

HYDE PARK HERALD

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Local
Since
1882

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One big project? Sparks fly over Kenwood Park

Packaging Harper Theater and Harper Court on the table

By KATE HAWLEY
Staff Writer

A single developer may end up owning The Harper Court shopping center and a vacant building at the northwest corner of Harper Avenue and 53rd Street - a structure that houses both the defunct Harper Theater and a chunk of commercial space widely known in the neighborhood as the Herald Building.

The University of Chicago, which owns Harper Court and the Harper Theater building, might bundle them together in a package deal, according to Susan Campbell, associate vice president for community affairs.

Officials are currently considering the future of the theater building, perhaps to "include it or hold it out as another element for Harper Court," she said Monday, Sept. 8, at a meeting of the 53rd Street Tax Increment Finance (TIF) advisory council at

Kenwood Academy, 5015 S. Blackstone Ave.

"It's a consideration, not a decision," she added. "It hasn't been fully vetted."

The theater building has been in limbo since May, when the university fired Baum Realty and Brinshore Development. The developers planned to rehab the structure for retail space, but had trouble meeting financial commitments and contractual deadlines, university officials have said.

Also in May, the university announced its purchase of Harper Court, the shopping center located along Harper Avenue between 52nd and 53rd streets, and its plan to acquire the adjacent city-owned parking lot.

The university will seek a developer for the Harper Court parcels through a Request for Proposals, or RFP, a competitive bidding process

sponsored by the city. Campbell had no word yet on whether the RFP, which will likely be issued in the fall, will include the Harper Theater building.

And it's unclear at this stage what bundling the properties would mean for efforts to preserve the 1913 Harper Theater building, designed by noted Chicago architect Horatio Wilson. Its orange rating in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey means a 90-day hold on demolition. The building is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Campbell and Ilene "Jo" Reizner, director of real estate operations for the university and a member of the council, said the building may not be worth saving.

Three years ago, before selecting Baum and Brinshore as developers, the university commissioned a study

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Sparks fly over Kenwood Park

Preckwinkle-created committee will slate candidates

By CRYSTAL FENCKE
Staff Writer



George Rumsey

returned.

This occurred near the end of the scheduled gathering of park stakeholders, when leader George Rumsey brought up the imminent park election. He said, "The only thing that can put us off base is the advisory council election."

Rumsey was right on target.

Steve Molasky, a neighbor who said he has been active in raising funds for park projects, said "Nothing will change." Molasky is afraid that the new Kenwood Park Advisory Council (KPAC) will be made up of local government appointments, and as such, will not serve the best interests of the Kenwood Park community.

Julie Marie Lemon of the current KPAC leadership said that she is not sure how a new council could keep peace. And in response, Harold Bailey, a manager with the Chicago Park District, said "Good luck." He said he has commonly seen fractures within park advisory councils across the city.

The KPAC election is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Sept. 24 at St. Paul & the Redeemer Church, 4945 S. Dorchester Ave. It was changed from an earlier date in July to the time in September.

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Chicago Half Marathon



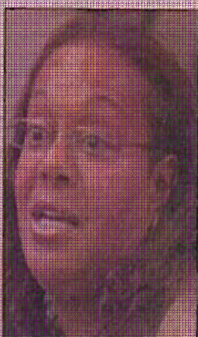
Runners check the time or start their stopwatches as they begin the Banco Popular Chicago Half Marathon Sunday morning. Despite the rain, more than 10,400 runners ran the race along the lakefront and in Jackson Park.

Marc Monaghan

Hyde Park hears more about tennis "bubble"

Sports complex to be supported through a mix of government bonds and member fees

By CRYSTAL FENCKE
Staff Writer



Ald. Leslie Hairston (5th)

to enclose the tennis courts in the park.

