Application form:
RTA Community Planning Program and
CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program

DEADLINE: Noon on Thursday, June 29, 2017

This application form is online at www.rtachicago.org/applications. You may submit the form by email to applications@rtachicago.org. Upon receipt of application, you will receive an e-mail verifying that your application has been received.

1. Name of Applicant
The Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI), www.greaterchathaminitiative.org

2. Main Contact for Application

Name: Nedra Sims-Fears
Title: Executive Director
Phone number: 773-644-1451
Email: nedra@greaterchathaminitiative.org

3. Type of Applicant (please check any that apply)

____ Local government

____ Multijurisdictional group* → Please list the members of the group (including government and nongovernmental organizations):

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

X____ Nongovernmental organization* → Name of local government partner(s):

Bobby L. Rush, U.S. Congressman, 1st District Illinois
Jacqueline Y. Collins, Illinois State Senator, 16th District
Roderick T. Sawyer, Alderman 6th Ward City of Chicago

*Applications submitted by multijurisdictional groups and nongovernmental organizations must include a letter indicating support from each relevant local government. See the FAQs for more information. Nongovernmental applicants are strongly encouraged to contact CMAP or the RTA prior to submitting their application to discuss their project and the demonstration of local support.
4. Project Type (please check any that apply)

Please check all statements below that describe characteristics of your project.

- [X] My project involves preparation of a plan.
- [ ] My project involves updating an already existing plan.
- [ ] My project helps to implement a past plan.
- [ ] My project links land use, transportation, and housing.
- [ ] My project has direct relevance to public transit and supports the use of the existing transit system.
- [X] My project is not directly related to transportation or land use, but implements GO TO 2040 in other ways.

5. Local Match Requirement (please initial to indicate you are aware of the local match requirements)

I am aware that a local match will be required for most projects, and understand that if my project is selected it is up to the project applicant to contribute a local match. (See the program guide for further details on local match requirements.)

- [X] Yes, I understand that applicants will be required to contribute a local match.

6. Project Location

Please provide a brief description of the location of your project. You may include a map if that helps to describe location, but this is not required. If your project helps to implement a past plan, please include a link to that plan.

The Downtown Chatham project location includes: 75th Street between Wabash Avenue and Cottage Grove Avenue, Cottage Grove Avenue between 75th Street and 79th Street and 79th Street between Michigan to Maryland Avenues. Downtown Chatham has 166 active existing business licenses in the area—which is unusually high for a local commercial Chicago corridor. There is substantial concentration of vintage character buildings along its streets, including official Chicago Landmarks and properties listed in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS). This project location complements neighboring City of Chicago development plans, including connection to the 75th Street boundary of the City’s Green Healthy Neighborhoods (GHN) plan, (a 10- to 20-year planning strategy to maximize the use of vacant land and other neighborhood resources within several of Chicago’s community areas, including Greater Grand Crossing). A map of the project location follows.

7. Project Description

Please tell us what you would like to do in your community, and what assistance is needed. If you have more than one idea, please submit a separate application for each project. Please be specific, but also brief (less than two pages per project idea)—we simply want to have a basic understanding of what you want to do. For plan updates please tell us how you will be building upon (or replacing) the previous work. Program staff will follow-up with you if we need any additional information to fully understand your proposed project.
Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI), is a 501(c)3 economic development organization that serves the Chatham, Auburn Gresham, Avalon Park and Greater Grand Crossings communities. The size of a mid-size city, Greater Chatham is a 15-square mile area that has 122,000 residents. These residents are comprised of low, moderate and middle-income African-American families. It is also home to over 4,500 businesses that generate $712 million in annual sales. These firms employ 51,000 people of which 19% live in Greater Chatham. Greater Chatham boasts having many big-box stores such as Walmart, Lowes, Target, etc. The retail sector has $234 million in annual sales. After Chicago’s downtown, Greater Chatham is the second destination for African-Americans consumers who live on the South Side. 80% of the retail sales are at the big-box stores. The other 20% are at the small retail and service providers located on the local strips.

