

North Lawndale residents weigh in on plan to enrich neighborhood

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Nearly 300 residents of North Lawndale filled a movie theater on the corner of Roosevelt and Homan to find out about a [new development plan](#) for the historically underserved neighborhood at the third annual Community Planning Conference on Saturday.

It's the first plan in approximately 50 years that will apply to the entirety of North Lawndale, according to Rodney Brown, a member of the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, the organization that was formed in early 2016 to lead the process.

Spread across seven different topics, from public safety to arts and culture, the plan paints a picture of current conditions in the low-income West Side neighborhood, and presents a set of short and long-term goals aimed at improving quality of life during the next 10 to 15 years.

It was crafted over the past two years in a series of community and working group meetings involving an estimated total of 600 people, as well as support from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Local Initiatives Support Corporation. The version released this Saturday was a near-final draft, which will be open for public review and comment until the end of May.

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“The desire when NLCCC was formed was that this was something driven by the community, not something somebody said we should do,” said Brown. “We want it to be something where the community says, ‘Yeah, this is what we want.’ ”

At the conference, after an initial gathering that included speeches by Alderman Michael Scott and Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer, residents were invited to disperse along the hallway outside, where each working group had set up a presentation. There, people could pass on their contact information, as well as any ideas for improvements. For instance, one Post-it note suggested a trade school program to help ex-offenders rehabilitate some of the 4,000 vacant homes in the neighborhood.

At another table, Carlos Robles from community development group OoUD answered questions about a new project to revitalize 16th Street, with the goal of turning it into a community hub and commercial corridor for small businesses. OoUD and Studio Gang, architect Jeanne Gang's firm, are both providing pro bono consulting on the 16th Street section of the plan.

“Our main goal is to learn as much as we can about the history of 16th Street and the people who have been there,” said Robles. “We want to make sure that we learn from their stories.” One possible improvement here could include a zoning change to make the street pedestrian-friendly, which would encourage foot traffic and restrict vehicles.

North Lawndale resident Dee Wallace said that, once the 16th Street project is underway, she wants a similar initiative to begin along Roosevelt Road. She’s a long-time local with deep roots in the neighborhood. In 1946, her aunt bought the house Wallace lives in now, and she remembers her mother making sandwiches for city firemen during the 1968 riots that devastated much of the West Side.

“It’s a great start,” she said of the plan. “But we have to see what happens from here, and make sure they actually do something.”

A final version of the plan, with public comments incorporated, is set to be published in June or July. Brandon Nolin, CMAP’s project manager for the plan, said he’s hopeful that its implementation, which will take place under the auspices of the different working groups, can begin toward the end of the summer. The organizers noted that the hardest work, executing the goals set forth, is still ahead.

“The beginning starts at the end. Oftentimes we go through the process, and these plans get put on the shelf, and everybody forgets about them,” said Deer. “But we know that ain’t going to happen here in North Lawndale.”

