

## **WOODLAWN PARK: A PROPOSAL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Preservation of Affordable Housing, Inc – POAH – is revitalizing a key three-block stretch of South Cottage Grove Avenue in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood. This is a comprehensive redevelopment effort that will bring new life to Grove Parc Plaza Apartments and the surrounding Woodlawn community.

**About POAH** POAH is an Illinois-incorporated, mission-driven housing nonprofit with offices in Chicago and Boston that specializes in the acquisition, rehabilitation and long-term preservation of existing, at-risk subsidized multifamily housing. POAH owns and operates nearly 6,500 affordable housing units nationwide.

**Grove Parc and Woodlawn Park** Grove Parc Plaza is a 504-unit Section 8 housing development in Woodlawn located at the nexus between the University of Chicago and the terminus of the CTA’s Green Line. Since its construction in 1969, Grove Parc has suffered from significant design flaws and concentrated poverty, and by 2007 the property was severely distressed and threatened with foreclosure. At the invitation of Grove Parc’s residents, POAH took over the property in January 2008 with the twin goals of assisting the residents and revitalizing the site.



POAH has facilitated a collaborative planning process with a broad range of stakeholders to develop a blueprint for revitalizing Grove Parc. The resulting vision -- for a vibrant mixed-income, mixed-use district -- has the engagement and support of key local parties including Alderman Willie Cochran, Congressman Bobby Rush, State Senator Kwame Raoul Bishop Arthur M. Brazier, LISC Chicago, The Illinois Housing Development Authority, the City of Chicago, the University of Chicago, and Grove Parc residents.

This collaborative process has yielded a plan for Woodlawn Park -- a bustling community which embraces social and economic diversity and invites new residents, workers and shoppers to a thriving commercial district featuring attractive housing for all income levels. Woodlawn Park will feature retail anchors at its north and south ends, near the University of Chicago and the Green Line terminus. Along Cottage Grove between these commercial gateways will be a revitalized, walkable streetscape lined with attractive contemporary market-rate and affordable apartment buildings as well as small retail spaces and an urban recreation and education center which will serve young people from Woodlawn Park and the neighborhood. The principle of environmental sustainability is key to POAH’s vision for the site.



**Woodlawn & Choice Neighborhoods** Anticipating HUD’s innovative Choice Neighborhoods initiative, POAH is working to develop a network of partnerships with public agencies and local stakeholders to establish the renewed Woodlawn Park as the center of a healthy, richly serviced “neighborhood of choice” in Woodlawn. POAH’s goal is to leverage existing and committed investments in the Woodlawn Park project by HUD, the City of Chicago and others to catalyze and coordinate investments in the neighborhood’s education, transportation, and social service infrastructure. Woodlawn’s existing opportunities and challenges – the Grove Parc revitalization, already underway; the Cottage Grove CTA station, in need of refurbishment; the concentration of foreclosures and designation as an NSP target area; a new Woodlawn Children’s Promise Zone; the University of Chicago’s strong presence through its \$2 billion South Campus expansion adjacent to Grove Parc and its various community initiatives such as the CARA job readiness program, four neighborhood charter schools, and the School of Social Service Administration’s community outreach; the

coordinated neighborhood planning work carried out by LISC’s Woodlawn New Communities Program; and far more – make Woodlawn an exciting incubator for HUD’s Choice Neighborhood initiative.

**Financing & Timeline** POAH acquired Grove Parc in December 2008 and is moving ahead with the phased development process; the first, southernmost stage of onsite development to began in April 2010. Woodlawn Park’s market-rate residential construction will be financed with conventional debt and investor equity, supplemented by TIF funds and bridge resources from POAH; these units will operate as rental until the local market allows ownership conversion and equity take-out. The site’s affordable housing will be financed with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, taxable and tax-exempt financing, and other public subsidies. POAH was pleased to be one of 12 out of 60 projects selected for an LIHTC award in IHDA’s recent tax credit competition for its first phase Woodlawn Center South initiative, which closed and began demolition in April 2010. Retail space will be financed and built in partnership with credit tenants; POAH has engaged an experienced retail team which is now in discussion with potential tenants.

**Development Team** POAH has assembled an outstanding team to execute this comprehensive vision for Woodlawn Park. It includes Landon Bone Baker as architects, Conservation Design Forum as site designer, Douglas Foy and Helen Kessler as sustainability consultants, S.B. Friedman and Associates creating the mechanics of the TIF district and reviewing retail opportunities, and Urban Relocation Services to manage resident moves and transfers. POAH will combine the expertise of its corporate staff in Boston with a highly experienced group on the ground in Chicago, under the direction of Dan Burke as Chicago Area Director and Eden Hurd as Project Manager. They will identify local vendors and suppliers, especially in the area of construction, and have pledged to exceed the standard 25%/5% MBE/WBE hiring requirements for this project.

**Next Steps & Conclusion**

In April 2010, POAH closed on construction financing and began demolition to clear the site for Woodlawn Park’s first phase, a 67-unit mixed-income residential development called Woodlawn Center South (see map at right for location). POAH is honored to have been selected to develop and implement the vision for Woodlawn Park and takes its responsibility to residents and the community with the utmost seriousness of purpose. In a spirit of collaboration, recognizing that compromise will be an integral element of the work ahead, POAH looks forward to a vital, vigorous, collective effort as this dynamic development process unfolds.

