



North River Communities Neighborhood Plan

September 2018



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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION



The North River Communities Neighborhood Plan presents a vision for the future and a framework for making decisions that align with long-term goals. It is the result of two years of work led by the North River Commission (NRC) and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) with the community's residents, business owners, workers, and leaders. The plan focuses on the North River communities, a core section of NRC's service area on the northwest side of Chicago.

The North River communities are located in the City of Chicago, approximately seven miles northwest of downtown. For this planning effort, NRC chose to focus on an area that includes Albany Park and parts of the North Park and Irving Park community areas, including the neighborhoods of Mayfair, North Mayfair, and Ravenswood Manor. NRC and CMAP chose the study area due its importance to the NRC service area as a whole. It includes the three CTA Brown Line stations that serve the neighborhood, the Lawrence and Foster Avenue commercial corridors, and the Upper North Branch of the Chicago River.

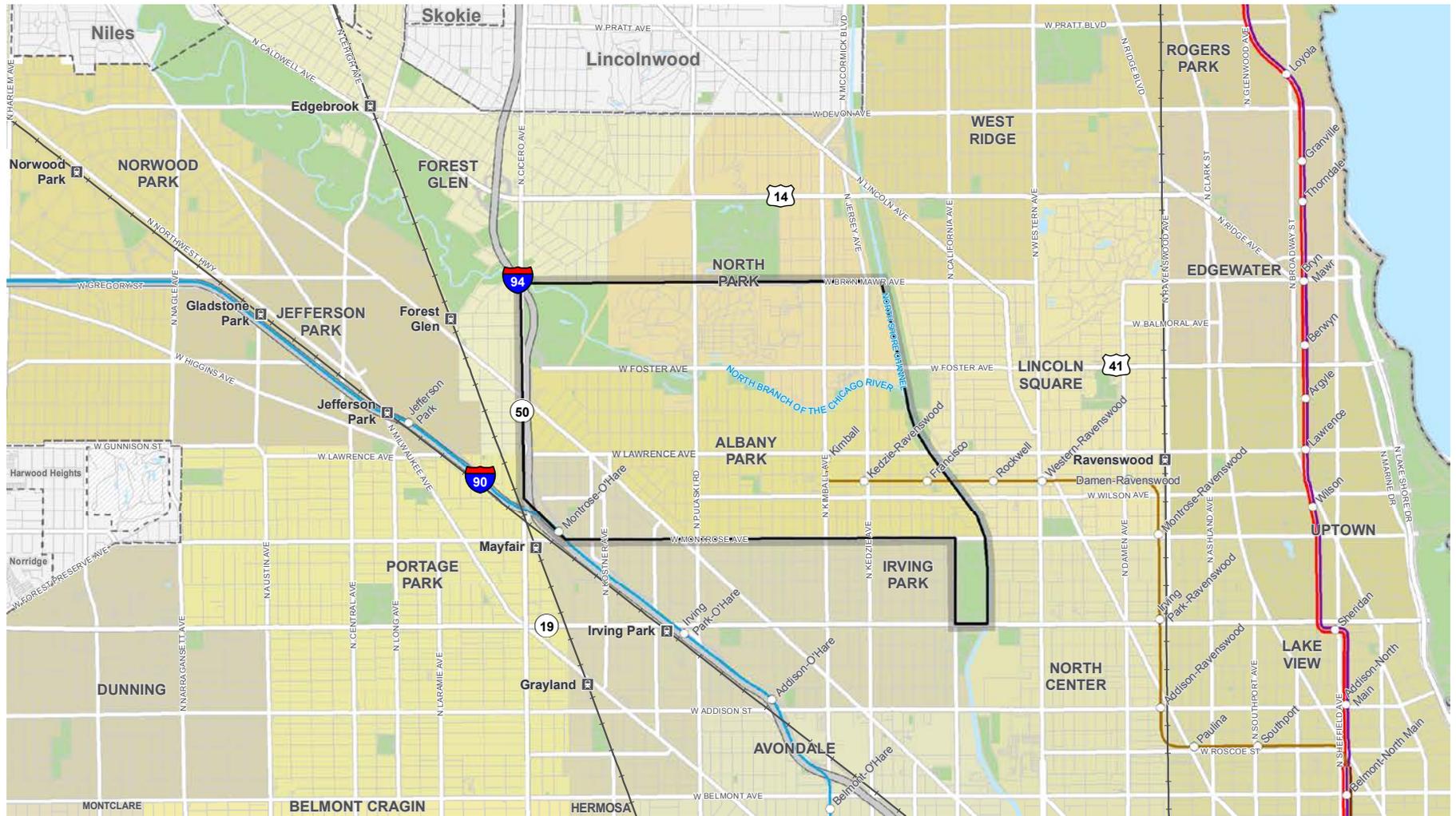
The need for a neighborhood plan

The North River communities boast many assets, including active commercial corridors, tree-lined residential areas, high quality architecture, beautiful parks, solid transit options, and two universities. Having long served as a port of entry for immigrant families newly arrived to Chicago from all parts of the globe, the North River communities are among the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the United States, and feature a tradition of civic engagement. However, the North River communities do not have their own plan to guide development and investment in ways that align with community priorities.

Residents and community stakeholders hope to direct today's choices according to a long-range vision for the community's future. NRC engaged CMAP's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program to develop a plan that builds on the area's valuable assets. Working with the area's community organizations, residents, and public agencies, CMAP and NRC created a plan that draws on the area's transportation assets, diverse community, unique commercial corridors, and rivers and open space to help guide and strengthen the North River communities in the decades ahead. The plan outlines the vision of the community as well as the policies and strategies that will allow it to achieve that vision. The plan will allow the NRC, elected officials, city departments, residents, business owners, and potential investors to make informed decisions on land use, transportation, infrastructure, and capital improvements throughout the area.

To guide implementation of its recommendations, the plan identifies specific action items, next steps, and relevant partners both within and outside government. The implementation strategies the plan identifies are not meant to be a comprehensive list of actions by NRC and its partners, but provide suggested next steps that will help to bring the plan to reality.

Figure 1.1. North River Communities Neighborhood Plan Study Area



- Northwest Side/Albany Park Study Area Limits
- Municipal Limits
- Unincorporated Areas
- Open Space
- Water
- Chicago Community Areas

- CTA Rail Lines**
- Blue Line (O'Hare)
 - Brown Line
 - Brown, Purple (Express), Red
 - Red, Purple Line
- Metra Rail Lines**
- Metra Rail Lines
 - Metra Stations



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2016.

Planning process

The process to create the North River Communities Neighborhood Plan included multiple steps that were undertaken over approximately two years. The process was crafted with assistance from a steering committee consisting of various community stakeholders and designed to include public input throughout. In late 2015, key staff from NRC and the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) met with CMAP staff to develop a scope of work for the project. A work plan established program tasks, a timeline for the program, and recommended participation by a community steering committee to assist CMAP staff in developing the final plan and recommendations. 33rd Ward Alderman Deb Mell, 35th Ward Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, and 39th Ward Alderman Margaret Laurino have all taken part in shaping and directing the project at key points in the process.

Engagement

One of the primary goals of the planning process was to fully and effectively engage the community. The North River Communities Neighborhood Plan study area encompasses one of the most racially and ethnically diverse communities in the City of Chicago. To provide mechanisms for meaningful outreach in such a diverse community, the project team implemented several approaches for public participation. The project team used interviews, steering committee meetings, focus groups, surveys, an interactive website, and attended events and meetings in the community.

The first phase of the planning process involved several outreach activities including the first steering committee meeting, stakeholder interviews, and a public kick-off meeting. The second step of the planning process was the visioning phase. The goal of the visioning phase was to present key findings from the existing conditions in the study area, and garner feedback from residents and stakeholders, including their thoughts on potential solutions to the issues and opportunities that were identified during phase one.

The highlight of the visioning phase was the public visioning workshop, which NRC hosted on February 22, 2017 at Roosevelt High School in Albany Park. More than 150 people attended the workshop, including residents, local business owners, aldermen, and representatives of community organizations and the Chicago Transit Authority. At the meeting, CMAP staff shared the purpose of the community plan, introduced the project team, and presented key findings from the existing conditions analysis (Appendix C). The visual presentation was provided in both English and Spanish and staff was available to provide Spanish translation for attendees who asked for assistance. Throughout the workshop, CMAP staff facilitated the use of electronic keypads to gain realtime feedback from the audience on the team's findings, potential directions for the plan, and the neighborhood's priorities for the future.

On April 17, 2018, NRC hosted a public open house at Roosevelt High School to present the draft plan to the community. More than 80 people attended the event, during which members of the community had the opportunity to review the draft plan's recommendations, identify the strategies they were most enthusiastic about, and discuss the plan with the project team. CMAP staff, NRC staff, and members of the steering committee held one-on-one and small group conversations about each of the plan's seven main themes. Spanish-speaking staff were on hand to provide translation and discuss the plan with community members who preferred to converse in Spanish.

The tools and techniques that CMAP staff employed during the planning process varied according to the activity, amount of time available, and the specific characteristics of each group. To ensure full participation from a broad-range of participants, CMAP staff developed an interactive website using MetroQuest to engage people who could not attend meetings. This online tool served to educate the community about the purpose of the project and to gather input about their priorities and preferred choices for the future of the North River communities. Almost 400 people submitted responses to the online survey.

During the plan development phase of the project, CMAP staff met with many of the civic organizations that make up the North River Commission. CMAP staff presented on the issues and opportunities this plan explores and vetted potential recommendations with groups including Albany Park Neighbors, People of East Albany Park, Horner Park Neighbors, the North Mayfair Improvement Association, and the Ravenswood Manor Improvement Association.

Organization of the plan

Community outreach summary

Overall, participants held many of the same concerns and generally expressed the desire to preserve the neighborhood's diversity and affordability, improve the appearance of its commercial corridors, and better connect with its rivers and open space. Common themes from community outreach included needing to preserve affordable housing (for renters and owners), supporting local businesses and improving the commercial corridors, creating recreational opportunities for local youth, continuing to serve as a port of entry for immigrants and refugees, improving public spaces, and addressing crime and safety. Other frequently cited goals included enhancing the pedestrian experience and improving transportation options.

In addition, many stakeholders would like to capitalize on the rivers as assets, attracting residents, visitors, and shoppers into the area.



Stakeholders attend a public open house at Roosevelt High School.

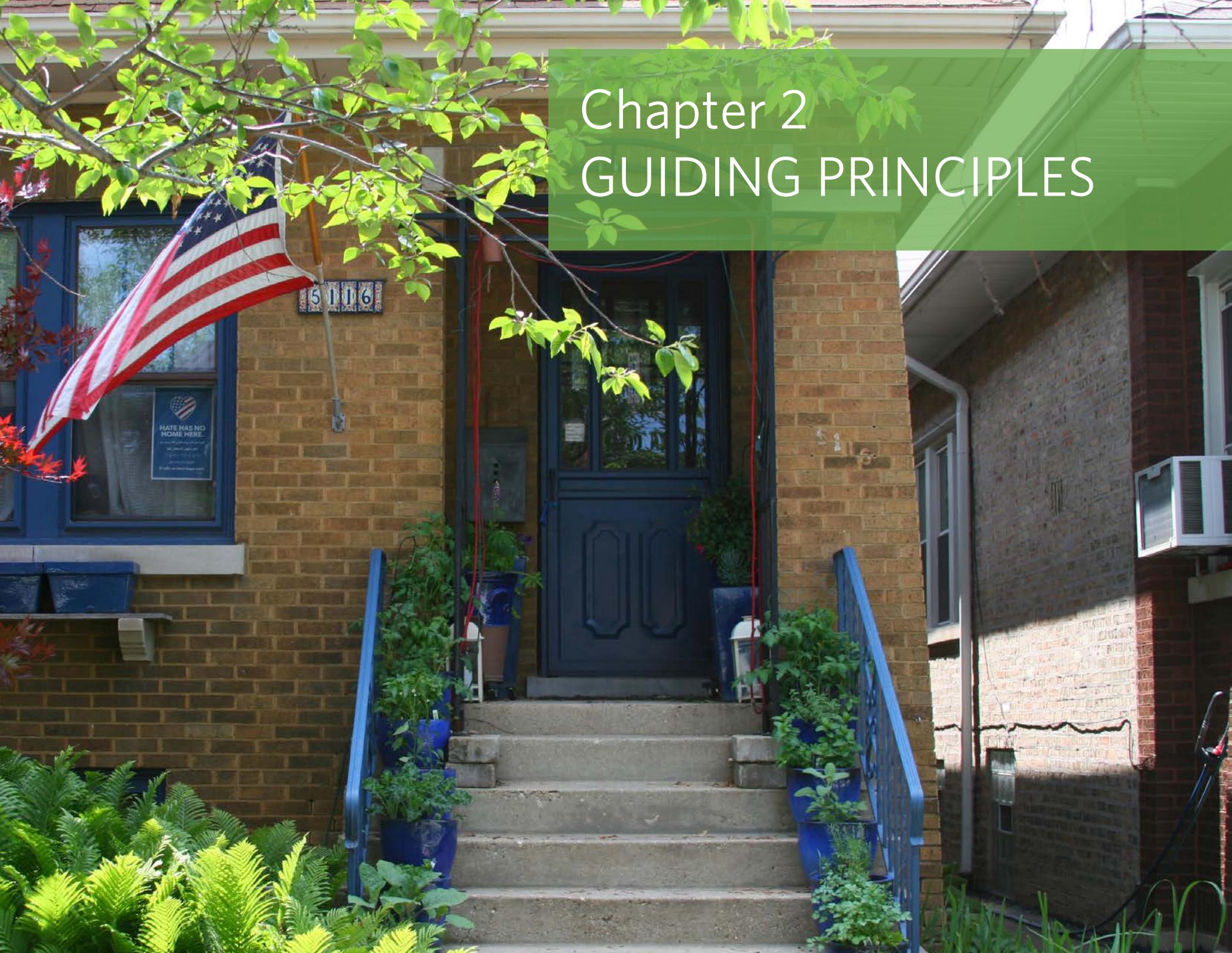
The North River Communities Neighborhood Plan is organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Guiding Principles
- Chapter 3: Neighborhood Diversity
- Chapter 4: Lawrence Avenue
- Chapter 5: Housing Affordability, Choices, and Quality
- Chapter 6: Transit Oriented Development
- Chapter 7: Community Safety
- Chapter 8: Stormwater and Flooding
- Chapter 9: Rivers, Parks, and Trails
- Appendix A: Workforce Housing Strategies for North River Communities (ULI)
- Appendix B: Stormwater and Flooding Resources Guide
- Appendix C: North River Communities Existing Conditions Overview

Each of these chapters includes a vision statement, a summary of key findings, and a set of recommendations followed by an implementation table that includes a description of actions to be undertaken. Additionally, the plan includes three appendices. Appendix A is the full report produced by the Urban Land Institute-Chicago's Technical Assistance Panel on workforce housing strategies, which forms the basis for this plan's housing recommendations (see Chapter 5). Appendix B contains resources for programs, funding, and other assistance related to the plan's stormwater and flooding strategies (Chapter 8). Appendix C is the Existing Conditions Overview, an interim deliverable for this plan that summarizes current conditions in the area at the outset of the planning process and identifies issues and opportunities for the plan to address.

Chapter 2

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



The North River communities have a bold vision for their future. They share a broad belief that the community's best future will combine the best elements of its heritage and assets with proactive steps to meet anticipated challenges. Six overarching principles emerged as goals to guide the strategies of the North River Communities Neighborhood Plan.

- Build on past accomplishments and current community efforts
- Preserve affordability and diversity
- Activate and enhance existing assets
- Provide safe and healthy places to live
- Promote clean, accessible rivers
- Cultivate and communicate a distinct sense of place



Chapter 3 NEIGHBORHOOD DIVERSITY



The North River communities will continue to welcome and celebrate culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse residents. By empowering its evolving population and ensuring a welcoming business environment, the community will build on its long history of diversity to provide opportunities for residents, business owners, workers, and students.

Introduction

The North River communities have historically served as a port of entry for immigrant families and are home to a wide variety of languages and ethnic groups. In the late 19th century, German and Swedish immigrants began to settle in Albany Park, the first of many successive waves of immigrants settling in the North River communities. Beginning in the early 20th century, the neighborhood saw an influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. The community remained predominantly Jewish through the 1950s, when many Jewish families moved to Chicago's northern suburbs, including Lincolnwood and Skokie. Since the 1970s, the community's Asian American and, more recently, Latino populations have driven population growth, a trend reflected by the variety of small businesses found along the neighborhood's commercial corridors as well as the long-standing presence of community organizations and places of worship serving these populations.

Community members regularly identify the neighborhood's extraordinary diversity as an asset that should be preserved and celebrated. In addition to enhancing the vitality of the neighborhood, diversity has made the North River communities a place that is welcoming for a wide variety of residents and business owners. While the neighborhood's diversity is a source of pride, however, many stakeholders have acknowledged the challenge of bridging differences and creating a strong, unified community.



Key Findings

- 1. The North River communities remain among the most diverse neighborhoods in Chicago.** Dating back to the early 20th century, the neighborhoods of Albany Park, North Park, and Irving Park have served as a port of entry for immigrant families newly arrived to Chicago. They remain ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse today. According to American Community Survey data for this plan's study area from the U.S. Census, the North River communities' racial and ethnic composition includes a mix of 47 percent Latino, 32 percent White and 15 percent Asian/Pacific Islander residents. More than 40 percent of the population speaks Spanish or Spanish Creole, while another 11 percent speak a variety of Asian or European languages including Tagalog, Gujarati, Croatian, and Polish.
- 2. The small businesses of the North River communities reflect the historical and current diversity of the neighborhood.** A variety of restaurants, community services, retail shops, and wholesale businesses provide for the varied needs of the neighborhood's residents and the broader Chicago region. These businesses not only serve the everyday needs of the many cultures present in the neighborhood, but have long provided entrepreneurial opportunities as well. The neighborhood's religious, educational, and social service institutions reflect its diversity as well.
- 3. Retaining Albany Park's cultural diversity is of great value to many community residents.** Stakeholders who were interviewed and residents who responded to surveys often noted that they consider the area's extraordinary diversity to be one of its greatest assets. Outreach has indicated a desire for the community to celebrate and preserve its cultural diversity through various efforts, such as increasing support and marketing of existing businesses, building stronger collaborations with institutions that serve immigrant and refugee populations, and highlighting cultural diversity through public art installations and design.

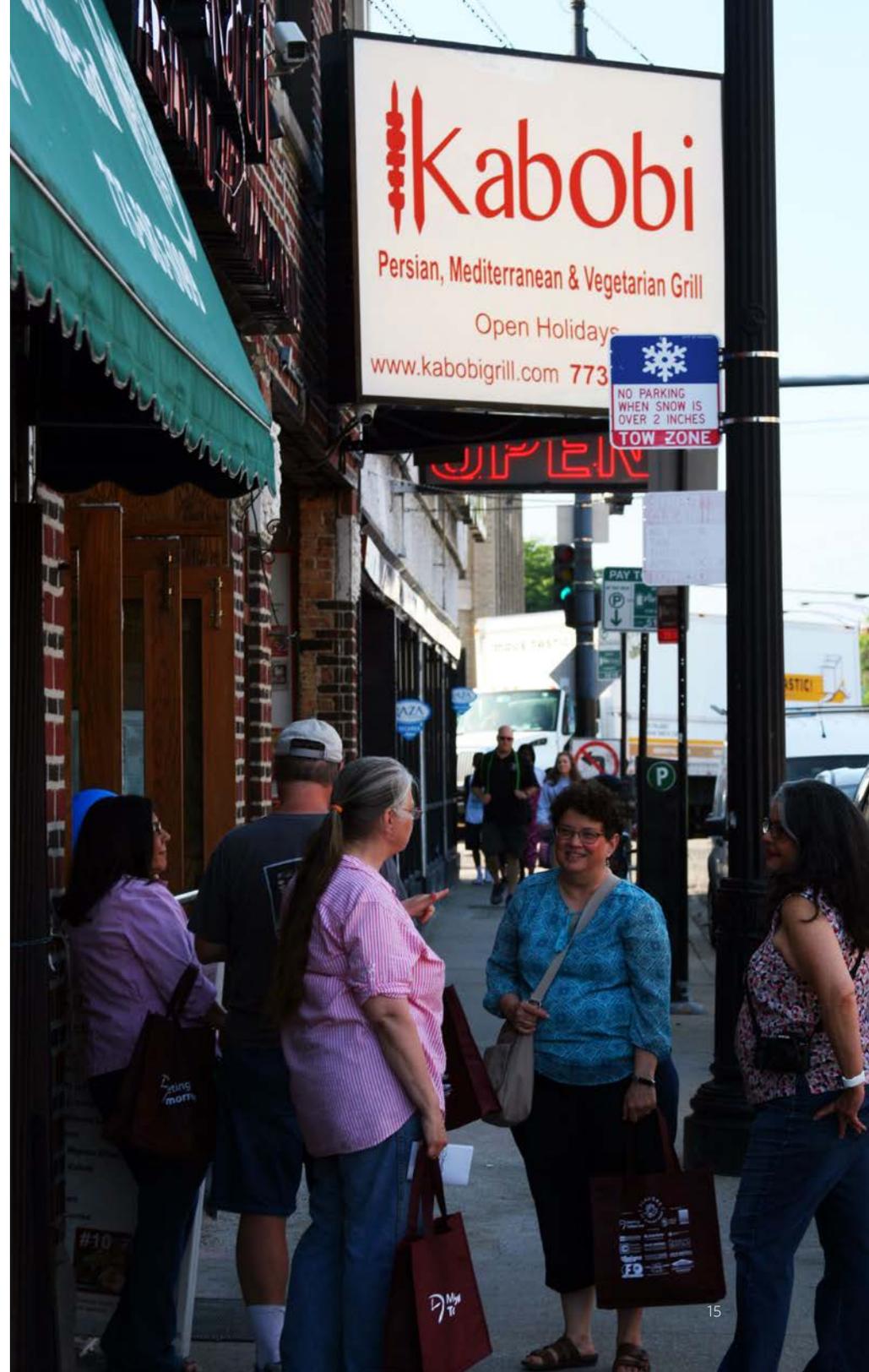
Recommendations

3.1 Use the North River communities' diversity to attract more residents and visitors

The North River communities feature a number of characteristics that can attract a wide range of visitors and potential residents. They offer a unique set of businesses and cultural institutions that appeal to arts and culture enthusiasts, food connoisseurs, and old and new Chicagoans from all backgrounds. Social service providers located in Albany Park and North Park, such as the HANA Center, Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, and the Global Garden Refugee Training Farm, encourage newly arriving families to settle in the community by welcoming and assisting them as they seek to improve their quality of life.

The area is also strategically located near mass transit and two major expressways, making it easy to reach from throughout the Chicago region. It is especially easy to reach from the northern and northwest suburbs of Chicago, where many Asian American families who initially settled in the North River communities have since relocated. Anchor businesses like Seafood City, a popular Filipino supermarket, cater to both residents of the North River communities and to the suburban residents who maintain historical and cultural ties to the neighborhood.

The North River communities' prime location and many immigrant-owned businesses can help advance the area's economic development and attract new residents, visitors, and businesses. By promoting the neighborhood's diverse, international atmosphere and working to attract additional distinctive businesses, the neighborhood can strengthen its identity as a multiethnic enclave with a regional draw.



Promote public art that communicates neighborhood identity

The integration of arts and culture in communities can make them vibrant places to live, work, and visit. Livable communities draw their strength and vitality from a unique “sense of place” that attracts people and makes them feel at home and welcome. Arts and culture can play a key role in the definition, preservation, and enhancement of this essential character of a community.

The North River communities already boast a cultural scene that is deeply rooted in the neighborhood’s diversity, featuring art that responds to issues of community interest. Institutions such as the Albany Park Theater Project, Halcyon Theatre, and Territory Albany Park have emerged as widely visible artistic outlets for the neighborhood, especially its young people of color. Arts and culture can also serve as a tool for economic development, helping to create attractive public spaces that strengthen neighborhood identity, drawing visitors and, ultimately, customers.

The North River communities can raise their profile throughout Chicago and the region by pursuing arts and culture planning that is creative, smart, and resourceful. A coordinated program of cultural events, public art, and branding can convey an identity as a multiethnic neighborhood with a vibrant artistic community. Street banners along major corridors, high-quality wall murals on buildings along commercial corridors, and temporary art installations on vacant and underutilized lots are but a few of the effective ways to communicate and reinforce the neighborhood’s view of its own history and unique assets. An “art windows” program that temporarily places works by local artists in the windows of vacant stores (see Chapter 4) could be another component of this strategy.

A community organization—or a temporary committee comprising multiple organizations—should lead the effort, engaging residents, students, artists, and business owners in a community-driven process to define and establish a clear vision for a campaign to communicate the neighborhood’s image. This effort can be assisted by CMAP’s Arts and Culture Planning: A Toolkit for Communities, which offers a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to arts and culture planning, including creating a local definition for arts and culture, setting goals, and articulating a desired result early in the process. The toolkit also provides practical guidance on maximizing community participation and input, assessing and overcoming obstacles, and pursuing effective implementation to achieve the vision of the community.

Organizers should engage the community’s youth in this effort. In the Chicago neighborhood of Belmont Cragin, a Steinmetz High School student designed street banners, which local businesses purchased to improve the appearance of the community’s commercial corridors. Similarly, the North River communities could engage the neighborhood’s youth in economic development projects to instill a sense of ownership and pride. Public art, murals, and promotional materials (signage, wayfinding, marketing brochures) could be developed in collaboration with local schools and after-school/summer programs (such as Territory Albany Park or the Albany Park Theater Project) to involve local youth in the creation of future branding.



Market the neighborhood's diversity

A coordinated marketing campaign focused on the diversity of the North River communities can help draw visitors, customers, and potential residents. As part of a larger marketing initiative, a good place to start would be for business development groups (such as SSA #60 and the Albany Park Chamber of Commerce) to organize local business owners to work on a campaign that highlights the diversity of restaurants and stores in the North River communities. A partnership with a marketing strategy firm or marketing program at a local university would be one effective approach to developing a campaign. Giving existing local businesses a central role in developing the campaign can help ensure that the strategy helps the longtime business owners who have invested in the neighborhood and its residents for decades, rather than just attracting new investors from elsewhere.

The marketing campaign should initially highlight the businesses that distinguish the North River communities from other neighborhoods. For example, popular restaurants, bakeries, and grocery stores that offer products that are hard to find elsewhere. It could be helpful to create a practical guide to the different cuisines currently available in the community, making it easy for the uninitiated to try an establishment—and perhaps a cuisine—they have never tried before. Made available at businesses along the area's main commercial corridors (as well as online), the guide would provide a similar introduction to the North River communities as NRC's popular Flavors of Albany Park event, but at any time of year.

The Albany Park Chamber of Commerce and SSA #60 should ensure that their website and Facebook page reflect the diverse businesses and services of the neighborhood. In addition to continuing to promote community-wide events and programs such as NRC's Flavors of Albany Park restaurant crawl and the Albany Park World Fest, these groups should use online guides and social media to clear connections between these festivals and local businesses. The diversity that attracts visitors from throughout the region to these events is present in the community every day, and can be leveraged to attract some of these visitors throughout the year.

Marketing the North River communities' diversity provides an opportunity for further collaboration between the Chamber, businesses, and local educational institutions. A good starting point would be to increase communication with the student affairs offices at Northeastern Illinois University and North Park University to encourage advertisement of local businesses and neighborhood amenities via school social media sites to attract the student population. Stakeholders should also explore partnerships between university, high school, and neighborhood programs that would engage students in the broader community in designing innovative marketing campaigns for local goods and community events. Potential partners include Northeastern Illinois University's College of Business and Management, North Park University's School of Business and Nonprofit Management, Northside College Preparatory High School, Roosevelt High School, Von Steuben Metropolitan Science Center, and Territory Albany Park.



3.2 Support, strengthen, and grow local businesses

Throughout the planning process, community stakeholders have emphasized their desire to maintain the signature diversity of the neighborhood’s small businesses. The North River communities’ commercial corridors have provided entrepreneurial opportunities for generations of immigrants, and have been part of the overall business and service ecosystem that has made the community an ideal location for families newly arriving in Chicago.

In the 21st century economy, local small businesses of all kinds face challenges, especially competition from national chains and online retailers. Support and guidance from trusted allies, such as chambers of commerce and local government offices, can help small business owners navigate many common difficulties. SSA #60, along with local aldermen and other organizations such as the Albany Park Community Center, already provide a variety of assistance programs and resources to local businesses to help them address many of the common challenges that face, such as the need

for façade and awning improvements, guidance on signage, and assistance with marketing and outreach. Chapter 4 offers detailed recommendations on how the community can build upon these programs to further assist neighborhood businesses.

Beyond the common challenges facing small businesses, there are particular elements of the North River communities’ business environment that present unique hurdles for economic development in the community, such as language barriers and other cultural factors. Business owners and advocates alike expressed a desire to increase connections between existing business assistance programs and the businesses they seek to help. In some cases, cultural barriers have hindered the kind of outreach that business advocacy groups have attempted. Some business owners, especially from immigrant communities, are not familiar with SSAs, City programs, or other business assistance models and have been hesitant to engage with potential partners they perceived to be connected to government, out of fear that the interaction was part of a code or law enforcement campaign.

Conduct cross-cultural outreach in collaboration with trusted partners

To offer the right assistance, it will be essential to gain a thorough understanding of the practical needs of business owners, commercial property owners, and aspiring entrepreneurs—as well as the resources they currently rely on. Organizations such as NRC, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, and Albany Park Community Center should combine resources to successfully engage and build support for immigrant-owned businesses and local entrepreneurs. A first step would be to focus on increasing communication: surveying business owners on needs and providing information on available business assistance resources in some of the community’s most commonly spoken languages other than English—such as Spanish, Tagalog, and Gujarati. Translated materials can promote existing programs and services to help with common needs such as façade improvement, business attraction, district marketing, start-ups, expansion, referrals, and loan assistance.

This effort should also seek the wisdom, guidance, and assistance of other knowledgeable community partners. Partners should consult community lenders and local financial institutions to gain knowledge of existing initiatives and programs aimed at serving the needs of immigrant businesses in the neighborhood. Even if they do not work specifically in the area of business assistance, trusted institutions with strong connections to particular immigrant groups, such as faith-based organizations and social service providers, can help establish contact and communication with hard-to-reach groups in the community.

The Albany Park Community Center stands out as a strong partner for implementing this strategy. The Community Center’s Business Planning & Development Department provides community-based economic development services, including assisting with business creation and expansion. They have a history of strong relationships with the diverse businesses that populate the neighborhood and could help bridge cultural gaps between other business advocacy groups and business owners.



