



City of Blue Island Comprehensive Plan

May 2012



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

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City of Blue Island Comprehensive Plan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank-you to the following groups, entities, residents, business owners, and elected officials who participated in the creation of this Plan.

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Chicago Jobs Council

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Delta Institute

Metra

Metropolitan Planning Council

Pace

Regional Transportation Authority

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Need for a Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan outlines the vision of what a community desires to become as well as the process that will allow it to realize that vision. In addition to providing a well-defined framework for the community's development and investment goals, the Plan seeks to explore and promote new opportunities and changing community trends.

Typically a comprehensive plan is written to provide guidance for a community to work towards its vision over the next 10 to 20 years. Although it should be viewed as a long-term document, the Plan should also be thought of as a plan to be used daily by the community to assist in land use and development decisions. It serves as a guide for elected officials, municipal staff, community residents, business owners, and potential investors, allowing them to make informed administrative and implementation choices, in community development decisions affecting land use, transportation, infrastructure, and capital improvements, throughout the entire City.

The comprehensive plan should also be considered flexible and one that can adapt with change. At any time the municipality can update its comprehensive plan to match local needs, interests, or opportunities. A municipality should typically update its comprehensive plan every five years to keep it as accurate as possible.

Elements of a Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is composed of a series of distinct yet interrelated elements defined within the Illinois Local Planning Assistance Act (Public Act 92-0768). The key elements addressed in the Blue Island Comprehensive Plan are based on those outlined in the State Statute, and include land use, economic development, housing, natural resources, transportation, community facilities, image and identity, and implementation.

Under the Illinois Municipal Code (65 ILCS 5/11-12-5(1)), a municipal plan commission is responsible for preparing and recommending a "comprehensive plan for the present and future development or redevelopment of the municipality." The code continues to say "that the plan may include reasonable requirements with reference to streets, alleys, public grounds, and other improvements."

Why Blue Island is Preparing a Comprehensive Plan

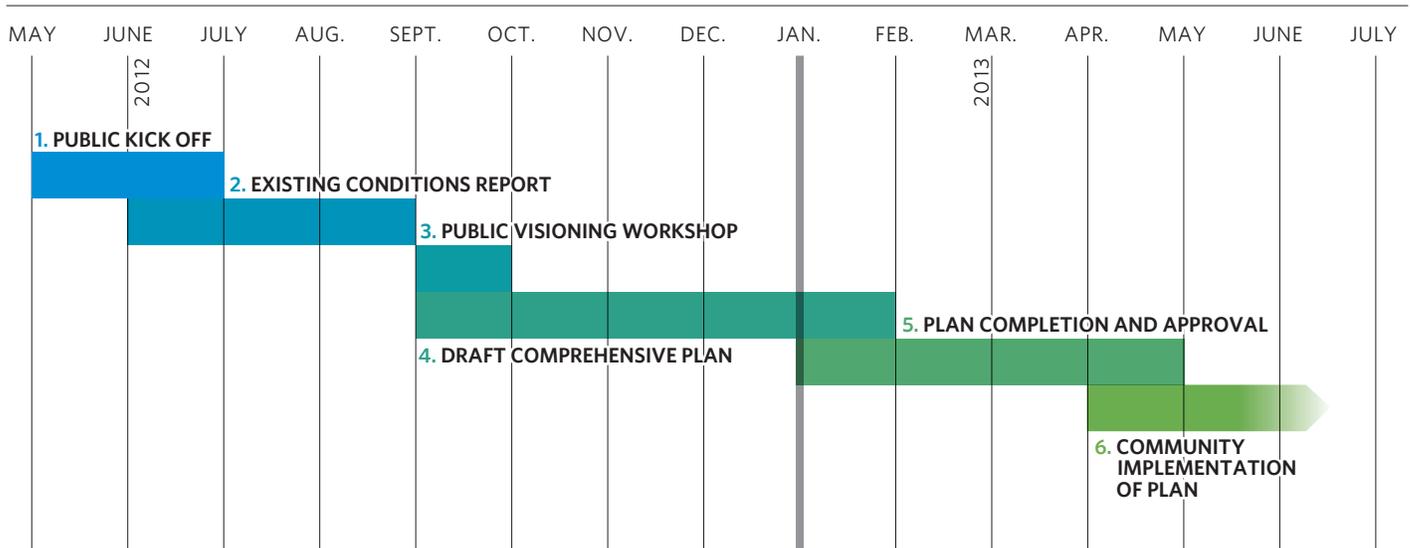
Blue Island enjoys a unique position in the south suburbs, possessing uncommon assets and considerable potential for future investment and growth. With an extensive network of major roadways (I-57, Tri-State Tollway, Dixie Highway) and convenient public transit connections to and from the greater Chicago region (via six Metra stations, Pace Bus service, and the nearby CTA), Blue Island is well-matched to the needs of businesses and employees alike. Excellent health care and recreational facilities, walkable neighborhoods, and a diverse housing stock are other key assets that make Blue Island a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Despite these assets, Blue Island faces several long-standing challenges. High industrial vacancies, aging infrastructure, and a struggling downtown are some of several factors that have restricted growth in the past decades.

Blue Island will be faced with numerous decisions in the near and distant future. Having an up-to-date comprehensive plan in place provides a context in which decisions affecting the future of Blue Island can be made with some certainty that today’s choices — whether large or small — contribute to achieving the long-term goals and vision of the community.

Because the City’s previous comprehensive plan was almost thirty years old (adopted in 1984), it did not provide adequate guidance for land use and development decisions in the community. As a result, Blue Island relied upon a 2005 plan created by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) which served as the city’s “unofficial” comprehensive plan, helping to guide development and investment decisions, primarily in areas of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Cargo Oriented Development (COD).

Planning Process

To create the Plan, the City of Blue Island used a multi-step planning process that was built upon public input and guidance. The 12-month planning process included multiple opportunities for public review. The key steps in the planning process are illustrated below.



Building Upon Previous Initiatives

Over the past decade, the City of Blue Island has undertaken or participated in a number of planning initiatives. A majority of these initiatives have however been focused on transit oriented and cargo oriented development opportunities around Metra stations and vacant industrial properties respectively. As part of the planning process, each of these studies were reviewed and analyzed in detail. Summaries of the key findings and recommendations from each of the below listed reports can be found within the Plan’s existing conditions report.

One key goal of the Plan is to incorporate findings and recommendations from all of the previous planning work compiled by the City over the past decade into one singular planning document.

In addition to TOD and COD, some initiatives focus on issues related to housing, economic development, and natural resource enhancements.

The structure and contents of the Plan have been shaped significantly by the past planning work of the City of Blue Island. Because so many forward-thinking plans have already been prepared, the Plan does not identify entirely new directions for the City; rather, it is meant to help strategically implement the recommendations of this past work. This has led to an unusual structure for this document, which consists primarily of detailed descriptions of implementation strategies to advance City priorities. While this is unusual, it also responds to the City’s unique situation and needs, and respects the years of planning work that preceded the Plan’s preparation.

Studies include:

- City of Blue Island Transit-Oriented Development Plan (1999)
<http://www.rtmas.org/reportLibrary/646.pdf>
- Blue Island Plan for Economic Development (2005)
<http://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/BlueIslandPlanEconomicDevelopmentExecutiveSummary2005.pdf>
- Blue Island Reaches Next Crossroads MPC Blue Island Task Force Report (2006)
<http://www.metroplanning.org/uploads/cms/documents/BlueIslandrpt.pdf>
- Blue Island Main Street Revitalization Study - Full Circle Mapping Project (2007)
http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/full-circle/case-studies/detail/-/asset_publisher/8zmQ/content/city-of-blue-island-main-street-revitalization
- Calumet River Corridor Economic Development Vision and Strategy (2007)
<http://www.blueisland.org/community-development-department/plans-projects-programs/calumet-rivers-development-project/>
- Blue Island Brownfields: A Technical Report and Recommendations (2007)
http://biplanning.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/blue-island-brownfields-report-final-february-2010_.pdf
- Homes for a Changing Region: Phase 2 (2009)
http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org/10_20.htm
- Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy (2009)
http://www.metroplanning.org/uploads/cms/documents/CBI_Robbins_EconomicDevelopmentVisionandStrategy.pdf
- Green River Pattern Book (2009)
<http://www.blueisland.org/wp-content/uploads/calumet-river-handbook-20090116-calumet-river-web-opt.pdf>
- Community Design Workshops (2009)
<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/community-design-workshops/blue-island>
- Chicago Southland Transit Region Initiative (2010)
<http://www.landvision.com/SSMMA/documents.htm>
- Green Transit, Intermodal, Manufacturing, Environmental (TIME) Zone (2010)
<http://www.cnt.org/repository/GTZ.pdf>
- CNT Case Study: Chicago's South Suburb's: Smart Growth in Older Communities (2011)
<http://www.cnt.org/repository/SS-Case-Study.pdf>
- South COD Plan (2011)
- City of Blue Island Uptown District Transit-Oriented Development Zoning Ordinance (2012)

Chapter 2

Community Profile

Established in 1835 as a scenic suburb with unique natural resources, Blue Island is one of the oldest communities in Cook County. The early development of the City can be attributed primarily to two natural resources — clay left by the glacial lake bed, and the Calumet River.

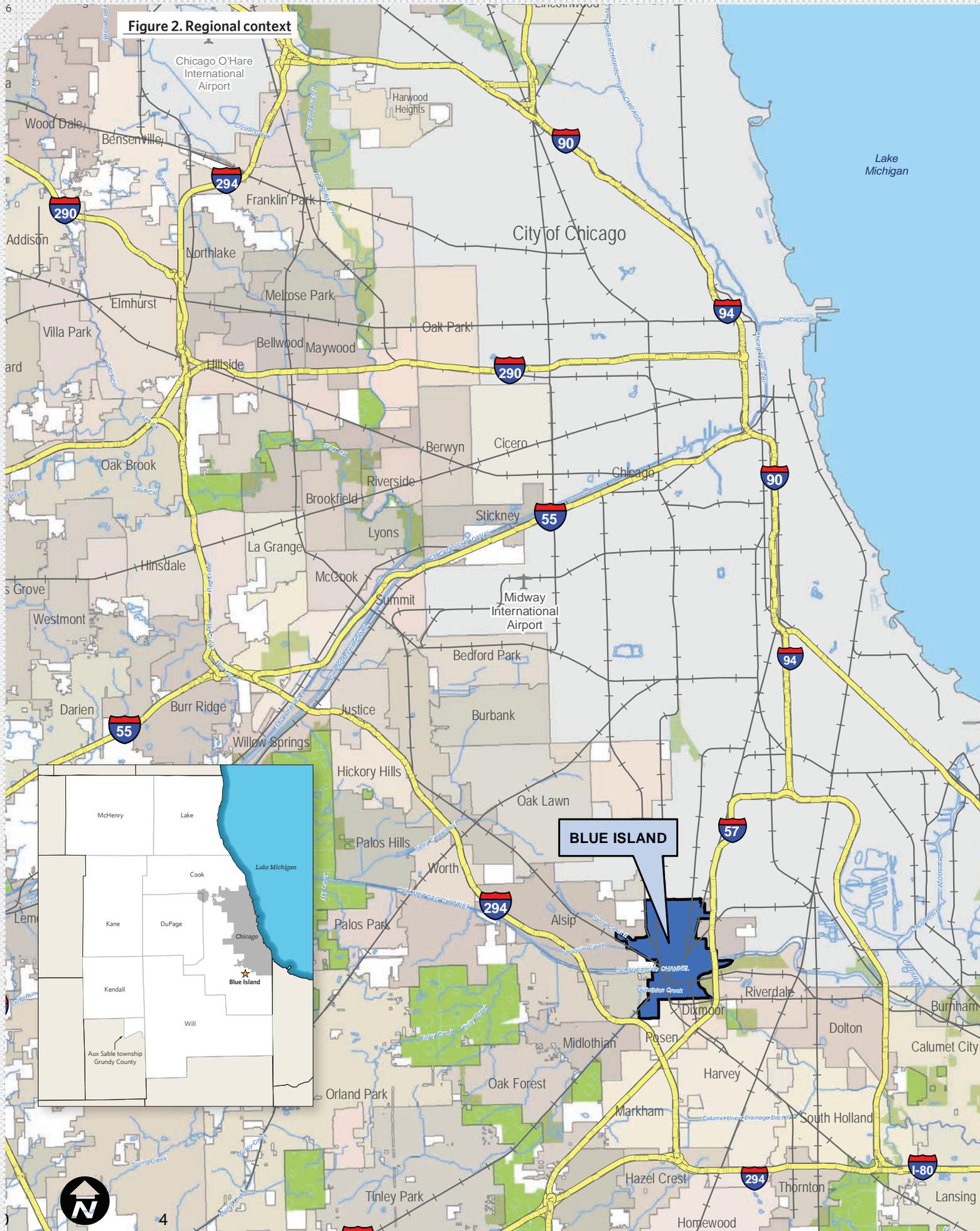
Brick manufacturing and the opening of the Calumet feeder canal in the mid to late 1800s brought a number of residents, entrepreneurs, and investors to the City. Businesses thrived and several residential neighborhoods were established during this period that exist and prosper to this day. The steady inflow of people and investment during this time resulted in the creation of a thriving Main Street with various cultural, retail, and recreational attractions. Blue Island continued to see rapid economic and physical growth through the early half of the twentieth century with the construction of railroads and heavy industries. Blue Island's rail infrastructure remains a vital asset not only for the community but for the greater region.

But over the last few decades, like many cities with an industrial history, Blue Island has been in a state of transition. Population decline and loss of jobs has significantly strained community resources and expenditures. To keep pace with the ever-changing economic environment, businesses and major employers have had to rethink the way they operate and grow. In spite of these setbacks, the city has created ambitious plans for revitalization that will help it successfully adjust to and benefit from the new socio-economic climate in years to come. The strategic investment decisions made throughout the history of Blue Island will continue to play a crucial role in its success over the next several decades.

Geographically, Blue Island is located just outside the City of Chicago's corporate limits and forms part of the south suburban area. From a regional perspective, Blue Island is strategically positioned at the heart of the region's transportation infrastructure. The City is home to an extensive network of freight and commuter railroads, waterways, Interstate highways, and is accessible from Midway International Airport and O'Hare International Airport, the nation's second largest airport. These attributes connect the City to the region and country, opening its door to unique economic and physical development opportunities.

The following pages describe key conclusions of the existing conditions analysis. A more complete summary is available in the Existing Conditions Report prepared as an interim product of the Plan, which is included as an appendix.

Figure 2. Regional context



Summary of Challenges and Opportunities

Blue Island has experienced significant changes in its demographic and physical makeup over the past decade. The declines in manufacturing employment which have affected the entire Midwest have been felt especially strongly in communities with high concentrations of industrial uses like Blue Island. Currently, the community is challenged by high rates of industrial and retail vacancies, low median incomes, below average educational attainment, and high unemployment rates. On the other hand, Blue Island's significant industrial and freight infrastructure presents unique opportunities for reinvestment in the community.

Demographic Profile

Blue Island can be characterized generally as a low-to-moderate income community, with significant pockets of middle-class and working-class family households, as well as more impoverished sections.

Despite its recent losses in population, Blue Island is becoming a point of destination for minority families. The slow growth in Blue Island's population is almost exclusively due to the decline in its number of white residents in the last decade. On the other hand, Blue Island showed modest increases in black and Hispanic populations, continuing a trend that has occurred for the last twenty years.

Table 1: Blue Island Race/Ethnicity

	2000	PCT.	2010	PCT.	PCT. CHANGE
White	8,498	36.2%	4,990	21.0%	-41.3%
Black	5,599	23.9%	7,173	30.3%	+28.1%
Hispanic	8,899	37.9%	11,133	47.0%	+25.1%
Asian	78	0.3%	79	0.3%	+1.2%
Other	389	1.7%	331	1.4%	-14.9%
Total	23,463	100.0%	23,706	100.0%	

Source: 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census.

Economic Conditions

Blue Island has lost approximately one-sixth of its private sector jobs since 2000. According to the Illinois Department of Employment Security, the number of jobs in Blue Island decreased from 9,521 to 7,889 during the last decade, a loss of 17 percent. A majority of the job losses have occurred within the industrial sector with businesses moving or in some cases shutting down operations.

Table 2. Private Sector Jobs Data

	2000	2010	PCT. CHANGE
Private Sector Businesses	453	444	-2.0%
Private Sector Jobs	9,521	7,889	-17.1%
Jobs per Resident	2.46	2.82	14.6%

Source: 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census.

Basic educational attainment of Blue Island residents (25 years and over) has increased over the last decade; however, the proportion of residents receiving degrees of higher education has decreased. More Blue Island residents are receiving high schools diplomas now, as compared to 2000, while a smaller percentage of residents are achieving bachelor's degrees or higher. The significant gap in college degree attainment between Blue Island and the county and region is growing. According to the 2008-2010 ACS Survey, 21 percent of high school graduates (includes equivalency) have engaged in some college, but have not received a higher education degree while almost 7 percent of residents have earned an Associate's degree.

Table 3: Educational Levels

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	PERCENTAGE
Less than high school diploma	25.6%
High school graduate and beyond	74.3%
High school graduate (includes GED)	36.0%
Some college, no degree	21.0%
Associate's degree	6.6%
Bachelor's degree	7.2%
Graduate or professional degree	3.6%

Source: 2008-2010 American Community Survey.

Employment generated by local institutions (such as MetroSouth Medical Center and Moraine Valley Community College) has continued to grow over the last decade. MetroSouth Medical Center is one of the largest landowners within the Uptown District and will be a crucial player in the areas future development. Moraine Valley is expanding its Uptown facility but faces challenges related to parking and transit service.

Across the metropolitan region workforce development services are delivered by a variety of public and private entities and are funded through a number of public funding streams. While residents have few opportunities to access workforce development services within Blue Island, several provider organizations in surrounding communities have expressed interest in providing workforce development services and resources to Blue Island residents. These provider organizations need to be linked better with residents, for example by creating venues to inform residents of workforce development services. The City of Blue Island and local community organizations can partner with these workforce development organizations to host information sessions, resource fairs, or simply to make informational materials available to residents.

Several community facilities offer a range of services to the residents of Blue Island. Recreational and social services are provided to residents through local organizations, such as Metropolitan Family Services, Salvation Army, and the Tommy A. Brown Sports Association. The Blue Island Public Library has a Tech Annex with several computer stations, as well as a meeting room that groups can reserve. Additionally, Blue Island has numerous religious institutions. All of these community facilities provide vital services, resources, and social opportunities for residents, and there is the opportunity to also use these facilities to connect residents with local workforce development services and resources.

Vermont Street freight railroad overpass



Land Use and Development Conditions

Industrial and single-family residential parcels are the dominant land uses within Blue Island, making up more than 40 percent of the total municipality. Open space areas, multi-family homes and commercial uses are present in significant numbers as well, with most commercial uses centered along the Western Avenue and 127th Street corridors.

Table 4: Land Use Composition

LAND USE	PERCENTAGE
Single Family Residential	28.5%
Open Space	14.5%
Industrial	13.6%
Transportation/Utilities	13.4%
Vacant	11.4%
Multi-Family Residential	9.5%
Commercial	4.5%
Institutional	4.5%

Source: 2008-2010 American Community Survey.

Residential neighborhoods in Blue Island contain an eclectic mix of single-family and multi-family units. This layout allows for greater integration of community members as well as diversity in individual neighborhoods. Although sometimes lacking in physical upkeep, the multi-family residential units do not create any significant conflict with adjacent single-family parcels. The City is home to a number of historic homes and commercial buildings located north of the Calumet-Sag Channel, due in part to ongoing preservation efforts by the City to maintain the character of these neighborhoods.

Western Avenue is home to a majority of the City's commercial real estate. Approximately 40 percent of the entire commercial land use in the City is located on either side of Western Avenue, making it a key economic engine of the community. However, the corridor has seen a significant increase in the number of vacancies over the past decade. Commercial and work place land uses are primarily located within the Uptown District and along Western Avenue north of the Calumet Sag Channel. In total, they account for 6 percent of the city's land area with an additional 1 percent being vacant parcels or buildings.

Blue Island's industrial base is supported by an extensive railroad, waterway, and roadway infrastructure. These include large intermodal facilities north of Vermont Street, manufacturing facilities south of 135th Street, and smaller scale industrial buildings along Wireton Road. Increasing vacancies have resulted in large swathes of poorly maintained land in immediate need of redevelopment. Studies undertaken by the City in the past decade have proposed innovative solutions to utilize these parcels, with some moving towards implementation gradually.

Housing Characteristics

Blue Island's residential parcels make up a majority of the land cover in the community. Single-family parcels cover 28 percent of the total land while two- to three-story multi-family units contribute an additional 9 percent. Out of the total housing units in the community, 46 percent consist of single-family units while the remaining 54 percent consists of multi-family units. A majority (27 percent) of multi-family buildings contain more than five units. A majority of the housing stock is well-maintained and consists of a mix of both aging and new construction. Also, the layout of neighborhoods such that single-family neighborhoods are interspersed with multi-family buildings has resulted in a positive residential character, allowing a variety of housing price points and types to co-exist.

According to the 2007-2010 American Community Survey, a majority of housing units (92.1 percent) in Blue Island are valued at less than \$250,000. Compared to the Chicago region, this is a significantly high number. The significant number of affordable homes makes Blue Island a desirable destination for home buyers looking for options close to the City with convenient access to transit.

Housing affordability and character differs significantly on either side of the Calumet-Sag Channel. The area north of the Calumet-Sag Channel contains several historic and well maintained neighborhoods within the Uptown District and north of 127th Street. In contrast, although newer home developments and attractive residential units exist south of the Channel, there are large areas that appear to need better maintenance and large vacant properties that detract from the overall neighborhood character. Mobile homes are present in small pockets to the south and east in Blue Island.

