

CENTRAL AREA PLAN |

FIRST ROUND FOCUS GROUP

MEETING SUMMARIES

In 2023, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) conducted several focus groups to gain community insight into the themes of DPD's Central Area Plan Update. Below is a summary of the ideas expressed by community members during these meetings, each of which focused on opportunities, assets, gaps, challenges and themes relating to a specific pillar topic. The input below may require future engagement, feasibility analyses (operational, legal, financial, etc.) and equity analyses.

Lifelong Learning - Meeting #1 (02.16.2023) 6:00-8:00PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

David Baker, DePaul University

Joseph Schwieterman, DePaul University

Ann Kalayil, Columbia College

Kathryn Chval, University of Illinois-Chicago

Marty Gutierrez, University of Illinois Chicago

Kari Fain, Northwestern University

Steve Thaxton, Northwestern University

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Make downtown a learning laboratory: Virtual and in-person experiential learning opportunities in downtown spaces will create connections between downtown, universities, and educational entities and ensure people see themselves within the fabric of the Central Area.**
- **Real and perceived crime and safety issues will continue to impact whoever chooses to live downtown.**
- **Enhancing mentorship opportunities—including paid internships, intergenerational, and peer-to-peer guidance—will increase access to career opportunities in the Central Area.**

- We need to think big about the cultural expressions and opportunities for all Chicagoans and visitors outside of the normal downtown infrastructure. This includes flexible and innovative technologies to further equity and access to learning.

Please submit 3 words that you feel are essential components of the 20-year vision for Lifelong Learning in the Central Area.



reimagine demographic
 education investment connection
 brokers collaboration
 counselors people ambassadors
 community navigation
 experimental learning family-friendly downtown
 fix the crime issue technology
 innovation ways showcase
 classes inspiring places
 one-on-one mentoring



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Assets:

- Civic-oriented events and speakers
 - They serve a lot of people and are classic Chicago, need to integrate
- Call-to-action for companies to offer paid-internships/learning programs
 - Increase working opportunities
 - Some big companies are currently doing this—partnerships with institutions
- Many committees/leaders from institutions/universities meeting monthly to collaborate
 - UIC has been working with Pilsen and sponsors to open more space for programming for younger (under 16)
- Chicago is a magnet with retention—lower cost of living compared to coasts/other large cities
- No city in country has concentration of higher ed and other educational institutions in central area like Chicago

Opportunities:

- Programs with coaches, mentors, one-on-one advisors, navigators
 - Coach to help navigate
 - Learning opportunities for LMI people—cohort programs—need each other
 - Coaches/Navigators who can be one-on-one advisors for what people could learn in Chicago

- People don't know what's available and what the options even are
- Internship program for high school students (Genesis Works)
- How do you get young people into different opportunities to just see the options? What are the various things like.
- City colleges run apprentice program (get associates degree and get paid by employees -- Accenture, Aon)
- Prospectus Charter school requires juniors/seniors to go to an internship on Wednesday, Christo Ray High School has been doing it for a long time
- Challenges: time commitment, liability with young people. How to manage at scale and give as many people access as possible? The issue is also that employees aren't coming into the office. Getting the high schoolers to the door is also an issue (need someone to meet them somewhere they are familiar and walk/commute with them)
- Senior demographic/Third phase of life–ideal stage of life for programs
 - Living and seeking lifelong education
 - There will be a growing number of older people as boomers age
 - Expanding their learning
- Intergenerational Learning
 - Legacy and desire to teach younger generations
 - Older adults enjoy and feel a legacy obligation to work with younger generations
 - Doesn't see much of it in the central core or in the neighborhoods either
 - It succeeds in places when there is good programming, often within traditional campuses
- Discussion-based/Peer-led/Peer-to-peer learning
 - Magical when they aren't sitting passively
 - Using their own knowledge/skills to contribute and learn
 - Learning for the joy of learning without tests/certificates
- Call-to-action for companies to offer paid-internships/learning programs
 - Increase working opportunities
 - Some big companies are currently doing this–partnerships with institutions
 - Incubator partnerships–tech-related fields
 - Each school has a few businesses that are connected to them
 - Also have seen in more recent years other colleges are getting connected (not just Northwestern and UChicago)–probably because companies want diversity
 - Not enough paid internships
 - Universities building partnerships with non-profits/institutions/incubators
 - While people don't always stay in Chicago after they graduate, it also is a magnet for people to come here
- Opportunities to collaborate with Universities/Institutions/City
 - Space with City or non-profit

- Families in neighborhoods are looking for spaces for their activities (dance, music, gymnastics, swim, soccer, etc.) and universities have facilities that can be shared
- Need to manage funding and liability issues related to working with minors
- Flexibility to have in-person or remote learning
 - Incredible this quick pivot and efforts made by educators and institutions
 - Next 20 years–New technologies change the way we do work–invests in employees–marriage with institutions to change education (emerging programs started)
 - Making movements to have more equity (POC and first generations) access to education
 - Virtual learning it is become well-used, and people feel safe engaging through the online experience
 - Huge for mental and physical health with education still being available via virtual opportunities
- Experiential Learning (seeing themselves in the fabric)
 - Semester to spend in Chicago. Make the Loop a learning laboratory.
 - Cross campus sharing, street fairs. A lot of people go downtown the same way
 - Experiential learning–both in the streets but also virtually
 - Inspire people about what our city offers
 - City should be the greatest recruitment strategy–should consider offering classes in those cool places
 - Offering classes in some of the unique spaces in the Central Area
 - Touching when students get excited about the Central Area
 - Take a walk with as class (City is a learning lab)
 - Can we do this for international students? Attraction with opportunities to learn virtually
 - Programs–spend a semester in Chicago–learning in the Central Area–no engagement with the neighborhood
 - Future of travel students presenting on how to go somewhere virtually from your couch–not leaving your place of residence
 - How do you create virtual experiences that teach people about the Central Area and provide hope/incentives for them to visit it?
- Cultural expressions and opportunities outside of the normal infrastructure
 - Students want to see themselves in art or elements of the sidewalk, streetscape, etc.
 - Wabash Arts Corridor–organically involved–physical impression
- New technology will make a difference in our learning and will make companies invest more in their employees
 - Higher education is about teaching people of all ages
 - Need to rethink how we provide learning opportunities (times) for people who may have multiple jobs

Gaps:

- Intergenerational Learning–lack of this in the Chicago area
 - Don't have spaces that are providing this
 - Those that do, tend to be in traditional spaces
- Diverse and affordable housing
 - Expensive, need to be in an environment which they are comfortable, no funding support (recruitment, especially African American students)
 - For international students housing is challenging–live with many people
 - For example, black students are getting scholarships including housing to out of state schools
 - Another anecdote that Black parents don't think their student is safe to be living in Chicago
- Access and transportation to get DT

Challenges:

- Concerns about crime
 - Fear–won't ride the L/public transit until reduction of crime incidents
 - Safety–parents not wanting African American children in DT Chicago
 - Need to address perception and reality of crime
 - DePaul has the coach buses from Lincoln Park to Downtown
- South of Monroe recovery is lagging. Storefronts on State Street are empty, that creates a big opportunity to repurpose for education spaces.
- Challenges: financial, access, transportation, other daily life responsibilities
- Need funding and support for cultural expressions and opportunities outside of the normal infrastructure
- Virtual learning shift (Impact of pandemic)
 - It was hard initially to transfer over to zoom, but now it is coveted. Now it is a major component of education (traditional and non-traditional)
 - People realized how important lifelong learning was for social ties during the Pandemic
 - Extraordinary way higher education pivoted in just two weeks
 - But there was a lot of learning losses from the Pandemic, generally four-year schools have recovered but City college enrollment still lagging
 - UIC did not have an enrollment loss during the Pandemic, but did have a drop in enrollment this fall
 - Young people are craving connection but don't know how to connect
 - UIC thinking a lot about redefining success
 - Someone who takes a long time to graduate college because they need to work
 - UIC having a higher graduation rate for seniors who don't live with their families
 - Online/virtual education challenging for many (especially seniors)
 - Virtual learning harmful to development and different learning styles

- Struggle to interact with other people and craving connection/do not know how to connect (didn't have that with virtual learning)
 - Many suffered significant declines during this period (graduate level the most)
- Institution/University retention
 - Demographics (age 18-24) aren't looking good for future education – education institutions likely to face declining enrollment as the next generation is smaller in size
 - Challenge with future graduation rates
- Lack of direction or uncertainty of career path
 - Don't know what they want to study/learn
 - Aren't exposed at a younger age to help shape their paths
- Not feeling included/welcomed in DT
 - Bad experiences in Pre-K learning which shape future learning attitudes
 - Change this to create positive experiences
- Non-traditional students–redefining success is challenging due to traditional/federal requirements and standards
- Utilizing the Universities/Institutions space/facilities for learning opportunities and programming
 - Liability–what form, go to legal, risk management, who do we go to?
 - Protection of Minors procedures–university employee needs training/whole process to undergo
 - Funding–axillary spaces aren't included in normal budget
 - Two million dollars insurance for events, otherwise must take the risk
 - Organization and individuals become involved–it becomes more complex
- DT retention of young professionals
 - Institutions have to think about who they are educating in the next 20 years (lower number of students at the end of the echo boom – children of baby boomers)
 - Students graduate and then move away for jobs
- Financial Support (not paying student teachers)–would have to come from external funding
 - State policies hindering this now
 - Commute/Money spent to get to the Central Area
 - Michigan is paying their student teachers recognizing you can't work
 - University can't pay student teachers because of federal financial aid

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Make the Loop a Learning Laboratory

- The Central Area should be our recruitment strategy for everyone, including students and tourists
- Rapid change of the next character of learning to work, and we should be tailoring emerging programs to test the waters in these areas.
- Partner with educational institutions for cultural expression throughout downtown public realm. Think Columbia College Master Plan and the Wabash Avenue Arts Corridor.
- Creating a Central Area that is affordable to both students *and* teachers and educational staff.