3.3 Build capacity for long-term, sustainable community engagement of an evolving neighborhood

A high level of civic engagement and community energy have been a constant in the history of the North River communities. Amid waves of immigration from Eastern Europe, East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central America, NRC, Albany Park Community Center, Communities United, and numerous religious and community organizations have engaged neighbors to work together to address the evolving needs of the neighborhood. Today, established community organizations and local institutions continue to provide a variety of services to new residents, including immigration services, workforce development, English as a second language (ESL), General Educational Development (GED), and citizenship classes. In recent years, NRC has pursued several initiatives to develop relationships with recent immigrants and other emerging populations. The strategies described in this section are intended to build on the outreach and integration efforts NRC has already undertaken.

To respond successfully to evolving challenges and opportunities, the North River communities will need to follow a framework for community involvement that builds on the community's proud past and reflects the community's promising future. Of particular note is the fact that approximately half of residents of the North River communities are Latino. Although this number refers specifically to the study area for this plan, the Latino population is growing in much of the surrounding community, including other neighborhoods that NRC serves. While the Latino population has grown in recent years, representation in the civic community has not quite kept pace. Public outreach for this plan has similarly struggled to gain the participation of Latino residents at a level comparable to their share of the neighborhood population.

Going forward, engaging Latino and immigrant residents and other stakeholders needs to be a greater priority for civic organizations in the community and the upcoming effort to implement this plan. These strategies are flexible enough to remain applicable as the demographics of the North River communities continue to evolve in the future. By working with schools and organizations that serve recently arrived immigrants, civic groups can connect with the Latino, Arab American, and Persian American residents whose presence is currently growing, and with other cultural groups that grow in future years.



Continue to develop relationships with organizations serving local immigrants and refugees

Ongoing work with organizations that provide services to local immigrants and refugees, such as the Ecuadorian Consulate, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm, and World Relief Chicago, can help NRC and other civic groups build trust with immigrant and refugee groups and become a stronger ally to longer-established residents. Through its Education Committee, NRC has developed close relationships with Global Garden and World Relief Chicago by partnering with local public schools and educators. The North River communities are also home to several religious institutions that serve Latino residents, such as Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church. A number of Muslim worship communities, such as the Muslim Community Center and the Midwest Association of Shia Organized Muslims (MASOM), serve many new Chicagoans in the community.

NRC has compiled a directory of social service resources and programs, including information on the languages in which assistance is available, which they intend to update annually and circulate throughout the community. Working with these organizations, civic groups can become familiar with the legal and everyday challenges these residents face and better direct immigrants and refugees to appropriate resources. One potential area for collaboration between civic groups and local organizations could be to create welcome packets for newly arrived immigrants. In addition to helping new arrivals better understand local government and connect them to local community groups, businesses, and resources, these packets, which can also be made available online, can help families better understand how the community can help them complete the tasks of everyday life, such as riding CTA, enrolling children in school, or seeking employment.

Continue to build relationships with local schools to reach parents

Several civic organizations in the North River communities have had difficulty making inroads with recent immigrants, despite a sincere interest in engaging them. Difficulties ranging from language barriers to different cultural expectations about the role of civic organizations can complicate efforts to connect. Local schools, including public and parochial schools, can serve as a tool to overcome these barriers and build trust. Several elementary schools in the North River communities, such as North River Elementary and Palmer Elementary, have invested considerable time and resources into creating a welcoming environment for recent immigrant students and their families. NRC already has a long history of working with local public schools on a variety of education projects. NRC's ongoing assistance in creating "Friends Of" groups for parents and other stakeholders for local public schools offers one route to connect to parents. The organization should explore ways to strengthen its partnerships with local school leaders to reach and build relationships with parents, helping them to engage with the broad scope of NRC's work in the neighborhood.

Local schools offer a way to not only reach parents, but to directly engage with youth themselves. NRC was instrumental in convening the 33rd Ward Youth Council in response to student interest in making their voices heard in the community. In collaboration with Alderman Mell and school principals, the NRC Education Committee helped student leader form the group, which currently focuses on issues of immigrant safety, youth homelessness, and political awareness.



Collaborate with Latino-focused departments at Northeastern Illinois University

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) enrolls about 10,000 students, and is federally designated as a Hispanic-serving institution. Deemed the most diverse college or university in the Midwest, NEIU provides Latino and immigrant students with a number of valuable resources.¹ Of particular note is the Angelina Pedrosa Center for Diversity and Intercultural Affairs, which provides programs and resources that include the Las Comadres mentoring program and resources for undocumented students. NRC and the 33rd Ward Youth Council have also worked with NEIU's undocumented student group (along with similar groups at North Park University and local high schools) to coordinate resources and raise public awareness through marches and rallies. Civic organizations can explore partnerships with the Center, and explore ways to connect to their programs to serve the needs of the larger Latino and immigrant community.

Implementation

Table 3.1. Neighborhood diversity implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
3.1: Use the North River communities' diversity to attract more residents and visitors			
Establish a campaign to communicate the neighborhood's image through public art	0-2 years	Business owners, local schools, Albany Park Theater Project, Halcyon Theatre, Territory Albany Park	Engage residents, students, artists, and business owners in a community-driven process to define and establish a clear vision for a campaign to communicate the neighborhood's image. CMAP's Arts and Culture toolkit can provide guidance for the project.
Organize a marketing campaign that highlights the diversity of restaurants and stores in the North River communities	0-2 years	Business owners, SSA #60, Albany Park Community Center, Hana Center, NEIU, North Park University School of Business	Organize local business owners and business development groups to work on a campaign. Explore partnerships with a marketing strategy firm or marketing program at a local university.
Create a guide to local restaurants	0-2 years	Business owners, HANA Center, Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm	Create a practical guide to the different cuisines currently available in the community and the establishments that serve them. The guide would provide a similar introduction to the North River communities as NRC's popular Flavors of Albany Park event, but at any time of year. The guide should be made available at businesses along the area's main commercial corridors as well as online.
Ensure websites and social media provide up-to-date information on local businesses	Ongoing	SSA #60, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce	NRC, the Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, and SSA #60 should ensure that their website and Facebook page reflect the diverse businesses and services of the neighborhood. The websites should make clear the connections between popular festivals and the local businesses that make them possible.
Engage with local universities and high schools to build social media connections to local businesses	0-2 years	NEIU, North Park University, CPS	Increase engagement with Northeastern Illinois University and North Park University student affairs offices to encourage more advertisement of local businesses and neighborhood amenities via school social media sites to attract the student population.
3.2: Support, strengthen, and grow local businesses			
Survey business owners with limited English proficiency	0-2 years	Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, SSA #660, Albany Park Community Center, HANA Center, Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm	Collaborate with partners trusted by local businesses to gain a thorough understanding of the practical needs of business owners, commercial property owners, and aspiring entrepreneurs—as well as the resources they currently rely on. Work with partners to conduct survey and promote existing programs provide information on available business assistance resources in some of the community's most commonly spoken languages other than English—such as Spanish, Tagalog, or Gujarati.
Survey other community institutions	0-2 years	Albany Bank, business owners, faith communities, social service providers	To gain knowledge of existing initiatives and programs aimed at serving the needs of immigrant businesses in the neighborhood, NRC should consult with community lenders, financial institutions, and other trusted partners. Even if they do not work specifically in the area of business assistance, trusted institutions with strong connections to particular immigrant groups, such as faith-based organizations and social service providers, can help establish contact and communication with hard-to-reach groups in the community.



Table 3.1 (Continued)

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
3.3: Build capacity for long-term, sustainable community engagement of an evolving neighborhood			
Develop relationships with organizations serving local immigrants and refugees	0-2 years	Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm, faith communities	Explore opportunities to collaborate with these organizations to become familiar with the legal and everyday challenges faced by residents face and better direct immigrants and refugees to appropriate resources. One potential area for collaboration could be to create welcome packets to newly arrived immigrants. NRC should also seek to regularly update its directory of social service resources and provide it online and in different languages. Compiling and updating the guide will provide an opportunity to contact and develop relationships with the organizations included in the directory.
Explore ways to strengthen partnerships with local schools	2-5 years	CPS, religious schools, "Friends Of" groups, 33rd Ward Youth Council, parent-teacher organizations	Local schools, including public and parochial schools, can serve as a tool to build trust. NRC already has a long history of working with local public schools on a variety of education projects. NRC should explore ways to strengthen its partnerships with local school leaders to reach and build relationships with parents.
Collaborate with Latino-focused departments at Northeastern Illinois University	0-2 years	Business owners, HANA Center, Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm	Create a practical guide to the different cuisines currently available in the community and the establishments that serve them. The guide would provide a similar introduction to the North River communities as NRC's popular Flavors of Albany Park event, but at any time of year. The guide should be made available at businesses along the area's main commercial corridors as well as online.

Chapter 4

LAWRENCE AVENUE



3432 - 3442
W. Lawrence
Managed by:
Mamill Kim
847-555-2301

501 102

3432

MON-FRI 11:00-8:00
SAT 11:00-6:00
SUN 11:00-6:00
HOURS OF OPERATION



Tuxedo Rentals

ONE WAY
→

ELI'S

Lawrence Avenue will offer a distinctive experience that serves the local needs of the North River communities while drawing visitors from the broader region. Through physical improvements, placemaking, and programming, the North River communities will elevate their “Main Street” to a destination that showcases the neighborhood’s character and diversity.

Introduction

Lawrence Avenue is the common thread that runs through the diverse areas and neighborhoods of the North River communities. It is a key transportation route for motorists, public transit users, and people walking and biking. The businesses located on Lawrence Avenue include grocers and shops for everyday needs, celebrated restaurants, and offices and institutions that provide vital services for residents. The corridor also offers a living history of the North River communities as a port of entry, continuing to provide opportunities for residents to own businesses that serve the Latino, Korean American, Arab American, and other communities.

While the Lawrence Avenue corridor is already a lively commercial district, the community can take action to enhance its appearance, build on its strengths, and cultivate the experience of being there. During the planning process, many neighborhood residents and business owners expressed the same opinion: Lawrence Avenue is less attractive than it could—and should—be.

This chapter identifies opportunities to embrace, preserve, and enhance the Lawrence Avenue corridor. The chapter’s recommendations fall in three main categories. Placemaking strategies are aimed at enhancing the experience of spending time on Lawrence Avenue, including ways to improve its streetscape and cultivate the feeling that it is the vibrant “Main Street” of the North River communities. Aesthetics strategies focus on how the community can make the corridor’s buildings and businesses more attractive and consistent in appearance. Engagement, promotion, and programming strategies offer ways to draw on the energy and resources of the business community to collaborate effectively on corridor enhancements, cultural programming and events, and other ways to draw visitors and patrons.

Key Findings

- 1. The physical appearance of the Lawrence Avenue corridor obscures its vitality.** Lawrence Avenue features a strong business climate with low vacancy rates. As of the end of 2015, the retail vacancy rate in the North River communities was 5.1 percent, lower than the rate of the Chicago region (7.8 percent) or the Northwest City submarket (5.8 percent). However, stakeholders consistently expressed a feeling that the corridor should be “spruced up” and ranked cleanup of the corridor and improving the appearance of retail businesses as top priorities.
- 2. The businesses of the Lawrence Avenue corridor reflect the diversity of the North River communities.** Lawrence Avenue features stores, restaurants, services, and offices of businesses that serve the many cultures who call the North River communities home. The diversity of the corridor is immediately evident in the signs and displays of local businesses, contributing to a distinct sense of place. Stakeholders stressed the importance of preserving this diversity while improving the appearance of the corridor. Effective strategies for enlivening Lawrence Avenue will treat this diversity as a strength.

- 3. Lawrence Avenue lacks public gathering places.** As discussed throughout this plan, Lawrence Avenue lacks parks, plazas, and other public spaces that could host festivals and public art—or just serve as places where community members can gather and socialize every day. Creating spaces to support formal and informal community gatherings is a priority for residents and business owners.
- 4. Anchor institutions and transportation assets located near Lawrence Avenue can help support business development.** The presence of NEIU, North Park University, and nearby Swedish Covenant Hospital provide steady streams of visitors and stable jobs that benefit the North River communities. In addition, the heavily used Kedzie and Kimball CTA Brown Line stations are located in central areas of the neighborhood, and two interstate highways and several regional bike trails are found close by.



Recommendations

Placemaking

Placemaking is an approach to enlivening neighborhoods by making their public spaces enjoyable, vibrant, and inviting. By shaping the public realm in the image of a community, placemaking deepens the social and cultural connections between people and the physical spaces of their neighborhood. Parks and plazas are a major component of placemaking, but so are streets and sidewalks—especially on a “Main Street” like Lawrence Avenue. Because of the shops, services, and transportation that it provides, Lawrence Avenue functions as more than a route for travel—it is a community space. By reflecting the community’s vision of itself, Lawrence Avenue can continue to provide for residents’ everyday needs, offer entrepreneurial opportunities, and attract new patrons and visitors who are drawn to the distinctive experience offered by the North River communities.

This section focuses on enhancing strategic locations along the Lawrence Avenue corridor. The three key locations are the “Kimball-Kedzie District,” and its gateways on the eastern and western ends. While the entire length of Lawrence Avenue is important to the North River communities, focusing on these key areas will help community stakeholders prioritize future investments in the most important locations. Gateways are especially important, as they provide a first impression for visitors, whether they are entering the neighborhood by car, bike, or foot from the east and west. And while the Kimball-Kedzie District is located in the heart of the Lawrence Avenue commercial corridor, it also functions as a gateway of sorts, since people arriving by public transit arrive first in this area via the Kimball and Kedzie CTA Brown Line stations. The Kimball-Kedzie District is also the most pedestrian-friendly part of the corridor (sidewalks become five feet narrower west of Central Park Avenue), making this district well positioned to attract retailers—and customers—since foot traffic is a significant demand driver for many small local businesses.

It should be noted that the placemaking strategies of this plan align closely with the plan’s strategies for community safety and neighborhood diversity. Whenever possible, stakeholders should coordinate their efforts so that implementation of the related strategies can be combined. For example, public art that celebrates the neighborhood’s diversity (as recommended in Chapter 3), can also be used to lend a sense of place at commercial gateways, and wayfinding recommendations (in Chapters 7 and 9) can both enhance feelings of safety and help direct patrons to local shops.

4.1 Develop a “Main Street” experience along Lawrence Avenue

The “Kimball-Kedzie District” should serve as the “Main Street” of the North River communities, meeting the everyday needs of residents while attracting visitors. This area, stretching from the North Branch of the Chicago River to Central Park Avenue (and including Kedzie Avenue from Ainslie Street to Sunnyside Avenue) includes the corridor’s densest concentration of shops and restaurants, as well as the Kimball and Kedzie CTA Brown Line Stations.

The Lawrence Avenue corridor already offers many opportunities for diners, shoppers, residents, and visitors to experience the North River communities. By clustering unique shopping and dining experiences in this smaller area, the community can create a distinct, attractive, and highly walkable district. The following strategies focus on developing a more comfortable and attractive walking experience.

Figure 4.1. Lawrence Avenue Placemaking - Key Locations



Increase streetscaping and beautification efforts

Streetscaping improvements can carry the joint benefits of making a street safer and making it more attractive. By calming traffic, improving visibility, and accommodating pedestrians, streetscaping can make people feel welcome and comfortable walking throughout a commercial district, encouraging the foot traffic that can be a boon for local businesses.

NRC, SSA #60, and the Chamber of Commerce should work with the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and local aldermen to advance a coordinated program of streetscaping improvements. These improvements could include crosswalks with ADA ramps, improved curbs and gutters, paver parkways, street furniture in public spaces, bike racks and waste containers, seating areas on side streets, landscaped in-ground and above-ground planters, and new trees with tree grates. Decorative crosswalks, similar to those on Foster Avenue in North Park, could add a consistent, distinctive visual identity. A partnership with CDOT would be the most effective way to implement these improvements, especially given CDOT’s experience with similar streetscaping projects, such as on Devon Avenue in West Ridge (see Chapter 7). This plan’s public art recommendations (Chapter 3) can also support this chapter’s placemaking goals.



Crosswalks on Foster Avenue evoke the nearby Chicago River.



In Ravenswood Manor, river-themed murals on the Wilson Avenue bridge add a local touch.

Install distinctive signage or markers

While the two gateways can provide opportunities to use art and larger signs or murals to announce that a visitor is entering the corridor, the community can enhance the placemaking effect by integrating the concept through the rest of the Kimball-Kedzie District. In Humboldt Park, banners on street lamps along Division Street feature the Puerto Rican flag, extending the theme of the larger flag archways that mark the ends of the “Paseo Boricua.” Mayfair already offers a great example of visually connecting banner signs to gateway features, with attractive posts on Lawrence Avenue marking entry to the neighborhood at its eastern and western boundaries, complemented by street lamp banners with similar designs that echo the theme throughout Mayfair’s section of Lawrence Avenue. Signage at the Kimball and Kedzie CTA stations, where many visitors enter the neighborhood, would be a strategic way to welcome and orient people.



Neighborhood markers in Mayfair, with pedestals at key gateways and banners along Lawrence and Pulaski Avenues, offer a local model for signage in the Kimball-Kedzie District.

Enliven storefronts with active tenants and local art

To enhance the Kedzie-Kimball District, NRC and its partners should focus on activating storefronts. During the planning process, many stakeholders identified vacant properties along Lawrence Avenue as a problem. However, the overall occupancy rate is relatively high. A walking tour of the corridor showed that while most storefronts contained active uses, many appeared to be vacant or uninviting due to poor signage, unattractive gates and bars across windows and doors, and other factors.

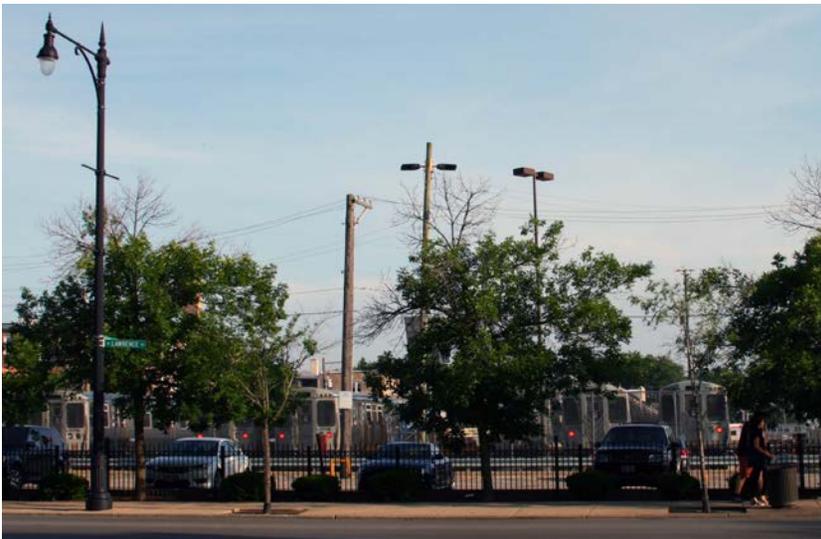
While business occupancy rates along the corridor are fairly high, some vacancy is present. SSA #60 or NRC should keep a current list of vacant storefronts and market these storefronts to businesses who are looking for locations in the area. Additionally, SSA #60 and NRC should work with property owners to invite existing local businesses and entrepreneurs to open pop-up shops as temporary uses that activate empty storefronts in visible locations.

Alternatively, SSA #60 and NRC can work with property owners to fill windows with works by local artists. Engaged property owners with temporary vacancies may be open to displaying work by local artists while their space remains vacant, providing an opportunity for artists to showcase their work and contact information. Several spaces along the corridor are partially occupied as offices, and these businesses may be open to the idea of hosting works in front windows if they are not needed to display advertising or merchandise. SSA #60 or NRC could serve as the coordinator of an art windows program, acting as a liaison between interested artists and property owners to coordinate access, installation, and relocation or artwork when the vacant space finds a tenant.



4.2 Create a plaza in the center of the neighborhood

Although the North River communities enjoy high quality open space, community institutions, and commercial destinations, residents and other stakeholders feel that the center of the neighborhood lacks a public space for gathering and interacting. They envision a centrally located plaza that supports lively interactions between community members and incorporates public art, seating, and neighborhood history. At the February 2017 public workshop, attendees ranked “parks or plazas where people can gather” as the feature they, by a large margin, would most like to see developed near the Brown Line stations. Throughout the visioning process for the CTA Lawrence Avenue Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study, adding a plaza has remained a priority for the community. Chapters 6 (Transit Oriented Development) and 7 (Community Safety) both include recommendations to explore the creation of one or more plazas in the



The CTA parking lot on Lawrence Avenue would be a prime location for a central plaza, possibly as part of a larger redevelopment of that part of the site.

center of Albany Park, as part of new TOD projects or as an independent project by Chicago Park District or CDOT. An inviting, active plaza would help attract people to the Kimball-Kedzie District, unifying its roles as a commercial corridor and a social hub for the community.

In addition to advocating for public space as part of new development on Lawrence Avenue, stakeholders should explore the conversion of underutilized sections of neighborhood streets. CDOT’s “Make Way for People” initiative could be one way to create new public spaces for gathering, whether large plazas or smaller, temporary sites. Some of Chicago’s most popular plazas were created on land that was converted from little-used sections of city streets. The Make Way for People program aims to create public spaces that build community and enliven neighborhoods by opening streets, parking spots, and alleys to new uses that prioritize people over vehicular traffic. The program consists of four types of “people places” that modify existing transportation rights-of-way: people spots, people streets, people plazas, and people alleys.

Some of these projects, including People Spots and People Alleys, enable temporary installations for outdoor seating, dining, and performances. People Streets projects, however, create year-round public spaces, typically on areas of roadway that are paved but are not necessary for the flow of traffic, such as cul-de-sacs or parts of diagonal intersections. In the Lakeview neighborhood, CDOT worked with the Lakeview Chamber of Commerce to create spaces for seating, walking, and calming car traffic at the six-way intersection of Southport, Lincoln, and Wellington Avenues. Large-scale People Streets projects require a sizeable local match from a community partner, which may require neighborhood stakeholders to raise funds or seek private-sector sponsors.



Giddings Plaza

Giddings Plaza, in Lincoln Square, is one of the neighborhood plazas that stakeholders frequently cited as a model for what they would like to see in the North River communities. Located along Lincoln Avenue just south of Lawrence Avenue, Giddings Plaza includes a fountain, attractive landscaping and trees, places to sit, and a place for musical performances. It is located in the middle of a popular stretch of shops and restaurants, close to the Western CTA Brown Line station. The plaza, which is also known as Kempf Plaza, hosts a summer concert series, cultural festivals, a beer festival, and a Christmas tree.

While Giddings Plaza is widely cited as a successful gathering place, it was once an active roadway. Until the 1970s, Giddings Street ran through the current site of the plaza to its intersection with Lincoln Avenue. The City of Chicago added a cul-de-sac at the eastern end of the plaza as part of a larger infrastructure project to calm traffic and boost economic development, adding the plaza over time.²

4.3 Create gateway features along Lawrence Avenue

People familiar with the North River communities know that it is a special, unique neighborhood. But for the many other people who pass through the neighborhood along Lawrence Avenue, there are no visual signifiers that clearly indicate they are entering the North River communities. By placing iconic markers, public art, and wayfinding signage at the eastern and western gateways of the Kimball-Kedzie District along Lawrence Avenue, the community would provide attractive, useful signifiers that people have arrived in a place they will want to remember.

The Chicago River, Ronan Park, Peterson Garden, and Global Garden Farm offer an ideal location for a gateway at the eastern end of Lawrence Avenue. The natural and community features at this gateway demonstrate the unique combination of diversity, community spirit, and riverside location that contribute to the North River communities' sense of place. The location is especially significant because it is not only a gateway for people traveling Lawrence Avenue, but also for the many people biking the North Shore Channel Trail. Attractive gateways welcoming people biking on popular regional trails to the North River communities can entice them to visit nearby businesses, offering a chance to capture economic benefits.

An appropriate location for a western gateway is at the intersection of Lawrence Avenue and Central Park Avenue. Although within the urban fabric of Lawrence Avenue, the intersection is located at a transition point that can serve to introduce the Kimball-Kedzie District as the heart of the Lawrence Avenue corridor, where wider sidewalks, public transit hubs, and denser commercial spaces provide a different experience. A western gateway at this location also presents an opportunity to use the vacant lot located at the southeast corner of the intersection to develop a park or plaza that could further enhance the gateway. A pocket park at this location could incorporate public art, wayfinding, and other features that are memorable and provide a reference point for the area.



Ronan Park offers a potential gateway location to welcome people arriving from the east on Lawrence Avenue, as well as on the North Shore Channel Trail. The gateway concept can incorporate the neighboring Peterson Garden, Global Garden Farm, and the Chicago River.



The vacant lot at the corner of Lawrence Avenue and Central Park Avenue could be the site of gateway features including a mural, wayfinding signage, and a park or plaza.

These gateways will serve as bookends to the “Kimball-Kedzie District,” providing a sense of arrival for residents as well as visitors. Neighborhoods in Chicago and elsewhere have used archways as effective ways to distinguish themselves visually, such as the Little Village Arch, the Lincoln Square Entrance Arch, and the Puerto Rican flag archways in Humboldt Park. However, a gateway feature does not need to arch over the road to achieve a similarly welcoming effect—murals, pedestal signs, and other markers can do so as well. Albany Park is already rich with public art and murals, but adding some in strategic locations would increase their visibility and contribute to placemaking. Signs, banners, and public art can incorporate the visual themes of the gateways in other parts of the neighborhood, such as businesses west of Central Park Avenue, to show visitors that the businesses and cultural opportunities the North River communities offer can be found throughout the neighborhood.

In the North River communities, the addition of distinctive park features and public art as gateways would also provide opportunities for recreation, places to gather, and support for community engagement. Both the vacant lot at the recommended western gateway and the city-owned park and gardens at the recommended eastern gateway offer the possibility of being enhanced as part of larger developments. Stakeholders should work with aldermen and developers to ensure that the gateway concept be included as part of any proposed developments, whether parks, new housing, or commercial uses.



Aesthetics

During the planning process, several stakeholders in the North River communities have indicated that the appearance of many buildings and businesses along Lawrence Avenue should be improved. What makes a corridor attractive is a matter of personal opinion, but several common themes emerged from community surveys, discussions with residents and business owners, and walks along the corridor by the project team.

In comments submitted through the project’s MetroQuest online public survey, members of the public cited specific problems such as trash on the corridor’s sidewalks, excessive coverage of windows with signage and stacked merchandise, and the use of rope lighting and LED signs. Other common complaints included safety bars, grates, and dark or covered windows—conditions that can create the appearance of vacancy. Overall, stakeholders indicated a general impression that the corridor’s appearance was holding it back. “Cleanup” and “improved business appearance” were ranked first and third among suggested improvements in the commercial corridors section of the online survey. In the economic development section of the survey, the top item was “upkeep of businesses.”

In addition to the strategies this chapter recommends, strategies from Chapter 7 (Community Safety) are relevant to improving the aesthetics of the Kimball-Kedzie District. Currently, the only pedestrian light fixtures along Lawrence Avenue are located at intersections with collector streets. Pedestrian-scale lighting could enhance feelings of safety and contribute to placemaking, and light fixtures could also double as platforms for placemaking banners or signage.

By addressing the widely-shared concerns about the corridor’s appearance, stakeholders in the community can capitalize on Lawrence Avenue’s many assets—such as its many beautiful buildings and visually interesting businesses—and bring the inherent attractiveness of the Lawrence Avenue corridor to the fore.

4.4 Connect business and property owners with beautification programs

Improving the corridor’s appearance will require action from business and property owners. However, some property owners have indicated that they cannot afford to make improvements and keep their properties affordable to tenants.

Numerous existing programs offer assistance to business and property owners who would like to improve their facilities, upgrade façades, and beautify their street frontage. One is SSA #60’s façade improvement program, which provides property owners and tenants with rebates of 50 percent of costs (up to \$7,500) for upgrades to building exteriors. Another is the City of Chicago’s Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF), which uses revenues in specified Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts to help property owners install new windows and roofs, improve accessibility, upgrade HVAC systems, and pursue other repairs. When interviewed, some business stakeholders expressed their belief that many business owners are unaware of these programs and therefore failed to take advantage of them.

Going forward, the NRC, SSA #60, aldermanic offices, and other funders should work together to extend these programs to as many eligible businesses as possible. In particular, they should keep in mind that business owners with limited English proficiency may not be aware of how to apply for these programs. Working with intermediaries trusted by business owners—such as Albany Park Community Center, HANA Center, and religious institutions—can help to expand access to these programs.



Form a task force to explore an SSA west of Kimball Avenue

Currently, SSA #60 covers Lawrence Avenue only as far west as Kimball Avenue. Stakeholder input and a walking survey of storefronts show a noticeable decrease in the quality of the pedestrian environment west of Kimball, including buildings that need façade improvements, areas with accumulated litter, and other problems. SSA #60 offers a program for façade improvements and rebates, litter collection, tree maintenance, snow patrol, and other benefits, but only within the boundaries of the district. In the past, efforts to extend the SSA west of Kimball have been unsuccessful. NRC should work with businesses, property owners, and aldermen to revisit the possibility and thoroughly discuss the costs and benefits of SSA expansion. Possible outcomes include the expansion of the SSA or the creation of a new, separate SSA that would cover the western part of the Lawrence Avenue corridor. In either scenario, coordinating investments and outreach would maximize the benefits of the district.

4.5 Develop guidance for window displays and signage

Stakeholders frequently cited window displays as an area where Lawrence Avenue could improve. A walk along Lawrence Avenue reveals a wide range of approaches to window displays and signage. Some businesses use their windows facing the street to provide passersby with an inviting glimpse into their restaurant or store. Others display selected merchandise or signage, advertising sale prices or specials—sometimes to the point of fully covering the window. Many have chosen to hang heavy curtains or install safety bars, obscuring any view into the space. The variety of visual approaches is part of the corridor’s charm, but greater consistency and transparency across different business types could help the corridor appear more attractive and welcoming, especially to people walking through the neighborhood.

NRC and its business advocacy partners can help improve the appearance of businesses by providing a practical guide on best practices for signage and window displays—as well as advice on grants and other ways to finance improvements. Guidance on signage and display practices can help business owners achieve their advertising goals but still contribute to the aesthetics and safety of the corridor. The following list includes examples of best practices for signage and window displays:

- To avoid clutter, limit window coverage to 20 percent of window area
- Avoid LED rope lighting, flashing lights, video displays, and digital light boards
- Focus menus and small signage at eye level
- Signage should be made of durable materials. Do not use excessive posters or other displays that lack a “sign structure”
- Replace safety bars with nonstructural safety equipment such as cameras or alarm systems
- Remove shelving that obscures the interior of the space

In developing the guide, the NRC should work with partners who are trusted by local business owners to learn more about what businesses want their displays to accomplish. It is important to underscore that the goal is not uniformity: best practices should allow for considerable creativity by individual business owners. Also, rather than being restrictive or punitive, it should provide a helping hand to business owners who want to improve the appearance of their businesses.

