

Frank Lloyd Wright Trust plans Learning Center expansion

By LACEY SIKORA
Contributing Reporter

The Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission approved March 14 the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust's plans for a new learning center on Chicago Avenue.

The planned center will consist of a new, contemporary building designed by architect John Ronan that will include a Reception Hall, Pavilion and Studio. An Art Resource Center will be housed in the repurposed historic building at 925 Chicago Ave., which will also include a Frank Lloyd Wright Reading Room and Archive.

Susie Trexler, urban planner in historic preservation for the village said the HPC was positive about the plan.

"The commission spoke very favorably about the trust's proposed learning center," Trexler said. "The commission expressed a lot of excitement both about the design and purpose as a learning center."

Celeste Adams, president and CEO of the trust, said that the design for the center had been developed during the past three years and noted that the trust has planned to announce the design this year to coincide with the trust's 50th anniversary.

"It's a critical moment for us to look back in gratitude to the many people who built and grew the trust as we also look forward to a new generation who will make their



COURTESY OF JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS AND FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRUST, CHICAGO

Guests will enter the building via Chicago Avenue walkway.

See *LEARNING CENTER* on page 32



View of the campus from Chicago Avenue.

COURTESY OF JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS AND FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRUST, CHICAGO

LEARNING CENTER

Sustainable artistry

from page 31

own contributions. We want the next generation to be part of Wright's living legacy."

The center will offer interactive programming, creative studio classes for all ages and access to learning resources.

"As we conduct preservation of Wright's buildings, we are constantly reminded of his innovation in design," Adams said. "His studio was his laboratory – a place of creativity. This is the spirit of the new Learning Center, a balanced combination of innovation and preservation."

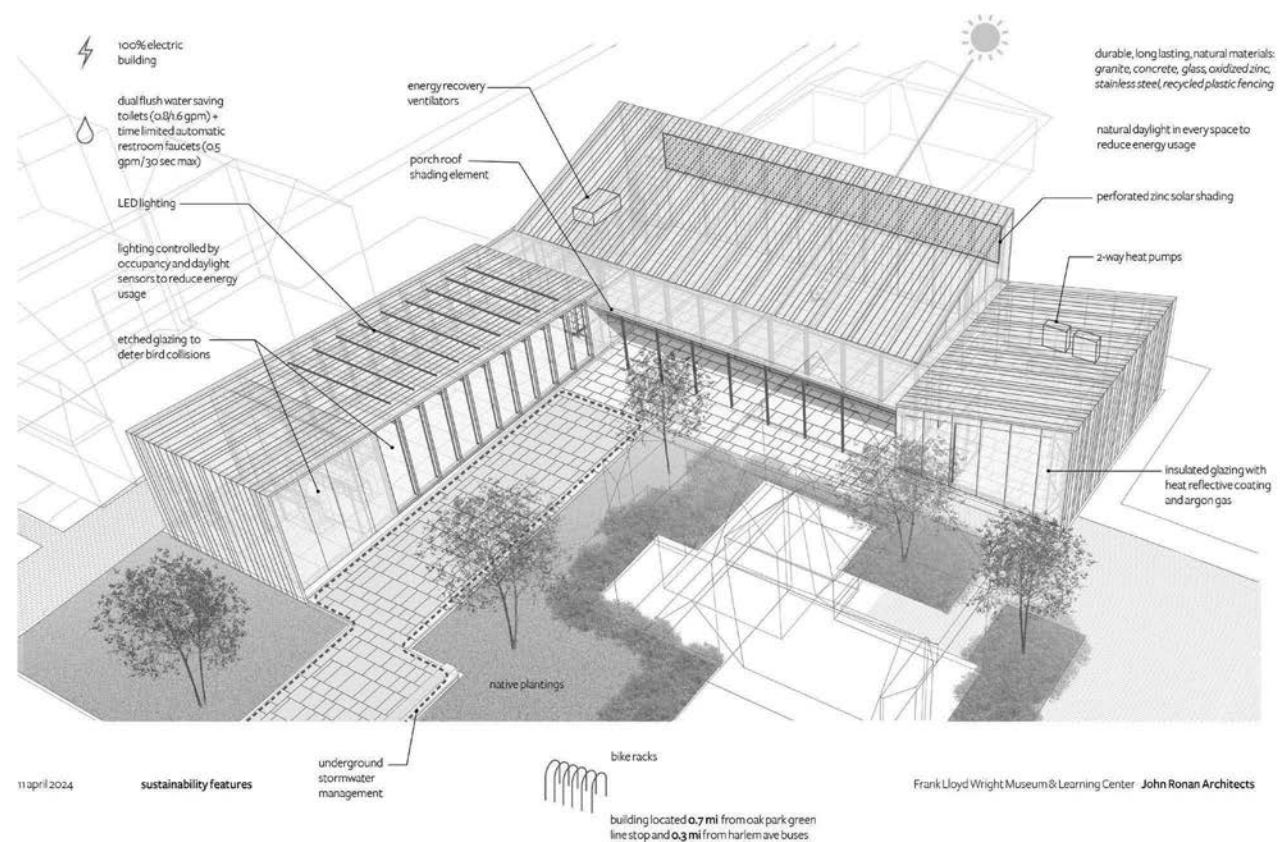
Adams added that not only will the center further the mission of the trust, but it will also expand its reach.