To take advantage of the destination shoppers who already frequent Greater Chatham, GCI proposes the creation of a ‘Downtown Chatham’ Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan. The Chatham community is one of several neighborhoods in which the City of Chicago has established diverse initiatives aimed at stimulating economic growth and fostering residential, commercial and mixed-use development investment opportunities.

These initiatives include

- the designation of two (2) Tax Increment Financing Districts
- the establishment of a Special Service Area #51 (SSA);
- designation of the Chatham Retail Thrive Zone and the Chicago Neighborhood NOW;
- the Micro-Market Recovery Program.;
- Chicago Landmark District;
- Kids Zone (Summer 2017);
- Boom Box (Fall 2017); and
- Mid Century Commercial District (upcoming).

See the following illustrations that maps the location of the aforementioned Initiatives.
Greater Chatham lost 15% of its population from 2000 to 2015. The area is experiencing the hollowing out of the middle-class and professional residents to other communities that have robust and rich arrays of businesses located on vibrant retail corridors. For example, per the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago the average African-American household income in a Chicago African-American community is $48,000 dollars, compared to the average African-American household income of $68,000 dollars in non-African-American communities. To compete for middle-and upper-income African-American households that reside in non-African-American Chicago communities Greater Chatham must develop a destination retail corridor that has a distinct up-market identity and exhibits a unique array of consumer products and services with an African-American vibe. This is already happening with destination merchants such as Soul Vegetarian, Lem’s Barbeque and Brown Sugar Bakery who attract customers to Greater Chatham from all areas of the City, the Midwest and the nation. These patrons believe the business location gives the food a certain ethnic authenticity.

CMAP support for the creation of a ‘Downtown Chatham’ Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan will be a significant resource in the economic stabilization and expansion of the Greater Chatham community. The Whitney M. Young, Jr. Library, an attraction on a portion of the retail corridor extending east along 79th Street from King Drive to St. Lawrence Street, draws an average of 75 children per day during the academic year and 225 youths per day during the summer months from Greater Chatham and nearby neighborhoods. This strip has two early childcare and education centers supporting local and nearby residents. Despite the daily traffic of families entering the community for these destinations, there are few merchants of consumer product or retail services in Chatham to attract and retain the economic interest of families with children. There are 25 real estate parcels located along the 3-block strip east of the library. These buildings house 54 storefronts of which 37 or 70% are occupied and 17 or 30% are vacant. Many of the vacant storefronts are marginally habitable. These properties must be improved, to attract quality merchants.

In addition, when episodic violence occurs along the retail corridor, consumers reduce their visits to this once vibrant area. The resulting absence of shoppers and decline in merchants increases the incidents of loitering and gang activity. This decreases market demand and depresses rents. As a result, property owners do not have the cash flow to improve their outdated retail spaces, and quality retailers will not relocate to the corridor because the retail spaces are not attractive to buyers. See the following map which illustrates the net migration of shoppers into Greater Chatham.
We want to intervene and end this downward economic spiral by working with CMAP to create a Downtown Chatham Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan for an improved retail corridor.
To meet this end, GCI requests CMAP support in five (5) areas. First, we need additional assistance planning the rollout and adoption of a new creative identity for an ethnically distinct retail corridor similar to Chicago’s Chinatown and Pilsen downtowns. Research into upgrading the facades of private mixed-use buildings with signage, decals, banners, outdoor furniture, planters, plants and sculpture is currently underway. GCI has partnered with Harvard Loeb Fellowship Program and the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development. DPD brought in the Congress for New Urbanism, the Driehaus Foundation, Chicago Transportation Authority’s Make Way for People and Farr & Associates to establish design guidelines for Downtown Chatham. The guidelines will be presented to GCI and the greater Chatham stakeholders in August 2017 and will include:

a. Improvements of existing buildings, including historic restorations (when feasible);
b. Canopies, awnings, and other signage and location, color palette, logo, etc,
c. Best practices for retail space layout;
d. Best practices for universal design for children and seniors;
e. New signs, placement and removal of intrusive signs;
f. Incorporation of streetscape elements such as
   a. street furnishings, planters, trees, parklets and
   b. Sound, touch, taste and smell.;
g. Ideas for vacant sites and infrastructure improvements;
h. Creation of a creative placemaking sculpture for the Kids Zone;
i. Best practices for defensible space and routes; and
j. Banners showcasing Chatham’s identity.