4.6 Develop resources that preserve and restore historic buildings

The many beautiful historic buildings that line Lawrence Avenue are a significant asset to the corridor. Many properties feature well-preserved terra cotta façades originally made by the Northwest Terra Cotta Company. These historic buildings provide a colorful backdrop, integral to the unique character of Albany Park, that can attract visitors. The corridor’s architecture also provides a rare opportunity for creative reuse of historic buildings for new purposes. The corridor already features interesting repurposing of buildings, and business advocacy groups should seek ways to attract businesses that are interested in adaptive reuse.



Bikes N' Roses, a not-for-profit bike shop that teaches bike repair and maintenance to youths, is one of several businesses located in the historic Willis Building at the corner of Lawrence and Sawyer Avenues.

Engagement, promotion, and programming

While placemaking and aesthetic improvements can help to heighten the distinctiveness of the Lawrence Avenue corridor, it is ultimately the people and culture of the North River communities that make the area special. Partnerships and collaboration between the community's many active business advocacy groups and their constituents will provide a platform for implementing the recommendations throughout this chapter.

The following recommendations describe strategies to strengthen engagement, programming, and promotion of the neighborhood by the community's civic organizations, business owners, residents, and cultural institutions. A collaborative approach that draws on the community's many talented people and cultural resources will help neighborhood stakeholders market the community's diversity and raise its profile, attracting tenants who will thrive on Lawrence Avenue and meet local needs.

4.7 Support and attract tenants who promote the Lawrence Avenue experience

The popular businesses located along Lawrence, Kimball, and Kedzie Avenues within the heart of Albany Park are major contributors to the Lawrence Avenue experience. The variety of services these businesses provide are key to meeting the needs of residents. They also reinforce the corridor's sense of place, with their multilingual signs, niche merchandise, and diverse clientele offering reminders of the many cultures present in the North River communities. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders stressed that any plans for the future of the corridor should include as partners the restaurants, shops, grocers, and offices that are essential to the diverse communities present in the neighborhood.

But while stakeholders value many of the businesses that populate the Lawrence Avenue corridor, they also identified several types of businesses that they see as less desirable (or, at least, as less essential or overrepresented). Mobile phone stores and automotive services were commonly cited examples of businesses that were unpopular with residents and neighboring businesses, whether because of their appearance, unpleasant noises and smells, or simply the lost opportunity of not having a more attractive business in a prime location.

To enhance the Lawrence Avenue experience and maintain the quality of life for current residents, business community advocates should work to retain and support the businesses that make Lawrence Avenue special, while working to add complementary new tenants to any newly available spaces.

Coordinate support for current businesses

The mix of locally oriented retail, restaurants, and services that many of the neighborhood's businesses offer is a good fit for current economic trends. As many national retailers have moved toward online formats with little or no brick-and-mortar presence, the kind of retail mix offered by the Lawrence Avenue corridor has emerged as a more stable alternative. The placemaking and aesthetic programs described earlier in this chapter can help existing businesses improve their facilities and look more inviting, increasing foot traffic and attracting patrons interested in the types of goods and services the community offers.

Other services that could support current businesses include assisting with holiday marketing, promoting the corridor city- and region-wide, landscaping, bike parking infrastructure, and hosting special events. Given the many languages spoken by entrepreneurs in the North River communities, business support groups should also consider helping with translation of marketing materials. As part of the City of Chicago's Small Business Center, the Albany Park Community Center offers several notable services, including assisting entrepreneurs with business creation and expansion, import/export resource development, and compliance with City and state regulations. The business support groups in the North River communities should collaborate where possible and refer businesses to appropriate partners to access the support services they need.

Work with property owners to attract new tenants

Business advocacy groups in the North River communities can help activate currently underutilized spaces by helping property owners and prospective tenants find one another. Many stakeholders, including some property owners, commented that they would like to see higher quality, longer-term commercial tenants occupy some ground floor locations that have seen many tenants in quick succession.

There are several different business types that would complement the community's existing business mix and benefit from being located along a busy, walkable street like Lawrence Avenue. Many residents expressed a desire for more local restaurants and nightlife uses, especially ones that feature sidewalk seating that would help activate the street. At a business focus group in August 2017, several attendees agreed that the addition of businesses with an entertainment focus would fit well and be welcomed by the community. NRC and other business advocacy groups should work with property owners within the district to identify spaces that would be suitable for live music, spoken word performances, and theater, and develop materials to market these spaces, while also conferring with current arts and culture oriented institutions in the neighborhood (such as Halcyon Theatre, Albany Park Theatre Project, North Park University, and WTTW) to find prospective tenants.



Attract and support businesses that appeal to dispersed immigrant populations

The North River communities are well connected to the northern and northwest suburbs, where many of the families who originally immigrated to Albany Park and North Park have since settled. Business advocacy stakeholders have stated that the buying power of many immigrant groups, especially the Korean American community, has moved to Chicago's northwest suburbs, where larger businesses serving these populations have located. However, recent developments show that the North River communities can successfully support large anchor businesses that both serve the local community and attract dispersed immigrant populations that retain ties to the neighborhood.

In 2016, Filipino American supermarket chain Seafood City opened its first Midwestern location on Elston Avenue in Mayfair. Seafood City features a large selection of groceries and a food court, offering ingredients and prepared food from several Asian culinary traditions. The store has attracted large crowds, catering to residents of both the North River communities and the suburbs. Business advocacy stakeholders should seek opportunities to attract businesses that could have similar draws for patrons with family connections to the North River communities.



Collaborate with major institutions in the community to locate space for start-ups and other ventures

Many communities have leveraged major educational and medical institutions to catalyze economic development opportunities. Several comparable institutions are located in or near the North River communities: Swedish Covenant Hospital, NEIU, and North Park University. NRC and its partners should explore ways to work with these institutions to identify opportunities to collaborate. For these institutions, nearby office space could provide sites for research, administration, community outreach, and other activities. Universities also present the chance to connect with graduating students who are looking for places to locate start-up businesses, food-related ventures, social enterprises, or nonprofit organizations. NRC and its partners should offer to connect with universities to help graduating students find suitable spaces for offices among the existing office stock in the neighborhood.

4.8 Streamline communication among business stakeholders

Elected officials and local organizations manage a variety of programs to support the business community and enhance the corridor. By improving communication among themselves and with residents and businesses, these groups can help bolster the collaboration that already takes place.

The cross-cultural outreach approach recommended in Chapter 3 will be important to helping this strategy succeed. Business stakeholders indicated that they believe the wide variation in business appearance may derive from the same diversity that lends the Lawrence Avenue corridor its unique energy. Business owners differ in their approaches to signage, advertising, and many other activities. NRC and other groups should continue to work to build relationships with business owners to better understand these cultural barriers, generate guidelines with widespread buy-in, and help to implement these guidelines. It is essential to include a broad and diverse coalition of businesses from the entire Lawrence Avenue corridor. To reassure and more effectively engage with uncertain business owners, business advocacy groups should work through trusted partners. Business owners may have preexisting relationships with faith communities, the Albany Park Community Center, and other human service organizations. NRC has strong relationships with these organizations as well and should engage them as part of any outreach campaigns. These groups can help NRC, SSA #60, and aldermen's offices to overcome language and cultural barriers to implement corridor improvement strategies.

Involve business owners in strategic planning

Business owners have invaluable knowledge of what kinds of assistance and improvements would help them thrive, and are crucial to both planning and implementing enhancements to the corridor. To build strong partnerships, business advocacy groups should expand their outreach to business owners to capture their ideas and understand their needs. If businesses feel they have had a hand in shaping a community-wide vision for the corridor, they may be more likely to participate in planning and implementation going forward. Taking the time to patiently ask businesses about their current and anticipated needs will help advocacy groups design programs that businesses will be interested in, as well as develop long-lasting, productive relationships.

Outside of strategic planning activities, business advocacy groups should develop effective newsletters, social media strategies, and in-person meetings to maintain regular communication with businesses about what funding and programming opportunities are available. These partnerships can also provide opportunities to promote and market businesses in the community, and provide an outlet for the business community to become sponsors, advocates, and general supporters of nearby events, festivals, concerts, and other activities.

4.9 Develop and promote cultural programming

Events and programs that display the culture of the North River communities should be a key element of placemaking for the Kimball-Kedzie District. The community already hosts several popular events that highlight the many cultures present in the neighborhood, including NRC's annual Flavors of Albany Park restaurant crawl. On three occasions, Albany Park Neighbors has hosted Albany Park World Fest, a popular multicultural street festival featuring food, music, and other performances highlighting the neighborhood's diversity, largely through the efforts of volunteers. Business advocacy groups should work with businesses, local civic organizations, and local arts groups to identify further opportunities for special events specifically targeted to enliven and bring people to the Lawrence Avenue corridor. Finding sponsors, grants, and adequate resources to make Albany Park World Fest a regular, sustainable event should be a priority, as community members have expressed interest in reviving the festival but feel it is beyond what volunteers can provide. Other potential events that the business community could help organize include:

- First Fridays: a popular event in many communities where businesses host a succession of art, live music, theater, dance, and other special events on the first Friday of a month.
- Holiday festivals: businesses could open for special hours or activities that align with celebrations of significant holidays in the neighborhood.
- Performances: businesses with spaces for live performances can host local or touring artists. Restaurants and businesses can also offer special promotions that align with performances at local theatres, universities, or special events such as the Beyond the Gates concerts held in Bohemian National Cemetery.
- Historic, culinary, and cultural tours: Organizations such as the Chicago Architecture Foundation have highlighted the importance of "heritage and cultural tourism." Food tours that focus on the cultures, restaurants, and groceries of the North River communities offer an excellent opportunity to display the unique heritage of the neighborhood. The NRC should work with other organizations to develop walking and biking tours to explore Lawrence Avenue and other areas of the community.
- Pop-up shops and markets: underutilized sites, including vacant parcels or vacant businesses, can host temporary installations of retailers and restaurants or special events such as food truck festivals and craft markets. Business advocacy groups should seek local artisans and restaurateurs to take part in these events.

Special cultural events can be integrated into the Lawrence Avenue corridor's gateways and into current and future parks and plazas. Business advocacy groups should collaborate to advertise these events via traditional and social media, including to local universities.

Implementation

Table 4.2. Lawrence Avenue implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
4.1: Develop a “Main Street” experience along Lawrence Avenue			
Advance a coordinated program of streetscaping improvements	2-5 years	CDOT, Aldermen, SSA #60, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce	Streetscaping improvements calm traffic, improve visibility, and accommodate pedestrians. There are many types of streetscaping Improvements, including crosswalks, improved curbs and gutters, paver parkways, street, bike racks and waste containers, seating areas on side streets, planters, and new trees. Streetscaping is most effective as a coordinated program.
Install distinctive signage or markers	2-5 years	CDOT, Aldermen, SSA #60, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce	In keeping with the themes established for the public art campaign, stakeholders should work to install consistently designed markers and signage at key gateways and throughout the neighborhood. The Mayfair signs along Lawrence Avenue provide one model.
Compile a list of vacant storefronts	0-2 years	SSA #60	Keep a current and regularly updated list of vacant storefronts and market these storefronts to businesses who are looking for locations in the area.
Encourage pop-up shops in vacant storefronts	0-2 years	SSA #60	Work with property owners to invite existing local businesses and entrepreneurs to open pop-up shops as temporary uses that activate empty storefronts in visible locations.
Coordinate an “art windows” program	0-2 years	SSA #60	Act as a liaison between interested artists and property owners of temporarily vacant storefronts, or businesses that do not use their front windows. Coordinate access, installation, and relocation of artwork when the vacant space finds a tenant.
4.2: Create a plaza in the center of the neighborhood			
Advocate for creating a plaza in the center of the neighborhood	Ongoing	Aldermen, SSA #60, CDOT, Chicago Park District, CTA, developers	Explore the creation of one or more plazas in the center of Albany Park, as part of new TOD projects or as an independent project by Chicago Park District. CDOT’s “Make Way for People” program could be a way to add a plaza on currently underutilized roadways, sidewalks, or parking areas.
4.3: Create gateway features along Lawrence Avenue			
Design and install attractive gateway features	2-5 years	Aldermen, SSA #60, Chicago Park District	Place iconic markers, public art, and wayfinding signage at the eastern and western gateways of the Kimball-Kedzie District along Lawrence Avenue.
Explore opportunity for pocket park at Lawrence and Central Park	2-5 years	Aldermen, Chicago Park District, CDOT	A pocket park and playground at the southeastern corner of Lawrence and Central Park Avenue, where three vacant lots, together comprising 16,651 square feet, are currently for sale, could be the foundation of an attractive gateway.
Advocate for gateway concept as part of proposed developments	Ongoing	Aldermen, civic organizations, residents, business owners	Both the eastern and western gateways along Lawrence Avenue are sites that could be developed as parks, new housing, or commercial uses. The community should advocate that any planned development at these sites include gateway features that will benefit the community as a whole.



Table 4.2 (Continued).

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
4.4: Connect business and property owners with beautification programs			
Expand use of current programs	Ongoing	Aldermen, SSA #60, City of Chicago Small Business Center, Albany Park Community Center, HANA Center	Work together to extend current programs, such as façade improvement programs and the Small Business Improvement Fund, to as many eligible businesses as possible. Collaborate with trusted partners to expand access to business and property owners with limited English proficiency
Form task force to consider SSA expansion	0-2 years	Business owners, property owners, residents, aldermen	Form group to study options for expanding current SSA or creating a new SSA to extend benefits further west along Lawrence Avenue. Develop strategies for coordinating future investments by SSAs.
4.5: Develop guidance for window displays and signage			
Collaborate to create a practical guide on best practices for signage and window displays	2-5 years	Businesses, SSA #60, Albany Park Community Center, HANA Center	Work with partners to create a culturally sensitive guide to best practices that responds to the goals and needs of business owners. Include advice on grants and other ways to finance adoption of the recommendations.
4.6: Develop resources that preserve and restore historic buildings			
Seek business tenants who will creatively reuse historic buildings	Ongoing	Chicago Historic Preservation Division, Landmarks Illinois	Work with partners to find prospective tenants whose businesses could benefit from interesting, attractive historic architecture. Talk to businesses who have adapted historic buildings to find out what would make it easier for future businesses to do similar projects.

Table 4.2 (Continued).

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
4.7: Support and attract tenants who promote the Lawrence Avenue experience			
Coordinate support for current businesses	Ongoing	SSA #60, Albany Park Community Center	Many organizations currently provide important assistance to businesses in the neighborhood. Collaborate to expand the reach of these programs, and to add additional support that businesses seek, including translations, assistance with holiday marketing, promoting the corridor city- and region-wide, landscaping, bike parking infrastructure, and hosting special events
Seek businesses that will fit with the district’s food and entertainment focus	Ongoing	SSA #60, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, Albany Park Community Center, Halcyon Theatre, Albany Park Theatre Project, NEIU, North Park University	Identify spaces that would be suitable for live music, spoken word performances, and theater, and develop materials to market these spaces. Work with current arts and culture oriented institutions in the neighborhood to find prospective tenants.
Collaborate with major institutions to locate space for start-ups and other ventures	Ongoing	NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant Hospital	Connect with universities and hospital to find office space for institutional needs and suitable spaces for ventures started by graduating students.
4.8: Streamline communication among business stakeholders			
Survey business stakeholders	0-2 years	Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, SSA #660, Albany Park Community Center	Collaborate with partners trusted by local businesses to gain a thorough understanding of the practical needs of business owners, commercial property owners, and aspiring entrepreneurs—as well as the resources they currently rely on. If businesses feel they have had a hand in shaping a community-wide vision for the corridor, they may be more likely to participate in planning and implementation going forward.
Regularly communicate with business stakeholders	Ongoing	Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, SSA #660, Albany Park Community Center	Develop effective newsletters, social media strategies, and in-person meetings to maintain regular communication with businesses about what funding and programming opportunities are available. These partnerships can also provide opportunities to promote and market businesses in the community, and provide an outlet for the business community to become sponsors, advocates, and general supporters of nearby events, festivals, concerts, and other activities.
4.9: Develop and promote cultural programming			
Develop additional cultural programming	0-2 years	Business owners, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, SSA #60, HANA Center, Ecuadorian Consulate, World Relief Chicago, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm	To building on the success of events like Albany Park World Fest and Flavors of Albany Park, explore creating events such as First Fridays, holiday festivals, performance tie-ins, cultural tours, and pop-up shops and markets.

A photograph of a residential street featuring a variety of housing styles. On the left is a three-story brick and stone building with multiple windows. Next to it is a two-story house with a white porch and a wooden deck. Further down the street, there are more houses, including one with a blue roof and an American flag. The scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the sidewalk. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

Chapter 5 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, CHOICES, AND QUALITY

The North River communities will offer residents a variety of safe housing options that accommodate the needs of families of many sizes, income levels, and diverse backgrounds. Stakeholders will leverage the community's strong housing stock, community networks, and transportation assets to preserve its status as an affordable, attainable neighborhood.

Introduction

The wide range of high quality housing options in the North River communities is central to the area's identity as a diverse, affordable part of Chicago. The community offers housing options that include courtyard apartment buildings, 2-4 flat homes, and historic bungalows. The area's housing options have allowed families of all income levels to make their homes in the North River communities, and remain in the neighborhood as their families grow.

Many neighborhood stakeholders have observed changes in the local housing market in recent years and anticipate that current and future increases in housing costs could threaten key characteristics of the North River communities. Community members and housing advocates fear that housing trends they have seen in neighborhoods to the south and west may be spreading to the North River communities, and have already witnessed families leaving Albany Park and North Park as the result of building renovations that lead to higher rents. While the neighborhood is not currently the site of significant new development or extensive teardowns of existing housing, many stakeholders share a feeling that the community is on the cusp of such change—and the displacement of the residents that make the North River communities the unique places they are today.

To develop strategies for preserving the affordability of housing in the North River communities, CMAP engaged the Urban Land Institute Chicago (ULI Chicago). ULI Chicago is a district council of the Urban Land Institute, a membership-based, multidisciplinary real estate forum. Through its Technical Assistance Services Program, ULI Chicago offers communities strategic advice from development experts. In partnership with CMAP and NRC, ULI Chicago convened a two-day workshop in June 2017 to study the housing situation in the community and develop strategies for preserving and developing housing that would be affordable for middle-income families. The panel included housing developers, housing policy experts, and community development and finance professionals.

Based on the panel's collaborative review of extensive background information, a community tour, and interviews of community stakeholders, ULI Chicago released a report, *Workforce Housing Strategies for North River Communities*. The recommendations in this chapter are largely drawn from ULI Chicago's report, which is included as Appendix A to this plan. The strategies address housing affordability through two main tracks: strategies to preserve existing workforce housing and strategies to attract development of new workforce housing.

Key Findings

- 1. The North River communities have many strengths that can boost efforts to preserve affordability.** The area’s high-quality housing stock offers opportunities to implement a wide range of strategies to preserve affordable housing. Organizations and anchor institutions in the North River communities contribute to civic pride, community energy, and knowledge of the neighborhood that will be essential to preserving and developing affordable housing, and all have demonstrated interest in working together on the issue. And through existing programs like Communities United’s Renters Organizing Ourselves to Stay (ROOTS), neighborhood housing advocates already have experience working with mission-driven developers to preserve affordable housing.
- 2. The area’s many assets are likely to attract market-rate developers and higher income residents and businesses.** The North River communities enjoy strong access to transit, attractive homes, and beautiful parks and forest preserves—features shared by some of the Chicago neighborhoods that have experienced rising housing costs and displacement of longtime residents. Stakeholders in the North River communities often point to similarities between Albany Park and other neighborhoods like Logan Square, Lincoln Square, Uptown, and Edgewater as indicators that similar upward trends in housing costs may emerge.
- 3. Now is the time to act to preserve affordability.** While scattered building rehabilitation and some amount of rising costs have occurred in the community, displacement and housing costs are not rising at the pace seen in neighboring areas. While average rents in the North River communities are increasing, they are still relatively affordable for middle-income families compared to neighborhoods like Ravenswood and Lincoln Square. At the ULI Chicago housing panel, stakeholders reported that they are not yet seeing teardowns, and few major new developments have been proposed. Although the housing market is strengthening, it is not too late for the community, aldermen, and partners to implement affordability strategies before market forces drive land and home values significantly higher.
- 4. Maintaining housing affordability requires targeted, strategic actions.** Historically, the North River communities have enjoyed “natural affordability,” in which the local housing market allowed middle-income households to afford housing without public subsidies or formal programs. While “natural affordability” has meant that the neighborhood as a whole has provided enough housing to meet the needs of middle-income households, going forward the community will need to focus on opportunities to keep individual units and buildings affordable. While the forces that drive housing markets are beyond the control of communities, advocates can find opportunities to take advantage of market forces (such as the current strong housing market) to leverage developer interest and drive the construction of new affordable housing.

Housing Market Context

Data on the housing market in the North River communities supports the perception shared by many stakeholders that housing costs are near the upper limit of affordability for area families. Rental housing costs in the Albany Park market area have risen in recent years from \$0.96 per square foot in 2006 to \$1.20 per square foot in 2016, a 25 percent increase.³ Applied to a 1,000 square foot, two-bedroom apartment, the \$1.20 per square foot cost of rental housing translates to a monthly rent of \$1,200 dollars.

The price at which housing is affordable depends on both household income and household size. In general, housing costs of up to 30 percent of a household’s income are considered affordable. The ULI Chicago panel focused on families earning between 50 percent and 120 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) for the Chicago area.⁴ Households earning more than 50 percent of the AMI are ineligible for many housing subsidies, but still face challenges finding affordable places to live. The median household income in the North River communities is \$53,287, below the AMI for the Chicago area.⁵ The chart below shows the annual income for households of different sizes at several percentages of AMI, followed by another chart indicating the maximum monthly housing costs that would be considered affordable for households of different sizes.

There is significant variation in rents in the North River communities, based on housing quality, location, size, and other factors. In addition, there is variation in the housing needs of different households. A hypothetical 1,000 square foot, \$1,200/month apartment would be considered affordable to many families in the North River communities, but not to lower-income families. And while the cost of the average rental apartment remains affordable to a household earning the median income in the neighborhood, it has risen to levels that strain household finances.

Table 5.1. Area Median Income Comparison by Household Size

Household Size	Area Median Income Limits, 2017				
	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI	100% AMI	120% AMI
1	\$27,650	\$33,180	\$44,250	\$55,300	\$66,360
2	\$31,600	\$37,920	\$50,600	\$63,200	\$75,840
3	\$35,550	\$42,680	\$56,900	\$71,100	\$85,320
4	\$39,500	\$47,400	\$63,200	\$79,000	\$94,800
5	\$42,700	\$51,240	\$68,300	\$85,400	\$102,480

Source: “Area Median Income (AMI) chart.” City of Chicago, https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/area_median_incomeamichart.html. Accessed January 25, 2018.

Table 5.2. Maximum Affordable Monthly Housing Costs

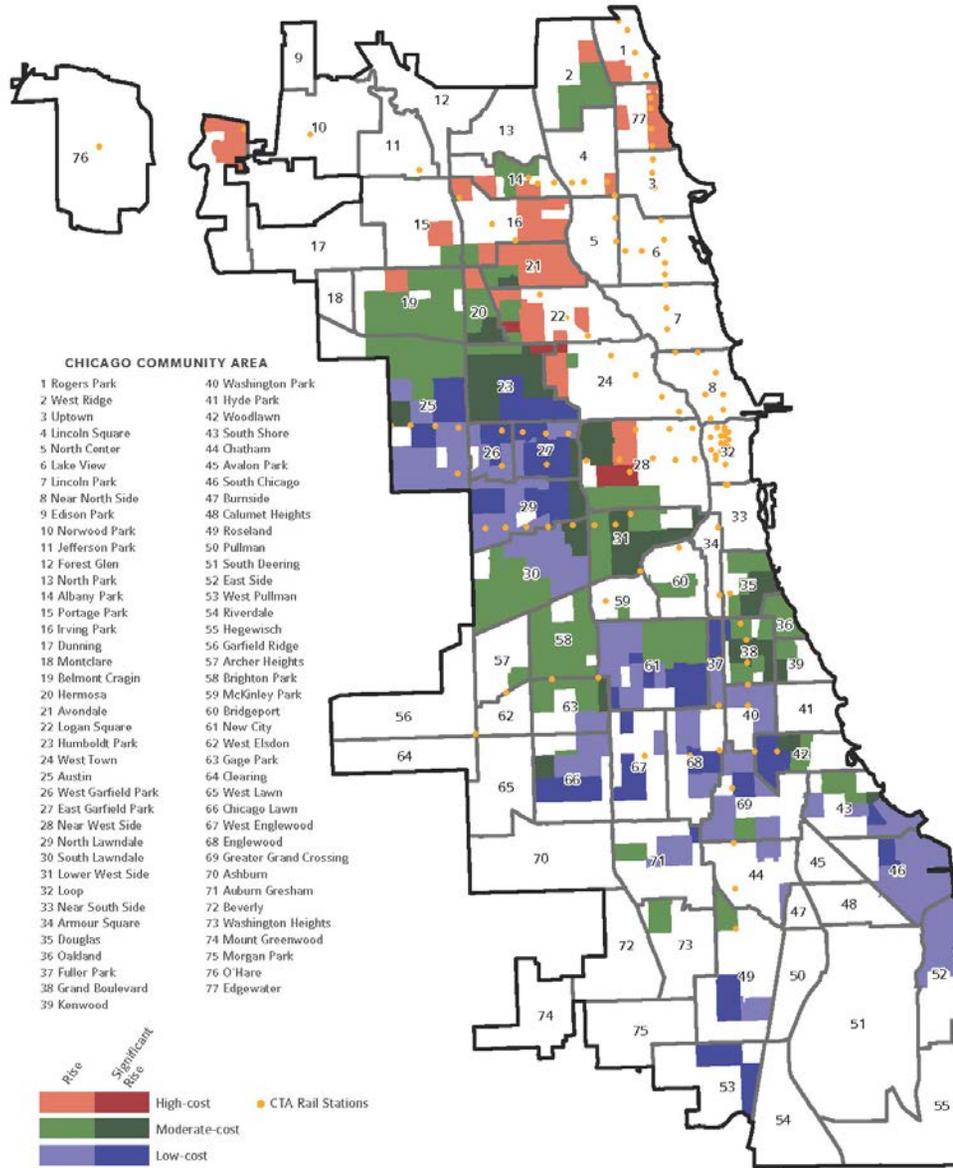
Household Size	Affordable Monthly Housing Cost (30% of income), 2017				
	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI	100% AMI	120% AMI
1	\$691	\$830	\$1,106	\$1,383	\$1,659
2	\$790	\$948	\$1,265	\$1,580	\$1,896
3	\$889	\$1,067	\$1,423	\$1,778	\$2,133
4	\$988	\$1,185	\$1,580	\$1,975	\$2,370
5	\$1,068	\$1,281	\$1,708	\$2,135	\$2,562

Source: CMAP.

DePaul IHS Research

The Institute of Housing Studies at DePaul University (IHS) has analyzed and mapped areas of the City of Chicago where residents are under significant pressure of displacement. Their study assessed whether a neighborhood is at high, medium, or low risk of displacement based on 1) housing prices rising at faster rates than the city's overall trend and 2) a significant percentage of residents being vulnerable based on income, housing cost burden, and housing tenure.⁶ IHS found that three sections of the study area—parts of Albany Park, Mayfair, and Irving Park—are in the highest risk category, with housing costs that are already high and rising prices. It also found that other sections of Albany Park were in the moderate risk category. In both cases, IHS found that prices in these areas, while rising, are not rising as quickly as in parts of the City with the most severe displacement pressures.

Figure 5.3. Vulnerable City of Chicago Submarkets with Rising Sale Values, 2016



Source: DePaul University Institute for Housing Studies.





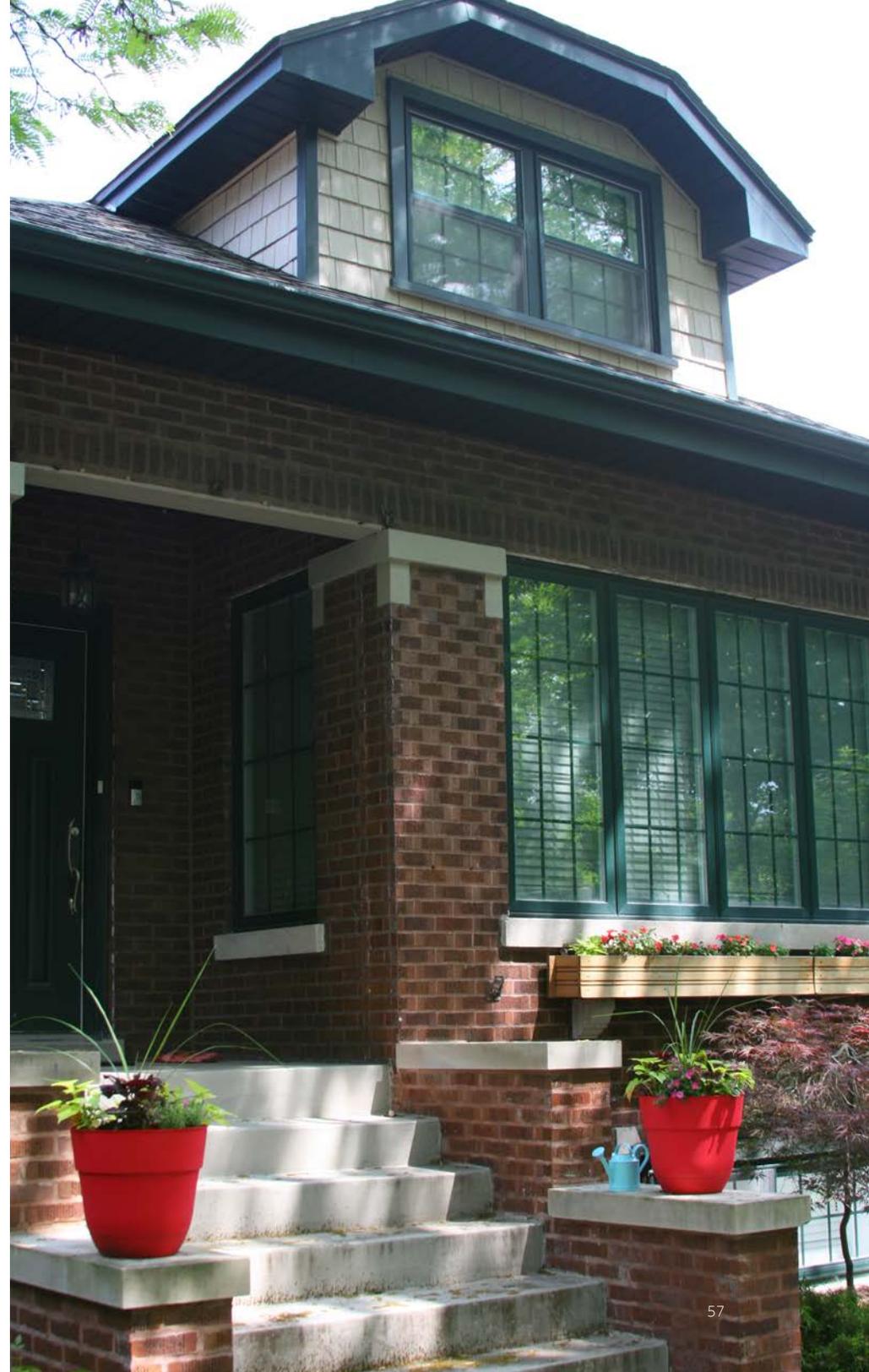
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CMAP Research

In response to stakeholder interest, CMAP investigated how certain demographic and housing trends in the North River communities compare to those in nearby neighborhoods. During the planning process, members of the steering committee and the public often referred to changes they had witnessed in other parts of the City, where quickly rising housing costs have led to displacement of longtime residents.

