

High-Rise Adaptive Re-Use

Consumers and Century Buildings, Chicago, IL

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Central Business Districts have seen dramatic changes since the pandemic and the growth of work-from-home policies. Commercial tenants no longer need as much office space and as a result, vacancy rates have soared to nearly 20%. Chicago's Loop has been hit particularly hard by this trend, resulting in a campaign by the City to adapt older, obsolete office buildings to residential functions. Downtown remains an attractive place to live, though it lacks many of the amenities—grocery stores, schools, etc.—that are found in traditional residential neighborhoods.

Two early 20th-century commercial skyscrapers along State Street are also the subject of a current preservation battle. Their proximity to the Dirksen Federal Courthouse Building led to the GSA purchasing them in 2007 but keeping them empty for security reasons. After the city landmarked the towers earlier this year, thwarting plans to demolish them, the GSA has issued a call for proposals to develop the two structures.

This studio will combine these two important issues in Chicago's downtown, asking student teams to develop schemes to re-purpose the two structures with a program of market-rate and subsidized housing units, and to re-imagine the vacant site between the two as an amenity space serving both the newly occupied towers and the growing residential population of the Loop. We'll work closely with two firms active in the adaptive re-use sphere, Pappageorge Haymes and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and will make a visit to the site and to their offices early in the semester.