Land Use, Housing & Economic Development - Meeting #1 **(02.21.2023) 6:00-8:00PM**

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Jeffery Ayersman, Resident

Helen Straus, Resident

Michael Edwards, Chicago Loop Alliance

Jonathan Snyder, NorthBranch Works

Julie Darling, West Loop Community Organization

Grant Uhlir, Gensler

David Doig, Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives

Patrick Allen, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

Nicol Chervenak Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

Larita Clark, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

Rod Burch, West Central Association

Fred Krol, Sterling Bay

Chris Hall, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Brian Stanton, Bank of America

Stuart Zadra, Landmark Development

Lynnette Crandall, Landmark Development

Gail Spreen, Streeterville Properties

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Expansion of the Experience: Recognize Chicago as a global city and expand social and entertainment spaces; think about how to introduce those experiences through the digital/virtual realm.**

- Economic Generator - Chicago being very accessible

Opportunities:

- Delicate balance of preserving character while providing density
 - Promote density
 - Allowing more density and residential space?
 - Transit; safety; and experience "knowing what exists outside of our circle" while respecting the character/history of neighborhoods/communities
- Central Area as an economic engine
 - Grow local job opportunities
 - Job Creation
 - Foster entrepreneurship locally to help those succeed and have a broader economic impact
 - A lot of workforce projects that help people who live outside of Central Area benefit
 - Businesses can tap into city initiatives for economic growth
- Improve transportation and connectivity
 - Really want the METRA stop to O'Hare Increase trails along river south and north, connect them to mega-developments
 - Bike Riding, trail connectivity for all methods of transportation
 - Extension of CTA line, improve public transit
- Attract more college-aged students to stay in the summer due to colleges/universities downtown
 - Students 18-22
- Draw people in for all the experiences they get from downtown
 - Generational shift on who goes downtown, appeal to employee
 - Social District, prime entertainment centric for all ages
- Increase green space for people
 - Deck a green space around 90/94, called cap the Kennedy
 - Indoor botanical garden/large scale conservatory
 - Incorporate more green space that accentuates day to day life
- SSA program, stakeholders on the street to provide higher level of municipal services
- Youth programming
- Self-marketing and digital access (access of technology) like digital pass? (Austin, Indie)
 - Future visits and retention
 - McCormick feeds off everything that happens (access to O'Hare, etc.)
 - McCormick want to be part of the neighborhood but do attract global events
 - For example, the Auto Show gathered employees from all over the region
- Expansion of "The Experience"
 - The better we can expand this area with experiences and resources, the better
 - Lakefront and south loop - where do we eat, drink, shop?

- Need it to feel like a neighborhood/opportunity for providing an experience
- Different districts thriving while others are not
 - West Loop growing and succeeding
 - How do we balance this?
 - Look at data of where people are coming in from (south + west side) - Damen stop
 - Central Area Action Plan and others - expand METRA stops
 - Neighborhood Opportunity Bonus Fund
- Think creatively, untested thinking that moves the needle
 - Anchor institutions + transit infrastructure - investments in planning
 - Good urban planning a blending of the two in the future (density/transit/infrastructure with respecting character/neighborhoods)
 - Transforming that to the neighborhood design guidelines - presence on street and green / public spaces (plaza and streetscape design)
 - Programs at the City institute - go over land use data and opportunities - landlocking the buildings - keep that character (historic buildings)
 - Revitalize neighborhood/enhancing connections and accessibility (shifted needle to have more local jobs)
 - 1) Continued plan / management to help keep it on track and 2) Land Use (so many large event-based) only busy during this
 - Has been successful with the restaurants and the Hilton
 - Motor Row - McCormick Place and South Loop interest - always been a part of these plans WCA was an additional validator - market and helped the city go along with it
 - Means for additional density, west of Halsted can be a DT district
 - Confluence of things - Green Line L Stop, Google - believe that can be something other than industrial - somewhere to go to work, eat out, etc.
 - What is the next level of the museum campus?

Gaps:

- Adequate and accessible transit
- No dining/restaurants experience on a weekday

Challenges:

- Many different construction projects, endless series of efforts
- Public parks, draw from all neighborhoods that is regional attraction
- Decrease in population and diversity
 - Losing population
 - Lack of diversity, increase of segregation
 - Lack of people who are working downtown, hybrid workplace
 - Sales tax gap from people not spending as much downtown
 - Employment is difficult downtown

- Problems with city services, resources, and programs
 - Safety concerns from mismatch of resources
 - More effort by municipal government on city services
 - Infrastructure in place is not being serviced
 - Issues from City not acting on civil services, city does not manage well
 - Park PAC is not hold responsible by Park District
- Crime downtown
 - History of crime (night scene) - violence
- Managing growth in Central Area
- Crime downtown
 - History of crime (night scene) - violence
 - McCormick – Crime perceptions and funding
- Land use issues
 - Change of ownership
 - Events that are not community-centered take up available green space (i.e., Lollapalooza, NASCAR)
 - No overlap from a commercial standpoint - McCormick focused on events
- Most challenged/aged areas and big unknowns
 - Area that is most challenged - investments are aged out
 - New purpose from the east loop - oldest building stock
 - Generational question / impact on commercial
 - Mag Mile area not doing well
 - East / West connections need work - new vision for transit / accessibility
 - Not only the loop anymore - but new connections also to think about
 - How do we connect these neighborhoods?
 - Timing of infrastructure (where infrastructure goes, the economy grows)
 - How do we get to O'Hare in less than 30 minutes?
 - A lot of placeholders... it is going to happen
 - Soldier Field - transportation - how do you get to it?
 - Will the Central Area Plan address this to utilize this space as a driver?

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Policies from different neighborhoods–diversity
 - Ensure a healthier mix + representative of the city
- Vibrant to thrive
- Global competitiveness–infrastructure, resilience to climate change, and jobs
- Transportation = Equity (vision, attitude and safe operations)
- How will the Central Area Plan prioritize and organize?
- Diversity (business/retail standpoint)–authentic/unique for others to enjoy
- Global (world-class) - technological/virtual world opportunities

- How can we create a space where residents, leaders, elected officials support and believe in the selfless model? Avoiding greed
- Diversity of opportunities for job (office, retail, food)–industrial businesses that aren't going anywhere–without advance degrees for living wage jobs
- Access to all
- Urgency – need for a five-year plan (green spaces, connectivity, equity)–building off We Will Chicago
- Diversity–whoever comes we want them to feel welcomed–feel safe, meet other people, new experience

Land Use, Housing & Economic Development - Meeting #2 **(02.23.2023) 6:00-8:00PM**

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Kimberly Bares, Magnificent Mile Association

Lesley Roth, Lamar Johnson Collaborative

Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson, Near South Planning Board

Kumar Kintala, Discovery Partners Institute

Travis Hunter, KPMG

Mike Reschke, The Prime Group

Brian Rueben, Deloitte

Tina Feldstein, Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance

Deborah Gershbein, Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR)

Adam Flickinger, Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR)

Judith Aiello, Resident

Andre Baker, JP Morgan Chase

Peter Holsten, Holsten Chicago

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Bring equity front and center in conversations.**
- **Chicago is a global city, and we need to build on this international reputation as a destination.**
- **Be creative and think out-of-the-box; highlight adventurous food scene, embrace silliness, design for “instaworthy” moments**
- **Address transportation gaps throughout downtown, including access to the lakefront.**

- Housing is happening organically for people that want to live in the loop, it is life choice

Opportunities:

- Improving affordability + access (large enough for all sizes of families)
 - Bringing more residential in the area
 - Big transportation infrastructure moves by the city
 - Build on affordable housing in the Central Area
- Quality retail in the area (activation, think out of the box)
 - Hold developers accountable for this
 - Tuesday downtown vs. Tuesday in Andersonville? Think about it very differently.
- Competing globally and with other large cities
 - Looking at best practices in Montreal, Tokyo, etc.
 - City marketing itself better
 - Daytime and leisure habits - rethink these
 - New days of retail traffic - need to be courageous - someone must be first (tax breaks for people that jump on this plan)
 - What to do with the district we built? Don't have the same people we built it with?
 - What to do with the low return to work #s?
 - How are the Fisher buildings doing? Good test to see this.
 - Updating the buildings (Fulton Market is doing a good job)
- Rethinking YOUR BRAND—authentic, experiential and tech-savvy
 - Don't want to be Fulton, Lincoln Park - want to be welcoming, innovative, authentic in OUR BRAND
 - What is Michigan Avenue 3.0 today?
 - Come into the tech age to be successful
 - Bring + retain people here - Need spots right in the Central area - need experience (food, drink)
- Public transportation needs to be innovative, clean, and safe
 - Use the lakefront - water taxis are necessary - look what NY has been doing forever
- Get people to work, job opportunities, back to work policy
 - Municipal and state employees required to go back to work full week, move away from hybrid work
- Bring people who work and live in the Central Area together
 - Mix of activities work and residencies, many students who live downtown
- Housing and Neighborhoods:
 - Increase affordable housing, as a percentage of AMI differentiate from subsidized housing and other federal housing
 - LaSalle RFP has housing income range that is more accessible and big opportunity

- Proximity of the lakefront, housing that is close enough for people to work/live/play
- Bring what the neighborhoods must downtown, downtown has different personality
- Think of residents of downtown, talk of downtown as a neighborhood
- Carved out spots downtown that are neighborhood, strategy emphasize neighborhood spots in the loop
- Plazas and neighborhood type parks for the residents
- More live close to work initiatives, especially for workers who earn less
- Riverwalk and adaptive reuse:
 - Adaptive reuse of the Loop, done intentionally, zones where there is focus for residents
 - Riverwalk is huge attraction, they can bring this together with other parts of the downtown, Ontario Street corridor

Gaps:

- Transportation and access:
 - Issues of transportation connectivity, get to West Loop to Michigan avenue takes multiple transfers as an example
 - Making the connections for transportation even if they live close, it is a huge burden and cost
 - Need to improve transit - can be gridlock - avoid Fulton Market because it is hard to access or park
- Park space and connectivity:
 - West Loop has one park, riverwalk is an amenity but only along the river
 - Acreage and open space need to be more accessible within walking distance, equity of parks

Challenges:

- Transportation and Access:
 - Strong need for transportation improvements
 - Transit needs to be fast and clean – make it easy to choose transit
 - Chi-line? Needs to address this to bring into the future. (Randolph is the only access, and traffic is horrible)
 - Huge new train station in the west loop (red line + buses) - we need one too
 - No improvements to lakefront access (big infrastructure need)
 - Lakefront for the people - transportation didn't follow along with it
 - Many utilize Uber now but there is surge charge pricing, many people cannot afford to take an Uber to work
- Lost tradition in places
 - Kill the golden goose sometimes (Bronzeville, Pilsen)
 - Love neighborhoods to Death