In response, CMAP compared trends in the Albany Park community area to those in the City as a whole, as well as to four community areas that stakeholders most often brought up as points of comparison: Edgewater, Lincoln Square, Logan Square, and Uptown.⁷ These four community areas share several common characteristics with the North River communities: they are located on the north side of Chicago, have strong transit access, and have similar density and housing stock.

Demographic trends from 2000 to 2015 support the case that now is the right time to act to preserve housing affordability. By many of the measures that CMAP researched, Albany Park has not seen changes at the same level or rate as the comparison neighborhoods, tracking more closely with the City overall than with these neighborhoods that have experienced rising costs and displacement. Many of the trends stakeholders associate with displacement, including the changing ethnic composition of a neighborhood, the number of school-age children, and the educational attainment of residents, are less pronounced in Albany Park.

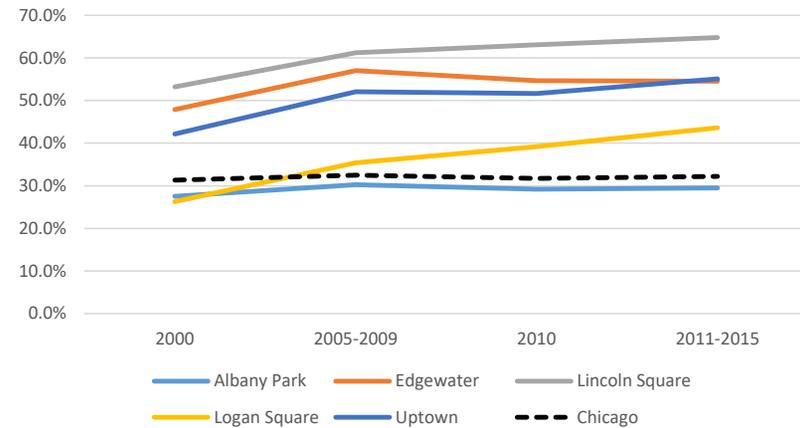


Race and Ethnicity

Albany Park, the four comparison neighborhoods, and the City of Chicago have all seen decreases in population since 2000. In the comparison neighborhoods, the percentage of white residents has increased over that time, with Logan Square, Lincoln Square, and Uptown seeing significant, consistent increases. The percentage of white residents in Albany Park has remained relatively steady, tracking with the citywide trend.

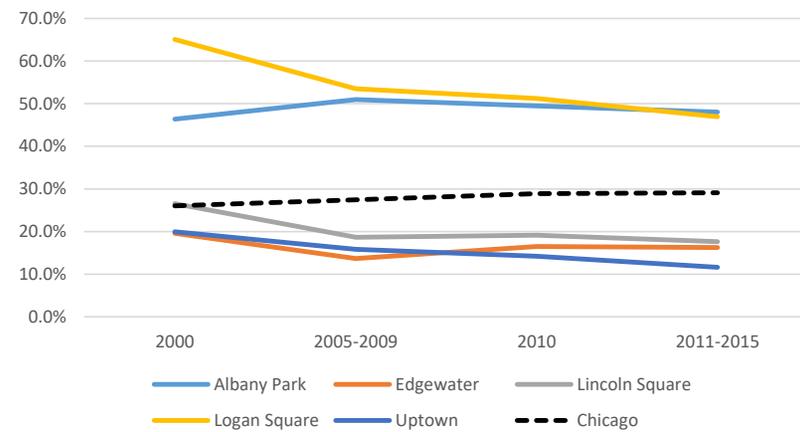
At the same time that these neighborhoods have seen increasing percentages of white residents, they have seen decreasing populations of Latino residents, both in terms of total number and percentage. Albany Park, on the other hand, had a similarly high percentage of Latino residents in 2015 compared to 2000 (although lower than in the 2005-2009 period).

Figure 5.4. Percentage White Population



Source: U.S. Census (2000, 2010), U.S. Census American Community Survey (2005-2009, 2011-2015).

Figure 5.5. Percentage Hispanic/Latino Population

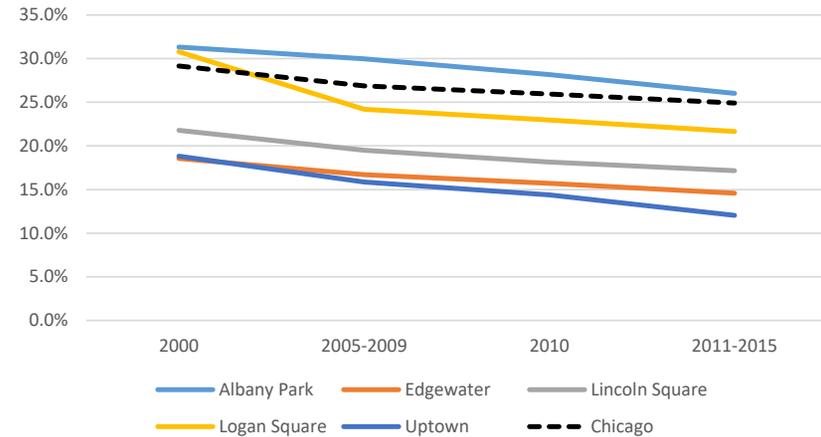


Source: U.S. Census (2000, 2010), U.S. Census American Community Survey (2005-2009, 2011-2015).

Age

Experts point to decreasing numbers of children in a neighborhood as a sign of displacement, as increasing numbers of young professionals are sometimes correlated with fewer families with children.⁸⁹ While all of the five neighborhoods, and Chicago as a whole, have seen declining percentages of residents under the age of nineteen since 2000, Albany Park retains a higher percentage than any of the comparison neighborhoods, and a higher percentage than Chicago overall.

Figure 5.6. Percentage of Population Under 19

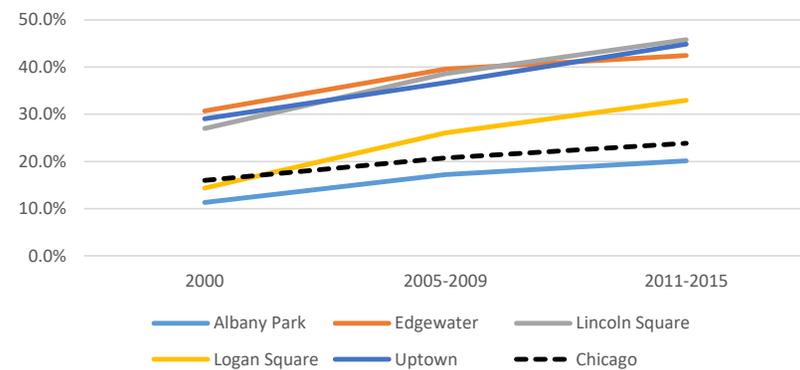


Source: U.S. Census (2000, 2010), U.S. Census American Community Survey (2005-2009, 2011-2015).

Educational Attainment

The percentage of college graduates in a neighborhood is another characteristic that experts cite as a potential indicator that displacement is occurring.⁹⁰ Each of the neighborhoods has seen increases in the percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree, but the percentage in Albany Park has increased at a slower rate and remains below the citywide percentage.

Figure 5.7. Percentage of Population with Bachelor's Degree



Source: U.S. Census (2000, 2010), U.S. Census American Community Survey (2005-2009, 2011-2015).

Recommendations

5.1 Form a neighborhood coalition to coordinate housing advocacy

To tackle a complex challenge like housing affordability, a community needs stakeholders who are energized, committed, and coordinated. The North River communities have the advantage of having many passionate residents and advocates who have formed numerous community organizations. The North River Commission unites more than 100 civic associations, businesses, schools, institutions, and places of worship who are engaged in improving the quality of life in northwest Chicago. NRC's Housing Committee guides the organization's work on housing affordability, choices, and quality. Communities United has organized stakeholders from the North River communities and elsewhere to work for equity and social justice, including in the housing sector. Additionally, Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), North Park University and Swedish Covenant Hospital have shown interest in the topic of housing and could be influential partners. These groups and others have already collaborated with government officials, developers, higher education institutions, and other key partners on countless programs to benefit the community.

NRC should partner with Communities United to form a neighborhood coalition that can organize and coordinate key stakeholders who seek to preserve and expand housing affordability. NRC's Housing Committee, which includes a broad set of stakeholders and engages with many of the issues this chapter addresses, can be the basis for this coalition. NRC should work with Communities United, ULI Chicago, and other local housing advocates to identify stakeholders who could be added to the committee to ensure it draws on the expertise and local knowledge required to implement this plan's recommendations. The coalition will provide a platform that leverages the combined resources, knowledge, and energy of organizations and institutions to implement the recommendations described in the rest of this chapter. It would also demonstrate the community's broad, organized support for affordable housing, which can make developers and elected officials more confident in siting new affordable housing developments in the neighborhood.

The Transit Oriented Development chapter of this plan (Chapter 6) also recommends that neighborhood stakeholders form a coalition of community organizations, local businesses, affordability advocates, and public sector stakeholders to advocate for the community's vision for equitable development. Ideally, the same group—a strategically expanded NRC Housing Committee—could serve both functions. Nonetheless, taking on the formation of this coalition will be a demanding task, and NRC should seek grants or other assistance to help enhance their capacity to coordinate the project. The Chicago Community Trust, Enterprise Community Partners, mission-driven community financial institutions, and philanthropic foundations with a focus on equity may be able to support this work.





5.2 Preserve existing workforce housing

Throughout the planning process, community stakeholders made clear the importance of preserving the existing housing stock in the neighborhood, which has provided natural housing affordability for generations of families. At the February 2017 public workshop, preserving existing affordability was the most popular choice, preferred by 40 percent of the audience, to be this plan's top priority for housing strategies.

Preserving the affordability of existing housing, particularly in the neighborhood's many 2-4 flat buildings, offers a great opportunity to provide housing for workforce families, today and into the future. Of all housing units in the neighborhood, 42 percent are part of 2-4 flat buildings, which typically contain larger units that can comfortably house families (Figure 5.8). The neighborhood is fortunate to already have thousands of these larger units, as it is typically harder to accommodate larger units in new developments. Keeping these existing larger units affordable presents numerous challenges, but the following strategies are designed to help advance the effort.

Use local knowledge to identify preservation opportunities

At the ULI Chicago panel, mission-oriented developers and local stakeholders explained that one of the barriers to preserving existing affordable units is that they are often sold to market-rate developers via "pocket listings," where buyer and seller connect without the property appearing in a public listing. Market-rate developers frequently acquire buildings after referrals from owners or by approaching owners directly, making it difficult for mission-oriented developers to compete to purchase and preserve these properties.

The strength of the North River communities' civic institutions provides an important resource for preserving the affordability of existing housing units. Members of community organizations, colleagues and administrators at anchor institutions, and members and leaders of religious organizations have considerable knowledge of the local housing market, including properties that may be becoming available for rent or purchase. Neighborhood stakeholders told the ULI Chicago panel that these social networks often provide new arrivals to the neighborhood with information about housing opportunities. A neighborhood-wide housing coalition could draw on these networks, connecting trusted mission-oriented developers with up-to-date information about potential opportunities for preservation before they are acquired by market-rate developers.

Partner with mission-oriented developers and operators

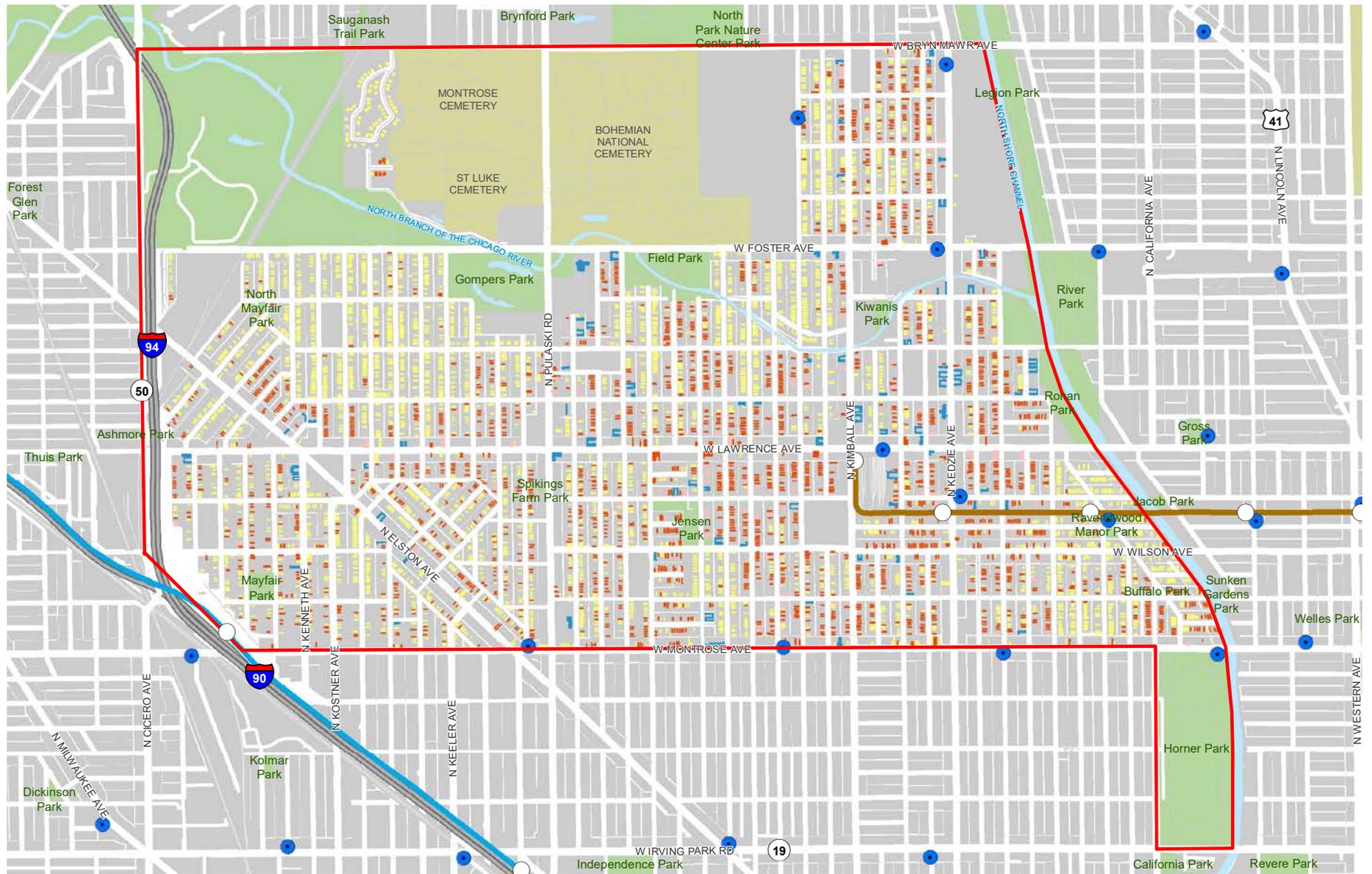
Collaborative partnerships offer the best platform for preserving the affordability of existing rental housing. Preservation poses challenges both in identifying opportunities and in funding activities to keep units affordable. During the planning process, neighborhood stakeholders and developers have stressed the importance of collaboration. Mission-oriented developers have cited the critical importance of local knowledge to help identify opportunity properties, and local advocates would like to connect with experienced organizations that can finance preservation efforts, which have a high degree of complexity.

Housing advocates and mission-oriented developers in the North River communities already have a successful model for collaboration in the ROOTS partnership. Since 2014, the ROOTS program—a joint effort of Communities United, Enterprise Community Partners, and the Chicago Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation (CMHDC)—has bought 2-4 flat buildings to rehabilitate and rent at below-market rates. ROOTS has succeeded by bringing together Communities United’s knowledge of local housing opportunities, the financing capacity of Enterprise Community Partners, and CMHDC’s experience with financing and carrying out the rehabilitation and management of housing units while keeping them affordable.

Partnerships with developers will help advance several key strategies to preserve housing affordability:

- **Target strategic properties.** Mission-oriented developers should focus their acquisition efforts on buildings that offer an opportunity for preserving affordability but are not as attractive to market-rate developers. Whereas market-rate developers are likely to seek distressed buildings they can “gut rehab,” mission-oriented developers can seek buildings that are in good repair. Local partners can help identify these opportunities.
- **Bundle smaller properties.** Because many preservation opportunities are likely to be in 2-4 flats, developers will need to “bundle” units from numerous buildings to finance rehabilitation and operation. Typically, collections of 50 units or more are suitable for bundling. Because bundling units is time-consuming and costly, it is not attractive to most market-rate developers, creating an opportunity for mission-oriented developers.
- **Leverage financing opportunities.** Mission-oriented developers are experienced in seeking and arranging complex financing programs for workforce housing. Funding programs for affordable housing come with many restrictions and requirements, and projects often require stitching together funds from multiple programs. Experienced developers can help the neighborhood take advantage of cutting-edge financing tools.

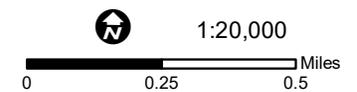
Figure 5.8. Residential Buildings in North River Communities by Number of Units



- Northwest Side/Albany Park Study Area Limits
- Open Space
- Water
- Divvy Stations (as of Apr., 2018)

- CTA Rail Lines**
- Blue Line (O'Hare)
- Brown Line
- Stations

- Residential Buildings**
- Single-Family
- 2-4 Flat
- 5-10 Units
- 11+ Units



Increase opportunities for affordable homeownership

While rental housing is a key focus of preserving housing affordability, homeownership can offer opportunities for middle-income families to remain in the North River communities as well. The neighborhood's many 2-4 flats have traditionally supported both affordable home ownership and affordable home rental, as the homeowner could live in one unit while renting the others for income. This arrangement remains common in the North River communities, but stakeholders fear that new owners of 2-4 flats may opt to convert them to single-family homes, taking affordable family rentals off the market.

Owner-occupants in 2-4 flats may be interested in programs that help with rehabilitation and maintenance costs in exchange for renting the property's additional units for slightly less than market rate. Programs that help existing homeowners maintain their homes, implement energy efficiency upgrades, and pursue other improvements can help them maintain their buildings without increasing rents. The City of Chicago offers several home repair assistance programs for low- and middle-income homeowners, including the Tax Increment Financing-Neighborhood Improvement Program (TIF-NIP), which provides home repair grants to owners of buildings with up to four units in eligible TIF districts, including the Lawrence/Kedzie TIF. Other City programs include the Small Accessible Repairs for Seniors (SARFS) program and the Roof, Porch and Emergency Heating Repair Program. Down payment assistance for aspiring homeowners, if tied to maintaining affordable rents, can also help keep 2-4 flats attainable for middle-income households. City of Chicago programs such as the Home Buyer Assistance Program and the Chicago Community Land Trust, which provides property tax relief for newly purchased homes, offer potential funding for this effort.

Income-eligible owners of historic Chicago bungalows, which are plentiful in the North River communities, may also qualify for grants that fund energy efficiency retrofits through the Historic Chicago Bungalow Initiative, offered by the Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development (HED). Further details about these and additional funding programs for home ownership are included in the ULI Chicago panel report.

Streamline legal use of basement apartments

The building stock in the North River communities includes many buildings that have basements or garden-level spaces that could support living spaces. Residents are already using basement space as garden apartments, especially in some 2-4 flats and larger multifamily buildings. In some cases, basement units are occupied without necessary building permits, suggesting they may not be complying with important city codes. Basement units clearly serve a housing need for the community, offering cheaper units in a dense neighborhood. These units should be allowed and encouraged, but should be formalized to ensure they are providing safe, adequate facilities.

One way to support the use of basement apartments would be for neighborhood aldermanic offices to offer permit-ready model plans for garden units. Model plans would provide guidance to property owners, explaining what they need to do to gain required permits and bring spaces to code. Because basement units are uniquely vulnerable to flooding, seepage, and sewer backups, model plans should also provide information on best practices for reducing the risk of stormwater problems. To develop these plans, housing advocates should work with local aldermen to seek grant funding or identify an architecture firm or school that would be interested in developing a model plan.

5.3 Develop new workforce housing

While preservation efforts can be a cost-effective strategy to minimize the displacement of families, new units of affordable housing are an important component of an overall strategy of maintaining affordability. The North River communities' strong access to public transit is an extraordinary asset, allowing central areas of the community to support dense developments that incorporate affordable one- to two-bedroom units. Encouraging affordable units as part of new development is a way to take advantage of a strengthening real estate market by channeling developers' interest in the neighborhood into developments that meet community needs.

To have a meaningful impact on neighborhood housing affordability, the ULI Chicago panel recommended developing 200 residential units along Lawrence Avenue or nearby locations. By focusing on smaller units near transit, efforts to attract new workforce housing can work hand-in-hand with preservation strategies. Developers and affordable housing experts who spoke to the ULI Chicago panel cited unmet demand for affordable units with one to two bedrooms, which can serve small families, seniors, and younger workers. As discussed earlier in this chapter, experts feel that preserving the affordability of existing units is the most cost-effective way to meet the need for larger units for families, since these units are expensive to build and the demand is not as strong. Smaller units are especially appropriate on a busy corridor like Lawrence Avenue, which has heavy traffic that makes it less desirable for families.

As described in Chapter 6, organizing in support of the connection between equity and transit oriented development is key to shaping the future of the CTA station areas. It can also be key to attracting new housing for working residents and families. Community support is a crucial ingredient for successful affordable developments.

Identify key sites for new workforce housing

Local stakeholders can also help advance the possibility of new workforce housing by working to identify potential sites to accommodate new development. A neighborhood housing coalition with broad representation of different stakeholders would have access to knowledge about suitable parcels that may become available, and can help connect mission-oriented developers with these opportunities. Collaborative efforts between developers and the community to find workforce housing opportunities in the neighborhood have already occurred in recent years through partnerships, such as the one between NRC and Evergreen Real Estate Group. Neighborhood stakeholders should continue and expand these efforts. Sites that are good candidates for workforce housing development include larger parcels within walking distance (one half-mile) of public transit, especially sites that are currently underutilized. Vacant parcels, parcels with unoccupied buildings, and parcels with surface parking or low-density commercial uses are all examples of sites that could be better used for housing.

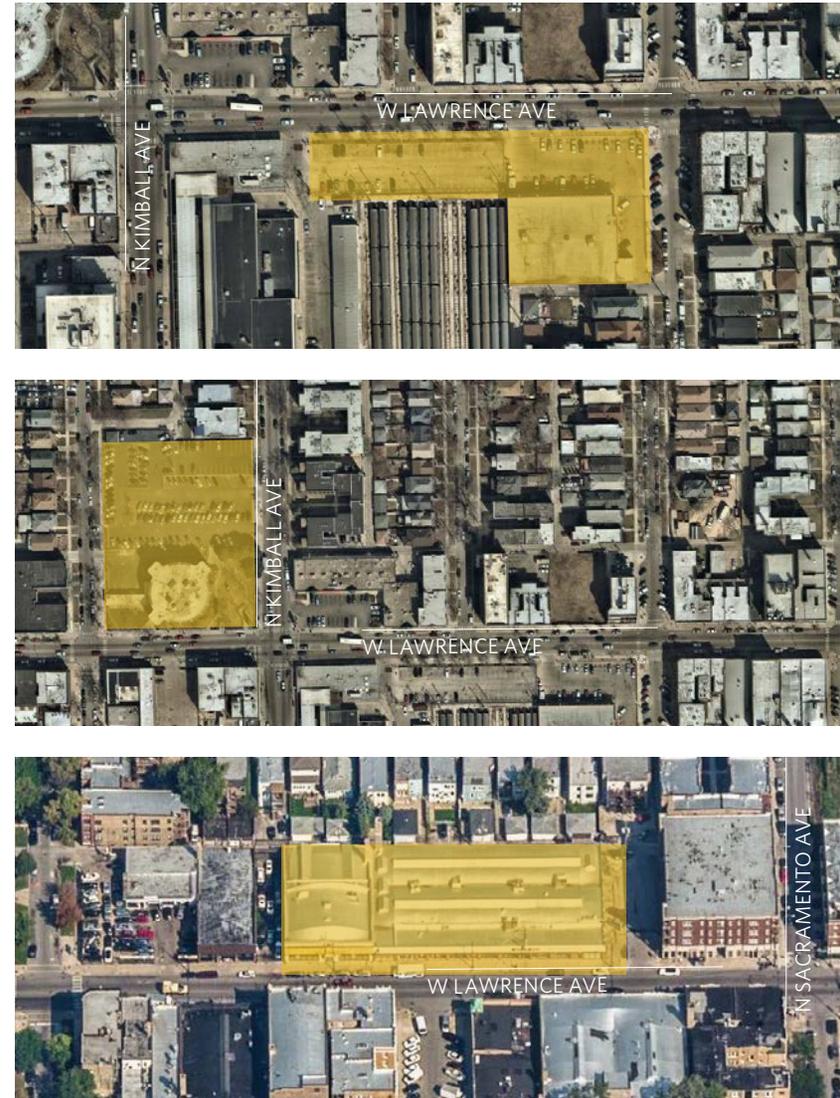
The ULI Chicago panel identified four potential sites on Lawrence Avenue that could be redeveloped as multi-family housing. While the panel did not conduct a detailed analysis of the redevelopment feasibility of these sites, they were selected as examples to demonstrate the type of property that may be appropriate to seek out. These sites, three of which are privately owned, do currently host active uses, but could support housing in the future. In the case of the community garden site, any future redevelopment plans should include plans to ensure that the current community use can be accommodated onsite or nearby.

Figure 5.9. North River Communities Potential New Housing Sites



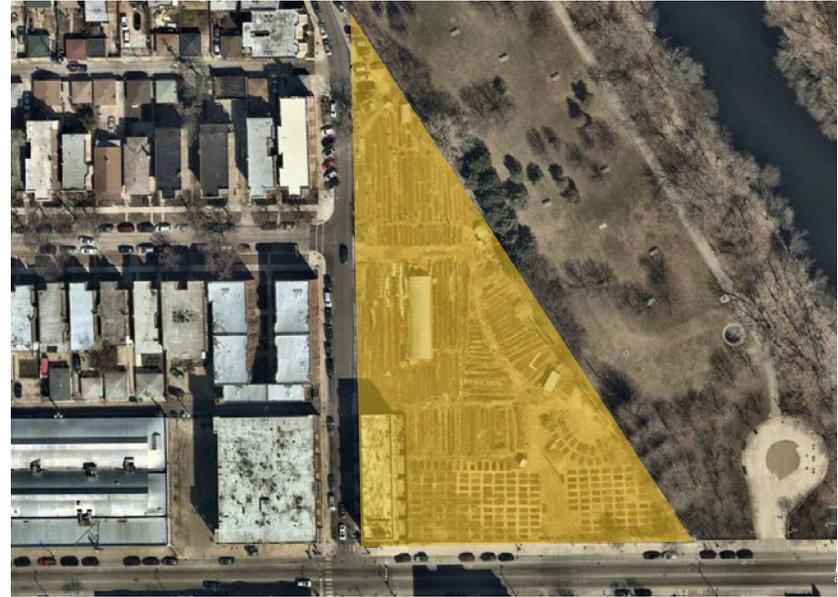
1. **CTA Rail Yard Parking.** The parking lot alongside Lawrence Avenue, adjacent to the CTA Kimball rail yard, could potentially be redeveloped. Stakeholders have frequently cited the adjacent parcel at the southwest corner of Lawrence Avenue and Spaulding Avenue, which is currently the site of the Village Discount Outlet Store, as a location where they would like to see TOD. If the parcels could be combined, especially in conjunction with CTA reconfiguration of the rail yard, they could support a mixed-use development that could include a small public plaza or park and workforce housing.
2. **Albany Bank Parking.** Albany Bank's headquarters, located on the northwest corner of Lawrence Avenue and Kimball Avenue, features an excellent location for transit access. In addition to Albany Bank's offices, the site includes two large parking lots that stakeholders report are not heavily used. Because of its large footprint, redevelopment of the site could comfortably incorporate offices for the bank in addition to housing.
3. **3030 West Lawrence Avenue.** The north side of Lawrence Avenue between Sacramento Avenue and Albany Avenue is currently the site of several one-story commercial uses. The largest of them, the former Socksco store, has been discussed as a redevelopment opportunity in the past. If the community demonstrates clear, wide support for workforce housing on the site, developers may revisit it as a possibility for new development.

Figure 5.10. Detail - Potential New Housing Sites



4. **Garden Site.** The northeast corner of Lawrence Avenue, between Ronan Park and Sacramento Avenue, is the site of a major collection of community gardens, shared by the Peterson Garden Project and the Global Garden Refugee Training Farm. The site is not underutilized—it hosts important, valued community uses by providing space for growing food and for training and serving refugee families who are a major contributor to the North River communities. However, the site’s location near multiple transit stations makes it attractive as a housing option, and its large size means a redevelopment could accommodate considerable space for gardens and farming even while adding housing units. Refugee advocates who attended the ULI Chicago panel noted that rising housing costs in the North River communities have made it difficult to find housing for refugees in the neighborhood, a difficulty that new workforce housing could help to address. Any plan for the site should identify areas within the redevelopment that can host gardens as well as finding alternative nearby locations for plots that are moved off site.

