

STITCHING IT TOGETHER

Session I: Listening and Learning



Community Engagement Summary

ENGLISH VERSION



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STUDY BACKGROUND

Stitching It Together is the first of a multi-phased planning initiative led by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) that aims to center local voices in a vision to strengthen connections between the Brighton Park and Gage Park communities and improve access to the new Park District facility at 48th Street and Western Boulevard. This initial phase will lay the groundwork and direction of all future planning phases, which may include DPD and other relevant departments and sister agencies.

Stitching it Together includes areas of Brighton Park and Gage Park. This planning initiative will serve as a vision for the communities and inform future planning work.

This study will explore ways to:



Improve the Public Realm

Make it safer and more comfortable to move around and access the Park District facility through public realm improvements



Support Local Business

Foster thriving commercial corridors by supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs



Manage the Impacts of Industrial Operations

Articulate design ideas that help to mitigate the impacts of existing industrial operations



Improve Public Health & Safety

Provide a future vision for the area that raises up and leverages community, institutional partners, and City investment toward a safer and healthier Brighton Park and Gage Park

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Why is planning important?

Urban planning helps create a vision for the future of communities and City by helping understand how residents experience, work, grow, and interact with the urban environment. Recommendations and decisions in urban planning give shape to neighborhoods by informing future economic development, locations for public assets such as parks and open space, community centers, and other public amenities, and improving physical and cultural connections.

The planning process brings together diverse representatives from the community to help shape a future that elevates quality of life for residents.

What will the engagement process look like?

Stitching It Together began in late 2023 and is anticipated to continue through late 2024. **Stitching It Together** is the first stop that will help to inform future phases of planning in these communities.

There will be multiple opportunities to engage and provide comments, ideas, and feedback. These opportunities will include: community open houses, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and opportunities at pop-up or other community events.

There will be four engagement sessions for this initiative. The first engagement session was completed in early spring. Each engagement session will include a Community Engagement Summary Report that will document the event, findings, and next steps. Future engagement opportunities will be announced in advance on social media outlets and through community and governmental partners.

Questions or comments regarding the engagement process are welcomed at dpd@cityofchicago.org.

SCHEDULE EL HORARIO



PRE-PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Prior to the official launch of *Stitching It Together*, the team, led by DPD and the supporting consultant group, interviewed key community members. These are community members with ongoing work, either through an organization or government. These engagement sessions included community listening sessions with community partners and an advisory group.

COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

Community listening sessions are a tool to inform the study from the perspective of key community members. This feedback and first-hand information provides important insight into area needs, concerns and helps identify special places or events, and informs how to best communicate this work to the community.

These listening sessions included: the 12th, 14th, and 15th Ward offices, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, SGA - Family and Youth Services. These listening sessions took place in January and early February.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP

The Community Advisory Group is a select group of members that represent various perspectives in the community or are key implementation partners for the study. These representative inform and guide the project and also help to get the word out.

This anticipates continued touch points with all of these stakeholder groups as the study progresses.

WHAT WE HEARD

Here is a summary of what was heard from these engagement sessions:

Development and Opportunity

There has been a lack of financial incentive opportunities in these communities, especially in Gage Park, because of the limits on economic drivers and programs in the area to spur growth. There are multiple types of business opportunities, storefront, street vendors, and others, along the corridors but there is a need for support and access to investment. Existing financial incentive programs receive a low number of applications,

are difficult to promote, and may not be suited to the needs and demographics of the community. Local businesses have also had difficulty with job training, workforce recruitment and outreach in the community.

Overall, this area needs infrastructure improvements and better maintenance. The industrial corridor's proximity to highways and railroad is seen as an asset. The industrial corridor has been slowly eroding due to new non-industrial uses, despite the corridor being a job engine for the region. In general, many community members see modern industrial and infrastructural land uses as dirty and polluting. Certain land uses, like recent waste and recycling collecting facilities, have had negative impacts, like odor issues, on the community.

Housing affordability is a growing concern. There is a significant presence of multi generational households. The community has expressed concerns over the amount vacant and underutilized land and sees the potential to develop the land for economic development and to fulfill and provide some of the community space needs.

