

GREAT RIVERS CHICAGO

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Reconnecting Chicago and our rivers

OUR GREAT RIVERS

A vision for the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines rivers

Our Great Rivers: A vision for the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines rivers

A report of Great Rivers Chicago, a project of the City of Chicago, Metropolitan Planning Council, Friends of the Chicago River, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and Ross Barney Architects, through generous support from ArcelorMittal, The Boeing Company, The Chicago Community Trust, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and The Joyce Foundation.

Published August 2016. Printed in Chicago by Mission Press, Inc.

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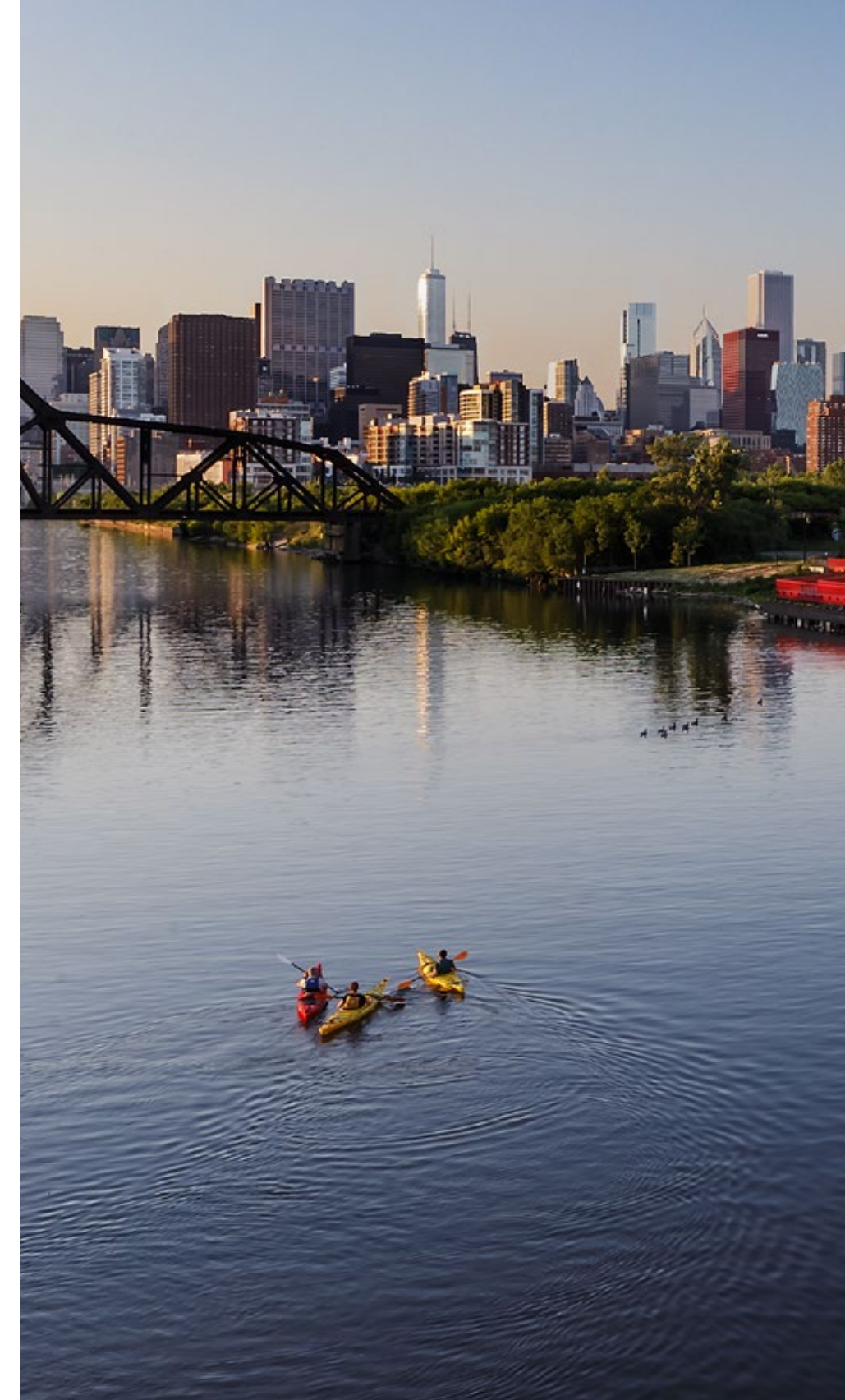


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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This vision and action agenda for the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines rivers was produced by the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), in close partnership with the City of Chicago Office of the Mayor, Friends of the Chicago River and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

The Great Rivers Chicago Leadership Commission, appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and a Resource Group comprised of professionals in water management, infrastructure, transportation, environment, planning, public safety, real estate development and industry dedicated hundreds of hours to share their expertise and perspectives.

More than 6,000 people who live, work and play along Chicago's three rivers provided thoughtful and in-depth input through nine community meetings,

more than 100 focus groups and an online survey that more than 3,800 people responded to.

We are immensely grateful to ArcelorMittal, The Boeing Company, The Chicago Community Trust, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and The Joyce Foundation for their generous support in establishing the vision for Great Rivers Chicago.

Ross Barney Architects, led by MPC Board member Carol Ross Barney, supported our place-based design charrettes and created renderings that bring the vision to life.

Friends of the Chicago River brought people to the river for direct engagement and surveying.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning supported our place-based design charrettes, and will support a second phase of work in late 2016, to engage some 20 suburban communities in examining how the vision can play out where they are.

Thanks also to Free Spirit Media, Wendella Boats and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) for making unique and valuable contributions to the effort.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LETTER FROM CHICAGO MAYOR RAHM EMANUEL

Dear Friends:

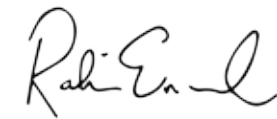
As Mayor and on behalf of the City of Chicago, I am pleased to offer my full support of Our Great Rivers. Chicago takes immense pride in its lakefront and rivers as they are a true testament to conservation, stewardship and planning. Our lakefront and rivers are a source of civic pride that bring neighborhoods together and have become a focal point for new jobs and productivity. The Riverwalk has transformed our downtown landscape into a shining example of what is possible when we create public spaces that give people reasons to use them.

My administration works tirelessly to provide recreational opportunities for our residents and visitors, accommodate commercial and industrial users, and attract new businesses that see our rivers as a fundamental element of ensuring a quality work environment for their employees. Our partners at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and the Forest Preserves of Cook County have made comparable investments along the Calumet and Des Plaines rivers to improve water quality, reduce flooding and increase public access and recreational programming.

The Calumet, Chicago and Des Plaines rivers are already tremendous assets to the Chicago-land area, but they hold the potential for much more. We have made great progress, and I'm pleased to present this vision and action agenda, Our Great Rivers. Working with the Metropolitan Planning Council, Friends of the Chicago River and the volunteers on the Leadership Commission and technical Resource Group, my administration has reviewed past policies and developments, and engaged thousands of Chicago residents and river stakeholders to share with us the current challenges and future hopes for our rivers.

On behalf of the City of Chicago, I invite you to find your place on Chicago's great rivers, for all of us and future generations.

Sincerely,



Mayor Rahm Emanuel



“Our rivers are already tremendous assets, but they hold the potential for much more.”

—Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel

GREAT RIVERS CHICAGO

Reconnecting Chicago and our rivers

“Our rivers are part of the true identity of Chicago, and being on or near them should convey that feeling.”

—Focus group participant

LETTER FROM THE GREAT RIVERS CHICAGO TEAM

When we set out to lead this process, we knew the work would be daunting: one document to convey a consensus-based future for three very different rivers, encompassing more than 150 miles of riverfront, connecting dozens of unique riverfront neighborhoods.

Our rivers constitute a final urban frontier that occupies the imaginations of our city's leading architects, designers and developers. They attract runners, walkers, paddlers, birders and tourists. They sustain tug boat and tour boat operators, industrialists, entrepreneurs and restaurateurs.

There is no shortage of good ideas for our rivers—and more importantly, many of these ideas are compatible and widely held. At the heart of them all is a sincere desire to embrace our rivers and maximize their potential today and in the future.

This process has confirmed the core of Chicago's vision for our rivers: We want inviting, productive and living rivers and riverfronts. This will look differently in different places. We will have forested trails, diverse and historic neighborhoods, the heart of downtown, job centers and restored open spaces. While certain stretches of river are more compatible with a specific type of use, as a whole, Chicago's 150-plus mile system creates myriad opportunities for people to have an unparalleled metropolitan river experience.

This report represents the city and region's collective next step in what has been nearly five decades of work to reclaim our rivers from a history of environmental abuse. It should guide a sustained, structured civic engagement that unites philanthropic, public and private leadership to realize this vision. Metropolitan Planning Council and Friends of the Chicago River are in this for the long haul, and we are confident our funders and partners will be too.

Our Great Rivers has been an honor and a privilege to lead. We sincerely thank our funders, partners, Mayor Emanuel and his team, the Leadership Commission and Resource Group, our staff and the thousands of Chicagoans who have worked with us to create this vision and action agenda. This is your vision for our rivers, Chicago, and it's a beautiful one.

What's next? We need to build trails, restore habitats, repair shorelines, clean the water, protect plants and animals, start businesses, change policies and connect communities back to our rivers. We can do all these things and more if we work together.

See you on the rivers,



Josh Ellis, Metropolitan Planning Council



MarySue Barrett, Metropolitan Planning Council



Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our Great Rivers is the first-ever unifying and forward-looking vision for all three of Chicago's rivers.

It also begins the process of looking upstream, downstream and across the banks to connect Chicagoans with forest preserves and suburban communities that will be vital partners in realizing our collective vision. That vision—by 2040, Chicago's rivers will be **inviting, productive and living** places where everyone can have their own experience—was articulated by thousands of stakeholders through an intensive 18-month, citywide visioning process led by the Metropolitan Planning Council, in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of the City of Chicago, Friends of the Chicago River and more. Our Great Rivers lays out discrete goals for 2020, 2030 and 2040, enabling us to monitor progress toward achieving inviting, productive and living rivers. It also articulates a need to determine new revenue streams and leadership collaborations for the rivers to ensure that this vision is realized and can endure.

What follows is a combination of the subtle and the bold. As an example, we'll develop a unified brand for our rivers by **2020**, which can then be used in marketing, trail signage and even T-shirts. By **2030**, we can go further, transforming the Port District and industrial corridors throughout the city into highly productive assets for the whole region, the river system and our neighborhoods. And by **2040**, as a result of decades of water quality improvements and habitat restoration, our rivers will be teeming with native plant and animal species. And we'll be swimming in them. Yes, you read that right.

Our Great Rivers comes at an important time for our rivers. For most of Chicago's history, our 150-plus miles of river and riverfront have been abused and polluted. We reversed the Chicago and Calumet rivers, channelized them, and used them to move wastewater out of the region. We used the rivers for transportation and heavy industry, but not much

else. Water quality, habitat, park space and even the aesthetics of the riverfront environment were not even an afterthought.

Fortunately, since the Clean Water Act of 1972 and the 1979 founding of Friends of the Chicago River, how Chicagoans view our rivers has been changing steadily. Increasingly clean water has brought a surge in recreational use, a return of critical species, and a desire to re-orient ourselves toward the rivers. Look no further than the downtown Riverwalk for evidence of that. Cleaner water has unleashed decades of pent-up demand for different experiences and uses of the rivers. In our online survey, which drew more than 3,800 responses, the top terms selected to describe the future of our rivers were "active," "easy to get to," and "clean."

The desire for use—for play, work, living, relaxation, community gathering, we heard it all in our commu-

nity outreach—comes at a time when new challenges above and beyond water quality compel us to rethink our rivers. The nature of our industrial riverfront is changing, in some places to new kinds of industry and in some away from industry all together. Aquatic invasive species, namely Asian carp, have drawn significant scrutiny. Toxic legacies of the past linger in contaminated sediments and riverfront brownfields. Our Great Rivers grapples with all these issues and more.

Our Great Rivers also comes at an important time for Chicago. Many communities are struggling. Outside the downtown core, too many people are leaving the city. Civic pride, in many communities, is at a nadir. Disinvestment, apathy and violence are realities that cannot be wistfully overlooked. This vision—and it is an aspirational vision, not a detailed master plan for every inch of our 150-plus miles of rivers and riverfronts—cannot hope to solve all of Chicago's woes. But our rivers can be an integral part of the solutions. We can create more jobs along our rivers by modern-

izing our land use policies and making sites more marketable for development. We can bring open space and recreation to more communities, creating opportunities for solace, connection with nature, exercise and good clean fun. We can create outlets for community pride by fostering stewardship and creating lively gathering places along our rivers. We need these things now more than ever.

Due in large part to the committed stewardship of our many partners, in particular Friends of the Chicago River, we are already on the path toward achieving many of the goals of Our Great Rivers. Still, there is much more to be done. This vision will unify activities and communities along the rivers, inspire new projects and ideas, motivate stewardship, guide new initiatives and prioritize investment. This vision for Our Great Rivers will only do those things if we collectively embrace our role in making these rivers and riverfronts what we want them to be. Join us.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time when our city and many of our neighborhoods are struggling, we can create jobs, improve communities and increase civic pride by investing in our rivers.