Figure 5.10 (continued). Detail - Potential New Housing Sites



Advocate for requirement that developers of ARO projects provide affordable units on site

Any development using city-owned land, receiving approval of a zoning change, or receiving tax credit assistance from the city will trigger the 2015 Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO). The ARO requires 10 percent of units to be affordable if projects meet these criteria, and 20 percent when financial assistance is provided by the City of Chicago. Developers have several options for satisfying ARO requirements, including paying fees into a City fund or building units off site rather than building the full number of required units as part of the proposed development. Chapter 6 includes several recommendations for how local stakeholders can work with aldermen to incentivize or require the construction of affordable units on site.

Additionally, in 2017 the Chicago City Council adopted a three-year pilot initiative to expand the ARO in certain areas of the City that are facing very high housing market pressure. The pilot, which covers areas of the Milwaukee Avenue Corridor, the Near North Side, and the Near West Side, increases the required affordable units to 15 percent or 20 percent, and increases the requirements for on-site construction. Neighborhood stakeholders should work with advocates and their aldermen to monitor the success of these pilot programs and explore the possibility of applying similar ARO changes in the North River communities if the pilots are successful.



Implementation

Table 5.3. Housing affordability, choice, and quality implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
5.1: Form a neighborhood coalition to coordinate housing advocacy			
Expand NRC Housing Committee to serve as neighborhood housing advocacy coalition	Immediate	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, mission-driven housing developers, philanthropic funders	NRC’s Housing Committee can be an effective neighborhood coalition to organize and coordinate key stakeholders who seek to preserve and expand housing affordability. NRC should work with Communities United and ULI to expand or modify the Housing Committee to make sure it represents the right set of stakeholders, including residents, advocates, mission-driven developers, and others. This coalition can be the same group that organizes to advocate for TOD goals. NRC should seek grants or other assistance to help enhance their capacity to coordinate the project.
5.2: Preserve existing workforce housing			
Use local knowledge to identify preservation opportunities	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, mission-driven housing developers	The neighborhood housing coalition should draw on existing community networks to identify properties that may be becoming available for rent or purchase. The coalition can connect trusted mission-oriented developers with up-to-date information about potential opportunities for preservation before they are acquired by market-rate developers.
Partner with mission-oriented developers and operators	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, mission-driven housing developers	Collaborative partnerships offer the best platform for preserving the affordability of existing rental housing. Partnerships with developers can help target strategic properties, bundle smaller properties, and leverage financing opportunities. Stakeholders in the neighborhood housing coalition should continue to support the ROOTS program and seek opportunities for similar collaborative partnerships.
Connect residents to programs that lower cost of homeownership	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, aldermen, Chicago DPD, Chicago HED	There are numerous programs available that help provide down payment assistance or help existing homeowners maintain their homes, implement energy efficiency upgrades, and pursue other improvements can help them maintain their buildings without increasing rents. The neighborhood housing coalition should seek to publicize the programs detailed in Appendix A.
Develop guidance for permit-ready basement apartments	0-2 years	Aldermen, Chicago DPD, architecture firms and schools	Work with aldermen’s offices to offer permit-ready model plans for garden units that address city codes and best practices for stormwater. Housing advocates should work with local aldermen to seek grant funding or identify an architecture firm or school that would be interested in developing a model plan.



Table 5.3 (Continued)

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
5.3: Develop new workforce housing			
Organize in support of equitable TOD	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago	The neighborhood housing coalition would be an excellent way to communicate to developers and aldermen that the neighborhood is receptive to workforce housing as part of transit oriented developments near the Kimball and Kedzie CTA Brown Line stations. Forming the coalition will communicate interest in equitable TOD, and organizing in support of new development that meets the workforce housing development goals of this plan will help those projects gain approval.
Continue to work with mission-driven developers to identify sites for new workforce housing	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, mission-driven housing developers	Neighborhood stakeholders should continue and expand efforts to partner with mission-driven developers to find opportunity sites for workforce housing. Sites that are good candidates include larger parcels within walking distance of public transit, vacant parcels, parcels with unoccupied buildings, and parcels with surface parking or low-density commercial uses.
Advocate for requirement that developers of ARO projects provide affordable units on site	Ongoing	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago	Work with aldermen to incentivize or require the construction of affordable units on site. Work with advocates and aldermen to monitor the success of ARO pilot programs and explore the possibility of applying similar ARO changes in the North River communities if the pilots are successful. Also see 6.1.

Chapter 6 TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



The North River communities will build on their strong transit assets to attract new development near train stations, enlivening existing retail districts, attracting new residents, and enhancing livability. The communities will pursue equitable development policies to expand affordable housing options, balance parking needs, and support a variety of businesses and services.

Introduction

The North River communities are home to three heavily used CTA Brown Line stations—Kimball, Kedzie, and Francisco—and several stakeholders have expressed interest in using the neighborhood’s strong access to transit to attract transit oriented development (TOD) to Albany Park.

TOD concentrates residential and commercial development near transit infrastructure to create density and lessen residents’ dependence on automobiles. By generating compact, mixed-use development and facilitating diverse activities within walkable distances around transit facilities, TOD can lower household transportation costs, improve access to economic opportunities, and enhance quality of life for residents.

The Kimball and Kedzie station areas, where vacant and underutilized lots could support new, denser development, present ample opportunities for TOD. The density of existing single-family dwellings surrounding the Francisco station makes it less of a candidate for TOD. Well-planned TOD that capitalizes on the central locations of the Kimball and Kedzie stations could be catalytic projects for the North River communities, enlivening the existing commercial corridors by bringing additional customers, increasing high-quality retail and restaurant space, and enhancing the streetscape.

Key Findings

- 1. The area’s CTA stations are major assets that attract residents and people from outside the North River communities on a daily basis.** Of the almost 20 million boardings on the Brown Line each year, roughly one in eight occurs at one of the stations in Albany Park. Boardings have continued to increase in recent years. Kimball station in particular serves not only local residents but also communities to the north and west, due to its location at the end of the Brown Line and bus connections to areas further from downtown.
- 2. The area’s existing walkable, mixed-use development provides a strong foundation for TOD.** What is now described as TOD is the same pattern of development that historically took place around train stations in Chicago. Dense, mixed-use development and walkable streets have been present in Albany Park for many decades. Lawrence Avenue is especially abundant with low- to mid-rise buildings that combine residential use with retail, restaurant, and office spaces—the hallmark of TOD.
- 3. Many properties near Kimball and Kedzie stations are already eligible for TOD density bonuses.** In recent years, the City of Chicago has increased incentives for developers to build near transit infrastructure by allowing greater density and reducing how much parking developers must provide for projects within walking distance of transit. The underlying zoning of many areas near the stations in the North River communities is supportive of TOD, and can provide incentives like reduced parking minimums and increased density to attract investment. These bonuses may make TOD opportunities more attractive to real estate developers.
- 4. Despite possessing many of the characteristics of a “high-opportunity” TOD area, little development has occurred in recent years.** Albany Park has seen little new mixed-use development near its three CTA Brown Line stations since 2009. While other neighborhoods along the Brown Line are seeing development activity accelerate, Albany Park has had only one new multifamily building constructed in its TOD zone since the end of the recession.

Recommendations

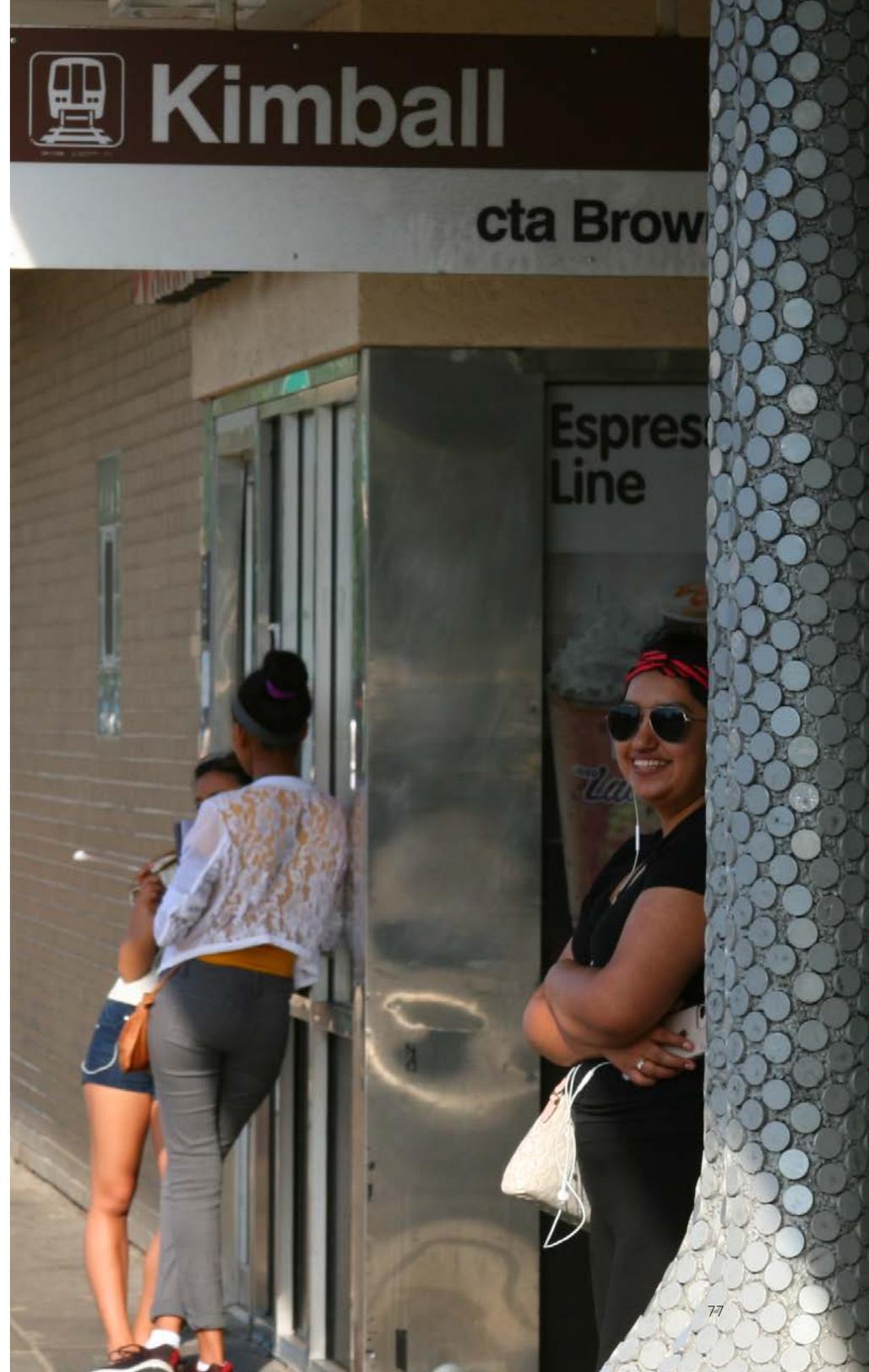
6.1 Convene a cross-sector partnership to define the community’s vision for equitable TOD

Throughout the development of this plan, community stakeholders have stressed the importance of using TOD to expand opportunities for neighborhood residents. Investments centered on transit infrastructure can significantly enhance opportunity for low- and moderate-income families by expanding access to low-cost transportation, creating business development opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and attracting new amenities for existing residents. However, the improvements and investments that accompany TOD can also raise property values, making it difficult for lower-income residents to remain in the neighborhood and share in the benefits.

Form an equitable TOD (eTOD) coalition for the North River communities

Developing a community strategy for “equitable transit oriented development” (eTOD) is one way to ensure that high-opportunity areas surrounding the Kimball and Kedzie stations remain inclusive and also provide opportunities for longtime residents. eTOD makes sure that living near transit benefits people of all income levels, and aligns public and private investments for optimal returns for communities.

The broad coalition NRC and other community stakeholders have formed to guide this plan and CTA’s Lawrence Avenue TOD Study has already identified some shared principles to guide future TOD in the area. Priorities these groups have established include the importance of including affordable housing in future TOD, a broad desire for maintaining the diverse and family-friendly character of the neighborhood, and using TOD as a means to gain more public gathering places and further invigorate the main retail districts near transit.



Chicago's TOD Ordinance

In recent years, the City of Chicago has increased incentives for developers to build near transit infrastructure by allowing greater density and reducing parking requirements for developments within walking distance of transit. A 2015 ordinance update more than doubled the distance around train stations where dense development is permitted, and virtually eliminated car parking requirements within these districts. Under the ordinance, land zoned for business, residential, commercial, downtown, or industrial uses within a quarter-mile of a train station is freed from any parking minimums, and on a pedestrian street, this district is expanded to reach a half-mile from each station. The ordinance includes density bonuses in Business (B) and Commercial (C) districts within these areas. The aim of the ordinance is to create more density by making it more affordable for developers to build compact, mixed-use TOD.

Pedestrian street (P-Street) designation is used to identify pedestrian-oriented shopping districts and streets throughout the city in order to preserve and enhance the character and safety of the pedestrian environment along these streets. Dense development along P-Streets within the City of Chicago is encouraged as a way to multiply the benefits of a walkable lifestyle. Streets that have been classified as P-Streets within this community include Lawrence Avenue from Central Park to Sacramento, Kedzie Avenue from Montrose to Lawrence, and Montrose Avenue from California to Kimball.

To ensure that the goals of affordability, transit access, and economic development are met, successful eTOD requires engagement and collaboration between the housing and transportation sectors, various levels of government, and organizations and groups within the community. A group comprising members of community organizations, local businesses, affordability advocates, and the public sector can be instrumental to coordinating this engagement.

The coalitions assembled to guide the North River Communities Plan and the CTA Lawrence Avenue TOD Study offer good models for providing collaborative leadership. With its long history of accomplishments in the neighborhood and strong ties to aldermen, civic organizations, the business community, and institutional stakeholders, NRC is uniquely positioned to build on these coalitions and convene a new partnership, or modify existing bodies such as the NRC Housing Committee or the Lawrence Avenue Development Corporation (LADCOR), to develop and communicate a shared vision for eTOD. Given the close connection between the goals of eTOD and those of housing affordability, NRC may choose to use a single coalition to implement this plan's TOD and housing recommendations. By working closely with LADCOR, the Housing Committee can be an effective coordinator this plan's housing and eTOD strategies.

The coalition can lead engagement to gain community input and communicate the issues and opportunities TOD presents. Guidance emerging from this group would help political leaders and developers shape projects that they can be confident the community will support, making the development review process more predictable. It could also help reform codes and policies that influence station area development when necessary. In addition to the overall guiding role of this coalition, there are several specific strategies that it may want to pursue toward the goal of equitable transit oriented development.

Pursue strategic partnerships to incorporate affordable housing into future developments

The eTOD coalition can pursue partnerships between the public and private sectors to implement affordable housing as part of future developments. One example would be joint development, where a transit agency such as CTA would work with a private partner to develop property that is owned by the transit agency and located near a transit station. The community could also pursue a partnership with a mission-driven developer to incorporate affordable units in developments on other vacant and underutilized parcels in the area with ready access to transit

Encourage developers to take advantage of incentives that make including affordable housing more feasible

Housing affordability and parking are closely linked. Because parking is expensive to build, high parking requirements can significantly burden the production of affordable housing, especially in locations where transit access makes parking less necessary. In Chicago, the construction cost per space for basic parking structures is often more than \$25,000.¹¹

The ability to construct less parking can reduce construction costs and mitigate some of the cost hurdles that exist to providing affordable units. The Chicago TOD ordinance specifically allows development near transit stations to build 50 percent fewer parking spaces than would otherwise be required, and can grant further reductions (up to 100 percent) upon approval of a zoning change or a special use designation.

The combination of parking minimum reductions and density bonuses can be especially effective in spurring development of affordable units. Using the City's TOD ordinance, developers can pursue creative and efficient designs for housing that are less expensive to build, such as "micro units" or smaller units with high ceilings, resulting in units that are more affordable. When working with developers, the coalition and local aldermen can highlight the cost benefits of these incentives.



6.2 Establish and communicate the community's goals for the form and design of new TOD

To ensure that new TOD development is consistent with the existing urban fabric of the neighborhood, stakeholders should include discussion of form and design in its outreach efforts. Guidelines for development can incorporate considerations for density, street frontage, setbacks, massing, and other urban design or architectural elements. There are many existing studies and other resources to aid in this effort, and zoning and development regulations can provide tools to communicate and achieve the desired forms for new development.

Use the CTA Lawrence Avenue TOD Study to inform design guidelines and visual preferences

In May 2018, CTA completed the Lawrence Avenue TOD Study, which explores community preferences for the design and form of potential new development near the Kimball and Kedzie Brown Line stations. Based on the input of a Technical Advisory Committee made up of local stakeholders and organizations in the North River communities, the study documents visual preferences for TOD, possible land uses, and transit-supportive design, connectivity, and streetscaping.

The TOD study establishes principles and guidelines to help future development and investments achieve a community-defined vision for the Kimball and Kedzie station areas. The study's vision statement says that "The Lawrence, Kedzie, Kimball area will become the activity hub of Albany Park, with mixed-use retail and mixed-income housing that enhance the existing neighborhood character, and walkable streets with a public square where the culturally diverse community can gather."¹² The vision and recommendations are consistent with this plan's strategies and offer a strong foundation for a neighborhood coalition to use in their work to attract TOD that meets community needs. The study includes principles and guidelines for the following four categories:

- **Transit-Supportive Land Uses.** The study recommends prioritizing infill, mixed-use development that will create a thriving community hub, encourage transit ridership, and provide convenient access to jobs and services. It recommends higher intensity uses nearest transit stations and major intersections in five- to six-story buildings, tapering to smaller (three- to four-story) mixed-use buildings elsewhere in the corridor. It also recommends pedestrian-oriented uses such as plazas and outdoor seating to create a family-friendly, active area. Specifically, the study identifies the CTA parking lot next to the Kimball rail yard as a site that can be a higher intensity use in the future, rather than for CTA operations.
- **Transit Stations and Connectivity.** The study recognizes that properly designed transit stations can be activity hubs for a neighborhood. It recommends integrating stations into streetscapes, adding a public plaza where people can comfortably wait for transit connections, and partially screening tracks and rail infrastructure to incorporate public art. It also recommends more space for attractive bus shelters, additional bike parking, and more bike sharing stations.
- **Neighborhood Character.** The principles and guidelines for neighborhood character focus on urban design that connects the historical and present-day feel of Lawrence Avenue. It emphasizes buildings that are accessible and pedestrian-oriented, with visually interesting façades, reuse of historic buildings, and neighborhood markers and signage to improve wayfinding.
- **Streetscape Experience.** To enhance the experience of walking in the Lawrence Avenue area, the study includes principles and guidelines for the streetscape that encourage pedestrian interaction. Recommendations include transparent and welcoming storefronts, awnings and signage, and street furniture and street trees. It also recommends minimal curb cuts, traffic calming measures, and public plazas and gathering spaces.



 **Kedzie**
cta Brown Line



6.3 Attract active uses for ground-floor spaces

Attractive and inviting ground-floor spaces are integral to shaping the pedestrian experience in a community. Well-designed storefronts and spaces for community amenities not only improve the streetscape, but can also cultivate a distinct sense of place, enliven public life, and provide places outside of home and work for residents to convene and enjoy their communities.

While mixed-use development is often composed of ground-floor retail and residential or office uses on the upper floor levels, active ground-floor uses are not limited to retail. There is already an abundance of diverse retail on both Lawrence and Kedzie Avenues, which offer opportunities to explore options for providing other needed services and amenities for residents. In addition, developers often have difficulty finding tenants for ground-floor

retail spaces because of market conditions or spaces that do not match the needs or potential tenants. Other uses can help meet community needs while providing the kind of continuous façades that make a street welcoming for people walking.

The community should work with developers to consider a variety of innovative possibilities for ground-floor use, and apply best practice strategies that utilize attractive, flexible design guidelines that can accommodate a range of uses. Flexibility can help the community fully capitalize on opportunities of TOD and enhance the strength and vitality of existing active corridors in the area.



Work with neighborhood to identify desirable community uses

Community stakeholders can collaboratively identify desired amenities or services other than retail that the neighborhood may currently lack. Possible uses can range from civic facilities to institutional uses, such as childcare, health clinics, social services, arts/theater/museum spaces, maker-spaces, or libraries. During project development, it will be crucial to design spaces with the flexibility to accommodate these desired uses.

Facilitate the creation of attractive, flexible ground-floor spaces

The most effective ground-floor spaces in TODs are attractive and flexible enough to house a variety of uses. To accommodate evolving long-term needs for space, developers could be encouraged to build flexible spaces that can be converted to multiple uses. Stakeholders can work with developers to explore options for designing flexible spaces at ground-level and incorporate the design guidelines into TOD development.

Best practices for architectural design can help create adaptable spaces that meet the needs of a variety of tenants. Ground-floor spaces that are inviting and attractive to pedestrians have different design requirements than residential or office uses. For instance, transparent façades with large windows and tall ceilings can create open and welcoming environments. Attractiveness of a space also extends to its frontage and sidewalk, and requires landscaping, distinct signage, and good exterior lighting to invite people into the space and create a sense of security. Well-designed developments can support multiple uses on the ground floor. With well-designed landscaping and entranceways, buildings can meet the privacy and security needs of residential space while allowing an active street presence for the parts of the building used for retail.¹³



Developers of a mixed-use building in Logan Square invited the community to suggest what they would like to see on the ground floor via text message.



6.4 Proactively address parking impacts

Parking impacts are often a concern for existing residents in areas that are seeking new, dense development. Anticipating that being close to good transit service means potential residents will own fewer cars, development projects near transit often include fewer off-street parking spaces than is typical in projects located far from transit. The City of Chicago TOD ordinance encourages this trend by reducing per-unit parking requirements for developments near transit, allowing developers to use more of a building's space for residential or commercial tenants.

When proposed developments include less parking, existing residents often express concern that the development's future residents will park on adjacent streets, increasing competition for limited on-street parking. However, by appealing to potential tenants who do not own a car—or who would prefer not to own a car—TOD projects can avoid increasing demand for on-street parking. In addition, strategies exist to mitigate additional demand if it is created.

Assess current parking conditions

To plan for parking, it is crucial to accurately assess current parking conditions and have a clear understanding of resident perceptions on the issue. CMAP has developed a Parking Strategies toolkit that provides a step-by-step guide for communities to create and conduct comprehensive parking surveys and engage in effective public outreach.⁴ Community engagement that seeks stakeholder input can identify areas where residents are concerned about parking. Local residents are often very knowledgeable about the busiest streets and the busiest times of day for parking, as well as where parking is in high demand for commuters, customers to businesses, and other visitors. If there is sufficient resident interest and resources are available, a full parking inventory study will help to identify underutilized parking, high-demand areas, and the opportunities and challenges to addressing parking needs.

Parking inventory studies require considerable time and resources. If limited resources and time make a full-scale parking inventory study too difficult to accomplish, the community can consult the toolkit's guidance on conducting a smaller study of the types of parking spaces, their locations and quantity, and when regulations are enforced, which can be helpful indicators of possible parking problems.

1611 West Division Street, Wicker Park

The 1611 W. Division apartment building in Wicker Park, located at the intersection of Division Street and Ashland Avenue, is an example of TOD that has successfully applied many of the parking strategies discussed in this chapter. Steps away from the Division CTA Blue Line station, and close to six bus stops and a Divvy station, the apartments were designed and marketed specifically to cater to tenants attracted to a walkable environment and car-free lifestyle. Instead of parking spaces for cars, the building offers 100 bicycle parking spaces and a carshare vehicle with a discounted membership. To promote transit use, a monitor in the lobby provides CTA Bus and Train Tracker times. Additionally, a clause in the leasing agreement makes tenants ineligible for residential parking permits on neighboring streets.

Through the combination of incentives and regulations to mitigate creation of new parking demand, the 1611 West Division development has had minimal effects on parking congestion and spillover parking in the neighborhood. As tenants choose the building for its convenience to transit and multiple mobility options, the lack of parking has also not served as a disincentive for leasing. On the contrary, about 90 percent of the available 99 units were rented out within about a year of the opening.¹⁵

Apply parking management best practices

Even with high demand for on-street parking, several parking management strategies exist to extend the capacity of the existing supply. Even at times when drivers cannot find parking, there are often spaces that are not being used. Difficulty in finding them may be the result of a lack of information or of policies that do not offer enough flexibility. Applying parking management best practices can help a community take better advantage of currently underutilized spaces and reduce competition for highly sought-after parking spaces. If demand for parking increases, there are several options to alleviate competition.

Improve signage and use apps to clearly indicate where parking is available

Clear and easily accessible information can help drivers find parking to suit their needs and alert them to open spaces at nearby parking lots or facilities. The community can work with the City and aldermen to create and disperse signage throughout the neighborhood to highlight different types of parking areas and underutilized lots. As much of commercial and private parking information and reservation services are available on-line through apps like SpotHero, organizations such as SSA #60 or NRC can also help market these technologies to promote awareness and usage.

Allow shared parking arrangements

Nearby businesses and institutions can share parking spaces if they each require parking at different times of the day or different days of the week. For example, TOD developments can share parking with nearby office buildings or commercial establishments so that commuters can park at night while employees and customers can park during business hours. Additionally, several churches near station areas have private parking spaces, which can be utilized on weekdays. Organizations like SSA #60 and NRC can play a role in facilitating connections between local parking lot owners and partnering with programs like SpotHero to incorporate reserved spaces for shared parking.

Partner with TOD property managers to mitigate new demand for parking

Reducing new demand is the first course of action for better parking management. Even if TOD provides less off-street parking for residents, developers can provide benefits for riding transit, biking, walking, or carsharing to attract potential tenants who prefer non car-dependent lifestyles. The City's TOD ordinance also supports the inclusion of active transportation facilities like bicycle parking by requiring developments taking advantage of TOD bonuses to address parking demand. The following strategies should supplement parking management strategies identified through the parking study, but can also be applied as a standalone set of recommendations to curb future demand.

- **Tenant bike and transit benefits.** Developers can offer complimentary or discounted transit passes or bike share membership to encourage tenants to commute and travel by biking or transit. Including these benefits in rent can tenants.
- **Bike parking and storage.** Secure bicycle parking and storage is one of the top factors contributing to bike ridership.⁶ The TOD ordinance requires developments taking advantage of parking reductions to provide at least one bicycle parking space for each automobile parking space that would otherwise be constructed, and additionally waives the “no more than 50 bicycle parking spaces per building” limit.

- **Permit-based management.** Stakeholders can work with aldermen to explore using permits for on-street parking to manage demand. In some recent TOD projects in Chicago, leases restrict tenants from receiving residential parking permits on neighboring streets. By attracting tenants who prefer to walk, bike, and take public transit, these developments have filled their units despite the restriction on parking permits.
- **Carsharing benefits.** Carsharing is an attractive option for tenants who may want occasional access to a car but do not need to use it every day. Zipcar currently has two locations near the Kimball station, each offering three vehicles. There may be an opportunity to partner with Zipcar to increase the fleet or additionally provide a location near the Kedzie station if TOD development occurs there. Developers including off-street parking in new projects can include dedicated parking for carsharing and include discounted memberships as a benefit to tenants.



A popular Divvy bike share station near the Francisco Brown Line station.

Implementation

Table 6.1. Transit oriented development implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
6.1: Convene a cross-sector partnership to define the community's vision for equitable TOD			
Form an eTOD coalition for the North River communities	0-2 years	Communities United, ULI, NEIU, North Park University, Swedish Covenant, Albany Park Community Center, World Relief Chicago, mission-driven housing developers, CTA philanthropic funders	Form a standing group to develop a community strategy for eTOD based on the principles of this plan, the CTA Lawrence Avenue TOD study, and further neighborhood visioning as necessary. This coalition could ideally be the same as that recommended in 5.1
Advocate for requirement that developers of ARO projects provide affordable units on site	Ongoing	eTOD coalition, aldermen, CTA	Also see 5.3. Work with aldermen to incentivize or require the construction of affordable units on site. Work with advocates and aldermen to monitor the success of ARO pilot programs and explore the possibility of applying similar ARO changes in the North River communities if the pilots are successful.
Pursue strategic partnerships to incorporate affordable housing into future developments	5+ years	eTOD coalition, aldermen, developers, landowners	Advocate that any future joint development near CTA stations include affordability requirements.
6.2: Establish and communicate the community's goals for the form and design of new TOD			
Create and advocate for design guidelines and visual preferences for TOD	0-2 years	eTOD coalition, aldermen, CTA	Use the results of the CTA Lawrence Avenue TOD study as the basis for a set of design guidelines and visual preferences to communicate to aldermen and developers. Establishing clear community preferences with the promise of public support for well-designed projects can help to attract development that the community would welcome.
Consider advocating for changes to underlying zoning to expand TOD bonuses	2-5 years	eTOD coalition, aldermen	If doing so would be consistent with the design guidelines and visual preferences the community establishes, work with aldermen to consider changes to zoning that would better enable the desired form of development.
6.3: Attract active uses for ground-floor spaces			
Identify desirable community uses	0-2 years	eTOD coalition, residents, business owners	Instead of retail, community stakeholders can collaboratively identify other desired amenities or services that may be currently lacking in the neighborhood. Possible uses can widely range from civic facilities to institutional uses, such as childcare, health clinics, arts/theater/museum spaces, hacker or maker-spaces, libraries, social services, among others.
Facilitate the creation of flexible spaces	0-2 years	eTOD coalition, aldermen	See also 6.2. As part of the design guidelines the eTOD coalition compiles, encourage developers to build flexible spaces that can be converted with ease to suit different uses.



Table 6.1 (Continued)

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
6.4: Proactively address parking impacts			
Engage in outreach to identify resident and business concerns	0-2 years	eTOD coalition, residents, business owners	Local residents are often very knowledgeable about the details of parking supply and demand. Effective outreach can also help educate communities about different parking policies and strategies.
Consider conducting a parking inventory study	2-5 years	eTOD coalition, residents, business owners, CMAP, CDOT	CMAP's Parking Strategies toolkit provides further guidance on the details of conducting a parking inventory. Because of the staff and volunteer time required for a parking inventory, grant funding may be required to provide necessary resources for a full study. If a full-scale parking inventory study is not feasible, just gathering information on the types of parking spaces, their locations and quantity, and when regulations are enforced can be helpful indicators for possible parking problems.
Apply parking management best practices	2-5 years	Residents, business owners, aldermen, CDOT	Depending on results of parking inventory study and public outreach, consider changes to signage, use of online apps, and shared parking arrangements.
Partner with TOD property managers to mitigate new demand for parking	Ongoing	eTOD coalition, developers, property managers	Managers of residential properties can apply several tools to manage their properties' demand on neighborhood parking. Stakeholders should encourage transit and biking benefits, carshare benefits, and bicycle parking as part of new TOD projects.

