

Alderman Cochran Fights for Area Schools – Letter from the Aldermen:

What's on my mind – and I'm certain on yours – is the school closings being proposed by the Chicago Board of Education and their potential impact on our community.

The current school closure plan disproportionately affects at-risk children in south and west side communities. In the 20th Ward alone, the proposed closings would displace 3,330 students.



Schools are the backbone of healthy communities. Like our children, they are our wealth. Schools to which our children can walk are important to families. It's part of why we choose to live in the communities that we do. If our schools have problems, we should be working to make these schools better, not talking about closing them down and shuttling already underserved kids halfway across the city to overcrowded, underperforming schools.

Shuttering schools is not only harmful to the affected students, but the entire community – We've seen what happens where schools are shut down. We get increased truancy, which can lead to increased violence, to decreased commercial and real estate investment. The issues surrounding these closings are much broader than a simple cost-saving effort by CPS. In order to better use the city's already available resources and keep local public schools open, I have co-sponsored a resolution calling for a moratorium on opening new charter schools thru the years 2014-15. The involvement of so many parents, stakeholders and educators clearly deserves notice. We should not hasten to implement closure policies without having done a complete evaluation and justification of proposed school closures that exceed the measure of money.

As community leaders, we should be encouraging better school attendance, not instituting educational barriers. That starts with a realistic approach to evaluating the city's educational assets, not simply trying to save money on the backs of working families.

If you wish to join this effort, call my office, and to make your voice heard on this issue, please contact CPS directly at (773) 553-1000.

"GRAND OPENING" continued from front
"We've decided to reinvent the community technology center for the 21st century digital age," said Clark, Co-Founder/Executive Director of the **Chicago Digital Access Alliance, Inc.**, the city-wide non-profit organization that is sponsoring the CT2C. "It's not enough anymore just to have access to a computer, but you need to know how to use a computer to do useful work that adds value."

The CT2C is an integral part of the digital literacy and broadband expansion work that Clark and Laura Lane, as co-directors of the Woodlawn Broadband Expansion Partnership L3C, have been working on for nearly two years. Governor Pat Quinn recently awarded \$2 million to a public-private partnership between government, community and private interests that will create a fiber-optic/Wi-Fi broadband network that offers high-speed bandwidth to nine Chicago communities, including Woodlawn.

Clark envisions community technology centers as central to enhancing digital literacy skills for Woodlawn residents. The CT2C will help further support and create programs and initiatives that advance the digital fluency and digital skills of Chicago residents in every neighborhood, with digital excellence as a benchmark standard, regardless of race, income or geography.

CT2C
6353 S. Cottage Grove
Call to schedule an appointment:
312.473.0373 or 312-970-0249



PRESERVATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING, INC.
c/o Grove Parc Plaza Apartments
6101 South Evans Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637
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FROM THE GROVE

A Preservation of Affordable Housing NEWSLETTER

From the Chicago Office

Hard to believe that we – POAH and our team of community partners – are already well into the second year of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative we hope will drive Woodlawn's economic resurgence.

I could go on at length about all that everyone has accomplished so far – 400 new apartments in mixed income buildings, new levels of community collaboration, partner-driven development along 63rd Street – but we think the year ahead could be even more exciting. It will certainly challenge us in new ways.

As I write, construction continues just north of 62nd Street on the east side of Cottage (Grove). By summer's end, we should have 33 new rental units in a building similar in layout to **Woodlawn Center South**, though the exterior treatments will be different. We are also completing rehabilitation of the former Westwood Apartments located along the 62nd Street corridor. All 102 units in these mixed-income buildings should be leased this spring.

We also intend to launch two for-sale opportunities – a new, 18-unit condominium building on 61st Street and Cottage Grove and a Woodlawn Housing Loan Fund to purchase and offer for sale 1-4-unit properties that today are vacant or otherwise distressed.

