

Project Summary



Image 1. 3D View of Plot.

This project addresses a pressing reality in the city of Chicago, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Many such neighborhoods, mainly on the west and south sides of the city, are experiencing losses of businesses as well as the loss of residents who are leaving the area for better opportunities. Unfortunately in the past 16 years, these neighborhoods have been disproportionately affected by the closing of over 150 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) [WTTW News]. Recently, projects such as “Rebirth of Garfield Park,” the “Chicago Housing Initiative,” “Reinventing Cities Initiative” and “Invest South/West” have been initiated with the aim of revitalizing these areas by encouraging housing development, promoting social housing and offering diverse programs to create work opportunities. The project site, former Genevieve Melody Public School, located at 412 S Keeler Ave, Chicago, IL 60624, follows through with the efforts being made to revitalize West Garfield Park. As a recently abandoned CPS building, Melody can act as a social instrument and serve as a catalyst for revitalization. Repurposing the school into a Mixed-Use Multi-Family space, provides an opportunity for change within the community. The repurposing of Melody can act as a model for other closed schools to be transformed.

The overarching concept for the project is the

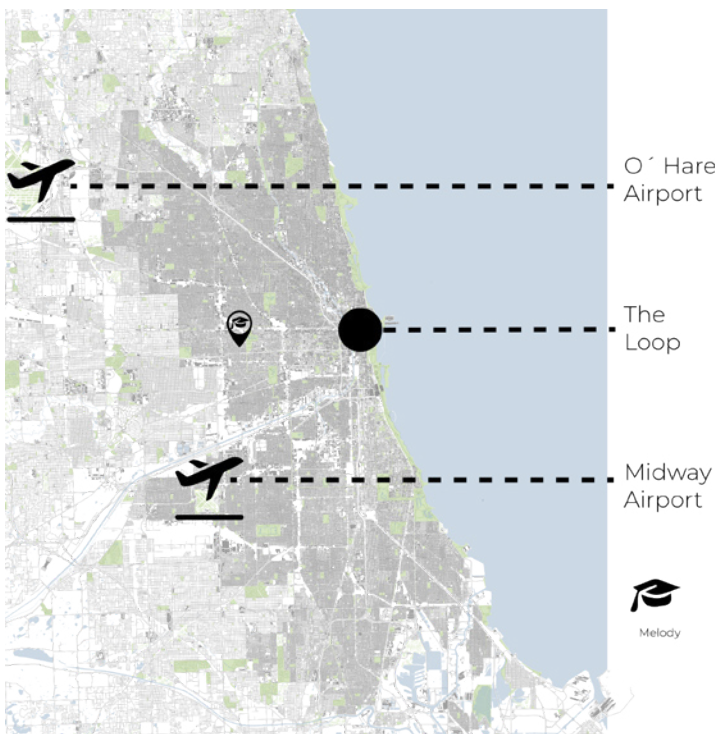


Image 2 Location.

Melody - Illinois Institute of Technology

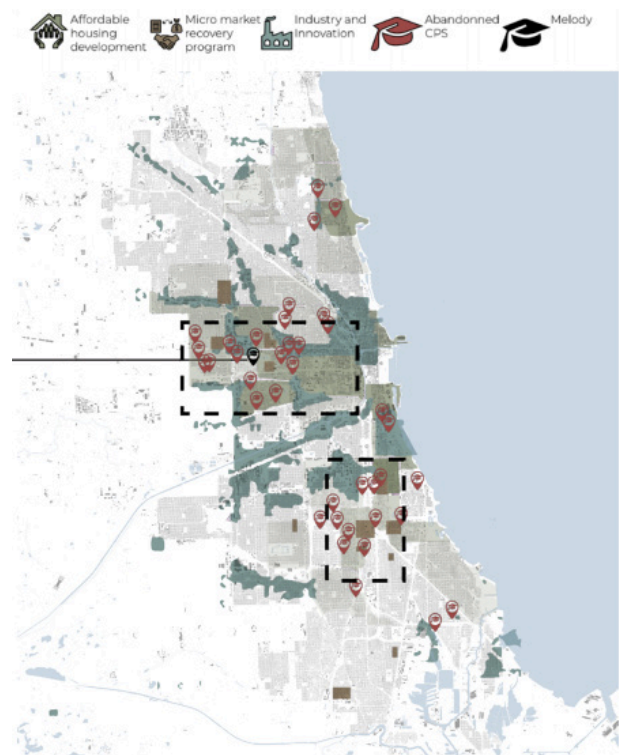


Image 3. CPS School Closings



“Loop”, which aids in the resilience of the building in terms of social, economical and environmental interests. Residents become part of the “Loop” as they enter the facility as interim residents and acquire knowledge and skills through various on-site workshops and partnerships with training facilities around the area. Once consistent income has been established, they have the opportunity to move into the low-income housing units. On a larger scale, the “Loop” system works towards regenerating interest in an abandoned building and by extension, revitalizing the neighborhood.



A sense of community is created by introducing an urban plaza and indoor public space, which incorporates social activities and addresses the needs of the neighborhood. The new pathways encourage movement across the site, bringing in more people towards the plaza. Additionally, the circulation paths and green spaces from the exterior continue on the inside. By utilizing the modules, materiality and circulation patterns, the “Loop” also drives the architectural design by blending the boundary between the inside and the outside.



Melody Public School sits on an L-shaped plot with roads on three sides and the I-290 towards the south. The existing layout consists of classes around the periphery and public functions placed in the core, all arranged on a 15'x15' grid. This has been incorporated into the design, retaining its character and presence in the neighborhood. All new additions have been made using the existing modularity of the structure. This strategy minimizes the need for new construction on the project and promotes the “Loop” in terms of reuse. Another major strategy in the architectural design is flexibility, which enables interim residents to make functional changes in their units. This allows for a greater sense of belonging and instilling a sense of ownership.



Materials, which are being removed, will be used for different purposes within the new design. An attempt is being made to have all new elements incorporated into the building to be made of recycled materials. The material choices reflect the “Loop” as they are easy to assemble and can easily be reused in the future. The aim is to keep the future in mind and recognize that buildings can be repurposed and remodeled again, therefore the new construction will be modular and flexible.



The energy aspect of Melody also falls under the idea of the “Loop” as all energy being produced will be used within the building or fed back to the grid. The concept of incorporating the program into a zero energy building will serve as a feasibility study on low-income housing. Reducing building consumption while increasing the use of renewable energy sources reduces the cost of living for residents and the cost of operation for the owner.