Chapter 7 COMMUNITY SAFETY



The North River communities will provide a comfortable and inviting environment for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. By providing attractive public spaces that encourage a variety of activities, the community will allow people to feel safe spending time in a vibrant public realm.

Introduction

Safety is clearly a fundamental issue for the North River communities. In interviews, focus groups, community meetings, and survey responses, many residents and other stakeholders expressed concern about crime in the area and its effect on public safety. In addition to identifying areas where fear of criminal activity and gangs makes them feel unsafe, many expressed a general concern that the perception of high crime in the neighborhood keeps visitors, businesses, and potential residents away.

The factors that contribute to crime are diverse and complex. Addressing crime and its impacts on a community requires the input and contributions of a broad set of stakeholders and community partners incorporating a wide range of educational, economic, and social policies and programs. Detailed recommendations for dealing with many aspects of crime are outside the scope of this plan, which focuses mainly on land use, transportation, economic development and the physical environment of the North River communities.

However, safety is a significant concern to residents of the neighborhood, and physical planning can help to create safe and welcoming environments. This section provides recommendations for physical design, infrastructure, and programming of public spaces that can contribute to feelings of safety in commercial areas, public spaces, and neighborhood streets. These recommendations focus on increasing activity in key spaces as well as on design improvements that enhance safety, particularly in parks and on neighborhood streets.

Key Findings

1. Crime in the North River communities has declined since 2001.

Total crime in the City of Chicago as a whole has been gradually declining since 2001. Annual crime totals show that the North River communities have echoed citywide crime trends. Citywide data shows an overall decrease in property and quality-of-life crimes, while the number of reported violent crimes has also been decreasing, but at a slower rate. Recent years have seen an uptick in overall property and violent crimes. The number of reported property, quality-of-life, and violent crimes in the North River communities has declined since 2001, and has generally declined or remained constant over the past five years.

2. The crime rate in the North River communities is average for the northwest side of Chicago. In the context of the city as a whole, the community areas that intersect the study area (Albany Park, North Park, and Irving Park) experience a crime rate that is comparable to much of the northwest side and lower than many areas of Chicago, but slightly higher than some neighboring community areas.

3. Few feel unsafe around the study area’s busiest areas. At the project’s public workshop in February 2017, participants were asked the question “Where do people feel least safe in the neighborhood?” Responding anonymously via electronic keypad polling, only 8 percent of participants indicated that people feel least safe at Lawrence and Kimball near the CTA station, and 4 percent at Lawrence and Kedzie near the Kedzie CTA station. Participants reported that people feel least safe away from these busy centers of activity, with 44 percent of participants indicating that they thought people feel least safe on residential side streets.

Responding to a follow-up question about which planning strategies would help most (to improve the sense of safety), 47 percent of participants indicated that they thought the most effective strategy would be to increase activity in key areas of community to increase “eyes on the street.”

Recommendations

7.1 Ensure that public spaces are active and inviting

Where streets and plazas are pleasant places to spend time and socialize, they are more attractive and easy to use. Seeing other people walking and socializing contributes to feelings of safety and comfort for individuals, who can gain confidence that these “eyes on the street” deter crime or nuisance behaviors. Good design can invite more people into a space by making spaces more enjoyable, better maintained, and welcoming of year-round activity. Many of the recommendations in this section correspond to recommendations in the chapters addressing placemaking on Lawrence Avenue (Chapter 4) and improvements to parks and trails (Chapter 9). This parallel reflects the intersecting ways that enhancements to a neighborhood can create benefits for residents, businesses, and recreational users alike by attracting people and increasing activity.

How design and programming can increase activity and create feelings of safety

One of the simplest ways to make spaces where people feel safe is to increase the number of people who spend time there. A space that has a diverse set of people coming, going, and lingering at different times over the course of the day feels more comfortable and welcoming. Active spaces can be a deterrent to criminal or nuisance activity, an indicator of safety, and a component of community building. The presence of people means there are “eyes on the street”—neighbors and visitors with common interests who can watch out for one another. “Eyes on the street” can contribute both to real improvements in safety and to greater feelings of safety in a street, park, or plaza. A space does not feel safe only when it is crowded, but rather once it is active.

Several strategies can help communities create more active and safe public spaces. Some of these strategies involve the physical design of streets, parks, and plazas. Design elements of these spaces, including the type and placement of lighting, seating, entrances and exits, and buildings, can invite more pedestrians and other users. In urban design, “programming” refers to the set of activities a space invites people to undertake, such as Park District special events, but also the activities that its facilities, such as ballfields, splashpads, and woodworking shops, make possible. Design and programming can draw people to a place for a variety of reasons, from sitting and talking with friends to eating at a sidewalk café to playing in organized sports leagues.

Crime prevention through environmental design

Planners and architects have created several frameworks for designing safer and more active spaces that offer strategies that the North River communities could apply. “Crime prevention through environmental design” (CPTED) is an approach to deterring criminal behavior through various design strategies that were originally developed in the mid-20th century under the premise that safe space is “defensible space.” While CPTED features many important and beneficial strategies, newer approaches offer more well-rounded methods that incorporate more positive elements of community building in place of the defensive tactics of CPTED.

The Gehl Institute, a respected international nonprofit organization dedicated to improving urban public spaces, has developed a “human-centered design framework” for CPTED. The framework addresses Gehl’s findings that “when spaces are designed to be defensive and uncomfortable to certain groups, they can become unwelcoming to everyone.” The Gehl Institute’s approach focuses on creating active, inclusive public spaces that welcome a wide range of people.

Create and enhance places to stop and gather

The most successful parks, plazas, and thoroughfares invite people to linger and spend time. Some of these popular places are parks or plazas designed specifically to provide gathering places. The public plaza this plan recommends as part of its strategies for Lawrence Avenue (Chapter 4) and TOD (Chapter 6) would be an important way to enhance feelings of safety by creating a hub of activity. But informal places for gathering occur throughout neighborhoods, along streets, in front of businesses, and in residential areas. Where a streetscape provides places to sit, shade from the sun, and attractive landscaping, it can help to transform a street from a transportation route to a place to visit with neighbors and friends. Best practices for urban design can help communities create these spaces, while protecting them from becoming places for loitering or nuisance behavior. Community stakeholders should work with the North River Commission, local aldermen and their staff, and the Albany Park-Irving Park Special Service Area (SSA #60), and CDOT to ensure the North River communities have enough opportunities to stop and stay.

Enhance opportunities to stop and stay throughout the neighborhood

As discussed in Chapter 4 (Lawrence Avenue), the North River communities would benefit from providing opportunities to stop and stay, sit, see, talk, and listen. Seating is important even outside of “destinations” like parks and plazas. Street seating, sidewalk dining, and well-designed bus shelters are all examples of additions that can add eyes on the street while adding amenities to major routes. It may be difficult to establish these opportunities along residential side streets, which were identified as the places where people feel least safe in the community. But by providing these opportunities at key locations along Lawrence Avenue and other primary corridors such as Kimball and Kedzie, the community can build a sense of belonging and responsibility over areas that provide access to residential side streets.

In consultation with aldermen and other neighborhood organizations, NRC should explore potential locations for targeted enhancements, especially the creation of attractive, well-maintained sidewalk seating areas for residents and visitors in highly-trafficked areas. Priority should be given to corners along Lawrence Avenue located to the west of Kimball Avenue—an area where a higher incidence of crime occurs and which residents and other stakeholders identified as an area in most need of aesthetic improvements and increase in activity. Other appropriate, but lower-priority, locations for seating areas and related enhancements would be at corners along commercial sections of Kedzie Avenue and Kimball Avenue south of Lawrence. Local aldermen, working with the Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, should develop an initiative to permit and encourage the many restaurants along Lawrence and Kedzie to install sidewalk seating, which would further increase the human presence and “eyes on the street” along these important corridors.

CDOT’s Make Way for People initiative (discussed in Chapter 4) may provide implementation support for these additions, through its People Spots and People Plazas programs. Stakeholders in the North River communities have already begun working with CDOT to create one people spot. In partnership with NRC, Territory, a youth urban design team based in Albany Park, has planned, designed, and secured permits for a People Spot that they will erect in 2018.

Gehl Institute Framework

The Gehl human-centered CPTED framework emphasizes three main categories of “urban quality criteria”: comfort, enjoyment, and protection. Spaces that best meet these criteria can positively influence how safe people are—and how safe they feel—in streets, parks, and plazas. Successful, comfortable public spaces should display as many of these criteria as possible.¹⁷

Comfort

- Opportunities to walk and bicycle
- Opportunities to stop and stay
- Opportunities to sit
- Opportunities to see
- Opportunities to talk and listen
- Opportunities for play

Enjoyment

- Dimensioned at human scale
- Opportunities to enjoy the positive aspects of climate
- Aesthetic quality and positive sensory experience

Protection

- Against traffic and accidents—feeling safe
- Against crime and violence—feeling secure
- Against unpleasant sensory experiences

Devon Avenue

Devon Avenue, between Leavitt and Kedzie Avenues, provides an excellent local example of how physical design can create small spaces and features to promote activity. A \$15 million streetscape enhancement by CDOT, funded mostly through Tax Increment Financing (TIF), dramatically widened the sidewalks with ramps, new curbs and gutters, and built curb bump-outs at corners to shorten pedestrian crossing distances. It has also beautified the public way with flower planters, trees, pavers in the parkways, and attractive lampposts. In addition to street decorations, chosen with input from locals, that reflect the neighborhood's ethnic mosaic, with designs inspired by Mughal architecture, Rangoli floor art, and henna tattoos, one of the most important enhancements entailed the installation of "seating pods" that provides residents and visitors with opportunities to stop and stay, sit, see, and talk and listen.



ABOVE: A man enjoys a new "seating pod" on Devon Avenue. BELOW: Street decorations on Devon Avenue inspired by the art of cultures that represent the heritage of Rogers Park residents.

Source: John Greenfield, "The Devon Streetscape Makes Walking in 'Little India' Safer and More Pleasant, Streetsblog Chicago, May 11, 2017, <https://chi.streetsblog.org/2017/05/11/the-devon-streetscape-makes-walking-in-little-india-safer-and-more-pleasant/>



Explore the addition of pocket parks

A sign of a successful public space is the presence of people of all ages. While neighborhood parks such as Horner Park and Eugene Field Park provide impressive recreational facilities, the community should explore options to provide opportunities for play in more central locations along or in close proximity to Lawrence Avenue and densely populated parts of the neighborhood. These spaces not only provide important opportunities for fun, they also help to “build social networks and ties to the neighborhood.”¹⁸ As discussed in Chapter 9, residents of many areas of the North River Communities live far from the large parks and forest preserves along the Chicago River. Considering the dense landscape and high number of children in the area, “pocket parks” with compact playground equipment could be an ideal addition to the community. In 2018, the Mayfair Civic Association, in partnership with 39th Ward Alderman Margaret Laurino and Openlands, worked to acquire a small, triangular parcel at the corner of Kedvale Avenue and Wilson Avenue with a goal of creating a pocket park. The effort used crowdfunding to supplement contributions from the City of Chicago, Chicago Park District, and aldermanic menu funds.¹⁹ Future efforts may prove successful in creating additional pocket parks in the area.

For future projects, the community should consider a variety of locations, but should first explore opportunities to create a pocket park and playground at the southeastern corner of Lawrence and Central Park Avenue, where three vacant lots, together comprising 16,651 square feet, are currently for sale. This location is central, near to several stores and restaurants, and adjacent to several blocks of multifamily residences, and could provide a highly visible opportunity for residents to play. A pocket park that also incorporates gateway and wayfinding features could accomplish multiple community goals.

Create and enhance opportunities to walk and bicycle

Walking and biking are modes of transportation and recreation, but also ways to move at a leisurely pace through public spaces. People walking and biking are important contributors to the community feeling of a park, plaza, or street. While safety is the primary consideration for walking and biking infrastructure, good design can also serve to beautify and activate sidewalks, streets, and paths. The community should ensure that it has “well-designed paths, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes, [which] direct and guide visitors to places to stop, stay, play, sit, and talk.”²⁰ CDOT’s Chicago Pedestrian Plan offers examples of interventions, such as curb extensions/ bump-outs, pedestrian refuge islands, and in-road stop signs to slow vehicular traffic in high-pedestrian areas, that can serve to make walking a safe and more comfortable experience. Chapter 9 (Rivers, Parks, and Trails) provides specific strategies to enhance neighborhood gateways and wayfinding, as well as connect and improve neighborhood bikeways.



Residents of all ages enjoying a walking path in Horner Park.

7.2 Pursue design improvements that increase feelings of safety in public spaces

While increasing activity by designing and programming attractive, enjoyable spaces is important, there are also improvements that can be made to public spaces that more directly address safety. Improving sightlines, lighting, and landscaping can help deter crime and make public areas feel safer. Reducing the isolation of key destinations, such as parks and transit stations, by providing clearer connections and wayfinding can make people feel more comfortable moving through the neighborhood. Spaces that are welcoming to all and upbeat in spirit work best; by contrast, surveillance hardware such as “blue light” security cameras and harsh lighting often end up stigmatizing spaces. Many of the strategies detailed below function by welcoming activity and opening areas up rather than focusing on overt signs of security or policing.

Improve visibility in neighborhood parks

Horner Park, Gompers Park, and Eugene Field Park are among the North River communities’ greatest assets. But even these popular and heavily used parks are situated outside of the main areas of neighborhood activity. Reducing isolation can improve these and the neighborhood’s other parks. There are several specific ways to reduce isolation in parks, including providing robust programming during standard park hours (6 a.m. to 11 p.m.) and encouraging adjacent residents to keep an eye out for unusual activity occurring in parks.

One of the most important attributes of a safe space is the ability for people to clearly see entrances, exits, walking paths, and other people. Lighting enables people to use a space more safely at night, when fewer other people might be present. In parks, it is important to ensure that the layout and design of parks is legible, sightlines are clear as possible, lighting is sufficient to encourage evening use of parks, and wayfinding (especially for entrances, exits, and routes) is well-defined. It also helps to connect and integrate park circulation systems with the circulation patterns of surrounding community to encourage maximum use; walking paths and bike trails should align with sidewalks and streets in nearby neighborhoods to make movement clear and easy. Landscaping can also affect the safety and feel of a park. Having plentiful greenery contributes important ecological and aesthetic benefits, but landscaping should be designed to preserve clear sightlines. Maintenance and upkeep are key to successful landscaping. The Horner Park Advisory Council, Eugene Field Park Advisory Council, and other community partners should work closely with the Chicago Park District to ensure that maintenance is sufficient, which may require the community to locate a dedicated and sustainable funding source to assist with maintenance.

Improve lighting and visibility along neighborhood streets

Lighting could also be improved along neighborhood streets. The community should work with aldermen and CDOT to ensure that the neighborhood's residential streets, which stakeholders at the February 2017 public workshop voted a main safety concern, are adequately lighted. However, the community's top priority for lighting improvements should be commercial corridors, especially Lawrence Avenue, where many people walk during nighttime hours. The busy one-mile stretch of Lawrence between Kedzie and Pulaski features street lighting only on the southern side of the street. These street lamps are also mounted at a height designed to light the roadway for motorists, rather than at the human scale of pedestrians.

Proper lighting is essential to ensuring a sense of safety along sidewalks. While many street lamps do a good job of lighting the street for drivers, they often do not provide the "face-to-face" lighting that enables pedestrians to comfortably see the features of oncoming persons. Many of the most active, walkable areas of Chicago, such as Andersonville and Lincoln Square have separate pedestrian lighting fixtures. Wicker Park and Lincoln Park incorporate pedestrian fixtures on streetlights to ensure both motorists and people walking have adequate lighting. As a general rule of thumb, lighting should provide good visibility 12 to 15 feet away and provide coverage throughout an entire area or street. Working with CDOT, the aldermen representing Lawrence Avenue between Kedzie and Pulaski should conduct an evaluation of lighting in this section, which may identify a need to supplement existing lighting with additional lighting that improves visibility and the sense of safety for pedestrians and others using the corridor.

Figure 7.1. Auto-scale and pedestrian-scale lighting.



Lighting along Lawrence Avenue (top) is located only on the south side of the street and placed at a height suited for motorists rather than pedestrians. On State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, lights sit at a lower height appropriate for pedestrians (bottom).



Source: Eric Lowry, pedbikeimages.org.

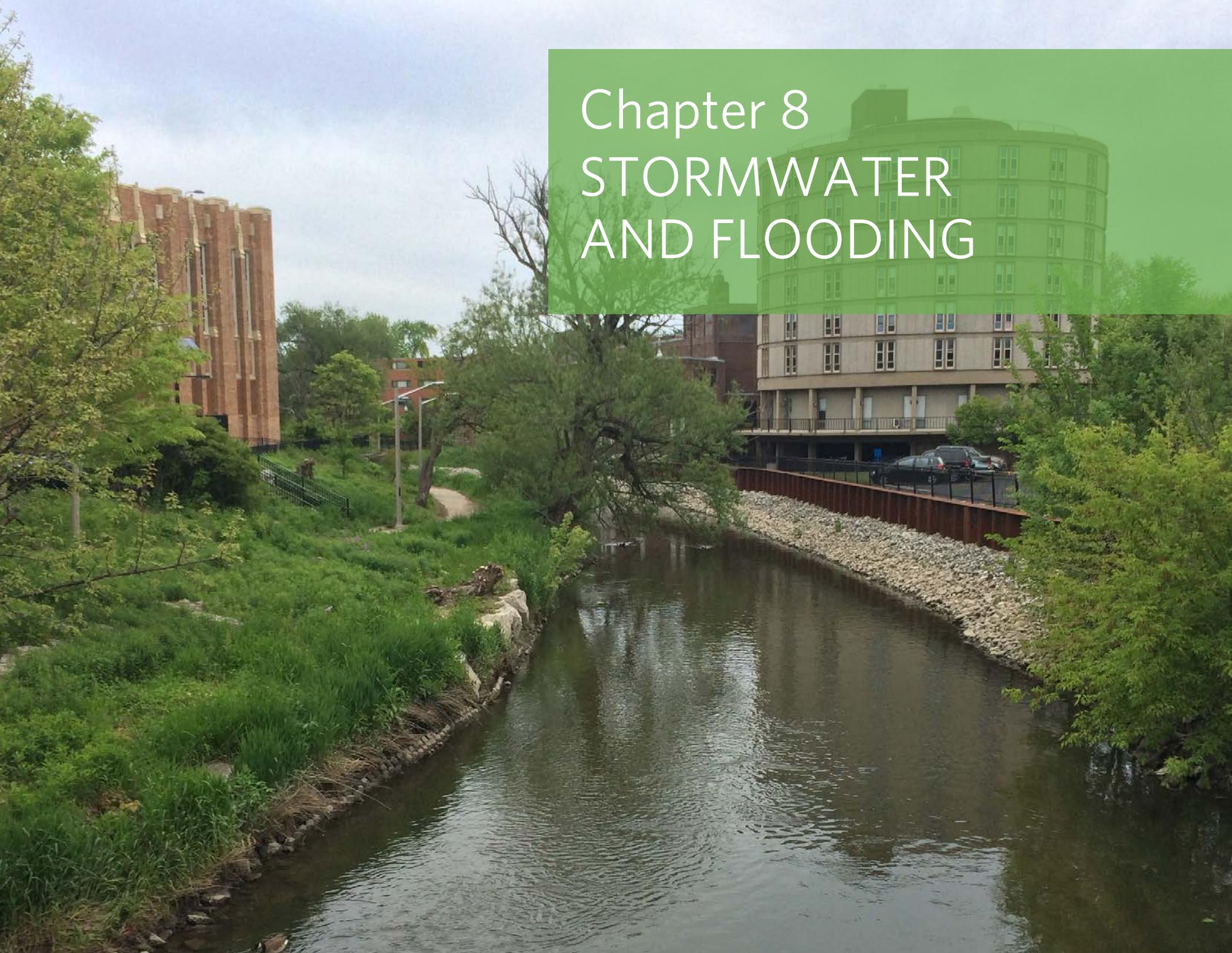
Implementation

Table 7.1. Community safety implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
7.1: Ensure that public spaces are active and inviting			
Work with CDOT to develop small plazas and other gathering places	0-2 years	Aldermen, CDOT, Territory Albany Park	Stakeholders should explore partnerships with CDOT’s “Make Way for People” program to create gathering places on underutilized cul-de-sacs, alleys, or “excess” areas of streets that are not needed for traffic flow.
Add sidewalk seating in Kimball-Kedzie-District	0-2 years	Aldermen, CDOT, SSA #60	Explore potential locations for the creation of attractive, well-maintained sidewalk seating areas for residents and visitors in highly-trafficked areas, as has been done on Devon Avenue.
Increase sidewalk cafes in Kimball-Kedzie District	0-2 years	Aldermen, CDOT, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, business owners	Develop an initiative to permit and encourage the many restaurants along Lawrence and Kedzie to install sidewalk seating, which would further increase the human presence and “eyes on the street” along these important corridors
Explore opportunities for pocket parks	2-5 years	Aldermen, SSA #60, Chicago Park District, Openlands, crowdfunding	Considering the dense landscape and high number of children in the area, “pocket parks” with compact playground equipment could be an ideal addition to the community.
Advocate for trail and path improvements	Ongoing	Aldermen, Active Transportation Alliance, park advisory councils, Metropolitan Planning Council, CMAP, CDOT	The community should advocate for sufficient well-designed paths, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes in accordance with plans and visions such as Our Great Rivers, CDOT’s Chicago Pedestrian Plan, and CDOT’s Chicago Streets for Cycling. See also: Chapter 9.
7.2: Pursue design improvements that increase feelings of safety in public spaces			
Advocate for improved lighting and landscaping maintenance in parks	0-2 years	Horner Park Advisory Council, Eugene Field Park Advisory Council, Chicago Park District	Ensure that lighting is well designed and landscaping is sufficiently well maintained. If possible, help to locate a dedicated and sustainable funding source to assist with maintenance.
Conduct an evaluation of lighting along Lawrence Avenue	2-5 years	Aldermen, CDOT	Conduct an evaluation of lighting between Kedzie and Pulaski Avenues, which may identify a need to supplement existing lighting with additional lighting that improves visibility and the sense of safety for pedestrians and others using the corridor.

rown Line





Chapter 8 STORMWATER AND FLOODING

The North River communities will ensure a built and natural environment that is resilient to floods and supports a clean, vibrant river. Through enhancements and education, the community will improve the quality of the Chicago River and prepare its critical infrastructure to serve all residents and businesses with fewer disruptions from flooding and a better ability to bounce back after a storm.

Introduction

Flooding is a longstanding challenge in the North River communities, driven by factors including the presence of waterways, development patterns, and aging infrastructure. Many structures in the North River communities are located in areas vulnerable to flooding, particularly along the Upper North Branch of the Chicago River, which meanders through residential areas and along school campuses. The neighborhood experienced extensive flood damage in 2008 and 2013, along with many smaller-scale flood events in recent years that have caused frequent flooding of basements, streets, and yards, and continue to affect the quality of water in the North Branch of the Chicago River and North Shore Channel.

The North River communities experience two types of flooding—overbank flooding and urban flooding—both of which reduce the quality of life for impacted residents and affect businesses and institutions in the area. Overbank flooding occurs when a river overflows its banks, usually due to upstream rainfall. Floodplains are the areas that are vulnerable to flooding from these overflowing rivers and streams. By contrast, urban flooding occurs when stormwater overwhelms the capacity of drainage systems, such as storm sewers, causing water to accumulate in low-lying areas. Urban flooding can happen anywhere, not just in the floodplain.

Key Findings

1. Overbank flooding has repeatedly inundated residents living in the floodplain of the Chicago River. Within the North River communities, property damage claims under multiple federal flood insurance programs are concentrated along the Chicago River. A stretch of the Upper North Branch between Pulaski Road and Kimball Avenue has experienced an especially high number of flood damage claims. Floodplain maps illustrate areas of a community that are at greater risk of overbank flooding from storms of different likelihood. The FEMA regulatory floodplain shows areas susceptible to flooding during a storm that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year (a “100-year flood”). In the North River communities, 85 buildings are in this floodplain, and 244 buildings are in the floodplain for storms with a 0.2 percent annual chance of occurring (a “500-year flood”).²¹

In response to past flooding events and the many structures located in flood-vulnerable areas, the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) partnered to construct a stormwater diversion tunnel along Foster Avenue. Upon completion in 2018, the diversion tunnel will allow floodwaters from up to a 100-year flood to bypass Albany Park and North Park, drastically reducing the community’s risk of overbank flooding.

2. Urban flooding remains an issue across the North River communities. While the stormwater diversion tunnel should alleviate overbank flooding, urban flooding will remain a concern even after the tunnel’s completion. Residents and other community stakeholders noted that widespread basement backups, which can cause serious health impacts for affected residents, are the most common and severe type of urban flooding in the neighborhood. Other common problems include basement seepage and street flooding, which restricts access for pedestrians and, in extreme cases, causes damage to vehicles.

3. Citywide and regional programs, policies, and investments have improved stormwater management in the North River communities. Effective stormwater management depends on both local best practices and larger, systemic investments and policies. Several improvements to Chicago’s regional stormwater system have had positive impacts in the North River communities. Chicago’s Stormwater Ordinance, Green Stormwater Infrastructure Strategy, and Sustainable Urban Infrastructure Guidelines have expanded stormwater infrastructure through private developments and public retrofits.²² The MWRD Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) has improved water quality in the Chicago Area Waterway System by reducing combined sewer overflows and, upon completion of the McCook flood control reservoir, will help detain floodwaters.

RIGHT: Wetland restoration at Eugene Field Park has protected more heavily used parts of the park from frequent flooding while providing habitat for native species that thrive in wet conditions.

Recommendations

8.1 Engage the community in flood mitigation solutions

Across the Chicago region, flooding is a complex challenge. Not only is it caused by a variety of factors, but mitigation and recovery actions involve several different agencies and authorities. This is especially true in the North River communities, which are situated at the lowest point in a 112-square-mile watershed that drains to the North Branch Chicago River, meaning that a wide range of actors, from across a vast area of the Chicago region, affect the stormwater situation within the neighborhood.

To successfully address this challenge, the North River communities will need to invest in greater organization, coordination, and collaboration. By doing so, they will achieve greater success implementing best practices to reduce vulnerability, enhance resilience, and mitigate flooding. Directly engaging residents in community-level organizing can help build on the stormwater-related work that NRC, the City of Chicago, aldermen's offices, and MWRD have undertaken in recent years, helping to align it with the current needs of residents. Partnerships can also provide greater expertise and resources to educate residents and other stakeholders about actions they can take to reduce their vulnerability to the effects of flooding.



Case Study: Midlothian, IL

Located in southern Cook County, the Village of Midlothian experiences overbank and urban flooding that causes damage to homes, garages, yards, and streets. After enduring severe floods that occurred in 2013, five families formed a group called “The Floodlothian 5.” The group met regularly to discuss the issue in one member’s garage and created a Facebook page to engage the community in conversations about flooding in Midlothian.

Now called “Floodlothian Midlothian,” the group has used public hearings, meetings, videos, and newspaper articles to engage the community and has been instrumental in building relationships with organizations, agencies, and politicians to garner support. Thanks to their perseverance and dedication, members of Floodlothian Midlothian have helped the Village obtain assistance to plan, design, and construct green and gray infrastructure improvements to mitigate flooding one drop at a time.

Form an urban flooding action group

An urban flooding action group brings together concerned citizens interested in addressing urban flooding and improving stormwater management across the community. Organizing a group with this specific focus can help empower residents and other community members to take control over their situation and reduce their flood risk. These groups provide a structure for the community to record and communicate problems, discuss flooding causes and solutions, and engage with government and non-governmental organizations.

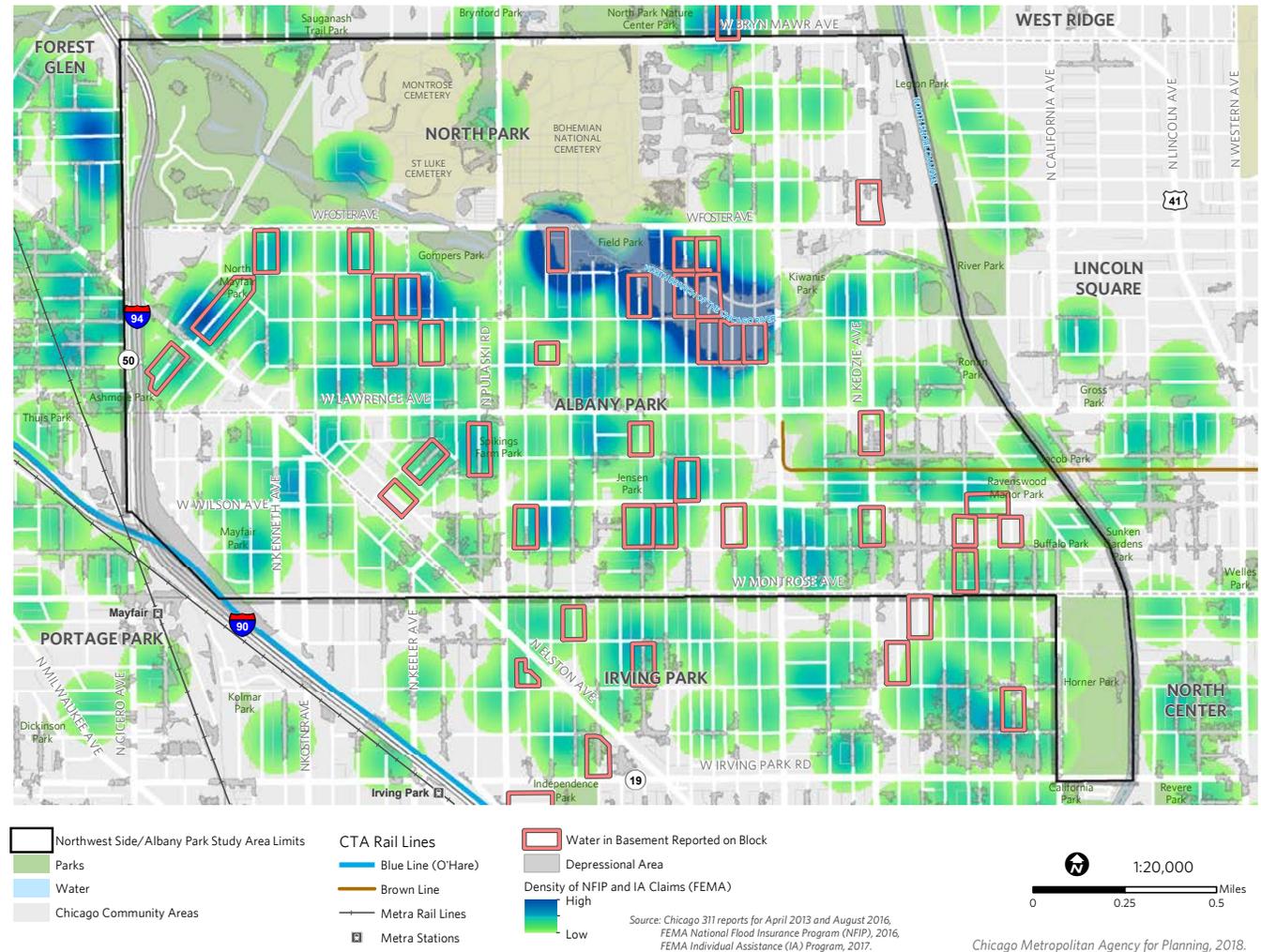
Through its Environment Committee, NRC could lead the initial organization of an urban flooding action group. As a first step, the NRC could identify key members of the community who could organize an introductory meeting and develop a communication strategy to publicize the event through as many means as possible. Grant funding or other assistance that would enable NRC to dedicate staff time to working with the Environment Committee on stormwater issues would bolster the implementation of the strategies in this chapter. The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), a Chicago-based non-profit organization with expertise in stormwater planning, has developed the RainReady program, which provides guidance on how to create and sustain an urban flooding action group.²³

Compile information on flooding

Information on the location, type, extent, and other characteristics of flooding is an essential tool when presenting the problem to officials and accessing resources. Time-stamped photos, videos, flood reports, and maps will all help to illustrate the extent and magnitude of the urban flooding problem in the North River communities. Documentation is also required to access disaster assistance provided by FEMA.

