



Chicago Park District

Legislation Text

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REQUEST TO OFFICIALLY NAME JACKSON PARK TURF AND TRACK FIELD IN HONOR OF BOB PICKENS

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 officially name the Jackson Park Turf and Track Field in honor of Bob Pickens.

Proposed Park or feature: Jackson Park Turf and Track Field

Location: East of Stony Island Avenue, west of Hayes Avenue between 62nd and 63rd Streets

Community Area: Wood Lawn

Ward: 5

Proposed Name: Bob Pickens Turf and Track Field

II. Explanation

The Chicago Park District naming and renaming procedures allow for the naming of features in parks, including playgrounds and buildings.

Robert J. Pickens grew up in Illinois. He attended high school in Evanston, where Coach Elias George mentored him and introduced him to wrestling. While attending Evanston Township High School, he was an all-state offensive tackle in football, the 1961 Heavyweight State Champion in wrestling and the 1961 Suburban

Shot Put and Discus Champion. After enrolling at the University of Wisconsin, Bob Pickens was selected as the 1963 pre-season All-American and Big Ten Lineman of the Year during his sophomore term.

In 1964, Bob Pickens was selected for the Greco-Roman Wrestling Team representing the U.S. at the Olympics in Tokyo, Japan. Pickens was the first African American wrestler to compete. He placed sixth in the world. In 1965, Pickens then transferred to the University of Nebraska where he was selected as an All-American candidate, received All Big-Eight offensive tackle honors in football and finished second in the National AAU Wrestling Tournament Heavyweight Division, and equally as important, earned his B. S. degree in Business Administration.

Bob Pickens was drafted to the NFL and played offensive tackle for his beloved Chicago Bears from 1967-1969. Following his three years with the Bears, he spent a year playing for the Edmonton Eskimos in the Canadian Football League. This illustrious sports career as an athlete resumed with Pickens serving as a football official for the Big Ten from 1976-1989. He has worked such games as the Big Ten Championships, the Liberty Bowl, Peach Bowl and Rose Bowl. Pickens also served as national steering committee President of the NFL Players Association and President of the NFL Retired Players Association, Chicago Chapter. Pickens also served a number of years on the USA Wrestling Diversity Committee, helping the organization to expand opportunities within the sport and develop programs that were more inclusive.

Bob Pickens had an extensive business career but made time for others. He volunteered for numerous community and civic organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Better Boys Foundation, the Michael F. Sheahan Youth Foundation and Boundless Playgrounds for children with special needs. He has been honored extensively, most notably with induction into The History Makers Athletic Hall of Fame and The Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame.

In 2000, Bob Pickens joined the Park District Board as a Commissioner and in 2005 was elected Vice President of the Board. In his role on the Park District Board, he was a strong advocate for a number of causes the inclusion of minority and women-owned firms in the District's procurement of goods and services. The creation of an art conservation program to introduce young people to this field as a possible career choice; naming the new field house in the Rogers Park community after Willye White, an outstanding Chicago athlete

and fellow Olympian; the development of a new field house at Jesse Owens Park, named after another fellow Olympian. The design of accessible playgrounds to serve all the children of Chicago equally, sports programming and programming for those served through the District's Special Recreation program. Vice President Pickens also enjoyed engaging in dialogue with citizens who came to address the board on a variety of topics.

Bob Pickens charity work was about mentoring and giving opportunities to children who might not otherwise have them.

Sadly, Bob Pickens passed away on April 12, 2018.

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.

The notice period of forty-five (45) days soliciting public input regarding the naming proposal was initiated on July 16, 2021. There has been positive support for this proposal from Alderman Hairston and the community. Staff recommends that the Board approve the request to name the Jackson Park Turf and Track Field in honor of Bob Pickens.

