



Chicago Park District

Legislation Text

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**REQUEST TO INITIATE 45-DAY NOTICE PERIOD
TO NAME PARK 564 AS BIG MARSH PARK
AND TO NAME PARK 562 IN HONOR OF MARIAN BYRNES**

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 Park 564 as Big Marsh Park and to name Park 562 in honor of Marian Byrnes.

Proposed Park or feature: Park 564

Location: 11555 South Stony Island Avenue

Community Area: South Deering

Ward: 10

Proposed Name: Big Marsh Park

Proposed Park or feature: Park 562

Location: 1735 East 95th Street

Community Area: South Deering

Ward: 10

Proposed Name: Marian Brynes Park

II. Explanation

Park 564

The Chicago Park District assigns an official park number to every property. In some instances, parks attain names that are well-known within their communities, even when the sites have never been officially named by the Chicago Park District. In some instances, these parks have signage with those names or are listed in various maps as such. In order to avoid confusion, it is proposed that the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners initiate the 45-day notice period to solicit public input to name Park 564 as Big Marsh Park. This proposal has the support of Alderman Garza, The Nature Conservancy, The Field Museum, Audubon Great Lakes, Friends of Big Marsh, and REI.

Proposed Name: Big Marsh Park

Park 564 is a 278-acre property on the southeast side of Chicago in the area commonly known as the Calumet Area Reserve. Once the site of a waste and slag dumping ground from surrounding industrial operations since the late 1800s, the City of Chicago and the Chicago Park District teamed up in the early 2000s to restore this area to a healthy habitat and eco-recreation park. Roughly 45 acres are developed for eco-recreation opportunities including hiking, adventure courses, and off-road biking. The eco-recreation elements are located primarily on existing slag fields where plants have a hard time growing and good habitat creation is unlikely. Other acreage is reserved for more passive recreation, including bird-watching and nature walking.

Park 562

The Chicago Park District naming and renaming procedures allow for the naming of parks. Alderman Garza requested that the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners name Park 562 in honor of Marian Byrnes. This proposal has support of former state legislator Clem Balanoff, the Environmental Law & Policy Center, The Field Museum, the Calumet Ecological Park Association, the Southeast Environmental Task Force, and Erma Tranter Consulting.

Marian Byrnes grew up on a farm in Indiana. While attending a one-room school, she won the 1938 Scripps National Spelling Bee. She attended Indiana University in the early 1940s, where she began her lifelong activism by organizing one of the first student chapters of the NAACP. After earning her master's degree from the University of Chicago, she embarked upon a career as a Chicago Public Schools teacher.

Throughout her life, she devoted herself to a number of causes, including labor, civil rights, anti-war, and animal welfare. In 1979, she learned of a proposal by the CTA to build a bus garage over a large portion of the Van Vliissingen Prairie, which was behind her home in Jeffrey Manor. Ms. Byrnes founded the Committee to Protect the Prairie, educating herself and others about the importance of the prairie, and was successful in blocking the construction of the bus depot. The open space was later known as the Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area. That was the beginning of what would become a lifetime of protecting the environment and natural spaces. After the Chicago Public Schools, she worked for then-State Representative Clem Balanoff, in a role that ultimately led her to heading the Southeast Environmental Task Force. In retirement, she increased her volunteer activities on a number of environmental issues. Later causes of hers included preventing the paving over of an open space for an airport, working to shut down a hazardous waste incinerator, working to prevent additional landfills in the region, helping to reclaim numerous local wetlands and open lands for cleanup and restoration, and founding Citizens United to Reclaim the Environment. She remained true to her first role as an educator, inspiring a partnership between high schools in the Calumet Area to enable them to research environmental issues in Southeast Side communities. Throughout her lifetime, Ms. Byrnes had been the recipient of numerous awards for her environmental activism, including House Joint Resolution LRB093 10694 KEP 11059, which was presented to her "as an

expression of our respect and esteem.”

Park 562, also commonly known as Van Vlissingen Prairie, is approximately 142 acres and one of the largest natural areas in Chicago. The park includes marsh, wet prairie, prairie, savanna, and woodland, and is home to varied wildlife. Ms. Byrnes passed away in 2010 at the age of 84. It is appropriate that this area, one of her first sites at which to champion the cause of environmental preservation, be named for Marian Byrnes.

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.

Pursuant to the Naming Ordinance, this request to rename and name 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 it 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.