Knowing the types of information needed to apply for assistance programs, the community can be prepared to assist the City to document incidents after a flood. The urban flooding action group should work with OEMC and other relevant City departments to see how it can assist with data collection following a flood. The sensitivity of this information will require measures to ensure anonymity is preserved. Partnerships with Northeastern Illinois University may help to stretch resources by leveraging technology and volunteers.

Figure 8.1. Reported Locations of Flooding in the North River Communities



Flood insurance claims (dark blue areas) appear throughout the study area, with the highest concentrations along the Upper North Branch in Albany Park. Orange boxes indicate blocks (not exact locations) where people reported water in basements to Chicago 311. Water in basements often occurs in depressional areas (gray), where stormwater runoff may flow during storm events.



Organize and pursue partnerships

The North River Commission has a history of establishing partnerships with local government agencies, elected officials, and institutions to improve flood mitigation and stormwater management. In 2016, the North River Commission partnered with 8th District Cook County Commissioner Luis Arroyo Jr. and MWRD to provide qualified property owners with free rain barrels.

There are many other partnership opportunities that NRC's Environment Committee and the urban flooding action group could pursue. Space to Grow is a partnership between Chicago Public Schools, the City of Chicago Department of Water Management, MWRD, the Healthy Schools Campaign, and Openlands that seeks to reduce flooding in a neighborhood by transforming paved schoolyards into water-absorbing landscapes that provide children with outdoor spaces to play, learn, and garden.²⁴ RainReady Home, offered through CNT, works with participating communities to help owners assess their properties for flooding and drainage problems, identify improvements, and provide construction oversight assistance. To extend their services to residents in the Chicago region, CNT launched a new initiative called RainReady Socials, which are interactive events that teach homeowners and their neighbors about their options for managing stormwater.²⁵ Chicago Conservation Corps trains community leaders in sustainability initiatives, including stormwater management, and assists with the development and implementation of small projects such as educational campaigns and stewardship workdays.²⁶

Local colleges offer another important opportunity for collaboration. Faculty and students from North Park University and NEIU may be interested in partnering with community groups to research, document, and mitigate flooding in the neighborhood. NRC has already worked with NEIU's Department of Geography and Environmental Studies on projects related to river access and water quality, and can build on these relationships in the future.

LEFT: Interpretive signage explains the benefits of a home rain garden in Ravenswood Manor. Rain gardens are one form of green stormwater infrastructure that can allow stormwater to infiltrate soil rather than run off into the sewer system

Educate residents, businesses, and other community members

Outreach and education activities are essential to increase public awareness of flooding risk, build local capacity, and garner support for investment in stormwater management. The urban flooding action group can direct community members to educational materials, assistance programs, and non-profit organizations that are working in the area. They should first seek resources to create a program to educate current and prospective homeowners, renters, businesses, and other property owners on urban flooding through workshops, factsheets, and events.²⁷ Specific topics should include floodproofing improvements and maintenance, downspout disconnection, flood insurance, and green and gray infrastructure maintenance. Many of the resources that could be shared have already been created by other organizations, and NRC should seek to incorporate them into their events, website, and published materials where appropriate.

NRC should also leverage its established relationships with landlords, property managers, and businesses to educate them about best practices. For example, NRC should educate property managers on issues of basement flooding and seepage that affect the health and safety of tenants, and discuss flooding issues and property drainage with businesses participating in SSA #6o.

The following list provides some ideas for specific outreach and education activities that NRC can pursue, subject to present capacity and available resources:

- Organize an informational booth at community events to educate residents on flood risk and mitigation activities, and gather up-to-date information from residents on the flood-related issues they face.
- Distribute pamphlets and posters with practical information about urban flooding, basement flooding mitigation, and green infrastructure strategies at the Albany Park Community Center, Chicago Public Library, religious institutions, social service providers, CTA stations, and park facilities. This effort can make use of the resources already developed by the City of Chicago, Chicago Bungalow Association, and the Center for Neighborhood Technology to educate residents and business owners on the causes of urban flooding, potential solutions, and available assistance.²⁸
- Build a practical, easy-to-use online resource to disseminate information to residents and other property owners.
- Develop a concise summary of essential information on flooding that can be included in a community “welcome packet” for new residents.
- Encourage participation in City assistance programs. For example, if 70 percent or more of neighbors on a block express interest, the City’s Basement Flooding Partnership program will conduct a series of steps to mitigate flooding on the block, including sewer inspection, 3-1-1 call analysis, computer analysis, and a paper survey of block residents.²⁹ The Private Drain Program, directed by the Department of Water Management, assists property owners in the repair of broken sewer drain tiles located under the public right-of-way between the city sidewalk and the center of the street.³⁰
- Promote ways to finance home improvements, such as loan services through Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago.³¹

8.2 Monitor implementation of the Albany Park stormwater diversion tunnel

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) are partnering to construct a stormwater diversion tunnel that will allow floodwaters from the Upper North Branch of the Chicago River to bypass Albany Park and North Park. Upon completion in 2018, the tunnel will intercept high river flows at Eugene Field Park and release them into the North Shore Channel at River Park (Figure 8.2). During construction, the City installed temporary jersey barriers at key locations to hold back floodwaters, and located sand bags within the community to reduce response times in the event of a major flood.

Figure 8.2. Albany Park Stormwater Diversion Tunnel Location

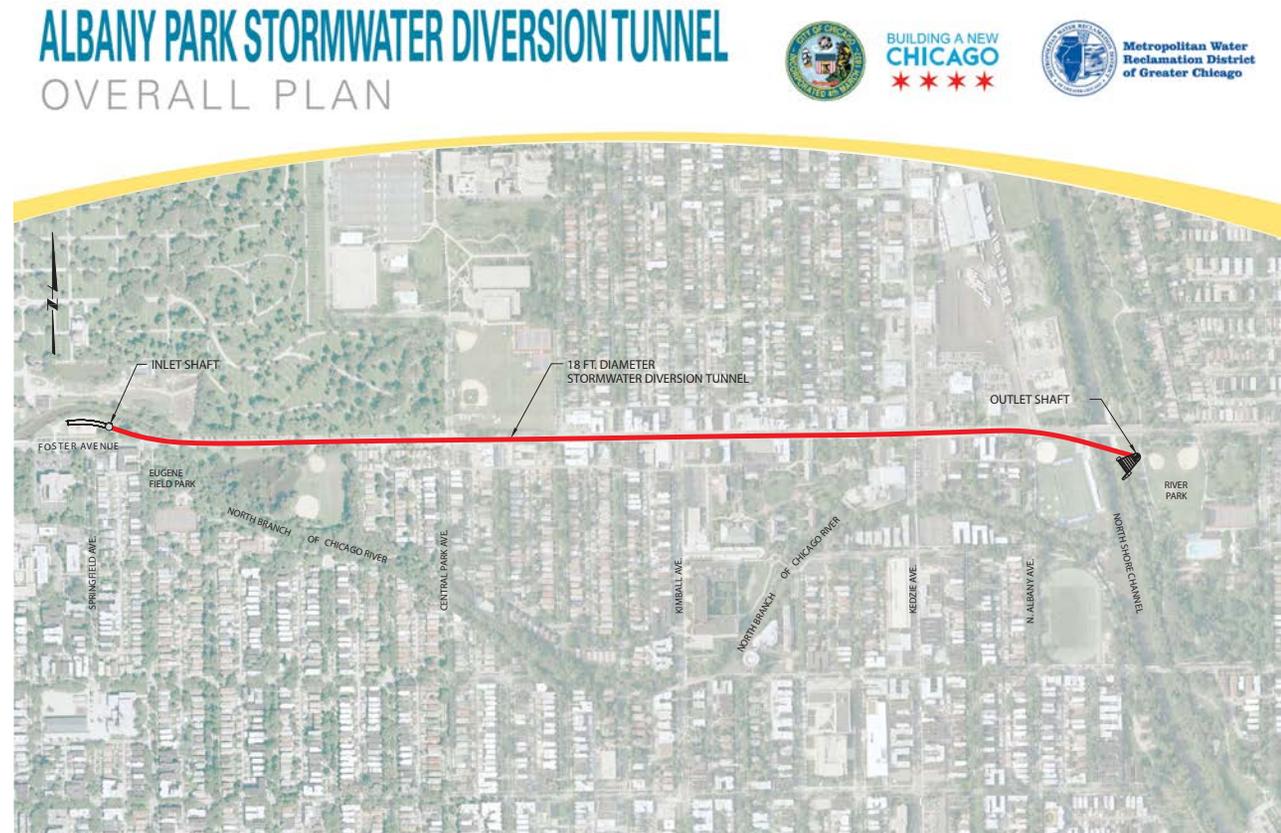


Illustration credit: City of Chicago and MWRD.

The tunnel is designed to manage the “1 percent annual chance storm,” which is equivalent to approximately 7.5 inches of rain received within a 24-hour period in Chicago.³² While the storm the tunnel is designed to handle means it will alleviate flooding during a significant amount of rainfall, “design storms” are estimates that based on historic rainfall data, and storms exceeding 7.5 inches of rain in 24 hours are currently likely to occur more frequently than in the past. When considering the increased frequency of storms caused by climate change, the annual chance that the North River communities will experience the amount of rain described by the 1 percent annual chance storm is likely to be greater than 1 percent. While the tunnel will drastically reduce the community’s risk of overbank flooding, inundation from larger, less frequent storms (such as the “0.2 percent annual chance storm”), may still occur.

As the lead agency for the diversion tunnel project, CDOT provides progress updates to the aldermanic offices representing affected areas, and holds public meetings at key points of project construction. Aldermen representing both the 33rd Ward and 39th Ward communicate project updates to residents and other stakeholders through their websites and e-newsletters. The North River Commission should advocate that aldermen continue to work with CDOT and MWRD to provide updates on tunnel performance once it is operational. NRC should also encourage residents to report any cases of overbank flooding (as opposed to urban flooding) to their respective ward office and 311 City Services. This practice will help the City monitor the effectiveness of the stormwater diversion tunnel and empower the community to advocate for additional assistance if needed.



8.3 Advocate for the targeted expansion of green stormwater infrastructure to reduce urban flooding

The investment made by the City and MWRD to construct the stormwater diversion tunnel will improve the quality of life and safety of residents who have been impacted by overbank flooding. However, past flood reports show that flooding outside of the floodplain is a widespread issue in the community. Figure 8.1 identifies areas of the North River communities that have reported flooding in the past and received damage payouts from FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) or Individual Assistance (IA) Program.³³ While the map shows the highest flood occurrence for properties within the floodplain of the North Branch of the Chicago River, instances of urban flooding are evident across the community, such as in areas of Albany Park and North Mayfair.

When a local sewer system cannot adequately drain stormwater runoff, the impacts can damage waterways as well. In combined sewer systems, such as the one serving the North River communities, the same pipes carry untreated wastewater and stormwater runoff. During heavy rain events, stormwater runoff volumes can exceed pipes' capacity, causing overflows of combined sewage and stormwater into waterways, basements, and storm drains. In riverfront neighborhoods like the North River communities, combined sewer overflows (CSOs) not only impair water quality and aquatic habitat, but make being near the river an unpleasant experience.

The complexity of urban flooding requires a range of solutions that expand the capacity of the drainage system to address current precipitation and future increases. Green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) is a cost-effective way to provide stormwater management by using plants, soils, and natural processes to treat runoff at the source. Rain gardens, bioretention, bioswales, permeable pavement, green roofs, green streets, and rainwater harvesting through rain barrels or cisterns are all examples of green infrastructure practices. These practices are effective at mitigating urban flooding and improving the water quality and attractiveness of local waterways by reducing CSOs. Other co-benefits of green stormwater infrastructure include reducing the costs of installing and replacing gray infrastructure, increasing habitat diversity, improving air quality and public health, increasing property values, and enhancing a community's visual image and identity.

Throughout this planning process, stakeholders have expressed interest in furthering the use of green stormwater infrastructure in their neighborhood. Stakeholders noted that pooling and ponding of potentially damaging stormwater takes place on streets, on residential properties, and in many of the parking lots in the neighborhood. At the public workshop held in February 2017, attendees indicated that green stormwater infrastructure was the flood mitigation strategy they favored most. The strategy's popularity suggests that in addition to offering an effective way to combat urban flooding, green stormwater infrastructure may be better received by residents than some past gray infrastructure projects.³⁴





The North River communities can advocate the installation of green infrastructure in the following ways:

- **Planned capital improvements.** Capital improvements are the building or upgrading of infrastructure such as streets, alleys, water mains, and sewer structures. The City of Chicago implements capital improvements through its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Aldermanic Menu Program.³⁵ The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) outlines priority investments in streets, sewer, water, and other infrastructure over a five-year period that is updated annually.³⁶ The Aldermanic Menu Program distributes financial resources to each ward to address their own specific infrastructure needs.

Coordinating investments to improve transportation, sewer, and water infrastructure presents opportunities to address stormwater improvement priorities. Incorporating GSI while a street is being reconstructed means that the City can save money by not having to tear up the street twice. Integrating GSI elements in capital improvement projects can also increase the array of possible funding sources. The City's Green Stormwater Infrastructure Strategy lays the foundation for incorporating green stormwater infrastructure into capital improvements and CDOT's Sustainable Urban Infrastructure Guidelines provides technical guidance for implementation.³⁷

NRC and the urban flooding action group should advocate that the City leverage its infrastructure investments to address urban flooding while improving the quality of life in the North River communities. The Department of Water Management (DWM) models sewer conditions to determine areas in need of improvement. However, NRC and the urban flooding action group can supplement this information with maps, surveys, and anecdotal information to make the case for investment in key areas. These groups can also work with DWM to identify areas where the City could relocate rainblockers to safely store runoff in the street and benefit residents on the block who experience basement backups.

Aldermen have not typically used menu money to fund green stormwater infrastructure. However, menu money has funded neighborhood greenway projects to improve street conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, which can be designed to also collect and absorb stormwater runoff. NRC should monitor projects included in the menu to identify opportunities that align with flood mitigation or neighborhood greening needs and advocate for these projects to incorporate green stormwater infrastructure financed through the Green Streets or Green Infrastructure Improvements programs in the CIP.

- **Green and gray infrastructure retrofits.** The CIP allocates budget for the City to expand its green infrastructure system through two programs—Green Streets and Green Infrastructure Improvements. These programs designate yearly investments of roughly one million dollars for the next three to four years. NRC and other community organizations should advocate for green infrastructure, or a combination of green and gray infrastructure, to help reduce flooding in high priority areas. NRC and the urban flooding action group should communicate and document priority/high need areas to aldermanic offices to help designate menu money to these areas.
- **Grant funding.** Numerous local and national philanthropic foundations and public agencies offer competitive funding to assist communities planning and implementing green stormwater infrastructure projects. Potential funders include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, ComEd, MWRD, and IDNR. NRC and its partners should pursue grants that can help address the areas of needs that the urban flooding action group and other local stakeholders identify. Appendix B provides further information on these grant programs.

Implementation

Table 8.1. Stormwater and flooding implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
8.1: Engage the community in flood mitigation solutions			
Pursue partnerships	Ongoing	CPS, Chicago DWM, Openlands, MWRD, CNT, NEIU, North Park University	The widespread nature of stormwater problems in the Chicago region has prompted many potential partners to take interest. NRC should seek to engage with partnership and grant opportunities from these organizations to facilitate data collection, improve local coordination, and fund green infrastructure.
Connect residents to key assistance programs	Ongoing	Chicago DPD, Chicago DWM, Chicago OEMC, IEMA, FEMA	By familiarizing itself with programs that help homeowners affected by flooding and establishing contacts within City departments, NRC and its partners can provide residents with accurate information about where to turn for assistance.
Form an urban flooding action group	Immediate	Residents, civic organizations, NEIU, CNT	Organizing an urban flooding action group can help empower community members to improve local stormwater management and reduce their flood risk. CNT's Rain Ready program provides guidance on how to create and sustain an urban flooding action group.
Compile information on flooding	Ongoing	Residents, civic organizations, NEIU, Chicago OEMC	The urban flooding action group should work with OEMC and other relevant City departments to see how it can assist with data collection following a flood. Partnerships with Northeastern Illinois University may help to stretch resources by leveraging technology, methods, and volunteer labor.
Develop education materials for residents, businesses, and other community members	0-2 years	CNT, NEIU, North Park University, CPS, Chicago DWM, Openlands, MWRD	NRC and the urban flooding action group should seek resources to create a program to educate homeowners, renters, prospective homebuyers, landlords, businesses, and other property owners on urban flooding through workshops, factsheets, and events. Many of these materials already exist and could form the basis of materials to share with North River communities stakeholders. Informational booths at community events, placing materials in libraries and community centers, and online resources can help advance this goal.
8.2: Monitor implementation of the Albany Park stormwater diversion tunnel			
Seek updates on performance of the Albany Park stormwater diversion tunnel	0-2 years	Residents, civic organizations, business owners, aldermen, CDOT, MWRD	Advocate that aldermen continue to work with CDOT and MWRD to provide updates on tunnel performance now that it is operational. NRC should also encourage residents to report any cases of overbank flooding (as opposed to urban flooding) to their respective ward office and 311 City Services.

Table 8.3 (Continued).

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
8.3: Advocate for the targeted expansion of green stormwater infrastructure to reduce urban flooding			
Advocate for GSI in strategic locations	Ongoing	Residents, civic organizations, NEIU, CNT, Chicago DWM, Chicago DPD, CDOT, MWRD, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	NRC and the urban flooding action group can help to provide public input and documentation of areas of high need. NRC and the urban flooding action group can supplement DWM's sewer modeling with maps, surveys, and anecdotal information to make the case for investment in key areas that are affected by stormwater problems. Once identified, NRC and the urban flooding action group should advocate for these projects to incorporate green stormwater infrastructure financed through the Green Streets or Green Infrastructure Improvements programs in the CIP.
Advocate for GSI through aldermanic spending	Ongoing	Residents, civic organizations, NEIU, CNT, aldermen	NRC should communicate priority/high need areas to aldermanic offices to help designate menu money to these areas. NRC and the urban flooding action group should monitor projects included in the menu to identify opportunities that align with flood mitigation or neighborhood greening needs.
Seek grant funding for GSI	0-2 years	Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program, ComEd, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, IDNR, MWRD, USACE	Foundations and public agencies offer several grant programs that community organizations and partners can access to implement green stormwater infrastructure projects. NRC and its partners should pursue funding for projects in the North River communities. Collaborative applications may be especially successful in seeking funding.

Chapter 9

RIVERS, PARKS, AND TRAILS



The North River communities will offer clean, active rivers, parks, and preserves that connect to the places where people live, work, and gather. People walking and biking will safely travel on clear routes between neighborhood destinations and enjoy parks that highlight a clean, accessible Chicago River.

Introduction

Rivers play a special role in shaping the environment, landscape, and character of the North River communities. The Chicago River system runs along and through the neighborhood, lined by parks, forest preserves, and regional trails, creating a unique set of opportunities for recreation, community building, and placemaking. While these treasured resources hold great promise as neighborhood assets, limits to public access, questions about water quality, and lack of connectivity present challenges to realizing their full environmental and recreational benefits.

The Chicago River system is experiencing a resurgence in interest in the North River communities and throughout the City of Chicago. At the plan's public workshop in February 2017, attendees were asked what they considered the most important need for recreation in the neighborhood. The top response, with almost 40 percent of the votes, was improving access to the rivers. The second most popular response was clean rivers. The City of Chicago is also focusing on its river system through the Our Great Rivers vision. Led by the Metropolitan Planning Council and Friends of the Chicago River, Our Great Rivers is a unifying and forward-looking vision for the Chicago, Calumet, and Des Plaines Rivers. The initiative recommends actions for the public and government to take in order to make the rivers inviting, productive, and living by 2040. The alignment of local and citywide goals of improving the river system offers plentiful opportunities for coordination and implementation.



Key Findings

- 1. The North River communities enjoy plentiful, high quality open space, but access is limited.** While the area is home to almost 300 acres of public open space, most is located along the various branches of the Chicago River system, more than half a mile from some of the most densely populated parts of Albany Park and Mayfair. Comfortable and low-stress bike facilities, which could provide easier park access for residents further from parks, are also located on the edges of the neighborhood.
- 2. Open space in the North River communities offers little direct access to the Chicago River.** While parks and forest preserves surround much of the river system, the riverbanks are mostly wooded, limiting both views and access, or steep, making reaching the river difficult. The neighborhood's parks and preserves offer only one constructed launch for canoes and kayaks. Stakeholders indicated that improved access to the river was their top priority for parks and open space.
- 3. Better bike connections through the neighborhood could improve safety and increase use of trails in the North River communities.** Major regional trails (such as the North Shore Channel Trail, Sauganash Trail, and North Branch Trail) lie on the outer edges of the North River communities, but do not connect to one another. The creation of better routes between these regional trails will improve recreational access for neighborhood residents as well as provide opportunities for trail users to visit neighborhood destinations. Improvements to bike facilities within the neighborhood could provide access while reducing crashes in locations that stakeholders and data both identified as problem spots.

Recommendations

9.1 Connect and improve neighborhood bikeways

Bicyclists in the North River communities enjoy a relatively high level of access to safe bike facilities, especially off-street bike trails that connect to open space in or near the study area. Just east of the study area, the North Shore Channel Trail provides a popular connection between Lawrence Avenue, riverfront parks, and destinations to the north. On the northern edge of the study area, the Sauganash/Valley Line Trail extends north from LaBagh Woods along a former railroad right-of-way, offering a safe and popular trail for bikers of all abilities. The North Branch Trail, which runs for almost 20 miles through forest preserves to the Skokie Lagoons in Glencoe, now reaches all the way through LaBagh Woods to Foster Avenue, thanks to a trail extension opened in the summer of 2017. Access to the regional bike trail network, already strong in the North River communities, continues to improve with recent and planned investments by the City of Chicago and Cook County.

However, these high quality regional facilities mostly lie on the outer edges of the North River communities. They do not connect directly to one another, nor do they connect to the neighborhood's transit stations, business corridors, or schools and universities. Within the neighborhood, a lack of dedicated bike infrastructure means bicyclists must bike on streets that often lack bike facilities, or on sidewalks not designed for biking. Stakeholders identified safe bike connections within the neighborhood—including connecting regional trails and neighborhood destinations—as important to their vision of the community's future. Partnerships and cooperation between public agencies, especially CDOT, the Chicago Park District, and the Cook County Forest Preserves, will be important to implementing the recommended bicycle network.

Provide clear, safe bike routes through the neighborhood

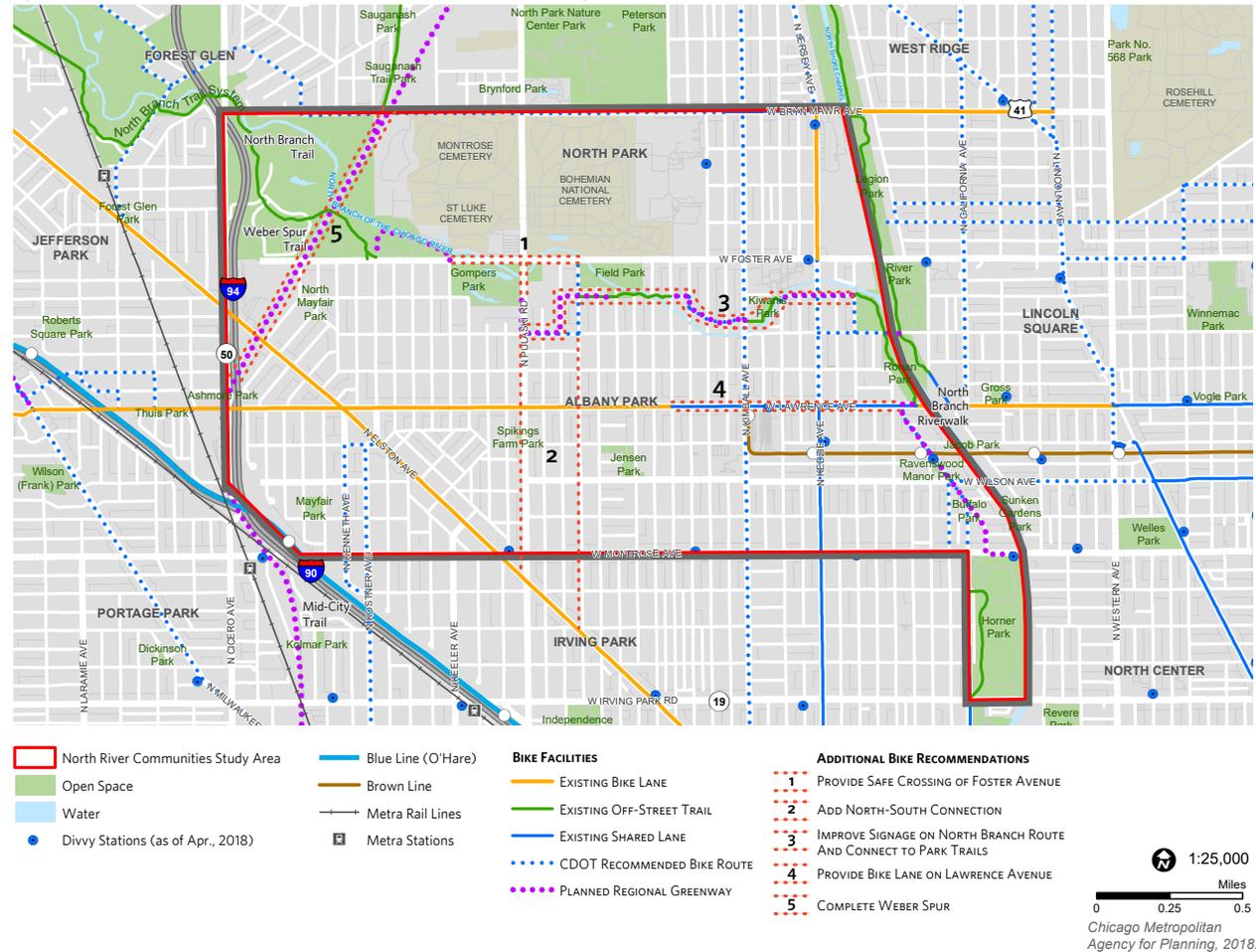
A network of low-stress bike connections on neighborhood streets can improve safety and provide routes between the heart of the neighborhood and the bike trails and open space located at its edges. From a local perspective, providing this route will improve park and trail access for residents and potentially bring new patrons to businesses. From a regional perspective, it will improve the performance of the trail network for northeastern Illinois by stitching together several of the region's major trails.

Outside of the off-street trails at the neighborhood's edges, few facilities in the area offer bicyclists separation from motor vehicle traffic. For example, a bike lane on Lawrence Avenue is the major east-west bicycle facility, but it is located on a street with heavy traffic and shares the lane with motorists between the North Branch of the Chicago River and Central Park Avenue, making it a stressful ride for less experienced bicyclists. There is also a bike route that runs on side streets near the Upper North Branch of the Chicago River, but is merely a recommended route, not a bike lane or trail that offers dedicated space for bikes.

Safe, clearly marked routes can connect visitors who use the area's regional trails to the amenities and businesses that the neighborhood offers. The area's trails would likely attract even more users as planned improvements like the 312 River Run Trail, which would connect Horner Park to a continuous riverfront trail to the south, are completed. Bringing these visitors to local businesses and destinations will require wayfinding signage that communicates the unique identity and offerings of the neighborhood.

In addition to informing visitors of what the neighborhood offers, there is a need to provide a clear, safe way to access it. Improvements should focus on providing better facilities on routes that are already heavily used, or providing alternatives that offer better service than routes that are currently popular. These routes and connections were identified and emphasized in input received as part of outreach for this plan, as well as in ride data that Strava Lab provides on their nation-wide heatmap.³⁸ While it may not be possible to engineer an off-street trail or a fully separated bike lane for some routes, there are other methods of welcoming bicycles and calming automobile traffic that may be feasible.

Figure 9.1. Recommended Pedestrian and Bike Network Improvements



The following bike improvements are high priorities to help connect the neighborhood for cycling:

1. Provide at least one north/south bike facility. There are currently no north/south bike facilities in the North River communities. Elston Avenue has a bike lane that provides access for bikers on the western end of the neighborhood, but there are no bike facilities that provide a route between Montrose Avenue and Bryn Mawr Avenue. Along the North Branch and North Shore Channel, trails extend north from Lawrence Avenue and south from Montrose Avenue through Horner Park, but there is a gap between Lawrence and Montrose. In the rest of the neighborhood, CDOT recommends that bicyclists use Kedzie or Kimball Avenues, and parts of Kedzie have a bike lane.³⁹ West of Kimball, there are no recommended routes. According to data from Strava, the most heavily used north/south routes are Manor, Kedzie, Pulaski, and Kimball.



The lack of north/south bike facilities leads many people to bike on sidewalks that are not designed to accommodate both walking and biking, such as this one on Springfield Avenue.

Manor Greenway

This plan recommends support for CDOT's Manor Greenway. As currently designed, the greenway will not divert traffic, but will add curb extensions and other improvements to calm traffic, as well as signage that clearly marks the street as a route shared with bicycles. Improvements to Manor Greenway would effectively connect the North Shore Channel Trail through Ravenswood Manor to Horner Park, where they can access the 312 River Run trail to destinations as far south as Belmont Avenue. The completion of the 312 River Run trail in 2019 is likely to increase the number of bicyclists traveling between the North Shore Channel Trail and Horner Park, and additional accommodations to improve safety with minimal disruption to the community may be needed.

