

Disposition of Land at 6435 N California Ave

Evelyn Miks <ejmiks@sbcglobal.net>

Mon 3/14/2022 8:36 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

The West Ridge Community Organization (WRCO) wishes to submit the statement below regarding an ordinance authorizing the disposition of land (the old Northtown Library) at 6435 N California scheduled for the March 17, 2022 Plan Commission meeting.

WRCO (the West Ridge Community Organization) requests deferral of the March 17, 2022 Chicago Plan Commission resolution authorizing negotiations with a preferred buyer for the property located at 6435 N California Avenue, the old Northtown Branch Library, for the following reasons:

Although the property is a public building there was never any notice to the community that the building was available for sale. Despite repeated attempts via phone and email to determine the status of the building by contact with James Hardin at DPD there was no response. Email was sent March 5, 2021, regarding disposition of the property – see below.

Evelyn Miks <ejmiks@sbcglobal.net>

[To:james.hardin@cityofchicago.org](mailto:james.hardin@cityofchicago.org)

Cc:Alderman Debra Silverstein

Fri, Mar 5, 2021, at 12:38 PM

Mr. Hardin - I'm inquiring about the status of a city owned property - the former Northtown Library at 6435 N California. The property was vacated around November/December 2018. At that time, I had spoken with someone at Fleet and Facilities Management. As I understand it the property is now under the Department of Planning and Development.

There is a non-profit organization that may be interested in purchasing the building. Whom should they contact for more information and how should they proceed? Has the city determined a valuation for the property?

Any information on this would be appreciated.

Thank you.

Evelyn Miks, Chair

West Ridge Community Organization

(773) 910-9021

Failing to get a response from DPD WRCO contacted Ald. Debra Silverstein. She responded via email that there was no RFP regarding the property because it did not meet the criteria.

When asked what that meant and did the city have plans for using the building, there was no response.

At no time since the building was closed was there any notice issued by DPD or the Alderman's office to the community that the building would be sold. The Alderman was fully aware that the community was interested in a pan-cultural arts center for reuse of the building. Several meetings were held with her in her office to notify her of interest in the building. There was a widely circulated petition to that effect and the Chicago Community Trust hosted an "On the Table" event to discuss the building's future with attendees from diverse community organizations where a consensus emerged for a community cultural center.

Suddenly in February 2022 we learn there is a proposal to purchase the building. Again there is no communication from DPD or the Alderman's office regarding the availability of the property, denying organizations or residents of this diverse community the opportunity to bid on a public property that most likely will be sold below market rate.

On February 24th DPD issues a legal notice of Invitation for Proposals with a deadline of March 31 for bids.

On February 26th authorization to negotiate with the preferred buyer is placed on the agenda of the Plan Commission for March 17, 2022. A legal notice is published March 1.

Based on the above we not only request deferral of the resolution at the Chicago Plan Commission on March 17th but also ask for an extension of 90 days of the proposal deadline to allow adequate advertisement of the opportunity for proposals from organizations and residents of this community.

Thank you

Evelyn Miks, Chair
West Ridge Community Organization

TO: Chicago Plan Commission

RE: Vacant Library Property at 6435 N. California Ave.

In the past few weeks, I have paid my property taxes on time, as always, while placing \$340 worth of stickers on my car, which I will repeat this fall for another car. During this time, I also learned that for months my Alderman was privately advancing the sale of a nearby property for what appears to be roughly half of its value. This bothers me, and I believe it should bother anyone with a sense of fairness, for multiple reasons.

Before I discuss those reasons, I want to make it crystal clear that I have absolutely nothing against the potential buyer. Yachad Chicago appears to be an excellent organization and would be welcomed in the 50th Ward. However, numerous other organizations and concepts could have also been welcomed, if other buyers were given a fair chance to make proposals for the building. I also feel that the financial return to the city should be much greater, given the published appraisal of the building. My concerns are as follows.

First, the former library has been of great interest to West Ridge residents ever since it was vacated years ago. As one example, the West Ridge Community Board (which I am not part of, and I am in no way speaking on their behalf) was both surprised and disappointed to learn of this potential sale, after numerous unsuccessful attempts to have its input heard by the Alderman (a portion of their public letter to the Alderman is attached below). In addition, many neighbors of mine are heavily involved in community service work, and through them I have learned that at least two organizations would have liked to have bid on this building, but never had the chance (until the last minute notice of a March 31 deadline). I have also heard of there are disappointed advocates who wanted to replace the Y that was closed on Touhy Ave. Thus, I have strong reason to believe that multiple buyers with equally worthy plans that would be supported by the neighborhood and the city were not only interested in this building, but would have bid much more than \$400,000.

