

# THE WINDY CITY Reaches for Its Rings

HOWARD KOZLOFF

Chicago looks to build on its legacy of “big plans” to win in its bid for the 2016 Olympic Games.

THE WORLD’S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION OF 1893 put Chicago on the world map. Exposition architect Daniel Burnham succinctly summed up the spirit behind the city’s grand effort: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood. Make big plans; aim high in work and hope. Remember that our children and grandchildren are going to do things that amaze us.”

In an effort to build on its legacy as host of the Columbian Exposition and the 1933 World’s Fair, and as the first U.S. city to hold the Pan-Am Games, in 1958, Chicago seeks its

reinsurance, and consulting firm. Daley summarizes Chicago’s history of city building as being “one of great plans and even greater accomplishments.” Ryan cites the potential of the Olympics to “leave a lasting legacy in sport, urban renewal, culture, and education.”

In Chicago’s bid, there is acknowledgment of the strength of Burnham’s 1909 city plan for Chicago, the first such metropolitan plan in the United States, in establishing the context in which such an event can be held, says Tom Kerwin, partner in the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM), the coordinating architect and master planner for Chicago 2016. The parks and boulevards, as well as the natural advantages of a lakefront site, provide the bid committee with an aesthetic and infrastructure base on which to build. Existing transit infrastructure, parks weaving through Chicago neighborhoods, and a strong central-city identity augment the organizers’ efforts.

The process through which a U.S. city becomes eligible for selection as an Olympic Games host begins with the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), which selects a candidate city from among a group of hopefuls; for the 2012 games, New York City was the U.S. candidate, losing out to London in the final selection process at the International Olympic Committee (IOC). For 2016, the USOC has narrowed a five-candidate list to two cities—Chicago and Los Angeles, which is hoping to hold its third Olympics. This April, the USOC will choose the U.S. candidate ahead of the IOC’s summer deadline.

The competitive international lobbying then begins, ending in IOC announcement of the host city in summer 2009. Important to note is that the USOC is under no obligation to submit a candidate for host city; it can choose to sit out the bidding process for 2016, though this is considered unlikely.



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The Olympic Village is planned for a 37-acre (15-ha) area along the lakefront south of McCormick Place, Chicago’s convention facility. The village would be constructed atop McCormick Place’s truck marshaling yards.

next citywide and worldwide showcase event as it vies to hold its first-ever Olympics, in 2016. In fact, Chicago was supposed to be the site of the 1904 Olympics, but the event was held in St. Louis instead in the mistaken belief that there would be synergies with the World’s Fair being held there the same year.

The city’s bid for the Olympics is led by Mayor Richard M. Daley and Pat Ryan, chairman of the Chicago 2016 bid committee and founder and executive chairman of Aon Corporation, a Chicago-based risk-management,

As was the case in past Olympic bids, Chicago's effort is predicated on the benefits the event can bring to a host city—accelerated infrastructure improvements, new and/or improved sports and athletics venues for community use, economic benefits through tourism and job creation, and general urban revitalization in neighborhoods chosen as centerpieces of the bid.

The larger issues, however, and those that tend to be more the focus in international evaluations of a bid city, include the capacity, location, and status of a proposed or existing Olympic stadium; the capacity, location, and post-Olympics use of the Olympic Village; security, especially in the wake of 9/11, and building on Athens's successful security program for the 2004 games; transportation and the ability of athletes and spectators to move around the city and from venue to venue with relative ease; and financing for the construction, development, and/or redevelopment of the various venues and facilities.

This last point is arguably the main reason New York City lost in its bid to hold the Olympics: politicians rejected the Olympic stadium plan, largely over the issue of financing, in the final days leading up to the IOC decision. As a result, Peter Ueberroth, USOC chairman and organ-

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izer of the successful 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, has made it a requirement that the Olympic stadium, as well as the Olympic Village, qualify as “existing or fully committed to” in order for the city to be chosen as the U.S. candidate.

Chicago's plan would finance construction of sports venues with a combination of private funds and Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG) revenues generated during the games. OCOG funds are used to pay for temporary facilities, which will be a sizable component of Chicago's bid. For instance, the proposed Olympic stadium itself will be a largely temporary facility located in Washington Park, a 380-acre (154-ha) Freder-

ick Law Olmsted–designed space in a South Side neighborhood that could benefit from an Olympics-related spending spree.

“Our goal is to invest in Washington Park as a major sports and cultural destination, and to turn the renovated park into a catalyst for economic development in the surrounding community,” Daley proclaimed late last year. Aside from the new venue, Chicago's bid plan envisions further improvements to Washington Park, including better transportation connections, improved lighting and security measures, and general aesthetic upgrades.

