Changing Lakefront Land Uses: Chicago and Cleveland

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the history of Northerly Island, the former site of Meigs Field airstrip, in downtown Chicago, Illinois and Burke Lakefront Airport in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. The origins of the airports are discussed with respect to each city’s historical use of the lakefront. The paper will show why Meigs Field is no longer a functioning airport, while Burke Lakefront Airport is still in use. While the two sites had a similar history during the mid-twentieth century, their history diverged in 2003 when Meigs Field was closed. This paper will demonstrate that the closing of Meigs Field was justified, since it returned the land to its original purpose.
Introduction

In the middle of the night on March 31, 2003, at the order of the mayor, bulldozers came and destroyed the runway of Meigs Field, small general aviation airport in Chicago, Illinois. How could this happen and why did it happen in Chicago while not in other cities with downtown lakefront airports like Cleveland, Ohio? The purpose of the paper is to compare the history of the two lakefront airports and examine the reasons for closure of Meigs while Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland is still operating. The history of the two airports is remarkably similar up until the recent decommissioning of Meigs Field. The paper will trace the similar development of the two airports and the reasons for recent difference and will examine how Mayor Daley’s plan for Northerly Island, the former site of Meigs Field, fits in with historic ideas and uses of the lakefront in Chicago.
Background

Chicago

Northerly Island is a rectangular strip of land approximately 100 acres in size originally constructed as an island. It extends north and south along Chicago’s lakefront between Solidarity Drive and Twenty-Third Street approximately a mile and a half from Chicago’s downtown area known as the Loop. The immediate area contains many of Chicago’s major regional cultural and recreational facilities. Grant Park and Millennium Park, both well-known, are located to the northwest. Major cultural facilities including the Field Museum of Natural History, the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Adler Planetarium are located near Northerly Island in the adjoining Museum Campus. Soldier Field, the home of the Bears national football league team is located in Burnham Park across the Harbor from Northerly Island at 14th Street. McCormick Place, the city’s convention and exhibition center, is located on the lakefront at Twenty-Third Street across the water from the Southern tip of Northerly Island. Burnham Park Yacht Harbor, which has moorings for more than 500 boats, is located in the lagoon which separates Northerly Island from the rest of Burnham Park.
Cleveland

Cleveland Burke Lakefront Airport is a general aviation airport located on the shore of Lake Erie, just north of downtown Cleveland, Ohio. Burke Lakefront is considered to be a critical part of the Cleveland airport system. It serves a growing number of corporate jets and air taxi services, and also serves as a reliever airport to Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, which is the Cleveland area’s primary airport. The airport has two runways and two fixed-base operators on the grounds. Burke Lakefront Airport is owned and operated by the city of Cleveland, which also operates Hopkins. Burke Lakefront handles approximately 80,000 operations per year and averages 230 operations per day with 76% of operation consisting of general aviation flight (Woodyard 2004)

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Birth of the Airports

Tracts of land large enough for major airport purposes have been by necessity somewhat removed from the business centers and highly developed residential areas. As a result downtown airports are rare. Speed or travel time is of major importance to air travel and loss of time by surface transportation between the airport and destination tends to limit the widespread use of air transportation particularly for short inter-city service. Therefore, with respect to major airports the time of travel from business districts, from industrial districts and from residential centers is of prime importance in considering the advantages of various sites. The relation of airports to freeways, access to rail and even water transportation should also be carefully considered.

A major airport is defined by the Civil Aeronautic Administration as one which should be restricted to the operation of scheduled transport and large cargo planes. It should be used for either passenger planes, mixed passenger or cargo planes. The initial problem faced in the planning of a major airport is the number of runway directions needed. These directions are governed by the prevailing winds and their velocity in the vicinity of the development. In this report it is considered that the ideal port should be developed with a four directional runway pattern providing a 90 percent wind coverage within an angle of 22.5 degrees from the runway directions.

Runway lengths are based on the region’s altitude above sea level and as recommended by the Civil Aeronautics Administration. The principal runway of a major port should be in the direction of the prevailing winds and should be not less than 6,000 feet, and
does not need to be longer than 7,000 feet in length. All other directional runways should be not less than 5,500 and preferable 5,800 feet effective length (The City of Cleveland 1946).

