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## Affordable housing developer tapped for East Garfield Park project

The firm Preservation of Affordable Housing plans a \$22.3 million environmentally friendly mixed-income housing development in the West Side neighborhood after winning a design competition.

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Perkins & Will

A rendering of Garfield Green, POAH's vision for a vacant 1.5-acre site at Kedzie and Fifth avenues in East Garfield Park.

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An affordable housing developer is planning a mixed-use project with 77 rental units in East Garfield Park after winning an international competition to design an environmentally friendly development for the West Side neighborhood.

The city of Chicago picked Preservation of Affordable Housing to move forward with its vision for a \$22.3 million, two-building project at Kedzie and Fifth avenues on vacant city-owned land in East Garfield Park, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

Dubbed Garfield Green, the plan from the Boston-based nonprofit contemplates a pair of three-story buildings on 1.5 acres with 32 rental units offered at affordable rates and 31 as cooperative housing units, which allow tenants to build equity in their properties. The project is slated for 9,000 square feet of retail, 20,000 square feet of public open space and a 12,000-square-foot public plaza, according to a city statement.

It's the type of investment that is sorely needed in East Garfield Park, where some parts of the neighborhood have a poverty rate of almost 50 percent, unemployment of 20 percent and a median household income of less than \$20,000, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Many city officials in recent months have bemoaned the lack of quality affordable housing in neighborhoods like it, and throughout the city.

But the project's sustainability features are what helped POAH win the city's selection for the site. POAH was one of 10 groups that entered an international "[Reinventing Cities](#)" [design competition](#) sponsored by C40, a global network of cities aimed at combating climate change. City officials announced the competition early last year and shortlisted three finalists in September before selecting POAH.

Garfield Green will meet Passive House standards, an environmentally friendly building standard that drastically reduces energy use. All of its energy will be supplied by solar panels, and most of its green roof will grow food and mitigate stormwater, according to the city statement. Planned commercial tenants will have a climate change tie-in, such as a clinic to address an increase in asthma rates, the statement said.

POAH Vice President Molly Ekerdt said the firm will meet with community groups in East Garfield Park to refine its plans with an eye on securing financing and zoning approvals from the city by the end of 2019. POAH is slated to buy the land from the city for \$600,000, though it could receive some forms of public assistance, such as low-income housing tax credits or help from Chicago's Low Income Housing Trust Fund.

The land is also located in a federally approved opportunity zone, which could also help with financing the project or businesses that set up there. The program allows investors to defer taxes on capital gains if they redirect those profits into one of thousands of designated blighted areas nationwide.

POAH's vision for the East Garfield Park site was "a place that would create wealth and stability and health and community," Ekerdt said. "Something that would last and be successful for a long time and that (residents) would say they were proud to live in a neighborhood with a project like that."

Perkins & Will designed POAH's planned buildings, which would add to its track record of investing in underserved Chicago neighborhoods. It was part of the group behind the development of a Jewel-Osco that opened in March in Woodlawn, the first grocery store to open in the neighborhood in 40 years. POAH owns and operates more than 11,000 affordable homes at more than 80 properties in nine states and the District of Columbia.

Ekerdt said the organization hasn't done much work on the West Side, but it has learned plenty from other local projects about how to use development to spur economic growth.

"One thing we learned with Woodlawn was that you can lead with affordable housing. You don't have to ship the poor people out," she said. "These projects are worth doing and they mean a lot to a lot of people. And you need a diversity of uses. You need a grocery store, a squash court, a day care—you can't just make a housing investment and walk away. It's investing in the people who live there."

Another site the city had hoped to jump-start through the design competition was a pair of massive, historic warehouses in [McKinley Park](#) at 1769 and 1869 W. Pershing Road near the old Chicago Union Stockyards.

The city shortlisted two of four proposals for those properties, but neither "met the city's submission requirements," the city's statement said. The properties remain for sale, according to a spokesman for the city's Department of Planning & Development.

Inline Play

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