- Lack of diverse and affordable housing:
 - they cannot afford housing downtown so people come from afar
 - get more affordable housing in the area so they do not have cost of transportation
 - cost of feasibility of class b and c office space to affordable housing
 - people who are critical who are important to downtown companies but need to live closer
 - More live close to work initiatives for those that do not earn a ton of money
 - Need to look at adding parks and open spaces with dense residential areas that are being built and are built
- Reinventing retail and repurposing space:
 - Transit, aging infrastructure, excess office space and what options can be provided for businesses/retail to possibly use that space
 - Mixed use of office space: long term hotel, coworking space, locations for people who are staying long term for work/school
 - Convert into useable space where there is access to schools, community space, parks
 - Bring quality retail (not just service - we have enough)
- Safety and security:
 - Some people are afraid to go downtown, due to the lack of safety and security, more presence on CTA
 - People avoid CTA due to safety and cleanliness, make them clean and beautify
 - Used to be a destination
 - Is perception of crime impacting people's willingness to come back?
 - red line + green line not being used to the same levels
 - impacting growth patterns - people coming back to work
 - Safety and security no matter what is being discussed
 - Parking lots, no presence of safety, police officers used to walk the beats
 - Storefronts that are empty and assets will not go unless there is more safety
- New developments and hurting districts:
 - Some of the new developments are challenging + hurting + pulling focus the old historic areas
 - Property taxes are really hurting people (not just for new residents but existing)
 - Is Printers Row even Printers Row anymore?
 - Density of West Chicago, need to think about public infrastructure, what is needed to support new areas development
 - Worried about safety + larger developments (need to involve the public)

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Creative, thematic, maybe silly–“instaworthy” and “experiential”
- We have been innovative–need to do it again and again
- Thinking about the current and where we need and could be in 20 years
- Transportation Hub–future of Chicago (move and draw people)
- Bring equity to the conversation
- Transportation was the KEY to Chicago and its future (clean, accessible, and safe)
- Food scene

Arts & Culture - Meeting #1 (02.27.2023) 6:00-8:00PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Kristin Larsen, Arts and Business Council of Chicago
 Tweed Thornton, Four Star Initiatives
 Kendra Parzen, Landmarks Illinois
 Bonnie McDonald, Landmarks Illinois
 Roche Schulfer, Goodman Theatre
 Adam Rubin, Chicago Architecture Center
 Ian Spula, Chicago Architecture Center
 Eleanor Gorski, Chicago Architecture Center
 Sara Furr, Field Museum
 Carla Funk, Cliff Dwellers Club
 Marissa Lynn Ford, League of Chicago Theatres
 Rebecca Fons, Siskel Film Center
 Debra Yepa-Pappan, Field Museum
 Joanna Furnans, Chicago DanceMakers Forum
 Mark Kelly, Resident
 Jorge Valdivia, Chicago Latino Theater Alliance
 Eileen Lacario,, Broadway in Chicago
 Courtney Lederer, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
 Nora Gainer, Art Institute of Chicago
 Ann Kalayil, Columbia College
 Greg Cameron, Joffrey Ballet
 Rachel Fink, Lookingglass Theater Company
 Juan Díes, Sones de México Ensemble
 Terrell Johnson, Chicago Philharmonic
 Vivian Teng, Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival

- Chicago Loop Alliance did an economic study of the arts (2016 ish). 2nd largest arts district in the country (NYC). Next city very far behind. We don't act like it! Building this arts district is imperative. More interconnectivity is needed. How do we create more mass and leverage it? Arts and culture are big there.

Opportunities:

- Vacancy
 - Central Area is an entertainment district. Retail #'s going down --> turn those spaces into spaces viable for arts/entertainment. Specifically, theater companies. Lost several spaces over the years. Gallery spaces also could be created. Music/recording spaces as well! Vibrant film community, is that something we can add to?
 - Theater companies need performance space, office space, shop space, rehearsal space, etc.
 - Space is necessary but you also need resources to program the space. The cultural community in Chicago is grossly underfunded. There have been improvements lately, but we need to create a business model to support nonprofit theater. Focus needs to be right and investment
 - Vacant spaces for rehearsal are essential. Some facilities in the central area but more are needed. Lots of empty space to leverage for this.
 - Gives more agency to artists to plan on their own schedules
 - Warehouse space could be turned into many things! Lots of opportunities for the arts + culture.
 - Plan to convert office to residential (would like to see it converted to artist housing, senior housing, well-being spaces, multigenerational communities)
 - Lots of storefront space which create an opportunity for training (temporary or permanently) -- Learning Centers
 - Empty spaces/storefronts (Loop Alliance has helped activate some)
- Accessibility and Connectivity
 - People want to live and visit downtown. How do we make it easier to get to places on foot or bike? We can support these efforts more.
 - The city can also bring back more street closures/shared streets to give people a chance to experience car-free streets downtown. Not just for restaurant patios but for informal gatherings, music and performance, and art installations.
 - EQUITY: Latinos represent +30% of Chicago's population and yet there's little representation in programming downtown.
 - Many ways to create career/ professional development (can be an artist AND something else)
 - Interpretive signage to make things always accessible any time of day
 - Our goal should be to make it more accessible/belonging. Create connectivity to places that are already here for people, but opportunity to remake those hidden gems and other places for a larger mass of people

- What is available to families? Accessibility for strollers.
- Communication
 - Relevance for Chicagoans (strategy with CPS, Park Districts, Libraries, City Colleges)
 - Cliff dwellers has an artist in residence program (connect with each other which is also beneficial; are mentored)
 - Connect residents of Loop (temporary like students); finding ways for their art to be shown
 - How can we curate a holistic experience? Collaborate with orgs to think about full experience
 - More conversations, looking at the barriers, etc. Identify the small collaborations that can grow.
 - CPS needs to be considered too! So many kids don't visit downtown, how do we encourage them to come? Field Trips? School requirements?
 - reframe educational opportunities
 - So many orgs support the central area but don't communicate with one another! We can better connect us all. TIF district similar way to help that happen.
 - We can bring community arts from diverse Chicago neighborhoods into the central area. It has been hard to find networks where they can participate in the downtown area. Open those paths!
- Corporate Partnerships
 - Corporate community support could go a long way.
 - What is Choose Chicago's role? Is there a partnership there?
 - How can we get Choose Chicago to focus on the present day in addition to the future events/partnerships?
 - More investment/money
 - How can World Business Chicago can help uplift
 - Back in 80s and 90s many corps had art in the lobby...would like to see more partnerships
 - Lots of meetings with DCASE, Choose Chicago, Loop Alliance, etc. Everyone always says how important it is, and yet the arts have been unable to create a critical mass/been unable to leverage business community. Need an advocacy effort. City would say to business community that they need to support the arts (and would be consequences for not supporting)

Gaps:

- Placemaking Downtown
 - Encourage vibrancy.
 - Create installations, artist residency programs? Sense of belonging for artists and their communities.
 - More and better green space is needed downtown! Natural attractor for creatives and organic movement. Happy about Grant Park reimagining

- More public artwork. Adds warmth and depth.
- Pioneer Plaza is a big opportunity to reframe the story/to focus
- Sustainability of existing/new centers (neighborhood might be more accessible for people)
- Safety
 - Safety adds to the experience. Lighting can add to the sense of safety. There are things that can be done now easily.
 - Safety is an issue. People might be worried about the L for example. The lighting/parking lots/abandoned buildings etc.
 - Safety when large groups gather; policing (esp. for Black and Brown people)
 - Safety concerns about coming downtown
- Diversity
 - Who gets left out of the conversations? We need to make sure we can get their thoughts
 - Naming is a way to make things more welcoming (limited hosting of Native Artists throughout Chicago, so Native Artists created their own space)
 - Creating a safe space for people (i.e., Native Artists)
 - Getting more kids (since getting culture into young kids lives more likely makes them engaged throughout life)
- Promotion
 - Chicago could do more to promote local artists nationally and internationally

Challenges:

- Downtown as a gathering place
 - It's a ghost town after a show by us on Michigan Avenue
 - Downtown isn't described as a place you hang out in. People go downtown to do something specific. Neighborhoods have their flair and depth. We are a neutral space, but people don't always feel like they belong? Build warmth
 - More public art, culinary arts, etc. but it needs to be intentional
 - It's interesting to me how we're spoke-and-hub when it comes to the workday commute but less so with leisure time. Not necessarily bad, but different than the Manhattan-Outer Borough dynamic
 - Large volunteer group; as Downtown becomes more residential (and students), how can we leverage folks who live in the Loop to be stewards of downtown
 - People go to the Loop for a thing (they may not wander as much) -- safety, storefronts, programming
 - Reimagine who has leisure time and when
 - Areas are empty at various times (and restaurants are closed); especially after the Pandemic

- Outside of 9-5pm and not a lot on weekends unless events
- Spaces and travel
 - The city doesn't own a lot of the land/buildings
 - Where are we having the conversation about who owns the land? Constantly on stolen land?
 - Events draw certain audiences, but it may inadvertently make it hard to access other parts of downtown (i.e., event at Grant Park makes it hard to get to museum campus)
 - Daily transit to museum campus is challenging (people are driving and parking is horrendous)
- Costs
 - Expensive parking
 - It keeps low-income folks from accessing programs downtown, even free ones.
 - Price of entry to institutions/ticketed events. How can the city leverage funding, create grants, etc. to open up more free days. Or a Smithsonian campus
 - Lots of arts orgs bring people through transitory/temporary basis. Housing is expensive. Need vouchers to arts groups
 - Downtown is expensive. ("True Chicagoans don't live Downtown, it's too expensive") Accessibility; welcoming; parking

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Accessibility
- Funding
- Collaboration
- Affordability
- Diversity
- Vibrancy

Land Use, Housing & Economic Development - Meeting #3 **(02.28.2023) 6:00-8:00PM**

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Malek Abdulsamad, Greenstone Partners
Dennis McClendon, South Loop Neighbors
David Wu, Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community
Julie Burros, CMAP
Robin Schabes, River North Residents Association
Brett Weidl, MKSK
Admir Sefo, Next Parking LLC
Sandya Dandamudi, River North Residents Association
Lisa Dzieken, World Business Chicago
Victoria Lakes-Battle, IFF
Mark Hopkins, Chicago Central Area Committee
John Bosca, Neighbors of River West