The capacity of a major airport will be determined by the ability of the terminal facilities to handle the peak hour contact landing and take-off operations which can be safely made on the ports’ runway system. The normal capacity of a major airport with a single runway system has been estimated between 35 and 40 contact movements and about 30 movements for instrument flying conditions during the peak hour. Dual and even triple directional runways may be necessary when anticipated peak hour movements exceed there figures. With a dual systems of runways the field capacity can safely be set at 120 peak hour contact operations and about 90 instrument operations (The City of Cleveland 1946). It is predicted that through the use of Radar equipment that poor weather or instrument landings might equal contact operations.
Northerly Island had been one of several suggested lakefront sites for an airport, which eventually resulted in the development of Meigs Field in the 1940s (Waldheim 2005). Waterfront locations both raised and solved certain urban, environmental, and aeronautical problems. The lake, for example, could serve a wide variety of water-based craft such as seaplanes and flying boats in addition to land-based craft operating from the adjacent shore. But stormy lake-effect weather could make operations hazardous. While an airport in or at the edge of the lake would be conveniently close to Chicago’s Loop, it would be an environmentalist’s and park planner’s nightmare—a hazard to park users, a noisy nuisance, and a potential source of water pollution. It would also be more difficult to engineer and more costly to build and maintain. Consequently, despite the benefits of a waterfront airport near the Central Business District, the decision to build such an airport was delayed until approximately the mid-1940s, even though dozens of schemes had been proposed.

Before Chicago employed Northerly Island as the site for an airport, it was used and considered for other purposes. The city also contemplated other sites for such an offshore airport, from suburban Evanston to points far south of the Loop. Harold F. McCormick was one of the earliest proponents of an airport on the lake. A year after observing the enthusiasm for an air show held in Grant Park in 1911, the industrial magnate envisaged an airport on this site as a “threshold” for “guests” winging their way to the city. While new lakefront was being developed in 1919, city officials began to realize the need for convenient air access to the downtown business district began to debate possible locations for a downtown airport.
Grant Park was less than suitable, not only because an airport would usurp its role as Chicago’s premier park, but because the proximity of buildings would make approaches and departures difficult as larger and faster aircraft became common. Construction began on Northerly Island in 1922, the same year that Mayor William Hale Thompson advocated locating the downtown airport there (Wille 1991). By the late 1920s consensus had grown. In 1924, under the leadership of Charles H. Wacker, the Chicago Plan Commission suggested the construction of two lakefront airports, one of which would be on an island slightly further east from the shore than Northerly Island (Zukowsky 1993). The South Park Commission had voted to place Chicago’s downtown airport on Northerly Island. Other members of the business community concurred. The Chicago Association of Commerce, in its 1928 publication “Chicago–The Aeronautical Center” declared that:

“The city of Chicago has recently taken steps that are expected to lead to an early agreement between the city, the South Park Commissioners and other parties to the Lake Front Improvement Ordinance of 1919 which will make it possible for the South Park Commissioners to proceed with the actual construction of the airport.”

The plans for the airport, however, were not consistent with the ordinance that was passed which specifically stated that new lakefront land should be used for recreational space not municipal or transport facilities (Waldheim 2005). Though Mayor Thompson, in power during a corrupt time period in Chicago, was able to push through many projects that were not supported by the general public, he was unable to change the ordinance or push through the lakefront airport. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, many grand civic plans were
put on hold. The plan for Chicago’s downtown airport was postponed while construction continued on Northerly Island. A planetarium was to be constructed on this island as well as an aquarium on the shore opposite the planetarium. Today they are known as the Adler Planetarium and the Shedd Aquarium.

In a bold move to bring money into the city during the depression, Chicago decided to host a world's fair. The proximity of Burnham Park and neighboring Northerly Island to museums, newly constructed Soldier Field, good transportation, and dramatic lakefront views all made it an ideal location for Chicago’s second world’s fair in 1933. As landfill operations were underway, architect Edward H. Bennett, who had previously designed buildings for the South Park Commission as a member of D.H. Burnham & Company and worked with Burnham on the 1909 Plan of Chicago, began laying out the plan for the fair (Zukowsky 1993). In 1933, the fair opened on Chicago’s lakefront, built on Northerly Island and the south lakefront. It became so popular that it was continued for a second year. Several of the exhibition halls and one of the fair’s famous sky towers were situated on the island which had been further developed for the fair. The World’s Fair titled “A Century of Progress” celebrated the 100th anniversary of the chartering of the Village of Chicago and received more than 38 million visitors during its two years of activity. The theme, the new Art Deco style buildings, and the fair’s focus on technological advances gave visitors a sense of hopefulness and pride during the difficult Depression years. In addition to museum and corporate exhibits, the fair featured attractions such as the “Sky Ride,” which consisted of double-decker rocket cars running along cables between two giant towers, and “Wings of a
Century,” highlighting the century’s advances in transportation from stage coaches to airplanes (Albert 1933). The Century of Progress Exposition was considered a success just as the previous World Fair of 1893, The Columbian Exposition.