Second, we need assistance identifying, attracting and sustaining the right mix of merchants (some will be Boom Box incubator graduates who are now ready for a storefront) for a family-friendly Kid’s Zone, whose brick-and-mortar businesses will attract a citywide consumer market, whose online retail presence will attract customers nationwide and all will become loyal to the concept of “Buying Chatham”. Chicago Trend episodically informs our work; however, we need a dedicated team of retail experts to help us target, recruit and retain new businesses.

Third, we need to create a place-based business incubator to help merchants located in Downtown Chatham become more successful than the norm. The goal of this incubator is to support business growth, and sustain/increase the operating profits of local property owners so they can continue to improve their properties and stop the cycle of underinvestment.

Fourth, we need assistance making the Downtown Chatham retail corridor a Safe Zone for younger families, older residents, local customers, employees and tourists alike, as we endeavor to attract more retail entrepreneurs and service providers. As vacant storefronts are occupied, Downtown Chatham will become a destination. In addition, as consumer traffic increases and existing businesses expand, there is a reasonable expectation that employment opportunities will increase along the corridor and within the nearby community.

Last, we need assistance developing processes to create and manage real estate broker/developer, merchant, and retail property owner engagements to identify the business owners who we believe will catalyze future and sustainable investments in Downtown Chatham.
As a recipient of CMAP assistance, GCI will be assured a plan that predicts retail entrepreneurs located in our well-branded, effectively marketed and physically revitalized Downtown Chatham will realize significant and continued economic benefits along with the Greater Chatham community, and help contribute to Chicago’s growing economy.

8. Previous Plan Implementation Efforts
Please describe actions you have taken to implement previous plans in your community – whether your efforts were successful or not – to achieve infrastructure improvements, development investment, policy changes, advocacy, volunteer involvement, or other actions. If you do not have experience implementing previous planning work, please describe what you will do to make sure that your plan is implemented. Illustrating a commitment to implement plan recommendations is very important to both agencies as we consider new planning projects.

Creation of a Downtown Chatham ‘demonstration area’ is currently underway along a 3-block strip of 79th Street east of the Whitney Young Jr. Library on Martin Luther King Drive. GCI has managed the

- logistics of this project,
- orchestrated community engagement through the submission of 17 applications totaling $2.7 million for the City of Chicago Neighborhood NOW and Retail Thrive Programs
- petitioned and received designation of an 8-block Retail Thrive Zone along 79th Street (including a City of Chicago allocation of $1.125 million)
- garnered the commitment of the Harvard Loeb Fellowship Alumni Program that will develop the Kids Zone guidelines during a community charrette that will take place July 2017
- City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development, who also partnered with the Congress for New Urbanism, the Driehaus Foundation, and Farr & Associates, to create Downtown Chatham Commercial Design Guidelines. Sample Commercial Design Guidelines tactics will be unveiled to the community during July 2017
- Managed the Boom Box, a pop-up business incubator that will be in place Fall 2017. Over 25 businesses have signed up to rent space in the Boom Box.

The demonstration area is within the proposed project area of this CMAP application. The Downtown Chatham Commercial Design Guidelines will be presented to GCI and the Greater Chatham community in August 2017. CMAP’s assistance will thereafter develop the rollout and adoption plans of the Downtown Chatham design guidelines, and produce a Downtown Chatham Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Implementation Plan.

For more information about this demonstration project, please go to:  

Chatham benefits from recent storm water improvements and streetscape improvement projects totaling $4.8 million along Cottage Grove Avenue, and a $12 million project renovating Whitney M. Young, Jr. Library at 79th street. Both of these projects are within the proposed project area of this CMAP application and are being led, in part, by GCI though its partnerships with the Chicago Department of Transportation and Chicago Public Libraries.
More about these projects and GCI’s involvement can be found at:

GCI was founded after 250 stakeholders participated in a two-year process to create a Comprehensive Plan for Economic Development and Neighborhood Vitality. GCI has succeeded in building infrastructures required to support the outcomes presented by our Comprehensive Plan. As a result of our efforts, GCI has received significant grants from the Sacks Family Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, MacArthur, Exelon Foundations, and Harvard Loeb Fellowship Alumni.