Other Routes

Additionally, a north/south bike facility located further to the west would help residents reach the neighborhood's outstanding parks and forest preserves. A facility on Pulaski Road would connect the bike lanes on Elston Avenue and Lawrence Avenue to the trails in Gompers Park and LaBagh Woods. Alternatively, paired bike lanes or marked shared lanes going south on Avers Avenue and north on Hamlin Avenue would accomplish the same goal, using streets with lower traffic than Pulaski Road. Considering these and other viable options, residents and neighborhood groups should work with their aldermen and CDOT to identify the most desirable location for this bike facility.

2. Improve east/west bike facilities. There are two main east-west routes through Albany Park that feature incomplete bike facilities. Lawrence Avenue features a bike lane from Central Park Avenue to the west, and markings for a shared lane between Central Park and the Chicago River. The other bikeway is a recommended route on side streets and park paths, roughly following the Upper North Branch from River Park to Gompers Park. This plan recommends improvements to these routes, or the addition of another east-west route.

Lawrence Avenue

Lawrence Avenue is a heavily used bicycle route that would benefit from improvements that provide a safer, more comfortable riding experience. According to Strava data, Lawrence Avenue is, along with Bryn Mawr Avenue, one of the two most used east-west routes in the North River communities. Lawrence Avenue also has the second-highest automobile traffic volume of all roads in the area. In addition to being located along a busy thoroughfare, the Lawrence Avenue bike lane is shared with motorists east of Central Park Avenue—home to the area’s busy CTA Brown Line stations, many stores and restaurants, and intense pedestrian activity. The section of Lawrence from approximately Central Park Avenue to Troy Street is the site of the highest concentration of bicycle crashes, and was commonly identified during public outreach as an area that needs bicycling improvements.

In the City of Chicago’s Streets for Cycling plan, CDOT identifies Lawrence Avenue as a “crosstown bike route,” which means it is meant to offer a long, continuous route on a major road that connects major destinations. The plan recommends that crosstown bike routes have, in order of priority: barrier-protected bike lanes, two-way barrier-protected bike lanes, buffer-protected bike lanes (as found along the western end of Lawrence Avenue), or bike lanes/marked shared lanes.

As a popular, important route that currently suffers from frequent crashes, Lawrence Avenue merits better bike accommodations. Above all, the buffer-protected bike lane should be extended for the full length of Lawrence Avenue between Central Park and the North Branch of the Chicago River. Over the longer term, CDOT should explore implementing one of the more protected bike accommodations recommended for crosstown bike routes. In Ravenswood, CDOT has implemented an attractive and functional streetscaping project on Lawrence Avenue, improving sidewalks, adding bike lanes, and planting trees. The Lawrence Avenue corridor in Albany Park is probably not wide enough to accommodate the full treatment CDOT implemented in Ravenswood, but the community should work with NRC, CDOT, and their aldermen to advocate for appropriate improvements that could enhance the streetscape while also improving bicycle safety.



People biking on Lawrence Avenue must contend with heavy auto traffic and a lack of a dedicated bike lane east of Central Park Avenue.

Upper North Branch

To travel by bike between the North Branch Trail in LaBagh Woods and the North Shore Channel Trail in River Park, there is a recommended route along the Upper North Branch. The route combines short trails in local parks with on-street routes on low-stress neighborhood streets, mostly along Carmen Avenue. This network of bike connections is included in the Streets for Cycling plan, and is marked with small wayfinding signs at key points.

The current route is likely to remain the best option for a quiet bike route near the river, but there are small improvements that can be made. Several small gaps exist in the current route, and in the network identified in the Streets for Cycling plan. CDOT, the Chicago Park District, and property owners should work to identify a route or trail that fills the three-block gap located between Avers Avenue and Pulaski Road. Options include continuing a trail along the river (with a potential mid-block crossing at Pulaski Road that might require signals or other improvements), or an on-street route using widened sidewalks along Pulaski, Foster, and Avers. Bicyclists also need a safe way to cross Foster Avenue near Gompers Park where the North Branch Trail ends. In addition to being identified by stakeholders as an area that needs bike improvements, crash data indicates that this gap is the location of a relatively high numbers of crashes, including several that caused incapacitating injuries.

The City of Chicago's recently renewed interest in its riverfront offers opportunities for the North River communities to leverage public energy to help implement bike improvements in the neighborhood. The City of Chicago's Our Great Rivers vision sets a goal of continuous riverfront trails throughout the city.⁴⁰ The Active Transportation Alliance, a leading bike and pedestrian advocacy group, is working with the City and residents to improve trails along the river, and their Chicago River Trail Action Plan includes goals consistent with the recommendations of this plan.

Bryn Mawr Avenue

On the north end of the study area, Bryn Mawr Avenue provides a bike route that is popular among bicyclists despite its lack of bike facilities. Bryn Mawr connects the North Shore Channel Trail to the Sauganash/Valley Line Trail, LaBagh Woods, and the North Park Nature Center, and has much lower traffic volumes than Foster, Lawrence, and Montrose Avenues. The Streets for Cycling plan identifies Bryn Mawr as a Neighborhood Bike Route, and the Chicago River Trail Action Plan identifies it as a priority connection. Given the low traffic volume on Bryn Mawr, bikes could be accommodated sufficiently with relatively minor changes such as shared lane markings or traffic calming measures like curb extensions.



Improve bike infrastructure at high-risk locations

In addition to providing clear, safe bicycle routes through the North River communities, infrastructure improvements can help to reduce safety risks for bicyclists at key locations where crashes have been common. Analysis of crash data from IDOT shows that areas of the neighborhood that lack cycling infrastructure correspond with hotspots of frequent bicycle crashes. The stretch of Lawrence Avenue with the highest number of crashes lacks a dedicated bike lane. There have also been several crashes that led to incapacitating injury on Foster Avenue near Gompers Park, an important crossing for trail users that lacks bike facilities.

The community should work with their aldermen and CDOT to identify what types of interventions would be most appropriate at these locations. Resources such as the Streets for Cycling plan and the CMAP Complete Streets Toolkit offer practical guidance on potential design strategies, traffic calming measures, and bike infrastructure that can help to lessen the safety risk that bicyclists—as well as pedestrians and drivers—face. For example, refuge islands can make crossings easier on wide streets. They consist of raised barriers located in the center of the roadway, through which a crosswalk passes, providing a place for pedestrians—or bicyclists who are walking with their bikes—to wait safely for a suitable gap in traffic or a “walk” signal. Refuge islands enable pedestrians and bicyclists to focus on crossing one half of the roadway at a time, and also provide an attractive way to improve the visibility of crossing pedestrians and bicyclists and calm traffic speeds. Other possible improvements could include bike lanes, shared bike-bus lanes, or curb extensions.



Advocate for completion of Weber Spur

The Weber Spur is a planned trail that will extend south from the Sauganash Trail through LaBagh Woods along an elevated former railroad track. Once completed, the Weber Spur will connect to both the North Branch Trail and the Sauganash/Valley Line/Skokie Line Trail, providing an uninterrupted, multi-use trail of several dozen miles. Considered a high priority for the region's bike network, the Weber Spur is part of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan.

Besides connecting key trails and destinations, the Weber Spur will provide access to another high quality recreational trail for local cyclists, and has the potential to become a destination in itself. The project is similar to the popular 606 Trail, another multi-use trail on a former elevated railroad track that runs through Bucktown, Logan Square, and Humboldt Park. Like the 606, the Weber Spur Trail will provide elevated views and a safe walking and bicycling experience separated from traffic.

The project has received federal transportation funding for engineering of the stretch from Devon Avenue to Elston Avenue, but is currently on hold pending negotiations with Union Pacific, the railroad that owns the right-of-way. Several stakeholders identified completion of the Weber Spur as a priority in interviews and the online survey conducted during the planning process.

The importance of the Weber Spur is evident from its current popularity as an informal route for biking and walking since Union Pacific removed the railroad tracks from the right-of-way sometime after rail traffic ceased in the mid-2000s. While the Weber Spur is already a popular location for walking and biking, it is still officially railroad property and therefore lacks the safety accommodations and other physical improvements of a public trail. Stakeholders should work with bicycling advocates to help the City and other public agencies acquire the corridor and move the project forward.

9.2 Enhance wayfinding

With multiple regional trails nearby, it is likely that many bicyclists and walkers from around Chicago pass by the North River communities, unfamiliar with all that the neighborhood offers. There is an opportunity to attract people to the neighborhood's businesses, cultural attractions, and other amenities, but current signage and gateways to the neighborhood do not establish clear connections between trailheads and neighborhood destinations. A comprehensive wayfinding system identifies important routes to access key destinations, and caters to various transportation modes. Successful wayfinding makes it easy to travel between destinations, find parking, and feel confident navigating an unfamiliar area.

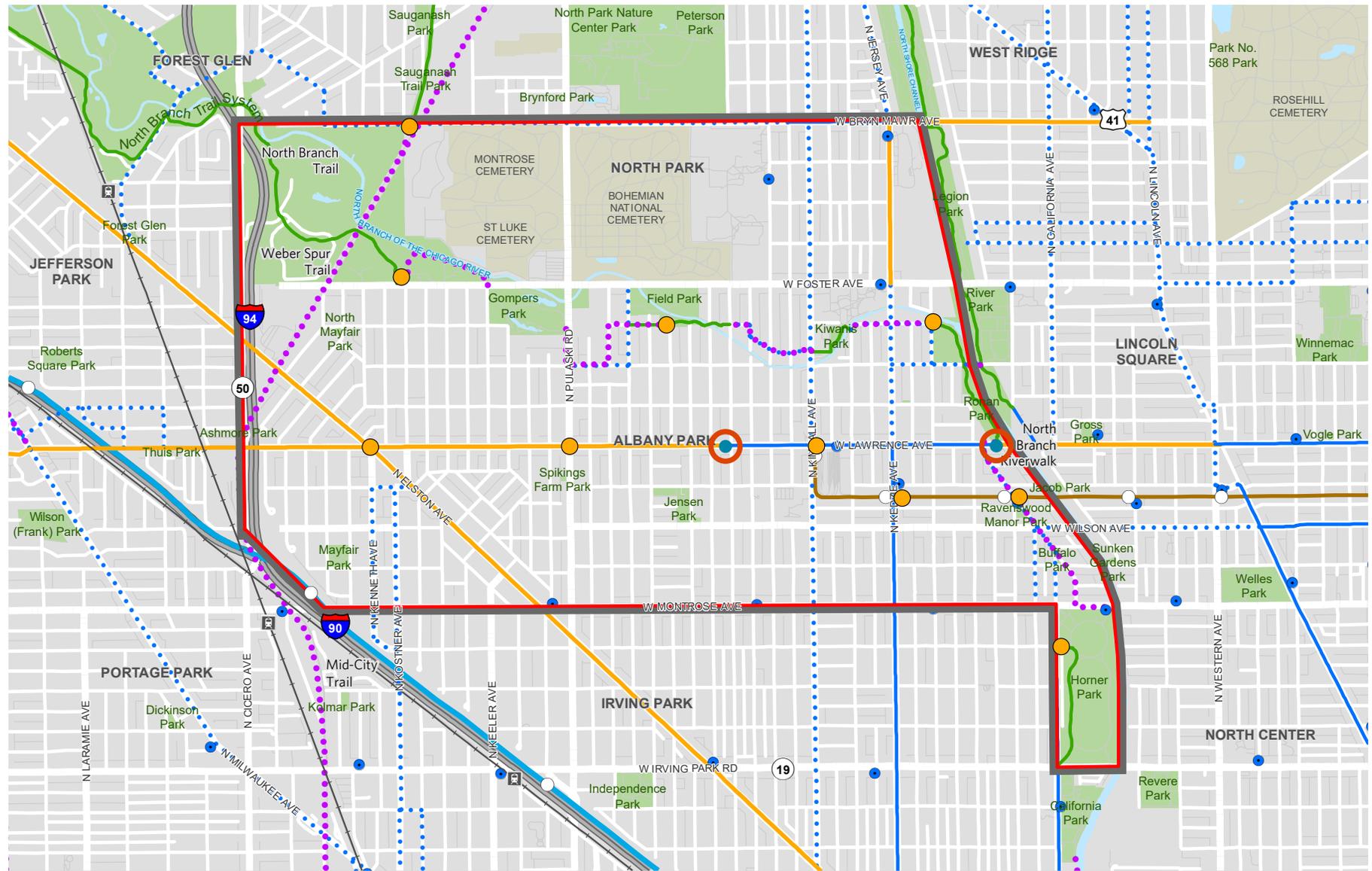
While signs and maps make up crucial elements of wayfinding, a good wayfinding system does more than simply give people directions. It should also help people learn about and appreciate their surroundings, improving the experience of being there. The following wayfinding recommendations are intended to complement the strategies discussed in Chapter 4 that focus on the design and experience of the Lawrence Avenue corridor, targeting a more general audience, including people arriving in the area by car or public transit. The recommendations in this chapter seek to serve the more specific purpose of connecting recreational visitors to the neighborhood, and neighborhood residents to recreational opportunities.

Provide guidance to connect visitors to neighborhood destinations

The wayfinding system could provide information on the number of minutes it would take to walk or bike between destinations, bus and train information, historic and cultural information, and ecological information about the area. It should incorporate multiple languages, both to communicate effectively with residents with limited English, and to signify the neighborhood's pride in its diversity.

Above all, the wayfinding system should connect people to the community's unique destinations. NRC should work with the SSA or Chamber of Commerce to determine the best way to connect visitors to the neighborhood's businesses through the wayfinding campaign—whether by spotlighting certain businesses, types of businesses, or different business districts (such as the concentration of local restaurants near Kimball and Kedzie). Other key neighborhood destinations could be highlighted, such as the distance and route to North Park University, NEIU, North Park Village Nature Center, and the National Cambodian Heritage Museum. Signs could also include other information features, such as notable historical and cultural information about significant places in the North River communities.

Figure 9.2. Recommended Signage and Wayfinding Locations



North River Communities Study Area	Blue Line (O'Hare)	BIKE FACILITIES	WAYFINDING RECOMMENDATIONS
Open Space	Brown Line	EXISTING BIKE LANE	WAYFINDING SIGNAGE LOCATION
Water	Metra Rail Lines	EXISTING OFF-STREET TRAIL	GATEWAY LOCATION
Divvy Stations (as of Apr., 2018)	Metra Stations	EXISTING SHARED LANE	
		CDOT RECOMMENDED BIKE ROUTE	
		PLANNED REGIONAL GREENWAY	



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2018.



Identify key locations for wayfinding elements

There are several locations in the North River communities where new signage and wayfinding elements could have maximum impact. In general, areas where large numbers of people enter or exit the neighborhood are ideal locations to help orient visitors, inform them about the community, and invite them in. As described in Chapter 5, some of these gateways include the Kimball, Kedzie, and Francisco CTA stations, as well as major gateways along the Lawrence Avenue Corridor. Trailheads offer another obvious opportunity, as people walking or riding bicycles arrive in the North River communities from regional trails. Figure 9.2 identifies several gateway locations for people walking or biking, such as the ends of the North Branch Trail, Sauganash Trail, and North Shore Channel Trail, as well as Horner Park, which will become an increasingly important point of entry when the City completes the 312 River Run Trail. Trail junctions, such as where the planned Weber Spur Trail connects to the Sauganash Trail and North Branch Trails, will also be important.

Coordinate with other Chicago River wayfinding and signage projects

The community should also explore using a wayfinding system that could be part of a larger network of Chicago River neighborhoods, with consistent icons and fonts that present a cohesive, familiar set of signs to the larger community. This approach could help to promote recreational river usage and trail activity, while also advancing this plan's goal of leveraging the neighborhood's recreational assets to bolster local businesses. It is also in accord with the City of Chicago's Our Great Rivers vision, which sets a goal of establishing a unified, comprehensive wayfinding system for providing information about events and amenities in riverfront communities. Citywide interest in this goal from public agencies, community groups, and philanthropies could help the North River communities access funding to improve signage locally.⁴¹

9.3 Improve river visibility and access in parks and preserves

Together, the North Shore Channel, the North Branch of the Chicago River, and the Upper North Branch make up an iconic feature of the community, rich with history, wildlife habitat, and natural beauty. Embracing these rivers by increasing their visibility and accessibility will build on their potential as an attraction and resource.

Today, the North River communities boast waterways with excellent recreational and placemaking potential, but little public access. While the Chicago River winds through residential neighborhoods, alongside school campuses, and through beautiful parks and preserves, the banks are steep in many places and artificially channelized in others. The expansion of both active and passive recreational amenities can highlight the rivers as a community resource while providing opportunities for enjoyment and environmental education.

Deepening people's relationship to the rivers in their community is an important way to build local engagement in environmental quality improvements. The more visible and utilized rivers become, the more people become invested in enhancing water quality and stewarding habitat. As the waterways in the North River communities become more welcoming, new opportunities and energy for collaborative advocacy, cleanup, and enjoyment may emerge.



Expand infrastructure for active recreation

Establishing and expanding recreational infrastructure will improve access to the river's recreational opportunities, attract more visitors to the area, and enhance the river's role as a community resource. The slow-moving Chicago River offers a great location for canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding, for users of all abilities and experience levels. However, the area's parks and preserves have only one formal boat launch (in River Park). Despite the small number of improved access points, the North Branch, Upper North Branch, and North Shore Channel are popular paddling areas that Openlands recommends as water trails for both novice and experienced users.⁴² The addition of well-designed boat launches in key locations will help more users take advantage of the North River communities' ideal location for active recreation.

Stakeholders repeatedly cited the difficulty of accessing the river from neighborhoods parks, recounting experiences such as scrambling down steep wooded riverbanks while sliding a canoe in front of them. In some parks, fences block access to the river. In the online survey conducted during the planning process, improved river access was the third-most cited need for parks and open space. With the exception of the Chicago Park District boat launch in River Park, the only public launches for canoes and kayaks are unimproved areas in LaBagh Woods and neighborhood parks where slopes are sufficiently cleared and gentle enough to allow experienced users to safely launch their boats. The current lack of access points to the river not only creates safety hazards for recreational users, but also discourages less experienced paddlers from enjoying the river's recreational benefits.

To fully take advantage of the opportunity the river provides, safe and accessible boat launches should be added in public open space. Through the online survey's map exercise, several respondents identified areas where they would like to see better river access or boat launches, mostly along the North Shore Channel and North Branch. Key locations where boat launches could be added include LaBagh Woods Forest Preserve, Gompers Park, Eugene Field Park, Ronan Park, Legion Park, and Horner Park. NRC and community stakeholders should work with park advisory councils, CPD, FPCC, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to advocate for boat launches to be added to these parks and preserves where ecologically, topography, and engineering concerns allow it.

The Army Corps' upcoming project in the area may present an opportunity to add boat launches to local parks. Similar to the recent project in Horner Park, the project will regrade the river banks in Ronan Park, River Park, and Legion Park, in conjunction with the planned removal of the dam at the confluence of the Upper North Branch and North Shore Channel. While the project's goals focus on ecological objectives, the regrading and naturalization of the banks may offer easier access for boaters, and the removal of the dam will enable people to easily paddle between the North River communities and the full Chicago River system. Stakeholders should work with the Army Corps to determine whether recreational amenities can be included as part of the improvements, while maintaining the project's environmental goals, as will be done in Horner Park, where a new canoe and kayak landing is planned as part of the restoration project.



Incorporate opportunities for passive enjoyment of the river

There are many ways people enjoy rivers besides canoeing and kayaking. Rivers offer scenic vistas, backdrops for walking and picnicking, and sites for viewing wildlife. Several locations offer paths and trails where people can walk and bike with views of the river, including pedestrian bridges near the Eugene Field Park Fieldhouse and at Bernard Street, Monticello Avenue, North Park University, and Albany Avenue. But for many stretches of riverbank, steep grades, heavy tree cover, or sheet pile walls cut pedestrians off from river access.

A variety of amenities could improve visual access and passive recreational opportunities in the North River communities. Viewing stations or overlook areas, picnic areas, interpretive signage for natural history and wildlife, and areas for fishing could expand access and enjoyment among residents. The area supports a large population of diverse wildlife, including spring warblers, tanagers, and hawks, as well as oaks, cottonwoods, and wildflowers. Signage would help casual observers identify the birds, plants, and other wildlife they see and direct them to the right locations and times of year for viewing harder-to-find species. There may be opportunities to incorporate these amenities into local parks and preserves, especially as part of the Army Corps' upcoming riparian restoration work.



Promote river recreation to local residents

While the enhancement of recreational offerings in the North River communities will attract new visitors and users to the area, serving the neighborhood's current residents should remain the top priority. To ensure that residents can enjoy the benefits of the Chicago River, the CPD and FPCC should work with community groups to promote their recreational offerings in Spanish and other languages commonly spoken in the area. Beyond simply making programming available and publicizing it, these groups should pursue educational programs to help expand the audience for outdoor recreation to diverse groups of residents and visitors. Local schools, community centers, and youth outreach groups may be able to help make the neighborhood and introduce and educate new users about how to get involved and take advantage of the opportunities the rivers offer.

9.4 Pursue collaborative efforts to improve water quality and wildlife habitat

The Chicago River's water quality has significantly improved in recent years, due to ongoing projects to clean up the river, including efforts to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and the introduction of ultraviolet (UV) radiation at the O'Brien Water Reclamation Plant to neutralize microbes. Today, with its water quality steadily improving, the Chicago River supports a large number of animal and plant species.⁴³ However, water quality assessment by the Illinois EPA has indicated that the river still suffers from numerous impairments, and residents and other stakeholders shared their concerns about water quality throughout the planning process.

Continuing to improve water quality in the Chicago River is an essential part of efforts to connect Chicagoans to their river in the North River communities and throughout the city. But the North River communities can have only a small impact if they address this on their own. Many of the strategies for improving environmental quality in the area will be far more effective if the community pursues them as part of a broader coordinated effort with other stakeholders in the region whose actions affect the Chicago River. Similarly, best practices can be adopted more strategically and broadly if multiple jurisdictions and agencies collaborate on devising and implementing policies together.

Several ongoing efforts are underway to improve water quality and riparian habitat, reduce erosion, and generally create a more healthful, ecologically vibrant river. The City of Chicago, public agencies including the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, Chicago Park District, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and advocacy groups such as the Friends of the Chicago River are working to improve the river and its surrounding ecosystem. The Our Great Rivers vision sets relevant goals that include promoting stewardship, managing invasive species, and coordinating prevention of river pollution. Not only are partnerships the most effective way to have a real impact on these issues, they are also an opportunity to find funding, implementation partners, and innovative ideas. NRC and its partners should pursue funding for planning, programming, and implementation of collaborative environmental improvement projects through programs such as the Chicago Community Trust's Our Great Rivers program, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, and other sources. The North River communities should seek opportunities to engage with these programs and make their voices heard, advocating for the community's needs such as naturalized riverbanks and developing partnerships that promote education and stewardship.

Eugene Field Park

The Army Corps of Engineers' wetland restoration project in Eugene Field Park, completed in 2014, demonstrates the benefits of naturalization as well as the importance of communicating what the effects of naturalization will look like, particularly in an area that has been in public use. The process of restoring a native ecosystem can involve removing trees and fields in favor of a landscape that, while native to the Chicago area, may seem unfamiliar or less useful. More to the point, naturalization may involve turning park areas of grassy fields and non-native trees into marshes and prairies that sometimes flood in strategic locations, keeping the rest of a park free of flooding and improving its usability.

Eugene Field Park experienced regular flooding, prompting a major project to restore parts of the park, including a picnic area, to a more natural state. The project restored wetlands and savanna habitats, removed invasive tree species, and provided floodwater storage. The project stabilized the riverbank and provided new habitat for aquatic species. The Army Corps considers the project a success from a restoration and flood relief standpoint. Whereas the entire park periodically flooded in the past, now flooding is mostly restricted to the restored wetland, where plants benefit from floodwaters, and the rest of the park remains flood-free.

Support naturalization of floodplains and riverbanks

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' recent work in Horner Park and other projects demonstrate the potential benefits of creating more natural riverbanks throughout the North River communities. Restoration of wetlands, riverbanks, riparian areas, instream segments of tributaries, and the reintroduction of prairies and native plants can have a positive impact on water quality and aquatic habitat. Planting and preserving native vegetation has additional benefits, as it tends to have deeper, more extensive roots than non-native species, helping to stabilize soil and decrease erosion. Naturalizing riverbanks can also help to mitigate flooding, both at the site of improvements and downstream.

The community should advocate for coordinated investments in riverfront open space so that projects naturalize riverbanks and floodplains, while simultaneously increasing safe public access and boosting ecosystems. In particular, the planned improvements in Ronan, River, and Legion Park will offer substantial benefits to the community and the local ecosystem, and NRC and stakeholders should seek full implementation of the proposal.

Encourage pride and stewardship of the river through education.

Residents who are familiar with the ecological and recreational benefits the rivers provide to the community are likely to take steps to help protect this crucial resource. To encourage stewardship and adoption of best environmental practices, stakeholder could develop programs to educate property owners in riparian areas on the benefits of native vegetation, filter strips, bank restoration, phosphate-free home and garden products, permeable pavement, and other practices that would encourage implementation of these approaches. Providing seasonal programming, such as nature day camps for kids and birdwatching outings, will activate the rivers through the open spaces of the North River communities. Group walks and bike rides on riverfront trails can further connect the recreational and ecological assets of the area.

The North River Commission already has an active and engaged environment program that engages residents with issues related to the Chicago River. Partnerships with the Chicago Park District, North Park Village Nature Center, NEIU, and local schools present valuable opportunities to develop further programming to educate property owners, interested residents, youth, and outdoor enthusiasts.



Implementation

Table 9.1. Rivers, parks, and trails implementation actions

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
9.1: Connect and improve neighborhood bikeways			
Advocate for facilities on key neighborhood bike connections	Ongoing	Active Transportation Alliance, Aldermen, CDOT, Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, CMAP, IDOT, MPC, Chicago Community Trust	The neighborhood currently lacks a north/south bike facility and the east/west facilities are inadequate. Stakeholders should work with aldermen, CDOT, and other partners to identify the best locations for north/south connections and upgrades to east/west bike routes. The City's implementation of its Our Great Rivers vision may offer funding opportunities for continuous riverfront trails.
Improve bike infrastructure at high-risk locations	0-2 years	Active Transportation Alliance, Aldermen, CDOT, Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, CMAP, IDOT, MPC	Work with aldermen and CDOT to identify what types of interventions would be most appropriate at the locations the plan identifies as areas of frequent crashes.
Advocate for completion of Weber Spur	Ongoing	Active Transportation Alliance, Aldermen, Cook County Forest Preserves	Stakeholders should work with bicycling advocates to help the City and other public agencies acquire the corridor and move the project forward.
9.2: Enhance wayfinding			
Work with business stakeholders to develop economic development element of wayfinding strategy	0-2 years	SSA #60, Albany Park Chamber of Commerce, business owners	Determine the best way to connect visitors to the neighborhood's businesses through the wayfinding campaign—whether by spotlighting certain businesses, types of businesses, or different business districts (such as the concentration of local restaurants near Kimball and Kedzie).
Coordinate with other Chicago River wayfinding and signage projects	0-2 years	Active Transportation Alliance, Aldermen, CDOT, Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, MPC, Friends of the Chicago River	The City of Chicago's Our Great Rivers vision sets a goal of establishing a unified, comprehensive wayfinding system for providing information about events and amenities in riverfront communities. Citywide interest in this goal from public agencies, community groups, and philanthropies could help the North River communities access funding to improve signage locally.
9.3: Improve river visibility and access in parks and preserves			
Expand infrastructure for active recreation	2-5 years	Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, park advisory councils, USACE, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	Stakeholders advocate for boat launches to be added to parks and preserves where ecologically, topography, and engineering concerns allow it. Key locations where boat launches could be added include LaBagh Woods Forest Preserve, Gompers Park, Eugene Field Park, Ronan Park, Legion Park, and Horner Park. Where safe access to the river is possible, CPD should consider removing fences that separate the river from the rest of the park.
Incorporate opportunities for passive enjoyment of the river	2-5 years	Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, park advisory councils, USACE, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	Viewing stations or overlook areas, picnic areas, interpretive signage for natural history and wildlife, and areas for fishing could expand access and enjoyment among residents. There may be opportunities to incorporate these amenities into local parks and preserves, especially as part of the Army Corps' upcoming riparian restoration work.
Promote river recreation to local residents	Ongoing	Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, park advisory councils, MPC, CPS, Albany Park Community Center, Friends of the Chicago River, Chicago Community Trust, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	To ensure that residents can enjoy the benefits of the Chicago River, the CPD and FPCC should work with community groups to promote their recreational offerings in Spanish and other languages commonly spoken in the area. Local schools, community centers, and youth outreach groups may be able to help educate the community about how to become involved and take advantage of these opportunities.



Table 9.1 (Continued).

Strategy	Term	Partners	Description
9.4: Pursue collaborative efforts to improve water quality and wildlife habitat			
Engage with ongoing water quality improvement efforts	Ongoing	City of Chicago, MWRD, Chicago Park District, USACE, Friends of the Chicago River, MPC, Chicago Community Trust, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	Several ongoing efforts are underway to improve water quality and riparian habitat, reduce erosion, and generally create a more healthful, ecologically vibrant river. The North River communities should seek opportunities to engage with these programs and make their voices heard, advocating for the community's needs such as naturalized riverbanks and developing partnerships that promote education and stewardship.
Seek grant funding for planning, programming, and project implementation	0-2 years	Chicago Community Trust, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, Friends of the Chicago River	Foundations and public agencies currently manage a number of grant programs focusing on activating, restoring, and improving water quality of the Chicago River. NRC and its partners should pursue funding for collaborative projects that advance this plan's goals through these and other sources.
Support naturalization of floodplains and riverbanks	0-2 years	Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, park advisory councils, USACE, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	The community should advocate for coordinated investments in riverfront open space so that projects naturalize riverbanks and floodplains, while simultaneously increasing safe public access and boosting ecosystems. In particular, the planned improvements in Ronan, River, and Legion Park will offer substantial benefits to the community and the local ecosystem, and NRC and stakeholders should seek full implementation of the proposal.
Encourage pride and stewardship of the river through education.	Ongoing	Chicago Park District, Cook County Forest Preserves, Friends of the Chicago River, CPS, Chicago Community Trust, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund	Programs could include education for property owners on best practices for landscaping; seasonal programming such as nature camps and birdwatching outings; group walks and bike rides on riverfront trails.

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