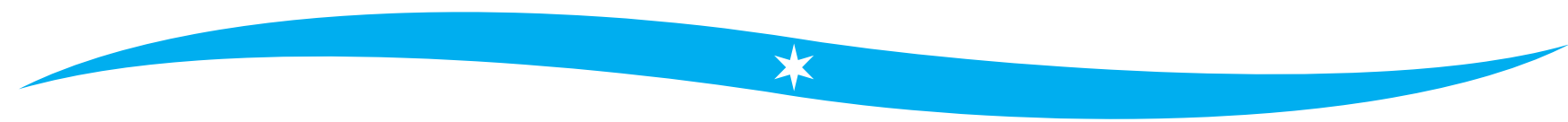
By 2040, Chicago's rivers will be inviting, productive and living, providing everyone with opportunities to find or create their own place, their own experience and their own community on our rivers.

Our rivers will invite us to engage in stewardship, recreation and work.

Our rivers will connect people to nature, in the city and beyond, and function as thriving ecosystems.

Our rivers will be the best of us, where communities, habitats and businesses prosper together.

Ultimately, our rivers will define us, rivaling the lakefront in our hearts and minds, and become a key source of pride for metropolitan Chicago.



Our Great Rivers is the result of the most varied and sweeping public outreach process in the 82-year history of the Metropolitan Planning Council.

With help from Friends of the Chicago River and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, we met people where they use—or hope to use—our rivers, to see the present and future through their eyes.

We organized nine community open houses, plus factory visits, paddling trips, site walks, bike rides, boat tours, design charrettes and more. All told, there were more than 100 formal and informal opportunities for Chicagoans to tell us their vision. We also dug into reams of past reports and findings, and conducted original research. While we did our best

to reach everyone we could, we know that there are many more people who have no relationship to our rivers, or difficulty accessing them, who must be engaged moving forward.

Our Leadership Commission, appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and Resource Group met a total of 17 times and collectively gave thousands of hours to help us grapple with conflicting interests, deepen our knowledge on particular issues and serve as a sounding board for ideas.



WHY A VISION, AND HOW WILL WE USE IT?

The vision of Our Great Rivers is a guide, not a mandate, meant to create expectations and establish priorities, not hinder flexibility or creativity.

For each section, you'll find aspirational visions of our rivers' future, looking out to 2020, 2030 and 2040, with recommended actions for the public and government to take. This is not a description of current conditions, but a vision of the future, and the full realization of the idea in question. We timed the goals based on a combination of feasibility and priority.

The vision articulates a greater whole that unifies discrete activities—e.g. a new park here, a new business there—increasing their impact and significance by making them part of something greater.

The vision inspires detailed plans, new projects, new designs and new ideas for buildings, public spaces, landscapes, habitats, policies and businesses.

The vision motivates residents and elected officials alike to invest time and energy in our rivers, and guides the development of new programs and infrastructure. Ultimately, the vision provides a basis upon which to prioritize the allocation of public resources.

6,000+ people contributed to Our Great Rivers



INVITING

INVITING PRODUCTIVE LIVING

Our rivers will be inviting: Enhancements to infrastructure, information and programming will make our rivers more intuitive, meaningful and exciting places to be, drawing more people for recreation, work and relaxation.

Improved cleanliness, safety and neighborhood linkages will lay the groundwork for creating more welcoming rivers and riverfronts. Better wayfinding and interpretative signage will convey the breadth of the rivers' role in shaping Chicago's past and future, while making the system easy to navigate. City, neighborhood and civic leaders will collaborate to design new access points, amenities, entertainment and activities for residents and tourists of all ages and abilities.

GOALS

- 2020** Activities to draw people to our rivers
- 2020** Safe rivers and riverfronts
- 2020** A unified brand and comprehensive wayfinding
- 2020** Real-time water quality information
- 2020** Water quality plans for all river stretches
- 2030** Continuous riverfront trails
- 2030** Easy access from all neighborhoods
- 2030** Access for people of all ages and abilities
- 2040** Fully litter- and odor-free rivers

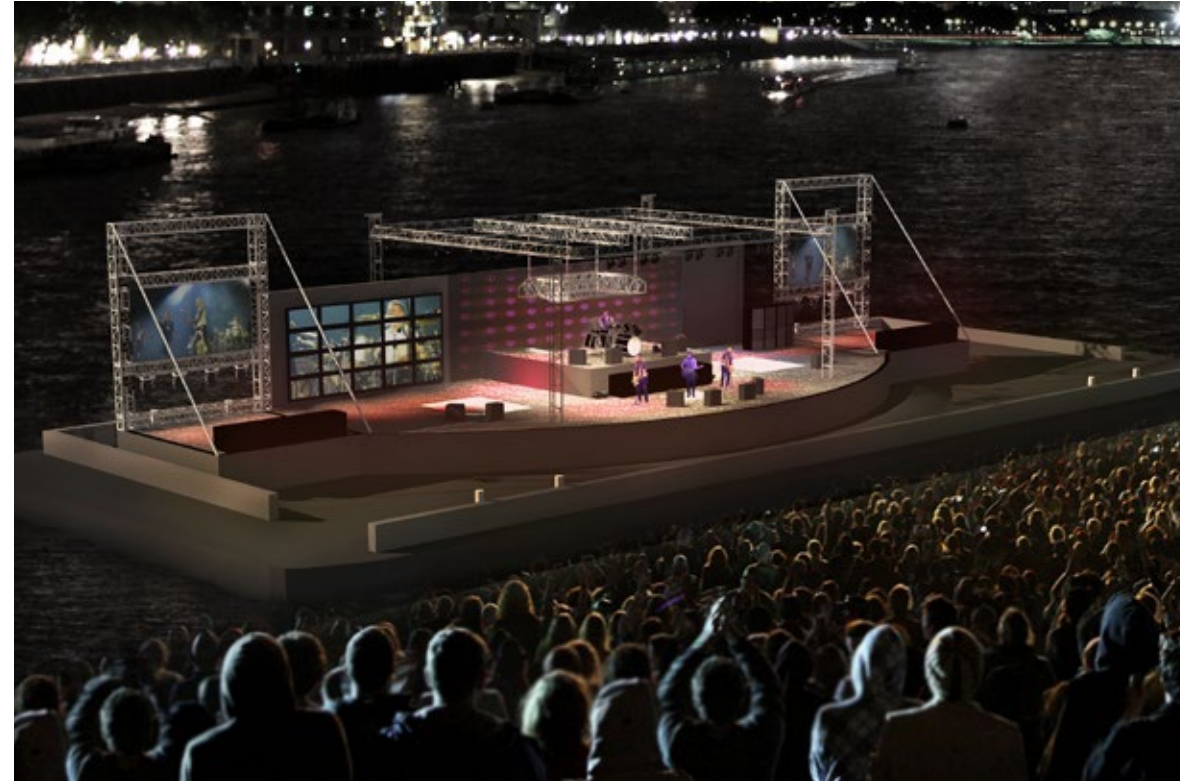
Kate Joyce Studio

2020 GOAL Activities to draw people to our rivers

Imagination and resources will converge to create a surge of activity on our rivers and riverfronts—which in turn begets future interest and innovation.

Large-scale events such as a river triathlon, tall ships, Chicago River Day and St. Patrick's Day will be complemented by more frequent, smaller scale events along previously less active stretches of riverfront. These include events like Movies in the Park, neighborhood river tours, school field trips, religious ceremonies and more. Five-k and 10k walks and runs, as well as paddling races will become regular occurrences along all three rivers; while the Calumet River, with its long stretches of straightaway, will develop a reputation as a prime regional destination for longer cycling and rowing events.

Seasonal barges moored along the riverfront will create temporary, movable public spaces. These "barge parks" will simultaneously fill gaps in riverfront access and provide new destinations for residents and tourists alike, such as pop-up bars and restaurants, fishing events, farmers markets, music performances and more. Likewise, previously vacant or underused land along the river will be temporarily repurposed to host food truck rallies, temporary parks, concerts and urban gardens. People from across the city can experience the culture and vibe of the surrounding neighborhoods while generating benefits for the local community, even as these sites await long-term public or private redevelopment.



Ross Barney Architects

A barge hosting a special event is one of many ways to draw people to the river.

"A continuous trail along the river would be a great place to host a 5k or 10k race."

—David Wong, Certare Ventures;
Great Rivers Chicago Leadership Commission

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Incorporate publicly owned riverfront land into the Chicago Dept. of Transportation's Make Way for People initiative, which creates public spaces that cultivate community and culture in Chicago's neighborhoods.
- Produce a centralized river and riverfront event planning guide to explain land ownership, permitting, environmental conditions and jurisdictional details.
- Encourage private land owners, community organizations and other groups to plan and implement events and activities on our riverfronts.

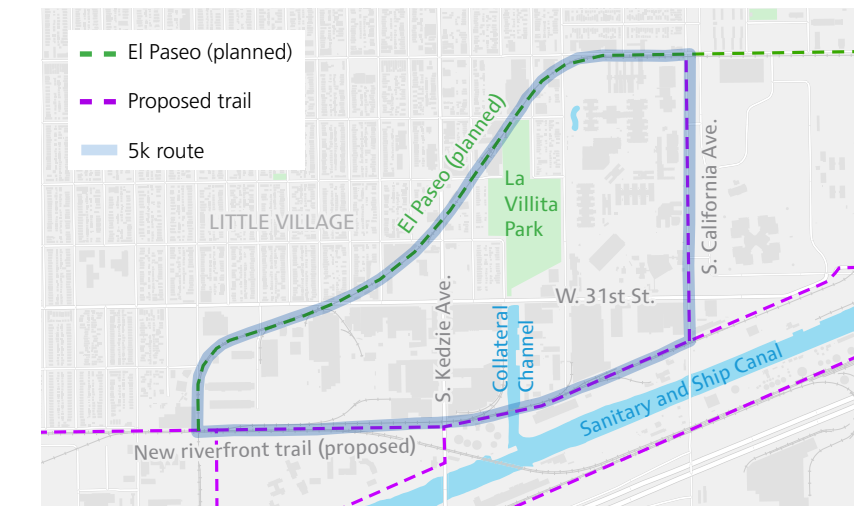
KEY PLAYERS

Mayor's Office, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, MWRD, Chicago Dept. of Fleets and Facilities, Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Friends of the Chicago River, local chambers of commerce, aldermanic offices, community organizations



Forest Preserves of Cook County

The annual Des Plaines River Canoe and Kayak Marathon draws crowds of competitors and spectators to the river.



This 5k route could showcase the river, Collateral Channel and planned El Paseo trail.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Help organize a Movie in the Park at a riverfront site.
- Contact the Chicago Park District or Forest Preserves of Cook County about special event permits, for example, for a 5k run for charity.
- Talk to riverfront property owners about hosting a low-cost community event, such as a food truck rally.
- Work with your alderman, church, school or local business group to plan a riverfront neighborhood festival.
- Join (or create!) a Park Advisory Council.

2020 GOAL Safe rivers and riverfronts

Through increased signage, security patrols and public education, the rivers and riverfronts will be safe 24-hour destinations.

Signs that provide information about right-of-way laws, no wake zones, boating etiquette and combined sewer overflow locations and effects will be posted on bridges and shorelines, educating river users about the rules of on-water navigation and safety. As the number of non-licensed boaters and paddlers continues to grow, posting this information will reduce the number of accidents and near-misses, making the rivers more enjoyable for everyone. Signage will be most comprehensive along the Main Stem of the Chicago River and extend north to North Avenue and south to Western Avenue. Signs also will be installed near public boat launches and marinas. Rental companies for motorized and non-motorized watercraft will distribute standardized safety information approved by the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee.

Increased and coordinated patrolling by federal, state and local agencies along highly used stretches of our rivers will ensure the well-being of visitors, day and night. Patrols should use proactive techniques to counsel operators of both motorized and human-powered crafts on safe traffic management practices, and a small squad of “kayak cops” could patrol the most highly paddled stretches of the river.

Likewise, more consistent security along riverfront trails, coupled with lighting enhancements where needed and more recreational and business activity, could add “eyes on the street” and make more Chicagoans likely to use the rivers in the mornings and evenings.

310 mentions of safety concerns in public comments



John W. Iwanski

Parts of the Chicago River, particularly the Main Stem, are often busy enough that safety becomes a concern.

“A great deal more needs to be done to ensure everyone is able to safely enjoy our rivers and riverfront.”

—Michael Borgström, Wendella Boats;
Chicago Harbor Safety Committee;
Great Rivers Chicago Leadership Commission

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Implement the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee’s 2016 Safety Recommendations and Guide to Rules and Regulations.
- Develop a comprehensive water safety signage and education program, building off the comprehensive rivers brand.
- Conduct a lighting study that investigates needs for safety in public spaces, while mitigating light pollution impacts on habitats and wildlife.
- Convene a working group of all agencies and departments with policing responsibilities. Assess options for increasing the frequency of river and riverfront patrols within existing resources, plus ways to increase patrolling with additional resources, including deploying law enforcement via kayak, bicycle or horseback.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Harbor Safety Committee, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, U.S. Coast Guard, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Dept. of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, MWRD, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County



Kate Joyce Studio

Good lighting and a steady presence of people create a safe feeling at night on the recently completed downtown Riverwalk.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Organize events for first-time paddlers in Chicago Park District lagoons or other non-navigable waterways.
- Report unsafe areas of the rivers or riverfronts to your alderman, 311 or the Chicago Police Department.
- Create walking or running clubs that use riverfront trails and increase “eyes on the street.”

