

RENEWAL

A POAH MIDWEST NEWSLETTER



From the POAH Midwest Office

Amidst wide speculation and concern about what the future holds for a resurgent Woodlawn, one thing is increasingly clear: Affordable housing will remain a priority.

In September the City Council adopted a Woodlawn-focused housing plan aimed at preserving the community's existing affordable assets and creating new opportunities on City-owned land, capping a lengthy and at times contentious debate between development interests and housing advocates, including Ald. Jeanette Taylor (20th) and Leslie Hairston (5th).



Given changing market conditions in Woodlawn and fears that lower-income residents face displacement, it was an important policy statement hammered out over months of community meetings.

It was also part of a long tradition. Affordable housing has for decades played an important role in Woodlawn, back to the activism of the late Rev. Arthur Brazier, Leon Finney, and others who resisted the University of Chicago's expansion plans in the middle of the last century and argued for housing for community residents.

POAH's work over the past decade built on those efforts, using redevelopment of the former Grove Parc Apartments as the foundation for renewed mixed-income neighborhood growth. 1,000 apartments and 100,000 square feet of new commercial and community space later speak to the underlying strength of the community.

The latest progress can be seen in the preservation and grand reopening of the buildings at 6146 S. Kenmore and 6230 S. Dorchester, now named the **Mattie Butler Apartments** for the founder of Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors who remains an ardent advocate for Woodlawn's low-income households. Ms. Butler and WECAN developed these buildings 25-plus years ago and sold them to POAH in 2017 in order to ensure that they remained affordable. And with the financial support of the city and state, the buildings have been fully rehabbed and modernized.

The Mattie Butler Apartments are particularly important due to their proximity to the site of the planned Obama Presidential Center which, while enjoying broad community support is likely to drive up rents and home prices in the area. In fact, prices for new single-family homes are already reaching \$700,000, the CTA is planning a complete overhaul of its Green Line station, and several new commercial projects are either under construction or in the works. These economic forces are likely to continue and put pressure on the more than three-quarters of Woodlawn residents who rent their homes.

So, when you think about it, the City Council's actions and the community engagement that they spring from are a sturdy bridge from the past to the future. With the right tools and commitments from the city and others, however, the hope is that those same households can remain and enjoy the fruits of that growth.

- Bill Eager
Senior Vice President, POAH Midwest