Acknowledgements

This Existing Conditions Report for the Pilsen and Little Village Land Use Plan is the cumulative effort of many individuals, including residents and stakeholders who provided time and expertise to identify community values and priorities, planning issues, and policies to help successfully complete this report. The project partners would like to thank all of the people who worked with the project team to identify and address the specific challenges and opportunities that will impact the future of Pilsen and Little Village.

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About CMAP

CMAP is the region’s official comprehensive planning organization. Its GO TO 2040 planning campaign is helping the region’s seven counties and 284 communities to implement strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality of life issues. See www.cmap.illinois.gov for more information.

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The City of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development (DPD), in partnership with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), is developing a Land Use Plan for Pilsen and Little Village. This planning initiative, which will involve the community in the process of plan development and build on past and current planning efforts, will outline a vision for future land use and the policies and strategies that will help accomplish that vision.

Purpose of the Existing Conditions Report

The first step to developing an effective plan is to establish an accurate understanding of existing issues and opportunities. The Existing Conditions Report, which represents approximately five months of research, analysis, and public outreach activities, provides an overview of the current conditions in Pilsen and Little Village and serves as the foundation for the Land Use Plan. The report is organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Summary of Previous Plans and Studies
- Chapter 3: Community Outreach and Engagement
- Chapter 4: Land Use and Development
- Chapter 5: Population and Housing
- Chapter 6: Economic Development
- Chapter 7: Transportation
- Appendix

Purpose of the Land Use Plan

Pilsen and Little Village are thriving urban neighborhoods located in Chicago’s Lower West Side and South Lawndale community areas, respectively. While each neighborhood has its own unique history, culture, assets, and challenges, the two areas also share many similarities. Both play important roles as vibrant centers of Mexican life in Chicago and the region. Both serve as important job centers and have a significant portion of their land designated for industrial activity. And both share similar goals for the future. Among others, these include: improving and expanding access to parks and open space; expanding housing options; and promoting sustainable business and retail development.

Pilsen and Little Village each have strong networks of community-based organizations with long histories of working on these goals. In developing the Pilsen-Little Village Land Use Plan, DPD seeks to build upon each community’s valuable assets, as well as past and current planning efforts, in order to complement and continue this work. The Plan will explore issues and opportunities for the key land uses found in both communities, including parks and open spaces, residential, commercial, and industrial uses. It will establish goals, identify and prioritize opportunity areas, and outline strategies to achieve these goals. The Plan will be presented to the Chicago Plan Commission for adoption and will help guide decisions and public and private investments for years to come.
This chapter describes the existing land use and development conditions in Pilsen and Little Village with a focus on the types of uses and zoning. The information in this section has been obtained from the City of Chicago, CMAP’s 2010 Land Use Inventory, and based upon a visual assessment of existing conditions.

Key Findings

- Both Pilsen and Little Village are greatly lacking in open space. Whereas GO TO 2040 recommends 4 acres of open space per 1,000 residents and CitySpace recommends a minimum of 2 acres per 1,000 residents, Pilsen and Little Village have less than 1 acre and .32 acres per 1,000 residents, respectively. While opportunities for new large-scale open spaces are limited, there are opportunities to increase smaller and mid-sized open spaces by way of pocket parks, sharing agreements with schools, redevelopment of the decommissioned coal plants, and trails such as the proposed Sangamon and BNSF Paseos.

- Industrial uses are the leading land uses in Pilsen and Little Village, occupying more acreage than any other use. While both industrial corridors are strong in smaller-scale manufacturing and warehousing operations—General Industrial uses account for 33 percent and 45 percent in Pilsen and Little Village, respectively—larger-scale warehousing/distribution and intermodal transfer uses are particularly strong in Pilsen, where they account for more than 20 percent of all industrial uses. Industrial uses in both community areas are protected by industrial corridor designations. Additionally, nearly 1,000 acres of Pilsen are part of a City-designated Planned Manufacturing District (PMD), which provides additional protections.