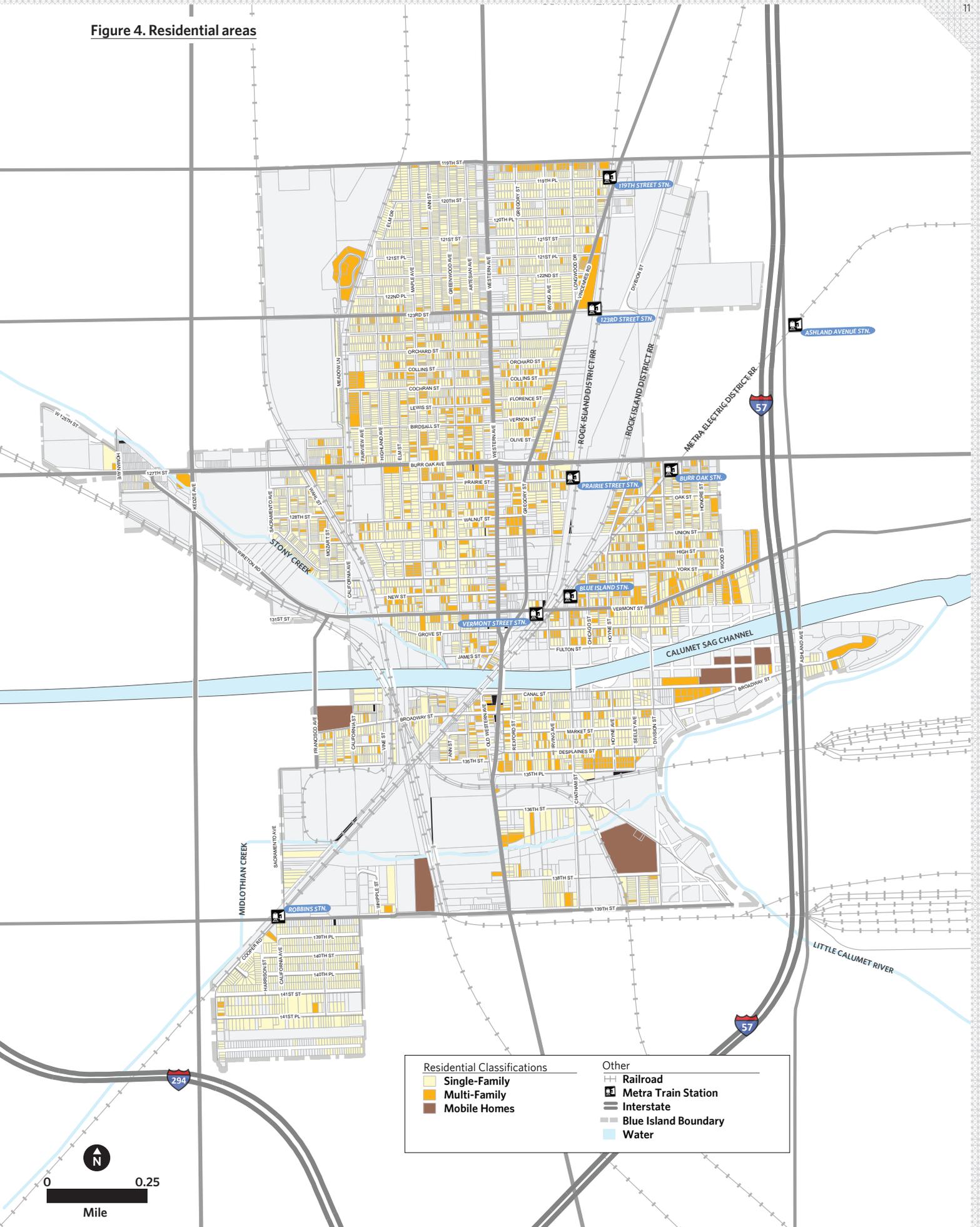
According to the Homes for a Changing Region report, high vacancy rates, large percentage of economically distressed homes, and overcrowding are the three major issues faced by the City's housing stock. Due in part to the national foreclosure crisis, vacant units nearly doubled in Blue Island in the past decade from 503 in 2000 to 920 in 2009. This represents an 83 percent increase over the period.



Diverse single-family housing stock in Blue Island



Figure 4. Residential areas



Residential Classifications		Other	
	Single-Family		Railroad
	Multi-Family		Metra Train Station
	Mobile Homes		Interstate
			Blue Island Boundary
			Water

0 0.25
Mile

Transportation and Circulation Characteristics

The network of roadways, rail lines, and waterways connecting Blue Island to the greater Chicago region is a unique strength that also presents some unique challenges.

Blue Island's close access to several interstate highways provides an advantage, and access will be even further improved with the planned construction of an interchange at I-294 and I-57, as well as additional interchange and roadway improvements in the vicinity. However, the City has significant circulation issues. Western Avenue and Gregory Street in Uptown are one-way streets that create a confusing and unsafe traffic pattern for vehicular and pedestrian traffic alike. Retailers and residents expressed concern that automobiles travel at high speeds along Western Avenue, making pedestrian movement unsafe.

The City has significant opportunities to boost freight infrastructure in the form of railroads, vacant industrial parcels adjoining railroad ROWs, existing intermodal facilities, and vacant sites for freight operations. Manufacturing and other industrial businesses utilize the existing freight infrastructure including railroads, intermodal facilities, and highways to move their goods through the region. Approximately 238 industrial companies operate within three miles of Blue Island, 45 of them within the city's corporate limits. The City's 2005 Economic Plan outlines the importance of freight rail in the community's economy and provides detailed recommendations for Cargo Oriented Development (COD) to take advantage of the rail opportunities in Blue Island. Additional recently completed COD studies have also identified Blue Island as a great location for freight and green manufacturing facilities.



Multiple freight rail lines crossing over the Cal-Sag Channel

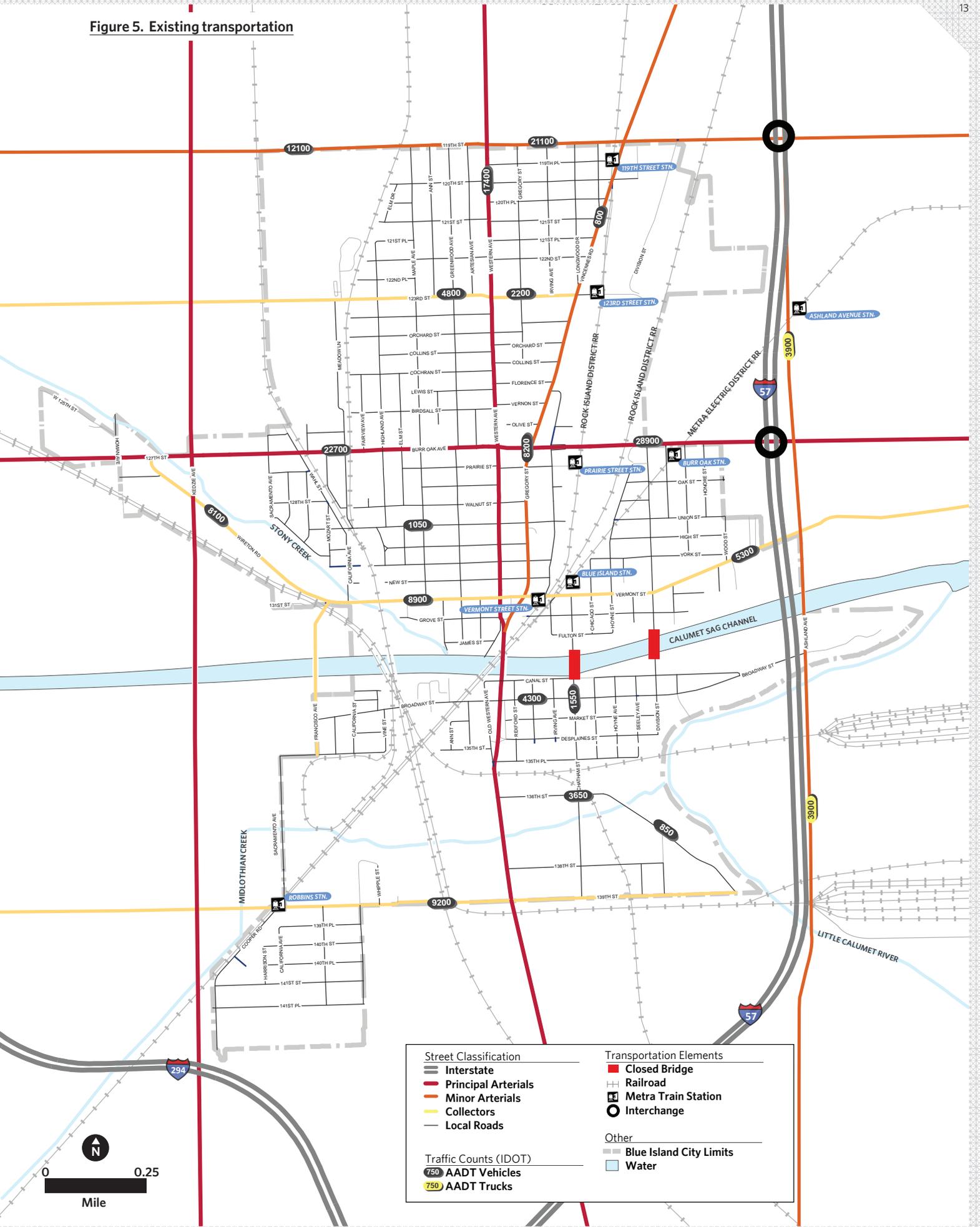
Blue Island has a long commitment to supporting alternative transportation. The City is served by five Pace bus routes and six Metra stations, an impressive number for a community the size of Blue Island. The City's continued efforts to develop the area surrounding Vermont Street station as walkable Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a critical for the successful revitalization of the Uptown District and expansion of the Medical District. In terms of non-motorized travel, the recently adopted Complete Streets Policy Plan and ongoing Calumet-Sag Regional trail project will assist the City in improving community health while making the area more attractive to visitors. At present, there are a number of barriers to safe pedestrian and bicycle movement. This has contributed to a greater use of personal vehicles and decrease in overall health of community residents.

In addition, the city's ownership of two closed bridges over the Calumet-Sag Channel is a major concern. Used informally by pedestrians only, these bridges are currently closed to vehicular traffic as the city lacks the funds to undertake repairs. Closure of the bridges has limited north-south connections within the community to Western Avenue and Ashland Avenue. In addition to circulation impacts, the closure of the bridges also resulted in larger social and economic concerns due to isolation of areas south of the Calumet-Sag Channel from the rest of the community. In general, throughout the City, aging infrastructure is beginning to show signs of disrepair and should be monitored on an on-going basis.



Blue Island Vermont Street Station

Figure 5. Existing transportation



Street Classification		Transportation Elements	
	Interstate		Closed Bridge
	Principal Arterials		Railroad
	Minor Arterials		Metra Train Station
	Collectors		Interchange
	Local Roads	Other	
Traffic Counts (IDOT)			Blue Island City Limits
	750 AADT Vehicles		Water
	750 AADT Trucks		

Natural Environment and Water Systems

Constituting over one-sixth of the total land area in Blue Island, open space and natural resources play a critical role in the well-being of the community. The amount of open space in Blue Island equals approximately 7.6 acres per 1,000 residents, below the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standard which recommends a minimum of 10 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents. Despite the low number, Blue Island residents also have access to several major open spaces nearby, including the Cook County Preserve and Whistler Preserve in Riverdale.

The Calumet-Sag Channel serves as a waterway for heavy industrial businesses in the far southern neighborhoods of Chicago and adjacent suburbs. The channel is heavily polluted by a combination of treated stormwater and sewer disposal and waste disposal from heavy industries. This has resulted in the channel as well as parcels adjacent to the channel being unusable for active and passive recreational activities. Given that the proposed Calumet-Sag trail will run alongside the Channel, opportunities to create public spaces and recreational amenities along the Channel should be investigated. Clean-up of the Calumet-Sag Channel will also be an important catalyst for creation of high quality open spaces along the Channel.

In addition to the Calumet-Sag Channel and Little Calumet River, there are a few significant water bodies located within the industrial districts as well. Stony

Creek and Midlothian Creek run through the industrial areas and in the process are subject to severe deterioration. Efforts to protect the creek using landscape buffers and setbacks will be required to maintain the long-term health of these creeks. The creeks also connect Blue Island to neighboring communities to the west.

Aging stormwater infrastructure is another key concern that the City of Blue Island faces. Presently, the Calumet-Sag Channel accommodates the stormwater runoff from the City. However, the need for maintenance and repairs to the existing infrastructure will require both short and long term actions. The City is currently working with MWRD and non-profit organizations to implement rain barrel and water harvesting programs aimed at reducing stormwater run-off from residential neighborhoods. Longer term initiatives will need to be undertaken in a phased manner and will depend on funding availability.

Recently, urban agriculture has emerged as an issue of interest in Blue Island. A number of community gardens can be found in residential neighborhoods. The City is currently working with Growing Home to install community gardens at Park District facilities adjacent to the Tommy A Brown Sports Association and in Memorial Park. Similar efforts will be pursued in other locations throughout the community in an attempt to combine redevelopment of parcels with community health.



Centennial Park



Neighborhood community garden

Figure 6. Existing natural features



Open Space		Other	
	Public Park		Blue Island City Limits
	Golf Course		Water
	Forest Preserve		Railroad
	Private Marina		



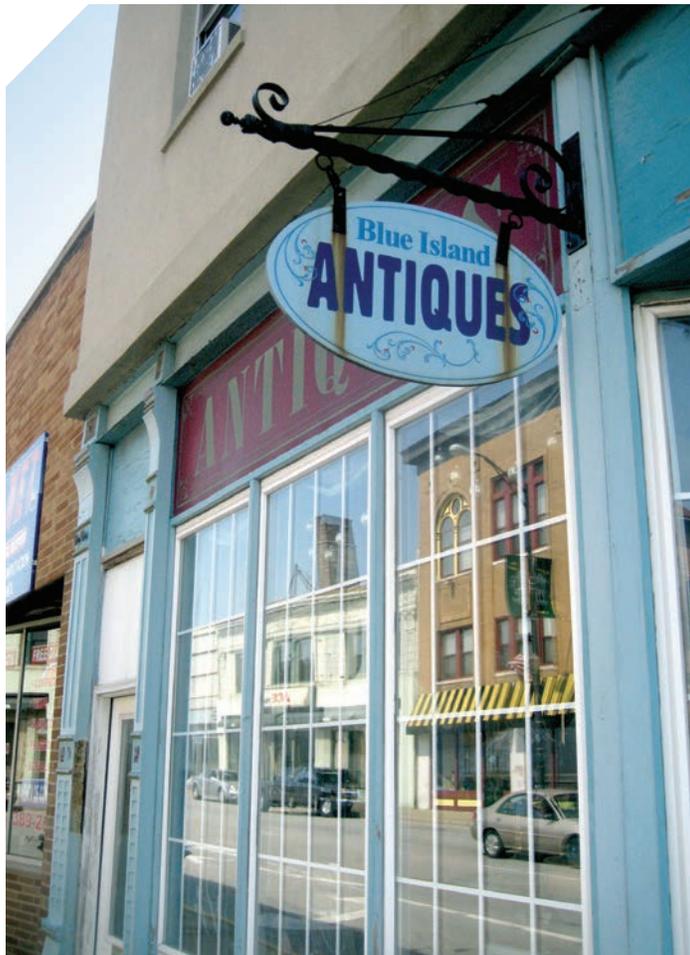
Image and Identity

Over the years, Blue Island’s rich architectural heritage has been preserved in a piecemeal manner. Olde Western Avenue was the City’s historic commercial corridor prior to construction of the Calumet-Sag Channel in 1911. A number of buildings have since gone into disrepair. Due to a lack of enforcement, facades of historic buildings along Western Avenue have been modified over the years by property owners.

In contrast, Blue Island has successfully maintained and marketed its historic housing stock. The Historic Landmarks Walking Tour is a program funded in part by the Department of Interior and administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Utilizing natural amenities such as the Calumet-Sag Channel to attract visitors and create new educational opportunities for the youth is an example of how the City can redefine its image. A group of residents partner with the Calumet Heritage Partnership to organize canoe trips on the Calumet-Sag Channel that allows residents and visitors to experience the City from a different viewpoint while also adding to a greater sense of community.

From an urban design perspective, Blue Island lacks specific programs that highlight the community’s assets as well as create a sense of place. Presently, no signage directs visitors to key destinations such as the Uptown District, train stations, medical institutions, or City Hall. Similarly, there is no clearly defined entrance or streetscape character despite two major corridors that lead into the City — 127th Street and Western Avenue.



Shops in historic Uptown District

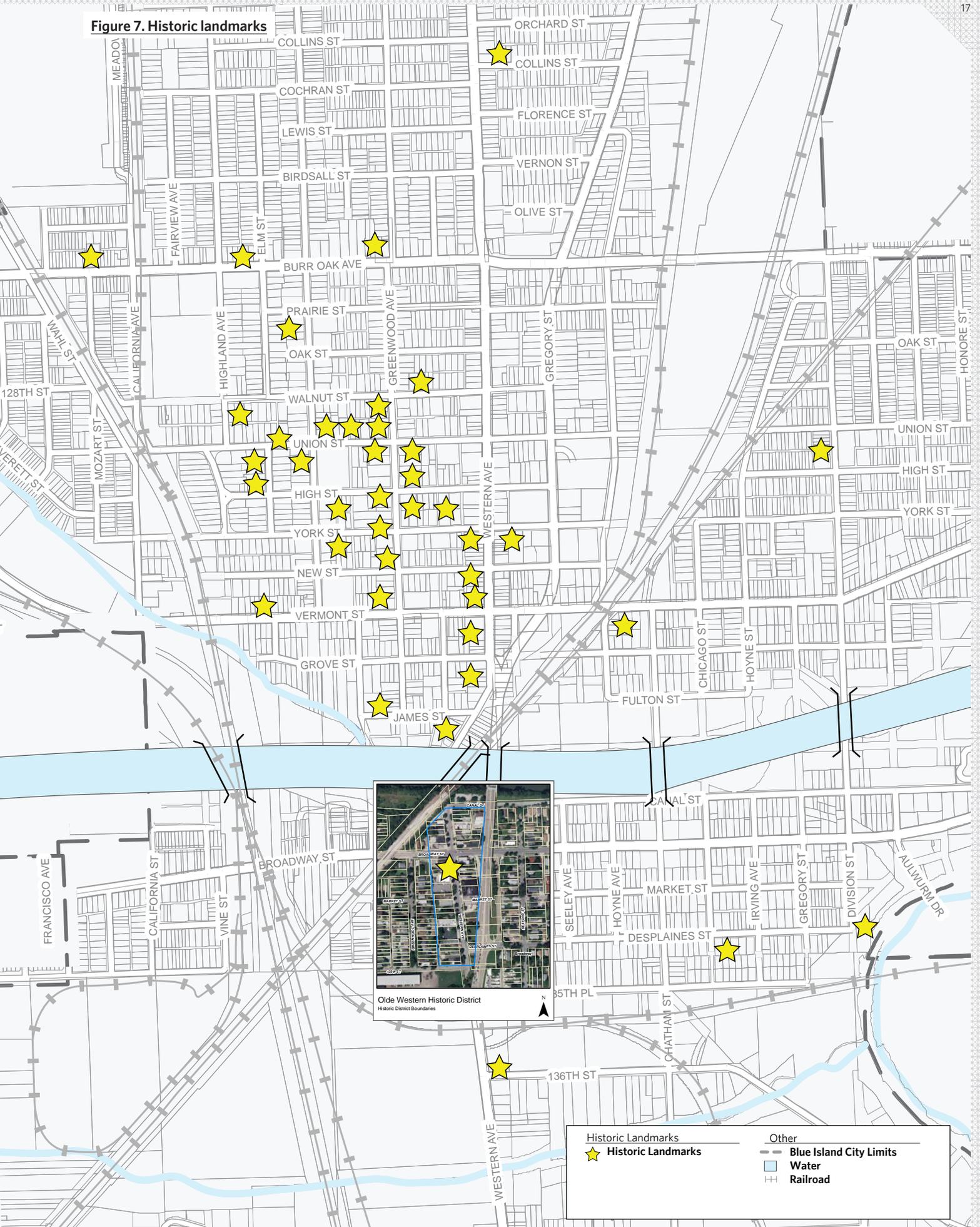


Historic building in Uptown, circa 1893



Historic building in Uptown

Figure 7. Historic landmarks



Historic Landmarks		Other	
★	Historic Landmarks	- - -	Blue Island City Limits
		■	Water
		⊥	Railroad

Olde Western Historic District
Historic District Boundaries

The inset map shows a detailed view of a street grid within the historic district. A yellow star marks a specific landmark. The streets shown include Broadway Street, Western Avenue, and 136th Street. The map also shows the Blue Island City Limits and railroad lines.



Chapter 3

A Vision for Blue Island

Twenty years from today, Blue Island is an economically and culturally thriving community. A vibrant and pedestrian-friendly Uptown District is home to successful local, regional, and national retailers located along a two-way Western Avenue Complete Street. Historic facades have been restored, with additional streetscape in the form of lighting, signage, wayfinding, and decorative planters installed to create a sense of place. Vermont Street Metra station area contains a number of high-quality mixed-use developments with residential units occupied by residents looking for affordable housing options while maintaining a high quality of life such as that provided by the City of Blue Island.

The City has been successful in redeveloping its vacant residential parcels while maintaining the housing mix that endeared it to earlier residents and visitors. While the community is growing in population, the neighborhoods are distinctly pedestrian-scale and immensely pedestrian-friendly. The supply and location of parks in the City place a park less than a five-minute walk from nearly every resident.

The City's industrial sector has been transformed by a number of highly successful and sustainable businesses that are utilizing cutting-edge technology to produce green energy components such as wind mills and solar panels. Given the excellent freight infrastructure, Blue Island has become one of the nation's largest manufacturers and distributors of green technology, creating a number of green jobs not only for the City but also for the entire region.

The much anticipated Calumet-Sag Channel clean-up has been completed and the waterway has been opened for active recreational activities. The Calumet-Sag regional bike trail is bringing a number of visitors into the community on a daily basis to patronize local businesses and join in community activities.

The Blue Island community is continually growing more diverse. While a number of young professionals are attracted to the City, the pedestrian and transit friendly City is also the preferred location for retirees looking for transportation choices, housing options, and high quality services such as those provided by the MetroSouth Medical Center, Pronger Smith Medical Services, and City of Blue Island Senior Services.

Goals and Objectives

Land Use and Development Goal

The City of Blue Island will achieve a high quality of life for residents, business owners, and visitors via a diversity of land uses and balance between the built and unbuilt environment.

Specific land use objectives are described later in this chapter, divided among the economic development, housing, and environmental goals. The future land use map shows the recommended pattern of land use in the City.

In order to accomplish its land use and development goal, the City and its partners will:

- Classify commercial development into two categories. Parcels classified as Node Commercial should be limited to major intersections along Western Avenue, the Uptown District, and Vermont Street Metra station area. These parcels should accommodate high density and pedestrian oriented mixed-use developments with residential units above retail spaces. Parcels classified as Neighborhood Commercial would contain retail uses serving the needs of residential neighborhoods they are located within or in proximity to.
- Develop new multi-family housing along Western Avenue to replace mid-block vacant and underutilized commercial parcels.
- Expand open space along waterways including the Calumet-Sag Channel, Midlothian Creek, Stony Creek, and Little Calumet River in order to preserve water quality and create additional opportunities for recreation and bike connections. Expand existing open space in Uptown at Western Avenue and Union Street in order to accommodate community activities.
- Enhance the historic district focused around the Olde Western Avenue corridor in order to enable the City to protect and maintain architecturally significant properties.
- Focus Industrial districts in areas south of 135th Street, east of Stony Creek, and northeast of the Vermont Street Metra train station to capitalize on the railroad and waterway infrastructure connecting these areas to the broader region.

