

Remarks by Bob Giloth

For those of us who have tried to implement equity planning in government and community development settings, Norm Krumholz has been a guiding light. He was a model practitioner/scholar/activist who never gave up the struggle.

I knew about Norm from my early planning studies, but I first met him when the National Commission on Neighborhoods – of which he was a member – held Chicago hearings and toured neighborhoods in 1978. A bunch of activists from the Pilsen neighborhood on the near southwest side, including myself, took over their bus for a few minutes and requested the Commission ask Lew Hill, Chicago's Commissioner of Planning, for some straight answers about the fate of the Schoenhofen Brewery. The old brewery complex still contained several hundred jobs and a handful of manufacturers. An artist coalition – armed with the tools of historic preservation – saw the brewery as the centerpiece for their fantasy remake of this immigrant, working-class neighborhood.

Norm listened and with a few other Commission members took up our questions. Of course, Chicago's planning czar ignored them. But we stopped or slowed gentrification for years to come. Sadly, the inevitable has occurred in recent years.

Six years after the Neighborhood Commission I found myself working for Rob Mier in the mayoral administration of Harold Washington. Rob knew Norm through Cornell connections and asked him for advice in restructuring the Department of Economic Development after the 1983 election. As I remember it, Norm recommended that Rob set up a staff unit to support his work, a kind of "skunk works." Rob ultimately established the R&D unit, which was led by Kari Moe, me and Ken O'Hare. The unit generated many policy and practice innovations with community, labor and business partners, including our work on protecting manufacturing districts.