- The Fisk and Crawford coal power plants, both closed in 2012, occupy about 115 acres in Pilsen and Little Village. The Fisk and Crawford Task Force has established guiding principles for the redevelopment of both sites, recommending advanced, sustainable light manufacturing that would train and employ residents of the local community. The Task Force also recommends that the sites be used to enhance public access to the Sanitary and Ship Canal.

- Residential zoning designations in both neighborhoods allow for two flat and three flat homes, but higher density is generally not permitted. Given that Pilsen and Little Village are built-out communities, current zoning limits the amount of new residential use or population that each neighborhood can accommodate.

- The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Pilsen Historic District, which includes nearly all of the residential and mixed-use areas in Pilsen north of the industrial corridor, does not offer alteration or demolition protection, but does offer financial benefits for qualified building rehabilitations, such as eligibility for Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits and the State Property Tax Assessment Freeze Program. Areas in both Pilsen and Little Village where zoning changes are being considered should be resurveyed to determine if any buildings should be protected with city landmark designation, individually or within a potential district.

- The City of Chicago’s TOD Ordinance creates potential for reduced parking, and, in a handful of cases, higher density redevelopment around transit stations in the study area.
Population and Housing

The population and housing chapter describes the key characteristics of Pilsen and Little Village's resident population and housing stock, as well as projections regarding the areas' demographic and housing profile in 2040. The information in this chapter was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employment-Household Dynamics (LEHD), and CMAP.

Key Findings

- Pilsen, and particularly Little Village, are very high density communities, with many blocks having densities of 25,000 to 50,000 people per square mile. In Little Village, this density is partially due to the large average household size—3.79 as compared to 2.92 in Pilsen and 2.52 in Chicago. Both communities' density is especially striking considering that housing stock in the study area tends to be low-rise, with two to four unit buildings being most prevalent.

- Between 2000 and 2010 Pilsen and Little Village experienced significant population loss, losing 19 percent and 13 percent of their population, respectively. The majority of this population loss was among Latino residents. In both communities, a more significant factor in the population loss was the decline in household size, rather than the loss of households.

- Both Pilsen and Little Village are young communities; approximately a third of their population is under 19 years. The high proportion of children and youth makes the lack of open space in the communities particularly challenging.

- Both Pilsen and Little Village struggle with low education achievement rates and higher unemployment as compared to the city, but Little Village faces greater challenges in these areas. Only 45.2 percent of Little Village residents have a high school diploma or higher, and only 5.8 percent of Little Village residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

- Additionally, while the unemployment rate in both communities is 15.8 percent—three percentage points higher than the city rate—Pilsen has a high labor force participation rate (74 percent), while only 55 percent of Little Village's population 16 and over is in the labor force.

- The manufacturing industry is the dominant employer of Little Village residents, while in Pilsen employment is more diverse; manufacturing, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and educational services all employ a significant number of Pilsen residents.

- The housing stock in both Pilsen and Little Village is significantly older than the City's, with over 70 percent of the housing stock built before 1940, and a median housing age of 1903 and 1908, respectively. Both communities are majority renter-occupied—76 percent and 67 percent in Pilsen and Little Village, respectively—and residents have cited the poor building condition of buildings and the need for costly rehabilitation, combined with low median incomes, as barriers to homeownership.

- At least 50 percent of owners and renters in both Pilsen and Little Village are cost-burdened (spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs), and at least 25 percent are severely cost-burdened (spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing costs). Since 2000, the share of cost-burdened owners and renters has increased in both neighborhoods as well as in the City, but Pilsen had the highest rate of increase among owners, and Little Village had the highest rate of increase among renters.

- Both Pilsen and Little Village are projected to grow over the next several decades. According to CMAP's projections, Pilsen could gain approximately 2,200 households and Little Village could gain approximately 3,000 households by 2040. In both neighborhoods, low-to-moderate income seniors are expected to drive the rental and owner housing markets.
This chapter examines key economic and market indicators in Pilsen and Little Village such as employment trends, dominant industries, and commercial property trends. Various data resources were utilized and analyzed in assembling this assessment including the Illinois Department of Employment Security, U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employment-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Illinois Department of Revenue, and CoStar Data.

