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Lathrop Homes
Architect: Robert DeGolyer
Landscape: Jens Jensen
WPA project, 1935 - 1938

Existing Site

New Deal Network

Proposed Site, 7/2013

DNA Info

ABOUT LATHROP HOMES

Located along the Chicago River in the northwest corner of the Lincoln Park community area (and near Bucktown and Roscoe Village), these refined brick buildings are mostly vacant, but still capible of their origional purpose: providing affordable housing and a pleasent community.

Lathrop Homes was one of Chicago's first affordable housing complexes, and the diversity and community that Lathrop supported contributed to the site being one of the greatest affordable housing success stories amidst many resounding failures. It is listed to the National Register of Historic Places, and is significant for criteria 1, 3, and 4.

These once thriving historic affordable housing units have been gradually taken offline (deliberately left vacant) by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), from the original 925 units to just 135. All remaining residents have been relocated to one building, and the rest of the buildings have been mothballed.

THE PLANS

As the value of the surrounding neighborhoods increases, pressure mounts to capitalize on Lathrop's open space and riverfront property.

The CHA's intention in 2006 was to demolish everything and redevelop the area as 1,200 mixed income units, motivated by the high property values in the surrounding neighborhoods and the site's proximity to the river, which the city is beginning to value as a new frontier for waterfront development.

The most recent (July 2013) redevelopment plan for Lathrop Homes preserves all of the buildings on the northern half and upgrades Jensen's "great lawn," but changes the southern half dramatically inlcuding a controversial high rise building along the bend in the river and infuses the area with market rate units.

STAKEHOLDERS

The CHA is working with Lathrop Community Partners which includes developer Related Midwest and the planning/architecture firm Farr Associates. They, along with and Alderman Joe Moreno claim mixed income infill buildings would increase density and infuse new life into the complex by adding more activity as well as provide visual interest. Mixed income units would also ensure that construction costs would be covered. The southern half of the site is in Alderman Scott Waguespack's ward, who opposes the proposed high rise.

Lathrop residents want a restoration of all Lathrop's buildings as affordable housing. They view market rate units as a harbinger of gradual displacement. Affordable housing advocacy groups throughout Chicago are also concerned about the legacy and function of these buildings. Residents and housing advocates have hosted protests and attended planning meetings in significant numbers, and their activism in partnership with preservation advocates is the reason that Lathrop Homes was saved from complete demolition.

Landmarks Illinois and Preservation Chicago have both placed Lathrop homes on their watchlists, and Landmarks Illinois created a redevelopment plan that influenced Lathrop Community Partners' site revisions. The push to landmark Lathrop was critical in ensuring that vacant buildings be properly maintained, making their reuse possible. Preservationists are open to infill buildings and mixed income and mixed use buildings, provided that they are harmonious with the existing site and buildings.