

CHICAGO FROM THE SKY: A REGIONAL TRANSFORMED

By Lawrence Okrent

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OVERVIEW: The presentation is adapted from my recent book of the same title, which is an illustrative retrospective of development in the Chicago region during the years 1985-2010. Primarily a work of urban history, the book is presented from the perspective of an urban planner and zoning specialist who has had direct professional involvement in the administrative review and approval of many of the projects depicted. Nearly all the illustrations are aerial photographs.

PART I: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Images 1-7: Explanation of the mechanics of aerial photography and its tools. Commentary on the FAA regulations that govern aviation over cities in general and Chicago, in particular.

PART II: THE MOUTH OF THE CHICAGO RIVER, TRANSFORMATION AND REGULATION

Images 8-12: Depicts changes from 1985 to 2010. References to

- A. The Supreme Court decision of 1930 that required the construction of the locks to regulate the release of Lake Michigan waters into the west-flowing Chicago River;
- B. The City's regulatory framework that has governed development within the former IC rail yards south of the river's main channel (Initial Planned Development 70 of 1969, its three subsequent legislative amendments, and its 44 administrative adjustments).
- C. The Lake Shore Drive realignment projects and related 14-acre landfill, and related economic impacts.
- D. The construction of DuSable Harbor at the lake level within a portion of the harbor that had previously been at the river level.

PART III: THE SOUTHERN END OF GRANT PARK, ESTABLISHING A PHYSICAL BOUNDARY.

Images 13-16: References to

- A. The construction, in 1995-6 of the Roosevelt Road extension to Lake Shore Drive.

B. The regulatory changes in the City code that opened nearby areas, previously zoned for commercial and business uses, to residential development.

C. The role of prior planning documents (*Chicago 21 Plan* of 1973, *Chicago Central Area Plan* of 1983) in establishing a vision of this transformation.

PART IV: THE MUSEUM CAMPUS

Images 17-19: References to

A. The creation of the Museum Campus, partly accomplished through consolidation of Lake Shore Drive to the west of the museums.

B. The reconstruction of Soldier Field and the lawsuit initiated by Richard Epstein and others that sought to prevent it. The case, which reached the state Supreme Court, invoked the inverse of the principle of just compensation, asserting that the project amounted to “an egregious public handout,” as the project embodied a substantial public investment that benefited, almost exclusively, the owners of the Chicago Bears.

PART V: TRANSFORMATION NORTH OF RANDOLPH AND EAST OF COLUMBUS DRIVE

Images 20-22: References to

A. The most concentrated spurt of growth in the period covered of 29 high-rise buildings, virtually all free-standing planned developments, or located within broader planned development districts, and with a cumulative height (if stacked on end) of 2.5 miles.

B. The Blue Cross Building, as constructed in two phases 10 years apart.

PART VI: WACKER DRIVE

Images 23-24: References to

A. Wacker Drive having reached maturity during the period covered

B. The 3-dimensional computer model created by Okrent Associates and used for (among other things) view simulations, shadow simulations, and graphic display of groupings of buildings with common attributes.

PART VII: SELECTED CHICAGO VIEWS

Image 25: Showing an older sector of the city with a non-conforming pattern of development, predating the adoption of the City’s first zoning ordinance in 1923.

Image 26: Showing the junction of the North Branch and Main Channels of the Chicago River where contaminated water (from the north) merges with Lake Michigan Water, a condition (partially) ameliorated by the ongoing Deep Tunnel flood management construction program.

Image 27: The “Circle” interchange, an exemplar of a compact urban expressway interchange that uses far less land than the suburban “diamond” and “cloverleaf” interchanges.

PART VIII: THE EMERGING SUBURBAN PATTERN

Images 28-37: References to

- A. Custom mapping in administrative review
- B. The expansive growth of industry in the Stevenson Expressway Corridor, as brought about by technological obsolescence in the city, ongoing expressway construction programs, and the real estate tax differential between Cook and Will Counties.
- C. The transformation of Glenview Naval Air Station into a residential-commercial-open space development within the Village of Glenview, with the Village being designated the redevelopment authority by the Department of Defense.
- D. The recent transformation of the Kenosha, Wisconsin lakefront from industrial to recreational use, illustrating the idea that Chicago’s embrace of its lakefront as public park space has—astonishingly—only recently been emulated by other Great Lakes cities.

PART IX: CONSEQUENTIAL PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECTS IN THE CITY

Images 38-57, 61-63: Reference to

- A. McCormick Place and its phased expansion, which has made it the largest convention center in the world, with 61.3 acres of exhibition space and 13.8 acres of meeting rooms.
- B. The campus of Michael Reese Hospital, acquired and cleared by the City in anticipation of its use during the unrealized Olympic games of 2016, the preservation issues related to its clearance, and the City’s current efforts to promote its redevelopment.
- C. The creation of US Cellular Field by the Illinois Sports Development Authority, reinvestment and reconfiguration since its inception, and land use trends in the immediate vicinity, including new development at the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology and the reimagining of nearby former public housing projects.

D. Millennium Park: How the project was funded in part with significant private contributions, how land use patterns on its perimeter have changed; and the indirect economic impacts of its initial investment. Comment on consistency of development plan with the four “Montgomery Ward” cases of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

E. Palmisano Park: How an abandoned stone quarry was converted into an exceptional new public park.

F. Robert Taylor Homes: How a public housing project originally built to house 11,000 residents ultimately housed 25,000. The project was demolished under the Hope VI program, adopted during the Clinton administration, which seeks to replace traditional public housing projects with mixed income communities with one-third public housing, one-third subsidized housing and one-third market rate housing, as a means of reducing the social isolation of the poorest.

G. Westinghouse High School and the work of the Public Building Commission of Chicago, which has constructed 200 new schools under its “Modern Schools Across Chicago” program.

H. As with other projects, Harold Washington Library Center has generated significant private investment nearby. A legal issue arose when the developer handed the building over to the city without the corner ornamentation. The developer (US Equities) was required under the terms of the original contract to add the ornamentation at his own expense because it had appeared in the original competition documents.

PART X: A PRIVATE SECTOR PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

Images 58-60:

The transformation of the site of Columbus Memorial Hospital into a residential condominium was a highly contentious proposal within the Lincoln Park Community. Local approval is a precursor to a formal Planned Development application. Under the sale agreement, the hospital chapel was to be retained in the redevelopment project.

CLOSE:

Images 64-67

PhotoShop techniques in processing the digital images after the completion of the flight.