

January 23, 2008

Dear Landmarks Illinois Member:

As a constituent of Representative Mark Kirk (10th U.S. Representative District), we want to bring to your attention an endangered historic building in his district on the Great Lakes Naval Base.

Included on **Landmarks Illinois' 2007-08 Chicagoland Watch List**, the former **Gunners' Mates School, Building #521**, is slated for demolition by the Navy. Built in 1954 and designed by renowned Modernist architect Bruce Graham of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), it stands as a testament to the Department of Defense's (DOD) early focus on commissioning cutting edge, Modern architecture for various military bases around the country.

Subject to a federally mandated Section 106 review process to which Landmarks Illinois has been a consulting party, the building was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by the state historic preservation office. As part of the 106 review, Landmarks Illinois was able to provide a study by SOM showing the economic feasibility to renovate and reuse the building as an officers' food galley – the Navy's proposed use for the site after demolition. Since successfully demonstrating the building's reuse potential, the Navy is continuing to push for demolition citing a change in plans for the site that are undecided and the DOD's national mandate for footprint reduction at all bases.

As a constituent, we hope you will contact Representative Kirk in support of this important preservation issue:

Key Points to emphasize to Representative Kirk:

- Mid-century military resources are often overlooked or underappreciated. The demolition of Building #521 would result in the loss of an irreplaceable Modernist building in military history as well as the development history of Great Lakes Naval Base.
- The Department of Defense (DOD) policy of requiring footprint reduction on military bases penalizes bases for retaining vacant structures, even if they are historic. This federal mandate is in direct conflict with other mandates for historic preservation and sustainability. The mandate in this case will facilitate demolition without any consideration of the building's significance or ability to be adapted as part of the long-term planning needs of Great Lakes Naval Base.
- The demolition of Building #521 will conflict with DOD's mandate to encourage "green" building practices. The Navy has claimed it wants "...to construct environmentally friendly facilities with little or no increase in first cost and with lifecycle savings." ("MCPON Plackett Manor Bachelor Enlisted Quarters, Great Lakes Naval Training Center", Website of U.S. Green Building Council). No building is greener than the one that already exists.

- The Navy has claimed to mothball the building until a use can be determined would be a waste of tax payer dollars. The renovation of an existing building has built-in cost benefits that can save tax payer dollars.
- Blair Kamin, architectural critic for the Chicago Tribune, recently noted that saving buildings from the recent past, “with their cool, abstract forms” is of key importance. “...the best of them deserve to be spared: Without them, we’ll lose a whole generation of our history.” (Chicago Tribune, December 23, 2007)

Please contact Representative Mark Kirk at:

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Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



David Bahlman
President

**Great Lakes Naval Base Building #521,
Gunners’ Mates School**

Great Lakes Naval Base, North Chicago
Built 1954
Bruce Graham for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill,
architect