Originally, the thought was to position the Olympic stadium on the lakefront at Meigs Field, a small airport closed in 2003 as part of



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what became a controversial series of events unrelated to Chicago's Olympic bid. However, planners determined that the site was too small, would require a substantial amount of landfill in the lake and construction of expensive bridges to accommodate roads, and was not easily accessible by transit. The bid committee set out to search for larger sites also meeting transit needs.

Flanked by rail lines on its east and west sides and containing a large meadow cur-

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rently occupied by softball fields, Washington Park fit the criteria. Plus, its proximity to the University of Chicago means that university facilities could be used for practice fields, eliminating the need to create new ones. Additional connections between venues and academic institutions were recognized, creating the possibility of synergies with local colleges such as the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Illinois Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, Chicago State University, and downtown institutions such as Roosevelt University and DePaul University.

Because the proposed Olympic stadium would largely be intended as a temporary structure, \$316 million for construction would come from OCOG funds, and an additional \$50 million would be privately funded—from the sale of air rights over the McCormick Place Convention Center truck marshaling yards—to create the permanent, or “legacy,” portion of the stadium. The temporary 80,000-seat stadium would be disassembled after the Olympics, leaving behind a 5,000-seat venue that would be better suited for a wider range of cultural and sporting events and programs. Modular components, such as concessions stands, toilets, and seating, among others, could be adapted to other venues after the Olympics are gone. The footprint left by the stadium once it is broken down—including a soft running track and a sloped berm system to support seating—would make it more readily adaptable to regular use and acceptable as a lasting memory of the Olympics.

Phil Enquist, partner in charge of planning and urban design in the Chicago office of SOM, touts Chicago’s ability to celebrate a real “city Olympics.” From the outset, people involved in the city’s bid realized that Chicago’s infrastructure, especially the parks system, provided a strong framework to support an event like the Olympics, he notes. “We looked to the park system to support a lot of the Olympics venues,” explains Enquist. “Parks are connected very strongly to neighborhoods and many academic institutions. The framework of the parks allowed [Chicago 2016] to do venue planning without purchasing more land.”

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## L.A. Goes for the Gold

ARGUABLY ONE OF THE BEST OLYMPICS GAMES ever staged was the 1984 event in Los Angeles, which was also host of the 1932 Olympics. Organizers of the more recent games discredited concerns about traffic woes as athletes and spectators flowed easily from venue to venue throughout an Olympics that were the first to turn a profit—an operating surplus of \$235 million in 1984 dollars. In many regards, the Los Angeles model is still emulated today by host-city hopefuls.

Hoping to build on that legacy and to become the second three-time host city—after London, site of the 2012 games—Los Angeles is competing with Chicago to be the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) candidate city for 2016. While relying on the city’s legendary climate and iconic imagery, the Los Angeles bid differs from that of Chicago in at least one major way—construction.

The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens were plagued by cost overruns and construction delays, resulting in many venues not being field-tested before the event. At one point, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) threatened to relocate the Olympics because of late construction. Realizing the IOC’s distaste for uncertainty, Los Angeles’s bid centers on existing venues. The centerpiece would be what organizers have promised will be a “renovated, transformed facility”—the Los Angeles Coliseum, historic for its role in both the 1932 and 1984 Olympics, and a permanent landmark. Organizers are touting the coming together of tradition, state-of-the-art venues, and legacy as the hub of the Los Angeles Olympics plan.

Most of the many competition venues needed for Olympic events have already been constructed, thereby minimizing potential pitfalls of new construction or costly renovations. These include venues such as Staples Center, home to several professional sports teams and one of the most successful sports arenas in the country, and Home Depot Center, home to professional soccer, tennis, and other sporting events. Likewise, the Olympic Village, a standard event component originating at the 1932 Olympic Games, would use existing student residence halls at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), complete with existing dining facilities and athletic training sites. The University of Southern California (USC), immediately adjacent to the Coliseum, would serve as the Media Village.

Barry Sanders, chairman of the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games, takes pride in the promise of the Los Angeles bid to return the Olympics to its roots. “Because we can stage the games with almost no construction of permanent facilities, we can turn our attention to building human spirit, human achievement, and joy—the fundamental Olympic values,” says Sanders.

Los Angeles’s role as one of the world’s great media centers and the centerpiece of the entertainment industry brings with it a unique capacity to stage events and make the Olympics a celebration. Sanders recognizes this, stating, “We will employ our star power to put a spotlight on [the athletes’] achievements.”

