

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Evanston’s long history of building greater density

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) July 6th, 2025

Although this story presents the local history of creating needed housing in landlocked Evanston, it is *not* about affordable housing — a highly charged topic discussed during the Envision Evanston 2045 hearings. But the idea of subdividing large estates, as with the double houses described in [Design Evanston’s new book](#), does provide additional housing, and greater density, in a city looking for more options.

Mary McWilliams, chair of the Evanston Preservation Commission in 1986, during the Cove School debate, cautioned, “As a city hemmed in on all sides by three communities and Lake Michigan, Evanston can only look inward for growth and development and must take special care to husband its resources.”

Lohr Estate (Lohr Park) – 1976

1401 Ridge Ave.



The Lenox Lohr mansion condo at 1406 Oak Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

The home at 1401 Ridge Ave. was built in the 1867 for Hugh and Catherine White, remodeled in 1895, then a second time in 1911 by the firm of Otis and Clark. Lenox Lohr, the third owner of the home, had been president of NBC in the '30s and General Manager of the 1933 Century of Progress Fair in Chicago.

In 1976 the Lohr Estate, bounded by Ridge Avenue, Greenwood Street and Oak Avenue, was sold for \$500,000 to architect Ed Noonan, principal in Chicago Associates Planners & Architects, for redevelopment. In 1977 the mansion was divided into two condominium units, with two more in the gatehouse. Additionally, four new single-family condominium “cottages” were built on the 2-acre site.

When the estate was subdivided and built out, Oak Avenue addresses were assigned to all the structures. One of the two mansion condominiums, 1406 Oak, was recently appraised at \$1.4 million and the 3 bedroom/3 bath cottage at 1400 Oak was priced at \$689K.

Wilson Estate (Cove School) – 1986

1110 Forest Ave.



The Milton Wilson Home at its original 1110 Forest Ave. address, now 305 Greenleaf St. (south half) and 1108 Forest (north half). Credit: Jack Weiss

The 24-room Milton Wilson home, at the northwest corner of Forest Avenue and Greenleaf Street was designed by the firm of Beers, Clay & Dutton and completed in 1896. It is now a local landmark. Wilson was a longtime trustee of Northwestern University. His bequest of \$8 million in 1928 was given to endow the College of Liberal Arts. The Queen Anne mansion and most of the 2-acre property were donated to Northwestern after Wilson’s death in 1929.

Cove School purchased the property in 1972. Cove School, which provides services for children with learning disabilities, needed to expand its existing Evanston facilities. After extensive remodeling, in 1973 the mansion became the new home of The Cove School in Illinois.

Architect-Developer Raymond Chou purchased the Wilson Estate from Cove School in 1986. His planned development — the first in Evanston — included dividing the home into two large duplexes, and the stables and servants' quarters also into two duplexes. Five new homes were built on the south and west sides of the property. All four duplexes and five houses sold before construction began in 1987.

The south portion of the large home was given a new address of 305 Greenleaf St. With seven bedrooms and five baths, it sold recently for \$1.9 million. The 3,814-square-foot home at 1111 Judson Ave. sold for nearly \$1.5 million this past year.

Ashcraft Estate (Ashcraft Park) – 1988

Asbury Avenue & Crain Street



The Edwin Ashcraft home at 1144 Asbury Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

Ashcraft Park is named for the original owner of the property, Edwin Ashcraft, and is on the northwest corner of Asbury Avenue and Crain Street. The large home, set far back on the site at 1144 Asbury, was built in 1872. It was completely remodeled by architects Mayo and Mayo in 1918 when the Ashcrafts bought the home. Ashcraft was a member of the City of Evanston Zoning Commission and served as vice-chair of the city's first Plan Commission

In 1988 the then-owner sold a large portion of land and the home to architect-developer Raymond Chou. Chou completely restored the home and subdivided the land to provide room for four new homes on the grounds. Like his Wilson Estate project, Chou sold all the units before construction began.

The home at 1144 Asbury, with six bedrooms and seven baths, sitting on a 1/3-acre lot, sold for \$1 million in 2024. One of the new homes at 1315 Crain, built in 1989 on a 7,300-square-foot lot, was recently valued at over \$1 million.

Dryden House (Dryden Place) – 2003/2012

1314 Ridge Ave.



The George Dryden home at 1314 Ridge Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

A national and local landmark, the 30-room George B. Dryden house occupies 2.3 acres of land at the northwest corner of Dempster Street and Ridge Avenue. It was designed by George Maher and completed in 1917. Dryden was a successful Chicago businessman. His wife Ellen was the heiress of George Eastman. Together, the couple were worth over \$9 million. In 1959 Dryden gifted the property to Northwestern University. Several years later Northwestern sold it to Evanston School District 65 for use as its headquarters.

Two developers, Mike Niazmand and partner Vladimir Novakovic, purchased the property in 2003. They spent four years transforming the house on Ridge into four condominiums and the coach house on Asbury into two condominiums, completed in 2007. The two partners paid \$2.97 million for the property.

When completed, prices for the house condos ranged from \$1.2 to \$1.6 million and the coach house condos from \$975,000 to \$1.2 million.

Subsequently, with a second developer, the Dryden property was subdivided and the four vacant lots facing Dempster were sold to Dryden Partners LLC for development of large single-family homes. The first home built, at 1212 Dryden Place (Dempster Street), sold recently for \$1.7 million.

Kendall College (Kendall Place) – 2006/2014

2408 Orrington Ave.



The seminary building at 2408 Orrington Ave. Credit: Courtesy of the Evanston History Center

Named for the 3½-acre Kendall College campus, Kendall Place became a prime redevelopment site when the college moved to Chicago in 2005. The full square block site is bordered by Lincoln Street, Orrington Avenue, Colfax Street and Sherman Avenue. The property was originally owned by the Swedish Methodist Theological Seminary. In 1907 the first building, designed by Lawrence Hallberg, was built at 2408 Orrington. The institution was renamed Kendall College in 1950. It became a unit of National Louis University in 2018.

In 2006, Smithfield Properties purchased the property from Kendall and proposed demolishing all existing structures and building 16 single-family houses and 8 townhouses. Strong opposition to the project arose due to the lack of diversity in pricing. Both the Cove School and Lohr Park projects provided examples of more diversity in pricing.

The project languished for years. In 2014 another developer, North Shore Builders, emerged and in the end won approval to build 19 single-family homes. Fourteen of the lots are 44 feet wide, and the additional five lots are 70 feet wide. In a nod to offering greater density, the 14 homes have two-car garages with coach houses above.

One of the first homes built at Kendall Place, a five-bedroom, 4½-bath Prairie Style at 732 Lincoln, had an estimated value of \$1.95 million this year. Another, the last home built, at 2390 Orrington, a 7,976-square-foot Colonial, sold for \$2.4 million.

There is strong reason to believe that the five redevelopment projects described above will not be the only ones this city will ever see. There are other large tracts of 2 to 3 acres that stand ready for similar redevelopment and that will produce increased housing density. When asked what that might look like and what form it could take, Eighth Ward councilmember Matt Rodgers, a former Land Use Commission chair, suggested, “These larger properties offer an opportunity to explore different types of housing in Evanston’s neighborhoods. Certainly, such developments would attract new residents and increase the city’s tax base.”

On a smaller scale, he said, individual homeowners already have the option of adding additional housing units on their own property through accessory dwelling units, aka ADUs or coach houses. More residential units could be included along major corridors and in transit-oriented development areas. Lastly, in some parts of the city, greater density would be an asset, building on the existing character of the community.

Design Evanston’s “Eye on Evanston” articles focus on Evanston’s design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.