Central Manufacturing District

1961 W. Pershing Road (Pictured)

OVERVIEW:
The Central Manufacturing District was the first planned industrial district in the nation and began as an outgrowth of the nearby and equally famous Chicago Union Stock Yards.

HISTORY:
The 265-acre Central Manufacturing District (CMD) is bounded roughly by 35th Street to the north, Morgan Street to the east, just south of Pershing Road and Western Boulevard to the west. The CMD was originally envisioned as a way to enhance business opportunities due to the convergence of the trunk lines of the nation’s railways and the proximity of the Chicago Union Stockyards, which had strong rail links.

Frederick Henry Prince, an East Coast Investor was behind the CMD concept and within 10 years more than 200 firms were operating within its boundaries. The early years of the CMD were so successful that Prince expanded the development south of Pershing and anchored it with a beautiful 12-story clock tower emblazoned with the company name and enclosed by a massive series of industrial buildings sharing a unity of design and ornamentation. Many of the buildings were built with rail tracks running through, between and under them to make shipping and transportation still more convenient.

Central Manufacturing District

Address: 1961 W. Pershing Rd.
Neighborhood: McKinley Park
Architect: Various
Date: 1905

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In 1925 there were more than 40,000 people working at the CMD and the Union Stockyards with the CMD working as a private banker, business incubator and maintaining the general grounds of the development.

It was once such an important and bustling district that it had its own police force and during the Great Depression the company extended credit terms and worked with firms at the CMD so that only a single company failed. It housed big name companies like Wrigley, Goodyear, Westinghouse and manufacturers of all kinds of goods. It also contains offices used by the U. S. government for warehousing and distribution.

Today the city of Chicago owns many of the buildings in the Central Manufacturing District. The original concept spawned copycat developments across the country and the founding company still maintains ownership of a later industrial development in the northwestern suburb of Itasca.

The CMD contains many buildings of fine quality largely Prairie-style employing principles of the Chicago Commercial Style emphasizing both the vertical thrust of the structures and large window spans accentuated by arched openings, crenelated corners and capstones with terra cotta decorative components. Many of the buildings have articulated corner towers with decorative terra cotta further emphasizing the verticality and massive scale of the development.

**THREAT:**
Many buildings in the district are underutilized or vacant. In January 2013 a building in the CMD caught fire in subzero temperatures that made it almost impossible to extinguish. It smoldered for days before being ultimately demolished.

Chicago Fire Department officials noted at that time that vacancy is a great danger to these buildings and it’s an ever-present danger until new uses are found for them. The recent demolition of the Wrigley Factory at 35th and Ashland illustrates a particular danger: that the district is disassembled piecemeal. As a whole it deserves protection and a plan for the reuse of the historic buildings.