

SKYLINE

NEWS OF LINCOLN PARK, OLD TOWN, RIVER NORTH AND GOLD COAST

Looking back at 2009 Our annual review of the year that was

12/30/2009 10:00 PM

By IAN FULLERTON

Contributing Reporter

Wrapping up a decade that will forever be remembered as a time of great change, innovation and confusion, 2009 was a whirlwind year from start to finish, both on the local and national scale.

Just as the dust began to settle from the housing market crash and the recession that followed, Chicagoans were already bracing to see if the city would be hosting an Olympic Games.

The line between private and public partnerships further thinned as the city sold off its meter system for the next 75 years, while spending millions to attract big name companies to relocate to Chicago's business district.

One day we were partying with Oprah, the next we were bidding her a tearful — and for some, an indifferent — adieu. Then it was off to the doctor's for a flu shot, perhaps the most sought after one in years.

As we look forward to another year of newsworthy tales, let's take a look back at some of the biggest stories to grace the pages of Skyline in 2009. Through our local, neighborhood scope on the city, we'll be watching all these fronts in 2010. Thank you for following our work, and stick with us in the new year.

An Olympic-sized loss

The story of the year was the city's failed bid for the 2016 Olympics.

With nearly \$75 million spent on the three-year bid campaign alone, shock and disbelief were the moods du jour when Chicago was dismissed in the first round of the International Olympic Committee's selection process.

Although the North Side didn't have much property on the table in the bid, many in the neighborhood still held a stake in the issue. While the area had its share of bid-backers, at public meetings, more than a few residents questioned the city's readiness to host the games, in addition to the level of transparency demonstrated by the bid committee and its local political backers.

And while hundreds of residents flocked to community meetings organized by Chicago 2016 to air their concerns, one Lincoln Park resident took it upon himself to meet the bid team at every turn.

Heading the anti-bid group No Games Chicago, Tom Tresser maintained throughout the process that hosting the Olympics would bury the city in financial debt while highlighting statistics stating the majority of Chicagoans did not want the games. →

The self-styled citizen activist even travelled to Copenhagen to deliver his message to the International Olympic Committee during the final days of the host city selection.

Heliport hiatus

Concerned Streeterville residents and officials spent another year weighing the pros and cons of the proposed Children's Memorial Hospital helipad, slated to be built atop the hospital's new location at 225 E. Chicago Avenue by 2012.

In August, players on both sides of the issue made their cases during a four-night stretch of public hearings, giving the state's Department of Transportation plenty to think about as they mull over their final decision on the proposal

Opponents of the proposal provided evidence from air traffic and wind pattern studies stating that the rooftop landing site would be a safety hazard to the surrounding area. On the hospital side, officials and aviation experts argued that leaving the hospital without a helipad would be done at the risk of patient lives.

Alderman Brendan Reilly (42nd), who remained neutral on the issue during the hearings, commended both sides for their attention to the issue, and kept open the possibility of moving the helipad to an alternative location if the rooftop site is not approved.

IDOT has not yet released their decision on whether they will grant Children's Memorial operating rights for the helipad. The new hospital is currently nearing the end of its construction phase.

Projects and plans

While the year proved to be a tough one for developers and architects big on plans but short on funding, there were a few downtown projects in both the public and private sector that managed to squeak through.

In April, the Ronald McDonald House Charities foundation finalized plans to construct an 86-unit residential facility in Streeterville. The project, slated for completion in 2012, will be used as a temporary residence for out-of-town families of children in the city's downtown hospitals.

The building which once housed the ritzy Lake Shore Drive Athletic Club caught a second wind when Northbrook-based Integrated Development Group unveiled designs to redevelop the Beaux Arts-inspired building into a \$150 million urban retirement community earlier this year.

Ogden Elementary in the Gold Coast is undergoing a \$41 million makeover from the ground up, as the school managed to secure funding from the city's Modern Schools Across Chicago program. The new K-8 school building is slated to feature a green roof with planting beds and solar panels, as well as 3,600 square feet library and classroom facilities for 900 students.

Yet another proposal from the redevelopment of the Three Arts Club ended up six-feet under. In November, developer Bill Bickford presented a plan to build a columbarium — for storing and displaying funerary urns — in the building once used as a residence for women in the arts. Unreceptive Gold Coast residents howled in opposition to the project and sent Bickford packing.

The Chicago Park recently put the final touches on their plans to revamp the dilapidated Dime Pier into a 2,610-foot-long marina facility, providing 240 new slips for permanent and transient boaters and 15,500 square feet of restaurant and retail space. The project is expected to cost \$40 million, a tab the agency plans to pick up by bonding against future boat slip revenues. →

Elsewhere, plans were debated and made.

Perhaps no planning effort garnered more attention than the Central Area Action Plan, a document that envisions a wide range of infrastructure, parks and urban design priorities for the city's downtown neighborhoods. The Central Area plan calls for everything from new CTA subway lines and stations to capping the Kennedy Expressway with an urban greenway. It received approval from the Plan Commission in August. Total cost, in hypothetical dollars that haven't been appropriated, of all the projects listed in the Central Area Action Plan: \$15.5 billion through 2020.

The Chicago Park District began publicly planning Northerly Island, the windswept 91 acres that once hosted Meigs Field airport, in the late fall. Hundreds of Chicagoans mulled over four concepts for Northerly at a November meeting, debating the proper uses of the green space.

The park district also made headlines in November by letting out a \$4.2 million contract to a Brooklyn-based landscape design firm called Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc. The group will plan the northern end of Grant Park, a 25-acre stretch between Daley Bicentennial Plaza on the west and Peanut Park, a grassy area adjacent to Lake Shore Drive, south of Randolph, on the east. The planning includes the area the Chicago Children's Museum wants to occupy; litigation seeking to block that move remains in court.

The Life of Reilly

With the 2011 municipal elections just more than a year off, Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd) kept busy in his downtown ward.

The alderman sponsored and supported several ordinances aimed at improving business practices and addressing quality of life issues downtown and elsewhere.

Reilly's measure to crackdown on street performers garnered cheers from Loop office workers tired of the bucket boys and boos from those who advocated that the street artists provide an irreplaceable sense of culture in the city.

More recently, Reilly proposed regulations on "nightly vacation rentals": the practice of condo owners renting out their units as hotel rooms on a nightly or weekly a basis—a trade the alderman called illegal.

And in a move that some touted as a shift in the city's subsidy dealings, Reilly last month turned down a proposal to establish a tax increment financing district in the East Loop, an area that he said did not satisfy the requirements for the funding tool.

Food and protests

Localvorum ran rampant in Lincoln Park, as the neighborhood's Green City Market headed indoors for their first year-round cycle. Featuring classes on preserving and chef demos, the market's scaled-down winter season is being held at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum. Green City also has plans to ramp up their services next year with help from a recently received federal grant from the Department of Agriculture.

Hotel workers took a stand in late September, when members of Unite Here Local 1, which represents most the city's unionized hotel staff, organized a 200-person sitdown outside the Park Hyatt Chicago in protest of the on-going contracting negotiations between the union and several major companies in the hospitality industry.