

SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

Alderman Brendan Reilly,
Office of the 42nd Ward
325 W. Huron St., Suite 150
Chicago, IL 60654

Re: Prentice Women's Hospital

21 December 2010

Dear Alderman Reilly:

I am writing on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) in support of any and all efforts to save and re-purpose Bertrand Goldberg's 1974 Prentice Women's Hospital. Prentice is a striking, original building of a type developed by Goldberg that was unique in the history of architecture. Along with his iconic Marina City Towers of 1961 – close by along the Chicago River, Prentice is one of Goldberg's most widely known and admired structures, and Goldberg himself one of Chicago's best and most famous architects of the mid-20th century.

Programmatically innovative in its day, it is distinguished by a striking seven storey quatrefoil concrete tower that rises out of an elegant Miesian steel and glass clad base. Each floor plate of the tower features a radial design with an efficient, minimal footprint that facilitates close interaction between the patients and the nursing staff. The central core design also allows for a column free space that permits flexibility in the internal arrangements.

Despite this flexibility, changing practice and regulatory requirements persuaded Northwestern University to build a new Women's Hospital, which opened in 2007. Although the base remains in use for the Stone Institute of Psychiatry, that facility is intending to relocate in 2011, which would then leave the whole building empty by the end of next year – and subject to an uncertain future.

The SAH therefore enthusiastically endorses and supports the campaign that has been launched by Landmarks Illinois, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Chicago, docomomo-Midwest and other organizations to encourage Northwestern University and the City of Chicago to be pro-active in finding a useful new purpose for a major milestone in the history of hospital design, a stunning example of the work of an internationally known architect, and a significant component of the architectural legacy of mid-20th century Chicago.

Very truly yours,



David N. Fixler, FAIA, LEED AP
Preservation Officer
Society of Architectural Historians