

= Park Grill =

The Park Grill is the only full @-@ service restaurant included in the multibillion @-@ dollar Millennium Park project in Chicago , Illinois . Its outdoor seating area is the largest al fresco dining area in Chicago . It has placed among the leaders in citywide best @-@ of competitions for best burger and is widely praised for its views .

The exclusive location , the lucrative contract terms , the investor list , and a close personal relationship between a managing partner of the restaurant and the Chicago Park District 's project manager led to a formal ethics investigation , court litigation , and extensive press coverage , and ranked among the most prominent scandals of the administration of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley in 2005 . The more than 80 investors include some of Daley 's friends and neighbors . One of the most financially successful restaurants in Chicago , the Park Grill remains exempt from property taxes after a multi @-@ year litigation which reached the Illinois Supreme Court .

= = Location and views = =

The Park Grill is located on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago in the Historic Michigan Boulevard District . Cloud Gate , a public sculpture , is located on AT & T Plaza on the roof of the Park Grill .

During the summer months , the restaurant 's outdoor seating area becomes the largest al fresco dining area in Chicago . During the winter months , the restaurant 's outdoor seating area becomes the McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink , and diners in the 300 @-@ seat The Park Grill overlooks the ice skating rink through floor @-@ to @-@ ceiling windows .

= = History = =

In late 2001 , Matthew A. O 'Malley and James Horan proposed Park Grill and Park Cafe to " provide both white @-@ tablecloth meals and picnic @-@ hamper fare for visitors in Millennium Park " . In 2003 , the Chicago Park District awarded a 20 @-@ year contract to run the Park Grill to a partnership , including several of Mayor Richard M. Daley 's friends and neighbors .

= = Background of managing partners = = =

The current managing partners of the Park Grill are O 'Malley and Horan . O 'Malley , who once worked for the U.S. Representative Dan Rostenkowski , runs the re @-@ purposed firehouse , Chicago Firehouse Restaurant , which is located around the corner from the home of Mayor Richard M. Daley , who has been a steady customer . The son of Alderman Edward Vrdolyak has also been a business partner with O 'Malley . Matthew O 'Malley and his brother Paul were picked to run the Clock Tower Cafe at the Sydney Marovitz Golf Course in Lincoln Park on the Chicago lakefront . James Horan is a restaurant owner and caterer . He is president of Blue Plate Catering , which runs a cafe at Gallery 37 , an after @-@ school program created and fostered by Mayor Daley 's wife , Maggie Daley .

= = Background of investors = = =

O 'Malley obtained commitments from over 80 prospective Park Grill investors , including some of Mayor Daley 's friends and neighbors . Each share of the restaurant cost investors \$ 200 @, @ 000 . Among the investors are Daley 's friend Fred Barbara , a nephew of the late Chicago Alderman Fred Roti . Barbara has ties to the Hired Truck Program scandal and the blue bag recycling controversy . Other investors include relatives of Daley 's political adviser Timothy Degnan , two neighbors of the mayor , Ray Chin , an O 'Hare Airport contractor , and Rick Simon , a controversial figure who runs a janitorial business and sits on the board of the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau . Also among the investors was Daley 's cousin Theresa E. Mintle , then the Chicago Transit Authority ? s director of governmental affairs and former congressman Morgan F. Murphy , who has had business

dealings with convicted labor union official John Serpico . Among the vendors for Park Grill was an architectural metal company owned by the son of then Chicago Alderman Burton Natarus ( 42nd ) .

= = = Contract award process = = =

O 'Malley 's and two other groups submitted proposals to run the restaurant in September 2001 . The Park Grill group 's proposal was twice as long as the other two but , technically , promised the Park District the lowest revenues . By the end of the year , O 'Malley 's team had been selected to run the restaurant , souvenir and concession stands , and a cafe in the new Millennium Park .

The Park Grill contract was signed February 11 , 2003 . The contract requires that Park Grill to pay a percent of net sales and an additional fee of \$ 275 @, @ 000 per year , but the latter was not due until the Park Grill recouped half its build @-@ out costs . As part of its deal , the Park District pays for water , gas , and garbage collection at Park Grill . The garbage pickup costs taxpayers about \$ 245 @, @ 000 annually .