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Cost of living sets Chicago and its downtown apart from other global cities. We need to nurture and promote that. Including the needs of wage workers in the plan is important to create a better Central Area.**
- **Accessibility and safety often go together.**
- **Diversity is more than a word, it's thinking about who is being left out of data, conversations, and considerations. It means diversity of people, uses, and strategies.**
- **Be more intentional now with our transit networks to set the stage for and accommodate catalytic development and the growth it will bring.**
 - **Our most pressing transit need is probably a Canal (or Clinton) subway. This would integrate quite well both with a "Chicago S-Bahn" that runs some Metra trains through the West Loop, and with a C-shaped circulator taking folks from Union/Ogilvie to Navy Pier/Northwestern Memorial Hospital and to Museum Campus/McCormick Place.**
- **Prioritize residential parks as growth continues to occur.**
- **Foster development of moderate-income senior housing to increase opportunities to age-in-place.**

Please submit 3 words that you feel are essential components of the 20-year vision for Land Use/Housing/Economic Development in the Central Area.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Takeaways/Themes:

- There is existing great use of space in the Central Area with the mag mile, lakefront, and riverfront
- Creativity, innovation, and technology for the future.
- Cost of living sets the Central Area of Chicago apart from other big cities in America – worth continuing to keep it that way.
- Creating people-first spaces is key.
- Including the needs of wage workers into the plan is important to create a better Central Area

Assets:

- Use of Space
 - Networks of open space
 - Riverfront - much residential growth
 - Mag mile to the lakefront
 - Historic key corridors - anchors Google and new residential developments
- Business diversity
 - Exchange of merchants
 - robust business mix
 - Tourism sector/ecosystem bounced back - good job security
 - Chicago's Chinatown is not in the center and competing with others
- Cost of living
 - Real grocery stores with real prices
 - reasonable cost of living
 - Construction looks the same for affordable housing.

- AFFORDABLE OWNERSHIP
- Is it a rental or for-sale? Which one is it? Providing subsidies for someone who is looking to buy.
- City recently headed in the affordable housing
- System of governmental work to be consistent - affordable housing needs to be the right size - ground floor activations - reasonable risk value - adaptable to each district / neighborhood - Quality of life - open space, etc.
- Vacant buildings can become an asset
 - The post office would be an example of a vacant building becoming an asset
 - 90s - east loop vacancies (converted to hotels and dorms)
 - Perhaps the odd low-floor spaces in the converted LaSalle and State St. buildings can make it possible for some of those to return downtown.

Opportunities:

- Thinking to the future
 - We should be considering and planning for autonomous vehicles intentionally now versus reactionary later
 - Develop and partner with people out in the neighborhoods - bring resources, relationships, knowledge
 - Preserve the character
 - Have the DT district be reflective of the demographic makeup of the city
- Age in Place/Housing
 - Moderate-income senior housing. We have a few high-amenity projects like The Clare, but the incredibly good transportation in the South and West Loops make them really good places to age in place, and units for seniors don't need parking stalls and may work very well in older small-floorplate historic buildings. The access to the arts and medical services is already wonderful, but senior projects do need adjacent parks and real supermarkets with supermarket prices.
 - Please consider the legally restricted condos in River West
 - Not only live, but live well
- New Retail Environment
 - We shop differently - retail needs a new face - housing - we want to live and play here - think of the new realities we live in
 - Experiential retail
 - Reimagine Water Tower
 - Activating ground floor retail - SPIF funds
 - Creativity along LaSalle and Mag Mile - lean into these
- Connectivity and Transit
 - walkability of DT (last mile) - more suburb and state movement - more freedom to create local, internal spaces
 - Prioritizing connectivity/transit FIRST can serve to set the stage for catalytic development second. Protecting those amenities as sacred from the start and enabling a strong network for development to build from.

- As we've let the office core drift west, our most pressing transit need is probably a Canal (or Clinton) subway. This would integrate quite well both with a "Chicago S-Bahn" that runs some Metra trains through the West Loop, and with a C-shaped circulator taking folks from Union/Ogilvie to Navy Pier/Northwestern Memorial Hospital and to Museum Campus/McCormick Place.
- leveraging theaters and connecting riverwalk
- Dream for knitting together the intersecting sections - not needing so many tickets to access places/spaces

Gaps:

- Welcoming environment for all
 - Public space coordinator to bring public realm vibrancy
 - Parts of the Central Area seeing great growth/economic advancement - where is the need?
 - Value of public space - inequities of no space during the pandemic
 - Parks for growing residential developments (city impact fees to CDOT) - need real neighborhood parks as residential growth happens
 - Real estate taxes - path to understand the bill / pushing people out of City (moving elsewhere)
 - Diversity - 1) race and color and 2) economic
 - A lesson we should take from NYC before we have an embarrassing situation is to forbid having a "poor door" separate entrance and separate elevators for the affordable units built as part of larger buildings.
- Inclusivity
 - Availability of service workers from the data?
 - Some workers cannot afford downtown
 - Elevate that someone is cleaning and serving the area. Can their everyday needs be met within the Central Area Plan?

Challenges:

- Transportation
 - Traverse into and throughout the Central Area is challenging - impediments - transportation needs work
 - Congestion of traffic on the grid
 - River west -lacking in infrastructure balance - transportation and blue line stops not ADA accessible
- Spatial Concerns
 - Hard to wrap head around the current Central Area boundaries in an ED - so broad and different
 - Boundaries are too large (strategies may be so different)
- Safety
 - Chicago is so dangerous / public safety and public realm improvements

Transportation & Infrastructure and Environment, Climate & Energy - Meeting #1 (03.01.2023) 6:00-8:00PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

David Kralik, Metra

Jane Wilberding, HNTB

Roberto Requejo, Elevated Chicago

Melvin Thompson, Endeleo Institute

Gin Kilgore, Friends of the Parks

Leslie Recht, Grant Park Advisory Council

Kendra Freeman, Metropolitan Planning Council

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **The Central Area needs to be more welcoming to all and ensure equity of access to transit and comfort.**
- **Despite lower numbers of drivers, automobile traffic still poses a risk to pedestrian safety.**
- **Improved communication between and coordination of transit agencies could help to create a more seamless transit experience.**
- **We should look at our waterways and part of our transit infrastructure and ensure access to the lake and along our rivers.**
- **We need to think through how to create connections so that the Central Area feels close-knit to other Chicago neighborhoods.**
- **Investment in a climate-friendly downtown should rely on time-tested tools such as increasing street trees, creating comfortable pedestrian environments, and ensuring transit is reliable.**

Please submit 3 words that you feel are essential components of the 20-year vision for Transportation/Infrastructure/Environment in the Central Area.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Assets:

- Existing infrastructure
 - There are so many existing modes of transportation. (Pace, Metra, El, bikeshare, walking)
 - CREATE Program—Partnership between City, state, transit agencies, and freight railroads that is good for the region (and located downtown), lots of stakeholder coordination; better coordinate passenger and freight rail lines
 - Metra has a project to have an additional line to get into Millennium Park
 - Grant Park Framework Plan (2002) is being reviewed: Public transit to and through Grant Park can be improved (part of complaint is museum campus, including for employees)
- Activity Downtown
 - Pre-Pandemic downtown did have a lot of life to it (in comparison to other US cities or Midwest cities like Cleveland, St. Louis, etc.). We can bring this back.
 -
- Sustainability
 - Lots of concentrations of green space (Millennium Park, Grant Park, etc.)
 - City interested in LEED certified buildings
 - Can build on existing assets (strong transit infrastructure) rather than focusing on new high-tech solutions

Opportunities:

- Safe Streets
 - Timing pedestrian walking lights especially east/west as a subtle way to encourage walking
 - Parts of Memphis have areas that do not allow cars (super pedestrian friendly)
 - First/last mile connection issues with the parks and key destinations within the central area. Lots of opportunities for bikeshare and micro mobility, and improved transit.
 - Designated bus lanes
 - Make space for other modes
- Coordination
 - How can we (Grant Park) get better funding? Renovations are needed.
 - Millennium Park garages run by SPP -- trying to make them ADA
 - Grant Park has a skateboard park that brings in people from across the city - Park District could support it with funding.
 - How to make better use of existing resources (as it relates to climate and energy)? -- green CTA fleet, more use of Divvy, etc.
 - Opportunity to coordinate with businesses to incentivize employees on how to get to work
 - Quality/time of service for public transit – “idea of not ever being afraid of missing a bus is mind altering”
 - Development along rivers (beyond riverwalk) (connection to neighborhoods, recreation, etc.) -- underutilized going south
 - “Have to be an insider to learn how to get around” - Better signage to show people that they can around Central Area on foot or transit rather than taking a Lyft/Uber

Gaps:

- Connectivity
 - Downtown may have the infrastructure, but it's not fully connected to the neighborhoods (i.e., bike lanes)
 - Billions invested Downtown, and only millions going out to neighborhoods in NOF
 - 2M Uber and Lyft rides have taken place within last 3 years within the Central Area
 - Between Metra/CTA/Pace, who is overseeing the planning?
- Inclusion
 - Downtown feels elite and isn't “for the people”
 - Downtown doesn't feel natural and welcoming
 - Depending on race, gender, immigration status, ability, may not be comfortable coming downtown or using different modes; may only be comfortable at certain times of day
 - Accommodate people with disabilities -- those people need to be part of the planning process
- Safety

- Not a tree on many streets, not over bridges (over River or highways) which makes it not pedestrian friendly
- Safe spaces for bikes, scooters, etc.
- Inequality of access/comfort to assets (in other cities, downtown is a place for all residents)

Challenges:

- Car-free use
 - Despite lower numbers of driving, downtown has so many one-way streets and stop and go that it doesn't feel safer as a pedestrian
 - Accident involving a pedestrian at Roosevelt (one-way) and Wabash shows the danger of these sorts of intersections.
 - Stop and go of cars is probably bad for the environment and bad for pedestrian health
- Welcoming environment
 - City seems resistant to anything outside of it (City needs to think more expansively and take lessons learned from other cities)
 - "Am I dressed right to go Downtown?"
 - How do you capture a feeling within the project framework? (There is no pretension, no prejudice)
 - Neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown are gentrifying (which can make it more intimidating)

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Accessibility
- Pedestrian-friendly
- Diversity
- Welcoming to all
- Safe streets

Mayor's Youth Commission - (03.11.2023) 1:00-3:00PM

Important Meeting Link:

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Public transportation can be a deterrent for youth in terms of accessing downtown. Transit challenges include high costs, crowding, and unreliability.**

- Youth of color do not see themselves in downtown, and many feel unsafe due to the high presence of police officers and K9 dogs.
- Downtown is often seen as a special occasion destination and should host more programming and events that appeal to locals, including youth.
- The Central Area is lacking in public places to hang out (more work than leisure oriented). Downtown should offer more community and green spaces for passive uses that could be activated for youth-oriented activities and events.
- Downtown (its shops and restaurants) are very expensive and more catered to tourists than residents.
- Create and incubate a district within Downtown that is designated space for local businesses. This area should be more economically accessible, featuring Black and Latino artists, as well as culture-based restaurants and shops.

