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Pie in the sky?

New Prairie Avenue group hopes to change plans for already approved towers

By LAURA PUTRE, Editor

South Loop

A group of residents in the Prairie Avenue District say they were so irked by X/O, a glass skyscraper going up in their otherwise low-rise historic neighborhood, that they have been inspired to form a new community group, the Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance.

"That was the straw that broke the camel's back," says Tina Feldstein, PDNA president and a real-estate agent who lives in the neighborhood. "In the last two years, all of a sudden, all these buildings started popping up that didn't belong here."

The group's boundaries will consist of the rail tracks north of 16th Street, Cermak, the west side of Indiana and Lake Shore Drive. Some thirty condo associations and their boards are members of the new group, says Feldstein. "We want to preserve the historic integrity and feel of the neighborhood, but with some respect."

Feldstein says her neighbors don't feel adequately represented by other community groups in the neighborhood, including the Near South Planning Board, which is primarily business-focused, and the Greater South Loop Association, which covers a much broader area. Both groups supported the X/O development, which would be located at 18th and Prairie near the Victorian-era mansions of a neighborhood that was once a millionaire's row.

"They're good groups, they're doing their thing, but the problem is neither of those groups are 100 percent residential," says Feldstein.

Feldstein said her group recently met with Second Ward Alderman Madeline Haithcock's office, who told them the X/O project would not go any further in the process. "We've asked for a redesign, but we haven't gotten a response from the developer. We met with the alderman and she said she did not want the zoning ordinance approved."

But the zoning ordinance already has been approved—at least for the phase of the project the PDNA most objects to. Keith Giles, developer for the X/O project, noted that the two high-rise towers—45 and 33 stories—proposed for the project have been



X/O
File photo



File photo
The Prairie District Neighbors Association hopes to halt construction of the X/O building at 18th and Prairie.

formally OK'd by the city's Plan Commission and thus any chance of negotiating has passed. The only part of the project still up for negotiation is the townhome phase, which is still on the drawing board.

"We've told them more than once, the towers are not up for discussion," he said. Since the city has already approved the project, he says, "we don't really have to talk to these people, but at the request of the alderman we've agreed to talk with them about the streetscape."

Feldstein emphasizes that hers is not a one-issue group. "We have so many goals," she says. "Very few areas in the city of Chicago have as many infrastructure issues as we do. We need new sewage, new water lines in the area from 16th to Cermak. They never got updated."

The PDNA also would like to name a new park in the area Fort Dearborn Park after the Fort Dearborn massacre that took place during the war of 1812. Along those lines, the group hopes to excavate an old memorial to the event that is supposedly lying in storage somewhere, for display in the park.