= = = Park District project manager 's relationship with contractor = = =

The Park District team , including an outside consultant , spent 18 months negotiating a contract with O 'Malley 's group . During that time , Laura Foxgrover , a top official in the Park District department directly overseeing the deal , gave birth to O 'Malley 's child . Prior to working for the Park District , Foxgrover had been an employee of O 'Malley as director of operations at the Chicago Firehouse Restaurant . Foxgrover held the title " senior project manager " at the Park District at an annual salary of \$ 94 @, @ 000 . In May 2002 , Foxgrover wrote a memo recusing herself from negotiations , without saying why , and never told her superiors she was carrying O 'Malley 's child . The girl was born in September , 2002 .

Foxgrover remained involved in the Millennium Park restaurant after she recused herself from contract negotiations in May , 2002 . In October 2003 , Foxgrover spoke in favor of the restaurant getting a liquor license before a Chicago City Council committee while O 'Malley owed Foxgrover at least \$ 5 @, @ 000 . On the same day , Foxgrover worked to get O 'Malley 's Clock Tower Cafe a liquor license . In one July 2003 e @-@ mail , Foxgrover , then the acting director of park services , said that if O 'Malley 's contractor had any questions for the Park District , she will be the point person . In August 2003 , Horan sent out an e @-@ mail mentioning a discussion Horan had with Foxgrover , in which Horan asked Foxgrover if the Park District would waive a form of insurance on the restaurant 's construction . A provision in the Park Grill contract allows the restaurant to arrange a series of summer concerts on the Millennium Park ice @-@ skating rink , drawing crowds that bolster food and drink sales . In summer 2004 , O 'Malley and his partners asked Clear Channel @-@ owned WNUA Radio to conduct the concerts . In February 2005 , Foxgrover led a five @-@ member Park District committee that chose Clear Channel over JAM Productions to operate the new concert venue at Northerly Island on the former site of Meigs Field .

Foxgrover was the subject of an ethics investigation . An ethics officer for the Chicago Board of Ethics concluded that Foxgrover did not violate the district 's ethics ordinance and should be allowed to keep her \$ 90 @, @ 000 @-@ a @-@ year job as the Park District 's director of development . By 2008 , Foxgrover had left the Park District to work for O 'Malley 's restaurant management company .

= = = Exemption from property tax = = =

On March 16 , 2005 , Cook County Assessor , James Houlihan 's office sent Horan and O 'Malley a letter notifying Park Grill that it was being assessed at \$ 502 @, @ 550 and that it would be sent a bill in the fall for 2004 property taxes . On August 5 , 2005 , Horan and O 'Malley filed a lawsuit against the assessor , asking that a judge prohibit the county from imposing property taxes . The owners asserted that their contract to run Park Grill was a property tax exempt concessionaire agreement and not a taxable lease . The state 's attorney 's office , which defended the assessor in

the case , said " our position is that the Park Grill is a leaseholder and as a leaseholder they are subject to taxes . " In 2009 , an appellate court affirmed the circuit court 's finding that the agreement to run Park Grill was not a lease but a license . In December , 2010 the Illinois Supreme Court with a 4 @-@ 3 vote affirmed the lower court decisions maintaining the Park Grill ? s " agreement with the Park District created an untaxable license as opposed to a taxable lease " to do business .

= = = Daley administration response = = =

Mayor Richard M. Daley criticized the Park Grill deal , blaming Chicago 's Corporation Counsel Mara Georges , saying that lawyers for the city and the Chicago Park District erred and that the city wanted to renegotiate the pact . " Lawyers do make mistakes , " Daley said . " That 's what it was . ... It 's embarrassing to them . Yes it is - the corporation counsel and the Park District counsel . " Chicago Park District Superintendent Tim Mitchell said the Park District also wanted to renegotiate the contract . In a February 9 , 2005 letter to O 'Malley and Horan , Georges warned that the concession agreement " does not authorize your occupation of the Park Grill facilities " because the city owns the land , and City Hall should have been party to the original agreement when it was not . On February 11 , 2005 , Daley asked state lawmakers to impose tougher penalties for defrauding tax payers , and was questioned by reporters about why the Park Grill had not paid any property taxes and gets free gas , water and garbage pick @-@ up . Erma Tranter , president of the Friends of the Parks watchdog group , speaking at a Park District Board of Commissioners meeting , questioned why the Park Grill contract had yet to be renegotiated 11 months after Mayor Daley vowed to do so . The Chicago Sun @-@ Times dubbed the Park Grill the " Clout Cafe " and included the contract award process in a year @-@ end review of 2005 Daley administration scandals .

