

**ULI Chicago 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Vision Awards**  
**July 11, 2024**



**Program Finalist:** Mega-Chaise Lounges at Lathrop Homes | Related Midwest & Bryan Saner and Erik Peterson

**Team:**

Developer/Owner: Related Midwest

**Program Description:** If you visit Chicago’s riverside Lathrop community this Spring, you might notice two large wobbly logs placed in the shade facing the Great Lawn. You might see residents or passersby seated on these two new

public artworks, chatting with friends or meeting someone new. These “mega-chaise lounges” are new to the Lathrop Homes, but the wood they are made from has a long history at the site. In 2018, during the first phase of the renovation of the historic Julia C. Lathrop Homes from public housing into a fully-integrated mixed income residential community with public, affordable, and market rate housing, we (artists Bryan Saner and Erik L. Peterson) were brought onboard for a large-scale urban forestry and milling project. Because of parking requirements and emergency vehicle right-of-way roads the developers needed to remove 34 mature hardwood trees, originally planted by pioneering landscape architect Jens Jensen in the 1930's. Throughout its history, Lathrop Homes has been a community on the river, where low-rise brick buildings, lush lawns, full trees, and the riverbank, has combined to create an urban/natural oasis in the City of Chicago. Instead of cutting down the trees and sending them to the woodchipper, Related Midwest and Lathrop Community Partners partnered with us to mill the trees and utilize the wood for projects ranging from boat-building, to community carpentry workshops, to nature playgrounds, to public benches. The project for which we are applying, the Artist Carved Mega-Chaise Lounges, consisting of four hand-carved multi-person public benches utilizing Lathrop Lumber.

Conceived and carved by Bryan Saner and Erik L. Peterson the Mega-Chaise Lounges were, in some respects, designed by nature. We found the four most strange and wonderful logs, which grew on the Lathrop grounds, but were unfit for milling into boards because of their undulating shapes. We transformed them, with over 150 hours of hand carving, into sculptural artistic benches, and installed them in the shade, at Lathrop Homes, a twelve foot bench and 14 foot bench overlooking the Great Lawn and Chicago River, and two five-foot benches gracing the courtyard of a building at the corner of Diversey and Clybourne. Thus, these trees were returned to the Great Lawn and the grounds of Lathrop Homes, where they were originally planted almost 100 years prior, for use by the next generation of Lathrop residents. These chaises serve as souvenirs to the first residents of Lathrop Homes. They are reminders of the passion that people brought to ensure that Lathrop was preserved as a mixed-income community in the 2000s. The trees preserve the past while creating something new for future Chicagoans—just like the development of Lathrop, which will now be home to new generations of people and trees.