Second, **according to city records, the former library "was vacated in late 2018 and was appraised for \$750,000"**. With property values (and taxes!) going up, it is hard to believe that this property located at such a busy Chicago intersection would decrease in value by that much. I would think it would be worth at least \$800,000 by now, double of the rather mysterious, estimated market value of \$400,000. The Alderman did state that significant deterioration has occurred, which may indeed be true, but we continue to deal in rumors rather than known facts. Plus, it would seem possible for the city to fix those problems at a lower cost in order to raise the sale price back to previous or higher values. It also ignores the possibility that an organization might want to tear the building down, and start with a new structure altogether. Clearly I don't know what is going on with this building, but I never had any interest in buying it. However, those who did have legitimate and worthy ideas should have had an equal chance at needed information to bid fairly on this property.

Third, in May 2019, Mayor Lightfoot signed an executive order placing restrictions on "aldermanic prerogative". Sadly, and surprisingly, my own close review of these restrictions does not indicate that an alderman is prohibited from advancing a plan to the DPD that: a) returns just a fraction of a property's value to the city, or b) lacks transparent community input or contact with other potential buyers.

I wish to repeat, I have nothing against Yachad Chicago. This is entirely about how this deal was made, and what happens next. If the Plan Commission supports this purchase at this bargain price, it feels like a slap in the face each time I find that my own taxes and fees have increased again. I also feel it would be in direct violation of the spirit of the executive order to restrict aldermanic privilege. **By accepting this proposal as is, in my opinion the City of Chicago is stating: We support the policy of allowing a Chicago politicians to use their privilege to circumvent and completely ignore the community they serve, even if the City of Chicago may lose \$400,000 or more in revenue.** This only bolsters views of corruption in Chicago politics.

Thus, I strongly encourage the Plan Commission to reconsider this proposed sale, even if other bids for the property have not been received by March 31. This sale should be freely and fairly advertised to potential buyers, at a price that matches the true value of the property. After that is done, if Yachad Chicago still purchases the building, I would be perfectly fine with that outcome. Regardless, I firmly believe that a message needs to be sent to aldermen in every Ward that this level of favoritism, privilege, secrecy, and financial loss is no longer acceptable. Again, this is not at all about the buyer, but the process. Surely, Yachad Chicago would feel upset if they were cut out of the corrupt process, rather than its sole beneficiary.

I wish to remain anonymous, given my concern that my Alderman cannot be trusted to act in fair and transparent ways with those who don't share her views.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my comments.

>>>> BELOW IS A COPY FROM THE WRCO BOARD LETTER POSTED ONLINE:

Dear Ald. Silverstein,

It has come to the attention of WRCO that the old Northtown Library building has recently been sold. The WRCO Board wishes to express our strong disappointment with the lack of transparency involved in the sale of this public building. As you know, WRCO was interested in the building becoming a multi-cultural arts center serving the whole community. We contacted you several months ago for help in finding out the status of the building with the Department of Planning and Development. You responded that the building did not meet the criteria for a Request for Proposal. We received no response when we questioned what that meant, and you offered no further information. It now appears the building was available for sale but there was no communication to the residents or organizations of this community that purchase was possible. Residents and organizations were not given the opportunity to bid on a public building that would sell for below market rate.

We find this process to be one that is inherently unfair and subjective. Therefore, we again propose, as we have in the past with the West Ridge Roundtable, that you implement a Citizens Advisory Committee on Economic Planning and Development. Almost half of the wards have Zoning Advisory Councils that advise aldermen on zoning and development. We believe the 50th ward needs such a committee so residents can know and be involved in the future development of their community. We will be following up with you to further discuss this concept and how it could be organized.

>>>>> END OF COPY FROM WRCO BOARD LETTER

Written testimony Plan Commission 3/17/22: defer 6435 N California

Hugh Devlin <hdevlin@ameritech.net>

Wed 3/16/2022 9:27 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: Maurice Cox <Maurice.Cox@cityofchicago.org>; Michael Gaynor <Michael.Gaynor@cityofchicago.gov>; Lori Lightfoot <Lori.Lightfoot@cityofchicago.org>; Celia Meza <Celia.Meza@cityofchicago.org>; Noah Szafranec <Noah.Szafranec@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

I respectfully must insist on deferral of the item on the agenda of the Chicago Plan Commission regarding the disposition of 6435 North California, in order to correct serious defects in disclosure and public notice:

"A resolution recommending a proposed ordinance authorizing a disposition of city owned land, generally located at 6435 North California Avenue to Yachad/Libenu (22-007-21; 50th Ward)."

