

A new initiative wants to make Chicago's rivers "odor-free" by 2040

The three rivers that run through Chicago—the Calumet River, Chicago River and Des Plaines River—are enjoyed by countless residents, but the bodies of water have often been neglected and mistreated. While the Chicago River is great for water taxis, boat tours and the occasional kayak trip, it's not exactly the ideal place to go for a swim after a meal on the Riverwalk. ["Our Great Rivers"](#), a new initiative that's supported by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, is seeking to improve the city's waterways and make them more accessible to residents in the coming decades.

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The "Our Great Rivers" report gauges the perception of Chicago's rivers, formed in collaboration with groups like Friends of the Chicago River and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning as well as thousands of Chicago residents who are current or prospective users of the city's rivers. The report identifies five key ways in which the city's waterways can be improved, including better access, increased recreational opportunities, improved water quality, an increase in riverfront businesses and more job opportunities along the rivers.

Most notably, "Our Great Rivers" sets goals and benchmarks for Chicago's waterways in the coming decades, some of which seem fairly ambitious. By 2020, the report anticipates lakefront events and activities (including mobile parks on barges) and a water quality plan for all of the city's rivers. By 2030, the report calls for a continuous riverfront trail system, creating a new way of traversing the city from north to south and giving easy access to all neighborhoods. By 2040, "Our Great Rivers" envisions litter- and odor-free rivers which are maintained by automated trash-skimming barges and increased water aeration.

The report builds on some of the riverfront-focused goals included in Mayor Emanuel's ["Building on Burnham" plan](#), which was announced earlier this year. However, it's important to note that while "Our Great Rivers" is being supported by the mayor, it was formed by a non-profit organization does not yet have the funding need to implement all of its goals—there's not even a single local organization that is in charge of coordinating the development and upkeep of Chicago's rivers. The report acknowledges that any progress will require the involvement and organization of community leaders and the securing and coordination of funding.

Cleaning up Chicago's rivers and making them integral parts of the community may seem like a tall order, but the success of Mayor Emanuel's Riverwalk project certainly shows that there's a demand for recreation and business on the riverfront—the trick will be finding an efficient way to fund similar projects across the entire city.