

## Chicago Fire soccer team looking to build training facility on CHA's land

By Monica M. Walk and William S. Bike

The City is inviting Near West Side residents to attend public community meetings to discuss plans to build a training facility and headquarters for the Chicago Fire Football Club, Chicago's Major League Soccer men's team, in the Roosevelt Square area.

The City had not set meeting dates for community input, however, as *Gazette Chicago* went to press but expects to hold them this spring, according to Chicago Department of Planning and Development Deputy Director Peter Strazzabosco. The City's webpage for the project notes meetings will begin in March. Dates, locations, and times for the public meetings will be posted on the City of Chicago and Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) websites once scheduled. See [www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/chicago-fire-football-club-headquarters.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago-fire-football-club-headquarters.html) and [www.thecha.org](http://www.thecha.org).



*The Chicago Fire and City of Chicago have proposed building a training facility on Chicago Housing Authority land in the Roosevelt Square area on the Near West Side.*

"The public engagement process will inform what the final facility will look like and how it fits into the community in a way that complements it, including through adding new community green space," CHA Senior Manager of Communications Matthew Aguilar told *Gazette Chicago*. "CHA residents and neighbors will have the opportunity to be part of this process."

"Any sort of development should be a springboard to CHA residents not just being housed but having opportunities for economic advancement to move out of housing," said Don Washington, executive director of the Chicago Housing Initiative. "This does none of that."

The proposed training facility would occupy a site in the Roosevelt Square area within a parcel bounded by Roosevelt Road on the north, Ashland Avenue on the West, 14th Street on the south, and Loomis Street on the east on approximately 30 acres of Chicago Housing Authority land previously occupied by portions of the ABLA (Addams-Brooks-Loomis-Abbott) Homes. CHA would retain ownership of the site and would not sell the land.

### Skepticism

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot's office, in collaboration with Chicago Fire FC, 28th Ward Alderman Jason Ervin, and CHA CEO Tracey Scott, on Jan. 27 announced preliminary discussions to build a training facility on the site.

Mayor Lightfoot said the new facility will "provide the surrounding West Side community with jobs and recreational and other incredible opportunities in the future."

Washington expressed skepticism, noting that, under the City's 1999 Plan for Transformation to rehabilitate or replace all of Chicago's public housing stock, 17,000 former public housing residents were supposed to have a right of return.

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"Will this complex lead to housing for 17,000 people or is somehow that complex going to create 17,000 jobs?" Washington asked. "That seems nonsensical."

The proposed longterm lease agreement between the City and the Fire would allow the Fire to develop the multi-million dollar facility while providing community benefits and public investments into neighboring public housing sites, longterm employment for community members, and recreational opportunities for youth, according to the City.

"I am committed to working closely with the Fire and the residents of the 28th Ward to ensure that this opportunity for economic investment creates a longterm positive impact on our community," Ervin said.

According to the Mayor's Office, officials have set an overall goal for the planning process of creating an economic anchor that provides employment; recreational opportunities; and affordable housing resources for the community, including rehabilitating and preserving nearby CHA properties and providing resources for minority and women-owned businesses and community green space

"They say this will create housing," Washington noted. "Where? When? How much?"

#### Investment in CHA?

"CHA sees this partnership with the Chicago Fire as an opportunity to invest in our families and in this community," said CHA CEO Tracey Scott. "By repurposing this unused land, we can secure substantial funds to rehabilitate CHA housing and develop new affordable housing while also creating employment opportunities for our residents and community members."

"The market-rate lease payments paid by the Fire would fund much needed substantial rehab work on public housing units in the immediate area," the CHA's Aguilar told *Gazette Chicago*. "CHA and the City will pursue the maximum benefits for residents and community members throughout the lease's duration. CHA sees this proposal as complementary to residential use and in line with mixed-use community development. It also puts unused land to active use that delivers benefits to CHA families and the broader community."



*Chicago Fire players may be coming to a new practice facility on the Near West Side on Chicago Housing Authority land.*

Washington questions the whole concept. "How is it possible for the CHA, with a billion dollar budget, to produce affordable housing for people by acting as a real estate agent to produce profit for the City of Chicago?" he asked, noting that, instead, the CHA "is utilizing its land in a way that does not produce housing for people."

Roosevelt Square developer Related Midwest already is replacing the former ABLA Homes with mixed-income housing, but the process is taking years longer than expected, and much land remains vacant. Washington is skeptical that the company will ever deliver.

"Related Midwest was supposed to be putting up a mixed-income housing complex—Roosevelt Square—where the Chicago Fire is going to have its practice field going up," he said. "If that practice facility goes up, is that still going to happen? Can it? I don't think it can."

"CHA will continue efforts to create mixed-income housing in this area and can do so on CHA-owned and private land and identify alternate sites within the area," Aguilar countered, noting the CHA has an ongoing commitment to developing mixed-income, mixed-use housing.

"We have a 120,000 person housing gap in Chicago for affordable housing, a situation that's not getting any closer to being fixed," Washington said. "And even if they did mixed-income housing in that area, people who can get only public housing will not be able to utilize the right of return."

"I am really disgusted with the CHA and Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who talks about affordable housing—but any housing that is being built that is called 'affordable' is not affordable for us," said Etta Davis, a leader with the Lugenia Burns Hope Center, a civic engagement organization.

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"We need low-income and subsidized housing," Davis continued, agreeing with Washington that "There are over 120,000 people on the CHA waiting list. The CHA says it takes an average of 4.3 years to get an apartment in CHA, but I know people who were on the list ten years."

A Related Midwest spokesperson said, "Related Midwest supports investment in the Roosevelt Square community, where we are committed to mixed-income housing as well as a vibrant mix of properties that offer residential, commercial, and civic uses for residents. We look forward to the public process and to working closely with all parties to ensure that development in the area is beneficial to the people who call Roosevelt Square home."

Fire facility plans at the time of the announcement tentatively included world-class practice and performance fields for match preparation as well as housing for the Fire Youth Academy with programming for youth, teens, and young adults in CHA housing and the surrounding community.

"The Chicago Fire Football Club is committed to making a difference in the lives of young people and communities through soccer," said Chicago Fire FC President Ishwara Glassman Chrein. "In neighborhoods across the city, soccer brings people together, fostering a strong sense of history and community while showing immense passion for the game. We look forward to presenting the project to the local community, hearing their feedback, and creating new opportunities for residents of the Near West Side to enjoy the game."

Davis countered by asking, "Where are the poor people going to go? I guess Chicago is just going to be for the rich."

The City and the Fire will determine facility details through community engagement as well as ongoing discussion among the Mayor's Office, City agencies, and the CHA.

For more information on the Chicago Fire, visit [chicagofirefc.com](http://chicagofirefc.com). For the CHA, log on to [www.thecha.org/](http://www.thecha.org/). For the Chicago Housing Initiative, log on to [www.chicagohousinginitiative.org/](http://www.chicagohousinginitiative.org/). See a proposal overview page at [chicago.gov/chicagofire](http://chicago.gov/chicagofire). DPD staff welcome initial comments at [dpd@cityofchicago.org](mailto:dpd@cityofchicago.org). For the Lugenia Burns Hope Center, log on to [www.lbhopecenter.com](http://www.lbhopecenter.com).

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