

# Gazette Chicago » Ald. Cardenas proposes redevelopment of historic McKinley Park buildings

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By Eva Hofmann

Alderman George Cardenas of the 12th Ward on June 28 met with McKinley Park residents to discuss a redevelopment project of historic buildings at 2139 and 2159 W. Pershing Road. Proposed by the developers at Pirhl, the project, known as Parkside Lofts, would repurpose the former manufacturing facilities, which are under review for senior and family housing.

A new community group, the McKinley Park Development Council (MKPDC), is in the process of registering as a not-for-profit. It was formed to define, articulate, and promote the development priorities for the neighborhood. The group has qualms about the project.

"I grew up in the neighborhood and am excited that someone wants to develop it," said MKPDC member Theresa Casillas. However, "these are huge buildings," she continued, wondering if residential was the best use for them.

According to Casillas, there are many empty buildings in the area that were once part of the Central Manufacturing District. "It would be nice to have something in them, but we need to know what we want," she said.

Developer Pirhl proposes 99 units in the building intended for retired seniors and 79 units in the residential building for working families. Some residents may qualify for rental assistance, which will be targeted predominantly for the senior units. Construction is slated for June 2018, and completion is projected for June 2020.

According to Cardenas, the current opportunity for new housing is a "unique gift" that must not be ignored. "McKinley Park has a history of diversity and inclusion of all people," he said. "Seniors are an integral part of McKinley Park and new housing that speaks directly to their needs is important from many perspectives.

"If those buildings are redeveloped, then seniors will be in a safe and active place and community," Cardenas said, adding, "We all need to mingle with our peers and the development is perfect for this. Developers can expand amenities for our retired community leaders that will only enhance their lives."

Because many seniors live on fixed incomes, vouchers are the only means for many to obtain affordable housing, according to Cardenas. "We cannot turn our backs on the generations that helped build McKinley Park and America," he said.

However, said MKPDC, the senior units would be operated by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and as such, would likely be restricted to people already on the CHA's wait list. This could essentially shut out McKinley Park residents from those buildings.

MKPDC would prefer that these historic buildings "be utilized for manufacturing, to house the next generation of innovative manufacturing uses, positioning our neighborhood as a job center again," according to Casillas. If this is not possible, the Council has asked that the developer commit to building a truly mixed-income community, with at least half the units built as true market-rate units, with no public funding or income restrictions.



Buildings that once housed manufacturing are being considered for senior and family housing.

**Neighborhood amenities**

One concern that some residents have, according to Casillas, is whether the neighborhood can offer the right amenities for prospective new tenants. For example, there are not many schools within walking distance for families, and currently not enough amenities to serve a large senior population.

Casillas cited the lack of public transportation along Pershing Road as one example. In a recent memo, the MKPDC cited the proposed development's isolation from transit, services, and retail, stating that "we should be building truly mixed-income developments, with walkable access to necessary goods and services."

According to Cardenas, however, the time to move forward is now.

"McKinley Park is maintained on family housing," he said. "Over 55% of all residents here and surrounding areas are renters. We must give the immediate area a chance to include the families that may save to buy in McKinley Park."

Cardenas added that the proposed family housing units will offer market-rate rents, meaning that renters will pay what the neighbors pay.

"These housing units will bring much-needed economic maintenance for amenities that have struggled to stay afloat in this burgeoning area," he said. "Neighborhoods attract businesses when there is a confirmed density that will enable businesses to be utilized at a profitable rate. McKinley needs more neighbors for economic growth. We cannot wait as we did for the CPS buildings west of Damen. It has proven to have a negative effect on the neighborhood."

MKPDC argues that, while the proposed development would add density that could potentially attract new businesses, it would not add a significant source of disposable income needed to foster economic growth in the area.

Casillas said that the community, in general, is relatively affordable, safe, and accessible, and the population diverse. "Over the years, I've seen more young families and professionals," she said. "We're close to the Loop, Chinatown and I-55." However, she said, it would be nice to have coffee shops and more restaurants.

"I know quite a few residents who grew up here and decided to stay, and we want to see the neighborhood progress, but it's a matter of timing," she said.

Right now, she said, there is no comprehensive plan for the neighborhood. To that end, the MKPDC has applied for a grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), and has asked Cardenas for support in this effort, which he has provided.

"I'm happy to see folks coming in who care enough to make a difference," Casillas said. "It's an exciting time and a turning point and if something does get done we want it to be done right. We want to preserve the historical nature of the buildings but it's not a deal breaker if what's coming in is a good thing for the neighborhood."

Cardenas's office was unable to confirm who currently owns the buildings.