2020 GOAL A unified brand and comprehensive wayfinding

As more and more people experience Chicago's rivers, the city will channel that energy into a unified brand that celebrates our rivers' history and promotes their future. The brand will be honed through these myriad experiences and ultimately will be communicated through wayfinding, marketing and programming.

Cooperation between the City of Chicago and other riverfront land managers, including the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County and suburban neighbors, will ensure a seamless experience. A "one-stop shopping" website will provide information about events, stewardship opportunities, construction and development news, accessibility maps and tips, water quality and conditions data, and historical information. To pique the curiosity of the millions of people who cross over or under the city's three rivers on a daily basis, branded rivers-related signs will be posted on auto and pedestrian bridges, and CTA trains and buses will announce river crossings. Comprehensive wayfinding will reinforce the brand and unify the riverfront, lakefront, off-street trails and bike lanes as one integrated system that connects Chicagoans, suburban neighbors and visitors.



Ryan Griffin-Stegink

Comprehensive wayfinding makes The 606 easy to navigate, and its brand and visual identity have helped it quickly become a part of Chicago culture. Our rivers need a brand for the same reasons.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Engage an experienced marketing and design firm to develop a comprehensive branding strategy for Chicago's three rivers. A brand and deployment strategy should be in place before additional signage, wayfinding, a river website or other materials are developed further.
- Build a centralized website for all river-related activities.
- Develop a comprehensive wayfinding plan for all three rivers that connect users to local amenities and attractions, bike routes and other existing trail networks.

KEY PLAYERS

Mayor's Office, Choose Chicago, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, community organizations



Cygnus Group

A brand and unified design language make Calgary's riverfront attractive and easy to get around.

"We could have visual signals that tell you the river is nearby, like unique planting boxes or different colors on bridges or street furniture."

—Focus group participant

2020 GOAL Real-time water quality information

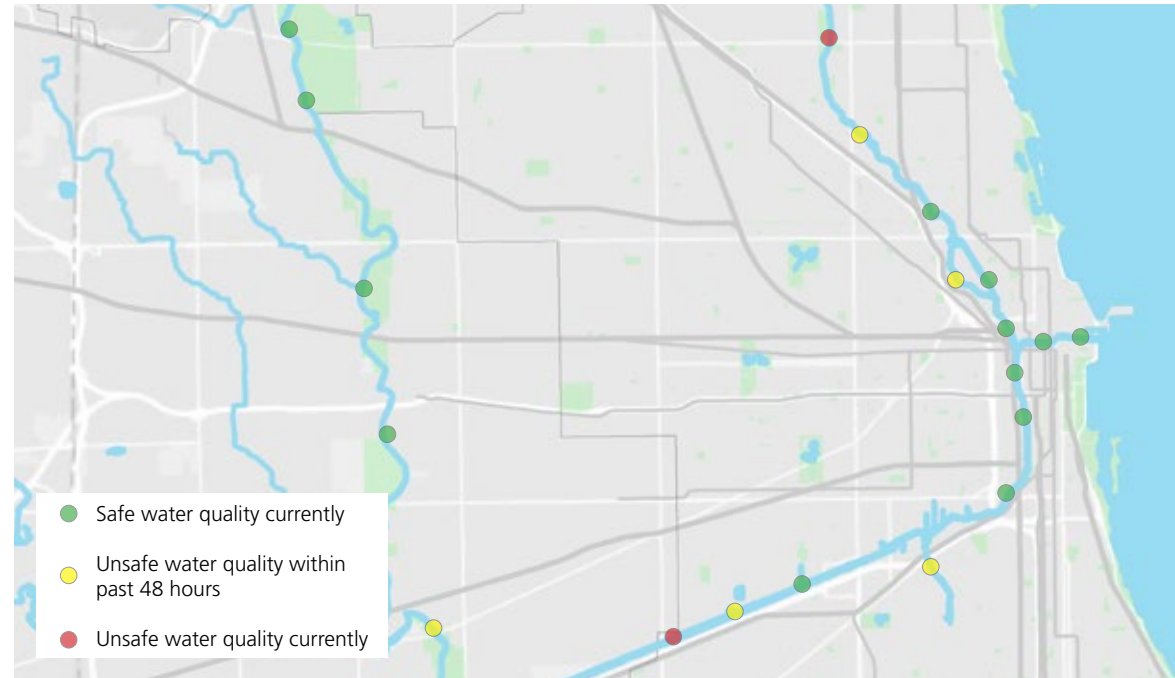
While water quality in Chicago’s rivers continues to improve, like many old cities, fully eliminating combined sewer overflows will take time. Real-time water quality monitoring will be deployed across all three rivers, with sensors in the water to track specific pollutants throughout a 24-hour period. This information on water quality should be widely available, including through smart phone applications, social media platforms, weather reports and mounted digital screens at key riverfront locations. Putting information about heavy rains and location-specific combined sewer overflows in the hands of people will enable them to plan which days they should head to the river to paddle, fish and volunteer, and when they should not. Making this information readily available also will call attention to the ongoing need to invest in improving water quality across all three rivers.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Develop a system of data-collection nodes that samples, analyzes and reports real-time water quality across a range of media.
- Provide water quality information at boat launches, bathhouses and other river access points, similar to the flag system used at Chicago’s lakefront beaches.

KEY PLAYERS

MWRD, Chicago Dept. of Water Management, Friends of the Chicago River, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



An easy-to-read map, like this mock-up, could be one way of sharing real-time water quality information.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Sign up for and share information from Friends of the Chicago River’s Overflow Action Alerts, as well as MWRD’s combined sewer overflow notifications.

“People assume the rivers are always in bad shape. They should know the water is actually okay on most days, but unsafe after heavy rain.”

—Focus group participant

2020 GOAL Water quality plans for all river stretches

In 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that some stretches of the Calumet, Chicago and Des Plaines rivers should be clean enough for “primary contact.” That designation allows safe swimming, paddling, fishing and more. These stretches have defined uses that serve as water quality goals, and the improvements needed to meet those goals are spelled out. By 2020, infrastructure and programming to support those uses will follow suit, in compliance with Clean Water Act requirements. Moreover, this process of defining uses, habitat needs and water quality goals will be expanded to all sections of our rivers so that the entire system’s needs are understood. This includes the Grand Calumet River and Lake Calumet, Lower Des Plaines, Bubbly Creek and the Chicago River southwest of Ashland Avenue. As recreational uses and thus the possibility of human contact increase, and as native species begin to thrive once again, we must develop operations plans and make capital investments that ensure safe water quality.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Initiate a Use Attainability Analysis for all stretches of the Calumet, Chicago and Des Plaines.
- Establish roles, responsibilities and resources necessary to ensure updated Use Attainability Analyses every three years moving forward, pursuant to Clean Water Act requirements.
- Determine capital investment and operation needs to achieve attainable uses for currently unplanned river reaches.

KEY PLAYERS

MWRD, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Pollution Control Board, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, environmental advocates, suburban municipalities and park districts, fishing and paddling enthusiasts



Forest Preserves of Cook County

The existing requirement that some parts of our rivers be safe enough for “primary contact” like paddling or swimming should be considered for all stretches of our rivers.

“We need policy that brings consistency to our rivers’ water quality standards for public use and habitat.”

—Lenore Beyer-Clow, Openlands;
Great Rivers Chicago Resource Group

2030 GOAL Continuous riverfront trails



Ross Barney Architects

A continuous riverfront trail system would invite thousands of Chicagoans to our three rivers every day—for commuting, strolling, accessing the river, and more. These trails must be well integrated into the street grid, bike infrastructure and transit system.

The Des Plaines River Trail will be well marked and well maintained, providing nearby residents, office workers and weekend visitors an unparalleled forest trail experience. (See page 63.) A network of completed and linked trails along the Calumet River—the Cal-Sag, Major Taylor, Burnham Greenway and more—will connect Chicagoans to employment centers, parks and preserves, river access points and Lake Michigan. On the northern reaches of the Chicago River, a series of under-bridge connections, floating or elevated trail segments, land easements and signs will fill remaining gaps, creating a seamless and easy to navigate trail experience from the Loop all the way to the northern suburbs. Comparable investments, plus stronger connections to the street grid where needed, will create a continuous trail experience from Western Avenue to the Loop along the southern reaches of the Chicago River, connecting to the El Paseo trail in Little Village and

Pilsen. All trails should have physical connections and programming opportunities, wherever possible, to schools, libraries, parks and community organizations.

New investments in pedestrian and bike bridges, under-bridge connections and even auto bridges, where prudent, would connect Chicagoans to social, recreational and job opportunities “over the river,” making the rivers carriers to, rather than barriers to opportunities.

“We need a continuous trail from north to south for both commuting and for fun.”

—Focus group participant

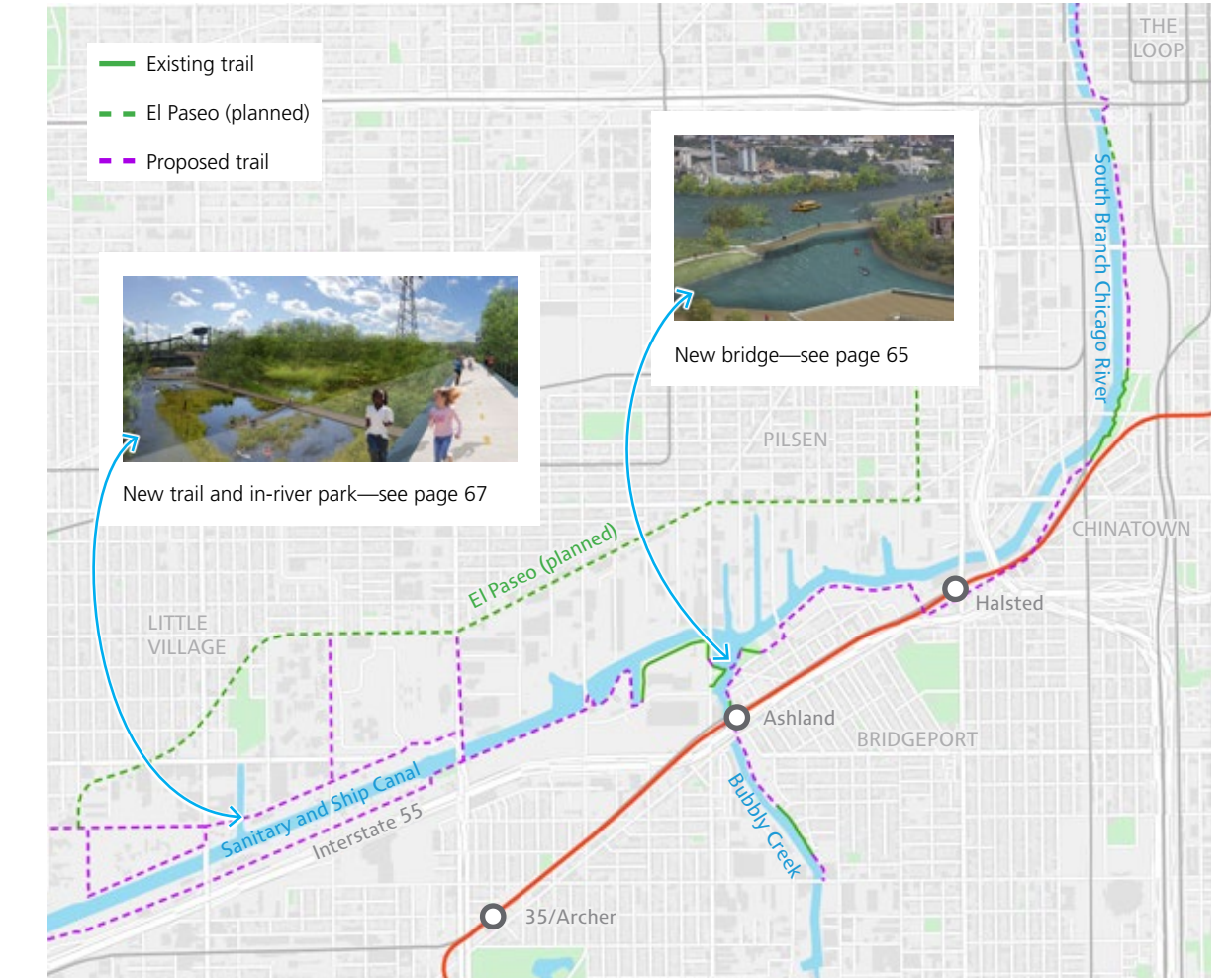
MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Improve connectivity on the street grid between Calumet area trails, and fund completion of planned Calumet trails. See page 71.
- Develop consistent signage directing people from Chicago and suburban streets to and from the Des Plaines River Trail. See page 63.
- Conduct a feasibility assessment for a continuous trail along the South Branch of the Chicago River and Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, connecting to El Paseo and established on-street bike networks. See map at right.
- Coordinate between agencies to assess opportunities for land acquisition, easements, bridges and under-bridge connections, floating or elevated trails and other strategies, as well as funding, to fill in trail gaps.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Active Transportation Alliance, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Dept. of Transportation, Trails for Illinois, suburban municipalities, Cook County Highway Department, bicycling advocates and enthusiasts

A CONTINUOUS TRAIL ON THE SOUTH BRANCH



A continuous trail on the South Branch, with a new bridge over Bubbly Creek, could connect downtown to Little Village and a new park at the Collateral Channel.

