

Preservation Chicago Unveils the 2013 **Chicago 7** Most Threatened...
Lathrop Homes, Clybourn & Diversey Parkway



Lathrop Homes, Photo Credit: Andy Marfia

Overview:

Lathrop Homes returns to Preservation Chicago's 7 Most Threatened list after first appearing in 2007. Arguably, Julia Lathrop Homes is the best public housing development Chicago has ever built, representing a racially mixed, remarkably stable community for generations of Chicagoans. Beautifully sited along the Chicago River with a magnificent and mature landscape, the buildings are low-rise and gently ornamented, creating an intimate, humane atmosphere. But, after years of contentious community meetings, seemingly endless presentations and often fruitless discussions with the Chicago Housing Authority and the master development team, the redevelopment as currently proposed will still demolish almost half of the historic buildings, destroy much of the lush landscapes and commercialize and densify the site to a point beyond what the community is willing to accept, destroying much of the complex's historic fabric.

Address: Clybourn Avenue & Diversey Parkway east of the Chicago River

Date: Completed in 1938

Architects: Robert S. De Golyer, Hugh M.G. Garden, Jens Jensen (landscaping), Thomas Tallmadge, Vernon Watson, E.E. Roberts, Charles White and Hubert Burnham

Style: Eclectic

CHRS Rating: Yellow

National of Register of Historic Places: Yes

Chicago 7: Lathrop Homes Continued:



Lathrop Homes, Photo Credit: Andy Marfia

History:

During the depths of the Great Depression, the Federal government determined to create much-needed public housing, and at the same time provide jobs for unemployed architects and building trades workers. To find a solution to the perpetual problem of creating livable public housing, the government assembled a “Dream Team” of the best and brightest architects from Chicago.

The development is small scale, low-density and well integrated with the surrounding neighborhood. The design owes much to the earlier 19th century industrial towns like Saltaire, New Lanark and Pullman as well as to the Garden City tradition started by Ebenezer Howard in England -- naturalistic setting, brick construction, low-rise buildings, curving walks and streets, informal siting of buildings, ample open green space, and simple ornamentation. The best way to know the Lathrop Homes is to go there and walk through the community. You will experience a neighborhood with the sense of individual, personal dwellings.

Among the “all-star” architects was Robert S. De Golyer, a designer of posh Lake Shore Drive high-rises. He was the team leader, providing a classical elegance that included fine brickwork, stone rooftop finials and arched arcades linking the buildings, which echoed his work for the wealthy. Hugh M.G. Garden was one of the respected former practitioners of the old “Chicago School,” imparting a meld of modernism and livable traditionalism. Jens Jensen was a legendarily, and often ornery, outspoken landscape designer known for his ideals of the native landscape and its populist, life-enhancing qualities for all. Many of Jensen’s original trees still remain in place, and have now aged into the sheltering maturity he envisioned. The townhouses included small kitchen gardens in which residents raised fresh vegetables right outside their doors.

Timeline of Significant Recent Events:

- 2006 - Lathrop Leadership Team created to represent concerns of Lathrop residents and the community.
- January 2010 - CHA releases a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) seeking a redevelopment team.

Chicago 7: Lathrop Homes Continued:



Lathrop Homes, Photo Credit: Andy Marfia

- September 2010 - Lathrop Community Partners (LPC) a consortium of real estate developers, housing agencies and other parties selected to oversee entire redevelopment and management of a new Lathrop.
- February 2011 - LPC begins series of individual stakeholder interviews.
- November 2011 - kick-off meeting held in community to introduce the design and development team.
- December 2011- community “workshops” convene just before Christmas holidays.
- September 2012 - Three LPC site plans are prematurely leaked to the public, none of which contained a viable historic preservation scenario.
- November 2012 - Three plans formally presented at two community meetings.
- February 2013 - Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) initiate the federal 106 Process, which allows Consulting Parties to find alternatives to demolition.

Threat:

At this writing, a single redevelopment proposal for the entire site is being created which, ostensibly, takes the myriad concerns of all of the stakeholders into account. However, if the past is prologue, then any lingering community skepticism about what will be produced could be justifiably warranted.

Recommendation:

Lathrop Homes is a viable, ethnically diverse urban community with structurally sound buildings. Preservation Chicago, as a longtime stakeholder and official Consulting Party, continues to advocate for the preservation of this historic community, its buildings and its landscapes. The fight we joined in 2006 will continue with the same vigor as when we first began. Ultimately, there will be changes to the property. We accept that. However, our mission is to ensure that those changes and additions are respectful and sensitive to the intent of the original architects, and that they enhance the existing community for both residents and neighbors alike.