= = = Profitability = = =

The grand opening was set for November 24 , 2003 . In its first year of operation , Park Grill paid \$ 162 @,@ 656 @.@ 72 in rent . The 2004 / 2005 Zagat Survey named the restaurant among the five " Top Newcomers " to Chicago . The Park Grill began making money for its investors in 2006 , its third year of operation , when investors split \$ 527 @,@ 250 in profits . In 2008 , the Park Grill was named one of the top 100 highest @-@ grossing independent restaurants in the U.S. , serving approximately 300 @,@ 000 meals and grossing approximately US \$ 12 million in sales , making it the seventh largest independent restaurant in terms of sales in Chicago in 2007 , according to Restaurants & Institutions magazine . The Park Grill remains exempt from property taxes , and the contract has not been renegotiated .

= = = Emanuel administration response = = =

Daley announced he would not seek a seventh term , and in the final months of Daley 's last term , the owners of the Park Grill , including O 'Malley and Barbara were reported as interested in selling . Daley 's successor , Mayor Rahm Emanuel appointed Theresa E. Mintle , one of the Park Grill investors , as his \$ 174 @,@ 996 @-@ a @-@ year chief of staff . Three days after Emanuel took office and Mintle started work as his top aide , Mintle transferred her financial stake in the restaurant to her husband .

On December 1 , 2011 , the Emanuel administration sued the Park Grill operating company , and the Chicago Park District , asking a judge to end the generous 2003 concession agreement with the Chicago Park District . The city wants the Park Grill operator , which is trying to sell the restaurant , to pay more for the privilege of operating at the park . On December 15 , 2011 the Park Grill operators filed a counter suit against the City and Park District . In June , 2013 O ? Malley and Foxgrover were married by Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne M. Burke . By October , 2013 the City had paid more than \$ 749 @,@ 000 and the Park District more than \$ 585 @,@ 000 in legal fees . Deposed in August , 2013 in the lawsuit , Daley responded " I don 't recall " 139 times . ? In

the Park Grill situation , city taxpayers were taken advantage of . They did not get a fair pricing for that property , ? Emanuel said . Chicago Sun @-@ Times columnist Mark Brown summarized " the Park Grill story " as

Guy meets girl . Guy owns a restaurant . Girl handles valuable Park District restaurant concession . Guy and girl make a baby together . Guy gets concession deal . Mayor knows nothing . Nothing ! But a bunch of his pals invest in what city lawyers later call a ? sweetheart deal . ?

On September 24 , 2015 , the court ruled in favor of the Park Grill , rejecting the Emanuel administration ? s claims that the contract was invalid .

= = Menu = =

The menu is traditional American food with international influences . Zagats describes the cuisine as New American . Bernard Laskowski , formerly of Chicago restaurants Marche and mk , is the executive chef . The Park Cafe , adjacent to the Park Grill , offers takeout food such as salads and sandwiches .

= = Critical reviews = =

The restaurant is notable for its views , its location , and its cuisine , especially its hamburgers . Zagat lists Park Grill as one of the " choice outdoor spots in town . " New City Chicago magazine named it one of the top 100 essential restaurants in the city , urging , " Ignore the scandal over sweetheart deals with the city for a moment and consider this : Park Grill sits in the hottest spot in the city today , if not in America . " In the 2006 / 07 and 2008 / 09 editions , Zagats respondents ranked it among the best of Chicago in the " Outdoors " and " Views " categories and lauded its fireplace .

Park Grill hamburgers achieved high citywide rankings in several publications , including best burgers in Time Out Chicago ( 2005 ) , Chicago Magazine ( 2008 ) and Citysearch ( 2008 ) .

The Unofficial Guide to Chicago points out the " spectacular view of the Chicago skyline , fronted by the ice rink at Millennium Park . " Fodor 's Chicago 2010 says " Location trumps service at Park Grill , where a seat on the patio in summer , in full view of Millennium Park , is among the best in the city . Sadly , the waitstaff lapses ... " The National Geographic 's website 's Chicago Walking Tour : Millennium and Grant Parks recommends the Park Grill as it " allows you to admire the surrounding architecture passively . " The restaurant was noted as one of the " 99 Best of Chicago , " named as one of three under the category of " Best Restaurants with a View " in Night + Day Chicago . The location , " under ' the bean ' or next to a swarm of ice skaters , all convenient to the Loop , " was cited by Crain 's Chicago Business as a reason for including Park Grill as one of Chicago 's best restaurants for business dining in 2010 .