

5700 block Woodlawn Avenue



Photo: David Schalliol , 2011

Overview:

The 5700 block of South Woodlawn Avenue and surrounding streets consist of numerous historic residences from the World's Columbian Exposition era (and shortly thereafter), many by notable architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House. While the area currently survives largely intact, recent purchases by the University of Chicago, coupled with zoning change requests by the university to convert from residential to institutional zoning have put the future of these properties and the historic integrity of the entire neighborhood in doubt. A recent community engagement process facilitated by Alderman Leslie Hairston (5th) between the university and community stakeholders has led to the establishment of a much-welcomed and much-improved communications procedure going forward.

Although this newly crafted civic engagement process did lead to a dramatically improve Planned Development document, threats to these individual buildings still remain.

5700 S. Woodlawn Avenue
Architects: Various
Date: Various
Style: Various

5700 S. Woodlawn Avenue Continued

History:

The 5700 block of Woodlawn in Hyde Park, as well as surrounding blocks, was developed with large single-family homes beginning in the 1890s. The serene residential character of the area contrasts gently with the neighboring Gothic Revival buildings of the original University of Chicago campus.

Many homes in the district were designed by notable architects and recognized for their historic significance:

- **5707 S. Woodlawn**, designed by William Carbys Zimmerman, constructed 1909.
- **5711 S. Woodlawn**, designed by Dwight H. Perkins, constructed 1901, and Orange rated in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS).
- **5720 S. Woodlawn**, designed by Myron Hunt, constructed 1904, and Orange rated in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS).
- **5757 S. Woodlawn**, Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House, constructed 1909 and designated a Chicago Landmark in 1966.

Threat:

In 2011, The University of Chicago completed the purchase of several residences and now owns a total of eleven historic buildings on the block, with five slated to be re-purposed in the near future. At that time, The University was seeking to expand its institutional Planned Development zone (PD43), a change that would have voided the current zoning restrictions and allow the University to develop its properties unilaterally with little community consultation. Although that process has been greatly improved due



Robie House, 1909

to a new process facilitated by the alderman, threats to the other buildings still remain. Because only the Robie House is a designated city landmark and cannot be demolished, there are currently no guarantees that the other historic homes on the block will not be demolished in the future.

Recommendations:

The University of Chicago had its Planned Development #43 expansion application approved by the Chicago Plan Commission in February of 2012. This stakeholder-negotiated agreement represents an outstanding resolution of the potential conflict between the University and the community over the future of university-owned buildings on the 5700 block of South Woodlawn Avenue.

However, the resolution is far from perfect. It doesn't include the properties on the 5700 block that the University does not own, nor important University buildings in the Woodlawn Corridor that abut the 5700 block. Many property owners and neighbors in the Woodlawn Avenue Corridor have indicated their support for the creation of a landmark district as another layer of protection for their community. To that end, Preservation Chicago will continue to work with property owners and other community stakeholders with regards to the ongoing discussion of creating a landmark district for the corridor.

Preservation Chicago