Please submit 3 words that you feel are essential components of the 20-year vision for Downtown.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Assets:

- Atmosphere
 - "Love downtown! The busy city life, great restaurants, etc."
 - "I like downtown and how busy it is." I like going to the lake to read by the water"
 - "I really enjoy the scenery. Many tall buildings and beautiful lights. I also love going to the lakefront for the 4th of July and watch fireworks"
 - "I feel excited when I go downtown, especially when I see the high rises. Has a lot of shops and restaurants that are not around my neighborhood. Every once and a while type of trip".
- Things to do
 - "I love how involved downtown is like the St. Patrick's, the ducks, pride, the tree"

- "I love the museums; they are beautiful, and I love how they offer free days for the public."
- "Programs downtown are nice. So much to do and walkable"

Opportunities:

- Offerings for youth
 - "Opportunity: certifications for teens (pharmacy)"
 - "Museums could amp up their offerings for teens"
 - "Teen arts pass is underutilized"
 - "More free events needed"
 - "More independent coffee shops!"
 - "Not just adding more - create a holistic space where local/smaller business makes sense"
- Transit
 - "Expand downtown! More buses maybe cable cars like San Fran. Rentable e-bikes. Another planetarium. Try to diversity downtown's culture"
 - "Cheaper parking. More of a film culture, wish people used the city as a filming location instead of LA + NY"
 - "Future: affordable ways to get around. Designated taxis or trolleys"
 - "In terms of transportation, maybe include small maps that show small shops. Making trains more vibrant and cleaner."
 - "More bike lanes"
 - "Airport style shuttle or tram for shorter distances during events. Increase overall frequency"
- Adaptive reuse
 - "Transform some office space into more housing/museums"
 - "Use solidier field for arts and culture"

Gaps:

- Diversity
 - "Downtown not representative of neighborhoods"
 - "More culture representation for the people who live there."
 - "I expect to see more recognition for Black/African American artists"
 - "Need more low-income representation"
 - "Need more local businesses"
 - "More recognition of restaurants and shops that are culture based to emphasize the diversity of culture"
- Art downtown
 - "More art to make downtown more vibrant. Can be art by youth for more recognition. Murals."
 - "Need more creative spaces"
- Getting around
 - "Delays on train + safety on red line"

- "I envision downtown w/ less car traffic. Higher use of public transport and walking/walkable streets"
- Spaces or opportunities for kids + students
 - No use of downtown outside of summertime for festivals (Lollapalooza, Holi) and to see some of the highlights (Bean, Millennium Park)
 - "People can be rude to school kids - it's very work not leisure orientation"
 - "Need more community spaces"
 - "Need more green space"
 - "Field Museum picks days student can't go (for free days)"

Challenges:

- Expensive
 - "No, I don't want to live downtown. Too expensive and too noisy"
 - "Food could be expensive depending on where you go"
- Transit
 - "Always by driving"
 - "Train smelly, crowded, but fast"
 - "Increase frequency! Especially for rush hour + events + beyond. Tracking system unreliable. Get Transit better than Ventra"
- Intimidating for non-white kids + students
 - Many police downtown so can feel unsafe for minority populations
 - Parents tell them to "be careful and be lowkey"
 - "Rich white people comes to mind when I think of downtown"
 - "Geared toward adults"
 - "Dogs (k-9s) intimidating" (Police dogs)
 - "It's very crowded on the streets and sidewalks"
- Downtown isn't a thought of destination
 - No NEED to go Downtown
 - Going downtown is usually for a special occasion
 - "Catered to tourists, not Chicagoans"

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Transit
- Diversity
- Community
- Accessibility

'Catch-All' FG - Meeting #1 (03.30.2023) 11:30AM-1:00PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF):

- Breakout #1: Arts & Culture / Lifelong Learning: [LINK](#)
- Breakout #2: Land Use / Housing / Economic Development: [LINK](#)
- Breakout #3: Transportation & Infrastructure / Environment / Climate & Energy: [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Joan Pomaranc, AIA Chicago
David Powe, Active Transportation Alliance
Kevin Fitzpatrick, Auditorium Theatre
Omar Farooqi, Analytix Solutions
Jorge Valdivia, Chicago Latino Theater Alliance
Cortney Lederer, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Michael Edwards, Chicago Loop Alliance
Richard Gamble, Chicago Loop Alliance & Realized Value Collaborative, LLC
Isabel Fischbein, Cliff Dwellers Club
Elizabeth Ginsberg, CMAP
Laurent Pernot, Columbia College Chicago
Kalindi Parikh, Current
Sarah Hallock, DePaul University
Joe Schwieterman, DePaul University
David Baker, DePaul University
Kyle Sussman, Discover Financial Services
Tweed Thornton, Four Star Initiatives
Amy Heldman, Friends of the Chicago River
James Wales, Grant Park Advisory Council
Leslie Recht, Grant Park Advisory Council
Jane Wilberding, HNTB
Jennifer Clark, Loyola University
Kendra Parzen, Landmarks Illinois
Nicol Chervenak, MPEA
Matt Letourneau, Neighbors of West Loop
May Toy, Neighbors of West Loop
Lyle Logan, Northern Trust
Jonathan Snyder, North Branch Works
Jennifer Kunde, Northwestern University
Bob Wislow, Parkside Realty, Inc.
Cindy Plante, Rogers Park Business Alliance
Judith Aiello, Streeterville Organization Active Residents
Malek Abdulsamad, Streeterville Organization Active Residents
Gail Spreen, Streeterville Properties
Octavion Thomas, Street Plus/Chicago Loop alliance
Julie Darling, West Loop Community Organization

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Breakout #1: Arts & Culture / Lifelong Learning

Assets:

- Space
 - Block 37 is in some ways a hidden gem because of all the space in there (could that be a focal point for a place to get all the information?). Lots of space for pop-ups within that building
 - There was an opening of a VR experience (where Disney Store) used to be
- Existing Programs
 - Cultural Center is a bit of an incubator in its own way we can do more of that
 - Great energy around Sundays on State and other events from Chicago Loop Alliance that could be layered/supported/expanded
 - Open House Chicago
- Public Access
 - Organizations like The Cliff Dwellers have programs and spaces that are open to the public
 - We bear a responsibility as institutions in Downtown in helping the democratization of offerings Downtown and through pop-ups
 - Democratization geographically and with programs/orgs

Opportunities:

- Wayfinding Resources
 - Both physical and virtual
 - Develop an app with a self-guiding walking tour for the Wabash Arts corridor
 - Map arts and culture organizations that are less known to help [get](#)-visibility
- Welcoming More Organizations + Creating Exposure
 - The Latino Theater moved to the Cultural Center meaning other neighborhood theaters can be welcomed downtown as well for programming
 - A cafeteria will bring a restaurant...how do we do that with the arts? Can the Central Area be a host for pop-up experiences to help bring people into broad exposure?
 - Creating connections outside of Central Area and getting folks to come to the Central Area – lots of opportunity for partnerships here
- Expanding Offerings
 - Could revive things - Circa 2013-2014 there was an idea for 24-hour arts Downtown (another City had done it before like Milan) ...there was an idea that there would be art at every corner you turned (alley, etc.)
 - Artist-in-residence program that brings people in, would be great to see larger organizations model this to be an equitable third space

Gaps:

- Consolidated Information
 - Need a place to know what is going on Downtown at all given times
 - Choose Chicago tries to do that, but Chicagoans may never think to look there
- Lost Arts Programs + Events
 - Around the Coyote was a non-profit that supported, promoted, and made accessible Chicago's multidisciplinary arts community
 - Events that used to happen that aren't there now
- Partnerships
 - There is a structure where universities work together, but there is less of a collaboration. City has not leveraged its role as a convener
 - Lots of organizations compete for the same dollars/donors (for education reform for example). There is a lot of duplication, which can be good but also sometimes act as competitors
 - Collaboration between Latino companies and other for international film festivals. Also meet with universities (but not all)
- Diversity
 - Larger institutions have a very white audience (for a reason)
 - Downtown has a reputation of being unwelcoming for some communities
 - Art is by White people, attendance is very white, places are very big. How do we expose people to more approachable experiences?