Key Findings

- Despite the economic downturn of the last decade, private sector job growth between 2002 and 2012 was strong in both Pilsen and Little Village. Growth was particularly strong in Pilsen, where there was a 20 percent increase in private sector employment.

- Pilsen and Little Village have similar industry strengths, with some key differences:
  - Health care and social assistance is strong in both communities, but is particularly dominant in Pilsen, where it employs over 24 percent of all private sector workers. Conversely, manufacturing is an important employer in both communities, but is stronger in Little Village, where it employs close to 20 percent of workers.
  - The biggest differences between the communities are in wholesale trade—which employs over 18 percent of Pilsen workers, but just about 3 percent of Little Village workers—and transportation and warehousing—which employs over 15 percent of workers in Little Village, but just 5 percent in Pilsen.

- Industry employment data trends highlight particular strengths and vulnerabilities in both communities:
  - Manufacturing in both communities, as in Chicago, experienced sustained and significant losses between 2002 and 2010. Counter to citywide trends, however, there was a manufacturing resurgence in both Pilsen and Little Village, with the industry growing by more than 20 percent between 2010 and 2011.
  - Health care and social assistance is a particular strength in Pilsen. The industry experienced small but steady growth since 2004, and significant growth since 2010, even amid a citywide decline.
  - While the information industry is not currently a major employer in Pilsen, it is a growing industry in the community and experienced dramatic growth of 180 percent between 2002 and 2011, despite losses and fluctuation early in the decade and contrary to citywide trends.
  - Transportation and warehousing has become Little Village’s fastest growing industry, with a 580 percent increase in employment between 2002 and 2011.

- Of the four TIF districts in the study area, all but the Kostner Avenue district are made up primarily of lands zoned for industrial activity.
Transportation

This section provides information on the existing transportation system within Pilsen and Little Village with a focus on streets, public transit, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The information in this section was obtained from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Metra, Pace, and based upon a visual assessment of existing conditions.

Key Findings

- While the city’s uniform grid network is well preserved throughout the residential and commercial portions of Pilsen and Little Village, the street grid is interrupted by the Pilsen and Little Village Industrial Corridors, as well as the Cook County Jail’s 96-acre facility. This limits connectivity throughout both neighborhoods and restricts access to the river. Other factors—such as poor condition of sidewalks, few bicycle lanes, unpleasant and unsafe conditions of the viaducts, high-traffic corridors such as Western Avenue, and the presence of street gangs—also limit connectivity within and between both communities. These challenges make it difficult for residents to access facilities and amenities, such as open spaces, in other parts of their communities and in other neighborhoods.

- Despite the high number of Pilsen and Little Village residents employed in industries that are robustly represented in the communities—namely manufacturing and health care and social assistance, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6—only about 700 residents from each community both live and work in their community. On a percentage basis, this comes out to just 5 percent and 6 percent of Pilsen and Little Village workers, respectively, or just 7 percent and 5 percent of employed Pilsen and Little Village residents, respectively.

- A greater percentage of Pilsen residents working outside the community work elsewhere in Chicago (61 percent), as compared to Little Village (51 percent). Conversely, a greater number of Little Village residents working outside the community commute out of the city, with suburban Cook County being the most popular destination and drawing 25 percent of the community’s employed residents.

- A significant percentage of Pilsen and Little Village workers commute in from other parts of Chicago—50 percent and 43 percent, respectively—and approximately a quarter commute in from suburban Cook County. Chicago neighborhoods and suburban communities south and southwest of Pilsen and Little Village are the most common origins for workers.

- While a similar percentage of Pilsen and Little Village residents drive alone to work (42 percent and 49 percent, respectively), a far greater percentage of Pilsen resident use public transit or active transportation (29 percent and 12.7 percent, respectively), as compared to Little Village residents (16 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Conversely, a far greater number of Little Village residents carpool (26 percent) as compared to Pilsen residents (16 percent). Little Village’s high rates of carpooling and low rates of public transit and active transportation suggest both transit access issues and a mismatch between employment locations of Little Village residents and the transit network’s reach.