



# City of Chicago



R2021-970

Office of the City Clerk

## Document Tracking Sheet

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	9/14/2021
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	Burke (14) Sposato (38) Napolitano (41)
<b>Type:</b>	Resolution
<b>Title:</b>	Commemoration of 150th Anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire
<b>Committee(s) Assignment:</b>	

**WHEREAS**, October 8, 2021, officially marks the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire, a calamitous event that left 300 people dead in its wake, 90,000 residents homeless, and 17,450 buildings destroyed resulting in the loss of \$200 million in property spread across four square miles (2,000 acres) from DeKoven Street on the south up to Fullerton Avenue; and

**WHEREAS**, the Chicago City Council has been informed of this important anniversary by Alderman Edward M. Burke; and

**WHEREAS**, the conflagration began in the rear lot of the property owned by Patrick and Katherine O'Leary at 137 DeKoven Street in the Conley's Patch district on the Near West Side shortly before 9:15 p.m. under suspicious circumstances; and

**WHEREAS**, as vicious, prevailing winds blowing in from the west fanned the flames, the fire quickly jumped to the adjoining barns, sheds and wooden residential dwellings before the resources of the Chicago Fire Department could adequately respond; and

**WHEREAS**, the firemen, worn out and exhausted by their labors from the previous day battling a day-long downtown fire in unusually hot and dry weather conditions that year, required 45 minutes to arrive at the point of origin on the West Side; and

**WHEREAS**, by which time the fire was out of control as hoses burst, equipment broke down and inadequate low water pressure failed to contain the wall of flames; and

**WHEREAS**, one by one, entire neighborhoods fell, from the impoverished immigrant quarters to exclusive Park Row and Terrance Row dwellings, the central business district, government buildings, the city bridewell, houses of worship and the retail and dry goods businesses along Lake Street driving thousands of terrified families into the streets as they attempted to cross the congested bridges spanning the Chicago River to the presumed safety of the North Side to escape wholesale death and destruction; and

**WHEREAS**, the city's most notable hotels and public buildings including the Sherman House, the Tremont House, the Palmer House, the Grand Pacific, the new Crosby's Opera House, McVickers Theater, Marshall Field's Department Store were all lost to the on-rushing inferno; and

**WHEREAS**, by 1:30 a.m. on the second day of the fire, the courthouse and Randolph Street where the present-day City Hall and Cook County Building now stand, collapsed and to the horror of everyone, the fire jumped the Chicago River and consumed much of the then sparsely populated Near North Side; and

**WHEREAS**, the intense heat forced fleeing families to wade into Lake Michigan adjoining Lincoln Park and stand in water up to their noses for protection as cinders and debris rained down; and

**WHEREAS**, welcome rains pelted the city late in the evening of October 9<sup>th</sup>, by which time the fire had finally begun to burn itself out; and

**WHEREAS**, the smoldering ruins cooled, and the mechanisms of city government resumed from inside the First Congregational Church; and

**WHEREAS**, surveying the bleak landscape, it was discovered that the grain elevators to the west and the stockyards to the south had survived in-tact, but only a handful of buildings in the fire zone were spared, including the Water Tower and pumping station, St Michael's Church on the North Side, St. Ignatius Church to the west, several North Side private residences; and

**WHEREAS**, over the next two decades, the City of Chicago rebuilt its' infrastructure and commercial, government and residential buildings at a remarkable space, utilizing more sustainable and fire-resistant construction materials including brick, stone, steel, and mortar; and

**WHEREAS**, out of the ashes emerged a bold new Chicago, giving rise to a generation of imaginative architects and city planners including Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, Dankmar Adler and William LeBaron Jenney that collectively became known as the First Chicago School of Architecture; and


**WHEREAS**, there are few surviving landmarks from the calamitous fire of October 9-10, 1871 in our modern age apart from the Water Tower and Pumping Station; and

**WHEREAS**, an urn-shaped finial, one of twenty-four decorative pieces of masonry that stood atop the old Chicago Courthouse roof at Clark and Randolph was salvaged from the ruins and repositioned in Lincoln Park at Clark Street and Armitage Avenue; and

**WHEREAS**, this historically-significant artifact situated nearest the northern boundary where the Great Chicago Fire finally ended on October 10<sup>th</sup>, has been ignored and rarely noticed by members of the public; now therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the Mayor and the members of the Chicago City council assembled this fourteenth day of September 2021, do hereby recommend and authorize the placement of a commemorative plaque to be affixed at the base of the Chicago Courthouse finial by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that suitable copies of this resolution be presented to the Chicago History Museum for their permanent Chicago Fire Archive.

  
Alderman Edward M. Burke  
Alderman, 14<sup>th</sup> Ward



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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
ANNA M. VALENCIA

## Chicago City Council Co-Sponsor Form

Document No.:

Subject: Resolution regarding the 150th Anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire

### Adding Co-Sponsor(s)

Please ADD Co-Sponsor(s) Shown Below – (Principal Sponsor's Consent Required)

Alderman Nicholas Sposato

Ward)

(Signature)

Alderman

Ward)

(Signature)

Date Filed:

9-9-21

Principal Sponsor:

(Signature)

### Removing Co-Sponsor(s)

Please REMOVE Co-Sponsor(s) Below – (Principal Sponsor's Consent NOT Required)

Alderman

Ward)

(Signature)

Alderman

Ward)

(Signature)

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- Chairman of Committee to which legislation was referred
- City Clerk



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Please **ADD** Co-Sponsor(s) Shown Below – (Principal Sponsor's Consent Required)

Alderman

Anthony Napolitano

(Signature)

Anthony Napolitano

☒ Ward

Ward)

Alderman

(Signature)

☐ Ward

Ward)

Date Filed:

9-10-21

Principal Sponsor:

Edwards. B...

(Signature)

### Removing Co-Sponsor(s)

Please **REMOVE** Co-Sponsor(s) Below – (Principal Sponsor's Consent **NOT** Required)

Alderman

(Signature)

☐ Ward

Ward)

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