2030 GOAL Easy access from all neighborhoods

Through strategic land acquisition, intergovernmental collaboration and new investments along our riverfronts, from downtown to the neighborhoods, residents and workers will see our rivers as part of their daily lives. Thanks to new park spaces, public access points and recreational amenities, people will know where their nearest river access point is. As with the lakefront, the riverfront will attract thousands of people from around the Chicago region every day.

When people arrive at the rivers, they'll have a variety of things to do, thanks to new trails and boat launches, concessions for watercraft rentals, picnic facilities, and regular programming for everything from fishing to paddling, provided by the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County and Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources. By programming river-related events throughout the city, rather than only downtown, transportation gaps will be reduced, inherently improving accessibility.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Conduct a thorough network assessment of sidewalks, streets, transit and riverfront trails to determine true accessibility of existing public space along the rivers, as well as gaps.

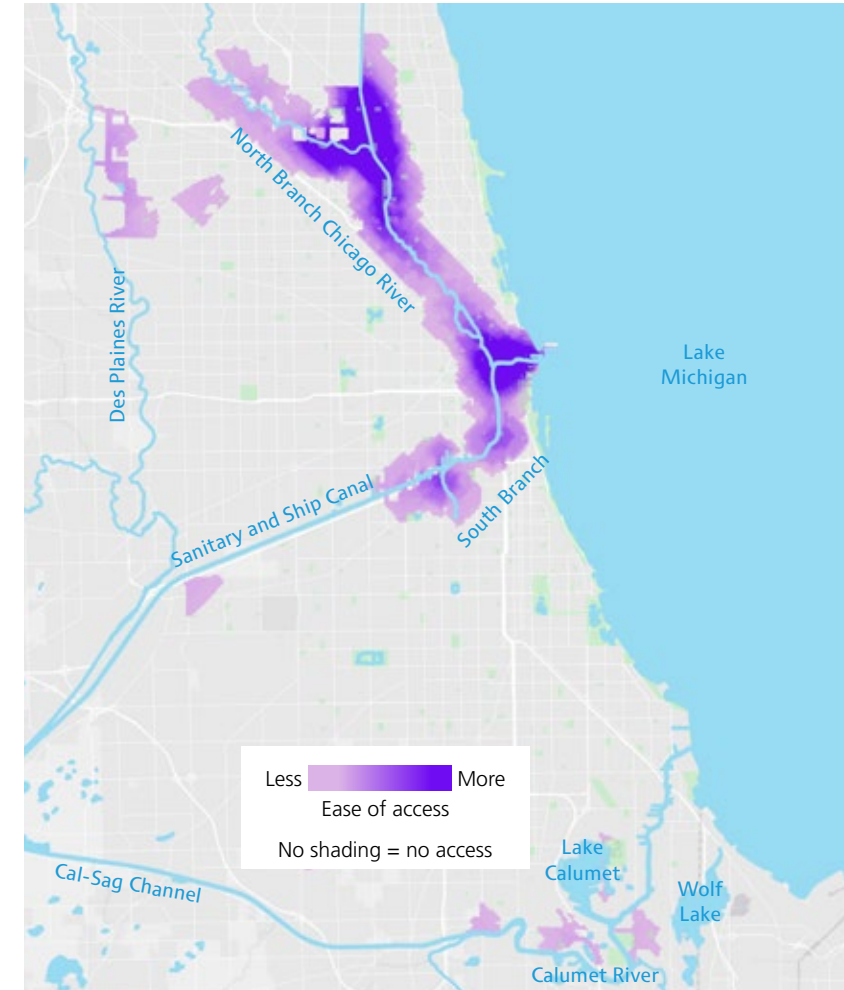
KEY PLAYERS

Mayor's Office, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Active Transportation Alliance, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, communities and community organizations

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Document barriers to river access at the neighborhood level—e.g., sidewalk conditions, lack of trail connections, missing signage, etc.

RIVER ACCESS INCONSISTENT TODAY



Downtown and many north side neighborhoods have easy access to the river (dark purple), while most of the South Branch, Calumet and Des Plaines remain difficult (light purple) or impossible (no shading) to access.

2030 GOAL Access for people of all ages and abilities

Chicago's full range of river and riverfront assets—the Riverwalk, major events, recreational opportunities and employment—as well as information about them will be readily accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Universal accessibility must be a central design concept to every new publicly accessible riverfront site, while existing sites should be retrofitted to accommodate people with disabilities. River-focused websites, events and signage will convey explicit and easy-to-find directions for people with sensory or physical disabilities. A distributed network of sites with infrastructure to support entry and exit to and from the water, elevators and ramps to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), storage of specialized equipment and supportive programming will enable individuals, families and groups to learn and enjoy water-based recreation throughout the city. Auditory, physical and visual cues built into riverfront infrastructure and signage will create a safer and more inviting environment.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Conduct a multi-agency ADA assessment of existing river and riverfront amenities, as well as online information and programming, to provide a seamlessly accessible experience traversing multiple agencies' sites and facilities in any given day.

KEY PLAYERS

Mayor's Office, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Access Living, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Active Transportation Alliance, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Advocate for ADA compliance at existing river and riverfront facilities.
- Organize riverfront events with people of all ages and abilities to determine what accessibility needs look like in your community.



Morgen Hodgetts, Chicago Rowing Foundation
An accessible launch makes kayaking or canoeing available to all, regardless of age or ability.

“We need platforms on the water that are ADA compliant and accessible to everyone.”

—Focus group participant

2040 GOAL Fully litter- and odor-free rivers

Increased and coordinated litter removal and odor management will greatly improve the cleanliness and aesthetics of Chicago’s rivers, and as a result, people will flock to them. As scheduled stormwater management investments are developed, fewer and fewer overflows into our rivers will occur, reducing litter loads. Once in the water, skimmer boats and innovative, automated instream technologies will play an increasing role. In addition, increased street sweeping and more garbage and recycling receptacles on land adjacent to the rivers will lead to significant improvement, because most river litter is blown by the wind from streets and sidewalks.

A public awareness campaign will teach residents and visitors that litter often ends up in the river. Storm drains and signs will be brightly painted to help people make the connection between street litter, oil and trash in the rivers. Litter clean-ups should occur more frequently throughout the year and at more sites, including along the Des Plaines River. By teaching people about the connection between litter and our rivers and by providing them with more opportunities to be stewards of our rivers, we will forge a deeper sense of shared responsibility in metropolitan Chicago for keeping our rivers clean. By 2030, litter in our rivers will be largely a thing of the past.

Odor improvements will occur over a longer time frame, and are the culmination of new investments in infrastructure, enhancements in wastewater treatment and stormwater management, and instream remediation. We will install additional aeration stations on marginal riverfront parcels, which would have the added benefit of creating visually engaging falling water installations. Nutrient pollution, which feeds smelly algae, will be reduced through improved wastewater management and nature-based stormwater infrastructure. In priority locations, such as Bubbly Creek and the Collateral Channel, we will have demonstrably improved odor problems through a combination of techniques, such as instream and sidestream aeration stations, capping or removing problem sediments and increasing water flow. Innovative in-pipe treatment technologies installed at priority combined sewer outfalls will further reduce litter and other pollution to the rivers, especially at points that once discharged high volumes on a regular basis.



This automated device, aptly nicknamed “Mr. Trash Wheel,” collects litter in Baltimore’s harbor. Automated devices like this could supplement and expand the coverage of the skimmer boats that already operate on Chicago’s rivers.

63% of focus group members reported litter or odor



Sidestream elevated pool aeration stations, like this one on the Calumet River, are an attractive way to reduce odor and improve water quality.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Determine costs and opportunities for more skimmer boats, staged at locations throughout the river system, and for using a variety of technologies to best handle the varied conditions of the rivers and shorelines.
- Assess the feasibility of and construct instream litter collection devices to filter litter out of river water, combined sewer overflow pipes and side bays.
- Assess the feasibility of and construct additional sidestream or instream aeration stations to restore oxygen to the water.
- Develop a schedule for preventative street sweeping in advance of major storms.
- Increase the number of garbage and recycling cans adjacent to riverfront locations.
- Develop a public awareness campaign to reduce litter.
- Prioritize sites with strong odor problems and develop remediation plans for each, including pollutant controls and aeration, if needed.
- Expand riverfront clean-up events to include all three of Chicago’s rivers, and develop a robust “Adopt-a-Mile” program to expand stewardship program participation.
- Expand household hazardous waste collection days and drop-off locations for expired or unused pharmaceuticals.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Streets and Sanitation, MWRD, Chicago Dept. of Water Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, community organizations, riverfront property owners

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Sign up for Chicago River Day and other clean-ups, ideally adding new sites to the mix throughout the year.
- Report noxious odors, litter and other issues to your alderman, the City (call 311) and MWRD on the web at gispub.mwrdd.org/incidentreporting.
- Participate in hazardous waste collection days and pharmaceutical drop offs, and help spread the word about both.

INVITING

Our rivers will be inviting.

Enhancements to infrastructure, information and programming will make our rivers more intuitive, meaningful and exciting places to be, drawing more people for recreation, work and relaxation.

Here's what that means to community members and stakeholders, in their own words.

“In areas where access to the water is available, there are no signs indicating that water quality of the river should be considered before and after contact.”

2020 GOAL Real-time water quality information
page 18

“If we could change the designation of all stretches of the river system to ‘primary contact recreation waters,’ that would allow for tubing, swimming, fishing and more.”

2020 GOAL Water quality plans for all river stretches
page 19

“There aren't many criteria to determine who can and who cannot drive a boat on the river. Roads have licenses for drivers, but there is nothing of that kind for the river. I've seen lots of close calls caused by untrained boaters on pontoons and party craft.”

2020 GOAL Safe rivers and riverfronts
page 14

“New technologies for universal access exist, but because nobody is enforcing requirements, they are not installed. Without an organization supporting and programming a facility, infrastructure is just infrastructure.”

2030 GOAL Access for people of all ages and abilities
page 23

“On the lakefront, there's a big path. That's very popular, obviously. There's nothing like that along most of the river.”

2030 GOAL Continuous riverfront trails
page 20

Ross Barney Architects



PRODUCTIVE

INVITING PRODUCTIVE LIVING

Our rivers will be productive: They have historically been and will continue to be working rivers that are transportation arteries, commercial corridors and tourism generators.

Where economic activity is the best use of riverfront land, we'll work to retain existing businesses that rely on the water and attract new types of entrepreneurs and jobs, while preserving the integrity of the water and the culture of surrounding communities. We'll enhance our rivers' transportation infrastructure to accommodate barges, tour boats, water taxis and recreational watercraft. Together, business, community, government and civic leaders will create innovative riverfront development that harmonizes the needs of people, businesses and nature.

GOALS

- 2020** New visions for modern working rivers
- 2020** New tools to support riverfront productivity
- 2030** A clear path forward for the Port District
- 2030** Integrated transit on land and water
- 2030** Local tourism and jobs
- 2030** Iconic riverfront destinations
- 2030** Productive use (and reuse) of water
- 2040** Revitalized and reimagined infrastructure



Ryan Griffin-Stegink

2020 GOAL New visions for modern working rivers

We will build upon the river as a recognized asset for both water-dependent businesses and employers who see the value of river adjacency for their workforce, commuting and corporate culture. In doing so, we'll redefine what "industrial" means and how other land uses can occur within the same landscapes.

Each of Chicago's five riverfront industrial corridors has unique pressures and assets, so we need five corridor-specific land use policies that attract an appropriate mix of productive enterprises and complementary uses. Redevelopment of riverfront land should account for and embrace proximity to the river. We will need to evaluate and address environmental impacts to ensure new uses are compatible with the living and inviting tenets of Our Great Rivers. Robust stakeholder engagement will lead to better riverfront land use planning and policies. Where traditional industrial uses have declined or relocated, the City should aggressively pursue redevelopment that balances neighborhood, city and regional goals for employment, parks and open space, environmental remediation and stormwater management. The result will be a stronger and more modernized industrial sector—one that may not even look like traditional perceptions of industry—and new economic growth or other uses where industry is no longer the most prudent use.

Redevelopment of dormant riverfront parcels outside of these corridors also will be aggressively encouraged. Legacy land uses for utilities, transportation and waste management will be scrutinized to determine the optimal siting of those facilities, as well as possible new uses for those sites.