The success of the Exposition prompted Mayor Edward J. Kelly to propose the construction of a year-round entertainment facility on Northerly Island, a conventional center on the lakefront, and an airport to be constructed on additional landfill east of the island. The entertainment facility was to have incorporated the already existent 12th Street Beach. Northerly Island was to become the “finest, most magnificent, most up to date recreation ground in America, if possible the world” (Wille 1991). In addition to the beach, there would be a casino and amusement park funhouses with an entrance fee of 25 cents. Burnham Park would be the location of the convention center. The proposed airport was to have 3 runways, a terminal and support facilities, with access provided by the extension of what is now Solidarity Drive on the north and by a bridge extending from 23rd Street. Wacker and his successors to the Plan Commission in the 1920s and 1930s, James Simpson and Colonel A. A. Sprague, all believed that a waterfront airport would beautify the lakefront and add transportation infrastructure. In December 1934 World War I aviator Captain Eddie Rickenbacker complained that air traffic clogged the Municipal Airport which is now known as Midway Airport. He thought that a lakefront airport at 16th Street—considered by the Chicago Plan Commission, backed by Mayor Edward J. Kelly, and supported by the Aeronautics Branch of the United States Department of Commerce—was an ideal solution. Rickenbacker believed that an additional ground facility would lessen congestion at the
municipal Airport at Cicero Avenue and 63rd Street and add a convenient airlink between it and the Central Business District (Zukowsky 1993). Although the Chicago Plan Commissioners and other civic leaders realized the importance of an airport as an integral component of urban access systems, they were unable to implement their idea. The Chicago City Council and Illinois State Legislatures passed resolutions to create the airport. Yet the combination of a poor economy, uncertainty over world events, and mixed civic feelings over the use of the lakefront for an airport delayed construction. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior refused to sign the loan because of the plan for an airport. It was believed that an airport that close to the downtown of a major city would be too dangerous (Waldheim 2005).

Consequently, due to public pressure and fiscal constraints, the federal Works Progress Administration refused to provide funding for the Northerly Island project until 1944.

As a result, little was changed about Northerly Island. In 1938, the Chicago Park District removed the bridge leading to Northerly Island and built a causeway connecting the island to Burnham Park. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Northerly Island featured only paths and walkways, scattered trees and grass, a parking lot and the 12th Street Beach. It was essentially neglected until the mid-1940s except for Adler Planetarium on the northeastern tip.

After the Chicago Citizens Committee, chaired by Mayor Kelly, had failed in its 1945 attempt to persuade the recently founded United Nations to locate its headquarters on Northerly Island, the city returned to the idea of placing an airport on the island (Waldheim 2005). In May of 1946, Merrill C. Meigs, Chairman of the city’s Aero Commission,
recommended construction on an airstrip on the island. His initial recommendation was altered by the City Council in August to include 50 additional acres of landfill on the east side of the island to accommodate aircraft more easily. In September, the Park District, which held title to Northerly Island, agreed to lease the land to the City for $1.00 a year for 50 years. Construction of the airstrip and a small terminal commenced immediately, financed through a bond issue. Engineer Ralph Burke began to construct the small airport, which opened in December 1948 at a cost of $2 million with the provisional name of Northerly Island Air Strip. Six months later the City council renamed the airport Meigs Field, in honor of Merrill C. Meigs (Hillman 1953). In 1951 the Department of Aviation erected a modest, woodframe passenger terminal, and a year later it added an air traffic control tower operated by the Federal Aviation Association. By 1959 the Department of Aviation had made plans to replace the old passenger terminal, which was criticized as a dirty and inadequate shack and the department employed the Chicago architecture firm Consoer and Morgan to design a new, larger terminal, finished in the fall of 1961 (Waldheim 2005). The airfield shared use of Northerly Island with the Burnham Harbor Yacht Club and the citizens who used the 12th Street Beach at the northern end of the island.
Cleveland

Cleveland followed Chicago’s lead in an attempt to raise public spirits and money during the depression. Only once in the city’s history have private commerce and public recreation interests combined on the lakefront to create a grand facility capable of entertaining masses of people: The Great Lakes Exposition. In 1936, Exposition buildings occupied two square miles north of St. Clair Avenue to the lakefront from West Third to East 20th Street (Chapman 1966). Formerly a public dump, the grounds were created by landfill and included a portion of the new constructed Lakeland Freeway. After the exhibition closed, sponsors decided it was successful, and so they scheduled a repeat performance in 1937. Combined attendance for both years was seven million persons. With the fairgrounds, however, lay another threat to recreational development. The Lakeland Freeway ushered in an era of concrete highway construction that continually widened and lengthened, covering the shore, and splitting small city parks in half. Protected by huge stone bulwarks, the freeways blocked what little pedestrian access was left to the lake, and nearly eliminated shore fishing.