Our Comprehensive Plan, (including multiple strategies across the areas of human capital/workforce development, business development, housing, public safety, support services/amenities, and civic capacity/institutional environment), supports the themes found in CMAP’s GO TO 2040 Plan. Ensuring the success of these strategies, GCI has established a relationship with Mission Measurement to facilitate the effective prioritization of our strategic efforts, http://www.missionmeasurement.com/. The goal is to determine which of the 20% of our planned 42 activities will drive the remaining 80% of our activities. Downtown Chatham is a key driver.

The development of a Downtown Chatham Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Implementation Plan will help GCI directly address several Comprehensive Plan strategies and CMAP themes related to business development, public safety, support services/amenities, and indirectly address human capital/workforce development, housing, and capacity/institutional environment strategies.


9. Additional Strategic Partnerships
Please list any additional partners you may want to include in this planning project. Please specify if you have made contact with them in advance of submitting this application.
Potential strategic partners include C. Johnson & Associates, DePaul University, the MacArthur Foundation, the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development, the Congress for New Urbanism, the Driehaus Foundation, Farr & Associates, the City of Chicago Retail Thrive Program and the Chicago Neighborhood Opportunity Fund. Each of these major resources has been contacted regarding our intentions to apply for CMAP assistance in the development of a Downtown Chatham Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan and the potential for their strategic participation.

Potential strategic partners include C. Johnson & Associates,* the MacArthur Foundation,* the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development,* the Congress for New Urbanism,* the Driehaus Foundation,* Farr & Associates,* City of Chicago Department of Transportation Make Way For People,* the City of Chicago Retail Thrive Program,* and the Chicago Neighborhood Opportunity Fund,* SSA #51,* Far South Side Development Corporation,* Alderman’s Sawyer’s office,* 79th Street
Business Association* and the Southside Community Investors’ Association. The asterisked stakeholders have been contacted regarding our intentions to apply for CMAP assistance in the development of a Downtown Chatham Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan and the potential for their strategic participation.

To address the physical and financial challenges facing business and property owners interested in upgrading Downtown Chatham storefront facades, GCI may engage C. Johnson & Associates, (The Façade Enhancement Program) and SSA #51. Since its launch in 2008, The Façade Enhancement Program has supported the renovation and enhancement of dozens of Chicago storefronts. The program is offered under several Special Service Areas (SSA) located on the south side of Chicago. The SSA board of directors set aside a portion of the SSA taxpayer dollars for façade improvements in the SSA area. Local businesses in the Special Service Area are eligible to participate yearly.

The Façade Enhancement Program not only assists with renovations but also provides businesses with free architectural services. Any business or building owner located within a participating SSA district seeking to invest in the façade of their building may apply. Businesses interested in participating are asked to attend an informational meeting held by the local SSA provider and C. Johnson & Associates.

The main issues addressed at this meeting will be signage and City of Chicago zoning regulations; and applications and grants offered to the businesses, including the Façade Enhancement, SBIF grant and Façade Rebate Programs.

Through providing technical assistance for the Façade Enhancement Program, C. Johnson & Associates will:

- Meet with business owners, one-on-one, to outline the preliminary design goals and outcomes;
- Provide support and guidance in completing the Façade Enhancement Program and/or the City of Chicago Grant applications;
- Research and recommend various improvement options such as signage, security systems and exterior lighting; and
- Provide free professional, high quality, architectural renderings with several design options.

The qualifying guidelines and improvements for the Façade Enhancement Program are as follows:

- All improvements must be visible to pedestrians on the main thoroughfare and contribute to the overall improvement of the SSA business district.
- Improvements include, but are not limited to: Windows, Doors, Framing, Signage, Awnings, Brick Repair, Brick Cleaning, Tuck-pointing, Light Fixtures, and Security Fixtures.

Additional information about the Façade Enhancement Program may be found at: http://www.cjohnsonandassociates.com/Facade%20Enhancement%20Program.html.

