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## ULI Issues Recommendations for Prison, US Steel Sites

By Robert Carr

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Solomon Cordwell Buenz created this rendering of a rebuilt US Steel site.

JOLIET, IL-You've probably seen the prison - it's where Jake "Joliet" Blues walks out of at the beginning of "Blues Brothers" - and it operated with prisoners until 2002. Now, the site and two nearby properties sit vacant, but a ULI Chicago-led partnership believes at least some redevelopment into industrial, retail and even multifamily use is worth trying.

The city, ULI Chicago and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning has released the results of its two-year study of the former Joliet Correctional Center and vacant US Steel sites. The 240 acres include the main prison, a former women's prison, vacant land next to the prisons and a non-contiguous former US Steel plant. The prison properties are bisected by Collins Street. The 54-acre US Steel site is to the south, separated from the prison by a few small businesses.

The partnership met in January 2012 to analyze the sites for redevelopment opportunities. David Galowich with Madison Realty Group chaired the 10-member group, which also included Ronan Remandaban with Lee & Associates of Illinois Inc. and Greg Terwilliger with McShane Construction Co.

Basically, the partnership recommends that the state, which owns the prison site, should spend about \$4 million to repair the prison buildings for future use a museum. The 160 acres to the east of the prison are mostly undevelopable, and could be used as recreational space, though some housing could be built if a nearby public housing project is demolished, redeveloped and extended.

The US Steel site has the best chance for redevelopment, Galowich tells GlobeSt.com that at least one industrial building is salvageable on the property, and the Collins Street frontage could hold retail. "There's not enough demand to draw a big box, but there's enough to draw a mid-sized box," he says. "You might not get a Costco, but you could certainly get an Aldi to go there."

There's good reasons the sites have sat empty. That area of the city has dropped in value, and US Steel is still working on plans to clean up pollution on its property. "The next step is for US Steel to work with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency on a plan for remediation," Galowich says. "They wouldn't reveal everything to us, but it's not likely toxic materials, just metals. Also, some public entity, maybe a consortium, needs to step up and take the lead role for the other properties. Because this is such a daunting and complicated project, I think the groups involved are nervous about starting and getting stuck paying the bill for all of it."