CORRIDOR-SPECIFIC VISIONS FOR RIVERFRONT PRODUCTIVITY ZONES

See map in back pocket or online at greatriverschicago.com

NORTH BRANCH

The transit-rich North Branch Industrial Corridor can be a diversified employment hub for Chicago's innovation economy. While long-time river-based industries continue to provide valuable services, new tech, craft, creative and collaborative business investments will create new jobs for highly skilled workers. In turn, nearby population growth will support new amenities, such as restaurants and bars, as well as infrastructure investment in bridges, riverfront parks and paths to provide an array of commuting options.

PILSEN

Located at the confluence of the South Branch of the Chicago River, Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and Bubbly Creek, the Pilsen Industrial Corridor supports a diverse mix of wholesale trade, manufacturing, transportation and distribution businesses. Large developable parcels and the corridor's proximity to Chicago's transportation network and central business district make it well-positioned for growth, including transit-oriented development and riverfront amenities. By redeveloping or remediating the river itself, Bubbly Creek, vacant riverfront parcels, blighted industrial sites and vacant buildings, we will generate new jobs and public access to the riverfront, where prudent.

LITTLE VILLAGE

With excellent access to the I-55 corridor, active railroads and navigable waterways, the Little Village Industrial Corridor provides quality jobs in transportation, food production, warehousing and manufacturing. By rethinking the industrial corridor and embracing its access to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, Chicago will invigorate the local economy, correct harmful environmental conditions (e.g. dust, noise, contaminated sediments) and build local employment. Obsolete properties provide opportunities for transition to modern uses through property assembly and environmental remediation. Multiple riverfront parcels—many with spectacular views—will become new neighborhood and regional destinations.

CALUMET

The Calumet River is a key freight connection between Lake Michigan and the rest of the Chicago Area Waterway System. The Calumet Industrial Corridor will become a renowned national model for the co-existence of productive and sustainable industry, thriving communities and healthy natural areas. To do so, the region must work to attract more job-rich manufacturers that rely on the waterways and barge shipping, while encouraging industrial stakeholders to proactively mitigate negative impacts on the environment and public health.

ADDISON

Along the Chicago River's North Branch, traversing portions of the North Center, Avondale and Logan Square neighborhoods, the Addison Industrial Corridor is a 21st Century urban business park with excellent access to transit and skilled workers. Redeveloping properties to create appropriate commercial and mixed-use developments will draw businesses that want to tap into the creative economy. Because companies located in the corridor do not use the waterway for operation, the area can create new riverfront access and recreation and strengthen connections to neighborhood amenities like the riverfront trail and Clark Park.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Conduct a broad and robust public engagement process to develop land use plans and policies that balance community desires, ecosystem health of the rivers and riverfronts, the needs of modern industry, and other productive uses.
- Pursue policy changes and infrastructure projects consistent with these new land use plans. This may include rezoning, developing new incentive programs, updating environmental and health codes, improving streets and bridges, and more.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Chicago and Illinois chambers of commerce, area industrial councils and business associations, neighborhood organizations



Industry in Pilsen and Little Village benefit from easy access to rail, interstate highways and a navigable river.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Participate in the Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development's forthcoming Industrial Land Use Corridor public engagement processes.
- Organize a neighborhood tour of legacy and new industrial uses along the riverfront to learn more about the needs of these businesses and opportunities for integration with other community and ecological interests. Many business owners eagerly host tours of this kind, but are rarely approached.

2020 GOAL New tools to support riverfront productivity

An array of new economic development incentives will attract new businesses of all types and sizes: concessions run by neighborhood entrepreneurs, reuse of historic buildings and structures, advanced manufacturing, tourism and hospitality, breweries, and more. Each incentive program must be managed transparently and aligned with Our Great Rivers, Chicago's revamped riverfront industrial corridor land use plans, and other community and city priorities.

For example, a new micro-loan program for developing concessions—particularly for capital needs, such as purchasing food carts or renting equipment—could activate riverfront spaces while creating local jobs, building community pride and enhancing neighborhood wealth.

These incentives also could support infrastructure that makes locating on the riverfronts more attractive to businesses. Examples of needed improvements include fixing river walls on the Chicago and Calumet rivers, transforming hardened shorelines into more ecologically productive living shorelines and expediting riverfront trail development to better connect private riverfront to public rights of way.



Formerly industrial buildings along the Milwaukee River now contain homes and businesses with river access.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Increase marketing of the existing Riverfront Improvement Fund to support shoreline maintenance, naturalization and trail connectivity.
- Establish a micro-loan program to support concessions owned and operated by neighborhood residents, and identify priority concession types and locations in parks, forest preserves and other public spaces.
- Explore adding all or parts of Chicago's riverfronts to the State of Illinois' River Edge Redevelopment Zone program.
- Ensure that new incentives created by the City's revamped industrial corridor planning, Neighborhood Opportunity Fund and other financing initiatives support implementation of Our Great Rivers, and are guided by robust community engagement.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of riverfront development incentives in other North American cities, and participate in peer exchanges with these cities.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Dept. of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Ill. Dept. of Commerce and Economic Activity, TIF and SBIF managers, area industrial councils and business associations, communities and community organizations, private business and local entrepreneurs

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Encourage your alderman and existing riverfront businesses to pursue currently available resources, such as the Riverfront Improvement Fund.
- Pursue a riverfront business of your own. Contact the Chicago Park District or Forest Preserves of Cook County to learn how to get going.

2030 GOAL A clear path forward for the Port District

Through the transfer of hundreds of acres of Illinois International Port District property on Lake Calumet into active management for open space, habitat and recreation (see page 53), the Port's facilities will be consolidated and focused on serving tenants that provide sustainable industry, jobs and positive community impact. Securing a qualified private manager for the Port is one route to unlocking a new infusion of capital to manage facilities, make infrastructure investments, promote and market the Port and bolster its contributions to Chicagoland's economy. A more robust and committed public management structure is another.

Though the Port is a regional amenity, its immediate proximity to residential neighborhoods and sensitive ecological areas necessitates a higher degree of local coordination. A new Local Advisory Committee will ensure that new investment in facilities and infrastructure, as well as new tenants of the Port, provide an array of positive benefits for nearby residents and the environment.

Alternatively, if a long-term private management firm with the ability to reinvest in the Port is not found, then a thoughtful process should be conducted to consider dissolving the Port and future ownership and management of its assets.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Make a prompt decision (by 2017) on future of the Illinois International Port District, vetting both a private management firm or dissolution of the Port District as options.
- Establish a Local Advisory Committee, facilitated by the local aldermanic office, to advise the Port Board, private manager, Mayor's Office and other parties.
- Transfer ownership and stewardship of ecologically-sensitive land and water assets to an established open space manager.

KEY PLAYERS

Illinois International Port District, City of Chicago, State of Illinois, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, neighborhood community and community organizations



Chicago is a shipping hub for barges (from the Mississippi River and other inland waterways) and deep water vessels from the Great Lakes and around the world.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Visit the Port area by land or water to see what kind of operations and opportunities for redevelopment exist. In addition to getting a sense of the industrial activity and legacy along the water and major corridors such as Torrence Avenue, 106th Street, or Avenue O, you can also visit places like Big Marsh, Hegewisch Marsh, Calumet Fisheries, the Burnham Greenway and William W. Powers State Recreation Area to understand how industry, community and nature can co-exist.

2030 GOAL Integrated transit on land and water

By enhancing and connecting riverfront trails, water taxi service, adjacent bus and rail stations, bike lanes, and sidewalks, people will be able to more easily explore our rivers and riverfront neighborhoods.

Water taxis are a viable transportation option for those willing to sacrifice some speed for the experience of boating to their destination. For some trips, a river route is the most direct. New water taxi stations at strategic locations will serve increasing demand, and riverfront residential and commercial developments will be encouraged to add water taxi service if feasible.

To promote water taxi use, routes and stations (and the rivers themselves) should be included in regional transit maps, vehicle tracker applications, integrated fare systems such as Ventra, and even onboard transit announcements. (“Now crossing the Chicago River, transfer here to water taxi.”) Likewise, signs at river trail access points should point to and from commuter rail stations.

Adding Divvy stations near river trail access points, employment hubs and major destinations would serve one-way commuters and last-mile transit needs, while increasing riverfront use. As other multi-use trails are created, such as The 606 and El Paseo, we should seek to connect them with the rivers whenever possible.

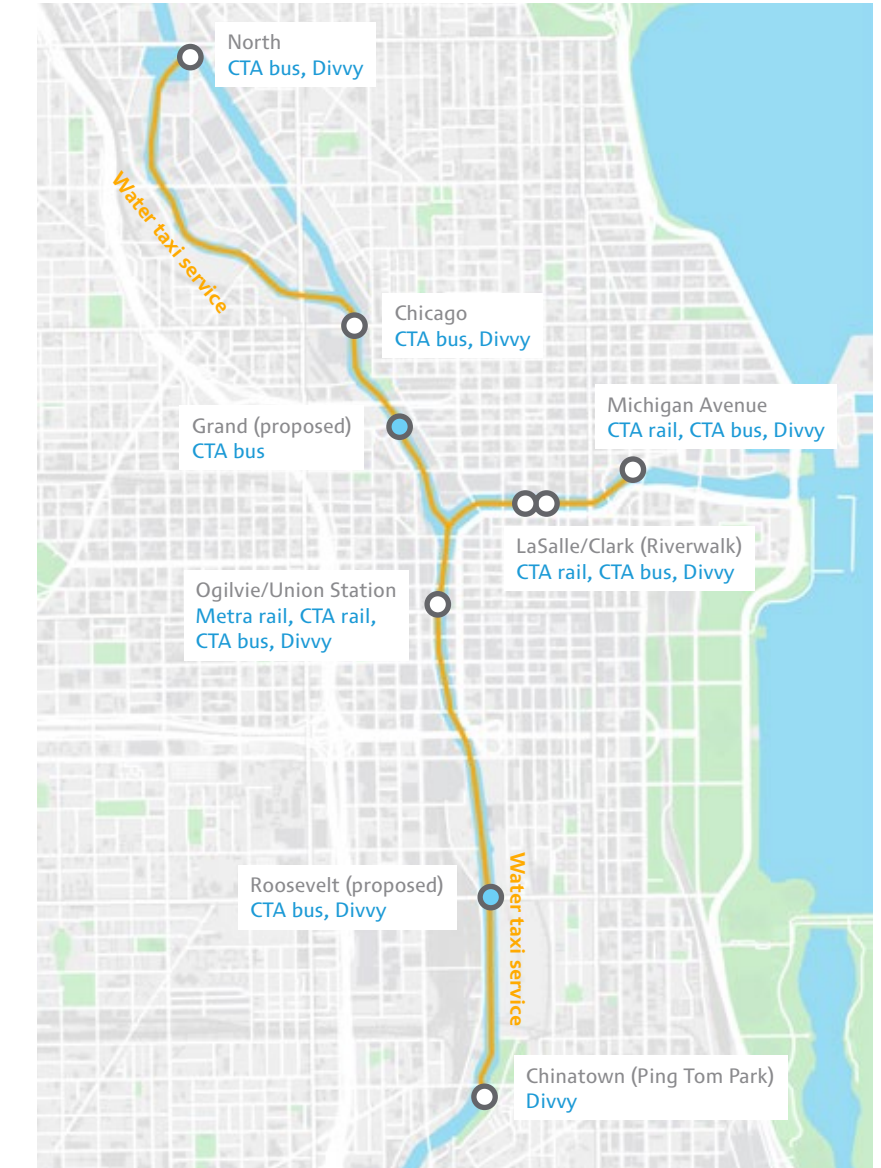


David Wilson

Our water taxi network should be better connected to our traditional transit network.

2.9 MILLION trips cross over or under one of Chicago's rivers via road or rail on an average weekday

WATER TAXI TRANSIT CONNECTIONS



Every water taxi stop connects to existing CTA rail or bus, commuter rail or Divvy.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Add infill water taxi stations at Grand Avenue on the North Branch and Roosevelt Road on the South Branch of the Chicago River.
- Examine the longer-term feasibility of expanding water taxi service south from Ping Tom Park on the Chicago River, and on the Calumet River.
- Integrate water taxi service into Ventra, transit system maps, on-board announcements, schedules and system planning.
- Explore the feasibility of adding Divvy stations near key riverfront sites.

KEY PLAYERS

Water taxi operators, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard, Chicago Harbor Safety Committee, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, Pace, Regional Transportation Authority, Divvy, Ill. Dept. of Transportation

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Try commuting by water taxi to determine if that's a feasible option for you.
- Take note of all the times you cross over or under one of Chicago's rivers in a day, a week, a month. You'll be surprised how frequent it is!

2030 GOAL Local tourism and jobs

To increase tourism and entertainment on Chicago's rivers, we need new parks with performance spaces, expanded riverfront trails and water taxi service that connect neighborhoods, and revised land use policies that support compatible, river-friendly uses. We will encourage local entrepreneurs to offer an array of river-based concessions: waterfront restaurants and cafes with food and drink reflective of our diverse neighborhoods, recreational experiences such as yoga and BBQ classes, and places to rent and store equipment like kayaks and fishing poles. Creating more formal ways for people to influence riverfront programming, such as new Park Advisory Councils for riverfront parks, will engage a broad range of stakeholders in activating our rivers. These activities harness the economic benefit from having inviting riverfronts and living rivers, and build support for further protecting and improving ecological conditions.