Public Safety

Public safety is a high priority for the community. There is a significant gang presence, including invisible gang lines where some community assets are inaccessible to youth. In addition, the current state of infrastructure, lack of maintenance, and overgrown vacant and underutilized lots, exacerbates public safety perceptions. For example, the lack of adequate lighting around the park district headquarters makes it feel unsafe to some. Community organizations have applied additional security protocols, such as security guard shifts, to address some public safety issues.

Existing traffic patterns have a significant impact on pedestrian and bike safety. The community would like to see bike lanes and other multimodal mobility solutions with safety in mind for any proposed designs. Truck traffic and speeding are major issues, especially near schools and major roads. Truck traffic is a noticeable issue on major streets, air quality, and overall neighborhood experience by residents.

Places and Community Assets

The neighborhood is diverse and keeps growing as it welcomes new residents. Existing community programs, centers, and facilities are at or over capacity. Some of these centers and facilities need repairs and have a lack of multi-generational services. In addition, there is a shortage of destination amenities and many seek amenities outside of the community.

The Park District headquarters is not seen as a community asset yet, with many perceiving it as unwelcoming. Despite the new open space, Brighton Park is still suffering from a lack of open space. Senka Park is a beloved open space by area residents, but is in need of a field house to support the community's current usage. Other frequently mentioned amenities the community would like to see are a pool and splash pad. The Gage Park Library branch is at capacity and its current building does not meet the needs of the community.

Local schools, parks, and houses of worship are a primary venue for community events, especially youth programming and community gathering. Some businesses, like cultural staples and coffee shops, have opened their doors to community events, while others forbid loitering.

Physical and Social Connections

Although both communities are connected by transit, the surrounding infrastructure, like viaducts and sidewalks, needs repair and proper maintenance. The current neighborhood grid is incomplete and affects overall connectivity. There are too many one-way streets that limit mobility. This also impacts multimodal options, like bikes and mass transit, access to retail, parks and other community assets.

Goals, Priorities and Aspirations

For this study to be successful, different groups should be engaged, like local businesses and industrial, and youth. There needs to be an effort to meet the community at events, schools, and other spaces in each neighborhood. This is a list of potential goals and priorities based on these conversations:

- Activate vacant and underutilized spaces, especially spaces with abandoned buildings.

- Attract new and improved community amenities like theaters, pools, parks, bowling alleys, etc.
 - Invest in and improve existing infrastructure and community spaces.
 - Support workforce development and incentives tailored to the needs of existing businesses.
 - Investments in and improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure and promote multimodal access.
 - Encourage inclusive community gathering spaces for programming, recreation, street vending, and other events.
 - Incorporate greenery, landscape buffers, and beautification initiatives as needed, especially near major corridors.
-

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

This event took place at the Brighton Park Community Campus (4830 S. Western Ave) on the 5th of March from 6-8 pm. The open house also included a resource fair component with community partners, sister agencies, and other organizations hosting resource tables.

All three Alderpeople Raymond Lopez (15th Ward), Julia Ramirez (12th ward), and Jeylu Gutierrez (14th ward), attended the event. The following organizations were part of the resource fair: SGA - Family and Youth Services, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago Public Library, PODER, and SW Collective.

What we heard

The event provided multiple activity stations. All materials provided were in English and Spanish. A team member provided bilingual support at each activity station. Bilingual team members also wore "Hablo Español" pins.

About 80% of the participants were youth. Participants enjoyed interactive stations, provided suggestions and feedback, and engaged in the event. Participants identified their relationship(s) to Brighton Park and Gage Park:

- Work Here: 38 votes
- Live Here: 35 votes
- Visit Here: 22 votes
- Go to School Here: 12 votes

Overall, 63 community members were registered. Comments cards were provided with the option to mail them to DPD. No comment cards have been returned via mail as of March 31st.

Activities and Stations

Preference and Ideas Boards

Participants commented and provided ideas for their top priorities. Each participant was provided with Post-It notes for their commentary. Participants indicated their experiences, ideas, and which themes were most important to them.

Each category board provided a series of example images. These images were intended help guide participants and inspire ideas.