In partnership with the **City of Chicago**, we have started a venture to acquire vacant, distressed, or at-risk small buildings (1-4 units in size), renovate them, and sell them to owner-occupants. POAH has set aside Choice money for this endeavor and expects to attract other public and private funds to create a program that rehabilitates 150 units over the next three years.

See "FROM THE CHICAGO OFFICE" inside >>>

Grand Opening of CT2C Technology Center



Long-time Woodlawn resident **Pierre Clark** has opened **Creative Technology Training Center (CT2C)**, a community technology center that will bring another level of digital literacy and support to the Woodlawn neighborhood. The community technology training center offers access to computers and teaches individuals the skills to use them effectively.

Located at 6353 S. Cottage Grove, Woodlawn residents can use CT2C to prepare resumes, research jobs, read e-mail messages, surf web sites and perform web-based research. Additionally, CT2C offers technology trainings in these digital skills: Microsoft Office/Open Office; digital editing; computer troubleshooting and refurbishing; A+ Repair Certification; Web Design and Development; Photoshop editing; music and video production/editing/recording; and Cisco academy network engineer training.

See "GRAND OPENING" on back >>>

Overcoming the Digital Divide: Woodlawn Expands Online

More residents of Woodlawn and eight other South Side Chicago communities will now have the opportunity to take part in the 'online digital world' as a result of a State of Illinois grant announced by **Governor Pat Quinn** in February. The \$2 million Gigabit Illinois Challenge Grant will cover the cost of building a high-speed fiber-optic Wi-Fi network, allowing residents access to the Internet from computers, smart phones and other web-connecting devices.

Access to broadband technology is increasingly essential to connect people to the jobs information, education, training, health care and other human services that individuals and families need. As numerous studies have pointed out, lack of access to the 'digital world' or what's known as the 'digital divide' has deepened disparities in every area, from income to health care outcomes.

According to a study commissioned by the City of Chicago, "**Digital Excellence in Chicago**," four out of every 10 Chicagoans face barriers to broadband access—having either limited or no Internet access at home. Overall, 25% of Chicago residents are not online, another 6% use the Internet



at times but lack home access, and 8% have more limited and slow dial-up connections rather than high-speed broadband.

In past years, governments have tried to bridge the gap through the use of public computer centers, libraries and schools, but these centers have quickly reached capacity and cannot accommodate the current demand. The State's initiative will help bridge that gap through investment in infrastructure, programs and applications that make high-speed Internet technology more accessible and user friendly.

"When high-speed broadband is available and easily accessible in the area, it becomes easier for neighborhood residents to use that access to find a job; build marketable skills; get information; purchase goods and services online; communicate with others online; and connect with learning and educational opportunities," says Laura Lane, Co-Director of the Woodlawn Broadband Expansion Partnership, which helped to bring the grant to Chicago's Mid-South communities.

While the network continues to be built, those seeking internet access and skills can find local sites, free of charge, by visiting www.weconnectchicago.com or calling 311.

"FROM THE CHICAGO OFFICE" continued from front

We are looking for a partner to simultaneously focus on the acquisition of target properties and attracting homeowners to them. As buildings are acquired and rehab plans drawn up, our partners will work with the potential homeowners on mortgage qualification, homeownership counseling and other pre-purchase steps to make sure the buyers are successful. Public funds will be used to subsidize the acquisition and rehab costs, and we are working with community leaders to provide additional buyer assistance.

In addition to our housing work—we will complete two more rental phases in 2013, start another and begin marketing commercial sites at the northwest corner of 61st and Cottage Grove and the northeast corner of 63rd and Cottage Grove. Additionally, our partner **Metrosquash** is making great progress in its development of a recreational facility—squash courts with classrooms and other amenities for tutoring and mentoring kids from grades 5-12 at 61st and Cottage Grove through a multi-million-dollar development campaign.

Our commercial property work is focused on bringing new economic activity to 61st and 63rd streets by leveraging our proximity to the Green Line and to the University of Chicago Hospital. Though some of this work is preliminary, we are talking to brokers and potential partners about developing a 125-room hotel or grocery store and a few more moderately-sized uses.

