

February 7, 2013

Mr. Charles Woodyard
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Housing Authority
60 E. Van Buren Street
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Dear Mr. Woodyard:

Please permit us to introduce ourselves. We are Charles Beach, president of Hamlin Park Neighbors (www.HamlinPark.org) and Brian O'Connell, president of Roscoe Village Neighbors (www.RoscoeVillage.org). Our two organizations represent more than 15,000 residents adjacent to the Julia C. Lathrop Homes on Chicago's North Side.

Representatives from Hamlin Park Neighbors and Roscoe Village Neighbors were integral participants in the series of community meetings that led to selection of Lathrop Community Partners as master developer for the redevelopment of Lathrop Homes (Lathrop). Craig Sieben, Hamlin Park Neighbors Vice President, is a member of the Lathrop Homes Working Group.

Similarly, we have provided continuous feedback to both Lathrop Community Partners and the Lathrop Homes Working Group about our constituents' primary concerns. These are:

1. Density
2. Traffic
3. Scale
4. Lathrop's successful physical reintegration into the urban grid.

During the Open Houses it hosted in November 2012, Lathrop Community Partners proposed three development scenarios, each inconsistent with the parameters articulated in the Chicago Housing Authority's RFQ. Its three design scenarios were named, *Riverworks*, *Gateways*, and *Greenscapes*.

Density

All three scenarios proposed 1,600 units – a whopping 173% of the site's current unit density, and 133% of the maximum density of 1,200 units allowed under the RFQ. Subsequently, the CHA announced a reduction of density from 1,600 to 1,300 units, which is still significantly more than the site's current density.

The density of the surrounding neighborhood, according to the 2010 census for ZIP code 60618, is approximately 20,000 residents per square mile. The site area of Lathrop is approximately 35 acres. If the density of the surrounding area were reproduced on the Lathrop site it would result in approximately 1,080 residents. Instead, assuming a conservative two individuals per household, Lathrop Community Partners' three proposals of 1,600 units each would result in a population of 3,200 residents – *three times* that of the surrounding area.

Even with 1,300 units, the resulting population would total 2,600 residents – *nearly two-and-a-half times* that of the surrounding area.

The impact of adding 1,500 to 2,000 additional residents *over and above* this historical average puts unnatural stresses on the surrounding infrastructure – including increased competition for access to schools, roadways, and public services.

It is why neither 1,600 units, nor 1,300 units are appropriate for this site, and why such density is unacceptable to our constituents.

Traffic

The increased traffic resulting from such inappropriate density at Lathrop would add significant new burdens to an area already suffering from near-gridlock conditions during peak weekday and weekend hours.

The availability of mass transit for Lathrop is limited almost exclusively to street-oriented bus service. The nearest mass transit rail stations are the Red Line, located at Diversey and Sheffield Avenues, 1.3 miles to the east, and the Brown Line, equidistant to the northeast. The Blue Line station is 1.5 miles away to the west. Each is beyond what both the CTA and commuters consider a routinely walkable distance, especially during harsh winter and summer weather conditions. This necessarily means that private car transportation would be the dominant mode of transportation for Lathrop's residents.

Lathrop anchors the north end of the Damen Avenue Bridge. Anchoring the south end is the intersection of Damen, Fullerton, and Elston Avenues, the single-most congested intersection in the City of Chicago, and consistently ranked one of the most congested in the nation. One-quarter mile to the west of Lathrop, on the opposite side of the river, is the intersection of Diversey, Western, and Elston Avenues, also ranked among the city and nation's most congested.

Both of these intersections are burdened by regional magnets of major, car-centric retail destinations – including Home Depot, Target, Costco, and Menards – all less than one-half mile away. It is a mathematical certainty that inappropriate density at Lathrop would impose higher traffic volumes and greater congestion delays upon these thoroughfares and surrounding streets during peak weekday and weekend hours.

Given its location at the very center of this traffic congestion, the density proposed by Lathrop Community Partners compounds, rather than responds to, the area's existing problems.

Moreover, it thwarts Mayor Emanuel's efforts to overcome long-standing obstacles to transform Chicago into an efficient and environmentally-sustainable city for the 21st Century.

Urban planners understand that addressing "density" is not merely allocating sufficient parking spaces for a given number of units, but also accounting for a development's impact upon the quality of life of its residents, as well as those already living in the surrounding community. That is why, in the absence of mass transit rail service located immediately adjacent to Lathrop, density of the scope and scale proposed would never be appropriate for this site.

Scale

Both the *Riverworks* and *Gateways* proposals contain high-rise buildings derivative of the abandoned policies of vertical public housing. They are the antithesis of the pedestrian scale of the communities of which Lathrop Homes is to be a part.