Signage for Olde Western Avenue historic commercial area



Figure 8. Future land use

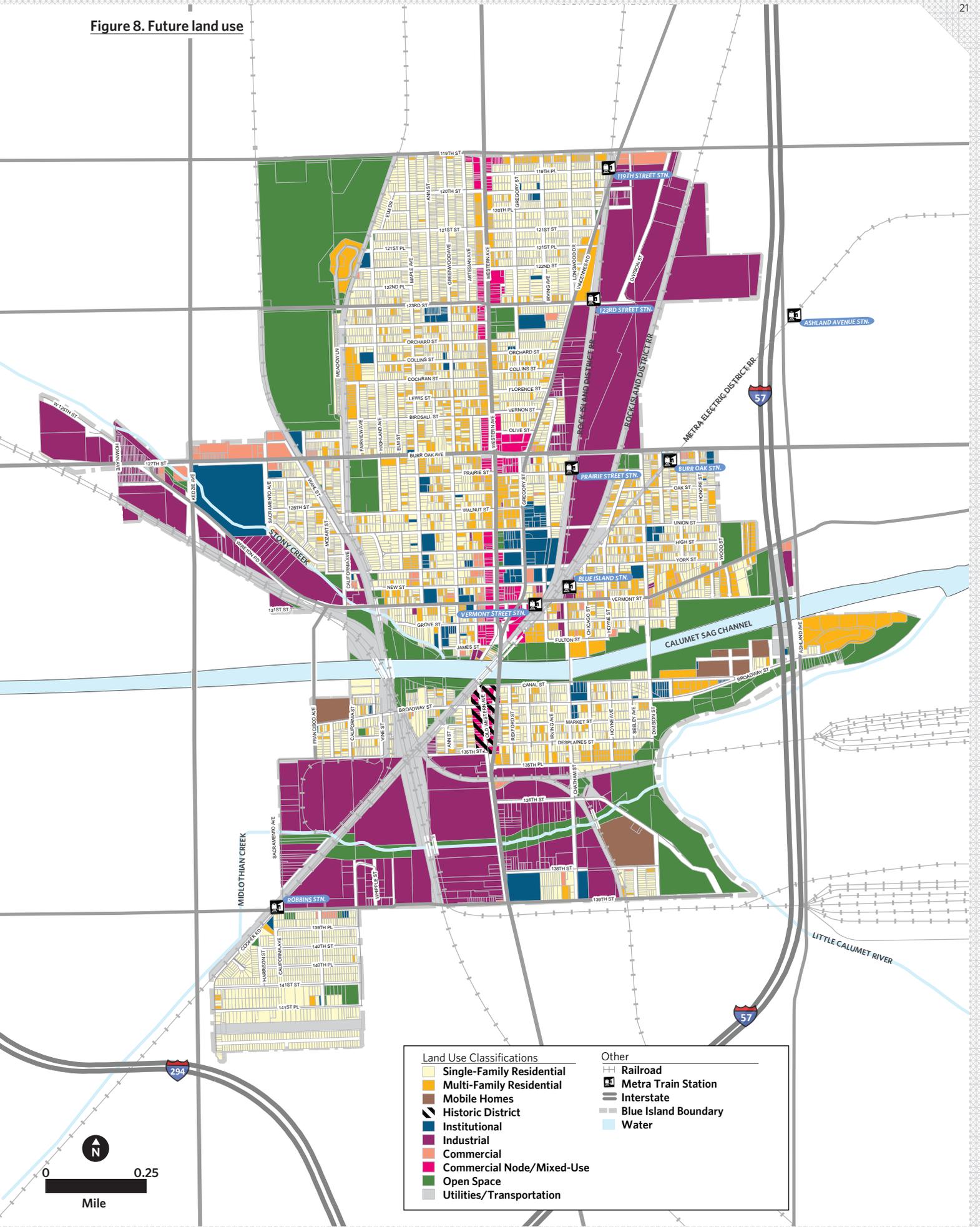


Figure 8a. Existing Land Use

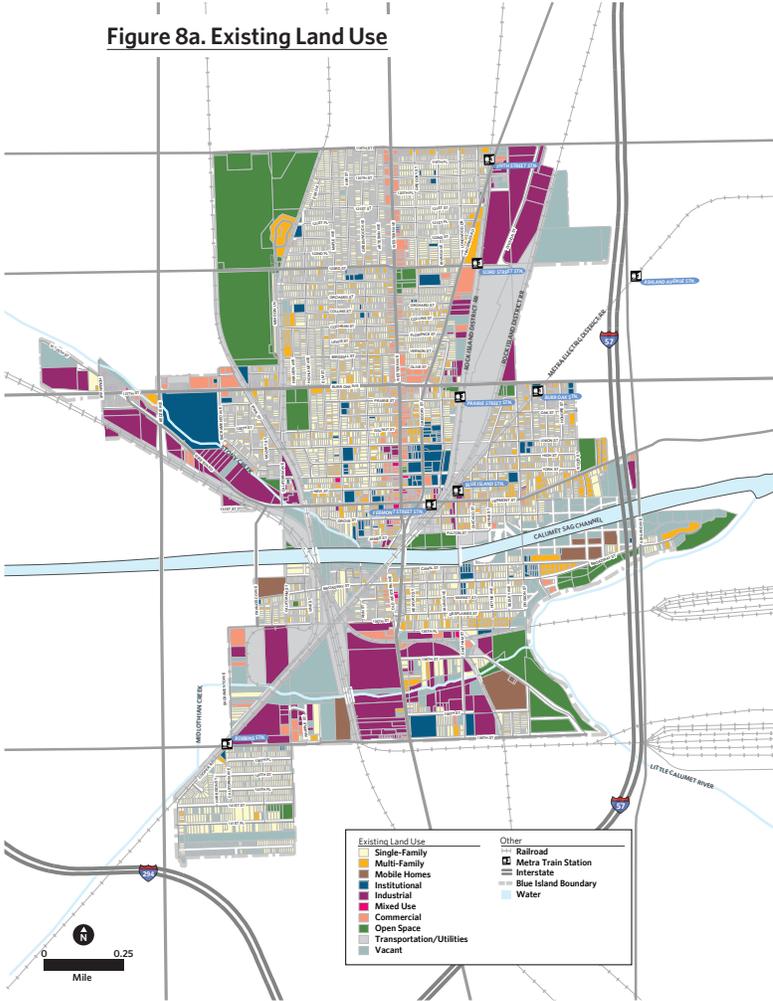


Figure 8a. Future Land Use

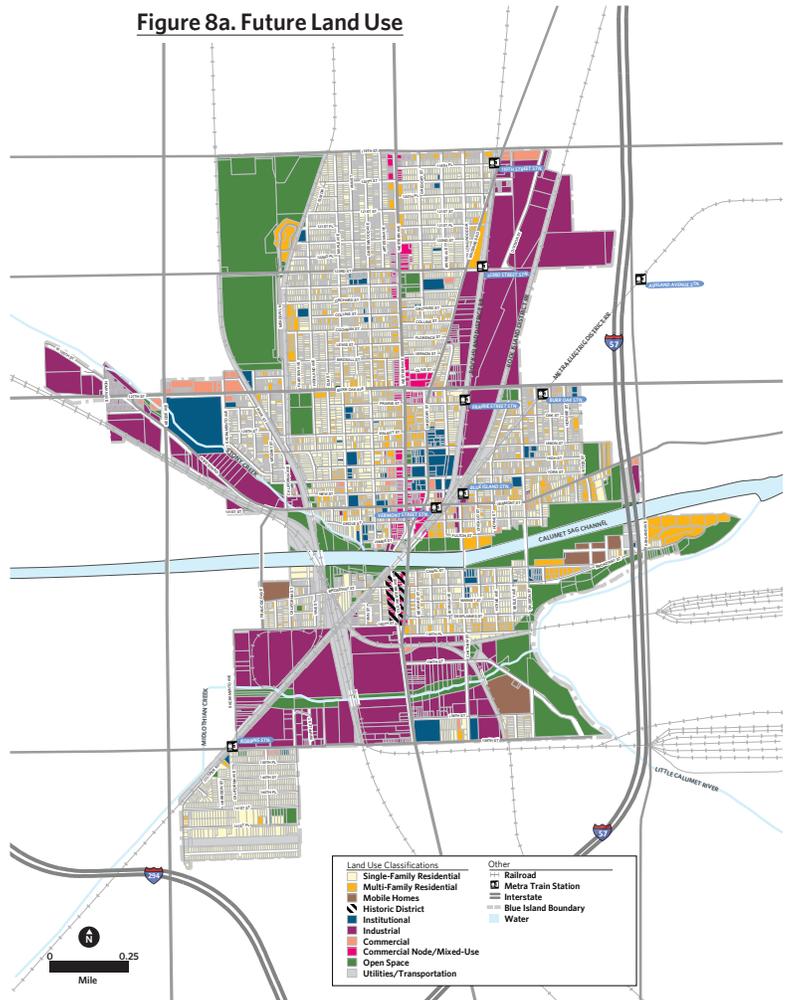
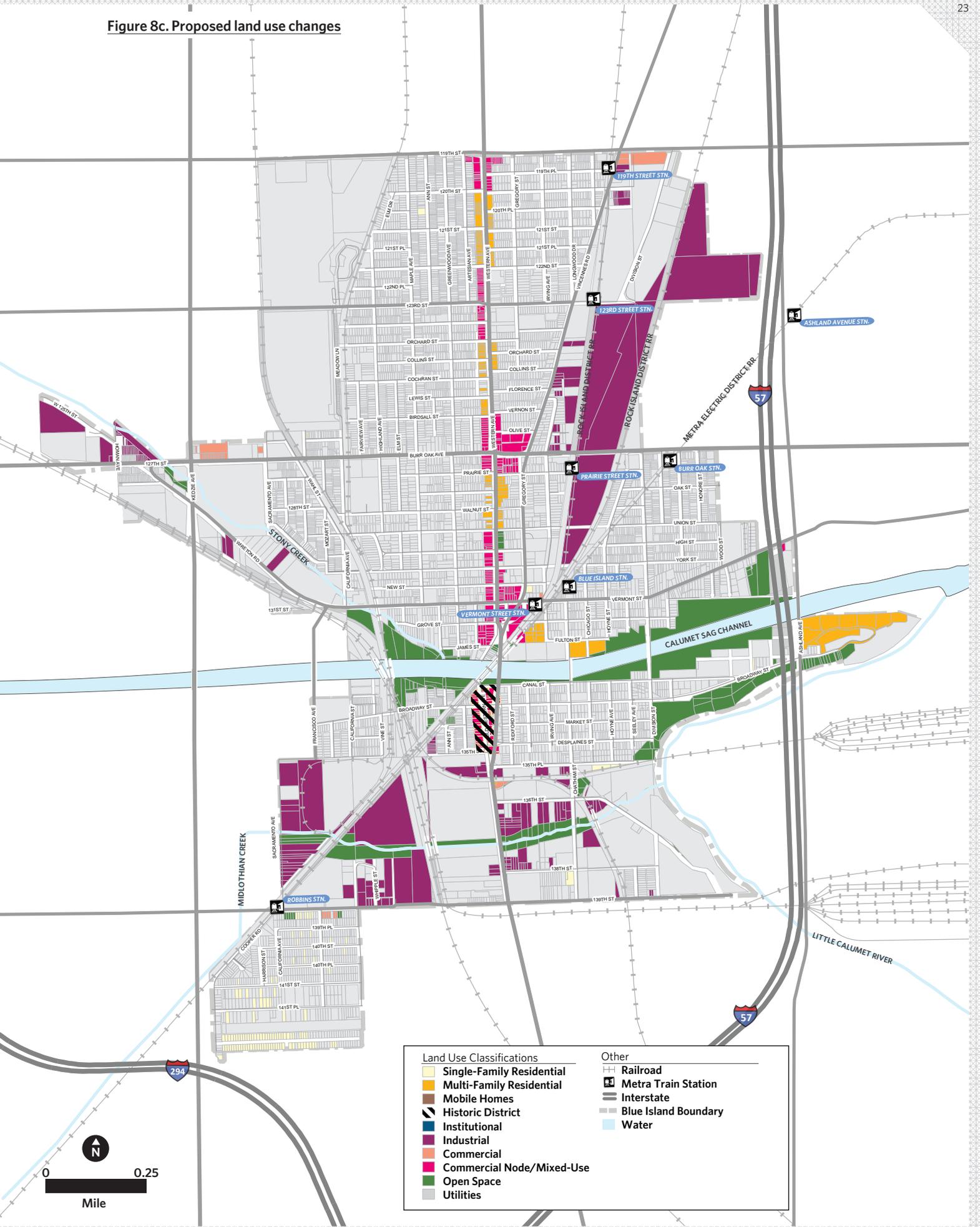


Figure 8c. Proposed land use changes



Land Use Classifications		Other	
	Single-Family Residential		Railroad
	Multi-Family Residential		Metra Train Station
	Mobile Homes		Interstate
	Historic District		Blue Island Boundary
	Institutional		Water
	Industrial		
	Commercial		
	Commercial Node/Mixed-Use		
	Open Space		
	Utilities		

Economic Development Goal

The City of Blue Island will create a vibrant and sustainable business environment that enables Blue Island to be recognized as a valuable element of the region's economy.

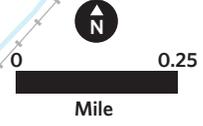
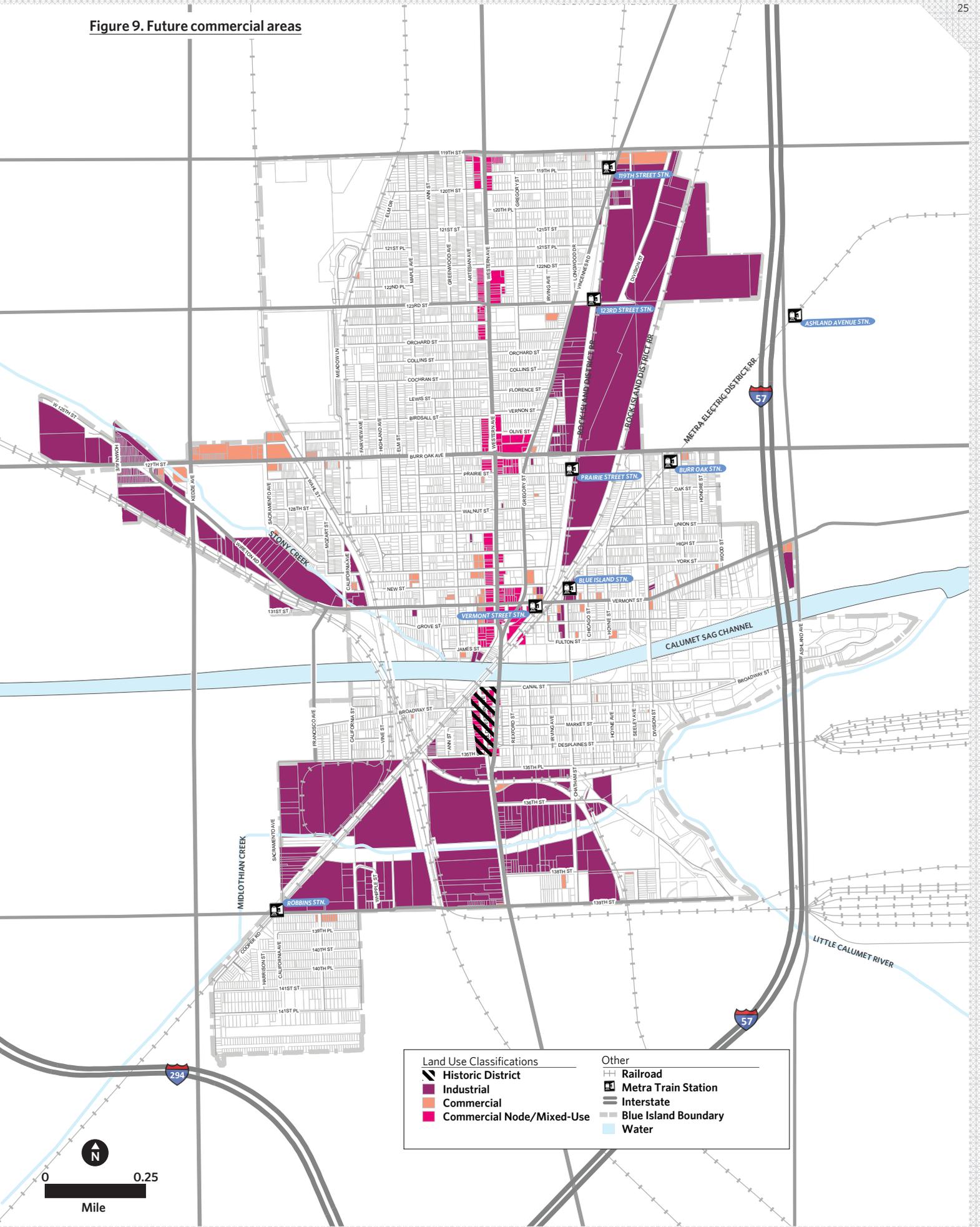
To accomplish this, the City and its partners will:

- Develop a positive environment for retail, service, and entertainment businesses at key locations in the City. Consolidate commercial development along Western Avenue in order to create high-density commercial nodes with a mix of retail, residential, and institutional uses. Promote high density, mixed-use, and walkable Transit Oriented Development within the Vermont Street station area that will also support revitalization of the City's Uptown District.
- Make Blue Island a recognized regional center for industrial, freight, logistics, and sustainable businesses. Remediate and redevelop vacant industrial parcels along railroad rights-of-way for cargo oriented development opportunities.
- Support expansion of medical facilities within the community in order to attract employees, utilize vacant parcels, and support local business growth.
- Focus on workforce development opportunities that will allow local labor force to find employment in local businesses as well as attract new businesses to locate within the community.

Vacant Jewel Osco store along 127th Street



Figure 9. Future commercial areas



Housing Goal

The City of Blue Island will preserve Blue Island’s unique housing diversity while creating additional housing typologies to attract new residents.

To accomplish this, the City and its partners will:

- Retain housing mix in terms of typologies and price points. Maintain the City’s historic single-family housing stock through proactive housing preservation programs. Rehabilitate existing multi-family units that are in need of improved maintenance, or external façade or internal infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage new multi-family housing and mixed-use developments in strategic locations throughout the community. These include the Vermont Street station area, Uptown District, Western Avenue corridor, and Fay’s Point. Provide housing options for senior citizens at locations that are within easy access of transit, community services, and retailers. These include locations in proximity to the Metra train stations, commercial nodes along Western Avenue, MetroSouth Medical Center, and Pronger Smith Medical Services.

Multi-family housing in Blue Island



Historic Robert Seyfarth House



THE ROBERT SEYFARTH HOUSE
 built 1903

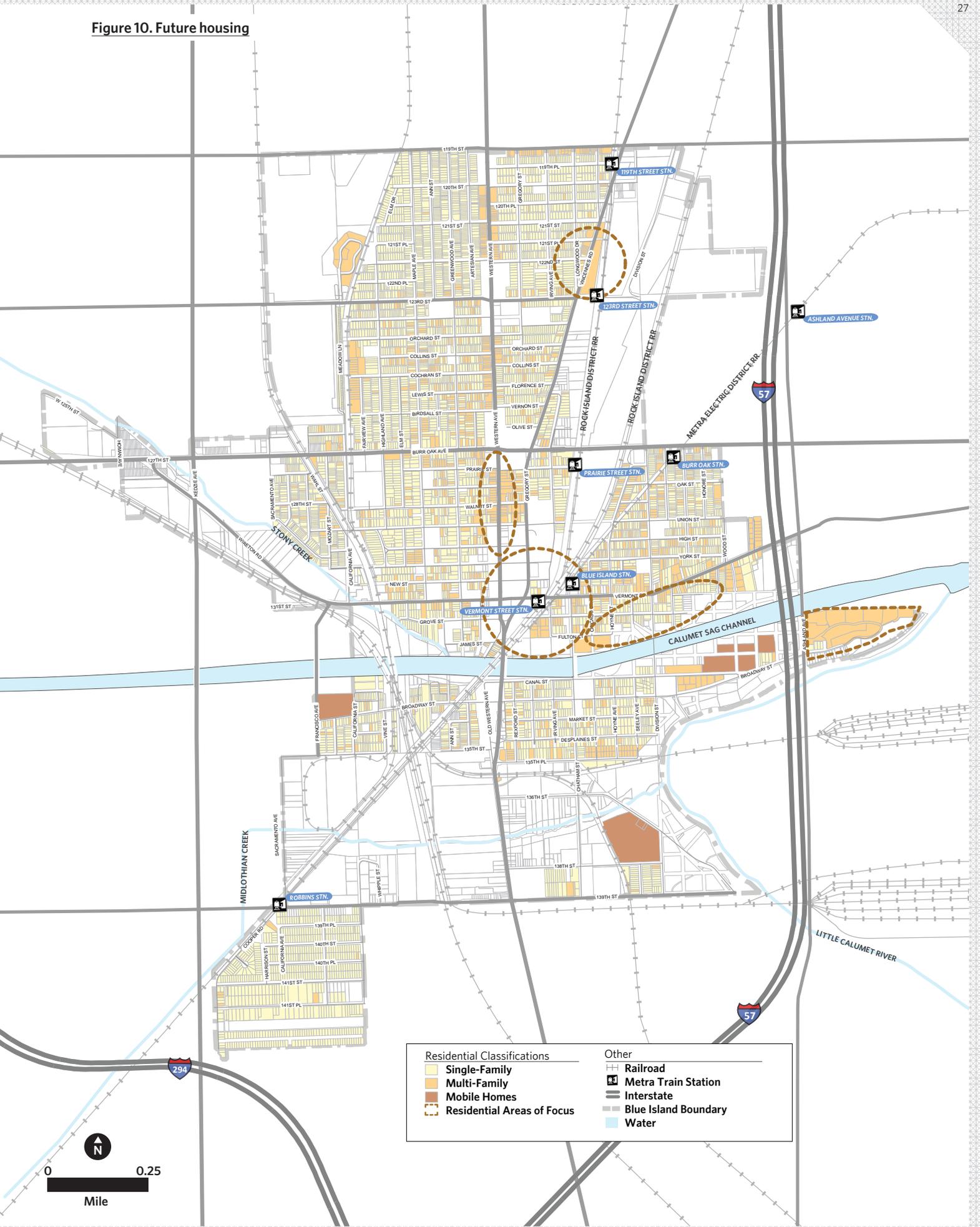
Robert Seyfarth was born in 1878 to Edward and Clara Seyfarth, well-to-do merchants whose hardware store was located on Western Avenue where his grandparents had operated the tavern and boarding house they established when they came to Blue Island in 1848. Seyfarth was an noted architect. He received his training at Chicago Manual Training School (which was later absorbed by the University of Chicago), and upon graduation in about 1898 went to work for George Maher, a noted Prairie School architect.

Although the design of this house reflects the tenets of the Prairie School, Seyfarth developed his own style which borrowed freely from the past to create homes that were imbued with the warmth and character of earlier times. His work today is highly regarded for its simplicity and correct proportion. Seyfarth continued his architectural practice until his death in 1950.

HISTORIC BLUE ISLAND, ILLINOIS
 Founded 1835

THIS PROJECT WAS PARTIALLY FUNDED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND THE ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY.

Figure 10. Future housing



Transportation and Circulation Goal

The City of Blue Island will provide each resident, business, and visitor with a viable option to choose among multiple modes of transportation that enable them to navigate the community, connect to their place of employment, and handle their business-related transportation needs.

To accomplish this, the City and its partners will:

- Pursue a high-quality multimodal transportation system throughout the community. Implement Complete Street Policy and non-motorized transportation plans that improve community health and provide sustainable alternatives to vehicular circulation.
- Convert Western Avenue and Gregory Street to two-way streets in order to improve local traffic circulation and create a safe pedestrian environment in the Uptown District.

- Repair pavement surfaces and sidewalks for improved circulation within residential neighborhoods as well as between major destinations, e.g., between the Vermont Street station and Uptown District.
- Support transit through continual coordination with Metra and Pace. Provide new bus shelters and rider amenities such as bike parking, route maps, and informational signage at Pace bus stops along Western Avenue, 127th Avenue, and Vermont Street.
- Provide a transportation system that supports freight traffic, as well as the industrial and logistics businesses that rely on goods movement.
- Promote regional bike trail connections such as the Calumet-Sag regional trail that connect Blue Island to neighboring communities, allow residents to access amenities outside its boundaries, and attract visitors from throughout the region.