The sky's the limit for expanding river tours beyond downtown: Tours on the Calumet and South Branch of the Chicago rivers could educate participants about our region's unique ecology and geology, Native American history, the I&M Canal, Underground Railroad, Great Migration, Industrial Revolution and even the Clean Water Act. Expanding water taxi service beyond Ping Tom Park on the South Branch would make site-hopping between downtown, Chinatown, Bridgeport, Pilsen and Little Village a reality. Throughout the river system, more and more riverfront businesses—from breweries to offices—can provide boat docks. This would go hand-in-hand with the creation of in-river parks, perfect for fishing and paddling, created by remediating stretches of the rivers that are not navigable to larger boats.



Ard van der Leeuw

We need parks and spaces along our rivers to support crowd-drawing events like dragonboat races.

“We can develop stronger connections by having boats go further up and down the river. Instead of just touring architecture downtown, boats could connect people to unique neighborhood culture.”

—Focus group participant

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Develop and pilot a broader array of riverfront tours in an expanded geography.
- Create interactive guides to existing neighborhood tourism options.
- Convene a working group of riverfront property owners to explore strategies for cultivating more active programming and enabling concessions.
- Expand water taxi service southward beyond Ping Tom Park.
- Include performance space and infrastructure for concessions in new or revamped riverfront open space.
- Explore options for centralized management and revenue options to support riverfront programming and tourism.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Amtrak, Tour boat industry, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Dept. of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, Choose Chicago, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Architecture Foundation, Chicago History Museum



Townsquare Media Albany

Riverfront spaces should be able to support temporary concessions, like food trucks, as well as more permanent ones, like restaurants and kayak rentals.

“We could get more for our investments if we consider all 12 months! Minnesota and Quebec embrace winter with riverfront activities.”

—Focus group participant

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Explore existing tourist sites on our rivers: the Bridgeport Art Center, McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum, and sites throughout the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor.
- When planning events like farmers' markets, craft fairs, drone races, Movies in the Park and more, look for riverfront settings to enhance the experience. Both the Chicago Park District and Forest Preserves of Cook County are open to hosting events planned and operated by outside organizations.

2030 GOAL Iconic riverfront destinations

In the tradition established by the Riverwalk, Ping Tom Park, and the boat houses at River Park, Clark Park and Eleanor Street, iconic destinations will abound along the rivers for active recreation and large events. In some instances these destinations will repurpose existing infrastructure and buildings as the backdrops and setting for new uses. As major riverfront properties—the old Chicago Post Office, Chicago Union Station, dormant grain silos at Damen Avenue on the Chicago River, DuSable Park, the northwestern corner of Lake Calumet, Fay’s Point, capped landfills along the Calumet and the Chicago Area Confined Disposal Facility—move toward development or redevelopment, there should be a concerted effort to create vibrant, iconic attractions for Chicagoans and visitors alike. The greatest design and architectural minds in Chicago and beyond, as well as the creative spirit and local know-how of area residents, will be brought to bear on these sites through frequent design challenges and studio-based workshops that inform development proposals and implementation. The resulting innovation in design also will support community visions and empower neighborhood stewardship.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Initiate a visioning and planning process for the Chicago Area Confined Disposal Facility at the mouth of the Calumet River, a rare opportunity for a park destination that is simultaneously riverfront and lakefront.
- Develop a priority list of opportunities for iconic attractions on public or private land, and place-based visions for future development.
- Where possible, link requests for proposals for development of publicly-owned sites to these visions.
- Engage the performing art, design, architectural and creative community in an ongoing dialogue about aspirations and constraints for activating riverfront.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Architecture Foundation, design and performing arts community



The striking architecture of the recently completed boathouse at Clark Park draws people to a part of the river they may not have noticed before.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Encourage groups such as the Chicago Architecture Foundation, American Institute of Architects or Illinois Institute of Technology to host design competitions for rethinking major riverfront properties.

2030 GOAL Productive use (and reuse) of water

Chicago’s rivers will be recognized and treated as an increasingly rich ecosystem that benefits plants, animals and people. By continuing to improve water quality, we will further boost surrounding property values and tax revenues. Without diminishing downstream water quality, water levels or habitats, we will derive more economic value from river water and treated effluent. High-quality effluent could be used throughout the river system for industrial purposes, irrigation of community-scale and production-scale farms and fish farms, coolant for data centers, and more. In limited circumstances, river water itself may be used for irrigation. Opportunities to productively use river water and effluent will be embedded in corridor-specific industrial land use plans.

Building off the success of Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) in recovering and selling phosphorous from wastewater, Chicago will build a global reputation for recovery, recycling and sale of nutrients from river water, effluent and sediments. New ways to generate renewable energy—from algae-based biofuel to hydrokinetic turbines—would harness the river for our region’s power grid. Experimental freshwater shellfish farming could improve water quality. Together these uses will clean the water and build our economy.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Investigate productive uses of effluent and incorporate them into newly revised industrial corridor plans.
- Conduct an assessment of feasible options and locations for cooling, irrigation or hydroelectric production, accounting for existing transportation needs and broader water management considerations.
- Assess feasibility and possible impacts from use of river water for irrigation of adjacent public landscapes or community-scale agriculture.
- Conduct a gap analysis to determine additional phosphorous management actions necessary to reach the State of Illinois’ goal of .01 milligrams per liter throughout the river system.
- Improve nutrient removal at all wastewater treatment facilities in the Chicago region.



A new nutrient recovery system at Stickney Water Reclamation Plant produces fertilizer from phosphorous removed from wastewater.

KEY PLAYERS

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MWRD, Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois International Port District, Current Innovation, academic institutions

\$2
MILLION

annual revenue MWRD expects from selling fertilizer recovered from wastewater

2040 GOAL Revitalized and reimagined infrastructure



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers installed an electric barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship canal in 2010 to help control aquatic invasive species.

The Chicago Area Waterway System will become a global model for the integrated and coordinated management and investment in traditional and natural infrastructure to effectively and efficiently move goods, manage water resources and prevent the movement of aquatic invasive species between two of the world's largest freshwater ecosystems.

All of these needs will be weighed and accounted for in robust, data-driven and future-oriented decision-making processes. Cross-sector and interjurisdictional dialogue to prioritize the diverse needs of waterways infrastructure will be an ongoing and collaborative effort, encouraged by vocal city, regional and congressional support.

We must secure new appropriations for demand-driven U.S. Army Corp of Engineers projects that will strategically repair, replace, remove and reimagine our locks, dams and river banks where appropriate to ensure they serve multiple purposes and provide multiple benefits. Addressing verifiable impediments to efficient maritime movement will reduce lock delays and other known barriers to growing the market for waterborne freight. These improvements also will attract water-freight businesses to priority employment areas identified by established land use and environmental plans, policies and regulations.

Completing the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan and making complementary investments in natural stormwater solutions will eliminate combined sewer overflows in all but the most intense storms. Cutting-edge treatment would make it possible, in some locations, to return river water to Lake Michigan. River banks, where possible and prudent, would be rehabilitated to provide habitat and reduce erosion.

We will prevent current and future aquatic invasive species movement between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River through long-term, two-way solutions in concert with investments in new or revamped navigational locks and dams.

These infrastructure investments will create many new jobs in the Chicago region, stimulating the economy and helping to maintain a healthy middle-class workforce. The benefits will be felt locally and beyond, motivating additional state and federal funding to address issues felt by multiple regions.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Convene a long-term, cross-sector and interjurisdictional working group of government and non-government interests in Chicago's rivers to develop a data-driven capital improvement plan for transportation, water resources and habitat needs. While this can be initiated right away, it may take years to secure enough resources to fully implement this proposed capital improvement plan.
- Coordinate strong congressional advocacy and action on funding waterway infrastructure needs.
- Identify existing or new revenue sources to ensure necessary local or regional cost-share for state or federal funding programs.

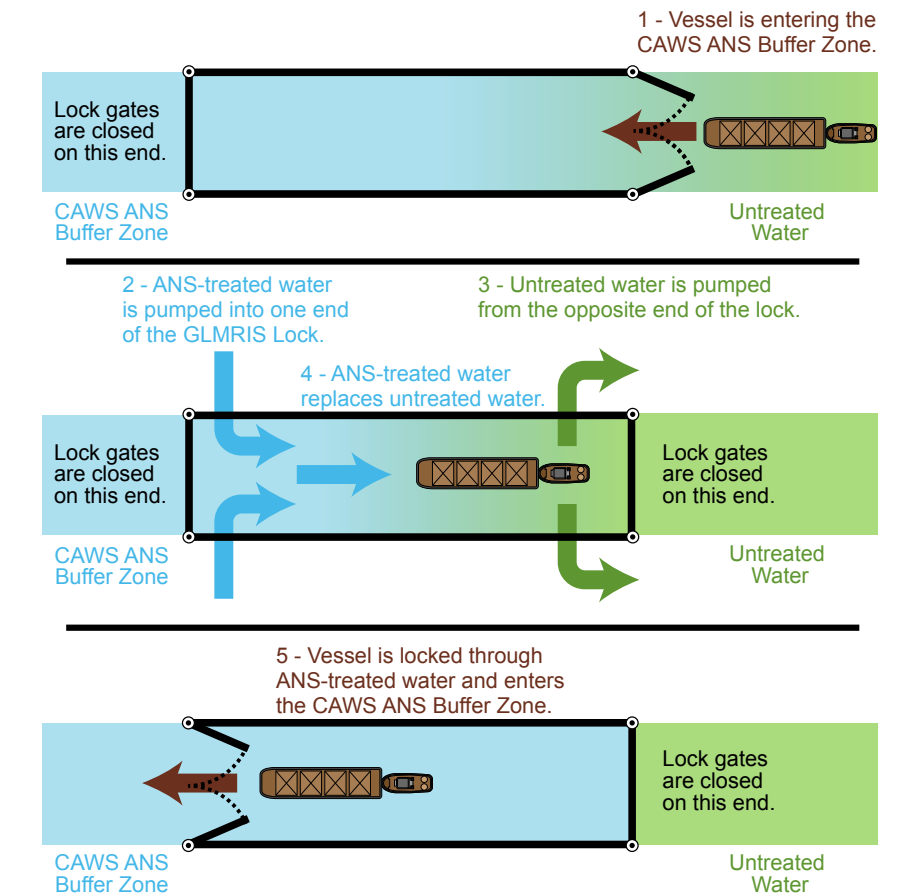
KEY PLAYERS

City of Chicago, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Illinois Congressional Delegation, United States Congress, Chicago-area maritime stakeholders, State of Illinois, environmental organizations, Illinois River Carriers Association, MWRD, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Contact your state and federal legislators to tell them you support needed investment in waterways infrastructure.

A WAY TO LOCK OUT INVASIVE SPECIES



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

This conceptual lock design, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study, allows movement of boat traffic throughout the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) while inhibiting invasive species (or ANS, Aquatic Nuisance Species).

PRODUCTIVE

Our rivers will be productive.

They have historically been and will continue to be working rivers that are transportation arteries, commercial corridors and tourism generators.

Here's what that means to community members and stakeholders, in their own words.

"We need to realize that whatever development there is along the river, it can't be a one-size-fits-all approach. It must take into account what makes sense for the surrounding community."

2020 GOAL New visions for modern working rivers
page 30

"I'd love vendors along the river for food and canoe rental. Shelters and pavilions for inclement weather. Winter time activities! And I really hope we can extend the water taxi route south."

2030 GOAL Local tourism and jobs
page 36

"My primary concerns are the deteriorating conditions of the navigation system and the lack of agency and public understanding of the importance to our local, regional and national economies."

2040 GOAL Revitalized and reimagined infrastructure
page 40

"I'd love to see a coordinated marketing initiative of the working riverfronts, to bring the benefits, jobs and productive utilization of the facilities for communities and the tax base."

2030 GOAL New tools to support riverfront productivity
page 32

"We foresee tremendous growth in the Chicago economy and think it necessary that all parties look to compromise between the recreational and business needs of the region's rivers. We use the river to transport products globally and locally."

2020 GOAL New visions for modern working rivers
page 30

Ross Barney Architects



LIVING

INVITING PRODUCTIVE LIVING

Our rivers will be living: From riverbeds to shorelines, plants, animals and people will co-exist in vibrant, healthy ecosystems.

Water quality management policies will proactively reduce pollution, restore the environment, create more habitat for fish and wildlife, and aggressively combat the spread of invasive species. Future riverfront development of all kinds will incorporate planned space for all forms of life, connecting people to nature.

