

# 839 West 79<sup>th</sup> Street Healthy Lifestyle Building

## PROJECT SHEET

The Auburn Gresham neighborhood, like other south side communities, has been an example of a classic Chicago community since the early 1900s when the area exploded with new commercial corridor development, new housing development of brick bungalows, brick two-flats, and apartment buildings, and the proliferation of local jobs within and nearby, that allowed residents to begin their realization of the American dream. Adding to this development, and with the flood of thousands of residents, came the construction of many magnificent and ornate buildings like churches (St. Sabina Catholic Church, St. Leo Catholic Church - Bell Tower remains), public and private schools (Calumet High School – now Perspectives Charter School, Leo Catholic High School for Boys, Richard Oglesby Elementary School), and theaters (see Capital and Highland Theaters). Linking all of this together was a web of street and rail transportation services including freight, transit, bus, and trolley services that made Auburn Gresham attractive for its access to transportation. Altogether, these aspects of Auburn Gresham (a bungalow belt community), exemplified a classic Chicago



community with vibrant, bustling commercial streets.

One of the community's main intersections of West 79<sup>th</sup> Street and South Halsted (shown in the picture above) was essentially a local downtown that offered goods and services for all residents. This intersection has always been the center of commerce, entertainment, education, and jobs for the Auburn Park and Gresham neighborhoods which are now called Auburn Gresham, community area #71 as designated by the city of Chicago. One of the first

Walgreen's Stores anchored the southeast corner of 79<sup>th</sup> & Halsted with a lunch counter in a 60,000 square foot office building that stood prominently at 7901 South Halsted with exuberant ornamental designs and totally covered in white Terra Cotta. This 3-story building shown in the picture with the large "MADRID" marquis was demolished in 2009. Nearby stood one of Chicago's great theater palaces called the Capitol Theater (marquis pictured in the distant).



## C O R P O R A T I O N

Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation (GAGDC) is leading the effort to redevelop a long vacant, office building on this key commercial corridor in the Auburn Gresham community. The redevelopment of 839-45 West 79<sup>th</sup> Street is a catalytic development project that will not only spur additional development along the disinvested business district, but will also bring back to life a once prominent commercial building that has stood ominously vacant for twenty years. The building is situated within the LISC Chicago-led Southwest Corridor Collaborative (SWCC) at the 79<sup>th</sup> & Halsted development node.

The redevelopment project is being implemented as part of the recently completed Auburn Gresham Quality of Life plan (QoL) which lists several strategies and tasks to improve the quality of life of residents in Auburn Gresham and surrounding communities. During the 1-1/2 year long planning process, more than one-thousand residents were engaged and took part in

monthly discussions and together, divided into separate issue area task force teams, drafted the community's Quality of Life plan. The task force teams focused on core areas including: (1) Jobs, Economic and Business Development; (2) Health & Wellness; (3) Education & Youth Development; (4) Senior Services; (5) Housing; and (6) Safety. When complete, the redevelopment of the vacant building into the Auburn Gresham Healthy Life Style Technology Hub will directly respond to the community's quality of life plan including workforce development - the creation of 100 living wage jobs within the community – access to health and wellness services “Hub”, technology and educational enhancements, along with community development services supporting youth, seniors, families and disenfranchised serving the greater south side.

The 0.7 acre site at 839-45 West 79th Street in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (Cook County Permanent Index Numbers [PINs] 20-32-206-001, -002, -003, -004, -005, and -006) is improved with a 56,500 square foot, four-story building built in 1926 with Terra Cotta façade. The building does not have historic landmark designation, but as part of the renovation the Terra Cotta façade will be preserved and treated so as to remain a prominent aspect of the building. The remainder of the site includes paved parking and landscaped areas. The site is currently a vacant office building.



Historically, the existing commercial/office building was constructed and occupied by Rusnak Brothers Furniture Store and Showroom. The Rusnak Brothers Furniture Store operated until at least 1974. The Illinois State Department of Public Aid began occupying the site in the late 1970s until approximately 2000. The site has remained a vacant office building since that time. Frank's Department Store across Green Street from the Rusnak Brothers Furniture Store and Showroom were prominent fixtures in Auburn Gresham near the 79<sup>th</sup> & Halsted intersection. Leo Catholic High School, an all boys Catholic high school, was also built and opened during this time directly west of the redevelopment site.

The GAGDC will gut the building and install windows to brighten the property and surrounding area paying special attention not to impact the structural integrity of the building's envelope. A new core (elevator shaft, stairwell, plumbing riser) will be designed and constructed allowing for a modern office building configuration. The GAGDC will relocate its headquarters into the building thus being an onsite manager of the property.

The tenant mix may consist of medical provider(s), dental services, technology services and call center, fitness center, educational tutoring and training services, and comprehensive community development services along with a ground floor mission-driven restaurant or café serving breakfast, lunch and possibly dinner for community residents and the building's

employees and visitors. This new healthy lifestyle hub will have major positive impact on the revitalization of the Auburn Gresham business corridor and community.

## **COMMUNITY PROJECT IMPACT SUMMARY**

### **Community Economic Development**

- Free Income Tax Prep Site, which annually serves approximately 1,500 clients. Since 2004 more than 15,000 clients have been served returning \$20.8M in tax refunds to the residents.
- Workforce development -Train and hire up to 20 hard-to-employ men and women from the community to work on the Urban Green Team, a social enterprise of the GAGDC focused on landscaping, maintenance and beautification, litter abatement and recycling in south side business districts.
- Business Improvement District management – provide safety and security services, marketing assistance, façade enhancement and maintenance & beautification to 600 businesses along key commercial corridors.

### **Education**

- Coordinate AG GOLD Summer Camp serving 60-70 youth from the community with a high quality, math and reading literacy camp including citywide excursions and enrichment activities.
- Hire 6-10 college of education interns from Illinois State University for summer programming while living with host families in the neighborhood.
- Workforce development - Train 125 workforce adult clients as part of our 2 Generation program (2Gen applies to GAGDC working with parents of the students attending our AG GOLD school) receiving literacy training - 50 increased test scores and 20 were hired for full-time jobs.
- Host out of school time activities for up to 135 middle school students
- Provide ACT prep, SAT prep and one-on-one tutoring to 120 individuals per year

### **Housing & Senior Services**

- Free Senior Home Repair Program for 50 to 60 home owners each year allowing the senior citizens to be independent and age in place; over 300 homes repairs since program inception, including sourcing of local subcontractors.
- Vacant homes (4) and city owned lots (85) acquired, renovated and/or developed for affordable housing units.

### **Health & Wellness**

- Nearly 1,500 Chicago Public School students and their families received treatment at our 3,500 s.f. School Based Health Center located at one of our AG GOLD schools.
- Build out of a satellite health site at a second AG GOLD school to improve access to health care and support youth trauma and social support. The site enables care for over 500 local youth who attend the school.

### **Community Engagement**

- Bi-Annual Health Fair on the Block along with the Bi-annual Breakfast & Blues for Seniors events are events that promote health and intergenerational interaction for our seniors and youth.

