



October 7, 2014

Honorable Alderman Walter Burnett – 27<sup>th</sup> Ward  
4 N. Western Ave  
Chicago, IL 60612

RE: Chicago Children's Theater Proposal for 100 S Racine

On September 10, 2014 Neighbors of West Loop (NOWL) – Ward 27 Committee met with representatives from Chicago Children's Theater to discuss their proposal for the old 12<sup>th</sup> District Chicago Police Station located at 100 S Racine.

With qualified regret, NOWL cannot support giving away or selling the public/city-owned land at 100 S. Racine (Monroe & Racine) to Chicago Children's Theatre (CCT) for a nominal price at this time. The issue is NOT whether we want CCT in the West Loop. We think CCT would be a welcomed addition and we want to help bring CCT into the West Loop. Instead the true issue and determining factor is whether the City should transfer public land and property to a non-government enterprise that the City could not otherwise afford to buy itself and use for purely public uses.

High property values in the West Loop make it cost prohibitive to acquire land via eminent domain to build needed public facilities. A few years ago, the City had issued notices of eminent domain to acquire the adjacent properties between 100 S. Racine (City owned property) and the existing Skinner School location on Monroe St. to build a larger Skinner Elementary School campus, but were unable to acquire the private properties due to the high cost.

We strongly believe the City should retain this valuable property at Monroe & Racine for improvement and use completely and fully by the public for at least the following reasons:

The community does not have and currently needs

- 1) space for a community center
- 2) indoor gym space for community and Skinner Park
- 3) a library in the immediate area

No other centrally located public property exists in the West Loop that can accommodate the three public purposes listed above.

Other than the presumed price and possibly the current building, 1/3 of which will be demolished and the interior reconfigured, there is nothing unique about the Monroe & Racine property specific to CCT. Any other location in or near the West Loop could equally and adequately serve CCT. The majority of



the CCT audience based on the seats filled at the performances will be bused to the location and will not be kids from the immediate surrounding area.

It is our understanding that the Chicago Park District has turned down the property and there is a neighborhood initiative started by West Loop parents and residents to support building a public library at that location.

We have been told that the City does not have funds for a library or a park field house, but in our discussions with CCT they have said they are seeking public funds to help CCT finance the \$10 million needed. The community has also been told that CCT has requested a reduced price for the property and that the City would most likely sell the property for a nominal price to them. The full public cost of the proposed CCT project is unknown and we believe that information should be made available.

At the October 1, 2014 NOWL 27th Ward Committee meeting the majority of the attendees voted in favor of the property be used for public use, namely a library. Parents at the meeting informed us they currently have to travel outside of our community to access a library and that library programs are overbooked. We have been informed that the library at Skinner School has been converted for classroom use. Additionally, a library/community center will serve a broad spectrum of residents.

A public library/community center is consistent with the Near West Plan to create more public institutions and facilities in this immediate area to serve neighborhood residents. As stated in the City's "Near West Side - Area Land Use Plan - July 2000" for this neighborhood. "During the Near West Side planning process, local residents expressed a need for a community center, library, and daycare center. Such facilities could possibly be combined into a single facility that brings together community, library, arts, cultural, and educational uses."

It has been fourteen years since the plan was developed and the need for public amenities has increased. This area is one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in Chicago and public amenities are needed to support existing residents and families as well as future families that are moving here. The City has recently built innovative new libraries that also serve as community centers in Chinatown and Albany Park with TIF funds. We strongly urge the City to likewise re-invest our tax dollars in the West Loop by building much needed public facilities and retain valuable public/City own property in the neighborhood for such public uses which are the cornerstones and community anchors of any vibrant community.



Please contact me with any questions.

Thanks,

/s/ *Bob Aiken*

Bob Aiken

Neighbors of West Loop

Ward 27 Chairperson

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cc: Chicago Children's Theater  
Patricia Scudiero, City of Chicago Bureau of Planning and Zoning  
NOWL 27<sup>th</sup> Ward Committee