GOALS

- 2020** Active stewardship of every park and preserve
- 2020** Ecologically sensitive shoreline development
- 2020** Aggressive management of invasive species
- 2020** Expanded Chicago Park District Natural Areas
- 2030** Our rivers as parks
- 2030** Expanded preserves and parks
- 2030** Coordinated prevention of water pollution
- 2030** Rivers we can swim in
- 2040** Thriving river ecosystems

2020 GOAL Active stewardship of every park and preserve

By establishing a Park Advisory Council (PAC) or stewardship group dedicated to every riverfront park and preserve, Chicagoans will demonstrate their pride in and responsibility for clean, healthy and safe parks that support native vegetation, wildlife and active recreation. A PAC consists of community members who marshal financial resources and broader neighborhood support for managing and maintaining park infrastructure. A volunteer stewardship program is another approach, with members committed to trash-free shorelines, invasive species management and thriving native ecosystems.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- The Chicago Park District and Friends of the Parks, which have had good success in seeding and supporting PACs and some stewardship programs, and the Forest Preserves of Cook County and the Friends of the Forest Preserves, which have active stewardship groups, should collaborate to share practices and cultivate more civic ownership of open spaces.
- Expand the Centennial Volunteers to include more groups along rivers, including the Des Plaines.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Parks, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Friends of the Chicago River, Field Museum, aldermanic offices, community organizations, individuals



The Nature Conservancy

Removing invasive species, cleaning up litter and planting new vegetation are important roles of a Park Advisory Council.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Does your neighborhood riverfront park have an active Park Advisory Council? If so, join! If not, consider starting one with other engaged neighbors.
- Is there an active stewardship group in a park or forest preserve that you love? If so, sign up to help with an upcoming event.
- Does your favorite riverfront space have an established site leader for Chicago River Day? If not, can you be that person?

2020 GOAL Ecologically sensitive shoreline development

New real estate development and substantial redevelopment projects along the rivers will demonstrably improve habitats on land and in the water, increase public riverfront access and better prepare the city and region to weather the effects of climate change. To do so, we must modernize and consistently implement river edge design standards and add ecological considerations to the Chicago Zoning Ordinance's riverfront setback provisions. We must take a similar approach in suburban riverfront communities. Residential, commercial and industrial developments can and should enable public access to and through sites, integrate nature-based stormwater solutions into their properties and prevent erosion while improving the rivers' edges by planting native vegetation that connects land and water.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Examine the ecological or recreational benefit of revising the Riverfront Development Ordinance to require a larger setback than the current 30 feet where possible.
- Develop a model riverfront development ordinance for suburban adoption.
- Adopt new design standards that support and increase native riverfront habitat along Chicago's rivers.
- Explore adopting an incentive-based rating system for riverfront development similar to the Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines rating system created for New York City's waterfront.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development, Friends of the Chicago River, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, MWRD, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, suburban communities, real estate development community, environmental organizations



Ryan Griffin-Stegink

This residential development along Bubbly Creek has a large area that returns stormwater to the ground, rather than letting it flow into the sewer.

“We need a balance between human habitat and natural habitat.”

—Focus group participant

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

Review local real estate development proposals and provide public comment.

2020 GOAL Aggressive management of invasive species

Building off efforts begun in 2003 to combat invasive animals and plants on land and in the water, the City of Chicago and its partner agencies will take even more proactive measures to eradicate these threats to native animals, plants and their ecosystems. Policy-driven efforts, such as landscaping ordinances, must be consistently enforced. Chemical, biological and behavioral solutions will be deployed as needed, in compliance with health and environmental standards. Signs posted along all three rivers—particularly at boat launches—should communicate the risks of invasive species and teach people how they can help reduce those risks.

Recognizing its critical role as the connector between two of the world's largest freshwater ecosystems—and how inhospitable it would be for hordes of Asian carp to jump around just feet from the Riverwalk and other iconic and neighborhood destinations—the City of Chicago, in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Chamber of Commerce, Ill. River Carriers Association, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) and many others, will push to complete a feasible plan for preventing aquatic invasive species transfer between the greater Mississippi River and Great Lakes ecosystems. By 2020, we will enact this plan. What's more, the City and its partners should advocate for federal, state and local resources to support long-term infrastructure and other solutions to halt the spread of aquatic invasive species.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Complete a detailed, feasible and actionable plan for long-term solutions to halt the movement of aquatic invasive species through Chicago's rivers.
- Identify a mix of funding sources to support near-term and long-term solutions to aquatic invasive species transfer.
- Develop and deploy educational signage, hotline numbers and other means of empowering river and riverfront users to be part of monitoring.
- Explore the feasibility of an incentive program or contest for removal or capture of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species.



Asian carp are more than a nuisance: They could endanger native species.

KEY PLAYERS

City of Chicago, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Chamber of Commerce, Ill. River Carriers Association, MWRD, members of the Asian Carp Coordinating Committee and the ongoing Chicago Area Waterway System advisory group convened by the Great Lakes Commission, and Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Learn to recognize—and combat—invasive plants and other species on your own property and in protected open space in your community.
- If you're a boater or fisher, report sightings of aquatic invasive species to the Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources.
- Let your elected representatives at all levels of government know you support efforts to combat invasive species.

2020 GOAL Expanded Chicago Park District natural areas

Led by Mayor Emanuel's "Building on Burnham" vision, we will double the acreage of designated natural areas along our rivers. This will greatly increase access to nature in our region's urban core and achieve a target of 2,020 acres by 2020. These spaces will provide ample opportunities for recreation, stewardship and education about the region's unique natural environments. They also will create invaluable habitats for migratory birds, rare plants and spawning fish and mussels.

Day in and day out, students, families and tourists will visit Chicago Park District's designated riverfront natural areas. As these spaces are revived, they will become popular destinations for bird watching, bike riding and outdoor education. Students will learn first-hand about the plants and animals that make up prairies, woodlands and wetlands, as well as the importance these ecosystems have in our region. The Park District will cultivate local stewardship groups and engage neighboring communities in planning before and during site acquisition, remediation and development.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Identify gaps in access to natural areas within Chicago, and develop land acquisition or site naturalization plans accordingly.
- Expedite the transfer of Mittal Woods, Dead Stick Pond, Heron Pond, Hyde Lake and other priority conservation targets to public control.
- Engage neighboring communities in planning for natural areas expansion. Identify whether passive recreational activities—such as bird watching—are compatible with ecosystem needs on a site-by-site basis.
- Cultivate local stewardship groups for existing and new natural areas.
- Integrate wetlands and riparian zones into the natural areas program.

KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Park District, Park Advisory Councils and local stewardship groups, Friends of the Chicago River, Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, Friends of the Parks, Chicago Parks Foundation



Chicago Park District natural areas, like Hegewisch Marsh, offer a way to see and learn about plants and wildlife within the city.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Visit designated natural areas in a park near your home.
- Work with your local Park Advisory Council or volunteer stewardship group to determine whether areas of existing parks or other land in your community might be suitable for conservation or conversion to a designated natural area.

2030 GOAL Our rivers as parks



Ross Barney Architects

The Collateral Channel has the potential to become a natural asset and a major hub on a new south riverfront trail. See page 67.

Chicago can develop an international reputation for creating parks **in** rivers.

Non-navigable sections of Chicago's waterways—such as Bubbly Creek, the North Branch of the Chicago River east of Goose Island, the Grand Calumet River and portions of Lake Calumet—will be reimagined as instream parks by planting wetlands vegetation and restoring habitat in the water. These places can become hotspots for fishing, learning how to canoe and kayak in a safe environment, or even quietly meditating while surrounded by nature.

Native wetland vegetation will have the added benefits of helping clean the water, prevent erosion, and nurture populations of fish, otters and other wildlife. In areas such as the Grand Calumet River or Lake Calumet, these instream parks will connect to restored ecosystems managed by the Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Forest Preserves of Cook County and State of Indiana.

Likewise, we will transform neglected shorelines and man-made river walls—where feasible—into thriving habitats that connect land and water ecosystems. From crumbling sheet pile riverwalls to the river edges of Chicago Park District and Forest Preserves of Cook County properties—notably the latter's multiple riverfront golf courses—wholesale reimagining and redevelopment of the river edge will dramatically change the relationship between Chicago and its rivers.

**“Why do all of our parks have to be on land?
Why can't the river be the park?”**

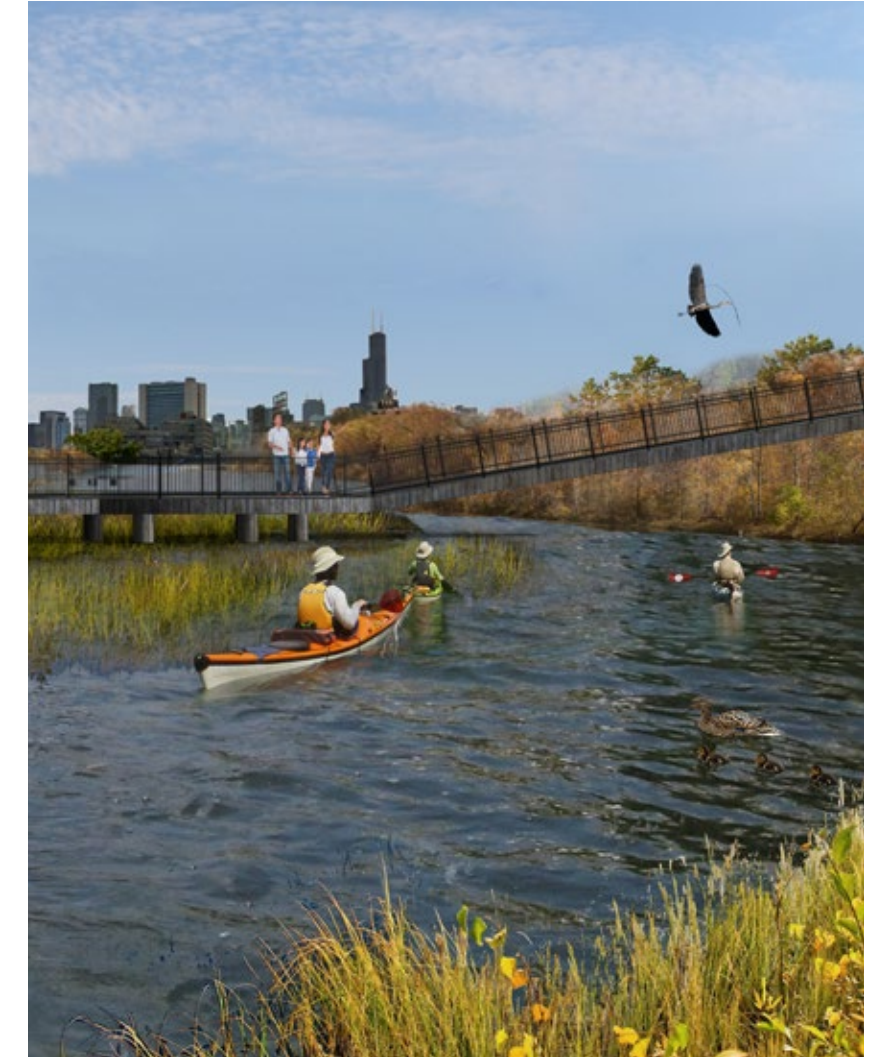
—Nick Wesley, *Urban Rivers*

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Fast track the removal of the River Park dam to improve fish and paddling passage up the North Branch of the Chicago River.
- Support remediation of Bubbly Creek by the U.S. and Ill. Environmental Protection agencies, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and legacy polluters.
- Assess the feasibility of developing instream wetlands in areas such as the Collateral Channel, Grand Calumet River, northwestern Lake Calumet and North Branch Canal.
- Pilot instream wetlands in one or more locations, to better understand plant health, water quality and flow effects, maintenance needs and more.
- Conduct an updated study of river wall conditions, and suitability of habitat restoration through river wall reconstruction or naturalization.
- Assess possible public, private and hybrid management scenarios for instream parks.
- Assess the feasibility of redesigning river edges of golf courses and other recreational areas.
- Reassess the feasibility of previously proposed habitat projects that have not been completed such as those identified within the 2005 “Chicago River Agenda” and MWRD’s 2010 “Habitat Evaluation and Improvement Study.”

KEY PLAYERS

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago Park District, Park Advisory Councils and local stewardship groups, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, MWRD, paddling and rowing associations, Openlands, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, Chicago Parks Foundation



Ross Barney Architects

The east branch of the Chicago River around Goose Island isn't navigable for large boats and could be an in-river park for paddling and wildlife. See page 69.

2030 GOAL Expanded preserves and parks

Thousands of acres of riverfront land should be transferred to experienced land managers for restoration, remediation, conservation and stewardship. These new riverfront open spaces will increase habitat and communities' access to natural areas, improve air and water quality, and make better use of previously dormant land. Plus, they will help meet regional open space goals such as those defined by Forest Preserves of Cook County's "Next Century Conservation Plan."

Along both the Chicago and Calumet rivers, the most creative minds in landscape architecture, design, botany and urban planning should be engaged with community organizations and government to transform thousands of acres of marginal riverfront property. We will turn capped landfills, containment facilities for dredging materials, brownfields from past industry, rights of way for power lines and other utilities, public holdings and abandoned rail lines into productive habitats that enhance surrounding neighborhoods.

These are not the region's most straightforward opportunities for expanding open space and natural areas. At the local level, however, they are often the only option if other land is to be preserved for job creation and employment. Building community and political support for these long-term investments will be easier with a concurrent increase in people actively participating in Park Advisory Councils and stewardship groups throughout the river system.



Ryan Griffin-Stegink

Unused land at the Illinois International Port District could be opened to the public as natural space for a variety of activities, including birdwatching.

