



2026 Designation Steps for New and Renewing Special Service Areas (SSAs)



City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development
www.cityofchicago.org/DPD
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The following are action steps and a general timeline leading to the submission of a 2025 SSA Designation Packet. DPD staff will be assigned to your agency to guide you through the SSA designation process. Your staff contact at DPD is an ongoing source of information if you have questions or concerns.

- 1. SEPTEMBER 1, 2024: Prepare SSA Feasibility Assessment.** The SSA Feasibility Assessment is a self-assessment prepared by the Sponsoring Agency to see if an SSA is right for your area and your agency has the capacity and resources needed to sponsor and manage an SSA. The template for the Feasibility Study including required exhibits, will be emailed to applicants who contact DPD and will also be posted on the DPD website at http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/special_service_areassaprogram.html
This document must be completed and submitted to DPD **by November 1, 2024.**
- 2. NOVEMBER 2024: Agency Interview.** For new applicants, DPD will coordinate an interview with your agency to discuss your agency and district readiness for an SSA. Agency should be prepared to discuss what aspects of the designation process they will do themselves and which they will outsource to consultants.
- 3. NOVEMBER 2024: Determine Designation Management.** The agency should prepare for sponsoring the SSA in the event they are supported by the City by determining what aspects of the designation process they will do themselves and which they will outsource to consultants. The agency is expected to conduct a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to select a qualified consultant and will have to justify any other selection method to the City's satisfaction. The RFP announcement must be posted on the sponsoring agency's website for a minimum of 30 days prior to the submission deadline. The RFP should be posted **by December 16, 2024.**
- 4. DECEMBER 2024: City notice regarding support to proceed.** DPD will notify the proposed sponsor agency **by December 2, 2024** of the City's approval/denial to sponsor an SSA. Applicants that are denied may continue community outreach but will not be considered for SSA establishment for 2026.
- 5. DECEMBER, 2024: Form a SSA Advisory Committee.** Once your agency is confirmed as the Sponsor Agency, in partnership with the aldermen and local stakeholders, you will initiate forming the SSA Advisory Committee. Formation of the Committee must be completed **by January 6, 2025.**

- Participants on the SSA Advisory Committee shall include primarily property owners/tenants in the proposed SSA. Local residents, elected officials, and community organizations may also be on the Advisory Committee. The Committee should consist of between 10 and 20 members.
- The SSA Advisory Committee shall select a chair with a history of involvement and experience in the community. The Chair will:
 - i. lead the SSA Advisory Committee through the remaining steps of the SSA designation process
 - ii. ensure the Sponsor Agency meets target dates in the SSA Project Plan
 - iii. represent the committee throughout the designation process
- The committee shall meet on a regular basis to keep the SSA designation process moving forward. The committee should maintain continuity in membership while also allowing interested stakeholders to be involved in the planning process.
- **An Excel spreadsheet of the SSA Advisory Committee Members shall be created and submitted to DPD by January 6, 2025.** The list shall contain each member's name, affiliation (property owner, business name, resident, non-profit name, existing SSA Commission, etc.), mailing address, PIN in the proposed SSA, ward, phone, email, and whether the person is a current board member of the Sponsor Agency.

6. Confirm SSA start-up funding. The Sponsor Agency must be able to show proof that it can pay for start-up costs in the event the SSA district is not created. **The Sponsor Agency must provide proof of available funds for start-up costs as part of the Feasibility Study package.** Proof of funds can include bank statements documenting sufficient funds to cover these expenses, or letters of intent for loans, grants, or lines of credit. This funding cannot be secured by anticipated tax revenue. **Loans or lines of credit cannot be secured by anticipated tax revenue. The Sponsoring Agency is responsible to pay for the expenses incurred during the application process in 2024, if the SSA is not created.** Start-up costs include, but are not limited to: a legal description, PIN database, mapping, public hearing notices, filing fees, and consultants as needed to provide these and other technical services. Costs vary; however, it is reasonable to plan for costs ranging from **\$20,000 - \$60,000**. SSA start-up costs are reimbursable in the 2023 SSA budget, if the SSA is created.