"Traditionally, the building has been seen as a tourist destination," she said of the Home and Studio. "We want to engage the community, open our site and welcome them in."

The center will be built behind existing buildings that are part of the home and studio campus. These other buildings are also getting facelifts as part of the plan to create a campus around the home and studio.

Work has already begun on 931 Chicago Ave., the John Blair and Anna Wright House, which has been going through a refurbishment so that it more closely resembles what it looked like when Wright lived in Oak Park. When finished, the building will house staff and will not be open to the public.

The 925 Chicago Ave. building has already had an exterior remodeling. Site work on the back of the house and interior



COURTESY OF JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS AND FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRUST, CHICAGO

The building will have multiple sustainability features.

are underway now to prepare the house for public access as the Art Resource Center for the trust.

The newly built Learning Center building will include 4,370 square feet of interior space, which will be ADA accessible and include a guest reception desk, 36-foot-long audio-visual programming screen, public restrooms and catering support.

Outdoors, there will be 2,033 square feet of terraces, with adjacent outdoor courtyards, walkways and patio areas measuring 2,420 square feet. Eighteen new trees will be planted and there will be a fountain on the terrace.

"The proposed building is set back from the street helping it to become part of the block," said Lou Garapolo, chair of the HPC. "It, however, has what could be a wonderful courtyard that welcomes the visitor in for what could be a delightful experience."

Adams called the design "environmentally friendly," and said it will provide ample natural light and views of the surrounding parklike setting. She said the combination of indoor and outdoor learning spaces will allow the trust to greatly expand its educational offerings to people of all ages.

The new center will allow for more summer camp offerings for school children and longer sessions of camp days, in addition to work experience in art, architecture and design for high school students. The popular 4th grade experience will be enhanced with workshops in the new space.

The trust also envisions the space hosting two artist-in-residency programs a

year. Guest artists – whether architects, visual artists, designers or sculptors – will be on site to draw inspiration from the site and work with students to create their own projects.

The trust has formed a Community Education Advisory Committee made up of local educators from Oak Park, River Forest and Austin, as well as trust members and leaders from the local arts community to weigh in on future programming for the center.

Adams said that the construction timeline for the center will be dependent on fundraising efforts. Calling this the "most significant capital effort of the trust in 50 years," Adams said that in the beginning of the planning stages, several years ago, initial cost estimates were in the \$5 million-\$10 million range. She said current estimates are at the high end of that range.

Fundraising is just beginning, but she added, "We are pleased to have the support of several major donors at this time."

Adams said she is excited about what the center means for the trust and for the community.

"What's wonderful about this expansion plan is its expanded return to the community," she said.



COURTESY OF JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS AND FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRUST, CHICAGO

The pavilion interior of the Learning Center.