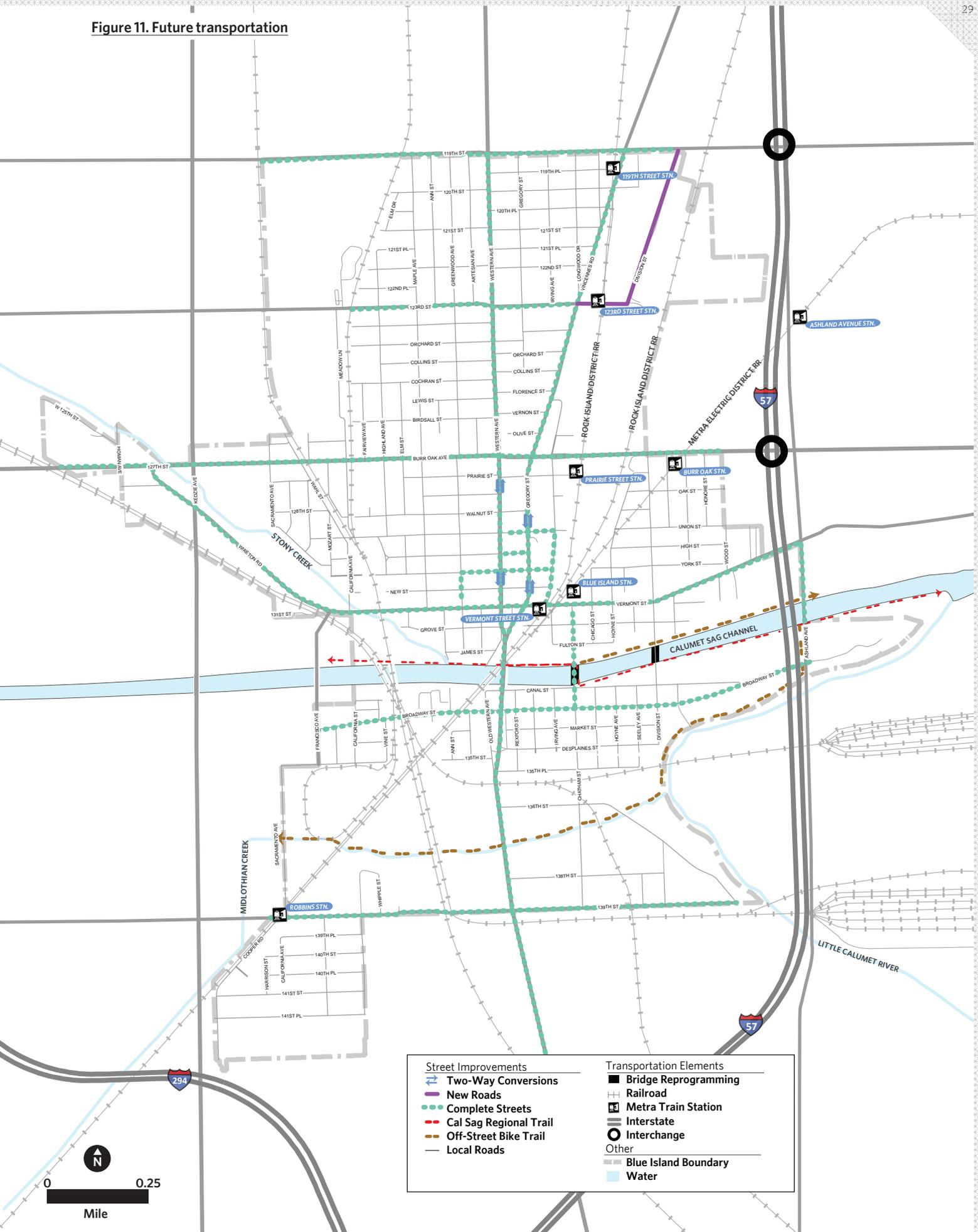
Existing bus shelter along Vermont Street



Vermont Metra station commuter parking



Figure 11. Future transportation



Street Improvements	Transportation Elements
↔ Two-Way Conversions	▣ Bridge Reprogramming
↗ New Roads	— Railroad
● Complete Streets	⊠ Metra Train Station
— Cal Sag Regional Trail	— Interstate
— Off-Street Bike Trail	○ Interchange
— Local Roads	Other
	— Blue Island Boundary
	■ Water

0 0.25
Mile

↑ N

Natural Environment and Water Systems Goal

The City of Blue Island will preserve its natural features, including its water bodies, while creating new open spaces for active and passive recreation.

To accomplish this, the City and its partners will:

- Make the Calumet-Sag Channel an asset to the City, rather than a barrier. Improve water quality of the Calumet-Sag Channel. Create new open space and recreation opportunities along Calumet-Sag Channel with a combination of trails such as the Calumet-Sag regional bike trail, neighborhood parks, outdoor event spaces, and water sports such as kayaking and rowing.
- Create additional parks and recreation facilities throughout the City. Locations include parcels along the Calumet-Sag Channel, vacant parcels in residential neighborhoods, and the Uptown District.

- Preserve and re-create natural areas adjoining Midlothian Creek and Little Calumet River in order to act as a buffer from adjacent uses and also accommodate recreational amenities such as bike trails and parks.
- Promote community gardening and local food production in vacant parcels as well as open spaces maintained by the Blue Island Park District.
- Repair and replace aging stormwater and wastewater infrastructure, and use green infrastructure to the extent possible.

Fay's Point waterfront development



Golf course



Figure 12. Future natural environment



Open Space	Other
Public Park	Cal-Sag Regional Trail
Golf Course	Bike Trail
Forest Preserve	Blue Island Boundary
Private Marina	Water
New Park/Greenway	Railroad
Community Garden	Interstate

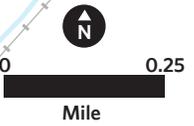


Image and Identity Goal

The City of Blue Island will highlight the unique assets of the City and restore the community's historic sense of place.

To accomplish this, the City and its partners will:

- Install signage and wayfinding programs that identify and direct visitors to key destinations within the community. Install gateway signs at entranceways into the community along Western Avenue and along 127th Street.
- Support preservation of historic commercial properties along Western Avenue and residential properties identified as architecturally significant.
- Create regional marketing programs to promote City's unique assets such as the Calumet-Sag Channel, freight infrastructure, transit, and historic housing stock to the region.

Jeben's Hardware, 1834



The American House Hotel, 1836



The Dr. Aaron Heimbach House, 1939, Bertrand Goldberg, Architect





THIS MEMORIAL ERECTED
BY A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY
TO HONOR THE MEN
AND WOMEN OF THE
THIRD WARD OF
BLUE ISLAND WHO
SERVED IN THE
ARMED SERVICES
OF OUR COUNTRY





Chapter 4

Plan Recommendations & Implementation Strategies

The purpose of this chapter of the Blue Island Comprehensive Plan is to describe high-priority recommendations for action to achieve the vision, goals, and objectives laid out in the previous chapter. The recommendations are intended to allow elected and appointed officials prioritize action items and focus on achievable short-term strategies.

Prioritizing a limited number of strategies is also intended to communicate that some positive activities are going to be lower priority. The City has finite staff resources and funding, so some worthwhile activities that are not prioritized in the Plan may have to be deferred.

The first part of this chapter contains a list of the top 10 strategies that are recommended for immediate action. Each strategy contains a series of prioritized action items that will allow City officials to move forward with achieving the strategy's intended goals. The latter part contains a discussion of longer term initiatives that will be pursued by the City as resources become available, but unlike the top 10 strategies below, are not activities where the City is expected to take a leadership role.

The 10 strategies detailed in this chapter include:

- 1. Reconfigure Western Avenue and Gregory Street as two-way “Complete Streets.”**
- 2. Consolidate commercial uses along Western Avenue.**
- 3. Preserve the housing mix while rehabilitating residential buildings.**
- 4. Promote Cargo Oriented Development (COD).**
- 5. Repair or reprogram bridges to reconnect community.**
- 6. Clean up the Calumet-Sag Channel to accommodate active and passive recreation.**
- 7. Undertake small-scale and low-cost infrastructure improvements.**
- 8. Create workforce training opportunities.**
- 9. Improve historic preservation efforts.**
- 10. Improve organizational structure and implementation prioritization.**

In addition, other strategies described further as longer-term or ongoing initiatives include continued support for major transportation projects like the CREATE program and the I-294 / I-57 interchange improvements, coordinating investments with neighboring communities, supporting reforms to Cook County’s tax structure, improving transit service, and supporting environmental and health initiatives like local food production and access and the use of green infrastructure.

The following matrix is meant to demonstrate how the strategies contained in this chapter relate to the goals laid out in Chapter 3, which correspond to recommendation sections typically contained in comprehensive plans. As this shows, although the structure of the Blue Island Comprehensive Plan is unusual, it does address the topics that are traditionally found in comprehensive plans.

Blue Island strategies matrix

	LAND USE	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	HOUSING	TRANSPORTATION	NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	COMMUNITY FACILITIES	IMAGE AND IDENTITY
1. Reconfigure Western Avenue and Gregory Street as two-way “complete streets.”		X		X			X
2. Consolidate commercial uses along Western Avenue.	X	X	X				
3. Preserve the housing mix while rehabilitating residential buildings.	X		X				
4. Promote Cargo Oriented Development (COD).	X	X		X			
5. Repair or reprogram bridges to reconnect community.				X		X	
6. Clean up the Calumet-Sag Channel to accommodate active and passive recreation.	X				X	X	
7. Undertake small-scale and low-cost infrastructure improvements.				X	X	X	
8. Create workforce training opportunities.		X				X	
9. Improve historic preservation efforts.	X						X
10. Improve organizational structure and implementation prioritization.	Not a topic-specific strategy.						

Strategy #1

Reconfigure Western Avenue and Gregory Street as two-way Complete Streets

Western Avenue serves as the primary gateway into Blue Island's Uptown District, the City's cultural, architectural, and commercial center. The right-of-way running from 127th Street to James Street is also home to nearly 40 percent of retail businesses located in the City, making it a key commercial corridor.

Converted in the 1970s to a one-way couplet with the primary intent of accommodating additional traffic volumes, Western Avenue and Gregory Street to this day allow for unrestricted flow of vehicles through the City of Blue Island. While the conversion has created two to three lanes of travel along with on-street parking opportunities for patrons of Uptown businesses, it has also dealt a major socio-economic blow to the overall community and Uptown specifically. Higher vehicular speeds and restricted circulation have (or contribute to) a threefold negative impact:

- Unsafe and less desirable pedestrian environment
- Decreased business activity
- Prevention of the development of a sustainable and vibrant Uptown District

The reconfiguration of Western Avenue as a two-way street will have a significant impact on the City's Uptown district. This impact, as well as the City's ongoing efforts to address this issue, makes it imperative for the Plan to recommend this strategy as a priority action item.

Benefits

Land Use and Development Benefits

The combination of a pedestrian friendly environment and proximate train station act as perfect catalysts for higher density development. A two-way Western Avenue would contribute significantly to improving the quality of living and doing business along Western Avenue.

Economic Benefits

The combination of slower vehicular speeds and safer pedestrian environment will make the Western Avenue corridor conducive to retail activity. Slower traffic speeds will enable storefronts to receive greater visibility, allowing motorists to stop and patronize businesses. It will also allow pedestrians to cross the Western Avenue roadway in a safe manner and therefore make businesses on either side of the street more accessible. Over the long term, higher density mixed-use development at key nodes will also encourage a greater number of residents to walk to local shops along Western Avenue.

Transportation and Circulation Benefits

The conversion to two-way streets would improve traffic flow, improve safety, and support the use of alternative transportation modes. Blue Island's street-grid network would allow a much more effective circulation of traffic, eliminating the number of circuitous travel routes required to connect east-west neighborhoods. Given the high speed of traffic and wide right-of-way, there are many instances of vehicles either missing their turn or doing so last minute. This is a traffic hazard that could be easily avoided with the two-way conversion.

Decreased traffic speeds within the Uptown District would also contribute significantly to a safer and more pedestrian friendly environment. Alternate modes of transportation including bike lanes and buses could also be accommodated to make Western Avenue a Complete Street (as identified within the City's adopted 2011 Complete Streets Policy). Pace buses would also see an increase in ridership, making existing bus routes more efficient and financially feasible.

Community Health Benefits

Walkable environments have a direct and positive impact on physical health. Urban environments are defined as pedestrian and transit friendly areas that contain higher density mixed or multi use development. Creating a Complete Western Avenue right-of-way that accommodates sidewalks, safer crosswalks, bike lanes, and bus shelters would encourage greater physical activity among residents. It also would have direct transportation safety impacts, as described above.

Image and Identity Benefits

The Western Avenue corridor is home to a number of historic commercial buildings. A vibrant corridor would encourage and allow the business owners to maintain historic facades while also allowing the City to dedicate additional resources to ensure the same. The two-way Western Avenue corridor would provide several direct and indirect benefits to the Uptown District, the city's historic downtown. This would include a boost in commerce, cultural activities, and physical appearance.

Figure 13. Western Avenue 2-way conversion concept



Detailed Strategy

The conversion of Western Avenue and Gregory Street to two-way streets includes a number of changes. Below, these are broken into two types: transportation infrastructure improvements; as well as new policies and ordinances to be adopted by the City.

Transportation Infrastructure

The reconfiguration of Western and Gregory involves changes to these roadways themselves, redesign of intersections of other streets, and modifications to on-street parking. Overall, the roadways are recommended to be converted to two-way streets, with one travel lane in each direction, on-street parking on both sides of the street, and bike lanes on either side. It is also recommended that Gregory Street be realigned to intersect Western Avenue at a 90-degree angle opposite Grove Street to create a four-leg intersection in this location.

In addition, the intersections of Western Avenue with other streets are recommended to be redesigned. Recommended improvements include the following:

- Install curb extensions as per 2010 Traffic Study recommendations
- Re-stripe crosswalks on Western Avenue and each east-west street
- Retain and repair, as needed, brick-paver crosswalks at all existing locations.
- Add brick paver crosswalks at the intersection of Grove Street.
- Modernize signal equipment at York Street and at Vermont Street.
- Install new traffic signal at the intersection of realigned Western Avenue and Grove Street.
- Retain stop sign control at all existing intersections and modify to accommodate two-way traffic.
- Install gateway signage at existing triangular space between Western Avenue and the north-bound free flow lane of Gregory Street.
- Accommodate bus stops and bus shelters at appropriate locations as determined by Pace. Refer to Pace's Posted Stops Program to determine criteria for consolidation and relocation of existing stops.

On-street parking requirements are recommended to be modified as well. Parking lanes should remain on both sides of Western, except for removal in the following locations:

- East side of Western Avenue between Vermont Street and Grove Street/Gregory Street
- East side of Western Avenue for the southern half block between New Street and Vermont Street and on the northern half block between York Street and New Street.

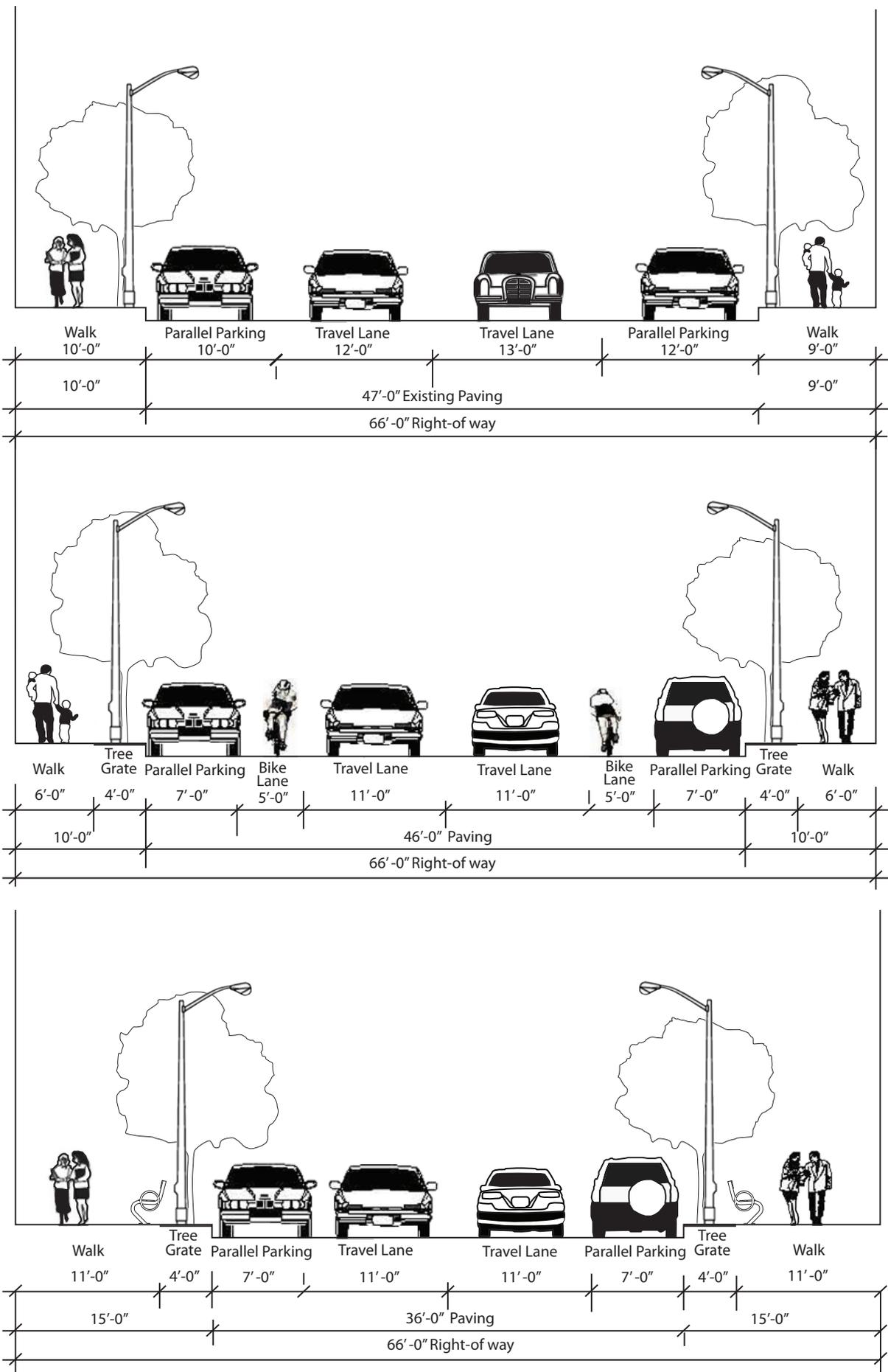
Policy and Programming Actions

In addition to identifying infrastructure improvements, the City should create and/or support the creation of the following policies and programs that would move the recommendation forward.

One important action is the creation of an advocacy group consisting of business owners along Western Avenue. This group would be beneficial in two ways. First, it would help raise awareness and gain support from Blue Island residents for the two-way reconfiguration by highlighting the benefits for the entire community as opposed to businesses along the corridor. Second, it would enable business owners to assist the City in reaching out to external organizations such as the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and play an active role in implementation.

The City should also implement policies and regulations that would help improve the aesthetics and function of the corridor, both before and after the reconfiguration. A signage & wayfinding ordinance and landscape ordinance will assist the City enhance its visual character, and implementing the Complete Streets Policy ordinance will improve traffic circulation while improving community health.

Figure 14. Western Avenue reconfiguration concepts



Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Reaches Next Crossroads:** contains policy recommendations to support revitalization of the Uptown District
- **Western Avenue- Gregory Street Traffic Study:** analyzes the feasibility and provides recommendations for two-way conversion of Western Avenue and Gregory Street.
- **Economic Assessment of Western Avenue Two-Way Conversion:** demonstrates the positive economic impact of conversion of Western Avenue on local businesses.
- **City of Blue Island Complete Streets Policy:** identifies rights-of-way that should accommodate non-motorized transportation and transit as well as supporting improvements.
- **Uptown TOD Zoning Ordinance:** outlines standards that would allow creation of a pedestrian-friendly and vibrant mixed-use Uptown District and TOD area around the Vermont Street Metra station.

Implementation

The conversion of Western Avenue and Gregory Street will not be a simple task, as demonstrated by the lack of progress that has been made to accomplish this strategy, even though it has been recommended for years. Because Western Avenue is under the jurisdiction of IDOT, this project must be made a priority of IDOT before it will move forward.

The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, the goal is to have IDOT consider this project to be a positive improvement, and to have IDOT program this project within its statewide transportation improvement program. Realistically, any physical improvements will be longer-term; the short-term goal is receiving institutional support. A three-part implementation strategy should be pursued over the next two years to advance this recommendation. The three elements of the strategy include:

- Build and demonstrate local support for the two-way conversion.
- Bring the project to IDOT’s attention and determine whether further work is needed to demonstrate its positive impact.
- Make this project a priority for legislative officials who represent Blue Island at the state and federal level.

Strategy #1 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Develop brief summary of project details to discuss with IDOT Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Engineering Department (Consultant)	Prepare a short description of the proposed improvements that focuses on its impact on traffic flow and safety. The KLOA report will be a good source for this information.
Create educational materials for local businesses and residents Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Community Development Department	Prepare an educational fact sheet that describes the proposed changes and illustrates the potential future alignment. This should focus broadly on project benefits and be meant to build support locally.
Form local business advocacy group Timeline: <i>6-12 months and beyond</i>	Community Development Department	Identify a number of local businesses that support the project and are willing to participate in an informal advocacy group of local businesses to assist City staff and elected officials in advancing the project. Hold periodic meetings to discuss progress of discussions with IDOT and legislators.
Meet with IDOT to discuss need for project and identify further studies needed Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Elected officials, Engineering Department, Community Development Department	Request meeting with IDOT leadership. At the meeting, present the case for the project, including its economic benefits and positive impacts on traffic flow and safety. Request that IDOT identify any further studies that would need to be completed to justify the change.
Conduct follow-up studies as needed Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Engineering Department, Community Development Department	Based on the above meeting, conduct any further studies as requested by IDOT to help justify the project, or participate in these studies if they are done by another group.
Meet with legislators at the state and federal level Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Elected officials, local business representatives	City elected officials and representatives from the local business advocacy group should meet with state and federal legislators. The purpose of the meeting is to demonstrate clear community and local business support for the project, request support for the project from the legislators, and ask for assistance in making the project an IDOT priority.
Meet with legislators and IDOT Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Elected officials, local business representatives	A follow-up meeting should be held with City elected officials, local business leaders, supportive legislators, and high-level IDOT representatives. The purpose of this meeting will be to communicate the broad support for the project and to request that IDOT take steps to advance it, including a commitment from IDOT to program the project or to seek external funds to allow its implementation.

Strategy #2

Consolidate commercial uses along Western Avenue



The Western Avenue commercial corridor is unique in several aspects. An unsafe pedestrian environment, combined with growing retail vacancies and deteriorating streetscape conditions has resulted in an economically and aesthetically distressed corridor. The once vibrant Uptown District has been reduced to a combination of vacant and poorly maintained buildings in need of immediate attention.

The consolidation of commercial uses at key intersections is intended to have economic as well as quality-of-life benefits for the community. While creating higher density nodes, it will also free up intermediate parcels for development of complementary uses that further support the vitality of local businesses.

Benefits

Land Use and Development Benefits

Restricting commercial uses to key intersections will support a higher density of mixed-use developments. This in turn will contribute to a better quality of housing for Blue Island residents and business environment for local retailers. Consolidation would also free up mid-block parcels for complementary land uses that could take advantage and in the process support businesses along Western Avenue. Examples could include senior housing units, live-work units, workforce housing units, commercial office spaces, and civic uses to name a few.

