State. Elected November 3, 1998, he is the first African-American and longest serving person in this post. Prior to being Secretary of State, White was the Recorder of Deeds of Cook County. Prior to his election as Recorder, Jesse White served 16 years in the Illinois General Assembly. As a state legislator, he built a solid record for fighting crime, improving education and helping senior citizens. White was chairman of the Illinois House Committee on Human Services. He was an active member of the education committee and the select committees on children and aging. His community service office remains open today as a constant source of information and help for the neighborhood in which he has lived and worked all his life.

In 2007, White established the Jesse White Foundation as a vehicle for making transformational contributions to benefit Chicago's Cabrini-Green community, especially young people. The Foundation worked with the Park District to develop the fieldhouse we now propose bear his name. Contributions of time, talent and finances came together to create this building so that subsequent generations may benefit from the exemplary spirit of commitment to community Jesse White has provided over the last half-century.

Members of the community have proposed that the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners name the new fieldhouse at Park No. 560 in honor of Jesse White. This proposal has support of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Alderman Walter Burnett, numerous community groups and the General Superintendent. The proposed waiver of the provision that an individual be deceased for one year in order to name a feature in his or her honor is an extraordinary step. However, reflecting upon how rare it is that in one lifetime, Jesse White could be such champion of youth and children and also be an accomplished athlete, scholar, visionary, teacher, mentor, coach, war hero, public servant, community leader and public official at the highest levels of government, the waiver is no more extraordinary than the man, himself.

III. Park Naming Procedures

Chapter VII, Section E of the Code of the Chicago Park District, (the Naming Ordinance), which governs the naming and renaming of parks and park features, states that if a proposed name honors a person, the (i) person shall have been deceased for a least one (1) year prior to consideration; and (ii) the person shall have demonstrated a continued commitment and made an extraordinary contribution to civic betterment, locally, nationally or internationally. Exceptions to the above criteria may be made upon a finding of an extraordinary circumstance by the General Superintendent.

In this case, the General Superintendent has recognized Jesse White as just such an extraordinary circumstance and shall exercise the little known provision that allows park features to be named after benefactors who are still alive.

Pursuant to the Naming Ordinance, this request to rename parks have been forwarded to the Secretary of the Chicago Park District, who shall (i) file a copy of this request with the Board of Commissioners (or appropriate Committee); and (ii) initiate a notice period of at least 45 days to provide notice and solicit public input. Such notice shall be posted at the respective subject park field house (or for any park without a field house, at the nearest field house) and shall be sent to advisory councils located within a one (1) mile radius of the subject park. At the conclusion of the notice period, the General Superintendent or his designee may in his discretion recommend to the Board that it approve the requested renames and names.