

Chicago Grants 1st Permit Ahead of G-8, NATO

By CARLA K. JOHNSON *Associated Press*
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Chicago officials said Thursday they approved the first parade permit to protesters ahead of meetings set for May of the leading industrial nations and sought to quell critics' concerns that proposed changes to city laws will step on demonstrators' First Amendment rights.

The back-to-back G-8 and NATO summits will be held in Chicago May 19-21 — the first time in more than three decades a city has hosted both meetings — and tens of thousands of protesters are expected to greet the expected 7,500 delegates from up to 80 nations. Costs for the event could reach \$65 million, officials said.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel's challenge is to keep order and showcase the city to the world, while also allowing protesters with varying agendas to have a voice. Top aides to the mayor promised Thursday that the city would protect protesters' freedoms and even go so far as to provide plenty of portable toilets and sound amplification systems to them.

"As the city of Chicago issues permits for these events, we stand in strong support of the applicant organizations' First Amendment right to protest," Emanuel said in a statement.

At an unusual briefing for reporters held Thursday at City Hall, officials and the head of the summit host committee released more details about planning for the gatherings, which have drawn massive and unruly protests elsewhere. But much remains uncertain, including the official site of many summit events and U.S. Secret Service security perimeters.

Details such as road closures and parking restrictions may not be known until two to four weeks before the event, said Frank Benedetto of the Secret Service's Chicago field office in a statement.

The host committee and the city have estimated the summits could cost \$40 million to \$65 million and will be paid by donations from the private sector and federal funds, not by local taxpayers. Officials would not release fundraising goals.

The briefing came days before two Chicago City Council committees are expected to consider proposed security measures related to the NATO and G-8 summits. On Thursday, city officials said they've revised some of those proposals to respond to critics worried about infringements to First Amendment rights.

For example, they are dropping a proposal to raise the maximum fine for a violation of the parade ordinance and eliminating a requirement for parade marshals for every 100 participants. They are leaving the time of a parade at two hours and 15 minutes, instead of cutting it to two hours.

Another proposed ordinance would give the Chicago police chief the power to deputize trained law enforcement officers from other states to help with security, close public parks two hours longer than usual each day, and speed up certain procurement requirements to deal with last-minute purchasing needs.

So far, two groups have submitted four requests for permits for protest events, and Emanuel's office announced the approval of the first such permit Thursday. It went to the Coalition Against the NATO/G-8 War and Poverty Agenda, also called CANG8.

City officials said Thursday they'll approve two other permits soon, one for a rally planned by CANG8 and another for an event planned by National Nurses United, the nation's largest nurses union. A fourth permit request, also from the nurses group, will be denied because it conflicts with CANG8's Daley Plaza event, officials said, but they'll work to find the nurses an alternative site.

The Secret Service will oversee security for the summits and may designate security zones that impact the protest permits. If that happens, the mayor said, the city pledges to work with protesters to find other rally sites and protest

routes.

The mayor's promise wasn't enough for activists. Protest leader Andy Thayer said Thursday the city's pledge of an alternate route if the Secret Service plans a security zone for the approved route is an unacceptable "escape clause."

"We reject the notion that the Secret Service should reject permits that have already been approved," Thayer said in a statement.