Sixty third Street will be an area of particular focus. Most immediately, we are talking to commercial brokers about how best to position the POAH-owned parcel at Cottage Grove. A bit to the east on 63rd, two non-POAH projects are under way. The **Sonia Shankman School of Orthogenics** and the **Hyde Park Day School** are under construction between Ingleside and Ellis.

Nevertheless, significant tracts of vacant land remain east and west of Cottage Grove. We believe one or two parcels might be suitable for a grocer or other large user and are engaging a retail broker to pursue that route. We are working with Ald. Cochran and others to create an economic development plan for the corridor.

And if that's not enough, the work of our key partners—**Metropolitan Family Services**, the **Woodlawn Children's Promise Community** and the **Network of Woodlawn**—grows more robust with each week.

Choice has always been about much more than affordable housing. With your assistance, we will begin to see the fruits of those efforts soon.

- Bill Eager, Vice President, POAH Chicago

POAH Brings Valuable Resources to Community

More than 1,200 Grove Parc and Woodlawn community residents have taken advantage of the job placement, educational and career training resources available at the **Woodlawn Resource Center (WRC)**, 830 E. 63rd Street, opened by Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) last June.

WRC's team of case managers, employment specialists and financial literacy coaches are assisting Grove Parc and Woodlawn residents to achieve their education and job training goals, while helping them learn how to manage their finances and personal credit matters.

Grove Parc residents can access many community resources at the Center, and Woodlawn community residents can participate in the many workshops and trainings that are offered - from job readiness programs to money management seminars.

"The Woodlawn Resource Center has successfully integrated intake, referrals, programs and supports to provide the coordinated, wrap-around services families need," said **Felicia Dawson, POAH Chicago's Director of Community Engagement**.

Guided by individual needs assessments and a case management approach, the WRC staff coaches youth and adults to articulate their aspirations and establish realistic action plans. The WRC serves as a gateway to developing quality educational and resource options for Woodlawn residents through an extensive network of local partners and resources, including continuing education courses at Kennedy King College.

"Although people may be reluctant at first to share information about their personal finances and situation, there are enormous benefits to be gained here," said

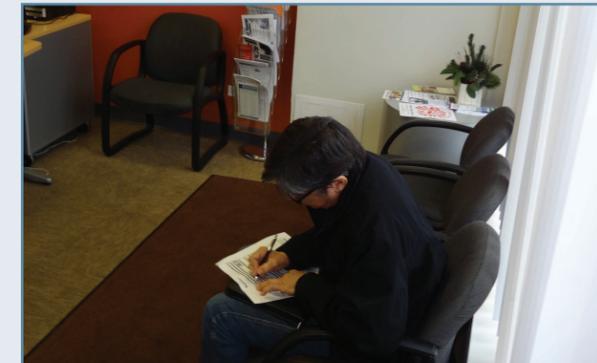
Jeneen Ford, WRC Employment Specialist. "We are helping families to take full advantage of job placement services, financial counseling and literacy, as well as educational and training opportunities."



"We meet people where they are in life, and offer them the services to help reach their goals," said Ford.

Ford said that WRC staff is helping residents work through individual challenges such as limited computer skills, domestic violence, child care or mental health issues.

"My first client from Grove Parc stated that he wanted work and would do what it took for him to achieve that goal. He had a few challenges in his background, but we were able to help him find employment opportunities and he did all the work it took for him to take advantage of those job opportunities. We have since assisted many of his friends and family members with employment opportunities," said Ford. "He didn't sell our program. The individuals he has referred have seen how the services we offer helped him achieve his goals, and now they are beginning to take advantage of the services for themselves."



"This same client told me that many of the past programs he participated in were not very helpful, but this program is different in a good way. It meets people where they are in life and that is important to their success."

The Woodlawn Resource Center
830 E. 63rd Street
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30am to 5:30pm
773.891.4781 www.metrofamily.org