

Department of Environment
2025 Budget Hearing – December 3, 2024
Angela Tovar, Commissioner

DEPT. 72 OPENING STATEMENT – FY 2025

Good morning, Chair Ervin, Vice Chair Lee, and honorable members of the City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of the Department of Environment. After the historic passage of last year's budget, which included the restoration of the City of Chicago Department of Environment, I am thrilled to be here today to share more about the DOE's progress to date and vision for the upcoming fiscal year. Before delving into the details, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to this Council for your steadfast partnership. Together, we have laid the foundation for a more sustainable, equitable, and climate-resilient Chicago, and stand to make continued progress in the upcoming fiscal year and beyond.

Our work in the Department of Environment is guided by the 2022 Chicago Climate Action Plan, which sets an ambitious goal of reducing Chicago's greenhouse gas emissions by 62% by 2040 while delivering tangible benefits to every community. This plan is our roadmap toward environmental justice, climate change impact mitigation, and green economic investments in all 77 of Chicago's neighborhoods.

At the core of our mission is a commitment to equity. We are ensuring that those communities historically burdened by environmental harm benefit the most from Chicago's climate initiatives. This Council has been instrumental in enabling us to make meaningful progress on this front. The FY 2024 budget allowed us to add capacity to our team tasked with coordinating citywide efforts to mitigate climate impacts, alleviate environmental harm, and build wealth in communities by promoting a just transition to a green economy.

Some department accomplishments from last year we would like to highlight include:

- **Cumulative Impacts Assessment and Environmental Justice Action Plan:** We completed the Cumulative Impacts Assessment (CIA) to measure and address environmental burdens across communities. This data-driven report will guide our city's policies, ensuring that environmental justice is embedded in decision-making processes. Additionally, we continue to work cross-departmentally on the Environmental Justice Action Plan, a coordinated strategy to address environmental inequities across city agencies, focusing on pollution reduction, community engagement, and equitable resource distribution.
- **Chicago Recovery Plan:** We continue to make tremendous strides on climate and environmental justice initiatives through the Chicago Recovery Plan. Notable successes include the **Our Roots Chicago** tree planting initiative, which, in partnership with DSS

and CDOT, has planted thousands of trees in low-canopy neighborhoods, and **Chicago Electric**, where, in partnership with 2FM, we've made substantial progress in electrifying our municipal fleet by 25% and installing over 200 EV charging stations for the City fleet across Chicago.

- **Climate Infrastructure Fund:** In 2024, in partnership with DPD, we awarded \$6 million to nonprofit organizations and small businesses to support renewable energy, green infrastructure, and electric vehicle adoption, ensuring that underserved communities benefit from Chicago's transition to a green economy.
- **Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement:** Our department has worked with an extensive network of partners, including community-based organizations, academic institutions, business leaders, state agencies, and other City departments, to co-create solutions that meet Chicago's climate challenges. This approach has strengthened our initiatives, from climate resiliency to tree equity, to clean energy programs and beyond.
- **Federal Funding:** In 2024, our team committed to maximizing funding through the Inflation Reduction Act and other federal programs. We supported City departments, community organizations, and sister agencies through funding applications to support climate resilience, community engagement, and clean energy transition projects. Our collective efforts lead to funding for projects to advance bus electrification, community-wide energy planning, city-wide EV charging and more.

A year into the formal re-establishment of the Department of Environment, we focused on building capacity within the department by nearly tripling in size and hiring personnel skilled in administration, project management, communications, and grants management. These hires are essential to supporting the Department's expanded scope, particularly as we continue to explore future opportunities to migrate existing environmental functions and duties under its purview. Looking ahead to FY 2025, we will continue to prioritize equity, sustainability, and climate resilience across all aspects of our work. We plan to:

1. **Advance Environmental Justice Policy:** One of our top priorities is the continued development of the Cumulative Impacts Policy. This legislation will formalize environmental justice considerations in city decision-making, ensuring that we proactively address the compounded impacts of environmental and social stressors on vulnerable communities.
2. **Scale Up Green Infrastructure Solutions** We are working with the Department of Water Management (DWM) to publish Chicago's updated Green Stormwater Infrastructure Strategy, which will include initiatives to manage flood risks, advance nature-based solutions, and improve water quality. We will also continue our tremendous progress on Space to Grow, a partnership with DWM, CPS, and MWRD to create resilient and healthy schoolyards for Chicago Public Schools.

3. **Promote Climate Resiliency:** In collaboration with OEMC, Cook County, and community partners, we continue to support the City's response to extreme weather through heat mitigation efforts, air quality monitoring, strategy-building, and analysis. We will continue to be a partner in updating our policies to account for climate vulnerabilities.
4. **Expand Sustainable Transportation:** Building on the success of Chicago Electric, we will continue to partner with 2FM to develop a comprehensive fleet electrification plan, complete with actionable goals and recommendations. This plan will position Chicago as a leader in fleet transition and emissions reduction. Furthermore, we serve as a partner to CDOT to support their ongoing planning efforts and implementation of their equitable city-wide public charging program.
5. **Green Homes Chicago:** As part of our focus on creating healthier, energy-efficient homes, we will co-lead with DOH the rollout of retrofit programs for 1-to-4-unit homes and multifamily buildings. Through Green Homes, we aim to deliver much-needed retrofits that improve energy efficiency, address outstanding deferred maintenance lower utility costs, and enhance the comfort and health of residents.
6. **Continued Partnership Development:** We will seek opportunities to expand our reach to coordinate more directly with residents, sector leaders, community organizations, and youth. We are thrilled to launch the Shoreline Advisory Board and the Data Center Working Group this year and will continue to create avenues for cross-sector coordination on important climate-related issue areas.

The past year has been one of tremendous progress, and the year ahead presents even greater opportunities. We stand ready to continue building on the foundations we have laid, advancing climate and environmental justice for all Chicagoans, especially in the face of changes at the federal level. However, our success relies on continued partnership—with this Council, our communities, and our City departments.

As we consider the budget for FY 2025, I ask for your support in empowering the Department of Environment to fully realize its mission. Together, we can ensure that Chicago remains at the forefront of climate action, with a focus on equity, justice, and resilience.

Thank you for your time, your partnership, and your commitment to a better, more sustainable, and more just Chicago. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.