In 1946, a downtown airport was proposed to lessen the strain on Cleveland Municipal Airport. The proposed lakefront port was proposed to be located three quarters of a mile from Cleveland’s Public Square on part of the land used for the Great Lakes Exposition. It would be serviced by the downtown Loop Bus which gives easy access and rapid transportation to the downtown business sections and hotels. It would also be adjacent to the Cleveland Memorial Shoreway making it easily and equally accessible to both the east
and west residential sections. The port was planned to cater primarily to amphibious plane operations and have all the facilities for sea plane or hydroplane operations (The City of Cleveland 1946). In addition the field would have two runways which would effectively handle bi-motor plane operations and permit feeder line service and air taxi service planes for shuttle passenger service to the Cleveland Municipal Airport.

Burke Lakefront Airport, a municipally operated air terminal, was located on Cleveland’s lakefront and was built to relieve Cleveland-Hopkins International Airport of the need to handle large numbers of smaller aircraft. A lakefront airport was first suggested by William Rogers during the Great Lakes Exposition of 1936 (Chapman 1966). World War II disrupted planning and it was not until August of 1947 that operations began on a 3,600 foot dirt runway served by a small operations headquarters. Only 202 flights were logged during the first month of operations. Many improvements were made to the facility during the tenure of Mayor Thomas Burke and in 1958 the city council voted to name the airport in his honor; dedicating it on October 9, 1960. As an independent Democrat, Burke was elected mayor in 1945 and served 4 terms. During his administration, he presided over a large capital-improvement program, including the lakefront airport built on landfill, the first downtown airport in the country. In 1957 additional landfill deposited in Lake Erie permitted the construction of a 5,200 foot hard surface runway (Buckley 1966). During the 1970s the airport added a new building, control tower, sales facilities, passenger accommodations, and 6,200 foot runway enabling it to accommodate large, multi-engine jet aircraft. In the 1990s the airport’s focus was on corporate and general aviation. It is now the largest of the five FAA designated reliever airports to Cleveland-Hopkins.
History of the Lakefront

Chicago

The Lake Michigan shore created and shaped Chicago, and it continues to be the city’s most defining physical feature. The city stretches for about twenty-five miles along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan. It was first settled at the convergence of Lake Michigan and the Chicago River, because that river could lead into the Mississippi River system. Since its founding days the city of Chicago has taken pride in its lakefront and availability of open park space. The original plat map of Chicago included a note regarding the future use of the lakefront. It was to be “a public ground – a common to remain forever open, clear and free of any buildings or other obstruction whatever.” The commissioners in charge of dividing the land for purchase also refused to sell the land along the lakefront in the original division of land (Wille 1991). This commitment to preserving open space and the lakefront distinguished Chicago from other cities in the mid-nineteenth century. In spite of or perhaps because of the open lakefront, Chicago played an important role in transportation. Chicago was the crucial intersection between the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River (the East) and the Illinois, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers (the Heartland), and the West. Later, this transportation pattern was duplicated by the national railroad system, with large eastern trunk lines and Midwestern and western rail lines all converging in Chicago. Today Chicago is still a transportation hub due to its central location and size with two major airports.

The first changes to the lakefront were made to the mouth of the Chicago River, near
the site of Fort Dearborn. The river approached Lake Michigan from the west, but originally took a sharp turn to the south before curving back to meet the lake. In 1830, the first plans were made to cut through the sand dune and straighten out the river as it entered Lake Michigan. Once the river was straightened, Senator Stephen Douglas exerted his influence to have new rail lines routed along the lakefront. The tracks were built in shallow water on trestles, but that area was soon filled in (Zukowsky 1993). The renowned Columbia Exposition of 1893 again reshaped the land on the southern shore and created Jackson Harbor. Next, the ambitious Burnham Plan of 1909 reimagined the lakefront as a monumental civic sculpture, complete with parks, lagoons, canals, islands, and promenades.

The most famous plan for the lakefront of Chicago was the Plan of Chicago. The Plan was authored by prominent Chicago architect and planner, Daniel H. Burnham, and Edward J. Bennett, and published in 1909 by the Commercial Club of Chicago. It became the blueprint for Chicago’s existing string of lakefront parks and beaches. Burnham stated in the Plan of Chicago, “First in importance to the city is the shore of Lake Michigan. It should be treated as park space to the greatest possible extent. The lakefront by right belongs to the people. Not a foot of it should be appropriated to the exclusion of the people.”

