



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Lucy Hutcherson, Chicago Wilderness
630-234-3906

Waukegan Partnership Plans to Provide Green, Healing Spaces for Their Community

Chicago Wilderness members and partners working in Waukegan, Illinois recently received a generous grant from the TKF Foundation to plan community green spaces that will connect residents living in dense, multi-unit housing developments with nearby nature. The planning kicked off on February 27, as more than 50 community members thought through how to create an easily accessible, healing green space in the heart of the city's downtown.

The community members shared their hopes and aspirations for the neighborhood and made specific recommendations to the project partners and landscape designer, Kaizad Irani of Parkland College. The project is a collaboration between Parkland College, the First Baptist Church of Waukegan, Lake County Forest Preserves, and the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The project advances the goal of Chicago Wilderness' Leave No Child Inside initiative to foster outdoor play and exploration, to benefit children's health and foster a long-term sense of connection to the natural world. Emerging research shows that access to nature is critical to human health. In particular, it promotes healthy childhood development with benefits to children's physical, cognitive, and creative abilities. Dr. Francis Kuo of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will study the impact of the healing spaces on residents' social and emotional health.

One of the planned healing spaces is owned by, and adjacent to, the First Baptist Church of Waukegan. The site has already served as a traditional refuge for neighborhood children who do not have easy access to safe, green spaces. As Rev. Keith Cerk, of the First Baptist Church of Waukegan, characterized the project at the planning meeting, "This space can be one piece of the puzzle of a healthier downtown Waukegan, but we want to design it together with all of you."

The First Baptist Church green space will serve as a sister site to a second one planned at Lake County Forest Preserves' Greenbelt Cultural Center in North Chicago. Project partners hope that the connection between the two sites will also encourage area residents to access services and

programs at other forest preserve facilities that otherwise might remain unknown or underutilized by the community.

The project adds a new component to efforts of Chicago Wilderness members working in the Waukegan area to connect residents with local nature in meaningful and culturally sensitive ways. It also builds on the collaborative restoration and conservation work underway at the Waukegan Harbor and adjacent lake shore, the Waukegan Savanna and other local forest preserve, park district, and community garden sites throughout Waukegan and North Chicago.

A second community engagement meeting will take place on the morning of March 31. The project team plans to apply to the TKF Foundation for an implementation grant in early summer, to bring the planned spaces to fruition.

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About Chicago Wilderness

Chicago Wilderness is a regional alliance that connects people and nature. More than 260 public, private and corporate organizations work together to restore local nature and improve the quality of life for all who live here, by protecting the lands and waters on which we all depend. The four key initiatives of Chicago Wilderness—to restore the health of local nature, promote green infrastructure, mitigate climate change, and leave no child inside—reflect our commitment to using science and emerging knowledge, as well as a collaborative approach to conservation, to benefit all the region’s residents. For more information, visit www.chicagowilderness.org.

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