

Residential Real Estate

\$4 million rescue ahead for 1933 world's fair House of Tomorrow

By Dennis Rodkin



Credit: Wisconsin Historical Society

An undated image of the house as it originally looked

[Reprints](#) [Share](#)

March 18, 2024 06:12 AM | UPDATED 6 HOURS AGO

The long-stalled rescue of a futuristic house designed in the 1930s for Chicago's Century of Progress fair and later moved to the Indiana shoreline will get a sorely needed rehab with \$4 million in federal funding.

Vacant and decaying since at least the early 2000s on a dune-side site in Beverly Shores, the House of Tomorrow is a pioneering glass structure designed by George Fred Keck for the [Century of Progress](#) fair. He was more than a decade ahead of Chicagoan Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and New Yorker Philip Johnson, who designed glass houses that are far more famous.



Credit: Jan Parr

The House of Tomorrow as it looks now

Although it's in terrible shape now, the building "is too important to lose," said Todd Ravesloot, chief of facilities at Indiana Dunes National Park, which encompasses the site where the House of Tomorrow and four other former houses from the fair stand. "It's one of our most unique attractions in the park and a symbol of innovation and development in architecture."

Keck designed the 12-sided house for the fair's showcase of future home designs that modern architectural styles and emerging technologies would make possible. [The house](#) had a new-fangled dishwasher, electronic eyes to open the doors to the garage and kitchen and a place to park a personal aircraft.

The national park [announced March 12](#) that it's getting \$22 million in federal funds for historic restorations. Of that, \$4 million will go to restore the exterior of the House of Tomorrow, Ravesloot said.

The work will include rebuilding the original glass and aluminum exterior and some structural repairs, he said. "We're going to restore it to its original appearance which has almost disappeared over time."

The work is all exterior, Ravesloot said, with the goal of "making it a finished shell that's more palatable and affordable for someone to redo the interior."

[Subscribe](#)

Another, flashier world's fair house in the cluster, the flamingo-pink Florida Tropical House, was extensively restored via the lease-for-rehab arrangement. The family that did the work beginning in the early 2000s is now offering to [sell the 52-year lease for \\$2.5 million](#), which must be paid all in cash.

Ravesloot said he has no estimate of what the interior work at the House of Tomorrow will cost but that the combined total for interior and exterior restoration has been “too much for anyone” to take on in return for a rent-free lease. In 2019, Indiana Landmarks [launched a \\$2.5 million fundraising campaign](#) to get the house restored, but more than five years later, the House of Tomorrow is still shrouded in construction wrap, as it was at the time.

The Indiana Dunes National Park's \$22 million in restoration fund is coming from the Great American Outdoors Act, passed by Congress in 2020 to provide \$9.5 billion over five years to help national parks catch up on a huge backlog of maintenance and repair projects, such as the House of Tomorrow.

Of the \$22 million Indiana Dunes National Park is getting, Ravesloot said, \$13 million will go to restoration of Good Fellow Lodge, a handsome 1940s building that was the centerpiece of [US Steel's Good Fellow Youth Camp](#). Another \$5 million will go to restoring the [Bailly Homestead](#), a site associated with a fur trader who set up a trading post in 1822 on the road from Detroit to Chicago.

The trio of restorations, all long overdue, are all projects “we've never been able to do because we couldn't put our hands on these kinds of resources in one shot,” Ravesloot said. The \$22 million, he said, “is probably the largest investment ever made into the park's historic structures.”

After restoration, the Good Fellow building will be used for meetings and education and may be offered for rent as an event venue, Ravesloot said. In 2023, the park began [soliciting proposals](#) from businesses or other groups for putting the Bailly Homestead to use after its restoration.

Together, the three restorations “will let us show off the cultural resources” in a park that is “best known for our beaches,” Ravesloot said.

The national park, 40 miles from the Loop, had [over 2.8 million visitors in 2022](#), the latest year for which figures have been released.

By Dennis Rodkin

Dennis Rodkin is a senior reporter covering residential real estate for Crain's Chicago Business. He joined Crain's in 2014 and has been covering real estate in Chicago since 1991.