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## Danger zone

### Future of Prentice Women's building is uncertain

05/05/2009 12:38 PM

By IAN FULLERTON

Contributing Reporter

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#### Streeterville

The towers of Prentice Women's Hospital in Streeterville are worth preserving, according to Landmarks Illinois, a historic preservation group.

The hospital, located at 251 E. Huron on the Northwestern Memorial Hospital campus, made Landmark's annual Ten Most Endangered Historic Places list, released April 28. The list is intended to draw attention to buildings in the state that the organization sees as threatened by deterioration, maintenance problems or funding issues.

"Prentice Women's is an important building from an architectural period that is just now gaining attention," said Landmarks President Jim Peters. At 34 years old, he noted, the hospital is the youngest building on the list.

The hospital, built in 1975, was designed by Bertrand Goldberg, known commonly as the architect of Chicago's Marina City. The building's design is similar to that of Marina, with a modernist double-tower exterior and Goldberg's patented fanned room layout.

Prentice vacated the structure in 2007, moving its operations to a new 18-story tower at Chicago and Fairbanks. The base of the structure, according to Peters, is still partially in use by the hospital.

The towers were originally designed to accommodate 3,000 newborn deliveries a year. By the time the facility was vacated, it was handling more than twice the intended number of births.

In two years, the hospital will transfer ownership of the building to Northwestern University. Peters said the university has shown interest in constructing a new research facility on the site, and fears these plans could mark the end for the concrete cloverleaf towers, which currently have no landmark protection.

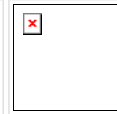
Landmarks Illinois has known about the university's plans for a few years, and decided to act sooner than later in spreading the word, said Peters.

Alan Cabbage, vice president of university relations at Northwestern, said the school has no specific plans



Courtesy of Landmarks Illinois  
Prentice Women's Hospital, 251 E. Huron St.

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for the property at this time.

“Whatever we do will be consistent with the university’s missions of education, research and community service,” he said.

Alderman Brendan Reilly (42nd) said he has had extensive conversations with Landmarks and Preservation Chicago, another historic preservation group, concerning the building, but has not received any conceptual designs or plans from the university.

“If there’s a way to preserve and reuse a historically significant building, that’s always my preference,” Reilly said.

Peters said buildings in their thirties and forties often face the teardown or rehabilitation crossroads. He said that the Sears Tower and the John Hancock Center both underwent major remodeling projects when they hit the 30-year mark.

Streeterville Organization of Active Residents president Gail Spreen said her group hasn’t taken a position on the matter yet.

“Some might say it’s a golden treasure we have to preserve while others might say it looks like a prison,” Spreen said.

She said the group will tour the building and evaluate the landmark review before addressing the general membership to make a decision.

Also on this year’s list were the South Side’s Michael Reese Hospital Campus and the Chicago Landmark Ordinance, which Landmarks said “is operating under a cloud,” referring to an Appellate Court ruling that the city’s 41-year-old ordinance’s criteria for landmark designations were vague.

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