This agenda item was published on the Plan Commission website on Thursday, February 24, 2022 and as a legal notice in the Chicago Tribune on Wednesday, March 2.

https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/zlup/Planning_and_Policy/Agendas/cpc_materials/03_2022/02.24.2022_DRAFT_MARCH_17_PUBLIC_NOTICE.pdf

The agenda item is incorrect, and deceptive. The applicant is not Yachad, Libenu, or any combination. Yachad Chicago is PROGRAM of a New York-based religious not-for-profit organization. Yachad Chicago is ineligible to apply to the Department's Market Rate Land Sales program because they are not incorporated and so cannot own real property. Neither is Libenu the applicant. Yachad Chicago and Libenu are proposed as TENANTS of the old Northtown library building. The Department of Planning and Development does not need authorization to enter into negotiations with Yachad or Libenu because they are not the applicant.

The notice for this agenda item is inadequate to the requirements of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Meanwhile, the local alderman is saying that Yachad Chicago is the applicant, and Libenu a leasee, giving the appearance of a co-ordinated effort by the City of Chicago to attempt secure City action while concealing the identity applicant from the public.

[https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.facebook.com/50thWardChicago/posts/320769180075559d-newsletter-fq4qmetwzc-1602117_!!B24N9PvjPQId!NVnGOTcMaLUY4Tk8uMyFqcv9sleFbIXdxwkAlqAAo_Tyn7DZfVhsAYlyTsjhgbhQaw\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.facebook.com/50thWardChicago/posts/320769180075559d-newsletter-fq4qmetwzc-1602117_!!B24N9PvjPQId!NVnGOTcMaLUY4Tk8uMyFqcv9sleFbIXdxwkAlqAAo_Tyn7DZfVhsAYlyTsjhgbhQaw$)

The Department of Planning and Development and an alderman making the same misrepresentation can only be interpreted as cooperation within the City of Chicago to deliberately conceal disclosure of the applicant for this City action. Here the proposed tenants are being used to front for the applicant in public postings by the City. At this late date, the public has yet to be informed as to the identity of the

applicant seeking City action. Absent this transparency the Plan Commission may not take action.

Therefore I respectfully must insist that this item be postponed until timely, accurate, conformant notice of this action is provided to the public.

Thank you,
Hugh Devlin
2322 W Estes Ave
Chicago IL 60645-3406
(773) 743-8370



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FOR REFUGEES IN AMERICA

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Transparency
2022

Candid.

1723 W. Devon Ave, PO Box #60085, Chicago, IL 60660

Dear Chicago Plan Commission:

I write to you regarding the sale process for the former Northtown Branch (library), located at 6435 N. California Ave. I write on behalf of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA), the non-profit that abuts the library. FORA wants to bid on the building, and we believe that if the bidding is fair that we have a great chance of submitting the winning bid.

FORA is a West Ridge based 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission it is to ensure that refugee families who come to Chicago are provided access to an education sufficient to prepare them to become economically self-sufficient and robustly engaged in American life. We focus on working with SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) refugee students, helping them to catch up to grade level through an intensive process called High Dosage Tutoring (HDT). Since the start of the pandemic alone, we have provided scores of students a total of almost 60,000 hours of HDT, and the results are amazing. We also have a robust parent empowerment program that helps parents meaningfully interact with school administrators and teachers in support of their children.

FORA currently has approximately twenty-nine full-time, part-time and work-study employees and has had more than 345 staff and volunteers in the past three years who have undergone extensive state, local and federal background checks. We are not a religious organization, and we are open to serve refugees of all religions and ethnicities. Most of our current families are Muslim. Currently, the families we serve come from Myanmar, Malaysia, South Sudan, Syria, Bhutan, and, just recently, Afghanistan. Perhaps Ukrainian arrivals might be arriving soon; we will robustly welcome them if they do arrive. We remain culturally sensitive to the needs of all the families we serve, and we meet them where they are at in their lives. West Ridge has always been a welcoming community to refugees and it should remain so. Refugee organizations should get the same shot at community resources as other organizations, but refugees lack access to political capital. We at FORA are hoping to help change the equation.

If you want to know more about us, you can go to the following links: an NBC news report about FORA (<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/local-org-seeks-tutors-for-refugees-in-chicago/2603663/>) and a FORA introduction video (<https://vimeo.com/656351536>). You can also see our most recent annual report at https://issuu.com/refugeefora/docs/2021_annual_report_print , and a Chicago Tribune article about us (<https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-refugee-tutoring-covid-learning-loss-tt-20210825-bk43yk5uunc7ri7eranq7eafh4-story.html>).