While the lack of new construction needed is a plus for Los Angeles’s bid, concerns about the transportation problems that plague the region will need to be overcome. In 1984, many residents stayed off the roads during the Olympics, and employers cooperated, resulting in a general ease of movement throughout the city and region. However, traffic undoubtedly is worse now. New now, though, are both existing and planned transit networks. Two new rail lines, expansion of bus service and addition of rapid bus lines, and expansion of carpool lanes have already alleviated some traffic pressures. With additional planned rail service, some of which is already under construction, Los Angeles can address these concerns. And, with little construction needed for new venues, the promise of an Olympics is likely to spur continued and fast-tracked infrastructure improvements.

The other potential pitfall for Los Angeles is its status as a three-time host city, whereas the IOC may prefer the notion of presenting a new host city—although the selection of London for 2012 minimizes that concern. And, given the problems faced by Athens in 2004, perhaps the IOC would prefer a tried-and-true host city to get the Olympic legacy back on track.—H.K.

LOS ANGELES MEMORIAL COLISEUM COMMISSION



Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.



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Chicago's bid will alleviate some of the transportation and crowd-management issues that come with a single "Olympic Park" by creating three clusters: the Olympic stadium and other venues to the south; a central cluster (pictured here) including McCormick Place, the Olympic Village, Soldier Field, and a new sailing harbor; and a northern cluster around Lincoln Park.

McCormick Place, Chicago's enormous convention facility that would be retrofitted to accommodate nearly a dozen competition venues through temporary installations, likely funded through OCOG. Construction of the Olympic Village atop McCormick Place's truck marshaling yards would preserve this important convention business amenity while eliminating an unsightly large parking lot and creating a new lakefront neighborhood.

Funding for the \$1.1 billion Olympic Village is planned to come from private developers who would convert the housing into residential and commercial space after the event. Early involvement by the design and real estate communities fosters a strong belief that this new neighborhood could be built even without the need to accommodate Olympic athletes. This early involvement resulted in a solid plan based in the reality of construction costs, feasibility, and real estate value, Kerwin says. In fact, a number of developers have already signed letters of interest indicating their intention to bid on the development project.

The proximity of the proposed Olympic Village site to Washington Park would serve dual purposes—it would further the revitalization agenda of that neighborhood and, according to the bid committee, ensure that nearly 90 percent of the athletes would be within 15 minutes' travel time of their competition venue.

This final point is important to the IOC. Mobility and access for athletes and specta-

tors are major criteria in selecting an Olympics host city. The 1996 Atlanta Games—the most recent Summer Olympics held in the United States—though financially successful, were plagued by transportation issues that hindered access to some of the more far-flung venues. In addressing broader transportation demands, Chicago has the benefit of two international airports—O'Hare and Midway—that are more than capable of handling large traffic flows. In addition, an extensive rail network that includes downtown subways and the El, as well as a regional commuter network and bus service, makes navigation through the city possible without a car.

The notion of a compact Olympic Games brings with it the need for a balancing act. Having venues interspersed through a region constitutes both a benefit and a liability. On one hand, spreading venues can allow multiple neighborhoods to reap at least some of the benefits of having the Olympics and can ease the transportation burden by spreading the demand among multiple nodes. However, this decentralization also requires more travel time by spectators visiting multiple venues, creates more potential for transportation snarls, and can dilute some of the collective energy that comes with the Olympics.

SOM's Kerwin recognized early on that the inherent tension between compactness and congestion needed to be addressed. "Venues are adequately dispersed throughout the city

so that rail, bus, and vehicular transit can all be achieved in an efficient way, but still [constitute] a relatively compact plan," he says.

Chicago's bid proposes achieving the balance through creation of clusters of activity that would alleviate some of the transportation and crowd-management issues that come with a single "Olympic Park." The clusters in Chicago's bid include the Olympic stadium and other venues to the south; a central cluster including McCormick Place, the Olympic Village, Soldier Field, and a new sailing harbor, among other venues; and a northern cluster focused around Lincoln Park that includes tennis, the triathlon, and whitewater kayak and canoe, among other events. Beijing's 2008 Olympics plan, rapidly coming to fruition, made similar adjustments.

U.S. cities have a good track record as Summer Olympics hosts. The 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles turned the experience into a giant citywide celebration and were the first to make a profit, and the 1996 Atlanta Games were privately financed and profitable. The USOC hopes to continue that streak with its 2016 candidate city, and Chicago hopes for the success of its next "big plan." **U**

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