Challenges:

- Highlighting Lesser-Known Organizations
 - How do we highlight hidden gems / those off the beaten path?
 - Cultural resources outside the Central Area can seem daunting to go to
 - There are hidden gems, probably challenging to create a platform. It would be great for people to select an experience and go from there. "Yes and" to introduce people to newer institutions
- Wayfinding
 - Restore confidence in public transportation
- Use of Space + Feel of Central Area
 - Vacant retail spaces are not welcoming and create a feeling of apprehension. This creates domino effect for collaboration where no one wants to go
 - More housing (like LaSalle Street Reimagined)
 - Retail devastation from Pandemic (aesthetics, degradation of infrastructure)
 - Downtown as a place where people just go to, doesn't quite work. The idea of live, work, play has taken over (and quickly from the Pandemic)
 - Downtown during day feels different than it did pre-Pandemic
- Audience
 - Tourism is a different audience than residents

Breakout #2: Land Use / Housing / Economic Development

Assets:

- Walkability
 - New central area is a group of walkable 15-minute cities - River North, Loop, South Loop, Fulton Market, Lakeshore east, all places of their own, but part of a larger downtown
- Location
 - Center of Chicagoland (people in Chicago love their downtown), attractive to suburbanites per visitation, the Loop still attracting new companies, the city attracting high tech companies, great place to begin a career
- Existing Infrastructure + Population
 - Density, public transit, relative safety, tourism and visitor attractions, lake, and Riverwalk
 - A lot of development in the West Loop, used to be low density neighborhood and now high density
 - 58,000 university students, growing residential population, world class arts & cultural institutions
 - Attractions that are provided by the city and loop alliance
 - Concerts at Grant Park and other events created by the city
 - Amazing convention and meeting space, McCormick Place
 - A lot of people who live downtown also work downtown
 - Development in the West loop is unprecedented, a lot of cultural values

Opportunities:

- Available Land + Buildings
 - Include opportunities to reuse existing buildings and buildings that are not historic from office space to other uses
 - Using large parcels of old railroad or industrial land in a way that fits into existing city fabric and isn't isolated enclaves.
 - Vacant land for use of different projects such as large-scale developments and other community-focused projects
- Healthcare Marketing
 - Look at the institutions that comprise the area such as medical tourism, new tech start-ups, medical facilities
 - We have the greatest medical institutions and best rehab facility; we need to improve marketing in this area
- Branding Downtown
 - Post pandemic the value proposition for downtown has to be more compelling. WFH, new technology and changing lifestyle demand an exciting downtown that beats customer, worker, visitor expectation-
 - South Loop previously was not a part of people's idea of what is downtown – add campaigns including them-
 - Need central area to be a nexus for other areas that are around the central area

- Need to accentuate the unique attributes that are different parts of Central Area, work so that not everything is homogenous
- Transit
 - Improve connectivity for public transportation in Streeterville and Navy Pier
 - TOD must incentivize transit usage
 - How is it going to change movement patterns once there is more residential downtown, have to think through impacts
 - Issues with transportation in terms of connection it brings to the entire City and safety concerns
 - We want to see growth in ridership, but can we handle the safety issues that come with more people riding the train/bus

Gaps:

- Increasing Stock
 - Residential and office stock should be increased
- Affordable housing
 - Very few affordable housing units, we have low-income housing near Skinner Park, need to talk about low-income housing when talking about affordable housing
 - Seniors need low-income housing due to needed amenities (transportation, attractions)
 - Moderate income housing, people who have trouble finding apartments downtown such as healthcare workers
- Green Space
 - The city has not allocated enough green space to meet the demand of increase in residents
 - Quality of life issue that there is not enough park/green space for the residents in the downtown area

Challenges:

- Vacancy + Retention (keeping people here)
 - Fill storefronts with something that goes beyond Fortune 500 companies
 - Promote college tourism and keep the students that are graduating from Chicago
- Safety
 - Is it safe to go downtown, how does somebody feel safe on the train?
 - How to make people feel comfortable going downtown and easy to commute downtown?
 - With a growing Central Area, police need to re-evaluate how they patrol downtown
 - We have lost a lot of students due to the safety concerns on public transportation
- Space
 - Competing uses of the area, integrating all the uses is biggest challenge

- Residential is coming up against industrial buildings and how do you balance those areas

Breakout #3: Transportation & Infrastructure / Environment / Climate & Energy

Assets:

- Existing Public Space
 - The river is an asset and needs to be considered. Walkability and bike trails. Connected Blue/Green corridor. Extending the riverwalk south! Can bring more people into the area
- Public Transit Connectivity
 - Loop Link is an asset to build on! Connecting our transit for easy travel. Water taxis also could be useful
 - Metra is fantastic - that could be the key. Encourage folks to use it more. Increase frequency

Opportunities:

- Improve Public Transit
 - Improve bus lanes and add elevated bus boarding. Opportunities to speed up buses. Lots of space taken up by single-use vehicles. Helping working class Chicagoans is critical. Build on Better Streets for Buses plan.
 - Expansion of BRT and Loop Link
 - Roosevelt Road for example, you can out-walk buses. Dedicated bus lanes would go a long way
 - Water taxi improvement! Can make it connect with other public transit
 - Metra is in the process of Regional Rail. Less centered on commuter centric 9-5 and more on frequent service 7 days a week. That's on everyone's radar
 - More protected bike lanes and bike parking
 - We need to lay out a vision for biking in the Central Area
 - Re-evaluate how the CTA is operated. What do we allow to happen to our vital transit systems? How can we make the system run better?
- Collaboration
 - Better working partnership with CDOT, IDOT, City, Park District
 - Having a coordinated, gov, approach to bike usage, parking, trails and public space is important
- Electric Vehicles
 - EV charging stations are something that could be encouraged. The Millennium garages already have EV charging stations but there could be charging stations across the Downtown
 - Infrastructure for electric vehicles needed: more people are buying them
 - More electric busses
 - Electric transit is more sustainable than cars - even EVs
 - EVs are also 2 wheels - important to keep in mind (Scooters and bikes)

- EVs are expensive still even with subsidies. Large sums of money leave working class people out. Improve transit because parking takes up valuable space for housing and space for people. Density over single-use initiatives
- Increasing Public Space
 - We should be supporting riverfront development and connectivity with green spaces. Also supportive of more opportunities to engage/educate the public on climate related issues as it relates to our waterways, especially in busy public spaces like the riverwalk
 - Complete Northerly Island: it is in a state of no progress to - If it's an important asset for the city, then assessing the progress to date and vision, it to completion should be an objective
 - Need to look at the Museum Campus Plan, which proposes to close Solidarity Drive and to add a new ice-skating rink near Northerly Island
 - Grant Park is in a framework process. Looking at very similar issues - opportunity to coordinate. Looking to convert some of Grant Park to butterfly gardens and things like that. This plays into sustainability
 - Regarding parks and open space: in areas with development a lot of the green space is private. Making it accessible is important so anyone can enjoy it. Also leverage the 78 to add more open space
 - City is making big efforts to connect neighborhoods to the lakefront south of McCormick – need to do that in Central Area

Gaps:

- Transit Connectivity
 - Huge gap: CTA and Metra are not connected
- Public Space for All
 - Grant Park is going to be closed off for a large portion of the summer - this is a neighborhood park, and no residents were consulted before making these huge decisions
 - Parks are only great if everyone has access to them. Southbank Park is great. Native vegetation and not just turf grass.
 - Highways cut you off as a pedestrian and biker

Challenges:

- Transit Maintenance
 - Ghosting is a huge problem on the bus and train. How do we expect people to get to the central area if they can't count on our public transit? They're not going to wait 45 min for the next bus or train.
 - Improvement of quality, cleanliness, operational management and leadership, and safety & crime.
- Transit Safety
 - A Metra conductor walks up and down which is what helps. How can we bring that to the CTA and then bring the positives from the CTA to Metra?
 - Conductors on the trains would be so helpful. And adding way more frequency.

- My household has given up on CTA because of the ghosting, the lack of reliability, and the bad behavior that happens on every train. Metra doesn't have these problems - thus we've shifted to Metra.
- Lakeshore Drive aspect of biking - getting across the road. So many fatalities and incidents. The biking community and CDOT have had issues.
- Keeping Promises to Chicagoans
 - We've fallen short on what was promised and delivered with Northerly Island. No vision of the previous themes.
 - There is no priority - none of the promised growth or activities have come to fruition.

VISIONING

Takeaways/Themes:

- Expansion of pedestrian and cycling spaces
- Collaboration between organizations and the city
- Creating a space where people feel safe

CENTRAL AREA PLAN |

SECOND ROUND FOCUS GROUP

SUMMARIES

Lifelong Learning - (10.16.2023) 12:00-1:30PM

Important Meeting Links

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

David Baker, DePaul University
Lionel Kimble, Chicago Urban League
Joe Schwieterman, DePaul University
Brendan DuBois, After School Matters
Melissa Mister, After School Matters
Octavion Thomas, Chicago Loop Alliance

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Access to diverse, paid learning and professional development opportunities with reduced obstacles (safe and affordable transportation) for youth are critical to offering new pathways to their futures.**
- **Intergenerational and senior/retired persons learning opportunities can be interconnected. For the next 20 years, to foster continued and undiluted experiential education in the Central Area, young people and seniors can connect and understand the space from various perspectives.**
- **Through programming and planning, develop engagement opportunities for first generation students to have opportunities to advance careers.**
- **The planning and development of youth/educational programs must be developed intentionally to ensure that the wealth of diversity represented within Chicago is also reflected within the Central Area.**

LIFELONG LEARNING – THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 – Diverse Learning and Professional Development Opportunities for Youth

- Building a collective of interested parties to work together (employers, institutions, government)
- Inclusivity does not happen without intention – need to plan program with diverse youth in mind (and the barriers they face – schedule, transportation)
- Need support from corporations
- Paid internships can be part of the solution to building the in-office workplace and small labor market
- Build out of school and after school programs that can provide guidance, mentoring and partnerships
- Public transportation has cause safety concerns and should create an opportunity for staff to assist those commute downtown
- Create a program to give free CTA fare cards to students and those who have youth programming in the summer such as After School Matters
- Solidify relationship between universities and civic organizations, foundations, government to create more investments in the Loop
- Universities trying to figure out how to maintain enrollment as they have seen a drop off in population
- Expand the lifelong learning offerings and think beyond the downtown to provide access to these offerings

#2 – Expand Workforce Development Opportunities

- Interns bring vitality to workforce
- Many institutions have invested in their downtown infrastructure and depend on the success of the Central Area
- Demographic population decrease had impacted the variety of learning opportunities
- Expand reach to engage learners to replace loss of standard demographic

#3 – Accessibility to Learning

- Public transportation for students is important such as free transit and developing comradery so they do not have to ride alone
- Give access to more paid internships than unpaid internships
- Importance of bringing different learners into higher education and work opportunities as a pathway to their future

#4 – Coordination Between Institutions

- Institutions have made significant investments into facilities
- Institution, civic, foundation and government coordination
 - Build a group of interested parties to discuss this issue through regular meetings affiliated with this new committee
- Cross institution collaboration with internship programs to create opportunities with higher education but more importantly to build a pipeline for access to jobs

#5 – Learning Opportunities for Retired Persons/Seniors

- Senior learning needed to replace regular 18 to 26 demographic as it is projected to decline

#6 – Intergenerational Learning

- Improve engagement with cultural institutions
- An idea is for young people to be trained as docents for them to learn more about careers within museums
- Older students are coming back for non-degree certificates
- Plan for the 78 megadevelopment and other loop developments to host high school students
- Discovery Partners Institute (DPI) as an educational system for the city not just a specific location
- Trying to find ways to brand and market for creating bridges between younger and older generations

PUBLIC HEALTH + SAFETY - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 – Safety

- Improve the perception, especially from those outside of Chicago
- Have security staff and ambassadors on public transportation that can help to increase safety measures on the CTA
- Due to problems with CTA, universities investing in private transportation
- Create spaces that are welcoming for teens and programmed for teens that they can access
- Work on a holistic plan for safety that does not only focus on crime in the downtown but implements purposeful programs in the neighborhoods

#2 - Holistic Approach to Addressing Homelessness

#3 - Addressing Public Health and Safety Concerns Through Integrated Services and Partnerships

- Organizations involved with youth activities can work together to have conversations and start addressing issues through an increase in resources

#4 - Policing and Crime

- Safety needs to be managed considering all generations
 - Public safety officials need to remember what it's like to be a kid and not think about how to criminalize normal behaviors from youth instead how to engage them
- Over policing is a problem, specifically with Black kids, the approach must change

#5 - Cleanliness

- The cleanliness of CTA is a barrier and can be addressed through collaboration between CTA, CPD, and universities.