7. JANUARY - MARCH 2025: Note: The following documents are often facilitated and prepared by a consultant and should be included in the RFP for consultant

SSA Funding, Visioning and Boundaries

- a. **Project Plan.** The SSA Advisory Committee, in partnership with the Sponsor Agency, shall draft a project plan that sets target dates for the completion of action items needed to complete the application process **by June 13, 2025**. The project plan should be revised as needed to keep on schedule.
- b. **Vision Statement.** The SSA Advisory Committee shall prepare a Vision Statement for the SSA which will answer questions such as: What kind of place

do they want the SSA to be? Which goals are most widely held for the SSA? Why did they join the committee? The Sponsor Agency will help the committee prepare a Vision Statement to be available to the public.

- c. **Refine Boundaries.** Although the boundaries may change through the designation process, a reasonably final boundary should be defined to estimate services and costs. Properties in the boundary must be contiguous.
- d. **Prepare a Map.** The Sponsor Agency should prepare a study area map using the tax parcels as the base, parcel color-coding showing the County Class codes, wards, TIFs, adjacent SSAs, and any other relevant overlays to give context. The Sponsor Agency will submit the boundaries and map to DPD who will use this map and the subsequent legal description to prepare the final official map.
- e. **Prepare a PIN Database.** The PIN database is one of the most important research tools of the SSA designation. The database will include information on properties within the proposed SSA boundaries and will allow you to contact taxpayers and do tax analysis. See the Appendix for components of the PIN database. The consultant should update the PIN data spreadsheet when actual 2024 EAVs are released in **June, 2025**. For more information see Appendix on Page 8.
- f. **Conduct a Needs Assessment.** A Needs Assessment will help prioritize services and programs the SSA stakeholders want and are willing to pay for. The Needs Assessment Survey can be prepared via an online survey program and distributed via email and posted on the agency's website. The Sponsor Agency shall make every effort to conduct in-person surveys with taxpayers, tenants, residents and shoppers to get a "district user" perspective.
- g. **Establish metrics and baseline data.** In coordination with the City and SSA Advisory Committee, the Sponsor Agency will determine on what basis (e.g. what metrics) the SSA's impact will be evaluated. Examples of metrics that can be used include:
 - Business profitability and enhanced property values
 - Number of new and renewing business licenses in the district
 - Assessed values of business improvement district properties
 - Property tax valuation of district properties
 - Rates of vacancy and occupancy
 - Overall retail performance
 - Cleanliness and maintenance
 - Garbage removal, in total bags and tonnage of garbage
 - Square footage of new plantings and replacement plantings
 - Number of incidents of graffiti removal
 - Number of maintenance calls to 311
 - Safety
 - Number of crimes reported
 - Number of vacant lots and abandoned buildings

- h. The Sponsor Agency in coordination with the SSA Advisory Committee and City shall determine what baseline data is needed to track the SSA's impact. The Sponsor Agency may conduct studies in advance of creating or reconstituting the SSA district, such as market studies, economic impact studies, land use inventories, etc.
- i. **City and Other Governmental Services Inventory.** The Sponsor Agency shall work with government agencies to create an inventory of current and proposed services in the district as well as gain an understanding of how to work with the respective governmental entity on service delivery. The purpose of this step is to avoid service duplication/gaps and ensure compliance/coordination with procedures. Inventories may include such things as: maintenance programming with Dept. of Streets and Sanitation, streetscape elements with Dept. of Transportation, and security programs with the Chicago Police Department.
- j. **Prepare a draft legal description.** The Sponsor Agency shall retain a surveyor to prepare a meets-and-bounds legal description for the SSA. This document shall be submitted in MS Word format. DPD GIS staff will use the draft legal to prepare the draft map. DPD will also confirm the legal description with the Cook County Clerk's office.
- k. **Draft the SSA District Plan.** The District Plan is the most important deliverable in the SSA planning process because it is the "business plan" for the SSA. It outlines such aspects as the services, budget, tax rate, governance, operations, results, and assessment. Once complete, the SSA District Plan shall answer all reasonable questions about the intentions and provide a road map of the SSA. See the Appendix page 9 for specifics on preparing the SSA District Plan.