Economic Benefits

Businesses that are clustered together would benefit from sharing resources and costs. Shared parking and loading areas allow for greater development densities and also minimize maintenance costs. Successful businesses would provide more employment opportunities for residents while also giving a significant boost to the City's tax revenue that can in turn be dedicated to other city-wide initiatives.

Transportation and Circulation Benefits

At present, the spread out nature of commercial development makes it difficult for Pace to identify ideal locations for bus stops. Creating clustered development would enable more efficient placement of bus stops such that commuters could benefit the most from an accessibility and convenience standpoint. In addition, transit amenities such as bus shelters, information signage, bike racks, and benches would be effectively utilized when placed at these nodes.

Community Health Benefits

A built environment that frames key intersections and supports a mix of commercial and residential uses also results in higher levels of pedestrian activity. This in turn creates a safer public domain with reduced vehicular speeds and fewer points of vehicle-pedestrian conflict.

Detailed Strategy

The changes that would help accomplish consolidation of commercial uses are broken into two types: actions that improve physical development; and policies and programs that improve business climate.

Physical Development Policies

The City could undertake several actions to directly influence physical development along the Western Avenue corridor, especially within the Uptown District and at major intersections.

In terms of ordinances, the City should create regulations requiring façade maintenance. Updating and implementing the vacant storefront ordinance would ensure that the City can hold landlords more accountable for maintenance of their properties. It would require owners to screen vacant windows with high-quality historic images or blinds that do not detract from the character of the overall business environment. Additionally, the City should update its zoning ordinance. Parcels that would be rezoned in this process would be required to comply with regulations either voluntarily or as parcels change ownership over time. The City is currently in the process of adopting an Uptown Transit-Oriented Development Ordinance that outlines bulk regulations that encourage higher density mixed-use development at major intersections.

One of the key focus areas for commercial development is the Uptown District. As outlined within the 2006 MPC Task Force report, retail business retention and attraction efforts should be concentrated in a four-block area extending along Western Avenue from High Street to Grove Street. Additional efforts should be made to support businesses on Old Western Avenue across the Calumet-Sag Channel. Specific physical improvements that would support achievement of the strategy include creation of a well-designed central open space at Western Avenue and Union Street. This public space would further stimulate higher density development at the intersection.

Business Growth Policies and Programs

In addition to physical improvements, the City should adopt strategies that would support business growth and economic activity, which in turn act as catalysts for physical improvement of the area.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry would play a central role in proactively engaging building owners. This could begin by the Chamber educating business owners about the benefits of commercial consolidation and alleviating concerns that they may have. The Chamber should create a sub-committee within its membership consisting of stakeholders located exclusively in the Uptown District. The Uptown Business Committee, with continued support and assistance from the entire Chamber would create, administer, and monitor programs specifically focused on the improvement of Uptown. The advisory committee would work closely with the Plan Commission and City's Community Development Department. The Uptown Business Committee would also work with the Chamber and City to develop effective educational initiatives and marketing campaigns that encourage residents to support locally owned businesses.

A financing mechanism the City should explore to help improve visual character of commercial development is the Western Avenue Special Service Area (SSA). The designated area would be a local taxing district that would fund expanded services and programs through a localized tax levy on property owners along Western Avenue. Funds could be administered by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Uptown Business Association and used for public or private improvements including streetscape, marketing and advertising, business retention/ attraction, special events and promotional activities, transit improvements, and facade improvements. Similar SSAs have been created by several neighborhoods in the City of Chicago.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Reaches Next Crossroads:** provides policy recommendations and action items to improve economic activity in the Uptown District.

Implementation

In order to move forward with implementation of the aforementioned strategies and achieve a vibrant commercial character, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, elected officials, and City staff would each need to assume leadership roles. The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, all policies and programs listed below should have been accomplished.

Strategy #2 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Create educational materials for local businesses, residents, and elected officials Timeline: 6-12 months	Community Development Department/ Community Relations Department	Prepare an educational fact sheet that describes the benefits of commercial nodes and high-density mixed use developments. Review Planning Advisory Service reports available with the American Planning Association containing case studies.
Create and distribute surveys to gauge interest of business community Timeline: 6-12 months	Chamber of Commerce and Industry	The Chamber should distribute surveys to all Western Avenue businesses to gauge their interest in relocating, redeveloping, or renovating their business location.
Create Uptown Business Committee within Chamber of Commerce and Industry Timeline: 12-18 months	Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Identify a number of local businesses within the Uptown District that are willing to act as an informal advocacy group of local businesses to create, administer, and monitor programs specifically focused on the improvement of Uptown.
Conduct detailed market feasibility study Timeline: 12-18 months	Community Development Department	Apply for grants to hire a market consultant who can help understand the types and density of development feasible.
Undertake cost-benefit analysis for creation of a SSA Timeline: 18-24 months	Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Uptown Business Committee	Chamber of Commerce and Industry should work with its Uptown Business Committee, elected officials, and Community Development staff in exploring the need for a SSA. Community Development staff should identify and analyze successful examples in similar communities and present their findings to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Uptown Business Committee, an elected officials.

Figure 15. Western Avenue at Grove Street: before and after



Strategy #3

Preserve housing mix while rehabilitating residential buildings

Having stable and attractive housing options for a wide range of users forms the backbone of a sustainable community. Blue Island is close to achieving this, and a few adjustments and investments will ensure that it successfully gets there. The housing strategy will identify programs, policies, and implementation steps that would help the City in realizing its goals.

Blue Island housing stock is diverse, both in terms of typology and price point. The Plan recommends maintaining this diversity while looking at additional housing opportunities to help attract a new demographic to the community. While it is important to maintain diversity, it is also imperative that the City take measures to improve the physical upkeep of its housing.

Benefits

Economic Benefits

A successful housing market will attract new businesses while helping existing businesses expand within the community. Larger businesses looking for business locations would also be attracted to the variety of housing options available for their workforce. Housing variety, combined with other business-friendly factors will enable employers to locate their operations in the City. This will result in an increase in the City's tax revenue that could be utilized to further improve residential conditions and/or undertake new ventures.

According to the 2009 Homes for a Changing Region study, one in five people who work in Blue Island commute from nearby communities. If the City were to build transit oriented development around Vermont Street and mixed-use buildings in the Uptown District, there is a strong possibility of drawing these workers to live in Blue Island. New residents in the form of senior citizens and college students would also be attracted to the City with the introduction of these new housing typologies.

Image and Identity Benefits

Neighborhood diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, income levels, and family size is critical for true integration of all community residents and to avoid gentrification. Retaining this diversity will enable Blue Island to serve as a regional model for housing integration.

Mixed-use and transit oriented developments will contribute to a thriving Uptown district. The greater density of residential units, combined with pedestrian friendly environment and easy access to retail will support retailers which in turn will attract more residents to live in the Uptown District.

Improved safety is another outcome of improved housing conditions. Strict enforcement of housing standards, combined with good neighborhood design (open space, sidewalks, bike trails) that allow for more 'eyes on the street' will help decrease crime rates.

Detailed strategy

Preserving the City's existing housing mix while improving its visual character requires action by the Building & Zoning Department, Community Development Department, Public Works Department, local non-profits, developers and citizens. Actions should focus on physical improvements as well as new policies and ordinances adopted by the City.

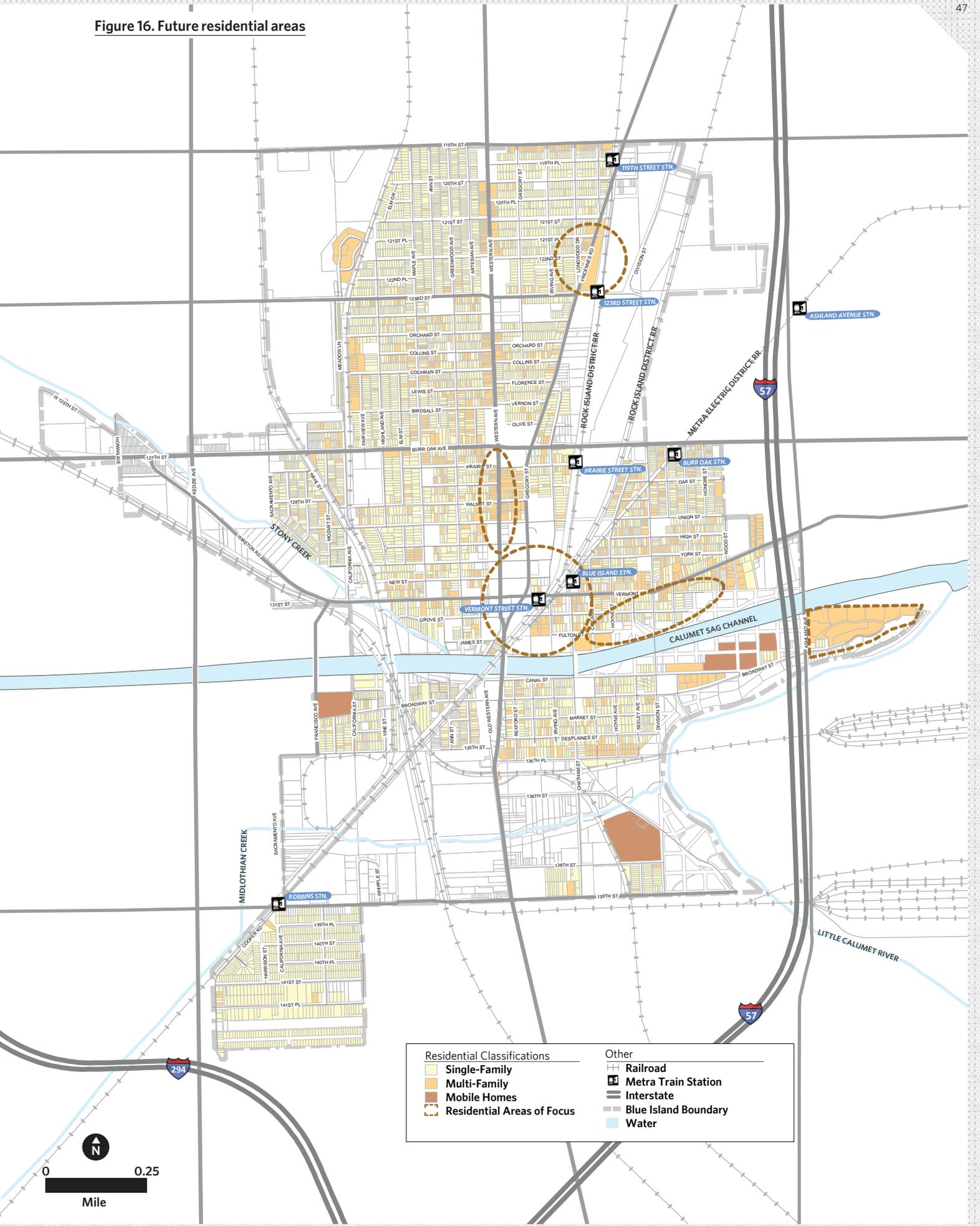
Due to the necessary level of coordination combined with the limited resources available, it is important that the City focus its first phase of housing rehabilitation/addition (both physically and policy driven) in specific areas of Blue Island. While it is understood that some policy efforts will have impacts beyond the initial target neighborhoods, the bulk of resources dedicated to this effort should remain focused on the selected areas. Targeting initial rehabilitation/addition efforts on select areas will allow elected and appointed officials to successfully revitalize targeted neighborhoods, thereby demonstrating the results to the citizens and funding agencies, improving the chances of acquiring additional support and funding to similarly improve other areas.

Building off of the recommendations in the Blue Island Plan for Economic Development and Homes for a Changing Region documents, this Plan recommends that the City focus on the following areas:

- Residential Additions. Half-mile station area around the Vermont Street Metra station, parcels along the Western Avenue corridor and Fay's Point;
- Rehabilitation of Existing Units. The neighborhood near Vermont Street east of the Metra station and neighborhood around Vincennes Road north of 123rd Street.

Even within these targeted areas the City should use a tiered approach. Activities within the initial two year period after the adoption of the Plan should focus on the rehabilitation of existing units, using the improvements in the targeted neighborhoods to prime Blue Island for residential additions in the other target areas.

Figure 16. Future residential areas



Residential Classifications	Other
 Single-Family	Railroad
 Multi-Family	Metra Train Station
 Mobile Homes	Interstate
 Residential Areas of Focus	Blue Island Boundary
	Water

0 0.25
Mile

Physical Improvements

Three types of physical improvements would help further strengthen Blue Island's housing diversity. The first physical improvement relates to maintenance of existing multi-family developments. The *Homes for a Changing Region* study emphasizes that the City focus its initial rehabilitation efforts on two areas: Vermont Street east of the train station area; and housing near Vincennes Road and 123rd Street.

Within these two target areas, the City should use a multi-pronged approach to preserving and improving the housing stock:

- *Homeowner Rehabilitation*

The City should work with existing homeowners to rehabilitate non-code compliant units. Efforts could include partnering with a non-profit to undertake comprehensive rehabilitations through grants/loans or the City providing reduced fees for homeowners undertaking rehabilitations within the targeted areas.

- *Acquisition/Rehabilitation/Resale or Rental*

Modeled on activities undertaken as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), existing for-sale units should be purchased within the targeted neighborhoods for rehabilitation and subsequent rental or sale. Depending on the funding source for this activity, occupants can be targeted to affordable households (those making less than 80 percent of the area median income). Due to the lack of a Blue Island non-profit with this expertise it is recommended that the City work with the South Suburban Housing Collaborative to identify an entity with the necessary capacity.

- *Downpayment Assistance*

Rather than actively rehabilitating units, the City can improve neighborhood appearance by boosting demand for housing units in a targeted neighborhood by incentivizing the purchase of units within the area. Once again, most communities undertake similar activities through a non-profit funded by federal sources.

While it is understood that the City will need federal or other external grant funding to roll out each of these rehabilitation strategies within the targeted areas, their combined impact holds the potential to create a self-sustaining rehabilitation source from which the City can target additional neighborhoods. Physical improvements will boost property values and therefore tax revenues.

The second type of physical improvement relates to the creation of additional housing typologies in the form of mixed-use, Transit Oriented Development (TOD) that contains residential units above retail uses. Western Avenue and the Vermont Street station area are two ideal locations for this housing type. The City should require a range of price points to be included in each development. TOD around the Vermont Street station should accommodate 6 story (maximum) mixed-use buildings, multi-family buildings, and senior housing.

The third improvement relates to continued support for the Fay's Point redevelopment. As market conditions improve, the City should also proactively reach out to developers of Fay's Point and support completion of remaining residential units, ensuring that the site does not deteriorate and go into a state of disrepair.

To reinforce these improvements the City should focus small-scale infrastructure improvements within these targeted neighborhoods. Pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks are important amenities that connect residential neighborhoods to key destinations. As further described in strategy #7, the City should ensure that sidewalks and cross-walks are maintained within all residential neighborhoods.

Policy and Programming Improvements

An important part of reinforcing the City's physical improvements are supporting policy and programming efforts. With this in mind, the City's primary effort should be heightened code enforcement activities within the neighborhoods targeted for rehabilitation. Combining code enforcement with grants, loans, or fee reductions for homeowners and landlords in the targeted areas will encourage property owners to make improvements.

The City of Blue Island should adopt a condo conversion ordinance to help ensure that rental properties targeted for conversion to condominiums are well maintained. The Building and Zoning department should meet regularly with landlords and property managers to share issues and concerns related to property maintenance and code violations. In terms of existing ordinances, the City should adopt the Uptown TOD Zoning Ordinance that provides standards for creating high density housing developments within the TOD and Uptown District.

From a programming perspective, the City should continue to participate in sub-regional housing initiatives. The success of the South Suburban Housing Collaborative has demonstrated the need for communities to work together in resolving housing concerns. The City should also actively coordinate with non-profit organizations that have expertise in neighborhood revitalization and stakeholder (landlords, homeowners, community based organizations) engagement.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Plan for Economic Development:** provides recommended locations and densities for TOD around the Vermont Street station.
- **Homes for a Changing Region:** provides strategies and policies to enhance and improve housing stock.
- **Uptown TOD Zoning Ordinance:** outlines standards that would allow creation of a high density housing typologies within the Uptown District and TOD area around the Vermont Street Metra station.

Implementation

A combination of new policies and their effective enforcement is critical to the success of this strategy. Most actions recommended as part of this strategy would require continuous and ongoing monitoring. The Mayor’s office, Building & Zoning Department, Community Development Department, and Public Works Department would each need to assume leadership roles as part of the implementation process.

The implementation actions below should be focused on the two areas identified for housing rehabilitation. They should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, The City should focus its efforts on the two strategic areas identified for housing additions.

Strategy #3 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Organize a meeting consisting of staff members from the Building & Zoning Department, Water and Sewer Department, Community Development Department, Engineering Department, Fire Department, and Public Works Department. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Create a detailed inventory of issues encountered by each department with regards to the targeted neighborhoods. Based on the list created, identify implementation gaps, existing policies that can adequately resolve issues, and new policies that are required.
Organize meeting with landlords and representatives of management companies in the two areas identified for rehabilitation of existing units Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	The Building and Zoning Department should meet with building owners in the two areas to understand issues faced by them in maintenance of properties and ways in which City can provide assistance. Gauge interest in organizing monthly meetings to discuss progress and identify any obstacles.
Create and distribute homeowner and tenant survey for rehabilitation areas Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Create a paper and online survey directed to residents, both renters and homeowners about housing needs and deficiencies. Also distribute on SSMMA website. Tabulate results received and share with various City Departments in order to identify solutions.
Create booklet for distribution to landlords and tenants containing tips on easy property maintenance Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Work with a non-profit group such as Preservation Compact or MPC to create a booklet containing information on simple procedures for landlords and tenants to maintain their properties. For landlords, also include a summary of building codes that landlords need to comply with.
Meet with SSMMA housing staff to identify grant opportunities for housing maintenance and assistance with marketing efforts Timeline: <i>within 12 months and beyond</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Meet with SSMMA to identify ongoing housing initiatives and potential benefit for Blue Island. Discuss opportunity to collaborate with neighboring communities such as Robbins to obtain funding for rehabilitation of units. Provide marketing materials to SSMMA for distribution at regional and national events.
Create condo conversion ordinance Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Create an ordinance aimed at maintenance of multi-family properties. Engage landlords throughout planning process. This activity would likely be advanced through a contract with a consulting firm.
Research creation of incentives for ‘good landlord behavior’ Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	Identify and analyze examples of landlord incentives provided by communities for proper maintenance of their properties. This process would include meeting with officials of communities identified as well as site visits.

Strategy #4

Promote Cargo Oriented Development (COD)

Blue Island's unique freight infrastructure is highlighted by its network of five freight railroads, two expressways, and a waterway. These assets collectively position Blue Island to benefit from location efficiency, allowing employers and businesses to cluster in areas of the City and utilize the same distribution and transportation networks resourcefully.

Cargo oriented development (COD) addresses underutilized and vacant industrial land by encouraging the redevelopment of manufacturing, logistics, and related businesses at locations with strong freight access and an available workforce. Three such COD sites exist at the edges of Blue Island and hold great economic potential for the City. Although thorough study of these locations has been ongoing for years, a continued focus on these COD sites will require both the improvement of infrastructure to support industrial redevelopment, as well as the exploration of policies to bolster freight investment in the community.



Roadway overpass for truck traffic

Benefits

Land Use and Development Benefits

Redevelopment of COD sites, which currently contain a great deal of vacant or underutilized land, would allow for the consolidation and relocation of industrial businesses that operate in Blue Island to move closer to the transportation networks that they need. In some cases, this industrial business relocation would free up land in areas around commuter rail stations and nodes of public bus activity, thus creating opportunities for Transit Oriented Development (TOD). By clustering industrial businesses and consolidating land use types to be located in a uniform area, a more harmonious pattern of land use is created throughout the whole City.

Economic Benefits

Successful redevelopment and establishment of new businesses will bring in new tax revenue for the City. In areas designated as TIF districts, revenue generated could be utilized to further improve the area and attract further investment. Also, due to the decrease in manufacturing employment opportunities that once existed over the past few decades in Blue Island, the local labor supply has experience and skills needed to excel in the freight, logistics, and manufacturing industries.

Transportation and Circulation Benefits

By making some of the infrastructural improvements that have been suggested in previous COD planning studies, the City could create new routes for dedicated freight movement and take freight off of local community roads. This will decrease traffic congestion and truck pollution in residential and commercial areas of the City.

Community Health Benefits

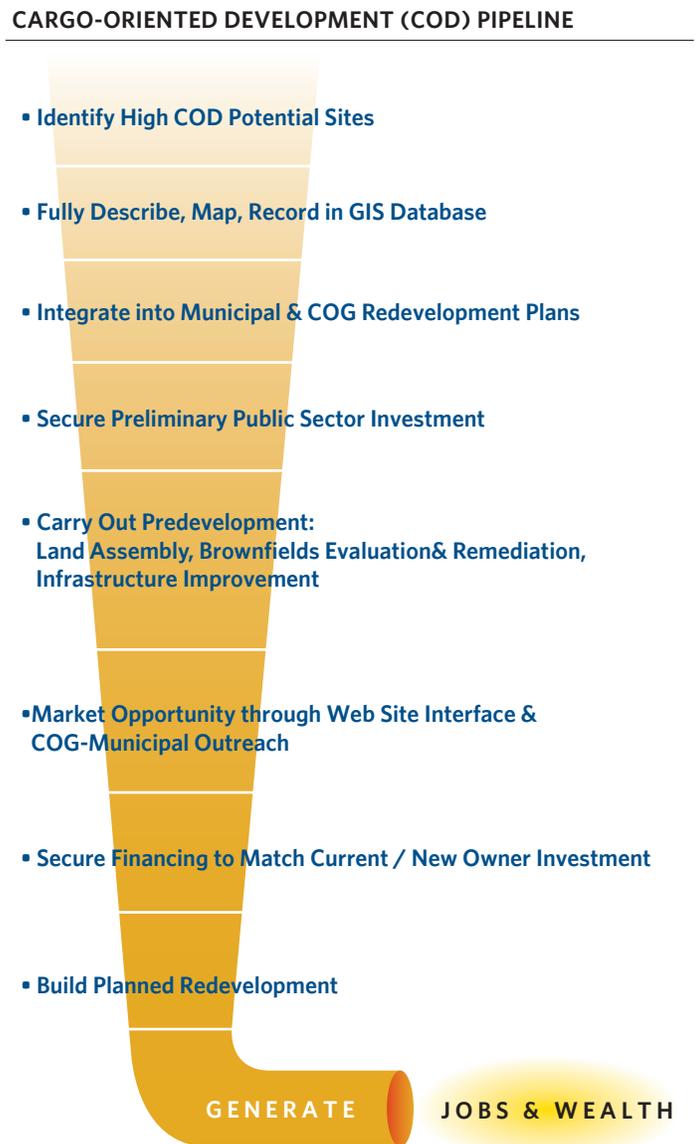
The environmental remediation required to convert these COD sites into compliant areas for new businesses to locate will provide a safe and clean working environment for employees. Additionally, environmental clean-up of these sites will improve soil and water quality, which in turn will improve conditions for community residents.

