

Chicago Tribune



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Southeast Side residents push back

Opponents, activists blast proposal to allow mining for underground complex

By Nara Schoenberg
Chicago Tribune

Environmentalists and community activists are blasting a proposed ordinance that would allow mining in Chicago and open the doors to a controversial project on the heavily polluted South-

east Side.

"I want people to think about this," Oscar Sanchez of the Southeast Environmental Task Force said in a Zoom news conference Thursday.

"If a mine was proposed in Lincoln Park, or in the South Loop, that would be shut down immedi-

ately," he said. "There would be no question people would see that as absurd. Yet here we are, facing the same proposal in our community."

Speakers at the news conference were particularly concerned about the Invert, a proposed two-story underground commercial real estate complex with 6 million square feet of leasable space. The project would be located on the Southeast Side, near George Washington High School.

The project website says the

Invert would be "the biggest job creator on the far South Side in decades," leading to over 3,000 permanent new jobs in the region.

There would be a new park, a community center, EV charging, a community solar field and ecological restoration.

But opponents point to the lead investor: Ozinga Ventures, an independent investment group established by the Ozinga family, owners of a construction materials business based in Mokena. Limestone,

which would be removed to create the Invert's underground complex, is a key ingredient in cement and concrete.

The Invert, which did not respond to requests for comment, denied that mining is the goal in an FAQ on the project website, saying that the economics don't pencil out.

"Our interest is in the uniqueness, size and location of the

Turn to Mining, Page 5



EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CPS charter supporters rally

Chicago Public Schools charter school parents and supporters hold a rally outside CPS headquarters ahead of a Chicago Board of Education vote Thursday on renewing contracts with 49 publicly funded charter schools. Those at the rally demanded longer renewal terms than the one to four years CPS Chief Executive Officer Pedro Martinez recommended. The board later approved each proposed renewal agreement in a series of unanimous votes, with two abstentions. **Chicagoland, Page 2**

Trump takes stand briefly in trial over defamation

Ex-president testified for under 3 minutes, broke judge's rules

By Jake Offenhartz,
Jennifer Peltz
and Larry Neumeister
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump testified for under three minutes. But he still broke a judge's rules on what he could tell a jury about writer E. Jean Carroll's sexual assault and defamation allegations, and he left the courtroom Thursday bristling to the spectators: "This is not America."

Testifying in his own defense in the defamation trial, Trump didn't look at the jury during his short, heavily negotiated stint on the witness stand. Because of the complex legal context of the case, the judge limited his lawyers to asking a handful of short questions, each of which could be answered yes or no — such as whether he'd made his negative statements in response to an accusation and didn't intend anyone to harm Carroll.

But Trump nudged past those limits.

"She said something that I considered to be a false accusation," he said, later adding: "I just wanted to defend myself, my

Turn to Trump, Page 9



Riverside Brookfield High School District 208 Superintendent Kevin Skinkis takes part in a school board meeting on Tuesday. **CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Cook County leaders may walk back paid leave rule

Suburban officials have lobbied against adding the benefit

By A.D. Quig
and Zareen Syed
Chicago Tribune

Responding to a robust lobbying effort, Cook County leaders are moving to exempt thousands of suburban park and school district employees from a new Cook County ordinance that strengthened paid leave policies by allowing workers in the county to take time off for any reason, not just

sickness.

Decrying an unfunded mandate and scant notice about how to implement the hastily passed ordinance, several suburban park and school district leaders urged the county to exempt them from the union-backed initiative. With enforcement efforts kicking in next week, the park and school district leaders mounted a letter-writing campaign in recent days and pleaded their case at the Cook County Board meeting on Thursday.

Their pushback led to an unusual split between some

city and suburban county commissioners over whether to partially unwind the new rules. Dozens of suburban district leaders said the requirements are confusing and burdensome, and would lead to cutbacks, reduced services or increased fees for residents.

Shortly before the holidays, the Cook County Board passed its own expanded version of the state's paid leave law. That new state law, which took effect Jan. 1 across Illinois for employees of businesses of any

Turn to Ordinance, Page 5

Chicago cash plays in race in Houston

City Hall insiders' funds go to mom of Johnson aide in mayoral bid

By Alice Yin
and Gregory Royal Pratt
Chicago Tribune

When Houston mayoral candidate Sheila Jackson Lee visited Chicago to fundraise last year, she found a faithful ally in Mayor Brandon Johnson.

Standing onstage at an August fundraiser in the West Loop, Johnson applauded their shared progressive values. Then he made a more unique appeal on behalf of the longtime Democratic congresswoman, noting to the crowd her connection to one of his most important City Hall advisers, according to a recording posted on YouTube.

"Now, my senior adviser and the political brain trust that really has affirmed my conscience is the son of the next mayor of Houston, Texas," Johnson said, referring to his top aide, Jason Lee.

Johnson continued: "And so if the son of Houston, Texas, can elect a mayor in the city of Chicago, well, Chicago, we got to make sure that Houston elects Sheila Jackson Lee as the next mayor of the city of Houston."

Jackson Lee would go on to get a financial boost in her Texas campaign from Chicago City Hall insiders, bringing in more than \$51,500 from city contractors, lobbyists and politicians between that August fundraiser and her loss in the December runoff, a Tribune analysis found. In total, her

Turn to Houston, Page 4

INSIDE



EILEEN T. MESLAR/TRIBUNE

Appraising choices Bears GM made

Ranking the 10 major decisions made by Bears GM Ryan Poles on the two-year anniversary of his hiring. **Chicago Sports**

Border deal, Ukraine aid in jeopardy

Former President Donald Trump's opposition may kill compromise pairing in the Senate. **Nation & World in Business, Page 4**

'Something about our times'

Actor Dana Delany corresponded with a fan on Twitter. What happened next is "Highway Patrol" at the Goodman Theatre. **A+E**