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Notes

Open Space and Recreation

- Open Green Spaces and Greenery
- Pools and aquatic recreation
- Recreational facilities with programming
- Outdoor markets and event spaces (such as for parades, concerts, street fests, and movies)

48
Notes

Economic Opportunity and Development

- Resources, education, job training, career/vocational development services, and outreach
- Financial incentives and access to support
- Hubs for similar goals and interests

40
Notes

Community Spaces, Art and Culture

- Programming such as art, music, poetry, festivals and other community events
- Places and opportunities for community to gather, host events and resources
- Field houses, library branches, theaters and other community facilities.

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Notes

Connections

- Safe and accessible multi-modal access to community amenities and assets, including features that serve bikes, strollers, and shopping carts
- Streetscapes and public realm activation by improving quality of life, safety, traffic mitigation

35
Notes

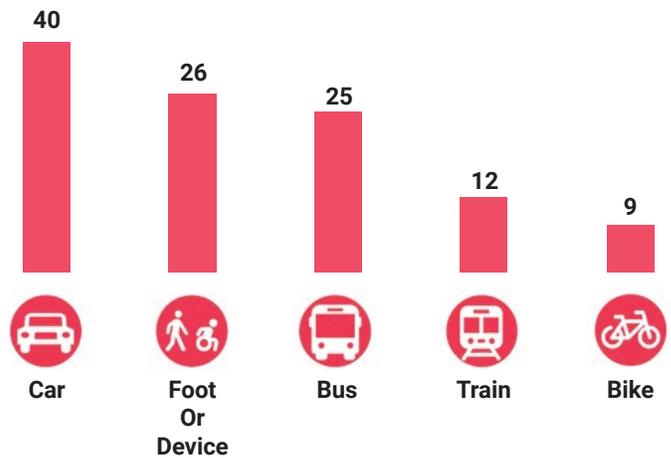
Wellness

- Multi-generational services and facilities
- Health programs and spaces, like wellness centers, and related events like festivals, fairs, runs, etc.
- Nature-focused solutions such as pocket gardens, green spaces, and more landscaping
- Proper litter and compost collection



Poll Question: How to you transport yourself?

Participants identified modes of mobility they used to move around the community. Participants placed small balls in corresponding containers that identified their mode(s) of transport in the community.



Vision Wall: Today my neighborhood is

For this activity, participants were asked to complete the sentence that describes how they view their community today:

- Needs color, trees, and green space
- Feels unsafe, polluted, congested, noisy because of trucks and traffic
- Needs improved infrastructure and facilities to keep it clean
- People who care
- In dire need of school programs
- Inaccessible to pedestrians

Vision Wall: Tomorrow, my neighborhood will be

For this activity, participants were asked to complete the sentence that describes how they imagine their community in the future:

- Beautiful, vibrant, and prosperous
- Full of parks, green spaces, and bike paths
- Safer to, in, and from school
- Walkable and accessible for all
- Offers more programs, classes, and opportunities
- Has the same amenities and features of the North Side neighborhoods
- Healthy and environmentally friendly

Map Experience: Activity and Interviews

Participants shared their experiences around their neighborhood. This included their observations, concerns, what they like and don't like. Participants used stickers corresponding to the activity questions. The questions with their corresponding stickers were:

- Where are your favorite places in the neighborhood?
- What areas have the potential to change?
- Where do you find movement challenging?

Participants highly favored open spaces but also indicated there are assets that need more attention.



Western & Park District Headquarters

Overall, the Park District headquarters is perceived positively. The Western Orange Line stop is one of the most challenging connections, particularly on the crosswalk to the station and the Park District headquarters. The street crossing at 47th and Western is a difficult connection point. Based on previous observations, the heavy traffic flow at Western and 47th make the boulevard feel unsafe for pedestrians. Participants identified the areas around the Brighton Park Community Campus and Western as areas that have the potential to change, mainly focused on the street and opportunities for open space on the Boulevard.

Western Boulevard from the Western CTA Orange Line stop to Gage Park High School was identified as a space with the potential to change.

47th & Kedzie

Participants identified this is a very difficult intersection. There is a constant presence of truck traffic. Truck traffic on Kedzie may be a direct result of the proximity to the I-55 Stevenson Expressway.

The area around the Kedzie Orange Line stop needs maintenance. The state of this area makes it feel dangerous and unwelcoming to users.



