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HomeLife & Real Estate

Where are the grocers? Agglomeration, bell cows and the quest for broccoli

BY SALLY DUROS

Something has happened to my corner lot and I'm in a bit of a bind. Three years ago it was a vacant lot with a few weeds and a few trees. Now it's a parking lot for a grocery store. I'm not sure if I should be happy or sad. I've been thinking about this a lot lately. I wonder if I should have bought it sooner. I wonder if I should have sold it sooner. I wonder if I should have done something else. I wonder if I should have just left it alone. I wonder if I should have... (text continues)

The new CABRINI II



Behind the scenes... the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side

Mixed-income dwellings are rising from the rubble of a once infamous housing project

For years, I and my husband... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)



Construction on land that was formerly Cabrini Green

FROM THE COVER WHAT IS THIS PLACE? THE NEW CABRINI



Construction on land that was formerly Cabrini Green

CABRINI - BY THE NUMBERS

Long sought by developers... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)

NATURE NOTES

SOIL: typical urban soil... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)

ON THE GRID

Map showing the location of the new Cabrini II development in relation to the city grid.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

- 1. 1. Pioneer Square City East... 2. 2. Old Town Village... 3. 3. The Loop... 4. 4. The Loop... 5. 5. The Loop... 6. 6. The Loop... 7. 7. The Loop... 8. 8. The Loop... 9. 9. The Loop... 10. 10. The Loop...

CABRINI AREA HOME SALES

Table with columns for SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED, CONDO/TOWN HOMES, and various statistics like Avg. Sale Price, Avg. Days on Market, etc.

THE RIGHT PLACE | Where your pad meets our blog at SunTimes.com

'Everyone had their own lawns. It was beautiful'

It was different when Howard... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)

Former Cabrini resident sees positives in CHA relocation

Cabrini native Steve Mitchell... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)

The Cabrini Residences were built in 1942 for veterans.



The Cabrini Residences were built in 1942 for veterans.

CHA relocation

Steve Mitchell, a former resident... (text continues) ...the new high-rise neighborhood on the Near North Side... (text continues)

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

The New Cabrini

Notorious No More: Mixed-income dwellings are rising from the rubble of a once infamous housing project

By Pat Terry

For years, I and my husband rode the No. 37 bus south on Sedgwick, east on Division, then down Orleans alongside the notorious Cabrini-Green housing projects. After a publicized wave of gang shootings or drug busts, I'd slouch a little lower in my seat.

Sometime in the early '90s, we began spotting the periodic burned-out home below Division. "The developers are planning to turn Cabrini into luxury condos," we'd joke.

But the joke was on us.

Cabrini-Green is being demolished—except for the Frances Cabrini Rowhouses built for returning WWII veterans—and is being rebuilt as a new mixed-income community. Among them are, yes, pricey condos.

Parkside of Old Town, the first re-development on Cabrini-Green's 72-acre site, will eventually offer nearly 800 mixed-income units, for sale and for rent, including 50 percent market rate, 30 percent CHA replacement and 20 percent affordable (based on the Chicago PMSA median income tables).

Town-house buyers in Phase I will move in after Labor Day, having paid \$499,900 to \$700,000 (70 percent sold), while condo occupancy is set for spring. Remaining condos (80 percent sold) run \$300,000 to the mid-\$400,000s.

The new 18-acre development—attractive brick town houses encircled by condo and rental buildings—lies between Division and Oak, Larrabee and an expanded Seward Park with rehabbed green space, basketball hoops, kids' play equipment and a fieldhouse offering numerous programs.

'Just minutes from work'

"We bought a town home the very first day," said Catherine Hughey, Parkside's sales director, "but I didn't get any special treatment." She's moving with her husband, Roshawn, and young daughter, from a recently rehabbed house in Chatham.

Although Hughey's jobs have exposed her to lots of developments, this is the first place she "really, really" wanted to move in.

"Who wouldn't want to be in a great area, in a brand new home right downtown?" she asked. "It's just minutes from work."

Her husband, a Chicago police officer, hopes to work out of the nearby station.

A former electrical engineering student, Hughey did her homework before accepting the job at Parkside, a unique three-way partnership among Holsten Real Estate Development, Kimball Hill Urban Centers and the Cabrini Local Advisory Council.

“I was very impressed with Peter Holsten’s story, his desire to bring good, affordable housing to the area. Peter and Jackie Taylor Holsten are phenomenal people,” she said. Holsten, whom some call a visionary, is a University of Chicago MBA, who developed North Town Village with Hal Lichterman of Kenard Corporation.

James Diestel will move into a Parkside condo this spring — with fiancée Nicole Marino — from a nearby River Village town house. A Realtor himself

(Remax), Diestel couldn’t resist the view:

“I bought a penthouse condo that faces south and east, with a wrap-around terrace and sliding glass doors. It overlooks the park, and I can see the Hancock building and Sears Tower.”