CENTRAL AREA OVERVIEW WORDS

Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture where downtown is today
15 responses



Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture how the Central Area Plan links to the City as a whole
8 responses



Please submit 3 words that you feel capture what you'd like to see for the future of downtown
3 responses

pulsing
reimagined
engaging



Land Use, Housing and Economic Development - (10.16.2023)

5:00-6:30PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Michael Edwards, Chicago Loop Alliance

Sam Toia, Illinois Restaurant

Julie Darling, West Loop Community Organization

Lee Golub, Golub & Company

Chris Hall, SOM

Quintin Primo, Capri Investment Group

James Letchinger, JDL Development

Patrick Allen, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

Nicol Chervenak, Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

Gail Spreen, Streeterville Properties

Kimberly Bares, Magnificent Mile Association

Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson, Near South Planning Board

Randall Blakey, Near North Unity Project

Mike Reschke, The Prime Group

Brian Rueben, Deloitte

Judith Aiello, Resident

Deborah Gershbein, Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR)

Malek Abdulsamad, Greenstone Partners

Farzin Parang, BOMA

Rob Johnson, BOMA

Sandya Dandamudi, River North Residents Association

Robin Schabes, River North Residents Association

Mark Hoplamazian, Hyatt Hotels
Brett Weidl, MKSK
Mark Hopkins, Chicago Central Area Committee
Julie Burros, CMAP
Erin Lavin Carbonargi, Urban ReSOLVE
Victoria Lakes-Battle, IFF
Kendra Parzen, Landmarks Illinois
Walter Burnett, Alderman of 27th Ward
Jacqueline Hayes, Hayes Retail
Kyle Sussman, Resident
Dave Kostelansky, Lake Shore Park Advisory Council
Joan Pomaranc, AIA Chicago
Jay Lubinsky
Robert Fojtik, Choose Chicago
Romila Aloysius
John Bosca, Bosca Realty
Josh Romunik
Bernie Earll

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Make transit and infrastructure investments to accommodate current and projected residential growth. This can include reducing auto traffic to increase ridership on the CTA.**
- **Create an environment where downtown is seen as a neighborhood. A neighborhood should include grocery stores, parks, reliable public infrastructure, schools and health facilities.**
- **Support affordable units built downtown by surrounding them with neighborhood amenities that help people stay long-term.**
- **Plan a downtown that serves as an experience. Use the concept of downtown as our base to have it benefit us as an economic engine that supports neighborhoods.**

LAND USE - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Transit and Infrastructure Investments to Accommodate Current and Projected Residential Growth

- Improve safety by adding more security and technology on CTA, specifically on the Red Line
- Develop strategic mobility hubs to connect people between multiple forms of transit
- Increased enforcement against double parking
- Make the CTA a taxing body to remove fares and increase funding for transit projects and existing service
- Create beautiful streetscapes to encourage pedestrian and bike infrastructure

#2 - Downtown as a Neighborhood

- Support attraction of neighborhood amenities and services such as grocery stores
- Streamline the process to allow restaurants and business to use streets for outdoor purposes and improve pedestrian accessibility
- Integrate more dog parks, pocket parks and play spaces
- Improved infrastructure for running and biking process connecting to existing infrastructure
- Reduction in rental rates to allow more small businesses to come downtown and have pop-ups and services for first-floor retail. Include subsidies for new tenants
- Activate empty storefront with local art

#3 - Creative Reuse of Historic Buildings

- Create other uses of historic buildings that go beyond residential
- Possibility of use for schools, non-profits, pantries, etc. that can help benefit the community

#4 - New Development Potential

#5 - Central Area closes too early

HOUSING + NEIGHBORHOODS - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Ensure Neighborhood Amenities around Affordable Units

- Amenities should be for all residents
- Public policy initiatives to support private investment
- Affordable childcare
- Neighborhood pop-ups and an increase in opportunities for locally owned storefronts
- Increase connectivity to South and West sides
- Utilize more tax incentives and TIFs to move toward this goal
- Use technology to accelerate change such as partnerships with Google and Salesforce
- Partner with stakeholders to work on greening and decarbonization efforts
- Promote initiatives like LaSalle Street Reimagined since capital is made available through these programs for infrastructure and housing

#2 - Planning for the Future

- Equity in development and ownership access
- Think big: start to see what other cities are doing and copy what they do
- Plan for an active transportation future that creates a safer space for cyclists and improves public transit
- Use areas that can act as dual spaces and help integrate open spaces with natural spaces
- More mixed-use corridors to have amenities close to people and help them stay close to home
- Focus on corridors such as State, LaSalle, and Wacker Streets

- Create more hobby-based businesses such as art classes and swim classes
- Public transit must adapt to support mixed-use districts

#3 - Lack of Affordability

- Affordable childcare for parents
- Provide housing for business owners and employees who work downtown
- Increase housing for recent graduates
- Build more deeply affordable housing for those who cannot afford to live downtown
- Work on building more housing in Chicago as a whole

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Downtown as an experience

- In preparation for summer festivals create permanent festival grounds
- Preservation of theatres as cultural and historical attractions
- Create a centralized calendar of events that people can search online
- Increasing the number of places for people to sit and gather downtown can help create a safer, welcoming environment
- More low-cost parking and free trolleys that take you to downtown attractions
- IRA investment tax credit marketing

#2 - Position Chicago as a City of the Future

- Wayfinding signage makes downtown look dated and needs updating to develop new infrastructure
- Think radically about how historic buildings can be used to create innovation hubs and urban farming opportunities
- Focus on public realm by playing up our walkability
- Make the Central Area more senior-friendly
- Focus on active transportation opportunities and micro-mobility

#3 - Downtown as a gateway to Chicago's neighborhoods

- Focus on the use of food to help accentuate and attract people downtown
- Market neighborhoods with local restaurants
- Bring in younger populations for jobs and training positions
- Offer entry-level training and inherent model for union partnerships
- Attract a larger workforce downtown so we can attract more businesses downtown
- Developers should pay into a neighborhood opportunity fund to create new ideas and housing projects

#4 - Foster local entrepreneurship

- Program connecting local business to vacant storefronts
- Use older buildings to create small business incubators
- IRA investment tax credit marketing

PUBLIC HEALTH + SAFETY - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Safety

- To create a holistic approach to safety you need to create partnerships and interrelationships
- Increase CTA ridership and have more eyes on the street
- Balanced approach of bringing people back to work for those who can and want to come back to office

#2- Holistic approach to addressing homelessness

- Urban farming potential opportunities to help create job security and provide a reliable food source
- If you do not have access to a safe place to sleep, you must have access to mental health resources, job opportunities and temporary, affordable housing opportunities
- An improvement of interconnectivity and oversight are needed for intentional, cohesive housing for the homelessness
- Full holistic support for the homeless that centers on mental health resources and job equity

#3 - Policing and crime

- Additional police staff, especially on business corridors, that would include more foot patrols
- Currently relying on sheriff's office and need to shift the reliance back to the Chicago Police Department

#4 - Cleanliness

- Channel graffiti in a more artistic way, a potential program with DCASE

#5 - Addressing public health and safety concerns through integrated services and partnerships

- Urban farming that would take vacant and obsolete office space and use it for farming. People would have to rely on technology to grow food within office space or other buildings for re-use. This would allow an element of internships and education for youth to learn about urban farming.

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture what you'd like to see for the future of downtown
35 responses



Arts + Entertainment - (10.17.2023) 12:00-1:30PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Cortney Lederer, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Nora Gainer, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Eleanor Gorski, Chicago Architecture Center
Eileen Lacario, Broadway in Chicago
Juan Díes, Sones de Mexico Ensemble
Marissa Lynn Ford, League of Chicago Theatres
Emily Long, Siskel Film Center
Terrell Johnson, Chicago Philharmonic
Bonnie McDonald, Landmarks Illinois
Philip Bahar, Chicago Humanities Festiva
Roche Schulfer, Goodman Theatre
Steven Strohmeier, Field Museum
Aurelia Fisher Cohen, Lookingglass Theatre
Nathan Bakkum, Columbia College
Joan Pomaranc, AIA Chicago
Julie Treumann, Driehaus Museum

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Focus on the promotion of Arts + Entertainment events and offerings for people to enjoy, especially those that are free/low-cost.**

- **Incorporate the creation for the re-use of spaces for art and cultural programming that invites a diverse audience.**
- **Prioritize the cultural exchange opportunities between the downtown and neighborhoods to help create partnerships.**
- **Effective collaboration with different Arts + Entertainment spaces to help create stable careers with affordable housing opportunities.**

ARTS + ENTERTAINMENT - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Promotion of events and offerings

- Improve promotion for tourists and Chicagoans to learn about the different destinations within Chicago
 - City funding can support entertainment reporters by asking them to assist in the creation and promotion of a central database
- Sell full experience such as the use of theatres and concert venues along with restaurants and other local businesses
- Cultural exchange for creative reuse for lower cost and promotion of events
- More optimism about the return of attendance after the pandemic than philanthropy
 - Philanthropy is interested in supporting art where it supports our neighborhoods
- Arts and entertainment need to continue to be relevant
- Create a database for non-commercial event listing for locals and tourists to find available art entertainment options in the city
- Improve the Chicago banner process to improve the promotion of arts and entertainment