To this end, Burnham’s plan called for the development of a lakefront park located to the east of the downtown area. Included in the plan was the provision for construction of two symmetrical harbor and recreational peninsulas built at the northern and southern ends of the park. Burnham imagined the location of Northerly Island as one of the northernmost points in a series of semi-connecting manmade islands stretching between Grant and Jackson Parks.
creating a lagoon area (Art Institute of Chicago 1979). His vision for the lakefront park included lagoons, harbors, beaches, recreation areas, a scenic drive and grand stretches of green space that would provide views of both the lake and city skyline. These recreational islands and mile long piers were meant to welcome people coming into the city by boat as well as provide recreation facilities for Chicago's inhabitants. The Plan also included transportation facilities in the form of piers, including what is now Navy Pier. However, it contained no mention of airports for they had not been invented by 1909.

The Burnham Plan of 1909 started an almost continuous program for Chicago, in which the business community has played an active role, of planning for open space and recreation in the central city, especially along the lakefront, which until this day has made a crucial difference to the success and attractiveness of Chicago. Twenty-four of the 30 miles of Chicago’s lakefront are publicly owned and contain public parks and beaches and a multitude of recreational and cultural uses and facilities (Wille 1991). It was recognized that basic to all lakefront policies is the determination that the entire Chicago shoreline should be publicly owned, locally controlled and devoted to public purposes as much as possible. It is within this context that there had been movements for the return of Northerly Island to its intended use as a regional lakefront park and recreational facility for the past quarter century.

Burnham died in 1912, but a news article shows that four years later, Burnham’s partner Bennett advocated that an airport be located on the lakefront. “The lake front appears to offer a site naturally adapted for [airport] terminal facilities,” a 1916 Bennett letter is quoted in the Chicago Tribune on July 13, 1919. “A site on the lake front would appear also
to be more conveniently placed than any other large area available within a short distance of
the central business district.” This statement was a precursor to other plans for airport
location and would be used in later years by groups advocating the continued used of Meigs
Field. At this time, however, the majority of Chicago was committed to Burnham’s plan for
lakefront recreation areas.

On July 21, 1919, the Chicago City Council passed an ordinance entitled, “An
Ordinance for the Establishment of Harbor District No. 3” for the purpose of increasing
lakefront recreational space. This ordinance charged the South Park Commission, a
precursor to the Chicago Park District, with the filling in and reclaiming of the submerged
lands under the waters of Lake Michigan from the Chicago River to E. 67th Street (Wille
1991). As a part of the reclamation process the commission was to create a lagoon between
the reclaimed lands and the shore of Lake Michigan in accordance with the 1909 Plan of
Chicago.

The South Park Commission in addition to creating a new linear park of human-made
islands, planned a boat harbor, bathing beaches, meadows, and playfields, extending from
Grant to Jackson parks. Before any work could proceed, however, many other legal matters
had to be settled. For example, there were various lawsuits between park interests and other
lakefront property owners, and government agencies at every level, including the Secretary of
War, had to approve the plans. In 1920, consent of all parties was finally secured, and voters
approved a $20 million bond issue to finance the project. Landfill operations began at the
northern end of the new park, and by 1925 new landforms were constructed as far south as
23rd Street (Zukowsky 1993). With work on the mainland progressing and Northerly Island taking shape, the South Park commissioners officially named the entire site in honor of Daniel H. Burnham in 1927.
Cleveland

Cleveland’s lakefront has developed in a different matter than that of Chicago. The public recreation potential for Cleveland’s lakefront has been mostly neglected since Moses Cleaveland and his surveyor, Seth Pease, drew the city’s first plan in 1796. Pease divided the Lake Erie shoreline into 29 large residential lots and a public street for wagon traffic (Chapman 1966). Private ownership and community transportation got top priority on the new city’s water front. The land Moses Cleaveland, the city’s founder and namesake, set aside for public ownership and pleasure was Public Square – a common reminiscent of New England – several blocks south of the shore. The event established a precedent. Although great tracts of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County would eventually be set aside for public recreation, Clevelanders have consistently looked inward for parks. The lakefront’s potential was largely ignored. One of the reasons the city turns its back on Lake Erie may be the unpredictable and violent nature of storms blown directly at Cleveland across Lake Erie by prevailing westerly winds. Wind and water erosion have always been a major problem for city residents.