8. MARCH - APRIL, 2025: SSA Outreach, Support, Refinement and Submission

- a. **Distribute an informational mailing and host community meetings.** Once the SSA District Plan is drafted, the SSA Advisory Committee along with the Sponsor Agency, DPD, and the aldermen **must hold at minimum two community meetings**. These meetings will educate stakeholders about the SSA, allow for feedback and gauge support for the SSA.
 - i. The **informational mailing** should include notice of both meetings, information about SSAs, and information about the proposed or reconstituting SSA. The mailing must be sent by first class mail to property owners and stakeholders at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.
 - ii. The Sponsor Agency and SSA Advisory Committee should also **encourage stakeholders to attend via personal contact, email and other methods to encourage attendance.**
 - iii. The Sponsor Agency and SSA Advisory Committee will work with DPD to prepare the community meeting presentation. The presentation will be kicked-off by the local aldermen followed by DPD introduction to SSAs.

The Sponsor Agency with the SSA Advisory Committee and consultant then present on the specific SSA. Questions are fielded by any of the presenters. **The Sponsor Agency will take notes from both meetings and post them on their website in a timely manner.**

- b. Distribute a second informational mailing as needed and host additional community meetings as needed.** A second mailing and additional community meetings may be necessary based on feedback from the first two community meetings and other factors. The Sponsor Agency shall host additional meetings as needed for the community and/or specific stakeholders.
- c. Support.** The Sponsor Agency and SSA Advisory Committee shall prove that there is support from the community the SSA is seeking to serve. **SPECIFICALLY, THEY ARE REQUIRED TO COLLECT SUPPORT SIGNATURES OF THE TAXPAYERS OF RECORD FROM AT LEAST 20% OF THE PINs WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PROPOSED SSA and submitted to DPD as follows:** support signatures from a minimum of 10% of the PINs are due with the application on **June 13, 2025**. The balance of support signatures totaling a minimum of 20% of the PINs must be submitted to DPD **by August 1, 2025**. If during DPD's review there are questions regarding the authenticity of signatures, the SSA provider **MUST** provide additional information to prove that the signer is the owner or taxpayer of record, or an authorized representative of the property associated with a given PIN. DPD will provide an affidavit for the applicant to complete attesting to the accuracy of the signatures, and an affidavit for the consultant to complete attesting to the accuracy of the PIN list at the time it was obtained. These affidavits must be submitted to DPD when the 20% requirement has been attained.
- d. Identify the SSA Commissioners.** With focus and clarity on the SSA, the Sponsor Agency, in coordination with the aldermen and SSA Advisory Committee, shall help recruit the first slate of SSA Commissioners and collect their applications.
 - i. SSA Commissioners are mayoral-appointed public officials so qualifications and recruitment/renewal procedures should factor in both City and local criteria.
 - ii. To avoid the appearance of or actual conflicts of interest, Commissioners are prohibited from also being an active board member of the Service Provider Agency.
 - iii. The Sponsor Agency and DPD shall coordinate with candidates to complete the City's SSA Commissioner application.
 - iv. Include with the commissioner applications a summary list of candidates with their SSA address, ward, property owner or tenant status, and status on the Service Provider Agency's board.

- 9. JUNE 13, 2025: SSA Application Package Due. SSA Application Package Due.** Provide an electronic copy (thumb drive) of the SSA application documents, organized so that each section of the application is saved in folders and PDF files. **The application must include support signatures from taxpayers of record of at**

least 10% of the proposed PINs. DPD will not review applications if this initial signature requirement is not attained. Once the signatures are confirmed, DPD will review the SSA Packet and contact you with questions.

