

**Palmer Square**

**(Logan Square Boulevards District)**

*Palmer Square is composed of a linear park surrounded by streets that connect Kedzie Boulevard with Humboldt Boulevard at Palmer. The square is rectangular, with the original semi-circular ends later cut off when Kedzie and Humboldt Boulevards were extended through the park.*

*The City of Chicago received a grant from the State of Illinois for improvements to this square. A playground and general site improvements were proposed, with five community meetings held to discuss the planning and design. The Chicago Park District (CPD) will oversee the improvements and will then take over the maintenance and programming of the improved park. The two semi-circular 'islands' east and west of the park will remain unimproved and will be maintained by the Chicago Department of Transportation.*

*Julia Bachrach, historian for the CPD, worked closely with the design team and their preservation consultants in identifying the significant features of this landscape and defining guidelines for any new elements that will be introduced. CPD's analysis was based upon preservation brief number 36 Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes and The Secretary of the Interiors Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes.*

**Reason for Review:** Addition to existing feature.

**Significant Features:** All landscaped boulevards and squares located within the District

**Status:** Pre-Permit. The community groups have reviewed the project.

**Applicant:** Bob Foster, Chicago Park District  
Ron Daye, Department of Planning and Development, Zoning Division

**Proposal:** Improvements to Palmer Square including:

1. Enhanced landscape at the perimeter and entries
2. Improve existing recreation trail with a new finely crushed stone surface
3. Eight improved seating areas with new benches, based on historic models
4. Two new accessible drinking fountains, new garbage cans at the perimeter, additional lights at the play area and improved site utilities
5. New central play area

**Items for consideration:** None

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Committee find that the project, with the following conditions, will not have an adverse effect on the significant historical and architectural features of the landmark and approve the project, subject to this condition and review and approval of Landmarks staff:

**As the sculpted play features are developed, shop drawings and/or sketches are to be submitted to landmarks staff for**

**review and approval prior to fabrication. This submittal shall also include material specifications.**

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**Determination of Effect (Article IV, B2):**

*a) The work will maintain the significant historical or architectural feature with no material change to that feature.*

The significant historical or architectural features of Palmer Square are its site design and landscape. The overall existing site configuration will be maintained, with the footprint of the park and the four existing through-paths to remain unchanged. Historically, the landscape was conceived of as trees and shrubs surrounding open meadow-like grass areas in the center of the park. The new perimeter plantings will augment this existing historical scheme.

*f) The work constitutes an addition of a feature where the new feature will not alter, change, obscure, damage, or destroy any significant historical or architectural feature.*

The new play space in the middle of the park is a new feature for the square. The play space is conceived of as three nodes, to break down the scale and better integrate it into the existing landscape. Though this area of the park now has many trees, it was historically planned as an open meadow. In the 1980's, trees were planted by residents in the central meadow area to discourage organized sports. The two meadow areas at the east and west ends were not as altered. The new trees are considered an alteration to the original historic character. The central area of the park was chosen as the spot for the new play area, given this. The area would not be restored back to the open meadow; only two trees will be removed in this scope of work, and those trees will be replaced with two new plantings.

The new benches and light fixtures are based upon historic elements. The new garbage cans and water fountains are not based upon historic elements, but are compatible.

**Criteria for New Construction and Additions (Article IV, D1)**

*a) Size, shape and scale*

*The size, shape and scale of the play area were configured to work within the existing landscape. The play area was broken into three nodes, spaced to work around existing trees and connected by a paved path. The scale of the play equipment was kept small and integrated into the landscape through form and materials.*

*b) Site plan*

The existing site plan will remain, with the addition of a new play area in the center of the square. See discussion above about appropriateness. No fences are proposed as part of this work.

*c) General historic and architectural characteristics*

Historically, there was no playground on this site. The new play area was conceived based upon historic guidelines for site design, see below.

*d) Compatible materials*

The light posts are to be a composite concrete material, which matches the existing posts. The benches are to be iron supports with wood seats. The play area will have a soft, sponge-like surface at grade, in a neutral brown. The play equipment will consist of standard bounce and

spinner equipment in metal and custom sculptural elements out of cast concrete. The paths connecting the play area nodes will be concrete or asphalt.

*e) Impact on critical features*

Staff feels that the proposed project does not have an adverse effect on the critical features of the subject property.

**Historic Guidelines for Site Design, as distilled by the CPD and the design team based upon landscape guidelines:**

*New elements should be –*

*Low in height*

The play equipment was conceived to be low in scale, and when this was not possible, the grade was excavated to allow a dip in the landscape to hide the equipment.

*Natural or natural-looking material and colors*

See description above.

*Be of a size and location such that the square reads as the square*

The central location of the play area minimizes its visibility from the surrounding streets and sidewalks and allows it to blend-in with the existing plantings in the center of the square. From the perimeter, the square will still read as the square.

*Be a minor element of the whole*

The area of the play area is minor and spread out to minimize its impact on the site.

*A complement to the overall naturalistic look “...design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association” of Palmer Square*

This has been achieved through the use of three nodes instead of one large play area, the grade changes to minimize visibility of new elements and the design of custom play elements in neutral materials.

*Palmer Square, with its integrated improvements, should maintain the integrity of the above key features and continue to be a visually logical component of Chicago’s Boulevard System*

**Applicable Guidelines:**

Additions: Working within the existing envelope of an historic structure in order to accommodate space needs is always preferable to building an addition. Additions will be allowed only if they do not alter, change, obscure, damage, or destroy any significant features of the landmark or district. Of particular concern are the effects of an addition on a building’s historic relationship to its site; on a building’s size, shape, and roofline; and on individual design details, elements, or materials which constitute all or part of a building’s significant features. If an addition is appropriate, its design will be guided by the criteria for new construction (see “New Construction”).

Inappropriate changes made in the past: Many buildings have been altered over time; often these alterations represent inappropriate changes. When rehabilitation work is being undertaken, consideration should be given to removing inappropriate additions and changes, restoring the building to its original design and character. Existing situations that are inappropriate may be maintained if no substantial work is to be undertaken on them. However, existing changes that are inappropriate may not be retained if they are to be rebuilt or substantially altered.

**Applicable Standards:**

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.