As early as 1820 the lake’s potential for commercial development was recognized. Far-sighted entrepreneurs constructed docks out into the lake permitting large ships to be unloaded that would have run aground in the shallow water near the shore. To protect these private investments, city fathers authorized the incorporation of the privately owned Lake Shore Company in 1837 and allowed the firm to construct bulkheads that would protect the banks from erosion (Chapman 1966). In return for its expenses protecting the shore, the
company was allowed to build wharves and piers for private gain. The company accomplished little. Instead, railroads laid tracks up to the docks and erected their own protective ramparts. The Lake Shore Company’s failure and the railroads’ ambitions construction and growing economic and political power quickly led to an era when railroad tracks essentially covered the shoreline. Although the railroads’ importance would diminish in time, rail owners fought with public officials for years, protecting their private rights to the lakeshore and curtailing public development.

Lakefront park planning, what little there was of it, was in the hands of Cleveland’s landed gentry. William R. Gordon, who loved the shore and maintained a home for years on Water Street near the mouth of the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie was a key figure. In 1870 commercial development forced him to move east. Gordon built an estate where Doan Creek empties into Lake Erie and eventually bequeathed his land to the City of Cleveland (Tittle 2002). In 1893, Gordon Park was opened. His personal plans for the site called for a “great seawall, upper and lower lake drives, groves of trees and a sheep pasture.”

Although there were not many parks along the lakefront, building parks throughout the city became a priority during the latter years of the nineteenth century. By far one of the greatest landmarks of the city of Cleveland is its park areas. The city of Cleveland was once known as the “Forest City” because it had beautiful elm and maple trees lining its streets. Cleveland gained the greatest urban parks system in the United States when William Stinchcomb began the Metropolitan Parks System in 1918 (Condon 1967). The park system was started as an effort to save the city’s precious greenery. The Cleveland Metro Parks, also
referred to as the “Emerald Necklace,” consists of approximately 18,500 acres of park land that circle around the metropolitan area from Rocky River on the west, to the east and, Berea and Bedford to the south. Public parks have become an attribute to this city of industry. Several of Cleveland’s parks, both in and around the city, were donated by prominent citizens.

These parks were needed because in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the city of Cleveland underwent enormous growth and development. Industrialization and its attendant forces transformed the small mercantile town into a thriving, prosperous big city. However, the forces which would earn the city its fortune were the same forces which would lead it into decline. Edmund Chapman, in *Cleveland: Village to Metropolis*, describes a city in which “economic forces reign supreme” over its best interests. Increasing industrialization; expansion of the railroads and retail districts; rising population; air, water, and noise pollution; and an intractable city, both in physical and governmental terms—all contributed to a course of disintegration, congestion, disorder, and deterioration, resulting in “malfunction and disease in the body of the city.” The livability of the town became increasingly worse. In some part of the city, the by-products of noise and dirt resulted in a steady decline which produced substandard dwellings, overcrowded conditions, and uncleanliness. And the design of the town was year by year more completely dissolved into formlessness. Commercial growth began to press on Public Square, park land became woefully scarce, and even exclusive Euclid avenue, “Millionaire’s Row,” “the most beautiful street in America,” began to fall into decline. By the 1890s the city was anything but
beautiful.

Prior to 1850 there was no great need for parkland in Cleveland. The city’s population in 1850 was 17,034. In 1900 it was 381,768; by 1910 it would nearly double to 560,663 (Chapman 1966). Early public parks consisted of town greens such as Public Square in downtown Cleveland and Miles Park in Newburgh, adequate green space for the town in 1850. Areas like Tremont which would be characterized for their high density and congestion at the turn of the century were still rural farmland. Sites for picnics and other weekend recreational activities were within easy reach of the city. However, the rapid growth of the city soon made this situation inadequate, and failed attempts to create parks were made in 1856 and 1865. By the end of the century, Cleveland was considered behind most cities of its class in the development of park space.

The city was able to establish its first Board of Park Commissioners in 1871, and the first park bonds were issued in 1874. The first land was purchased for Lake View Park, overlooking the lakefront. In 1875 Franklin Circle was added, and Lincoln Square in 1879. However, these last two represented only 1.4 and 7.5 acres of park land, respectively.

In 1891 the Park Board was disbanded by the state legislature which ended municipal administration of parks. On April 5, 1893, the Ohio Park Act, a local law, House Bill No. 1180, was created specifically for Cleveland “to provide a board of park commissioners and to provide for the acquisition of grounds for parks, park entrances and park driveways, and for the improvement, management and control” thereof. The act provided the board of park commissioners with the power to issue bonds and acquire land. According to the first Park
Commission report, the law came about as a result of agitation in favor of including in the municipal establishment of Cleveland a system of parks and boulevards which should afford the residents of the city needed pleasure grounds and breathing space, as well as visitors an opportunity of grasping the beauty and importance of the growth of the city, and to endeavor to provide for the “Forest City” a system of parks commensurate with her size and growing importance (Cleveland Landmarks Commission 1991). All of these goals were central to the City Beautiful movement.