10. The following items must be included in the SSA Packet:

- a. SSA District Plan**
- b. SSA Application** (2-page document) signed by a property owner with proof of ownership
- c.** Original SSA **Commissioner Applications** must be mailed or dropped off to DPD.
- d. Financing Commitment:** If the Sponsor Agency is being considered as the SSA Service Provider, the Agency shall provide proof of financing commitment to finance Year 1 of the SSA, if providing services in advance of the tax distribution is desired (final confirmation is due upon submission of the SSA application **by June 3, 2025**. The Agency should provide a letter of intent from its lender. This financing CANNOT be secured by anticipated tax collections.

11. JUNE - JULY 2025: Make final corrections to the SSA Packet. With support from relevant City agencies, DPD will work with the Sponsor Agency to finalize documents for the SSA ordinance, especially the legal description, PIN list and map. An SSA application, inclusive of any updates or changes to the initial application, must be on file with the DPD. **The City has the final authority to accept or reject the application.**

12. AUG - DEC 2025 Legislative Steps.

- a. Legislation.** DPD will commence the required legislative authorization. Legislative steps include a public hearing, and an ordinance authorizing the SSA term, annual work plan/budget, service provider ordinance, and the SSA Commissioner confirmations. DPD will provide a checklist to the agency to prepare documentation needed for the Service Provider Agreement ordinance.
- b. Public Hearing Notice:** The City Council Committee on Economic, Capital and Technology Development will designate when a public hearing will be held. The sponsoring agency shall be responsible for paying for the cost of a public notice in a newspaper of general circulation at least 15 days prior to the date of the public hearing. The notice will be prepared and placed by the City. The sponsoring agency shall also be responsible for notifying all taxpayers of record for each PIN located within the boundaries of the proposed SSA. DPD will provide envelopes, but all other costs of copying, assembling, and mailing the notices, **including postage**, will be the responsibility of the sponsoring agency. The notice must be sent by First Class mail and a certification of mailing shall be provided to DPD. The notices must be **postmarked a minimum of 10 days prior to the date of the public hearing.**
- c. Financing.** Should it be desired to start services prior to the first tax distribution, the Service Provider Agency must have a line of credit or clearly designated funding source identified **by June 13, 2025**. We recommend that services start prior to the first tax distribution, if possible. Please note, if the funding source is

a line of credit, it must be secured under the name of the Sponsoring Agency on its own creditworthiness and **cannot be secured by anticipated tax collections.**

13. DEC 2025 – FEB 2026: Governance and Operations Set-up

- a. **SSA Commissioner Bylaws.** The City will provide the SSA Commission with the SSA Commission bylaws template so they can customize and adopt their bylaws.
- b. **SSA Commissioner Training.** The City will coordinate a SSA Commissioner training, which will include training on the City’s Governmental Ethics Ordinance, the IL Open Meetings Act, Robert’s Rules of Order, and overall best practices for governance.
- c. **SSA Policies.** The SSA Commission shall establish policies to guide the SSA Service Provider’s operations. Policies may include such areas as: communications, fiscal, vendor selection, etc.
- d. **Set up SSA Operations.** In coordination with SSA policies, the Service Provider Agency shall refine and implement its SSA Operations Plan. Operations procedures shall include, but not be limited to: how the agency will manage the SSA, job descriptions for people assigned to the SSA, financial procedures, communication procedures, request for proposals (“RFPs”) for key SSA services, assessment methods, etc.
- e. **SSA Service Provider Agency Training.** While agencies come prepared with the skills to manage a SSA, the City will provide ongoing training and best practices support for SSA Provider Agencies. Support will include a best practices library, a digital forum, gatherings of SSA agencies, and topical guest speakers/webinars.

14. FEBRUARY – APRIL 2026: SSA Tax Levy Distribution (Renewing SSAs): The first SSA tax levy (2025 taxes due in 2026) will be due and anticipated to be paid on the first installment tax bill. The City will distribute SSA funds via Automated Clearing House (ACH) to the Service Provider Agency or what ever the method is at the time of distribution.