Detailed Strategy

As previously mentioned, several plans have been laid and are continually revisited to redevelop Blue Island’s COD sites. Thus far, the main barriers to moving these COD redevelopment projects forward in a downturned economy have been lack of financing and challenges with land assembly. The Smart Growth in Older Communities case study outlines the order of actions needed for COD. Blue Island is currently in different phases of this action-oriented pipeline varying by COD site. For the most part, these redevelopment projects are in the planning or pre-development stages.

The following recommended actions can be categorized in two groups: 1) infrastructure and land improvements, many of which are already ongoing; and, 2) the longer-term policy and programmatic steps to take in order to support these projects and a broader freight-based local economy.

Figure 18. COD Development



Land and Infrastructure Actions

Actions in this category include environmental remediation, investments in infrastructure, land assembly, and support for existing logistics businesses already in Blue Island. These actions are described further in the following paragraphs.

A principal part of making Blue Island a center for COD and logistics is retaining existing freight-related businesses and building on the assets that already exist. A major intermodal facility in the city is currently operated by Iowa Interstate (IAIS), and the nearby area should be a focus for COD. A growing trend in the transportation and warehousing industry is the location of industrial business parks near intermodal facilities, allowing these businesses to cut down on their transportation costs because of their proximity to the networks that deliver and distribute their goods. Estimates of the twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) — an approximate measure of cargo capacity — at Blue Island’s IAIS terminal have shown decline over the last decade, with the estimated annual lifts in 2010 down over 4,000 units from 36,537 TEUs in 2006. Placing more value on the great asset of having an intermodal terminal within city limits should be a focus for Blue Island, from making the facility easier to access, to promoting it to potential developers for adjacent vacant parcels.

An early essential step in redeveloping the community’s COD target sites is conducting cleanup planning and environmental remediation of these areas. The City has begun to carry out this critical action; for instance, the Community Development Department is applying for funding through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Multi-purpose Pilot Grant in order to remediate two parcels at the former landfill site in the northeast site. The sustained pursuit of public funding for this phase of redevelopment is crucial, and the City reflects its commitment to this through a dedicated staff position titled Brownfields Coordinator. The City should continue these activities and explore additional work to accomplish these goals.

The City should also continue planning and land assembly efforts at all three COD sites. Reestablishing industrial operations at the targeted COD sites requires complex land assembly for development. While the City has pursued Cook County’s no-cash bid program of tax-delinquent properties, securing many of the parcels that are needed to fulfill redevelopment plans at these sites necessitates working with both public and private landowners. The City should dedicate staff time to raising capital and arranging solutions with landowners that satisfy all parties in the transaction.

Several infrastructure improvements are needed to support COD. First, a dedicated truck route should be established between 119th and 123rd Streets in the Northeast COD site. An abandoned roadway from 119th Street — which has a ramp connecting to Interstate 57 — runs to the IAIS intermodal terminal on 123rd Street. Recovering this road and establishing it as a dedicated truck route would directly connect freight on the I-57 to the intermodal facility, eradicating the need thousands of heavy truck trips to traverse local streets in Blue Island. Whether it is Cook County or the City of Blue Island responsible for this roadway, it is a key infrastructural improvement to make access into the Northeast COD site more efficient.

Also, right of ways should be improved near the COD sites. As discussed in Hitchcock's 2011 master plan for the South COD site, several infrastructural improvements could vastly increase the functionality and aesthetic appeal of many of the arterials that lead to the targeted COD sites. For instance in the South COD site, reconstruction and enhancement of portions of 135th and 137th Streets will help increase access to the industrial site and will create a buffer for the nearby residential neighborhoods. The City should prioritize these projects when capital improvement funds are available to strengthen the prospects of the COD redevelopments.

Truck traffic along Vincennes Road



The City should also be positioning itself to take advantage of the interchange improvement at I-294 and I-57, which also will result in new interchanges with other arterial roads. These new interchanges will improve interstate access from Blue Island, making it a more attractive location for freight and logistics businesses. Similarly, the City should support the infrastructure improvements of the CREATE Program, as these will improve the freight system of the entire Chicago metropolitan area.

Policy Actions

The above recommendations describe some of the physical improvements that would help to support COD in Blue Island. There are also important policy steps to be taken, which are described in the paragraphs below. These include coordinating with regional and subregional efforts, addressing workforce needs, and working in partnership with freight companies to promote development.

Previous plans have recommended that the City co-market its potential for redevelopment — specifically with Iowa Interstate (IAIS) and Indiana Harbor Belt railways for the West Industrial Site — in partnership with the freight companies that would benefit from increased activity on their routes. The City should develop a marketing strategy in conjunction with railroad and trucking companies to create a more compelling argument for potential investors and developers. Partnering with the Blue Island Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry could be beneficial for creating a comprehensive marketing strategy, tying the promotion of the COD sites to broader efforts to attract “green” manufacturers, for instance.

The City should also coordinate with nearby municipalities to push forward a subregional strategy, as described in the Green TIME Zone plan. The involvement of South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA) has been crucial for elevating COD sites to interest potential investors, as well as securing public financing that would not otherwise be available to individual municipalities. SSMMA's efforts across south suburban Chicago have helped Blue Island in the past, and their presence will continue to be a linchpin for a subregional strategy to revitalize the south suburbs. COD redevelopment in Blue Island will require interjurisdictional collaboration with neighboring municipalities like Calumet Park to the northeast and Robbins to the southwest. The City should actively include SSMMA in the implementation of all of the recommendations contained in this section, and in particular in any requisite interjurisdictional efforts, as they can help create smoother collaboration that is tied to a broader vision for the subregion.

In the broader Chicago region, the City should support efforts to create regional freight authority. Freight infrastructure is an ingrained element of Blue Island and the overall Chicago region. For the foreseeable future, the freight transportation network will continue to provide a competitive advantage to the region, and Blue Island can benefit economically and socially from smarter, freight-oriented planning. It is logical, then, for Blue Island to support a governing body to address the financing demands and community needs that relate to this industry. A regional freight authority could help with financing capital improvements needed throughout the region's freight network, and could address public policy concerns formally, increasing systemic efficiency and benefiting Blue Island in the long run.

A comprehensive approach to COD must also address workforce needs. Particularly for Blue Island residents who used to hold manufacturing jobs before plant closures or relocations, these COD sites hold the promise of future employment opportunities that relate to the experience and skills they possess. Providing a transparent record to the public of the status of COD projects, preparing future employees with additional training for the new operations, and matching industrial employers to a local workforce are all necessary steps for this recommendation. (Please see this plan's eighth strategy — to create workforce training opportunities in Blue Island — for more details about workforce development).

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Economic Development Plan:** contains detailed studies and recommendations for the three COD sites and the three TOD sites, and it utilized an extensive public engagement process.
- **Chicago's South Suburbs: Smart Growth in Older Cities:** sets criteria for older suburbs primed for redevelopment, and examines both Blue Island and Harvey as case studies.
- **City of Blue Island South COD Redevelopment Plan: Final Master Plan:** master plan for the COD site south of the Calumet-Sag Channel details the necessary remediation and right of way changes, as well as needed partnerships with private landholders and adjacent communities.
- **CMAP's GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan:** recommends specific actions to improve regional mobility, including the creation of a more efficient freight network and exploring a governance structure to oversee freight activity for the entire region.

Rail lines passing over Cal-Sag Channel



Implementation

The matrix below identifies the key actions, timelines, and lead implementers for both the infrastructure and policy recommendations of this strategy. The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years.

Strategy #4 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Coordinate with SSMMA to discuss a subregional freight strategy and strengthen interjurisdictional collaboration. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Community Development Department; SSMMA	Blue Island staff, along with staff from Calumet City, Robbins, and other south suburban municipalities with freight assets should meet with SSMMA to inventory and coordinate any separate efforts toward freight infrastructure improvements. This group should identify common multi-municipal goals and shared priorities that would benefit multiple communities, such as joint applications for state and federal funding. Blue Island should advocate for the priority infrastructure improvements noted in this section to be included as subregional priorities.
Target private entities that would benefit from the IAIS intermodal facility on the Northeast COD site. Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Community Development Department	Conduct a study of potential companies (both local and national) who would be interested in expanding their operations to an intermodal site like the Northeast COD. Target communications to those trucking companies, light manufacturing businesses, equipment/repair providers, and others that normally locate at these types of sites and promote Blue Island's assets to them.
Develop marketing and education materials for each of the three COD sites. Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Community Development Department (specifically the Brownfields Coordinator)	As the City continues its brownfield remediation at COD sites, it should prepare short descriptions of the economic potential of each site and dedicate staff time to extensive outreach to private entities (like logistics firms and "green" manufacturers). This effort will help secure land agreements for after the environmental clean-up is completed.
Publicize shared priorities to Cook County, IDOT, and other county and state entities. Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Elected officials; SSMMA	Once subregional infrastructure priorities are established and agreed upon, Blue Island should collaborate with SSMMA to work with Cook County, IDOT, and other public entities to identify funding to implement infrastructure projects that affect multiple communities.
Co-market the COD sites with railroad companies. Timeline: <i>12-24 months</i>	Community Development Department; Blue Island Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Collaborate with the relevant staff at IAIS and Indiana Harbor Beltway companies to launch a marketing strategy to promote the three COD sites. This partnership would create a strong message to attract private development interests to these sites by highlighting their prime locations.
Establish a dedicated truck route between 119th and 123rd Streets in the Northeast COD site. Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Public Works Department	Work with Cook County and IDOT to identify funds to repave this roadway and classify it as a freight route for trucks to access the intermodal site.
Begin improving key rights of way, particularly those identified around the South COD site. Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Community Development Department; Public Works	With a South COD master plan in place, the City should request meetings with IDOT and Cook County to make the argument that there is a demonstrated need for improvements along nearby right of ways to create access to the site. The infrastructure changes will take longer than 24 months, but in this time, the City could apply for Surface Transportation Program funds and the other agencies could prioritize these right of way projects in their capital planning.
Initiate a workforce program to match local workers with incoming employers at the COD sites. Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Community Development Department; Community Relations	As new companies begin to locate and start operations in the COD areas, the City should help facilitate a training and matching program between local employees who used to hold manufacturing jobs that have since left Blue Island, and new employment opportunities in the COD sites. Partnering with Moraine Valley Community College and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry on these efforts could help identify program models and resources for starting and sustaining a workforce program between the community and future employers.

Strategy #5

Repair or reprogram bridges to reconnect community

The Calumet-Sag Channel bisects the City of Blue Island and has necessitated the construction of bridges to maintain north-south roadway connections. The closure of two of these bridges has not only restricted vehicular access, but also created economic and social divisions. There is an urgent need to repair and reprogram these bridges in order to unite the community physically, economically, socially, and perceptually.

Benefits

Land Use and Development Benefits

Parcels adjacent to the closed Chatham Street and Division Street bridges suffer from a lack of convenient access. This has stymied development and could be remedied to a certain extent if the bridges were re-opened. Even if the bridges cannot be re-opened for vehicular traffic, repairing the bridges to the extent that they allow safe and attractive access for pedestrians will create new open space opportunities. Areas along the Calumet-Sag Channel would become more accessible to the community via the bridges, making it possible to recreate these areas as vibrant public spaces.

Residential neighborhoods would also greatly benefit from this strategy. Vacant parcels would become more viable for development as access becomes easier while commercial uses would find it easier to service the neighborhoods and benefit from increased visibility.

Economic Benefits

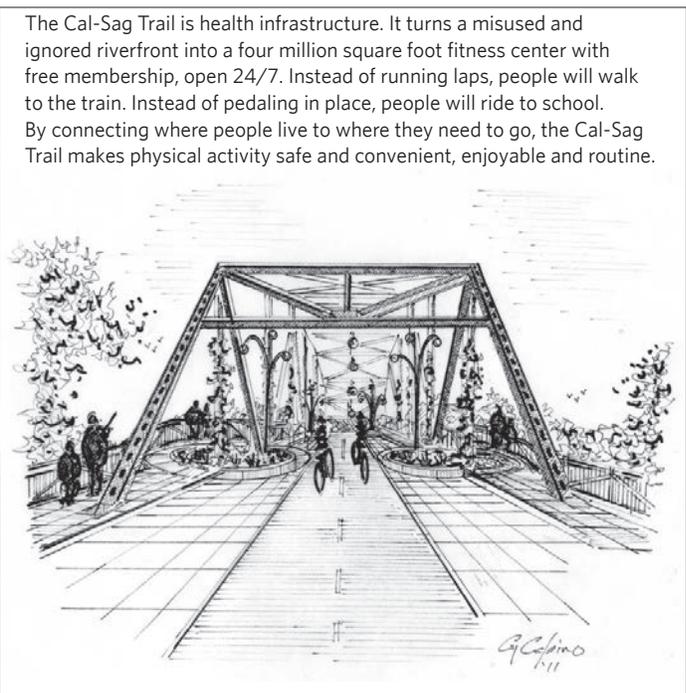
Improved access and physical improvements would contribute to a better economic environment. In the long term, demand for commercial and residential development would see an upswing due to a combination of the direct and indirect effects of implementing this strategy.

Transportation and Circulation Benefits

Better vehicular and/or non-motorized transportation access is the foremost benefit of this strategy. This benefit in fact, is the underlying principle that influences all other physical, economic, social benefits outlined in this section. At present, community members and visitors depend on either Western Avenue or Ashland Avenue to cross over the Calumet-Sag Channel. The Cal-Sag trail “Legacy Campaign” proposes the redesign the closed Chatham Street bridge to create an attractive public realm and improve non-motorized access.

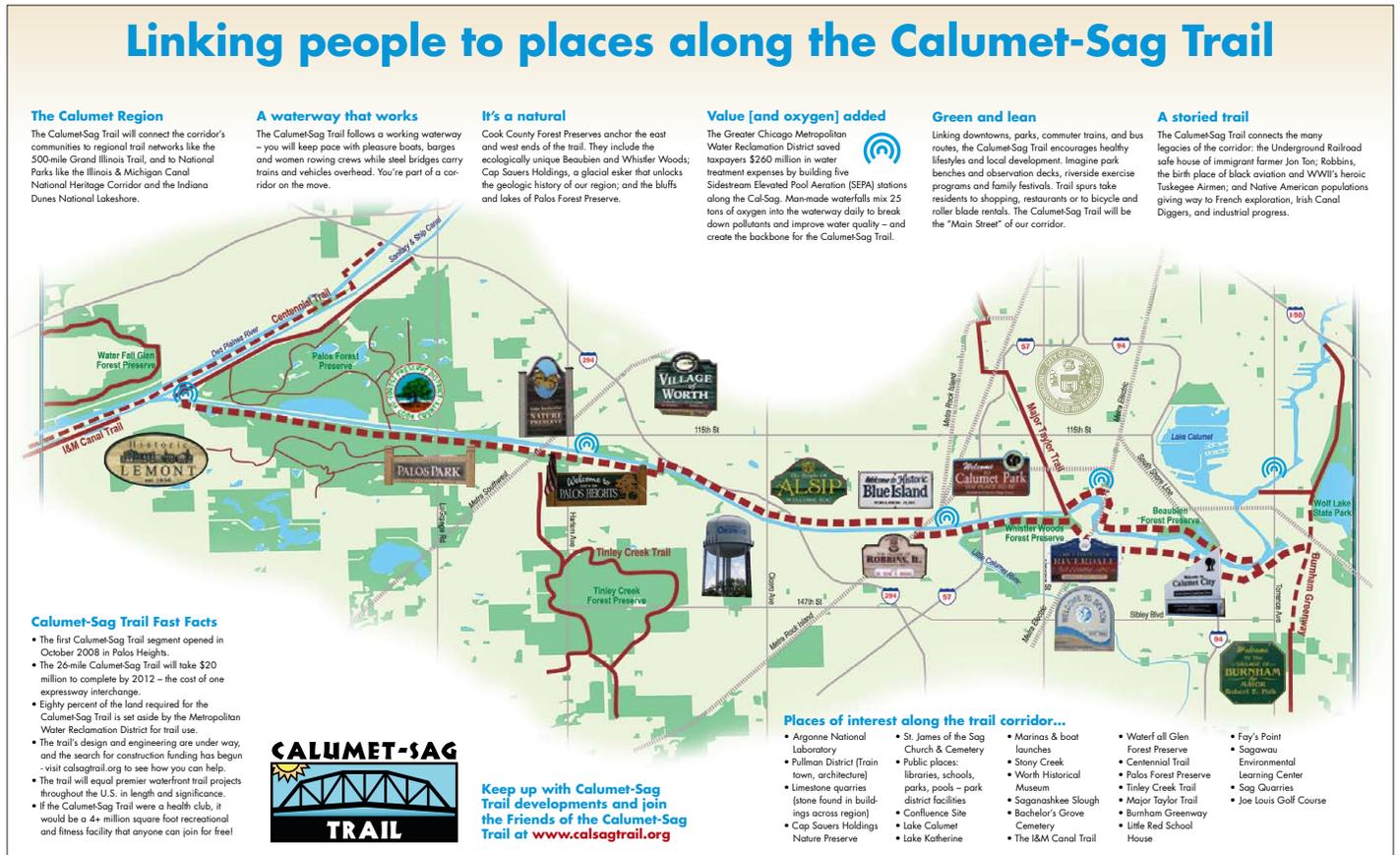
While affecting neighborhoods on either side of the Channel, the closed bridges disproportionately affect residents on the south end as most of the City’s commercial, institutional, and transit infrastructure is located on the north end. Opening the bridges would improve circulation drastically for these residents. Safety for students walking or biking to their schools would significantly improve as well.

Figure 19. Bridge concepts



The Cal-Sag Trail is health infrastructure. It turns a misused and ignored riverfront into a four million square foot fitness center with free membership, open 24/7. Instead of running laps, people will walk to the train. Instead of pedaling in place, people will ride to school. By connecting where people live to where they need to go, the Cal-Sag Trail makes physical activity safe and convenient, enjoyable and routine.

Figure 20. Calumet-Sag Trail



Source: Friends of the Calumet-Sag Trail

Detailed Strategy

Owning and maintaining large infrastructure such as roadway bridges is cost-prohibitive for most local units of government. There are limited sources of funding and stringent safety requirements that need to be met. The fact that Blue Island has not one, but two such bridges under its ownership requires the City to take a unique approach to utilizing the bridge and funding their maintenance.

In order to accurately understand the financial implications of various alternatives, the City should commission a planning and engineering study to evaluate the cost of each of the following alternatives:

- **Repair bridge for full vehicular use:** reopening the bridge to two-way vehicular traffic and potentially truck traffic.
- **Repair bridge for pedestrian and light vehicular use:** in addition to vehicular traffic, the bridge would be open to pedestrians with sidewalks and streetscape amenities included, but heavy trucks and buses would be prohibited.
- **Repair bridge for non-motorized (bicycle-pedestrian) use only:** as illustrated in the Legacy Campaign document, this option would open the bridge only to bicycle and pedestrian traffic and convert the bridge right-of-way to a landscaped open space.

At present, the City is focussing its efforts on repairing and reopening the Division Street bridge for vehicular traffic, funded through a federal grant.

In addition to cost estimates, each alternative should contain a phasing plan with timelines and funding strategies that would allow City officials to make an informed decision on their preferred alternative.

Based on the planning and engineering study's conclusions, the City should review its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and allocate funding for bridge improvements as well as identify ways to raise additional revenue. Although important, the CIP will form only part of the funding strategy. The City should identify and pursue funding sources from local, regional, state, and federal agencies. From federal, state, and regional agencies, the City should investigate specific bridge programs, more general sources like STP and CMAQ, and of course should also review the potential for locally-supported bonds or capital improvement funds to be used.

In addition to acquiring funds for physical improvements, the City should also initiate programs that would build support for the strategy. The City should actively coordinate with organizations such as Friends of the Cal-Sag Trail, ATA, MPC, CMAP, and SSMMA to assist with funding, advocacy, and coordination.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Legacy Campaign to Build the Cal-Sag Trail:** contains concepts depicting landscape and non-motorized transportation improvements to the Chatham Bridge.

Implementation

Given the importance of building partnership with local organizations and coordination with state and federal organizations, the Mayor’s office and elected aldermen should play a leadership role in moving this strategy forward.

The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, all actions and programs listed below should have been accomplished.

Strategy #5 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Meet with SSMMA and non-profit partners to identify funding strategies and opportunities to undertake engineering study. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Community Relations Department	City officials should conduct meetings with SSMMA, MPC, ATA, Friends of the Cal-Sag and identify partnership and funding opportunities to conduct an engineering study, e.g., Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds.
Undertake detailed engineering study. Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Engineering Department	Upon receiving funding, the City should hire an engineering and economic consultant to prepare a cost-benefit analysis that evaluates the transportation, safety, and economic benefits of each of the three bridges repair/reopening options. The consultant should create materials to support the findings that can be used by City officials in external marketing efforts.
Discuss study’s recommendations with external agencies to identify funding for implementation. Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Community Relations Department	The City should meet with SSMMA, IDOT, and others to discuss study’s findings and identify potential funding sources to initiate project.

Strategy #6

Clean up the Calumet-Sag Channel to accommodate active and passive recreation

The Calumet-Sag Channel was built in the early 1900s as a navigation canal to serve heavy industries on the south side of Chicago and adjacent suburbs, including Blue Island. As of 2006, the channel also receives treated wastewater from communities in southern Cook County.

Clean-up of the Channel will allow residents to not only utilize the water for recreational purposes, but also land adjacent to the Channel's right-of-way to be developed for complementary uses. Due to the positive impact this clean-up will have on all communities along the Channel, the strategy has been prioritized for action within the Plan. Overall, the purpose of this strategy is to make the Calumet-Sag Channel an asset to the community, rather than a barrier.

Benefits

Land Use and Development Benefits

The Calumet-Sag right-of-way could be redeveloped with a series of public greenways for active and passive recreation. The proposed Calumet-Sag regional bike trail would pass through the areas, connecting the open spaces to the rest of the region.

Economic Benefits

The proximity of Uptown to the Calumet-Sag Channel will benefit businesses and residents in the district alike. Visitors attracted to the recreational activities in and around the Channel will also patronize businesses in Uptown. The abundance of activity within and in close proximity to Uptown will attract more residents to live in the area. Clean-up of and improvements to the Channel corridor will also benefit existing residential neighborhoods and attract investment in the form of neighborhood retailers and recreational areas. The Green River Pattern Book illustrates some of these benefits.

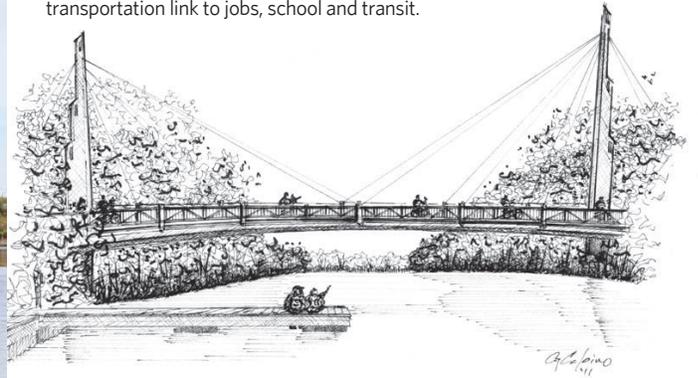
Treatment facility adjacent to the Cal-Sag Channel



Figure 21. Clean up of Calumet-Sag Channel



The Cal-Sag Trail turns a working waterway into a waterway that works for everyone. Communities gain a regional trail that attracts new residential and business development. Businesses gain a new source of customers flowing into the community and a sustainable, efficient alternative for their employees' commute. Residents gain a convenient, healthy, and free transportation link to jobs, school and transit.