By 1896, 1,200 acres of land had been assembled for the park system. Two-thirds of that land had been donated to the city. The park board lacked the resources to maintain, and improved the parkland that already existed. The park board was abolished in 1900 and the administration of the parks was then vested with the City of Cleveland. However, there was still a desire to have more parks in the city. The Cleveland Park Plan map of 1918 shows a series of parkways that would encircle the city (Tittle 2002).
Recent Events

Chicago

In addition to the need for transport facilities, there was also a desire in Chicago for more parkland and to protect what was already there. The Lakefront Plan was issued by the Department of Development and Planning in June 1973. It proposed the expansion of existing recreational areas from the shore, the acquisition of additional privately-owned shoreline, the construction of off-shore islands, and the development of recreational facilities to provide more and varied uses of this vital city asset. The Lake Michigan and Chicago Lakefront Protection Ordinance was passed by the Chicago City Council on October 24, 1973. The ordinance defined a lakefront protection district of varying widths for the entire shoreline of Lake Michigan within the City and set forth criteria designed to preserve and improve the lakefront. It established 3 zones (off-shore, public use, and private use) for which various controls are spelled out, together with the administrative and legislative mechanisms established to insure continued control of development geared toward preserving and enhancing Chicago’s lakefront (Chicago Plan Commission 1973). The ordinance required, among other things, that any development, either public or private, be submitted for review by the City Planning Commission.

In 1980 a plan was developed under Mayor Jane Byrne which called for replacing Meigs Field with a park. The plan did not come to fruition and died out before it could be fully proposed to the public. It would be more than 15 years before another mayor would
publicly try to develop a park on Northerly Island.

In 1996, Mayor Richard M. Daley announced plans to transform Meigs Field into Northerly Island, a model park for the 21st century. The lakefront park would be a fully accessible “outdoor interactive urban ecological museum” (E.K. 1997). The park would extend the earth, water, and sky themes from the adjacent cultural sites, the Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, and Adler Planetarium. Design elements included an enlarged beach, a “sky mound” offering views of Chicago’s skyline, a learning center, botanical gardens, an overnight camping facility, lagoons, and other recreational facilities. If built, “Northerly Island Park would complement Chicago’s magnificent system of lakefront parks,” according to Mayor Daley.

Mayor Daley succeeded in closing Meigs Field on September 30, 1996 when its 50-year lease expired. But state and federal courts prevented the city from demolishing the airstrip, which was prized by business executives as a convenient gateway to downtown. The delay allowed then Governor James R. Edgar’s supporters in the Illinois General Assembly to pass a bill authorizing a state takeover of the airport. The conflict was resolved in early January of 1997, when Edgar and Daley came up with a compromise plan. The airport would be reopened for five years, with the caveat that after that time the City of Chicago’s Park District was free to do whatever it wanted with the land (Johnson 2005). As a part of the compromise, the state was permanently enjoined by the courts from interfering with the land in the future.

Then, in 2001, with regional airport congestion and flight delays at an all-time high,
after a series of major public hearings, Mayor Daley and then-governor George Ryan reached a comprehensive agreement to expand O’Hare airport with 4 new runways, build a new airport in the south suburbs, and preserve Meigs Field for 24 years until 2026, unless the state legislature voted to close it earlier after 2006 (Kamen 1997).

Yet, just a few weeks after being re-elected in 2003, Mayor Daley ordered a midnight destruction of the lone runway on Meigs Field. In a controversial move on March 30, 2003, Mayor Daley ordered private crews to close the runway in the middle of the night, bulldozing large Xs into the runway surface. Sneaking in under the cover of darkness, City of Chicago construction crews began tearing up the runway at about 1:30 a.m. There was no advance warning, not even to the Federal Aviation Association. The airport was closed for good by the city citing homeland security reasons. Chicago’s Mayor Richard M. Daley ordered the closing of Meigs Field effectively ending its use as an airport and opening up the island to a park. The city’s actions caught people by surprise. The Meigs control tower even had no idea about the closing. Closing the airport also closed the tower, which monitored the airspace near downtown Chicago. The required notice was not given to the Federal Aviation Administration or the owners of airplanes tied down at the field, and as a result sixteen planes were left stranded at an airport with no operating runway. They were later allowed to depart from Meigs’ 3,000-foot taxiway.

Mayor Daley defended his actions by claiming it would save the City of Chicago the effort of further court battles before the airport could close. He claimed that safety concerns required the closure, due to the post-September 11 risk of terrorist-controlled aircraft
attacking the downtown waterfront near Meigs Field. Meigs advocates pointed out that Daley had been trying to close the airport since 1995 for non-safety-related reasons.

