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**Alderman Emma Mitts OP-Ed Response
Regarding Public Safety Academy
March 18, 2018**

Come on. Are. You. Serious? Really?!?

If you live on the West side like I do, sometimes it seems like you have to fight for every inch of access and opportunity - - while places like Lincoln Park have it easy.

And if you don't believe us, look no further than the proposed new park on the north side that could cost the city as much as \$200 million. Yep. You read that number right. And guess what else? You haven't read, seen or heard anyone complaining about the City's limited resources going to another new park in one of the city's choice areas like Lincoln Park, now have you? There's no protest, no negative blog or #hashtag condemning it.

It is the height of hypocrisy when a plan to spend as much as \$200 million on a new park near Lincoln Park is met with crickets, while an economic development plan to invest about \$100 million in the West Side for a much-needed Public Safety Training Academy is met with criticism and condemnation from some.

Talk about misplaced priorities! I remember a few years ago, there was a major uproar when we wanted to build a new Walmart in our west side community. Today however, Walmart stores are an accepted retail commodity throughout Chicago. Now there erupts another controversy when we want to build a new space for Chicago's first responders to get the best training, designed in part to help facilitate improved relations in our community. But no one seems to have a problem breaking the bank on a new park that would cost the city more than a pretty penny? Give us a break.

Let's be crystal clear. The future Public Safety Training Academy is no "cop academy." There is a time and place for hashtags and soundbites, but not when they muddy the waters, hide the facts and distort the truth.

We are talking about a place where firefighters, paramedics, and police officers will train and work jointly so they can better serve Chicago residents together. We're talking about a place where important techniques in de-escalation with community members will be taught. We're talking about a place where our first responders can learn how to better interact with homeless, other troubled at-risk and mentally ill residents. We're talking about a place that will create dozens of businesses nearby and be an economic engine to help revitalize a community that needs and deserves more investment, not less.

We're not asking for handouts, but it would be nice if the same critics who say we can't afford a West side community investment actually had something to say when the city is asked to pay through the nose for investments in any other area.

The City has worked closely with us and our communities to do the right thing and drive development in our neighborhoods. We told the City: Having thousands of first-responders reporting for training every day will add a strong public safety presence and economic jolt to our neighborhoods. When those officers go for morning runs, they will be running on our streets. When they go for a bite to eat, they will be spending money in both our current and future new restaurants, stores and diners.

Beyond this development, the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund is giving millions in grants to support dozens of small businesses on the South and West sides, like pharmacies in North Lawndale, a theater in West Austin, a restaurant in Austin and a wholesaler in South Lawndale. CTA is building a new Green Line station at Damen. A new business incubator for the food industry, The Hatchery, has opened up in East Garfield Park. There's a whole new state-of-the-art building for Malcolm X College.

But does anyone in this city seriously believe the West Side doesn't need more strategic neighborhood investment? More diverse economic development? What about additional public safety resources?

We have a message for anyone who wants to make political hay over the new training facility. Don't just talk - - work with those of us who also walk the walk. Here's an invitation. Come to the West Side and tell our residents the investment isn't needed. Better yet, walk a mile in our shoes or join us to tour a block in our wards, before running to news cameras to throw stones or criticize something that Chicago needs as plain as day. Take a look at the Obama Justice Department report on Chicago policing and tell us our public safety officials do not need a new training facility.

We don't blame our colleagues for advocating for their communities, but let's be serious, Chicago. Before we think about spending a boatload of money to build a big park on the near north side, let's make a needed investment in a part of town that truly needs it.

Emma Mitts
Alderman – 37th Ward