

LOGAN SQUARE, HUMBOLDT PARK, AVONDALE

After 6 Years Without A Puerto Rican Community Center, Tu Casa Project Planned For Humboldt Park

The Tu Casa Project will offer senior programs, barista training and a cosmetology school. Sisters and entrepreneurs Michelle and Melissa Gomez are behind the center, which they hope to open in 2026.



By Charles Thrush

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Michelle and Melissa Gomez presenting plans for the Tu Casa community center, March 19, 2025. Credit Chicago

HUMBOLDT PARK — A Puerto Rican community center that will provide educ

for locals is coming to Division Street, replacing a lot that was rezoned last summer.

The Tu Casa community center is the brainchild of sisters Michelle and Melissa Gomez, who, as co-owners of **Dynamic Productions**, organize the annual Puerto Rican Festival and Parade, Sangria Fest and Chicago Fashion Fest. The Gomez sisters hope to raise \$15 million for the project and are collaborating with local businesses.

A proposal for the Tu Casa Project was presented to a group of about 25 Humboldt Park residents Wednesday in conjunction with the 26th Ward in the Paseo Boricua Arts Building, 2709 W. Division St.

“Building on the legacy of Chicago’s community leaders, we create a home where education and business dreams come to life,” read a description of the project’s goals. “Our center brings together local expertise, hands-on training and business knowledge to open doors for the next generation of Chicago entrepreneurs and skilled workers, strengthening our neighborhoods for years to come.”

It is unclear when the community center will open, but Michelle Gomez said the project is “hoping for a 2026 opening” for the sake of numerical serendipity — Tu Casa’s address will be 2626 W. Division St. in the 26th Ward. The project will likely take years to reach completion.

Humboldt Park has been without a Puerto Rican community center for over six years. The neighborhood’s previous community center, Casa Puertorriqueña at 1237 N. California Ave., **shut in 2018** after its parent company was found liable for over \$900,000 in debt. The building was **demolished in 2019** and is being redeveloped as a **\$21 million, 40-unit affordable apartment building**.

The Tu Casa community center will offer senior activities along with permanent vocational programs, including a cosmetology school, a barista and culinary training center, and carpentry and construction classes. The center will have ample space for events throughout the year, Melissa Gomez told Block Club.

Senior programs will help spur a “transfer of knowledge” between generations as young students and older neighbors will be under one roof, she said.

The lower level will hold Tu Casa’s woodworking space, the first floor a senior center and café for the barista program, the second floor an event room and the culinary program, the third will be home to the cosmetology school and the fourth floor will have smaller training rooms, Melissa Gomez said

The rooftop will have a garden and may be available for summer gatherings.

Tu Casa’s cosmetology program was spotlighted during Wednesday’s meeting, as the Gomez sisters have owned and operated Dynamic Salon Spa, 1754 W. Division St., since 2001.

“Girls come to us all the time saying they’re learning cosmetology through YouTube,” Melissa Gomez said. “And although they’re learning a lot, they still need the proper certifications and know the right techniques on how to be sanitary.”

Tu Casa’s construction was **approved by City Council** last summer on what’s currently a city-owned lot. The zoning change coincided with the long-awaited rubber stamping of an archives center for the Puerto Rican cultural museum that was **demolished in early 2024** after museum leaders launched construction without acquiring a permit from the city.

Puerto Rican architect Maria Pelot with architecture firm UrbanWorks will design the building, although exact plans haven’t been finalized yet.

Residents can check out plans for the Tu Casa center **here**.



Paseo Boricua facing east in Humboldt Park, as seen from above on Aug. 5, 2022. Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

The center will be a fixture for Puerto Rican Chicagoans to unite and commune in

Division Street, Ald. Jessie Fuentes (26th) said during the meeting.

“It’s an opportunity for Puerto Ricans, not just in Humboldt Park but across the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois, to have a space where they can enjoy culture in all the ways that Puerto Ricans should,” Fuentes said.

“But more importantly, [this project will allow for us] to be in community with one another. It is no secret that Humboldt Park is a community that consistently has faced gentrification. The gentrification is not unique to Humboldt Park. I mean, Puerto Ricans face displacement all over the diaspora, more importantly, on the island. When we build community for Puerto Ricans to be able to be in a space and claim as their own, we are resolving for so much trauma, providing spaces of healing in a way that we don’t even understand.”

East Humboldt Park, where the community center is slated to open, has seen rapid development in recent years due to its proximity to neighborhoods like Wicker Park and Logan Square, which offer a variety of recreational options for wealthier residents.

Less than 50 percent of the housing stock in Humboldt Park is considered affordable for people who make 60 percent of the area median income, **according to a 2019 citywide neighborhood analysis**. An analysis of census data ending in 2021 found the neighborhood has more low-income renters than there are units, according to a **2023 State of Rental Housing** report by DePaul’s Institute for Housing Studies.

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