High-rise residential construction at Lathrop, like the proposed towers stretching up to 28 stories in height, is completely inconsistent with the character of the surrounding communities where few buildings exceed four stories – and even then only on a few auto-dominated streets. The remaining streets in the area are low density, two-, three-, and four-story buildings.

Our constituents will not support a return to the failed practices of the past that the CHA itself has rightly renounced. Such high-rise structures would once more isolate the site and its residents, doing a grave injustice to Lathrop's returning residents, violating the intent of the CHA's Plan of Transformation, and jeopardizing the success of the redevelopment. For these reasons, high-rise buildings on the site are unacceptable to our constituents.

Is Preservation Compatible with Successful Physical Reintegration?

The *Riverworks* and *Gateways* designs fail because both proposals perpetuate many of the key characteristics of the notoriously monolithic "super-block" concept that has proven itself to be a self-defeating strategy for creating humane and safe urban environments.

To overcome the long-standing institutionalization of public housing, the new Lathrop must be a natural extension of the scale and character of its surrounding community. It must facilitate rather than impede the "seamless integration with the broader community" called for by the Chicago Housing Authority's RFQ. To achieve this, it must extend – rather than cut off – the city's street grid, allowing Lathrop to reanimate its street life with the natural flow of automotive and pedestrian traffic from the surrounding neighborhoods. In this way it creates a safer environment, assures the success of its retail space, and offers all residents a higher quality of life.

Hamlin Park Neighbors and Roscoe Village Neighbors have long and distinguished histories of successfully fighting to preserve and re-use desirable housing stock and commercial space. We believe adaptive re-use complements the desirable mix of design and materials, and we acknowledge the environmental advantages of reusing existing structures whenever possible. However, we also recognize that yesterday's designs cannot always meet today's needs.

The scope and scale of Lathrop's redevelopment depends upon sound and proven planning principles to assure its success. As noted, to thrive it must seamlessly blend Lathrop into its

surrounding community by re-establishing the city's street grid. In our opinion, this cannot successfully be done with the existing structures in their present locations. We believe demolition of those structures to be the most appropriate course of action.

Improve the Proposal

While Lathrop Community Partners has lost valuable time by failing to follow the Chicago Housing Authority's RFQ and the neighboring communities' input about lower density, the *Greenscapes* design in particular could become the basis for serious discussion *if significant changes are made to lower its density*.

The *Greenscapes* design includes several positive elements, particularly in how it can:

- End the isolation of Lathrop residents by eliminating the “super-block” footprint in favor of the classic-sized city blocks that define Chicago;
- Create open and accessible public sidewalks and streets in lieu of the closed courtyards that now dominate Lathrop;
- Create a strong attraction that draws people to the river and the green amenities it offers;
- Provide proximity and convenience, including on-street, parallel parking on residential streets and adjacent to proposed retail space; and,
- Demolish the “Berlin Wall of Damen Avenue” that isolates Lathrop from everything to its east, by offering access and egress via Damen Avenue, consistent with the defining concepts of the urban grid.

Financing

We know developers need to make a fair profit. We also understand that desirable amenities must be paid for. But that does not oblige our constituents to agree to unacceptable designs that use inappropriate density to provide higher margins.

Instead, by combining the market subsidies of desirable retail space that extends the successful model of surface parking found in the Roscoe Square and Costco malls, with an appropriate blend of market-rate housing, there can be a meaningful reduction in the scale and density that brings the proposal in line with that of the communities of which Lathrop is to be a part.

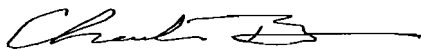
This type of plan, our constituents could support.

Conclusion

We believe that a significantly and properly modified *Greenscapes* proposal can be the basis for discussions that can lead to a vibrant and vital mixed-use addition to Chicago's North Side. Through the good faith efforts and creativity of all parties, we can perpetuate the mission of Lathrop without also perpetuating its past shortcomings.

We, and our constituents, stand ready to work with the Chicago Housing Authority and Lathrop Community Partners to assure the success of the next generation of Lathrop Homes.

Sincerely yours,



Charles Beach
President
Hamlin Park Neighbors



Brian O'Connell
President
Roscoe Village Neighbors

Cc: Mayor Rahm Emanuel
Ald. Proco Joe Moreno, 1st Ward
Ald. Scott Waguespack, 32nd Ward
Commissioner Andrew Mooney, Dept. of Housing and Economic Development,
Assistant Commissioner Eleanor Gorski, Dept. of Housing and Economic Development
Ms. Patricia Scudiero, Zoning Administrator, City of Chicago
Mr. Kerry Dickson, Lathrop Community Partners
Mr. Daniel Levin, Habitat Company
Mr. Michael Jackson, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
Mr. Robert Whitfield, Central Advisory Council, Lathrop Community Partners