The Cal-Sag Trail protects and interprets the corridor's natural history and cultural legacy. It will celebrate the suburban inner ring's heritage as a manufacturing and transportation hub that poured the steel for Chicago's skyscrapers and integrated a region. Visitors will discover the surprising biodiversity and delicate balance of the corridor's ecosystems, while the ecosystems benefit from the thousands of new eyes watching over them.



Source: Legacy Campaign to Build the Cal-Sag Trail

Natural Environment Benefits

The environmental benefits of improved water quality would be the foremost benefit of this strategy, allowing aquatic life to thrive in the Channel. This in turn will attract water-dependent birds species and further enhance the region's ecosystem. In terms of recreation, the improved water quality would allow for sporting activities and active recreation to take place in the Calumet-Sag channel. Examples include swimming, competitive boat racing, and fishing. Community garden plots could be incorporated into the greenway corridor, wherever possible. In addition to encouraging local food production, they are also an excellent education as well as community-building tool.

Community Health Benefits

The various improvements as a result of the Channel clean-up will directly benefit community health. Physical activity, cleaner water, and the resulting cleaner air will have a positive impact of residents' health.

Image and Identity Benefits

The unique variety of recreation, education, and shopping experiences available in Blue Island will benefit the community in creating a unique brand for itself. Attracting visitors from around the region would also make the City regionally prominent and further attract new residents and investors over time.

Detailed Strategy

Recommendations related to this strategy are broken into two categories of mutually supportive activities: those that address the water body itself, and those that address the use of nearby land. Both categories of actions require a multi-jurisdictional approach. As recommended within the Green River Pattern Book, the creation of a Calumet River Council would comprise of public and private sector leaders and organizations. The Council would play a leadership role in prioritizing projects along the corridor and help raise funding for detailed planning and implementation of projects. Municipalities along the Calumet-Sag Channel should be represented in the Council as well. The City should also monitor and support work on the Millennium Reserve within the Calumet area of Chicago, which is a major open space project which could positively impact Blue Island. The City is part of the Millennium Reserve Calumet Core.

Water Quality Improvement Actions

The Calumet-Sag Channel is one of three waterways in the region that have dangerously high bacteria levels due to the lack of disinfection systems, which have been installed in most other waterways by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD). This makes clean-up of the Channel a central issue that needs to be addressed comprehensively by a coalition of communities. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) has recommended clean-up of the Calumet-Sag Channel and other canals in the region. The City should continue to monitor regional trends and take steps at the local level that would help influence decision makers to begin the clean-up process in the short-term.

Once created, the Calumet River Corridor Council should proactively meet and discuss ways to move forward with organizations such as MWRD, IEPA, IDOT, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, among others. Initial efforts should be focused on MWRD as they are responsible for water treatment, own large parcels along the waterfront that are ideal for redevelopment for public use, and have one of their facilities located in Blue Island. Upgrading the treatment facility to add a disinfectant system would be a logical first step.

One of the first steps to be undertaken by a collaboration of communities adjacent to the Calumet-Sag Channel, under the leadership of the MWRD, is to commission a study that examines the types of pollutants in the Channel, their effect on water quality and plant species, and solutions to help improve water quality and natural areas along the waterway.

In terms of policies, adopting best management practices outlined within the Green River Pattern Book would allow City officials to influence clean-up at the local level. As the Channel is also accommodating surface water and stormwater run-off, the City should implement and also encourage businesses and residents to implement water conservation measures that reduce run-off including construction of bio-swales, dry wells, pervious pavements, rain barrels, and others.

Land and Greenway Planning Actions

The City should continue to support the Calumet-Sag regional trail that is being built along the Channel and will eventually connect to Blue Island. It will ensure that areas along the bike trail will have an opportunity to be maintained as open space and provide public access. Examples of proposed improvements are provided within the ‘Legacy Plan’ and include scenic overlooks, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities.

The City should collaborate with neighboring communities to undertake a multi-jurisdictional Greenway Master Plan study that envisions the future of the Calumet-Sag Channel corridor. The study should sub-divide the corridor into sections by community and provide specific concepts for development of the waterway and parcels along it. Preliminary cost estimates should be included to enable each municipality to gauge feasibility of alternatives.

In order to preserve parcels along the Channel for programmed open spaces in the future, the City should establish a land bank and begin negotiations with property owners. Land banking could be achieved by either i) the City’s acquisition of underutilized land, or ii) the transfer or purchase of development rights (TDR or PDR). The Transfer of Development Rights would allow for increased development densities in other parts of the community, e.g., Uptown, Vermont Street Metra station area, etc.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Green River Pattern Book:** Illustrates development alternatives for areas along the Calumet-Sag Channel as well as specific strategies to clean up stormwater runoff.

Implementation

In order to effectively move forward with achieving the intended goals of this strategy, the City would need to engage officials at the regional, state, and national level. Given the scale of improvement desired, the Mayor and elected officials should play a critical role in forging external partnerships while the City staff should undertake important technical and administrative tasks required to keep moving forward.

The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, all actions and programs listed in the following table should have been accomplished.

Strategy #6 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Participate in ongoing sub regional efforts as well as upcoming initiatives. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Mayor, Elected Officials	The City should be actively involved and take leadership roles in ongoing subregional planning efforts such as the Calumet-Sag Trail Initiative, Calumet River Corridor Initiative, and Millennium Reserve Project. This will allow the City to advocate for and monitor Blue Island’s interests.
Meet with neighboring communities to identify mid-sized projects for collaboration. Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Mayor, Community Relations Department	The City should collaborate with neighboring communities to identify projects to collaborate on. Examples include joint land banks, creating joint development guidelines, and unified permitting and development processes.
Identify and prioritize local projects for implementation. Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Community Relations Department	The Community Development Department should identify local projects to help improve water quality and parcel conditions along the Calumet-Sag Channel. These initiatives include implementation of the residential rain barrel program, installation of community gardens, and centralizing ownership of parcels along the Channel’s right-of-way.
Apply for funding for local or inter-jurisdictional projects. Timeline: <i>12-24 months</i>	Community Relations Department	Based on a list projects identified for implementation, the City should work with neighboring communities (if required) and SSMMA to identify and apply for funding to help move projects forward.

Strategy #7

Undertake small-scale and low-cost infrastructure improvements

Small-scale infrastructure improvements are low cost investments that go a long way in reinforcing a City's commitment to maintaining residents' quality of life and providing a supportive business environment. The previous strategies in the Plan require a phased approach and longer timeframes for implementation. The benefit of this strategy is that it can almost exclusively be accomplished in the short term with a combination of existing resources available with the City and limited external funding. The Plan recommends immediate action on these low-cost solutions, which are small but high-visibility, in order to demonstrate continuous progress while planning for longer-term improvements.

Benefits

Transportation and Circulation Benefits

Improvements to the public rights-of-way (ROW) will enable vehicular traffic to circulate more efficiently through the community. Similarly, repair and maintenance of sidewalks and bike paths, especially within the Uptown District and Vermont Street Metra station area will ensure safety of pedestrians while also contributing to decreasing the number of non-essential vehicular trips within the community.

Image and Identity Benefits

A well-maintained infrastructure will improve Blue Island's standing in the region. Visitors, scouting business owners, potential residents, and commuters passing through the community will recognize these improvements, enabling the City to attract additional outside investment and stand-out in the south suburban market.

Detailed Strategy

As mentioned above, low cost infrastructure improvements are an easy yet essential way of marketing a municipality's commitment to progress. City departments as well as Aldermen have been continually working with restricted budgets to ensure that services are provided to each ward in the community. Improvements that could benefit from further attention and funding are mainly related to transportation infrastructure improvements and streetscape improvements.

As mentioned in Strategy #3, it would be beneficial for the City to target its finite resources and funds on specific neighborhoods as opposed to distributing them throughout the community. Keeping this in mind, the Plan proposes that small scale infrastructure improvements be directed to areas identified previously in Strategy #3. These include:

- The half-mile station area around the Vermont Street Metra station
- Parcels along Western Avenue corridor and the Uptown District
- Parcels along Vermont Street east of the Metra station
- Housing development along Vincennes Road north of 123rd Street.

Most recommended physical improvements are a combination of transportation and streetscape maintenance initiatives that will require close coordination between City departments and elected officials. The City's Public Works Department should create an inventory of local streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks that are either in need of repair or are missing in critical places within each of the identified areas. A phasing plan should be developed by the Public Works Department to help identify improvements and prioritize them within the City's Capital Improvement Plan for the next 2-3 years.

Some of the key infrastructure issues to be addressed in these areas include, but are not limited to:

- Repair and maintenance of sidewalks in poor condition
- Completion of sidewalk network wherever links are missing
- Improvement of broken curbs, especially at intersections to allow safe handicap access
- Restriping of driving and parking lanes

In addition to the above mentioned infrastructure improvements at key locations, a number of specific physical improvements should be prioritized by the City along the Western Avenue corridor and within Uptown. These include:

- Replacement of light pole banners that are torn or worn out
- Maintenance of existing planters along the sidewalks on either side of the street
- Placement of bike racks at more locations to encourage non-motorized transportation
- Addition of bus shelters in high-boarding locations
- Restriping on-street parking lanes on either side of the thoroughfare
- Fixing sidewalks and cleaning up trash in vacant lots

In terms of community wide actions, community gardens are a low cost improvement that should be pursued. The City should apply for grants that would allow it to continue to work with non-profit organizations that have expertise in constructing community gardens. Potential locations for gardens could include Park District facilities or vacant City owned parcels identified as appropriate for construction of community gardens.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Reaches Next Crossroads:** identifies City neighborhoods and areas that should be the focus of short-term implementation efforts.
- **Homes for a Changing Region:** Identifies neighborhoods for focused residential rehabilitation and redevelopment

Implementation

Implementation of low cost and small scale infrastructure would be headed up by the City of Blue Island with funding allocated from, in most cases, the Capital Improvement Budget. The City has additional opportunities to seek state and federal grants (e.g., Enhancement Grants). The intent of this strategy is to allow City officials to show progress in the short-term with a combination of local funding and limited state, regional, or federal funding.

The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, all actions and programs listed below should have been accomplished.

Strategy #7 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Identify potential infrastructure improvements within the identified areas. Timeline: 6-12 months	Public Works Department	The Public Works Department should work with various City departments to i)create an inventory of required infrastructure improvements in the targeted areas; ii) prepare cost estimates to complete these improvements; and iii) create a priority list among all identified improvements based on funds and staff resources available.
Meet with Finance Department to discuss infrastructure improvements and prioritization. Timeline: 12-18 months	Mayor, Elected Officials	The priority improvements identified by City Departments should be discussed with the Finance Department in order to establish if funding them is realistically possible in the next two years. A revised list with fewer items may be proposed at the end of this meeting.
Identify external funding opportunities for infrastructure improvements and apply for funding. Timeline: 18-24 months	Public Works Department	The City staff should identify state and federal funding sources available in the short term, e.g., Enhancement Funds. Priority should be given to funding sources that closely align with community needs in order to preserve staff time and resources.
Hire a Grants Coordinator to assist with ongoing funding applications and administration. Timeline: 18-24 months	Mayor, Elected Officials	In order to continually monitor and apply for external funding, the City should apply for grants that will allow it to hire a grants coordinator. The coordinator would be responsible for all aspects of grant writing, allowing full-time City staff to focus their efforts on project management and implementation. This is described further in strategy #10.

Strategy #8

Create workforce training opportunities

Several development opportunities are planned for the City of Blue Island in the near future. With this comes the opportunity for residents to access employment and training associated with Transit Oriented Development (COD) and Cargo Oriented Development (COD) projects as well as housing rehabilitation investments. Additionally, there will be increased employment opportunities as transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL) and manufacturing companies move to Blue Island as a result of industrial redevelopment. Workforce development services are a key component to ensuring that residents can take advantage of new and existing employment opportunities. A skilled local workforce that meets industry-specific needs will encourage businesses to stay in or relocate to Blue Island.

Currently, workforce development services are limited in Blue Island, but several organizations in surrounding communities have expressed interest in providing these services to residents. This strategy outlines how residents can successfully connect with job placement, job readiness, and training services. Additionally, this strategy describes the importance of incorporating workforce development strategies into development projects. If the actions outlined below are taken, residents, businesses, and the community as a whole will benefit.

Benefits

Economic Benefits

Increased use of workforce development services, including training opportunities, will result in several economic benefits. First, there will be additional employment opportunities and greater economic stability for Blue Island residents, as well as an increase in the number of residents who are employed in the City. Additionally, Blue Island businesses will benefit, since higher employment rates and income stability among residents will lead to more residents buying their goods and services. Local businesses will also have access to a more skilled local workforce to meet their needs, which will give them reason to stay in or relocate to Blue Island. Businesses will also economically benefit by accessing publicly-funded training for new and existing workers.

Image and Identity Benefits

Increased employment among residents will lead to more involvement in community and civic activities. Gainful employment leads to enhanced self-esteem and sense of purpose, which correlates with community involvement and volunteerism. Additionally, if Blue Island businesses employ more residents, the former will feel more connected to and invest more in the community, both through time and financial donations.

A safer environment would be another indirect benefit. Individuals who have stable employment and income are less likely to participate in at-risk or criminal behavior. If residents are able to access needed workforce development and successfully gain employment as a result, public safety will improve.

MetroSouth Medical Center along Gregory Street



Detailed Strategy

In order to accomplish this strategy, the City will need to raise awareness among community stakeholders while also connecting them with resources and organizations outside the community. In order to effectively undertake this, recommendations for this strategy have been classified into two sections; 1) Education and Training Actions; and 2) Programmatic Actions.

Workforce Education and Training Actions

One of the key actions that should be taken by elected officials is to designate a staff person at the City whose responsibility would be to inform residents about workforce development resources in the area, as well as the range of related social services that are available.

In order for more Blue Island residents to become successfully employed and achieve career advancement, access to workforce development services (job readiness, job placement, and occupational skills training) is crucial. Additionally, access to a wide range of social services (i.e., mental/behavioral health services; supportive housing; child care; transportation assistance) also contributes to employment success. Although residents have few opportunities to access workforce development services within Blue Island, several provider organizations in surrounding communities have expressed interest in providing these services to Blue Island residents. Additionally, the Southland region has many social services agencies that can provide a range of supportive services to residents. Currently, no existing system or process is in place for workforce development and social service organizations to inform Blue Island residents about services and resources that are available to them. Also, Blue Island organizations providing social services can make more effective client referrals if they are more informed about the range of services available through other nearby organizations.

In order to address this information gap, the City should assume a proactive role in resource information sharing to benefit its residents. Thus, the City should designate a staff person — potentially from the Community Relation Department (see strategy #10) — to assume the responsibility for implementing the following strategies:

- Develop a “Resource Board” on the City’s website to post information about Southland workforce development and social services resources.
- Use local media (WDDE TV, local newspapers), the City website’s main page, community bulletin boards, community events (e.g., TGIF Picnic), etc. to inform residents about the City’s resource webpage and resource fairs.
- Coordinate resource fairs for residents (see next strategy).
- Identify a contact person at each Blue Island social services/ community organization. Relay key information about resources and related events to these contacts, so they are able to inform their clients/constituents. This will enable organizations to make appropriate referrals to services.

- Connect with the Southland Human Services Leadership Council (SHSLC) to learn about workforce development and social services in surrounding communities. Communicate with the Council and its Workforce Development Committee on a regular basis.

In addition to connecting residents to resource, the City should also educate employers about resources available through the public workforce system. The publicly funded workforce development system offers several resources targeted to employers. On-the-Job Training (OJT) and incumbent worker training are two resources available through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system that allow employers to train and increase the skills of new and existing workers.

Additionally, employers should work with public workforce development agencies to find qualified candidates who meet their specific business needs. The Community Relations Department should coordinate with the Oak Forest Illinois workNet Center (operated by MAXIMUS, Inc.), Calumet Area Industrial Commission (CAIC), the Chicago Federation of Labor Workers’ Assistance Committee (CFLWAC), and OAI, Inc. to facilitate information sessions for local employers about the various workforce development resources available to them. The Community Relations Department can coordinate the space and market the event to Blue Island companies, while the workforce development agencies can facilitate the sessions.

Programmatic Actions

In addition to the above mentioned actions geared towards increasing awareness among community leaders and members, the City should also launch programs and events that would help connect the City’s labor force to resources.

The City should host bi-annual resource fairs to increase linkages between Southland workforce development organizations and residents. At the bi-annual event, residents can learn about workforce development and social services available to them both in Blue Island and surrounding communities. The City could also connect with Southland workforce development and social services organizations through the SHSLC’s wide network of provider organizations. The City may also look into coordinating with neighboring municipalities. In addition to organizations identified by the SHSLC, the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), Oak Forest Illinois workNet Center (operated by MAXIMUS, Inc.), Moraine Valley Community College, and Blue Island community organizations could participate in the fairs. There are City and other community facilities (such as the public library, Salvation Army Crossgenerations Community Center, Tommy A. Brown Sports Association) that should have space for this type of event.

The City should also utilize existing Southland groups, such as the SHSLC's Workforce Development Committee, as a vehicle to connect Blue Island residents with Southland workforce development providers. Currently, there is a lack of easily accessible, accurate, and up-to-date information for Southland residents and organizations about where to access a range of social services, including workforce development services. The SHSLC coordinates Southland human services organizations, including workforce development providers, in order to improve service delivery to residents in the 62 South and Southwest suburban municipalities of Chicago. Participant organizations of the SHSLC represent various aspects of human services, including workforce development and training, developmental disabilities, education, health care, housing, mental/behavioral health, senior services, and youth services. Individuals from organizations representing these respective areas have formed certain work groups, and the Workforce Development Committee is one of these.

One of the SHSLC Workforce Development Committee's goals is to connect Southland workforce development providers with one another, in order to enhance service provision to Southland residents. The Committee is a vehicle to develop strategies to better connect workforce development providers in the area to Blue Island residents and organizations. Increased awareness about workforce development services in the area, as well as the development of referral partnerships with Blue Island social service and community organizations, will increase residents' access to needed workforce development services and skills training. Additionally, Blue Island organizations should consider participating on the SHSLC and/or its Workforce Development Committee.

Lastly, in order to develop increased employment opportunities for Blue Island residents, it is crucial that workforce development strategies are incorporated into Blue Island's economic development projects during the planning stages. If workforce development strategies are not included in initial project plans, there will be missed opportunities to train and employ residents. The Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation (CSEDC), which is an arm of the South Suburban Mayors & Managers Association (SSMMA), has a Workforce Development Committee that can assist with efforts to incorporate workforce development strategies into Blue Island's COD and TOD projects, as well as other development projects. The CSEDC, in partnership with the Community Development Department, should identify the types of training needed for each project and agencies who could provide this specific training.

Additionally, it is very important to ensure that residents are well informed of the workforce development strategies associated with local development projects. They should be connected to related training programs, so they are able to take advantage of employment opportunities. The Community Development Department should hold community meetings to inform residents about the workforce development strategies associated with each upcoming development project.

Example: The City is planning to continue environmental clean-up and brownfield remediation at COD target sites. The Community Development Department has applied for funding through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Multi-purpose Pilot Grant in order to remediate two parcels at the former landfill in the Northeast COD site. This redevelopment presents an opportunity to train Blue Island residents in brownfield remediation, so they can participate in this work. OAI, Inc., located in Harvey, offers a brownfields remediation training program and is interested in training Blue Island residents. This is one example of how the City can work to connect residents with training that is directly tied to local development projects.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Economic Development Plan:** recommends that the City inform residents of education and training opportunities and identifies the importance of incorporating workforce development strategies into the City's economic development efforts.
- **Chicago Southland's Green TIME Zone:** cites the need to use publicly-funded workforce development system to match the region's workforce with green manufacturing and TDL opportunities.
- **GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan:** contains background information that has subsequently informed the workforce development strategy recommendations.

Implementation

The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, both residents and employers will be more connected to valuable workforce development services in the area and be able to participate in the workforce development strategies associated with each development project. Residents will be able to successfully obtain new employment opportunities that result from development in Blue Island and a skilled local workforce will encourage businesses to stay in or relocate to Blue Island.

Strategy #8 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
<p>Designate a staff person to inform residents and organizations about workforce development and social services resources.</p> <p>Timeline: <i>within 6 months to define position; 6-12 months to designate staff person</i></p>	<p>Community Relations Department</p>	<p>The City should designate a staff person who is responsible for informing residents about workforce development resources in the area, as well as social services, using a variety of communication strategies. Potential entities to assist with resource information sharing include: Senior Citizens Department, Blue Island Public Library, Salvation Army Crossgenerations, Metropolitan Family Services, religious institutions, Blue Island School District, SHSLC. The City should first identify the responsibilities and likely time commitments for this position, and then designate a staff person</p>
<p>Host bi-annual resource fairs to increase linkages between Southland workforce development organizations, social service organizations, and residents.</p> <p>Timeline: <i>6-12 months and beyond</i></p>	<p>Community Relations Department; Blue Island community organization as co-convenor</p>	<p>Plan and host resource fairs on a bi-annual basis so that residents can connect with workforce development and social services available to them in Blue Island and the surrounding communities.</p> <p>The City may want to coordinate with the following entities to assist with planning and/or to participate: Blue Island community organizations (e.g., Salvation Army Crossgenerations, Metropolitan Family Services, Blue Cap), SHSLC, SSMMA, Calumet Township, other surrounding municipalities, Oak Forest Illinois workNet Center, IDES, MVCC.</p>
<p>Use an existing Southland group, such as the SHSLC Workforce Development Committee, as a vehicle to connect residents and organizations with workforce development providers.</p> <p>Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i></p>	<p>SHSLC Workforce Development Committee</p>	<p>The SHSLC Workforce Development Committee should develop strategies to better connect Blue Island residents and organizations to workforce development providers in the area. This will increase residents' access to needed workforce development services and skills training. The Community Development Department should participate in this committee, and help to carry out strategies as appropriate. Blue Island social services organizations should play a similar role.</p>
<p>Incorporate specific workforce development strategies into each economic development project.</p> <p>Timeline: <i>6-12 months and beyond</i></p>	<p>Community Development Department, CSEDC</p>	<p>Incorporate workforce development strategies into each upcoming development project — including COD, housing rehabilitation, and others. Strategies should identify employment associated with each project, types of training needed, and agencies providing specific training. Inform residents about the workforce development strategies associated with each development project via community meetings. The lead role in this activity should be played by the newly designated staff person.</p>
<p>Educate employers about resources available through the public workforce system.</p> <p>Timeline: <i>12-18 months and beyond</i></p>	<p>Community Relations Department, Oak Forest Illinois workNet Center (MAXIMUS, Inc.)</p>	<p>Educate local businesses about employer resources available through the public workforce system, including OJT, customized training, and qualified job candidates. The City should coordinate with the closest WIA workNet Center to facilitate the information sessions. Other workforce development organizations to coordinate with include CAIC, CFLWAC, and OAI, Inc.</p>

Strategy #9

Improve historic preservation efforts

Blue Island's historic heritage has enabled it to be classified as a Preserve America Community. However, the City's historic architecture and urban character is inconsistently preserved in its Uptown District and historic residential neighborhoods. For example, Western Avenue displays a variety of architectural styles dating back to the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, however, some facades have been hidden behind vinyl siding and wooden boards while others have been destroyed and given way to blank concrete facades. The Plan recommends actions that will improve historic preservation efforts such as improving preservation enforcement and strengthening relationships with other agencies in order to effectively preserve the community's rich architectural heritage.