The after-hours destruction of the airport also brought negative editorials from Chicago-area newspapers. The Chicago Sun-Times complained that “without any advance notice or public discussion, the city vandalized its lakefront jewel, Meigs Field.” Editorials in the Chicago Tribune pointed out that “the issue is Daley's increasingly authoritarian style that brooks no disagreements, legal challenges, negotiations, compromise or any of that messy give-and-take normally associated with democratic government” (Economist).

Interest groups attempted to use the courts to reopen Meigs Field over the following months, but because the airport was owned by the City of Chicago and had paid back its federal aviation grants, the courts ruled that Chicago was allowed to close the field. The FAA did fine the city $33,000 for closing an airport with a charted instrument approach without giving the required 30-day notice—small consolation to groups that were hoping to force the city to restore the airport (Phillips 2003).

By August 2003, construction crews had finished the demolition of Meigs Field, and conversion to a lakefront park was fully underway. In the aftermath, the “Meigs Legacy provision” was passed into law, requiring a 30-day notice to the FAA before the closure of an airport, and maximum fines of $10,000 for every day in violation.

The City has now converted Meigs Field into a 91-acre green open field with pathways circling it. It has returned the island back to uses that were consistent with both the desires of the earliest settlers of Chicago as well as those of the early twentieth century to
preserve the lakefront as open park land available to all people. The return of Northerly Island to park land had been recommended by city officials since the 1970s and it was time to realize that goal. This is a case in which the end justified the somewhat unconventional means. Located past the Adler Planetarium and the 12th Street beach, however, the island park has no compelling attractions for visitors except for a temporary, state-of-the-art concert venue that was built at the northern end of the island in June of 2005. Which was in the process of being dismantled in October 2005 and paved bike and walking trails. Currently there are no plans for the park development, according to a park official. There was no money budgeted for Northerly Island and money is being raised for park development through concert ticket sales from the temporary concert venue at the northern end of the park. It appears as if part of the Burnham Plan for Chicago is finally coming to fruition.
Cleveland

The Master Development Plan of 1979 was published as a guide for the future development of the Cleveland Lakefront State Park which is has park locations to the east and west of Burke Lakefront Airport. The Cleveland Lakefront State Park is a regional, urban park, a comparatively unknown recreational facility in the United States. While there was a need to increase the area of the park, there were no plans to move it closer to the city or to disrupt any transportation or commercial infrastructure along the lakefront of Cleveland’s downtown. The plan specifically called for the airport to stay in operation. At this time, the airport also began to be used for more than just general aviation and commuter flights.

The Cleveland Air Show began at the airport in 1964 and has been held annually since then and beginning in 1981, the airport served as the racetrack for the annual Grand Prix of Cleveland, an Indianapolis-style road race. Critics of Burke Lakefront Airport contend that the land on which the facility sits is far too valuable for the purpose of general aviation. The land, located directly on Cleveland’s underutilized lakefront, could, critics state, be developed into a new business and housing district. However, such critics equate the lack of commercial service at Burke with an airport that is not essential to the region. If the airport were closed, many of the 80,000 annual operations at Burke would shift to Cleveland-Hopkins, causing congestion and delays at the region’s primary airport, affecting all service to the area.
Conclusion

Burke Lakefront Airport is still in operation while Meigs Field is not. This is due to the history and cultures of the cities in which the airports were located. Chicago has placed more emphasis on parkland as was seen in the original plan drawn for Chicago, as well as the 1909 Burnham plan. The lakefront had been set aside for public, not private use. When the shoreline was not used in manners appropriate with the original plan for Chicago, there have been movements to open up the land and increase the parkland. This was done at the end of the nineteenth century in response to the concentration of industry on the lakefront of Chicago and was echoed in the 1909 Plan for Chicago. In the 1970s and 1980s there were calls by separate mayors to return Meigs Field to parkland. However, they were not successful in doing so. It would take a powerful mayor to turn the land into park space. The method may have been unconventional but it did return the area to parkland. Meigs Field, while it could have been considered a public area, was not used as such. It ultimately served private, elite groups which had the money to own personal aircraft or to use small aircraft for travel. Now the land is open to anyone, without charge, and is fulfilling its role as providing recreation space with walking paths and bike trails. Cleveland, however, did not put much forethought into planning for parkland and as such the lakefront is mostly commercial and industrial use now. The airport fits with the other uses of the surrounding lakefront area for industry and transportation. It is unlikely that Burke Lakefront Airport will be closed in the near future and it is now of the few remaining downtown airports currently in use. Time will tell if Cleveland follows in Chicago’s footsteps and opens up the lakefront to its citizens.
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