

Chicago's Chinatown 'An Unlikely Boom'

By [DNAinfo Staff](#) | February 24, 2016 10:48am



Chicago's Chinatown population grew by 26 percent between 2000 and 2010, with 65 percent of its residents foreign-born and nearly 10 percent arriving in the last three years. [View Full Caption](#)

CHINATOWN — Many Chinatowns across the country have been wiped out for a variety of reasons: Detroit, New Orleans, St. Louis. Washington's is disappearing quickly.

Not Chicago's though.

"Gentrification and changing cultural norms have all but killed off the traditional urban American Chinatown. Immigrants no longer pour into the Chinatowns in New York City and San Francisco the way they once did," writes Anna Clark.

"But they still head to Chicago, home to one of the only Chinatowns in the country that is still growing with recent immigrants," says Clark in *Next City*, a unique, non-profit site that tracks urban issues.

Chicago's Chinatown gets the spotlight treatment in a story headlined "The Unlikely Boom of Chinatown." In it, Clark notes that the area's population grew by 26 percent between 2000 and 2010, with 65 percent of its residents foreign-born and nearly 10 percent arriving in the last three years.

Clark gives credit to the [Chinatown Community Vision Plan](#), a 20-to-30-year roadmap for the area's future, a draft of which was unveiled in 2014. The Chicago Metropolitan Planning Agency's Stephen Ostrander, who worked on the plan, [told DNAinfo at the time](#) that the document would help obtaining government funding.

Among the highlights of the plan:

- Chinatown residents indicated they are unhappy with the quality of public education at the high school level, so residents should examine its options for bringing new programs — or even a new high school — to the community.
- The median age in Chinatown is higher than most other Chicago communities, yet there remains an influx of younger immigrants. The community should aim to provide new housing options and infrastructure for all ages in an effort to be more "age-friendly."
- Connecting "Old Chinatown," defined as Wentworth Avenue and areas south of Cermak Road, and "New Chinatown," defined roughly as the areas north of Archer Avenue, remains a major community concern, particularly when it comes to sustaining business in the older part of the neighborhood.

- There are pockets of land in and around Chinatown that could be developed, notably in the areas just east of Wentworth Avenue and the 60 acres of riverside vacant land north of the neighborhood.
- In addition to straightening out Wentworth Avenue and connecting the neighborhood to the Loop with the Wells-Wentworth connector, the city's urban planners should take a look at untangling the nearby Cermak Road, Archer Avenue and Princeton Avenue intersection.

The Chinese are the fastest-growing immigrant group in Chicago, and the city's third largest overall.

Chinatown has its issues, though, Clark says.

"Chinatown's challenges run the gamut from routine urban concerns about litter to deeper issues that come when a community speaks a different language than its representative government. Most of the neighborhood's residents speak Chinese at home, and about three-quarters say they are not comfortable with their English skills. Recently, high rates of robbery and car break-ins have led to fewer people out at night," she writes.