#2 - Creative re-use of spaces for art and cultural programming

- Use vacant storefronts for community groups, especially the theatre community that needs more space
 - There is no foreseeable return of bricks and mortar retail, so arts-based reuse is a way to diversify the uses of downtown
 - If there is reuse of spaces for music concerts, galleries, etc. businesses need to know that these spaces can become permanent
 - Promote small businesses in empty storefronts by displaying window art and art on the walls for local artists
 - Short-term re-use opportunities for multiple organizations to partner and be able to afford a space for a pop-up
- Downtown Chicago has vibrant street traffic and creating more street art will add more vibrancy to the experience
- Create flex space for transformative programming that small businesses can take advantage of
- Schedule meetings with larger commercial real estate groups with vacant spaces to discuss infrastructure and funding

- 360 observation towers can highlight local artists and think about other spaces that can promote the arts
- Improve transportation access to these spaces, especially museum campus

#3 - Cultural exchange between downtown and neighborhoods

- Connections between organizations need to be prioritized
- Collaborative programs with artists from Central Area and regions around downtown
- Inspire restaurants and theatres to have a showcase downtown to help uplift artists
- Create a launching pad to make outings and explore activities that go from downtown to neighborhoods
- Organize an art series campaign downtown that showcases the cultural riches of the neighborhood and adds to diversity of entertainment options downtown
- Add neighborhood cultural ambassadors to invite people and go door to door to invite people to events

#4 - Free and low-cost events

- Increase access to more arts and entertainment events
- Improve transit connectivity and user experience between destinations by welcoming different backgrounds
- Continue to work with schools, park districts and libraries to connect with arts and entertainment
- Promote Chicago theatre week to help build future paying audiences for organizations
- Plan a subsidizing program for many to attend different events at a lower cost or free
- Improved access to transportation and a reduction in the cost of transportation will allow others to access more events

#5 - Make downtown a more livable place for artists

- Improve the concerns of safety and cost of living
- Increase activities and events to attract people retail, business and restaurants
- Create affordable housing that is designated specifically for artists and employees of arts venues who work downtown

PUBLIC HEALTH + SAFETY - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Holistic approach to addressing homelessness

- The increase in homelessness has increased the perception of safety for attendees and staff around the museum campus
 - Identify a location to create a tent city as a temporary location for them to live so they can receive more resources in a central location
- Utilize vacant spaces/lots for transitional affordable housing and migrant housing
- Give access to arts and culture for people of all incomes and backgrounds

- Creative solutions for the newly arrived immigrants and refugees to address their needs for income, childcare, learning a new language and learning about the new country they are in

#2 – Policing and Crime

#3 - Addressing public health and safety concerns through integrated services and partnerships

- Look back at the Healthy Chicago 2.0 Plan to see the integrated public health approaches and look innovatively in public health and our well-being
- Copy what LA is doing through their adaptive reuse organization and creation of tiny houses in the downtown area
- Partnerships between artistic groups and social service agencies can help implement creative solutions
- Moving people and causing displacement does not solve housing issue

#4 - Safety

- Install clear markings and signs for videos that might make people feel safe
- Homelessness has caused an increased perception of safety for attendees and staff
- Mental health resources that are prompted by social workers can help many

#5 - Cleanliness

- Chicago as a clean city is an asset that needs to be maintained.
- Cleanliness and improved lighting can help with the perception of safety.

CENTRAL AREA OVERVIEW WORDS

Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture where downtown is today
39 responses



Please submit 3 words that you feel capture how the Central Area Plan links to the City as a whole
22 responses



Please submit 3 words that you feel capture what you'd like to see for the future of downtown
26 responses



Environment, Climate, Energy and Transportation - Meeting #4 (10.16.2023) 6:00-7:30PM

Important Meeting Links:

Miro Board Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

Menti Export (PDF): [LINK](#)

List of Participants:

Leslie Recht, Grant Park Advisory Council
Jane Wilberding, HNTB
James Wales, Grant Park Advisory Council
Michael Lange, Chicago Park District
Dan Thomas, Metra
Hugo Coronado, MPC

Ryan McCray, Sierra Club Chicago
Quinn Kasal, CTA
David Powe, ATA
Jeffrey Sriver, CDOT
Brian Blankstein
Joan Pomaranc, AIA Chicago
Jennifer Henry, CTA
Jaime Ponce, Millenium Garages
Clem Taylor

TAKEAWAYS + THEMES

- **Enhancing transportation experiences across modes is important to expanding the vitality of Chicago's Downtown.**
- **Providing Chicagoans and visitors with reliable and safe transportation options is necessary to transitioning the Central Area into a dynamic downtown accessible by all.**
- **Auto reduction and the implementation of green infrastructure in the Central Area can serve as a model for being environmentally friendly and sustainable.**
- **Environmental and climate awareness campaigns and programming is a way to cement Chicago's position as a global city for the next 20 years.**

THEMES OF TRANSPORTATION + INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CENTRAL AREA

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 – Connect the Grid

- Need high functioning system with options across modes
 - How can we address growing demand for transit on the periphery of the traditional Loop -- getting around without having to go in and then back out (especially by rail)?
- Connecting others to/in Downtown
 - Connect the grid is the common factor to all other transportation aspects
 - Provide more wayfinding, especially for less frequent users and visitors
 - Provide linkages to other parts of the city
- Facilitate movement around Central Area through mode upgrades that includes more bike lanes and bus pads, especially with land uses changes

#2 – Reliable Transit

- Service boards need to address reliability
 - Must consider what reliable means - frequency and/or showing up on time
- Safety is equal to reliability
 - Prioritize buses over cars

- Dedicated bus lanes
- Protected bike lanes
- Ensure dedicated loading zones/pickup/drop-off are used
- Relationship of downtown density and transit access
 - Density doesn't work well without "good" transit -- how do we define "good" transit?
- Need to meet user expectations
- Facilitate visitors travel to downtown with reliable service

#3 – Focus on Hierarchy of Users for Investment: Pedestrian, Bike, Transit, Auto

- Transit priority infrastructure
 - Raised crosswalks, median refuge islands, pedestrian improvements
- Transit signal priority
- Protected bike lanes
- Prioritize pedestrians, cyclists and transit users
- Avoid language like "improvements for all road users". Many useful changes will appear detrimental to autos

#4 – Enhance Transit Experience Downtown from All Areas Throughout the City

- Connections within city and suburbs for work, amenities
- Transfer experience is key - make it predictable, reliable, pleasant
 - As people move in and out of the Central Area, the base of current and prospective transit riders is always changing -- how do we ensure that new residents take up the transit habit?
- Make it easier to get around downtown from e.g., Union Station/OTC, museum campus, etc. Might be free shuttles around the area (see Charlottesville, VA) or better integration of the various transit systems
- Some change might need to happen outside of downtown - e.g., people might not take Metra because their home station is inconvenient

#5 – Innovate Around Sustainability and Higher Standards:

- Work on land use policies to share parking/limit parking requirements
- Low-emission zones for freight; EV requirements
- Transit is key - needed for density / density is needed for transit

#6 – Expand Approach to Waterways as Transit Routes:

- Useful and fun but current transit system is confusing
- Consider how tourists experience transit

#7 – Multimodal Safety:

- Bring back conductors

THEMES OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND ENERGY IN THE CENTRAL AREA

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 – Reduce Auto Impacts in the Downtown

- Designated zones for rideshare/cab pick-up and drop-off
- Enhance/Increase EV chargers
- Congestion pricing
- Barrier: people parking in bike/bus lanes
 - Bike parking (perhaps some have been eliminated?)
 - Divvy bikes may have impacted this
- Parking garages -- penalize via taxes (could have much better uses such as grocery, housing)
- Access for people with disabilities
- Streets are for all modes, could we specialize streets? I.e., street mostly for peds/bikes, one for cars, one for buses
- Find ways for people not to make a trip by ensuring basic amenities for residents are nearby
- Widening sidewalks
- Method of renting helmets for Divvy users

#2 – Green Infrastructure

- Bioswales (sunken gardens)
- Green and environmentally friendly storm water management practices
- Repair and improve Grant Park
- Native plants
- Pervious and permeable pavers
- Green space in areas away from Lakefront
- Tree canopies to make pedestrians feel safer and for beautification

#3 – Energy Performance of Buildings

- Financial incentives to encourage developers and property owners
- Design for electrification such as creating more EV charging spaces
- Recycling
- Have bicycle parking in buildings

#4 – Waste Reduction

- Composting: City drop locations proposed downtown and in neighborhoods
- Grocery bag tax to be applied to disposable coffee cups
- Drop off points or consolidated deliveries
- Plastic at takeout must be requested
- Reuse campaigns
- Recycling accuracy and accountability

PUBLIC HEALTH + SAFETY - THEMES & DESIRED OUTCOMES

*Highest ranked to lowest

#1 - Holistic Approach to Addressing Homelessness

- Pressure on CTA to solve problems and need support from other partners - create a safety committee with partners
- Increase single-room occupancy units
- Vacant spaces downtown can support housing

#2 - Safety

- Attract more people and business downtown to reduce vacancies
- Improvement of the red-light camera enforcement
- Curb bump outs and bollards for cyclists
- Synergies between increased transit riding and increased presence of pedestrians on the street, which improves safety and perceptions of safety

#3 - Addressing Public Health and Safety Concerns Through Integrated Services and Partnerships

- Broaden geography of Chicago Loop Alliance Ambassador Program
- Privately owned public space must be maintained by owner and if they do not City must mandate them to take care of it
- Transit Ambassador program that trains people in de-escalation and the best ways to get people the help those in tough situations on transit

#4 - Cleanliness

- If it looks like no one cares, it sends a signal and gives a negative perception
- Public bathrooms
- Trash pick-up on sidewalks and an increase in recycling cans
- City needs to continue to work on graffiti and help create a program that allows for more street art that is sanctioned
- Education campaigns on social media to not litter and on how to report service requests through the city

#5 - Policing and Crime

- Lawlessness seems to start on roads from private automobiles
- Not following traffic laws leads to this idea that folks can do anything
- Raised crosswalks that help create safer environment for pedestrians
- Make traffic crimes impossible to commit with better infrastructure such as increase in bus pads, bike lanes, planters, and more
- Separate department for traffic enforcement

CENTRAL AREA OVERVIEW WORDS

Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture where downtown is today
40 responses



Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture how the Central Area Plan links to the City as a whole
22 responses



Mentimeter

Please submit 3 words that you feel capture what you'd like to see for the future of downtown
28 responses