Local tennis coach, Tyrone Mason is spearheading the plan along with the nonprofit group he founded, Athletes Committed to Education, or ACE. Ald. Leslie Hairston (5th), whose ward encompasses the park, strongly

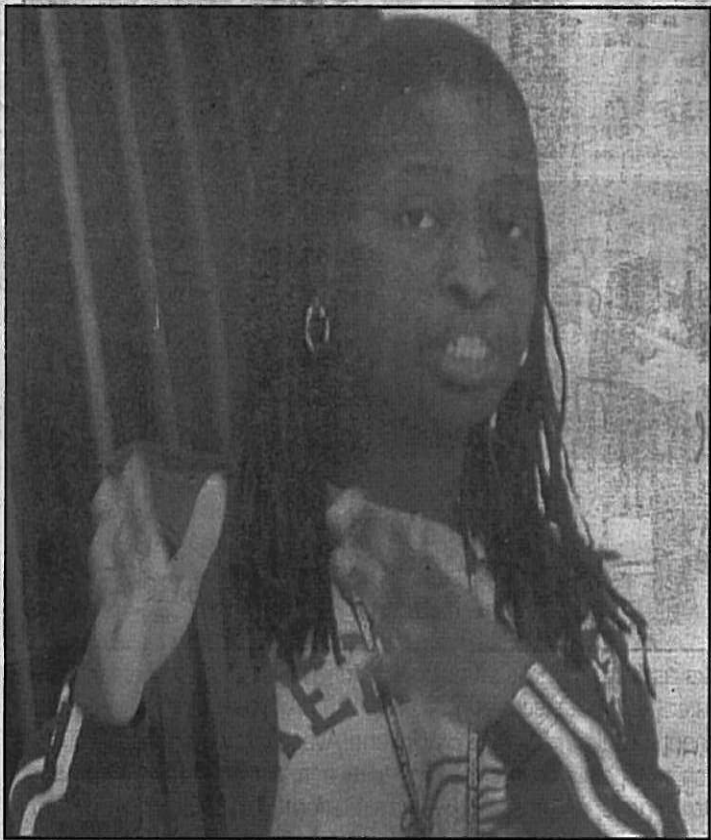
supports the proposal. Its main purpose is to keep young people active in tennis, golf and baseball year-round and to provide a professional springboard, said Mason.

Mason is currently in negotiations with the Chicago Park District. The two groups continue to talk about ownership and lease requirements.

Architect John M. Gay, from Chicago-based JAQ Corp. International, is working on the plans. Gay presented blueprints via a PowerPoint presentation showing diagrams of the 57,000-square-foot, 40-foot high complex to house six tennis courts, five batting cages and an area for golf simulators. There would be two buildings, one for administration functions. Gay said that the "bubble" would be an

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Welcome back!



Owen M. Lawson III

Principal Elizabeth Kirby welcomes parents and talks about academic programs for the coming school year at Saturday's open house at Kenwood Academy, 5015 S. Blackstone Ave.

Red Ball comes to Hyde Park Art Center

By CRYSTAL FENCKE
Staff Writer

The RedBall Project, a public art installation that has been traveling through Chicago, is scheduled to brighten up the front of the Hyde Park Art Center (HPAC) on Friday, Sept. 19.

Artist Kurt Perschke's 15-foot inflatable orb is an ongoing, site-specific installation, which has already journeyed through

Barcelona, Spain; Sydney, Australia; and Busan, South Korea. In the United States, it has come to Scottsdale, Ariz.; Portland, Ore.; and St. Louis, Mo.

Perschke uses it to discover each city's architectural landscape and history. The ball adapts its shape to the particular architecture it is wedged into.

Allison Quinn Peters, Director of Exhibitions at the HPAC, said she is

looking forward to the RedBall Project coming to the center. In an e-mail she said, "It's interactive and fun ... The project is a great way to promote the Hyde Park Art Center as a public art space and invite people inside to see what we're about."

In Chicago through September 21, the RedBall Project has visited Millennium Park and the Spertus Museum and it will stop at 11 other sites in addition to HPAC.

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on the property from BauerLatoza Studio, a Chicago firm specializing in architecture and historic preservation, Reizner told the roughly 50 people who attended the meeting.

The study concluded that razing the site was the most feasible solution and that "the building was not something that anyone should put a significant amount of money into," she said.

Moreover, the complex is in bad shape, she added, saying, "It's barely able to withstand another winter, I'd say."

Baum and Brinshore took on the project "hoping to gain a foothold in the community. It was not an economically viable project," she said.

In an email message, David Baum, principal of Baum Development and Baum Realty Group, reacted to Reizner's comments by saying, "Given the current economic conditions, we couldn't get the project to pencil."

"Preserving a building is important from both an historical and environmental perspective," he continued. The job "would have required extensive renovation, particularly the theater [portion of the] building, and it would have proven to be an expensive endeavor."

He held out the possibility that his firm would seek other projects in the neighborhood, saying, "I continue to believe very strongly in the fundamentals of Hyde Park. It's not a question of if, it's a question of when."

