



To: City of Highwood, Illinois

From: Openlands

Date: July 15, 2025

Subject: Public Comment for July 15 City Council Meeting – Petition to Rezone Parcel #16-10-401-014

Attention: Mayor of Highwood, City of Highwood Manager, Friends of Historic Fort Sheridan

Dear Mayor Pecaro and Members of the City Council,

On behalf of Openlands, I respectfully submit the following public comment regarding the Petition to rezone Parcel #16-10-401-014 as a Planned Unit Development (PUD) to allow for the development of a concert hall and musical campus associated with the Midwest Young Artists Campus Expansion.

Openlands is one of the oldest metropolitan conservation organizations in the nation, working for more than 60 years to protect the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region, including the Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve and the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve. Our mission is to protect the land and water that sustains healthy communities and wildlife, and we write today with concern about the potential environmental impacts of this proposed development.

Upon reviewing the site plan and associated materials submitted with the rezoning application, we have identified concerns related to the **preservation of water quality and quantity** — within the surrounding ecological systems, including the nearby Forest Preserve assets.

The parcel in question is located within a micro-watershed that flows directly into **Lake Michigan**, a globally significant freshwater resource. The increase in impermeable surfaces proposed in the development could contribute to **stormwater runoff**, with the potential to carry pollutants, increase erosion, and disrupt the delicate balance of water quantity and quality essential to maintaining the health of natural ecosystems in the area.

To responsibly assess the implications of this rezoning, we strongly urge the City to require:

- A **comprehensive stormwater management plan** as part of the rezoning application that clearly demonstrates how runoff will be managed and treated on-site, in compliance with best practices and relevant watershed protection standards.

- A thorough analysis of the **site's environmental sensitivity**, including soil conditions, groundwater infiltration potential, proximity to sensitive habitats, and any existing ecological assets.
- A transparent review of how the development may affect **off-site ecological areas**, including Forest Preserve lands and other public natural areas along the shoreline.

Such environmental due diligence is critical and should be completed **prior to any decision** on rezoning this parcel as a Planned Unit Development. We believe that with thoughtful planning and community collaboration, it is possible to meet the needs of development while honoring our collective responsibility to safeguard natural resources.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and remain available to support the City in identifying solutions that both serve community interests and uphold environmental stewardship.

Sincerely,

Michael Davidson

President & CEO

Openlands