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Park District acquires South Loop property

Vet museum to fully relocate
in 3 years

By ALLISON RIGGIO
Contributing Writer

Residents of Chicago's historic **Prairie District** have a new neighbor moving in. After a year-long battle over the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, the Chicago Park District's Board of Commissioners officially approved the acquisition of the property at a Nov. 14 meeting.

The museum will be moved to the third floor of the building, located at 1801 S. Indiana, while the park district will utilize the remaining space for yet-to-be-determined programming.

The Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance circulated petitions and worked with 2nd Ward Alderman Bob Fioretti's office to ensure the city transferred the building over to the park district and not to a private owner. The group shared its success with residents at their Nov. 14 meeting—just hours after the board's approval. PDNA officials said the group will continue its involvement with the Park District to determine what the new community center might offer to residents.



The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum is moving to the third floor of its current location at 1801 S. Indiana until a new location for the museum is found. The Chicago Park District acquired the property last week.

File photo

"We are working with the park district to actually be the resident voice and have an official group that will facilitate and go through the transparent process as the curriculum gets developed," said

PDNA president Tina Feldstein. "So this is really, really exciting for the community."

The acquisition of the property came after a year-long battle between the museum and Café Society, a neighborhood restaurant and first-floor tenant in the building. The museum was facing roughly \$600,000 in debt when it attempted to evict the eatery by claiming its owner failed to pay rent.

The museum sought out a lease-to-own agreement with another tenant in hopes that it might solve outstanding debt issues by allowing the new tenant to purchase the property in 2013. Since the museum was initially developed from TIF money, however, this plan violated regulations for its use.

The city stepped in and approved the repurchase of the property in June with plans to transfer it over to the Park District. Conditions of the Board of Commissioners' approval allow the museum to occupy the third floor of the space for three years.

"The city is looking at finding [the museum] a better home that's more conducive to foot traffic and a better location for their business," said Jeffrey Ayersman, treasurer of the PDNA. He added that future assessments, repairs and modifications to the building during the pending transition might delay park district programming well into 2008.

The PDNA plans to meet with the Chicago Park District soon to discuss plans for the property, Ayersman said. The group plans to send out surveys to residents requesting their suggestions for programming at the center.

"We'll work on what the next step is with the organization to get the residents involved in the operation of that community center," he said. "We really want to get folks involved."

Fioretti told residents at the PDNA meeting that he's pleased with the outcome of the situation. He feels it was best that the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum remain at its current address until a more suitable location is found. He added that the community center could give more exposure to all of the historic and cultural landmarks that already exist in the neighborhood.

"By making it a viable community center for everybody," he said, "it will increase participation with everybody."