

Landmark group: Preserve Michael Reese's core

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The core of the former Michael Reese Hospital campus on the South Side can be preserved and incorporated in a plan for Olympic athletes' housing, a landmarks advocacy group said today.

Landmarks Illinois issued a proposal calling for six of the 29 buildings on the 37-acre Reese campus to be re-used. The proposal challenges the idea pushed by Mayor Daley and the Chicago 2016 organizing committee that the campus should be leveled for the Olympic Village.

Using the village as private housing after the games is the cornerstone of Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Summer Olympics. A decision on the host city is due Oct. 2.

Landmarks Illinois said its plan meets requirements of the International Olympic Committee while preserving architecture of Walter Gropius, a renowned innovator in commercial design. Gropius helped plan the Reese campus, which represents his only work in Chicago.

The group said four buildings at the heart of the campus — three of them attributed to Gropius — are in good shape for re-use. Its plan also envisions keeping a Gropius-designed power plant on the north end of the Reese site as a "visual billboard" for the Olympics.

Like the city's own site plan, it would save the oldest Reese structure, the campus' "Old Main" building that dates from 1905. It is not a Gropius work.

The proposal calls for allotments of open space and would link the Olympic Village to the lakefront via a deck over the railroad tracks east of the site, an expensive item that the group acknowledged may not be practical.

Other elements, however, could reduce construction costs compared with the Chicago 2016 plan, said Jim Peters, president of Landmarks Illinois. "We are very much for getting the Olympics and having a well-designed community after the Olympics," Peters said.

The Reese property runs roughly from 26th to 35th streets, Cottage Grove to the railroad tracks. Landmarks Illinois would extend Cottage Grove into the Reese site, reintroducing the street grid.