Madison Park

For further information, and for additional copies of this pamphlet, please write to:

Madison Park Property Owners Association c/o Truitt, Brown & Truitt Suite 300, The Windermere Hyde Park Boulevard at 56th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 That Madison Park is an unusual place is obvious even at a casual glance—a hundred-year-old ribbon of lush parkland bordered by peaceful residences, an island of serenity in the heart of a busy city. How did such a place come into being? Who is responsible for it now? What are the problems it faces, and how can they be solved? This pamphlet is intended mainly for new residents in the Park, but we hope this brief description of our unique design for urban life will interest the visitor as well.



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Madison Park is in the Kenwood district on the south side of Chicago, lying between Woodlawn Avenue on the west and Dorchester Avenue on the east and between 50th and 51st Streets. The Park itself and much of the area around it was originally the property of a family named Dunham. In 1869 the Dunhams incorporated Madison Park as a private corporation and began selling what were then suburban house lots, whose owners would also control and maintain the grounds within the Park gates. While much of the Kenwood community came to be an upper-class neighborhood of large mansions, the Park seems always to have been less affluent. A few of the original modest homes of the 1880's and 1890's are still to be seen, while others were replaced in the 1920's by apartment buildings, some of them of a more sumptuous character reflecting the prosperity of the times, others comfortable in a less dramatic

Under the impact of the depression of the 1930's and the war-induced changes of the 1940's, the character of Madison Park began to change. The initial changes were not for the better. Much of the property around the Park began to deteriorate as the original

owners died or left the community. Increasing population pressure in the Kenwood area, and the tendency of the suppliers of housing to exploit this demand, soon created a situation of overuse of housing and school facilities in the neighborhood. Kenwood was faced with the threat of an exodus of its original residents and their successors, and it was clear that the possibility of maintaining the viable, stable, integrated neighborhood which they had worked for was in grave jeopardy. But this temptation toward exodus never became a grave reality. Under the leadership of local, interracial community organizations and with the support of the nearby University of Chicago, this process was reversed.

In 1965, the University purchased three large buildings in the Park for married student housing and, for the first time, families with children moved into these multi-unit structures. The new tenants added a further mixture of youth and age to what had become a remarkably friendly, peaceful community composed of people of a wide variety of income levels, races, occupations, and interests. With its current population, Madison Park is now serving more people than ever before in its history.

Madison Park is entirely privately owned; it is the largest of three such private parks left in Chicago. The Park charter since 1869 has provided for "each owner to share in the control and expense in proportion to the number of feet he shall own fronting or bordering on such Park." The Dunham family acted as trustees for the Park until 1926, and since that time its control and maintenance have been the responsibility of all the owners, incorporated as the Madison Park Property Owners Association. Each property owner is automatically a member of the Association, entitled to a vote and obligated to pay Park dues in proportion to his ownership interest. The members annually elect a new Board of Directors which in turn elects the Association's officers.

The most significant aspect of the private nature of the Park is that its owners have virtually complete responsibility for its maintenance, which elsewhere in Chicago would be undertaken by the city itself. We do get municipal police and fire protection, of course, but the sidewalks and curbs and streets as well as the trees and grass and all the other amenities of the Park belong to all of us. The costs of all this which are in addition to city real estate taxes—are not low. In 1967, for example, \$14,000 was spent to repave the Park roads, and from 1970 to 1974 nearly \$7,500 was spent in taking care of our precious trees. In addition, many City ordinances governing the use of public spaces have no legal application within the Park and, therefore, we must set our own rules (ultimately enforceable by the City police on our request) about such matters as automobiles, dogs, and other potential dangers to community residents and property.

The differences among our residents are great and, therefore, the Park is always subject to competing and often contradictory demands. How are we to reconcile the desire of dog-owning residents to use the lawns as a dog run with the desire of other residents to keep the Park clean and pleasant for small children and strollers? Can the Park be used simultaneously as a playground for toddlers, an athletic arena for teen-agers, and a place of quiet refuge for students and the elderly? How can we encourage the enlightening diversity of life styles evident in the Park and at the same time reassure people who have invested much of their savings in their homes that the Park remains a safe place for them and their property?

There are no simple and satisfactory answers to these questions. The Association's Board of Directors must make its decisions based on the familiar utilitarian principle of trying to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. It seeks to reflect the interests of all the kinds of people who live here—including apartment renters as well as property owners—in a continuing effort to preserve and enhance the quality of life in our urban village.

In the Park as elsewhere, ultimate responsibility for civic action must rest on each of us as individuals. And there is plenty of room for action in our small community—not only in making certain the Board of Directors knows your views about Park welfare, but also by helping to enforce the Park rules, working with the gardens and grounds committees, and in other ways. Above all, we hope you will share our pride and pleasure in the kind of life we can achieve together here.

