

## Chicago Tribune Blair Kamin: Cityscapes (Blog)

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**Alternative plans for Olympic Village emerge; they don't rate gold medals, but they advance the debate over key South Side parcel**



For months now, the city officials trying to bring the 2016 Summer Olympic Games to Chicago and the preservationists trying to save buildings co-designed by architect Walter Gropius on the proposed Olympic Village site have been on a collision course. And there was little doubt about who would get their way and who would not.

A visit last week to the city-owned, 37-acre site, formerly Michael Reese Hospital, did little to dispel the impression that everything on the campus is doomed except for the main Reese building (left), a 102-year-old Prairie Style structure that city officials have promised to spare.

Chain-link fencing surrounded the Reese complex, from 26th to 31st Streets near South Lake Shore Drive. The once-vibrant hospital campus resembled a ghost town, with security guards racing about in small white cars with whirling yellow lights on their roofs.

But this bleak picture, which emerged after the city awarded demolition contracts for the old Reese hospital site, belied some hopeful signs. Although the city's landmarks commission voted against placing the Reese campus on the National Register of Historic Places on Aug. 6, for example, some commission members and staff commented that a proposal that suggested saving fewer buildings might win their support.



Last week, as if on cue, a respected advocacy group, Landmarks Illinois, unveiled a plan calling for seven of the campus' 29 buildings to be reused (at left, a comparison of the plan to the official Olympic Village plan; click on the image to expand). In addition, Chicago architects DeStefano Partners have proposed their own alternative village plan to the city's Olympic organizers. The plan, it turns out, would preserve only one of the Gropius buildings, but the architects stress it can be modified.

What does all this add up to? A tiny opening for good planning, which would create lively streets, save selected buildings and offer a diversity of building types, uses and people. The stakes are enormous. Whether Chicago gets the Olympics or not, the redevelopment of the Reese campus will be one of

Chicago's signature undertakings of the early 21st Century. Blowing it with business-as-usual design should not be an option.



At their core, the Landmarks Illinois and DeStefano plans share a more enlightened attitude about making lively cities than the dismal village proposal (left) that was unveiled in February by the Chicago 2016 organizing committee. That proposal, calling for 21 high-rises, roughly 12 stories high, that would be lined up like tombstones, seemed a repeat of 1960s slash-and-burn urban renewal.

But the Chicago 2016 proposal, it should be noted, is not a fixed blueprint. It is more like an outline, one that could be tweaked if the International Olympic Committee awards Chicago the Games on Oct. 2. If the city loses the bid to Madrid, Rio de Janeiro or Tokyo, even more tweaking will be possible. Private developers building on the former Reese site will not be bound by Olympic standards requiring athletes to have comparable facilities -- in the wrong hands, a recipe for stultifying uniformity. A city spokeswoman said it is "highly unlikely" that buildings on the campus will be demolished before the selection is announced.



Not surprisingly, the Landmarks Illinois plan (left) does the better job of dealing with the buildings at Reese that were co-designed by Gropius, one of the 20th Century's most influential modernists and the founder of the Bauhaus design school. Put together

under the leadership of the group's president, Jim Peters, the plan strikes a middle course between trying to save all of the campus' Gropius buildings and a small number of related structures by other architects, as another advocacy group, the Gropius in Chicago Coalition, wants to do, and tearing them all down, as the city has suggested (You will have to click on the rendering and plan at left to expand them to readable size.)



Instead, the Landmarks Illinois proposal prunes structures seriously compromised by additions, like the linear accelerator building on the Reese campus' north, and focuses on preserving the serene courtyards, designed by the noted landscape architect Hideo Sasaki, that sit south of 29th Street (left).

The courtyards, marred already because demolition crews cut down many of their trees, are still ringed by clean-lined, buff-brick hospital buildings -- a patient pavilion (below), a convalescent home, a psychiatric hospital and others. Together, they form a tangible record of the humanistic values that guided Gropius and the Chicago architects with whom he collaborated on the hospital. Discarding them without trying to reuse them, as offices, residences or shops, would be madness.

In many respects, the DeStefano proposal, as shaped by principal Joseph Gonzalez and senior associate David Valaskovic, is a mirror image of the one from Landmarks Illinois. It is weak on preservation (saving only the main and psychiatric buildings at Reese), but strong on the idea of creating a vibrant city neighborhood.



Instead of buildings with uniform heights, for example, DeStefano suggests structures based on a cost-saving adaptable design that would be four to seven stories high. (Madrid's 2016 plan and London's 2012 Olympic Village also vary the heights.) Instead of a single developer working with a single architect, different teams would work on different parts of the campus. And they would build housing, both rental apartments and condominiums, aimed at a variety of users -- families, singles, students and seniors.

Both plans could be carried out, their backers say, without sacrificing the housing needs of Olympic athletes and officials. Chicago 2016 officials, who have met informally with the DeStefano team, declined to release a copy of the architects' alternative plan.

Whether the proposal is made public or not, the most important thing is that alternative visions for Chicago's Olympic Village are emerging -- and that some members of the city's architecture community are forming those plans instead of cowering on the sidelines for fear of alienating Mayor Richard Daley.

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