Gage Park & Garfield Boulevard

Participants identified this space as having potential to change. The community expressed the importance of Gage Park for recreation. The park is unique because it is also home to Gage Park High School and hosts multiple community events and recreation. The community expressed a need to properly maintain park.

Beyond the general study area, Garfield Boulevard was identified as an area with the potential to change. This again may highlight the value of the boulevards by community members. Lastly, the Gage Park Library Branch was identified as a space with the potential to change. The current Gage Park Library Branch occupies a storefront location. This limits the capacity to offer sufficient library programming and services for the community.



51st & Central Steel and Wire

This area was identified as an area with the potential to change, primarily the vacant and underutilized parking areas that show signs of neglect and overgrown vegetation.



51st & Currie High School

The Pulaski Orange Line station and lots were flagged as areas that could change. The overgrowth area next to Currie High School was flagged as challenging because the vegetation limits visibility.



Senka Park

Senka Park was identified as a favorite spot multiple times. This park has been brought up in multiple conversations, especially in terms of needed repairs and field house amenities.



51st & St. Louis

This area is difficult to cross and has heavy traffic. This location includes an Amazon facility. Comments included that truck traffic has caused issues on nearby residential streets. The combination of industrial, institutional, and residential land uses causes conflicts during specific times of day.



Comment Cards

Participants were provided comment cards. There were a total of 13 comments cards. Here are some highlights from the comments cards:

- “I think the park can get more traction if we focus on ways to make it safer to cross and take transit.”
- “Bike lanes! Would love our South Side half of Western to share the design of the North half...”
- “We need to THINK LESS about the cars AND MORE about people using CTA, biking, and walking to get place to place.”
- “It is challenging to get around safely and the drivers are very aggressive and there are too many trucks.”

BRIGHTON PARK & GAGE PARK POP-UPS

Events took place in Brighton Park on March 23rd from 12-3pm at 47th and Kedzie and Gage Park on March 24 from 11-2pm at PODER. These events were part of DFSS's MyCHI.My Future Spring Kickback Series hosted by SGA - Youth & family Services, where youth organized a series of events throughout the City.

What we heard

DPD provided bilingual various activities and informational material from this study and other DPD initiatives from other bureaus. The team provided a general overview of the study, a brief summary of key planning processes and terms, a survey, and a "make my own development" station.

Turnout was low at the Brighton Park event due to weather. Weather conditions at the Gage Park event were more favorable.

Activities and Stations

Study Overview and Informational Handouts

The team explained, based on language selection:

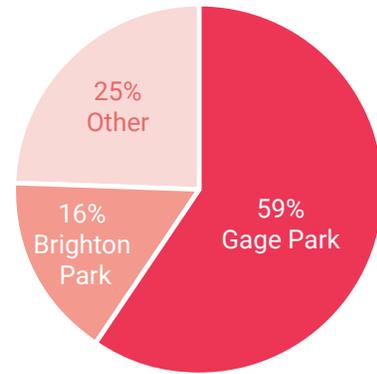
- Overview of the Study
- Why DPD is here? What is the planning processes? What are some key terms in planning and design?
- Study schedule and potential opportunities for continued community engagement sessions.

Each participant was provided with an informational hand out. This provided an overview of the study and an explanation of the planning process.

Survey and Results

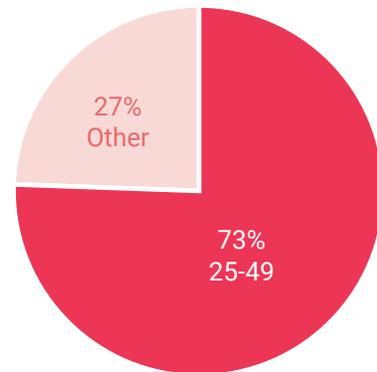
Community members were asked to complete a survey. In total, there were 37 survey participants total for both events.