Benefits

Image and Identity Benefits

Well-preserved historical buildings and neighborhoods will enhance the City's image and identity. It will help the City establish a unique brand and help market it to the greater region in an effort to attract investment.

Economic Benefits

Maintaining and marketing historic buildings and neighborhoods will enable the City to attract a greater number of visitors and new residents. This in turn will create sustainable opportunities for retail and residential growth and hence revenue for the City. The historic buildings that comprise a majority of the Uptown District and Olde Western Avenue will play a significant role in its revitalization.

Detailed Strategy

Historic preservation is a unique opportunity that Blue Island should continue to leverage in order to attract growth and investment. The City's Historic Preservation Commission has worked towards maintaining the City's historic heritage over the years with limited success. Although certain policies are in place, enforcement has been inconsistent. To effectively promote its historic housing and commercial stock, the City needs to put into place a set of actions that are comprehensive in nature.

The recommended actions for this strategy can be classified into two categories; 1) policies and programs that support preservation; and 2) efforts to raise awareness.

Preservation Policies and Programs

The City should undertake a study to identify and create an inventory of historic properties in the community and classify them according to state and federal standards. A similar study was recently completed by the City of Berwyn for properties along Cermak Road and should be reviewed by Blue Island City staff and the Historic Planning Commission. This would enable prioritization and help the City focus its finite resources and funds on high-priority sites.

Olde Western Avenue and properties along it should be considered to be designated as a historic district, based on the findings of the historic buildings inventory study. This would allow owners of historic properties in the proposed district to seek county, state, and federal funding to repair and maintain their buildings.

The City's recently updated its Historic Preservation Ordinance to reflect current standards. The original ordinance created in 1981 provided inadequate and vague directions for preservation of historic properties. The updated document should be further enhanced with graphic and photographic representations to help readers interpret the intent of the guidelines within the ordinance for protection of historic properties while ensuring new additions are consistent with the historic character.

Building Awareness and Support

Education and marketing are two key methods to help community members realize the value of historic preservation and abide by adopted standards. The City should continue to support existing groups and look for ways to strengthen their abilities by assisting them in seeking out grants or other funding sources. For example, the City should continue to support the Blue Island Historical Society and its Blue Island Landmark Tour. Not only should the City support existing groups but also take the lead in forging and maintaining strong partnerships with all entities involved in historic preservation efforts at the local and regional level.

Examples of key local entities include the Historical Society, the Historic Preservation Commission and owners of historic structures. State and national entities include the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Landmarks Illinois, and National Parks Services. The City should continue to work with others, such as the Blue Island FORUM, Blue Island Historical Society, and the Historic Preservation Commission, to have the annual Cavalcade of Pride competition.

The City should work closely with the Historic Preservation Commission, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Uptown Business Association, and City Aldermen in educating property owners about the benefits of historic commercial and residential preservation. Quarterly workshops could be combined with Chamber events such as the business breakfast meetings. Case studies of communities that have successfully preserved their structures and the benefits they have enjoyed as a result would be beneficial for property owners. Part of the education process should also include the steps that must be followed to have structures designated as a landmark.

From a marketing perspective, the City should organize events and marketing materials that highlight these unique assets. Examples of such programs include:

- Historic canoeing and kayaking tours on the Calumet-Sag Channel
- Architectural tour of historic Western Avenue corridor, Olde Western Avenue, and Uptown
- Architectural tour of ‘Silk Stocking District’

In 2008, Blue Island received a Preserve America Grant aimed to develop a comprehensive cultural heritage marketing strategy. The outcome of the initiative was a branding and marketing strategy that is helping Blue Island position itself as one of the premier heritage destinations in the Chicago region. The City should seek additional grants through the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to build upon the 2008 effort by launching a re-energized historic marketing plan to capture the attention of the region.

In the longer term, The City should also construct signage at key gateways and stops along the Calumet-Sag Recreational Trail. Signs should include a combination of business signage (i.e., This Way to Uptown Blue Island) and historical signage. Historical Signage will educate visitors about the community and may entice them to exit the trail and walk or bike into the City of Blue Island to explore the Uptown area and historic districts.

Previous Plans and Studies that Inform Strategy Recommendations

- **Blue Island Reaches Next Crossroads:** contains recommendations to support preservation of historic properties within the Uptown District.

Implementation

Sustained historic preservation efforts are central to achieving a better quality environment in Blue Island. Given that there are state and federal resources available to fund historic preservation efforts, the City should have a clear short-term action plan to move towards implementation. The implementation actions below should take place over the next two years. At the end of this period, all actions and programs listed below should have been accomplished.

Strategy #9 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Conduct an educational meeting with business owners Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Chamber of Commerce and Industry	The Chamber of Commerce and Industry should discuss the need for historic preservation with business owners at their monthly business breakfast meeting. A series of meetings should be organized to explain the various aspects of historic preservation. Examples of successful façade revitalization projects should be shown at these meetings.
Collect and create photographic inventory of historic facades Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	Historic Preservation Commission/ Building and Zoning Department	A catalogue of historic buildings should be created containing ‘before’ and ‘after’ images. This inventory would assist officials in attracting attention from regional, state, and federal agencies and obtain funding. Additionally, it would also be useful for the City’s marketing efforts and restoration efforts moving forward
Create façade preservation flyer Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Building and Zoning Department	The flyer would contain design guidelines to help property owners understand simple ways to maintain their building facades and interiors. The flyer would also contain information on funding sources to help the business owner undertake improvements.
Seek funding to create inventory of historic buildings in Uptown District Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Historic Preservation Commission	The City should apply for funding to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to hire a consultant to conduct a detailed inventory of buildings in the Uptown District and their historical significance. Based on the findings, the City can apply for historic designation of properties at the state or national level.

Strategy #10

Improve organizational structure and implementation prioritization

As Blue Island's rich history and infrastructural assets make the community prime for redevelopment, a great number of planning initiatives are underway at any given time. This strategy will provide administrative and logistical direction to assist entities responsible for heading up these initiatives. Unlike the other strategies presented in the Plan, this strategy focuses on internal changes in the City's administration. The Plan recommends the City consider implementing these actions in order to improve operational efficiency of City departments, clarify roles and responsibilities for individuals within various departments, and increase accountability for implementation of adopted policies and approved projects.

Benefits

Internal Benefits

- Increased efficiency in development review
- Improved efficiency in grant applications and administration
- Greater focus on code enforcement
- Broader knowledge base of modern planning tools and techniques
- More focused and specific "to do" lists
- Greater communication between staff, departments, and elected and appointed officials

External Benefits

- More projects are completed with greater efficiency
- Improved communication between the City and the public in terms of current and planned projects
- Improved code enforcement will lead to more aesthetic properties and areas
- Improved land use and development decisions
- Developers will see faster and more efficient development reviews
- Current businesses will be supported and new businesses will be attracted

Detailed Strategy

The City of Blue Island has excelled at capitalizing upon planning and funding opportunities which span a wide range of issues. From recreational trailways to commercial corridors to freight-related redevelopment, the City staff and its partners continue to focus on a variety of projects to improve Blue Island. This strategy intends to address the main constraints of executing each of these projects within the normal limitations of municipal budgets and of staff capacity.

The following recommended actions can be categorized into two groups: internal organizational restructuring and strategic programming, which involves administrative changes at the municipal level; and externally focused activities, meant to involve residents, businesses, and outside groups in the City's implementation of the Plan.

Internal Actions

Actions in this category include administrative changes within the City staff, continuing education for elected and appointed officials, utilizing the community's guiding documents like the comprehensive plan, and aligning planning activities with municipal budgeting.

The City of Blue Island has dedicated staff members to address the community's primary challenges while coordinating with partners and keeping the public involved. However, the limited capacity of its smaller planning department — which must both administer current projects as well as secure funding for new projects — creates an untenable demand on staff. There is a significant gap in the number of tasks that can be realistically administered by municipal staff members and the number currently assigned to City of Blue Island staff. In order to address this gap, the City should hire new staff to assist in planning functions. Recommended positions include a new grants coordinator, a code enforcement officer, and a project manager. The grants coordinator would reduce the pressure from administration of time-sensitive grant applications on current planning staff, allowing them to focus on planning projects and development review. The code enforcement officer would provide the much-needed oversight of building and street codes on the ground, helping policies are implemented as per required standards. The project manager could assist the department by focusing on the daily management of a particular planning initiative, much like the Brownfields Coordinator has done for the COD sites. Funding for any new staff positions may need to come from external sources due to municipal budgetary limitations.

The Community Development Department and Mayor’s Office should work together to identify educational and training opportunities that would benefit elected and appointed officials in making land use and development decisions. The City should contact other agencies and organizations that could provide presentations, reading materials, and follow-up training. Possible agencies include the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Metropolitan Planning Council, and the Illinois Chapter of the American Planning Association.

The Community Development Department should also lead the efforts in ensuring that other departments, elected and appointed officials, developers, and residents use the comprehensive plan on a daily basis in their programming and departmental activities. To start with, the Community Development Department should create an annual work plan for its activities that is consistent with the recommendations of the Plan. An annual update should be given to the City Council regarding any projects or strategies that have been undertaken or completed. The City should also celebrate its successes when completing a strategy, ensuring that the community and the greater region are made aware of Blue Island’s success.

On the other hand, the City’s focus on implementing the Plan will mean that there are other activities that City staff does not take on. Beginning new planning initiatives that are not mentioned within the Plan is not recommended for the first few years after the Plan’s adoption. The City should avoid diverging from the implementation of the Plan due to new planning opportunities, and should instead focus on advancing the many strategies described in the Plan.

The City should reference this comprehensive plan’s strategies during their annual appropriations process. Linking these strategies with the annual appropriations — as well as with longer-term Capital Improvements Program (CIP) planning — will help to ensure that the City completes the recommended actions and is programming its public dollars in a strategic manner. This will also assist the City in focusing on a manageable set of shorter-term steps before moving on to other strategies or projects.

The following actions form the basis of an annual work plan for City staff. The Community Development Department should spend time on the following types of actions, revisiting these recommended activities on an annual basis:

Recommended Actions

- **Producing materials**
(required to move forward strategies 1, 2, 3, 4, 9)
- **Coordinating with businesses**
(required to move forward strategies 1, 3, 4, 9)
- **Assistance with further studies to be undertaken by consultants or non-profits (which could require grant writing to apply for funding to undertake studies)**
(required to move forward strategies 1, 5, 6, 7, 9)
- **Participating in subregional coordination**
(required to move forward strategies 3, 4, 6)

External Actions

External actions include greater involvement in the City’s planning work by other key stakeholders in Blue Island, improved channels of communication between the City and community, and the proactive and strategic engagement of external groups, including nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and other government agencies.

In addition to bolstering daily functions of the City’s community development staff, other key stakeholders should take on a more involved role in planning activities. For instance, the City should work with the Blue Island Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry to identify challenges that the Chamber faces in supporting and attracting businesses into the community. While the Chamber provides useful programming and does have a strong, working relationship with the City, its functions could be strengthened with more support. The Chamber provides a forum for reengaging larger industrial entities, and the City should take advantage of the business-oriented organization by touting new services to potential future manufacturing and logistics companies that could locate on COD sites. As several strategies earlier in the Plan have noted, involvement of the City’s businesses is crucial to accomplishing many of its goals.

The City should also continue to strengthen its communication with residents and other stakeholders in the community, primarily through aldermanic offices. Blue Island has a wealth of civic-minded and active individuals who are dedicated to the City and want to see its full revitalization. By emphasizing the importance for aldermen to formally connect with the residents in their wards, a broader range of stakeholders can be engaged (on a volunteer basis) in planning initiatives that affect their neighborhoods and families.

Strategy #10 Implementation matrix

ACTION AND TIMELINE	LEAD IMPLEMENTERS	DETAILS
Launch marketing and coordination efforts with the Chamber. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Community Relations, Chamber of Commerce and Industry	In an effort to better serve not only retail businesses but also industrial businesses (which are often larger employers), the City should work with the Chamber to develop marketing programming aimed to make Blue Island more attractive to those types of companies. Knowing that there is a resource and support network for industrial businesses will help to attract new ones, which the City would benefit from.
Approach potential partners with the Plan in hand to identify implementers. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Community Development Department	The Plan addresses a variety of topics that will be of great interest to organizations that Blue Island has worked with before — RTA, MPC, CNT, Chicago Wilderness, and many others. The City should meet with these groups, review the Plan's recommendations, and ask each group to identify at least one project that they could contribute to.
Plan Commissioner trainings Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	CMAP, Illinois chapter of the American Planning Association	Throughout the region, CMAP holds multi-session trainings designed to teach and refresh volunteer planning commissioners about the importance of their work and the breadth of their responsibilities. Blue Island's various commissioners could benefit from these half-day sessions, held on weekends, which detail the elements of comprehensive planning in Illinois in a hands-on format.
Community Development Department one-year work plan. Timeline: <i>within 6 months</i>	Community Development Department	The Community Development Department should form a work plan for itself on an annual basis, which will outline the different tiers of their work actions for the year. These will include the production of educational materials, engagement with the business community, performance of further technical studies, and participation in subregional coordination.
Secure grant funding to hire additional planning staff, specifically a grants coordinator. Timeline: <i>within 12 months</i>	Mayor's Office	The additional staff would be assigned to the Community Development Department, providing additional capacity for handling grant applications or administering specific projects. This would assist the current staff by allowing them to focus on project implementation, and this additional staff capacity would help leverage the prior investment from technical assistance providers like MPC, CNT, and others. Local foundations and philanthropic groups like the Chicago Community Trust are good places to start when seeking external funding for new positions.
Establish cross-departmental meetings to align efforts and ensure the full utilization of planning documents. Timeline: <i>6-12 months</i>	City Departments	Initiating regularly scheduled check-in meetings amongst various City departments would provide a forum for discussing how each department has been able to use the comprehensive plan to guide decision-making. The departments, such as Public Works, can also discuss challenges and identify areas where multiple departments should be involved in a planning effort together. This process can build from the aforementioned Community Development Department's annual work plan.
Aldermanic offices to establish issue-based constituent groups. Timeline: <i>12-18 months</i>	Elected officials	The aldermen in the City should formally engage constituents in groups to harness residents' interest in and passion for certain planning issues. By having more formal documentation of the concerns of their ward, the alderman can have clearer requests during the appropriations process.
Align City budgeting with the adopted strategies of the comprehensive plan. Timeline: <i>18-24 months</i>	Elected officials, Mayor's office	This should be an ongoing action for the life of this comprehensive plan (even as its strategies are completed and the plan is updated). However within the first two years of the plan's adoption, the alignment of City funding priorities to plan strategies will directly enable implementation.

This strengthened communication could also help the aldermen to identify concrete community needs and to formulate related budgetary requests, which would consequently improve the City's appropriations process.

Lastly, building from its successful history of partnering with external entities to solve community problems, the City of Blue Island should continue to engage nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and other governmental agencies in its planning work. The involvement and technical expertise of groups like the Center for Neighborhood Technology has been vastly important to understanding the challenges that Blue Island faces, and the City should continue to proactively engage such groups, guiding them to

focus efforts on implementing the comprehensive plan. Additionally, these external groups that work with Blue Island in the future should take it upon themselves to read this comprehensive plan and strategically develop their planning endeavors around this plan's recommendations.

CMAP is committed to remaining engaged for two years after the adoption of this comprehensive plan, both to help monitor the progress of implementation, and to push recommended activities as necessary.



Image courtesy of Andrew Collings.

Chapter 5

Long-Term Projects Supported by Comprehensive Plan

The Plan focuses on short-term priorities for Blue Island to focus its efforts and resources. However, elected and appointed officials should be cognizant of long-term projects, programs, and policies that the City should support and benefit from. Many of these activities are led by other groups, rather than the City, so the City should play a role of supporting them rather than leading them.

Support major transportation projects

Two major transportation projects — the CREATE program and the I-294 / I-57 interchange — will have significant positive impacts on Blue Island.

CREATE is a partnership program between U.S. DOT, the State of Illinois, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and the nation's freight railroads. The program is funding a number of critical improvements aimed at increasing efficiency of the region's commuter and freight rail infrastructure. The CREATE program has funded 5 projects in Blue Island which are in various stages of implementation.

They include:

- 1. Construction of third main line along Indiana Harbor Belt. The project was completed in November 2011 and provides additional capacity for trains passing through the area.**
- 2. Signalization of Blue Island yard running tracks. The project is under construction and will increase the speed and capacity of freight trains, reducing delays on Metra commuter lines.**
- 3. Elimination of at-grade crossing at Western Avenue and CSX railroad tracks. The project is awaiting funding and will reduce roadway congestion and improve safety at the crossing upon implementation.**
- 4. Installation of crossovers between CSX and CN and new signals at Blue Island junction. The project is under construction and will allow even distribution of freight traffic throughout the region.**
- 5. Installation of bi-directional computerized Traffic Control System on CSX rail line along Western Avenue corridor. The project is under construction and will add capacity and increase speed for freight trains travelling through the region.**

The I-294/I-57 Interchange will be highly beneficial to Blue Island's industrial growth. The project is being undertaken jointly by the Illinois Tollway and IDOT, and construction activity for some supporting improvements is already underway. When completed, the interchange will relieve congestion on local routes that currently accommodate the interstate to interstate linkage. This will in turn reduce unnecessary travel for vehicles and improve travel times, improving efficiency of travel. For Blue Island, the improved highway system will allow for greater COD opportunities at the southern and western ends of the community due to improved truck connections.

The City should continue to support these projects, including planning for their impacts as well as providing political support for their continued prioritization.

Coordinate investments with neighboring communities

Communities nationwide are realizing the benefits of working with their neighbors to resolve common issues that cross municipal borders, e.g., housing, transportation, transit, infrastructure, and workforce development. Blue Island has successfully worked with other south suburban communities on housing and transit improvement projects in the past and should continue to reach across its borders to work on initiatives such as:

- Calumet-Sag Regional trail
- Calumet-Sag Channel cleanup
- Robbins Metra Station Area Redevelopment
- Workforce Development



Community Visioning Charrette at the MetroSouth Medical Center

Support reforms to Cook County tax structure

Cook County is the only county in the State that assesses commercial and industrial properties at a higher percentage of market value than residential properties. The most significant impact of this arrangement in Cook County is to shift the property tax burden toward commercial and industrial businesses. The disparity in this taxation across counties in the Chicago region has partially contributed to businesses relocating out of Blue Island and into other counties. Furthermore, it impedes broader development goals for the region as a whole, as some businesses choose to relocate completely outside of the Chicago region or the State to evade the higher tax burden.

The City of Blue Island should participate in efforts to reform the residential and commercial tax structure in Cook County. This includes supporting policies that phase out the discontinuity in taxation across the region over a period of years, allowing residential taxpayers in Cook County to adjust to their increased burden over time, as they become aligned with the residential taxation found in other counties across the region. Supporting reforms to Cook County's classification system may help boost economic development in the county by encouraging businesses to locate on the abundance of vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial property in communities like Blue Island. This, in turn, could improve the economic vitality of the entire region.

Improve transit service

The City of Blue Island should continue coordination with RTA, Pace, and Metra for improving transit service in the City and the region. As development and economic activity increases within the Uptown District, Vermont Metra station area, and Western Avenue corridor, there will be an increased demand for transit service connecting Blue Island residents and workforce to employment areas in the City and greater Chicagoland region.

Along Western Avenue, the City should coordinate improved bus service and amenities with Pace as development occurs at the commercial nodes and within the Uptown District. Physical improvements over time could include provision of bus shelters, informational signage for commuters, and bike racks while programming improvements could include improved service frequency and modified bus routes. The City should also continue to coordinate with Metra as development occurs around the Vermont Street Metra station to identify opportunities for programmed improvements including parking relocation, station building enhancements, and platform improvements, e.g. the Vermont Street station is currently identified for a \$3.15 million rehabilitation under the State of Illinois Bond Program.



Retail stores in Uptown



Pace transit service adjacent to Eisenhower High School

Support green initiatives

Blue Island has actively engaged in a variety of green initiatives in the past and should continue to do so.

As COD opportunities attract new industrial businesses and allow existing businesses to expand within the community, the City should work with property owners to pursue certification through the LEED New Construction (LEED-NC), LEED Existing Buildings (LEED-EB), and LEED Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) rating system. Similarly, the Vermont Street station area redevelopment is an excellent candidate for pursuing certification through the LEED-ND rating system. To demonstrate the importance of green building design, the City should work with non-profit groups to help incorporate energy efficiency and water conservation systems within its municipal facilities as well as funds become available.

Water and energy conservation efforts such as water harvesting and renewable energy should be encouraged as new development occurs in the Metra station area and Uptown District. Examples of energy efficient initiatives within strategic areas include solar panels to operate street lights and vehicle charging stations for electric vehicles.

From a community health standpoint, the City should continue to work with non-profit groups and regional entities to implement community gardens in City owned parcels that include Park District facilities or underutilized or vacant parcels under City ownership. Over time, successful completion of green initiatives would improve the quality of life for residents while making Blue Island an attractive destination for businesses and visitors.



Green roof on an industrial building

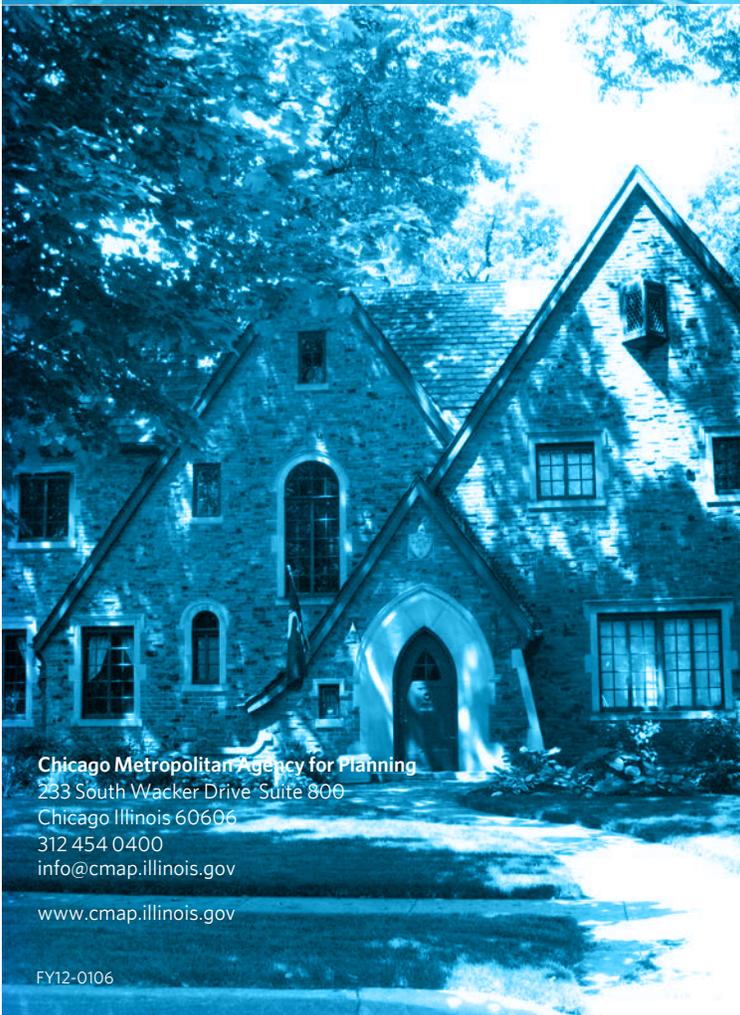
Figure 22. Map of CREATE projects





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FY12-0106