15. AUGUST - OCTOBER 2026: First SSA Tax Levy Distribution (New SSAs): The first SSA tax levy (2025 taxes due in 2026) will be due and anticipated to be paid on the second installment tax bill. The City will distribute SSA funds via Automated Clearing House (ACH) to the Service Provider Agency or whatever the method is at the time of distribution. For new SSAs, the full year of SSA levy is collected entirely in the second installment tax bill. In subsequent years, the SSA levy will be split between the first and second tax bills.

APPENDIX

SSA Database

Prepare the SSA Database in one Excel workbook to include, but not be limited to:

1. Worksheet describing the data collection/analysis method
2. Worksheet of summary data
 - a. Confirmation that 2025 board certified data is being used (NOTE: Accommodation will be made for updating data depending on timing of when 2025 board certified data is available)
 - b. Total number of PINs and of these:
 1. Total taxable PINs
 2. Total non-taxable PINs
 - c. Total EAV used to calculate the tax bills and of this:
 1. Total EAV captured in the Base EAV by each TIF (if applicable)
 2. Total EAV captured in the TIF Increment by each TIF (if applicable)
 3. EAV not captured in TIF(s)
 - d. Delinquent PINs
 - e. Any other relevant data
3. Worksheet(s) of the Cook County Land Use List and Pie Chart: list each county land use in the SSA, each land use's dollar amount and percent of the total Tax Year 2024 (payable in 2025) levy and maximum levy. Create a pie chart for the Tax Year 2024 (payable in 2025) and maximum levies showing the \$ and % of totals. Include a legend explaining what the county classification types mean.
4. Worksheet(s) with the following data columns for each PIN with totals at the top as relevant:
 - a. 14-digit PIN
 - b. property address in the SSA
 - c. Name and mailing address of the taxpayer who paid taxes for the last preceding year. If the taxes were not paid, note this and list the name and mailing address of the property owner (not taxpayer, but property owner)
 - d. Board certified 2023 or 2024 EAV used to calculate the tax bill
 - e. Board certified 2023 or 2024 EAV captured in the Base EAV for the respective TIF (if applicable)
 - f. Board certified 2023 or 2024 EAV captured in the TIF Increment by each TIF (if applicable)
 - g. Board certified 2023 or 2024 EAV not captured in TIF
 - h. Non-taxable PINs
 - i. Columns showing the SSA levy (\$ amount) generated from multiplying the EAV in items 4.d. – 4.g. above with:

1. the proposed maximum tax rate cap - the column header should state the tax rate cap % and % increase in tax bills this tax represents
 2. the estimated tax rate for 2025 levy payable in 2026 - the column header should state the tax rate cap % and % increase in tax bills this tax represents
 3. for existing SSAs: the tax rate for 2024 payable in 2025 - the column header should state the tax rate cap % and % increase in tax bills this tax represents
- j. Columns to track the positions of taxpayers (support or oppose)
 - k. Cook County class code (land use)
 - l. Other data columns as relevant

SSA District Plan

The SSA District Plan should be a one PDF file and include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. **SSA District Plan Executive Summary.** This shall serve as a “one-pager” on the SSA and include a brief overview including, but not limited to:
 - a. **Why the SSA?** Provide a summary as to why the new or reconstituted SSA is being proposed. Include the SSA Vision Statement.
 - b. **SSA Contacts.** List the Sponsor Agency and SSA Advisory Committee contact information.
 - c. **SSA Stats.** Included but not limited to: SSA number/name, general boundary, ward(s), community area, tax rate cap, year 1 tax rate, year 1 funding, typical year funding and tax rate, total 2023 or 2024 EAV used to calculate tax bills (if in TIF(s) itemize the portion of total EAV in each TIF base, each TIF increment, and EAV not in TIF as applicable), proposed term, and other stats that would help the reader quickly understand the SSA.
 - d. **History and Track Record.** For new and existing SSAs, provide a brief overview of the Sponsor Agency’s accomplishments that highlight how your agency is supporting the district. For existing SSAs, include a history and track record of the SSA including how you’ve spent funds as the SSA Service Provider. Provide an overview of key fiscal management measures the Service Provider Agency and Commission have (or will have) in place.
2. **Improvement and Activity Plan.**
 - a. **SSA Stakeholders.** Provide a list and description of participants in the SSA planning process including the Sponsor Agency, SSA Advisory Committee, aldermen, and other government and community partners.
 - b. **Project Plan.** Use the project plan to provide a timeline of activity to date for the SSA designation. Include a more detailed timeline as an exhibit.
 - c. **Needs Assessment Survey Summary.** Provide an overview of the survey process and results.
 - d. **Plan approval.** Note the local review/approval of the SSA District Plan, including progress to date on meeting the City’s support thresholds.
 - e. **SSA Boundaries.** List the boundaries and attach a map. Provide an overview explaining how the boundaries were determined. For existing SSAs, explain any recommended changes to the boundaries.

