Community-Wide Workshops

A community-wide workshop was held in Pilsen on November 18, 2013 at Dvorak Park and in Little Village on November 19, 2013 at Little Village Academy. The topics covered in the workshops included ideas for improving parks, open space, stormwater management, green infrastructure, and recreational walking and biking routes in the two communities. At both workshops, staff from the City of Chicago, CMAP, PNCC (in Pilsen), and Enlace (in Little Village) presented on the goals and timeframe of the project. The workshop attendees had the opportunity to ask the project team questions about the planning process before engaging in smaller group discussions.

During the second half of the workshops, attendees divided into smaller groups for breakout sessions facilitated by a representative of the project team, and/or community stakeholders. These smaller group discussions enabled participants to delve into the different topic areas and share their thoughts and goals in a smaller, more discussion-based setting. Both workshops were conducted in English with simultaneous Spanish interpretation. The input received at both of the community-wide workshops was recorded illustratively on maps.

Pilsen Community-Wide Workshop

Participants in the Pilsen workshop had the opportunity to participate in two breakout sessions, with each session offering three different discussion topics: the Sangamon Paseo, Western Avenue, and access to natural areas at the river.

Sangamon Paseo

The facilitator kicked off the table discussion by asking participants to think about the potential physical environment and appearance of the Sangamon Paseo. The majority of participants liked the idea of developing the Sangamon Paseo to be multi-use, equipped with bicycle paths and accessible walkways to improve safety and promote healthy lives for children, senior citizens, and families. Participants also liked the idea of incorporating the community's wide-ranging heritage through recreational activities such as cultural music and movies. Many participants addressed the need for better connections throughout the community and to the Sangamon Paseo and nearby schools. Generally, participants embraced the idea of stormwater landscapes for design and educational purposes. There were varying comments regarding the inclusion of community gardens. Some participants felt gardens should not dominate the Paseo, and preferred ornamental gardens to edible gardens. Others wanted edible gardens, so children are more in touch with where their food comes from.

Western Avenue

Participants were asked to think about opportunities for improving or expanding access to parks and open space along Western Avenue. A few key ideas were raised regarding the underutilization of existing open spaces. Participants identified the private ownership of open spaces as a barrier, as well as the difficulty of accessing open spaces due to a lack of signage and safety concerns with fast moving traffic. Adding to these safety concerns, participants expressed a need for improved lighting and beautification projects along the avenue and under viaducts to improve pedestrian safety. Participants also highlighted the concentration of several educational and institutional uses along Western, which draw many youth, and expressed the need for improved connections between these uses, as well as interest in developing the area between the institutions and railroad as public, open space. Several participants specified an interest in improve connectivity between Pilsen and Little Village via Western Avenue.

Access to Natural Areas at the River

A separate table discussion was conducted regarding access to natural areas at the river. When discussing Park 530, also known as Richard J.
Daley Park, participants expressed a need for better signage and easier connectivity to the park, which is hard to reach in its location at Western Avenue, under I-55. More specifically, participants would like to see water taxi services and bicycle access improved over the bridge. Currently, the park is mainly utilized by motorized boats, but could attract more visitors by providing fishing activities. Overall, workshop attendees believe green space is necessary for health and recreation and would like to see the physical appearance of parks and open spaces enhanced.

**Little Village Community-Wide Workshop**

Participants in the Little Village, attendees had the opportunity to participate in two breakout sessions, with each session offering three different discussion topics: community managed open space, recreational trails, and access to natural areas at the river.

**Community Managed Open Space**

Participants were primarily interested in understanding how City-owned vacant lots in the community could be developed to provide much needed green, open space. There was strong interest in using these lots to provide more active and better-maintained open space options, such as areas for sports, community gardens, and other educational and recreational activities for youth and other residents. Participants expressed that stormwater landscapes should also be incorporated into these spaces, if possible. Some participants raised the idea of establishing plazas in vacant lots for the community to gather, but were unclear as to who would be responsible for maintaining these spaces. Participants also highlighted the need to improve recreational areas on school grounds, particularly by reducing concrete areas and increasing permeable space.

**Recreational Trails**

Participants were asked to discuss opportunities for recreational trail connections in the community, including the potential for a Paseo along the unused BNSF rail tracks. Many participants want to provide a sense of history of place to the trails by incorporating its tie to the surrounding industries and including signage that reflects this history. A suggestion was made to apply strategies and experienced gained from developing the 606 Trail. There were some concerns regarding contamination and remediation. Attendees also identified stormwater management as an issue that needs to be addressed. Beyond the Paseo, participants also expressed interest in improved bicycle and pedestrian connections to the CTA Pink Line stations along Cermak, as well as improved east-west connections within Little Village. Similar to Pilsen, participants were also interested in improving connections between Pilsen and Little Village and to other surrounding neighborhoods via Western Avenue and other major roads.

**Access to natural areas at the river**

Participants were asked to share their thoughts about access to natural areas at the river and connectivity between Celotex Park and the Collateral Channel. The majority of participants were open to the idea of making use of these natural areas and providing opportunities to engage youth in developing the open spaces. There were concerns about contamination amongst the participants. As noted in the Pilsen workshop, Park 530 would significantly benefit from better signage and pedestrian access. Most participants had never been to the park, and many were unaware it existed.
Little Village Community Feedback
- Open Space -

Types of Projects to Investigate:
- Open Space
- Streets for Potential Bike/Ped Enhancements
- Ped/Bike Connector
- Enhance Usability

Legend:
- School Grounds
- Parks
- Industrial Corridors
- Community Areas
- School Gardens (Openlands)
- Community Gardens (Neighborhoods)
Pilsen Community Feedback - Open Space -

Types of Projects to Investigate:
- Open Space
- Streets for Potential Bike/Ped Enhancements
- Ped/Bike Connector
- Enhance Usability