There are hundreds of SLIFE refugees within walking distance of our buildings. We are called FORA in part because it is utterly important to have "fora" within walking distance of where the refugees we serve live. We currently rent two storefronts on N California Ave, right next to the library, and one storefront on Devon, just around the corner. The SLIFE children we serve come here every day, two hours each day, throughout the school year and during summers, from kindergarten through high school. We need to be in the community we serve and we hope to stay with each of these children through high school and into college. It is also important, if possible, for our children's safety to have our tutoring center on one floor within a long "line of sight" (plus of course lots of security cameras -- we currently have 24!). Now, children need to walk between buildings on Devon and California, crossing two streets, to go between our buildings. Given the need to ensure that our locations are within walking distance of those we serve, I cannot imagine that the old Northtown Library building is worth more to anyone else; and we are looking forward to following this to the end. If this process is open and fair, I think that we would have a great chance of submitting the winning bid. We are hoping for the best.

We were hoping to bid on the library whenever it would be publicly listed for sale, but, honestly, we assumed that it would be sold for its land value, perhaps out of our purchase range.

The library building was appraised by the city in 2018 at **\$750,000**. Despite the specter of inflation, it was appraised last year for **\$630,000**. I am not sure why the appraisal decreased \$120,000 in those three years. Now, there is a bid for **\$400,000**. It seems that in the span of four short years, the value decreased by **47%**. Meanwhile, with two of our three office-fronts right next door to the old library, we pay a total of \$5,000 a month for 3,779 square feet. Times twelve (for the twelve months is a year), that is \$15.87 dollars per square feet per year for rent. Meanwhile, the library is advertised at 11,400 square feet. If we were to rent 11,400 square feet (the size of the library) for \$15.87, we would be paying \$180,918 a year to rent such a hypothetical space. In other words, the sale price of the library is only 2.21 times the amount it would cost (based on our current rent) to rent a hypothetical space of that size. Yes, we understand that some rehab might be needed on the building, and landlords pay various costs, but 2.21 times is absurdly low in any case.

Even though our office abuts the library, FORA never knew that it was actively for sale and that there was a preferred bidder. There were never any "for sale" signs put up, and nobody decided to stop right next door to tell us the great news that the building was for sale. We did not find out that the site was up for sale until days after the presumed purchaser was announced on a Facebook page on **February 28, 2022**. Since then, we have been informed that there was one line in a massive city budget memo as early as **October 7, 2021** that a specific organization had applied to purchase the building; the city government memo did not say when the building was first actively put up for sale, or when the bidding organization first began conversations with the city or who in the city the conversations were with. In any case, it saddens us that we and others in the community were not made aware, even through a simple "for sale" sign, that the building right next to our offices was now, finally, actively up for sale. Furthermore, we were totally shocked that we had until only **March 31** to put in a full bid. Meanwhile, a hearing is already being held where their \$400,000 proposal will be presented on **March 17th**. Both NGOs are

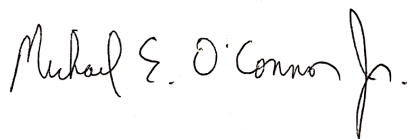
clearly worthy and provide vital services to the community. I believe a fair bidding process would end up with both a good NGO using the building and more money for Chicago's coffers in this time of great fiscal need.

Despite the lack of time, we are focused on placing a robust bid before the deadline. If we do bid, it will be significantly above the \$400,000 bid. We do not want to play games by bidding \$1 more. That does ill service to our concept of good citizenry. If we submit a robust bid that then starts a "bidding war" (thereby benefiting the taxpayers of Chicago) we expect to be able to be given the opportunity to top anybody else's counter bid or we would expect that the next round would be a blind bidding process. In any case, we are just asking for fairness, not favor. We will follow this to the end.

FORA's Board is professional. I am a retired attorney, having been a Senior Trial Attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice before becoming a commissioned officer and Associate Counsel to the President of the United States at the White House (Pres. Clinton), and then I went overseas for approximately seven years to do war relief, humanitarian and anti-trafficking work in leadership positions for international NGOs. We also have on our Board a child developmental psychologist; a retired public service attorney; a Cisco executive; a retired doctor; and a General Counsel at a non-profit that has revenue of more than \$50,000,000 a year. Our board is diverse, with four Muslim and one Jewish person on our eight person board, echoing the West Ridge community we serve.

I know that you are working to create standard processes and professionalize our city government. I hope that this issue is resolved in a way that we can all look back and say that it was done right and done well and is the beginning of a new mode of city governance. I would be remiss if I did not complement the efforts of Mr. McKenna in trying to help us during this too fast moving process. There is too much negative news about governments -- near and far -- these days. All of us need some good news. Let's do it right.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael E. O'Connor Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael E. O'Connor, Jr.
Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America
6431 N. California Ave.,
Chicago, IL 60637