Demographic Information: Name, Email, ZIP code and Community for balanced outreach, and age group



Participants by Community

Other Communities: Little Village, Englewood, Archer Heights



Participants by Age Group

Other Age Groups: 13-18, 19-24, 50-65, Prefer not to Answer

Priorities

Participants were asked to prioritize study themes, 1 being the top priority, 6 being the lowest. These were the average rankings by participants:

1. **Community Safety (Top)**
2. Housing Affordability
3. Health and Environmental Justice
4. Economic Development
5. Community Programming for All
6. Open Space and Beautification (Least)

Participants were able to share specific issues that relate to the main priority categories. These were the issues frequently identified:

- Public safety & gang activity
- Youth programs and services
- Housing affordability
- Traffic management
- Maintenance
- Support and opportunity for migrants



Street Intersections

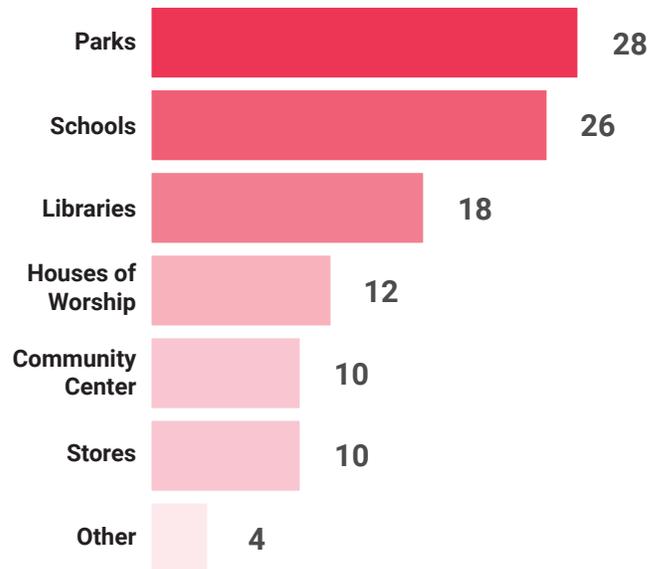
Participants identified **47th St, Kedzie Ave, 55th St, Pulaski Ave** as the most difficult intersections for safety and maintenance.

Participants provided their ideas for street solutions. The most common solutions were:

- Increase police presence
- Signal improvements, lower speeds, traffic regulation, and cameras
- Streetscape improvements
- More open space, parks, and greenery
- More safety protocols like upkeep, maintenance and visibility
- More events and programming on streets

“Hang Out” Spots

Participants selected any or all of the spots they and/or families hang out in the neighborhood. These were the top “hang out” spots:



Comments

A few participants provided comments. Here are some of the comment highlights:

- More parking or limit the number of cars per household.
- Consider people’s livelihood and be inclusive...
- Library improvements are needed.
- More youth and health services and programming.



SUMMARY

The goal of these engagement sessions is to incorporate community ideas and feedback into a future vision for this area of the city. DPD's goal is to be inclusive of the many voices that comprise the community and have an understanding of community's priorities and needs.

This marks the first of multiple community engagement sessions for this planning initiative. In this session, the main goal was to listen and document the observations, concerns, aspirations, and highlights the community shared. Overall, the common feedback and observations received centered around the following categories: public safety, open space and community assets, community programming, social and physical connections, economic development, and environment and public health.

The team noted the specific places the community uses, values, and cares for. Overwhelmingly, parks, schools, and libraries topped the list. When providing ideas, the majority of the ideas participants shared focused on the same community assets.

In the next engagement session, the team will work with the community to begin to develop priorities and objectives using initial feedback as a guidance. This will include a community workshop that will provide a forum for community members, leaders, and stakeholders to discuss and formulate the goals of this vision plan.

Stay tuned for more information! The team looks forward to working together towards a future, equitable vision in Brighton Park and Gage Park.

STAY INFORMED

Stitching It Together is expected to continue through 2024. There will be multiple opportunities for community engagement. DPD will provide additional information regarding community engagement events once an engagement plan is finalized.

If you have any questions, or if you would like for the team to keep you informed of any future public meetings and events, please email DPD at:

DPD@cityofchicago.org

THE ENGAGEMENT TEAM

DPD

Lead by: Roberto Astudillo, Nolan Zaroff, Luke Mich
Supported by: Jaya Eyzagirre, Raquel Vega, Marta McReady

SOM

Prime Consultant: Jennifer Skowlund, Tanvi Parikh, Chris Hall

Urban Works

Patricia Saldaña Natke, Maria Pellot, Jose Esquinca, Maria Hidalgo