Reached by phone, Brinshore president and CEO Rich Sciortino declined to comment on Reizner's assessment of the project's financial viability or the condition of the building.

Jack Spicer, a local preservation advocate, asked at the meeting how much effort the university plans to put into maintaining the building, "so we don't end up with demolition by neglect?"

Measures will be taken to ensure that the structure remains sound, Campbell said, adding, "It's not in our

interest or the community's interest to have the building fall apart."

In other business, the council approved Antheus Capital's proposal to redevelop the Village Center shopping mall at the southwest corner of Hyde Park Boulevard and Lake Park Avenue, paving the way for the company to seek approval from the Chicago City Council.

Also at the meeting, council Chair Howard Males announced the results of the biennial TIF council elections. The 13 members voted unanimously to reelect Males and Reizner, the vice chair.

And he announced that Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th), who appoints the council, had reappointed eight members to new two-year terms: Toni McCallister, Trushar Patel, Chuck Thurow, Laurel Stradford, Tony Wilkins, Jane Comiskey and Ginny Vaske, who serves as council secretary.

Three additional members, Andre Brumfeld, Rod Sawyer and Steve Soble, are up for reappointment when their terms expire in September 2009. k.hawley@hpherald.com

KPAC

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And it will only take place after a different meeting Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th) has decided must happen. The purpose of this preliminary session is for a steering committee to choose a "consensus slate of officers" for the KPAC, said Rumsey. It is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Sept. 16 at either the field house or the church, which is located across the street from the park.

The steering committee will be comprised of 13 members — an uneven number so there will not be a tie, said Rumsey. It will include a representative number of

stakeholders who should be able to come up with a slate of four KPAC nominees: a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary.

The 13 will include members of the previous KPAC, which Preckwinkle disbanded recently after the controversy surrounding the surprise enlargement of a baseball diamond in the park. Other stakeholders tapped include the South Side Fire Soccer Club and Legends Baseball. Friends of the Parks and some neighbors who use the park will also be among that group.

The aim is for them to create a slate of officers who can work together with the best interests of all parties

who use the park in mind. Rumsey said there are two ways the nominating process could go. The new KPAC would include members of the soccer club and baseball because "they have the most to lose," said Rumsey. Those two groups have been in contention over the past months because of the increased baseball diamond. The soccer field has lost space because of that increase.

In contrast, the new slate could be made up of disinterested members, or no one from the soccer club, baseball, or the former KPAC. That would lessen the chance of fighting among the group, he said. c.fencke@hpherald.com

BUBBLE

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improvement over the nine existing courts, as three of them retain water and three don't have nets.

Gay showed some of the advantages of the air-supported bubble structure. It can be erected in one day, and if there is a fire it can deflate. He said that the proposed design has "very low" environmental impact, and allows for natural lighting all day right through the flexible material. It is even self-cleaning: "When it rains, the soot and dirt wash right off," he said. The plans also include for a wildflower meadow to be planted behind it.

The "bubble" would cost \$3 million to build, and \$1 million to maintain yearly, said Mason. Although the facility would be in a Chicago park, ACE would have on its own payroll

expert coaching and other staff. The funding to build it would come from private investors. Moneys for maintenance would come from a combination of a government bond and yearly dues of about \$300 per individual member.

Tennis buff Allen Schechter said he worried about the proposed fee. "I'm a little concerned; I play there for free," said the 45-year resident of South Shore.

Mason responded that the "bubble" structure would only be up during the cooler months. In the summer, players would not have to pay to be members, he said. Mason added that the plan includes keeping fees low for those on limited incomes, by instituting a sliding scale.

Ross Peterson, president of the Jackson Park Advisory Council, has recently expressed doubts about building a structure that could block

views of the park. In the meeting, Joan Levin, a former Hyde Park resident, also voiced a concern about the location. "With the University of Chicago acquiring sites all over, there must be land available. What other sites have you considered?" she asked.

That question was not on the table, Hairston stressed, especially after a few other questions about a possible alternative location followed. She said, "It's not up for discussion. Please — this is about this site. The proposal before us happens to be in Jackson Park."

Myriam Weaver of North Kenwood attended with her two daughters, ages 4 and 6. She supports the project, she said, as she currently has to drive her daughters out of the area for their activities. "There is nothing on the South Side," Weaver said. c.fencke@hpherald.com

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