

## Controversial streetlights coming to New Eastside

By Tricia Parker — Staff Writer

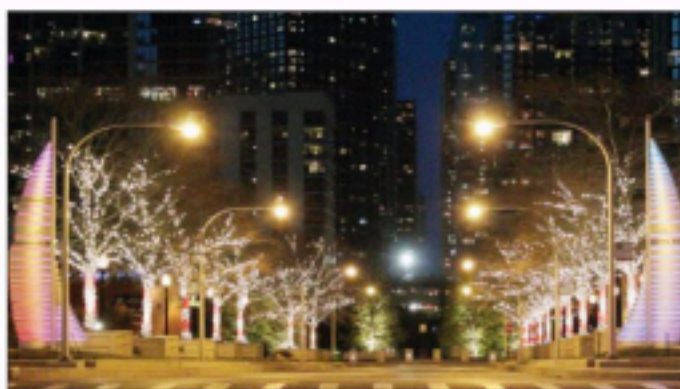
The Chicago Smart Lighting Project, an initiative of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's Chicago Infrastructure Trust (CIT), aims to replace nearly all the city's 290,000 "amber" streetlights with "white" energy-efficient LED lights over the next four years. The change will affect all "orange" streetlights in the New Eastside and will be one of the largest installations in the world.

"It's going to change the dynamics of Chicago," said Lakeshore East resident Todd Guynn. "The LED lighting can be very harsh."

The city began "test" installations of streetlights last year. Several people in the impacted neighborhoods have voiced concerns about the light they give off, which reminds them of "strip malls" and a "Greyhound bus station." The city declined to comment on when or where the "test lights" are, only saying about 1 percent of the 270,000 light fixtures have been replaced. (In total, currently 4,100 of the city's 317,900 light fixtures use LEDs.)

Research from the American Medical Association indicates that large amounts of blue light can cause "discomfort" and insomnia, finding that "white LED lamps have five times greater impact on circadian sleep rhythms than conventional street lamps." The research also says that "blue-rich LED streetlights operate at a wavelength that . . . adversely suppresses melatonin during night."

"When you return to your apartment after being exposed to all this high-energy blue, you're likely to have trouble sleeping," says Dr. Stuart Richer, OD, a



The entrance to Lake Shore East Park displays the variety of hues of electric light. (Patten)

practicing 35-year optometrist and human physiologist at the James Lovell Healthcare Facility in North Chicago. "This is a very, very important public health issue. We're potentially putting in streetlights disruptive to the retina and human physiology."

The new lights, which will be funded by outside investors, will slash the city's electricity bills by at least half, and will provide "more reliable and improved nighttime visibility, giving communities a greater sense of safety," according to the mayor's office. Stretches of orange lights currently ring the New Eastside, radiating out from Lakeshore East Park, which uses low-intensity LED lights, according to Chicago Department of Transportation spokesperson Mike Claffey.

A spectrum of LED lights are available on the market, including 4000 Kelvin (K) lights, whose

high levels of short-wavelength blue light can possibly cause retinal damage. "In my opinion, the best thing to do would be to put in a streetlight that mimicked the spectrum of natural candlelight but was energy efficient, such as sodium vapor 2700K or tungsten-halogen 3200K," says Richer.

In advance of the Dec. 14 deadline for final vendor proposals from the CIT's nine short-listed candidates, community members are voicing concerns about what is happening in their neighborhoods.

In an April 17 press release, CIT chairman Kurt Summers said that replacing the lights would be "complex," and that "community participation in this process is critical."

Even so, only one official meeting has been held regarding the lights (a May 3 industry "networking conference" at Malcolm X

College) and no further public hearing is scheduled for the lights, which could last upwards of twenty years — leaving some residents feeling left in the dark.

In a statement issued following the May meeting, the CIT's one-paragraph response about the new lights did not directly address health or wildlife concerns, and failed to explain where the public could find further information. The CIT simply said it will provide "light where needed" and "light when needed," and that it is committed to "shielding light and directing it downward," as well as selecting lighting with "warmer colors."

Similar installations around the country have garnered mixed reviews. In Brooklyn, public outcry over 250,000 new LEDs led to the city replacing about 29,000 lights with lower-intensity fixtures. Other cities, like Santa Rosa, Calif., enjoyed smoother installations, thanks to an involved process of responding to public feedback as the lights were put in.

Involvement is what residents here are looking for as well. "If I could see what they were, I'd like to have a ballot," said Guynn.

"In a perfect world, Chicago would ask, 'What are the parameters of the community lighting we're providing?'" says Drew Carhill, board member of the Illinois Coalition for Responsible Outdoor Lighting, a nonprofit advocacy group.

**Pictured:** The GE Ecolux® Sodium (HPS) bulb, similar to streetlights that mimic the spectrum of natural light, according to Dr. Stuart Richer, an optometrist at the James Lovell Healthcare Facility in North Chicago.