(Please include any additional information that is relevant, preferably by providing links to online documents.)
July 3, 2017

Mr. Tony Manno
Senior Planner
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60606

Re: CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program Grant

Dear Mr. Manno:

I am pleased to support the application of The Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI) and their proposal for the CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program Grant. This grant award will assist GCI’s effort to support, improve, and expand retail and economic development in the Chicago community of Chatham.

GCI’s ‘Downtown Chatham’ Retail Corridor Revitalization and Economic Development Plan is designed to help business owners strengthen their infrastructure along the Chatham commercial corridors of 75th and 79th streets and adopt branded design standards that will improve the aesthetic appeal of the retail area. In so doing, GCI seeks to attract more shoppers from surrounding Chicago neighborhoods and suburban areas; support efforts to reduce crime; and improve the overall quality of life for residents.

The Chatham community is one of several neighborhoods in which the City of Chicago has established diverse initiatives aimed at stimulating economic growth and fostering residential, commercial and mixed-use development investment opportunities. Some of these initiatives include the designation of two Tax Increment Financing Districts; the establishment of a Special Service Area (SSA); and the designation of the Chatham Retail Thrive Zone.

GCI was born from a comprehensive plan for economic growth and neighborhood vitality. Its mission is to strategically invest in the Chicago communities of Chatham, Greater Grand Crossing, Avalon Park, and Auburn Gresham so they can re-emerge as communities of opportunity and choice. As an awardee of the CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program grant, GCI will receive the resources and support to significantly advance its mission and help restore the economic viability of this important area on Chicago’s South Side.

I trust this application will receive your full consideration.

Sincerely,

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress
June 28, 2017

Tony Manno
Senior Planner
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60606

Re: CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program Grant

Dear Evaluation Committee:

I am writing this letter of support for The Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI) and their proposal for the CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program Grant.

The Greater Chatham Initiative, (GCI) was born from a comprehensive plan for economic growth and neighborhood vitality. Their mission is to strategically invest in the Chicago communities of Chatham, Greater Grand Crossing, Avalon Park, and Auburn Gresham so they can re-emerge as communities of opportunity and choice.

I fully support GCI’s vision to create a branded retail corridor, “Downtown Chatham.” The “Downtown Chatham” Initiative will improve the aesthetic appeal of the retail area and reduce street crime by helping business owners adopt branded design standards, and improve their infrastructure along Chatham commercial corridors along 75th and 79th streets. The initiative will expand retail entrepreneurship and attract more shoppers from surrounding Chicago neighborhoods and Suburban areas. The goal of the “Downtown Chatham” initiative is to make these retail corridors appealing “destination stops” for residents of and visitors to our city.

Being selected as an awardee of a 2017 CMAP, Community Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program grant will provide GCI the resources it needs to move this initiative from concept to plan for implementation and completion.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Y. Collins
State Senator, 16th District
June 26, 2017

Tony Manno
Senior Planner
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60606

Re: CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program Grant

Dear Evaluation Committee:

I am writing this letter of support for The Greater Chatham Initiative, (GCI). GCI was born from a comprehensive plan for economic growth and neighborhood vitality. Their mission is to strategically invest in the Chicago communities of Chatham, Greater Grand Crossing, Avalon Park, and Auburn Gresham so they can re-emerge as communities of opportunity and choice.

GCI has a vision to create a branded retail corridor, “Downtown Chatham”, which will expand retail entrepreneurship and attract more shoppers to a revitalized Chatham retail strip. The “Downtown Chatham” Initiative will improve the aesthetic appeal of the retail area and reduce street crime by helping business and building owners adopt branded design standards, upgrade their building facades and improve the infrastructures along Chatham commercial corridors along 75th and 79th streets. A 3-block Downtown Chatham demonstration strip, which includes a Kid’s Zone, is located on the 79th Street corridor (between Vernon and St. Lawrence Avenues) and anchored by the Whitney Young Library (currently undergoing a $12 million expansion) at 75th and Martin Luther King Drive.

Being selected as an awardee of a 2017 CMAP, Community Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program grant will afford GCI the continued resources it needs to develop and implement projects that re-vitalize our community, supporting, both residents & business owners. I look forward to working with the GCI team on this initiative as we move Downtown Chatham from vision to reality.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Roderick T. Sawyer
Alderman, 6th Ward