

## Having Something to Show for Winning the Right to Bid for the Olympics

Peter Creticos  
June 2008

Much has been said already about the many opportunities that will open to Chicago as a candidate city for the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics. Indeed, two great world events commemorated as stars on Chicago's municipal flag - the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition - launched new eras of Chicago development. The Olympics and Paralympics can be another such transformational milestone.

Of course, times were different in 1893 and 1933. Each event was defined by the norms of civil society and technology. The Columbian Exposition brought together the world's great minds to take stock of human understanding and invention and to set forth an agenda for further discourse and study. The Century of Progress showcased emerging technologies and a promise for a better future at a time when many people were caught up in the throes of the Great Depression.

The Olympics and Paralympics offer a different sort of opportunity. First and foremost, they are sporting events for the world's greatest athletes of the quadrennium. And, for the few weeks that these athletes are the stars, the host city provides the imagery and context that distinguishes the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics games from all others. An Olympics is also a coming out event for the host city. It causes a community to step back and consider the future in broadly new and creative ways. It provides the impetus for bold planning and investment. It galvanizes the attention of the public and encourages it to see change as offering many possibilities and challenges.

A Chicago Olympics faces many challenges, and the strong competition for a favorable IOC decision in 2009 makes it difficult to look much beyond next year. In order to win the vote in 2009, Chicago must demonstrate that it can do better than Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, or Madrid. It must be creative and meticulous in its planning and demonstrate that it can build and operate an event that is in keeping with the spirit as well as the operational requirements of the games. In order to win the hearts and minds of Chicagoans and residents of the region, however, the people must understand how their lives can be made much better as a result of the effort to win the games as well as actually winning the competition for the games.

The process of winning the games and then building and operating the Olympics and the process of taking advantage of the opportunity of bidding for, and ultimately hosting the Olympics are two separate, but closely coordinated activities. The preparation of a successful bid requires the singular, undivided focus of the Olympic organizing committee and the USOC. The IOC must be convinced that Chicago will be unequalled in all aspects of the games, venues, logistics, housing, security, finances and Olympic spirit. Anything extraneous to that process jeopardizes the ultimate success of the bid.

At the same time, people throughout the region are being told that many new opportunities will come as a result of the Olympics. But, they need to be part of creating the vision as to what those opportunities may be and how they may be accomplished. They need to think about what it will mean to have the world focus its attention on Chicago for a few short weeks: How it may bring about a new international reputation; How it may encourage international investment; How it may change the way we think about the city and the region as a global center; How we may align our public infrastructure to sustain long term growth and new prosperity during decades of rapid and profound change and global challenges – civil, economic, technological and environmental; How we may educate our children and train and retrain our workers to take advantage of these opportunities. Indeed, the children entering fifth grade in September 2008 will be graduating from high school in June 2016. How can the Olympics – or the possibility of the Olympics – become a defining opportunity for them?

The question of the hearts and minds of the people goes beyond what happens if Chicago hosts the Olympics. We must also address why the effort itself is important; i.e., what we can achieve by late 2009 irrespective of the decision of the IOC. At the very least, something great is accomplished if, by 2009, the region as a whole is able to come together and articulate a vision for the future, backed by public action, that puts Chicago firmly in the exclusive group of economic, social and cultural leaders among global cities.

While such a demonstration is critical to the success of Chicago's bid, it also is extraneous to the task of planning the Olympics and preparing a bid for the IOC. Therefore, there should be a partnership of two groups: One group that has the task of preparing Chicago's bid and, if successful, building and operating the Olympics and Paralympics. The other group, funded by foundations and other sources targeting community and economic development, has the task of organizing the region to put forth a vision of the future and to transform that vision into action regardless of the actions of the IOC. And, it is this aspect of the Olympics effort that is more interesting.

In thinking through how this view to the future can be accomplished, it is helpful to break the time between now and 2016 into three segments. The first segment begins today and continues to the IOC decision in 2009. During that time, efforts should be focused on engaging neighborhoods, ethnic communities, religious institutions, local and state governments and agencies, business groups and labor unions in the development of a collective vision. At the same time, these groups, in close coordination with the Olympic organizing committee, can also demonstrate their enthusiasm for the Olympics and Paralympics. This can be done:

- Through cultural and artistic events that celebrate the region and the Olympics
- Through "letters to home" by Chicago's diverse immigrant communities that tell family and friends about Chicago how it shows its high regard for people from other parts of the world
- Through new school curricula that bring the world to our youth in creative ways.

In short, November 2009 should mark the beginning of a new era for Chicago and the region irrespective of the IOC decision.

Should Chicago win the IOC designation, the second period covering three years begins with that decision and continues through the 2012 games in London. During that time, community efforts should focus on preparing for the many opportunities that can be launched in connection with the games and the four years leading up to them and beyond. The possibilities are limited only by our imagination. They may include co-investment strategies that leverage public and private resources for neighborhood revitalization efforts, international trade and exchange programs, cultural and artistic events and festivals, global human rights initiatives, language and cultural education, and world colloquia on the pressing issues of the day.

The final period of five years puts the planning and preparation into action. It commences with the conclusion of the games in London and extends one year beyond the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics. The idea here is to use the momentum gained by the Olympics to spur a burst of creativity and energy that transcends the games and that warrants a fifth star on Chicago's flag.

Just as in the case of the Olympics today, the proposed 1992 Chicago World's Fair was presented as a potentially seminal event providing very many new opportunities for Chicago and Illinois. It failed for many good reasons, but in part due to the governing authority's board and staff trying too hard to make the Fair all things to all people. On the one hand, the organizers did not produce a coherent set of plans and conservative estimates for building and operating the Fair. On the other hand, they did not properly address questions posed by the public and by their elected representatives regarding the long-term value of the Fair in the every day lives of Chicagoans. In the end, the organizers lost their credibility with the public, and without credibility they were unable to persuade the decision makers to go forward.

This plan and the concept of two independent, but closely coordinated working groups take account of the hard lessons of the Fair. More importantly, these ideas are driven by a desire to maximize the outcome of two separate, but connected, agendas: win the Olympics bid and create new opportunities for the people of Chicago and the region.