

South Loop residents heat up over development

Panel discussion brings concerns to the table

By HAYLEY GRAHAM - Editor

A panel discussion became heated when residents voiced their continued concerns over new developments at the Greater South Loop Association's meeting on May 19.

The debate covered a variety of issues from construction noise to design plans, and led into an introduction of one of the latest proposed developments in the South Loop.

The panel consisted of experts in urban planning and government officials, including 2nd Ward alderman Bob Fioretti and 3rd Ward alderman Pat Dowell. Benet Haller, director of Urban Planning for Chicago's Department of Planning and Mitch Carrel, chair of Land Use at Vedder Price, also sat on the panel.

Both Fioretti and Dowell stressed that increased communication between themselves, residents and developers will be key to ensuring that the needs and concerns of the South Loop community are met.

"Developers only go to the usual suspects, and need to talk to the condo associations," Dowell said.

And Fioretti reiterated what he had said throughout his election campaign, that he will only grant permits to developers with solid records and good relationships with the communities they have built in.

One resident who lives at 13th and Indiana spoke out saying that he has no problem with high rises, but added he would like to be informed on the process, which was the consensus among many of the people in attendance.

"We don't know anything about what's going on," he said.

However, others at the meeting also said it is the responsibility of the residents to seek out information on new development in the area and become more involved in the community.

Following the panel discussion, one of the newest proposed developments in the South Loop was introduced by its developers, Rokas International.

The 37-story high rise will be located at 21st and Prairie, and will include 325 units, 365 parking spaces and 7 townhouses, with about an additional 3,000 square feet of commercial space.

Steve Ryniewicz, a principal architect at FitzGerald Associates Architects, which is designing the building, said they took many the concerns and ideas of residents in the area into account while designing the building. He said that even though development problems have left people in the neighborhoods feeling sour, he is trying to work with the community to protect the **Prairie District**.

"We've taken a lot of comments back, and this is where we are at today," Ryniewicz said.

The building was well received by most South Loop residents at the meeting, and some stating that they liked the appearance of the building.

However, some people still had reservations, and are worried that the South Loop is losing its charm because of the incoming high-rises. Some residents said they had moved into the lofts of the **Prairie District** for the views, but are now living in "caves" shadowed by the towers surrounding them.