- f. **Determine services/improvements.** Review the work done so far on services and the results from the Needs Assessment Survey to prepare a list of service categories and the specific work scopes within each for the first year and through the next five years. Provide a narrative of the services for the first operating year and when applicable, include recommendations services in subsequent years. Include an overview of the Service Provider direct services and administrative services for the SSA. The services/ improvements will be used to prepare the 2026 Work Plan using DPD’s template.
- g. **Determine first-year and 5-year budgets.** SSA budgets are service-driven and based on the services research, rather than based on what the maximum levy could be and then determining how to spend the funds. Costs can be determined through vendor estimates and comparisons to comparable SSAs. Provide an overview of the first year 2026 budget and projections for 2026-2030. The budget information will be used to prepare the 2026 Budget using DPD’s template. Include a summary 2026 and 2026-2030 budget chart.
- h. **Determine the tax rate cap and typical tax rate.** SSA tax levy money is generated by multiplying a tax rate by each property’s Equalized Assessed Value (“EAV”). Properties with a larger EAV pay more than those that are smaller and should also receive proportionately more benefit. The tax rate cap should be high enough to allow for fluctuations in levy needs while also capping the amount the SSA could levy. Provide an easy-to-understand description of the tax method, including the difference between the tax rate and the percent increase in taxes from the SSA, TIF increment, the budget process, and time/manner of collecting levy.

3. **Governance, Management and Assessment**

- a. **SSA Commission.** Provide an overview of the commissioner qualifications and selection/renewal process and include the full version as an exhibit. Note the commission is a public body subject to the IL Open Meetings Act.
- b. **Service Provider Agency.** Describe how the agency plans to (or does) manage the SSA, including oversight of subcontractors. Include the SSA operations plan as an exhibit.
- c. **Baseline Data and Program Assessment.** Provide an overview of baseline data and metrics that will be tracked over time to correlate the impact of SSA services in the district. Explain how the Commission and Service Provider Agency will assess how SSA activities are doing in fulfilling the goals of the SSA. Include recommended methods for assessment (surveys, data sets, field checks, etc.) ways to report results (annual report, annual meetings, website, social media, etc). Provide detail as relevant as an exhibit.
- d. **Communications.** Provide an overview of how the proposed SSA Commission and Service Provider plan to communicate about SSA matters and make themselves accessible for questions and input from the public.

4. **Exhibits.** Exhibits shall include, but not be limited to:

- a. SSA Feasibility
- b. List of the SSA Advisory Committee and Sponsor Agency Board and Staff assigned to the designation and management of the SSA
- c. SSA Designation Timeline

- d.** SSA taxpayer list (highlights from the SSA Database and note which ones have letters of support on file)
- e.** Map with parcel, ward, and TIF detail
- f.** Copies of materials sent out in informational mailings
- g.** Minutes of SSA Advisory Committee Meetings and Community Meetings
- h.** Copies of media articles written about the SSA designation effort
- i.** List of the first slate of SSA Commissioners and the SSA Commissioner Qualifications and Recruitment/Renewal Procedures
- j.** SSA Operations Plan (shall include, but not be limited to: management plan, job descriptions, financial procedures, narrative of cost allocation planning, communication procedures, request for proposals for key SSA services, assessment methods, etc.)

Note: Sponsor Agency should brief local aldermen on their SSA application package. Aldermanic letters of support are not required but will be accepted.