Location is also important to Diestel, who works at home and in the suburbs, and to Marino. “It’s an easy shot down Division to the expressway,” he said.

The only drawback? His dog might be surprised to ride the elevator to go for a walk.

The changing community

Before Cabrini, which began with the Rowhouses in 1942, the red Extensions in 1958 and the white William-Green high-rises in 1962, the area was poor and working class.



Photo by Rich Hein, Sun-Times Photos

“The neighborhood was predominantly black and Italian,” said longtime homeowners Patricia Burns, who’s Sicilian, and her husband, Larry, who’s African American. Larry was born in the area before the Rowhouses, and remembers a vibrant community of homeowners and renters, grocery stores, taverns and theaters.

“It was a real community,” the couple emphasized during a conversation in the side yard of their four-story building on Orleans. Old-time neighbors pass up and down the adjacent alley beneath the L, waving or stopping to say hello.

“There are no families, no neighborhood anymore,” Patricia said. “Maybe in the future, new families will build community.”

The Burnses have mixed emotions about the rapid gentrification. “We never really had any trouble with Cabrini,” the retired firefighter said, but astronomical property-tax increases are another story.

Developers before demolition

Well before CHA launched its 10-year Plan for Transformation in 2000, developers and speculators were busy along Cabrini’s perimeters.

The 261-unit North Town Village, built on private land south of the shuttered New City YMCA—half market rate, with 30 percent of units set aside for returning CHA residents and 20 percent for “affordable” income—was probably the most significant mixed-income development early on, according to Doug Guthrie, president of Kimball Hill Urban

Centers. Like Parkside, the development supported former Cabrini residents with a raft of support services, including jobs and new neighbor training put together by its own Human Capital arm.

Dan McLean’s MCL Companies was the most prolific, creating four mixed-income housing developments with a combined 522 units, starting with Mohawk North (92 units), then Old Town Square (163 units). MCL also built the Old Town Shopping Center, reviving a blighted area on Division west of Sedgwick with a badly needed Dominick’s. He also donated land for a new library.

The most recent MCL projects, Old Town Village East, adjacent to the shopping center offer 273 units — 20 percent of which are CHA replacement housing. And all but a half dozen town houses are sold.

Although mixed-income development takes a lot of patience with paperwork, bureaucracy and all the interested parties, both MCL’s McLean and Parkside’s Guthrie are willing to do it again.

Guthrie can’t discuss future plans at this point, since Requests for Qualifications have not been issued for other Cabrini sites, but he’d like to work with Holsten again on another mixed income development.

“We’re proud that we’ve been able to have all these families live at Old Town for all these years without significant problems. Our goal was to break the pattern of dependence that generations of families had on the federal government, get them on their feet

and make them independent,” McLean said. “We will still consider any projects they bring us in the future.”

Friends called them crazy in 1996, when Margaret and John Comer invested in a three-flat condo building at Mohawk North, but “It was a no-brainer,” Margaret said. “With that location, at those prices (\$127,500 to \$147,500), how could you miss?” They had no trouble renting the units.

Later that year, Margaret spotted Old Town Square, and the Comers bought a single-family (\$349,000) with landscaped backyard, moving from a home farther north.

“The kids were out of the house, it was new construction and we liked the neighborhood,” said Margaret, who seems to know the whole neighborhood—from Mr. Wilson, the now-retired barber at Town & Garden Apartments, to Mr. Smith around the block. While the Comers love to socialize and invite people in, Margaret senses a chill from some affluent newcomers toward their subsidized neighbors.

Since MCL’s first development, the pace of subsidized housing has quickened — from architect Helmet Jahn’s silver single-room occupancy hotel, likened to “a diner on steroids,” to Structured Development’s proposal for retail and residential on the New City YMCA site.

CHA replacements too slow

Ald. Walter Burnett, whose 27th Ward encompasses most of Cabrini and much of the surrounding area, is not happy with the pace of CHA’s transformation.

“It is going too slow,” said Burnett, who grew up in Cabrini, “because it puts peoples’ lives in limbo, kids have to change schools, move to different neighborhoods. A lot of that I put on CHA—and some on the residents who had a hand in holding things up.” He’s referring to a tenant lawsuit filed against the CHA to increase replacement housing, among other issues. The lengthy lawsuit, plus financial strains, has pushed completion date for CHA’s 10-year Plan to 2015 — at which point, who knows where former residents might be?

Burnett made a promise to his community: to do everything he can to help them return. Proposed development on CHA or city land has a formula for public housing and “affordable” units, but Walter uses his leverage if it’s private land.

“If developers need any help from the city, such as upzoning or financial assistance—which they usually do—I ask for 10 percent of the units as CHA replacement, 10 percent affordable,” he said.

Alderman in adjacent wards—the 43rd, 32nd and 42nd—don’t seem to share Burnett’s passion.

Pat Terry is a Chicago-based freelance writer.