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Encourage local leaders to transform vacant lots into open space and rally your neighbors to do the same.
- Volunteer to help restore and maintain open spaces, parks and community gardens.

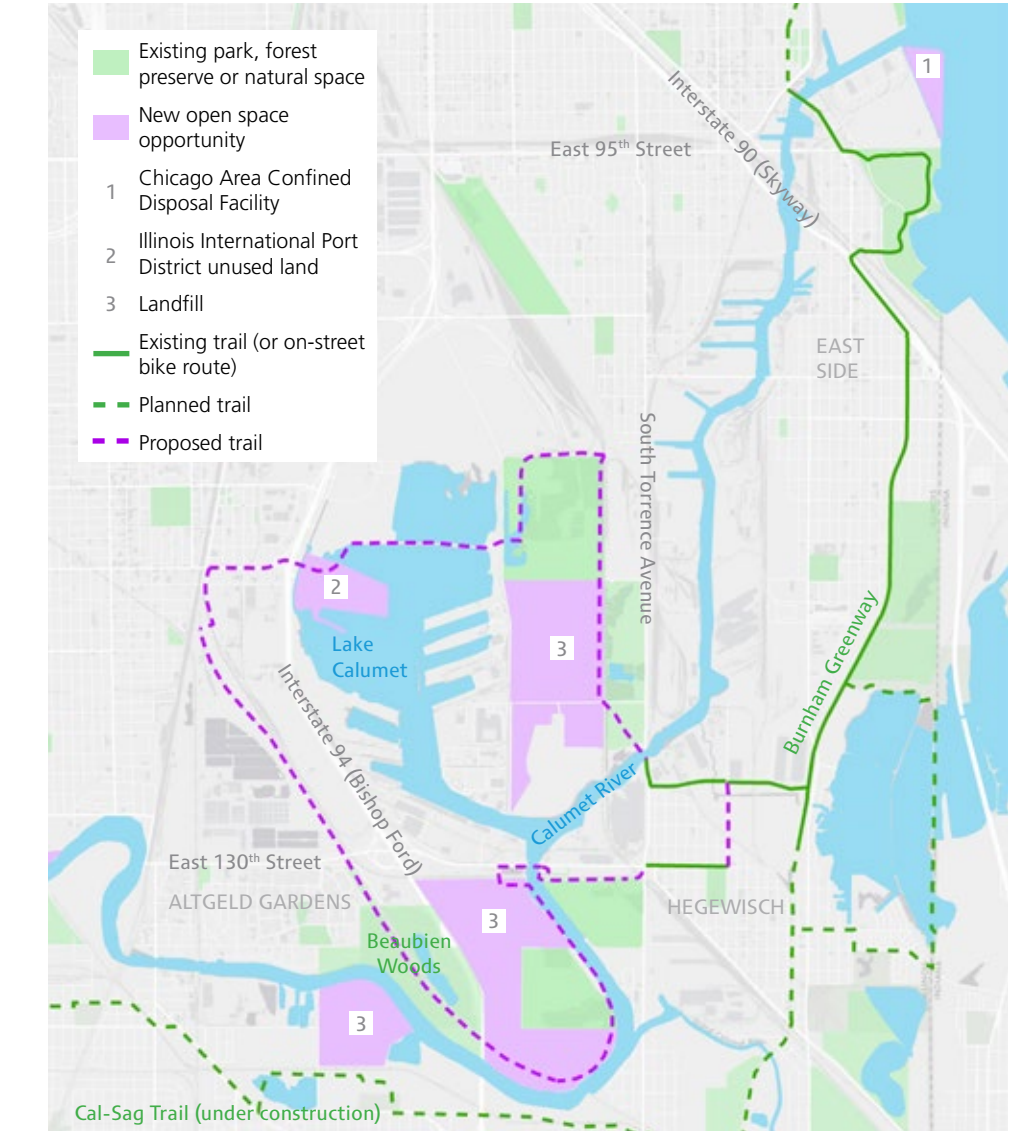
MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Develop a master plan for the combined geography of Beaubien Woods, Altgeld Gardens and vacant land along 134th Street.
- Assess the current condition and viable future use of landfills along the Calumet River.
- Develop a site plan for the parcel owned by MWRD at the mouth of the Collateral Channel.
- Develop a site plan for recreational development on the southwestern bank of the Chicago River, opposite Goose Island.
- Initiate a visioning and planning process for the Chicago Area Confined Disposal Facility at the mouth of the Calumet River, a rare opportunity for a park destination that is both riverfront and lakefront.
- Expedite planning, remediation and development of DuSable Park at the mouth of the Chicago River, another park destination that is both riverfront and lakefront.
- Conduct an updated ownership and liability assessment for all land along the Chicago and Calumet rivers.
- Examine rail, power line and other privately held rights of way to determine feasibility for connections between new or existing open space.

KEY PLAYERS

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago Park District, Park Advisory Councils and local stewardship groups, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, MWRD, Openlands, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, ComEd, private rail operators, landfill managers, Chicago Housing Authority, communities and community organizations

CALUMET OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES



The Calumet area has a wealth of former industrial and other vacant sites that are good opportunities to expand open space.

2030 GOAL Coordinated prevention of water pollution



Christina B. Castro

Signs on storm drains can remind people of the connection between our sewers and our rivers.

Chicago-area residents should be engaged in helping manage litter, pollution and local stormwater within their watershed to improve local and downstream river water quality.

By educating the public about the connections between water consumption, rain, litter, the sewer system and our rivers, we will increase understanding of how water moves through the city's interconnected system of curbs and underground pipes, and can easily make its way into the river. Widespread use of natural stormwater solutions—e.g bioswales and rain gardens—on public and private property will manage more rain where it falls, reducing flooding and runoff to storm drains.

City and civic organizations should partner with communities on public education, such as signs that inform people that gutters drain to the river in storm events and maps that illustrate which areas of the city drain to which areas of the rivers.

We also need to aggressively mitigate contaminants such as chlorides, pharmaceutical residuals and endocrine disruptors. To do so, MWRD should lead countywide programs to improve the efficiency and sustainability of road deicing in order to minimize salt use; and work with medical and law enforcement partners to create a distributed network of secure facilities for pharmaceutical drop-off and disposal.

1,834 square miles of land drain to our rivers

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Develop watershed-based plans for major sub-watersheds of Cook County and Chicago.
- Engage neighborhood organizations and business associations in watershed-based planning in major sewersheds.
- Develop a robust educational campaign to raise awareness of the connection between people's behavior, property management and river water quality.
- Create and promote a safe, dependable system for pharmaceutical drop-offs and disposal.
- Develop programs and policies to discourage excessive use of road salt.
- Develop programs and policies to encourage the use of nature-based stormwater management practices on private property.

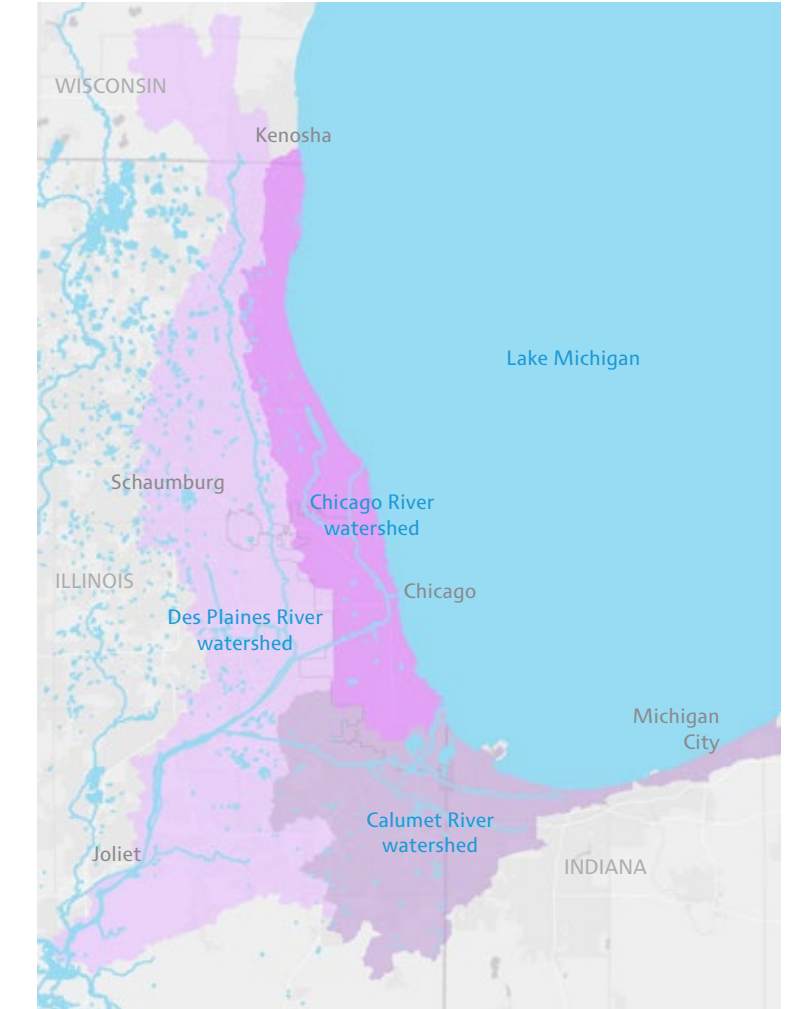
KEY PLAYERS

Chicago Dept. of Water Management, Chicago Park District, Chicago Dept. of Transportation, Chicago Dept. of Streets and Sanitation, MWRD, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

OUR RIVERS, OUR ROLE

- Explore options for installing nature-based stormwater solutions, such as a rain garden or cistern, on your property.
- Reduce water consumption during storms to reduce the likelihood of combined sewer overflows.
- Sign up for Friends of the Chicago Rivers' Overflow Action Alerts.
- Always return expired or unused pharmaceuticals to a secure facility. Never flush them down the toilet.

A VAST WATERSHED TO PROTECT



Together, the watersheds of our rivers drain more than 1,800 square miles of land across three states.

2030 GOAL Rivers we can swim in

All of Chicago's rivers will achieve the water quality standard set for them by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2011—primary contact waters that allow for safe swimming, paddling, fishing and more. The successful completion of the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan—the Deep Tunnel—in 2029, coupled with supplemental water quality improvements, could nearly eliminate combined sewer overflows. Investment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and MWRD on all our rivers, and especially on the Upper Des Plaines, will greatly reduce flooding, erosion and pollution. Widespread and substantial investment in nature-based stormwater infrastructure will further limit runoff to our rivers. Improvements at wastewater treatment facilities will drastically reduce nutrient pollution, limiting the overgrowth of algae and plants in our rivers. An ambitious program to cap, dredge or otherwise remove contaminated sediments throughout the river system will eliminate residual pollution. Instream wetlands in non-navigable stretches of the rivers further filter the water. As a result of the compound benefits from decades of investments, the water will be safe enough for swimming as consistently as it is in Lake Michigan.

And people will swim in it. Triathlons will use the Chicago River to take advantage of downtown spectating, with clean waters and a continuous riverfront trail for swimming, cycling and running. Ladders, ramps, pools, lifeguard stations and other infrastructure necessary for safe swimming will be installed in non-navigable areas of the rivers. On hot summer days, children in neighborhoods far from Lake Michigan will be able to walk down the street and hop in the river for good, clean fun.



Boston's Charles River once faced water quality challenges like our rivers, but is now clean enough for swimming.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Ensure the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan—especially McCook Reservoir—is completed in 2029.
- Maximize the capture of sewage and stormwater to reservoirs and sewage treatment plants.
- Conduct a gap analysis of current plans to determine additional improvements needed in water quality and stormwater management.
- Implement in-pipe treatments to reduce pollution from combined sewer overflows.
- Fully implement the planned improvements for the Upper Des Plaines River.
- Conduct a study to prioritize management and remediation of contaminated sediments throughout the river system.

KEY PLAYERS

MWRD, City of Chicago Dept. of Water Management, Friends of the Chicago River, Shedd Aquarium, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Park District, Chicago Harbor Safety Committee, Cook County, suburban communities, environmental advocacy organizations, property owners

2040 GOAL Thriving river ecosystems

The culmination of decades of open space expansion, improved stewardship, investments in water treatment, erosion control, shoreline naturalization and more will lead to healthy and abundant reproductive populations of native fish, plants, mammals, reptiles, birds and smaller organisms. Dispersed habitat creation and restoration throughout the rivers means that tree overhang, underwater shelter, instream vegetation, and natural banks will occur more consistently, enabling species mobility. Higher water quality will support more sustainable and vibrant communities of helpful bacteria, fungi and insects that form the base of the food chain. More and more, pollutants never reach the rivers, as everything from road salt to pharmaceuticals are better managed. Each distinct reach of the river system will have its own habitat restoration and improvement plan well underway.

People will play their own important role in these thriving ecosystems. The rivers and their instream and shoreline open spaces, wetlands and parks can be high quality birding spots, boosting local tourism, while providing native and migratory birds with shelter and food. Beavers and otters, ospreys and falcons, snapping turtles and largemouth bass—the highest profile of our native species—will be commonplace. Through Adopt-a-Mile programs, residents, businesses, schools and neighborhood organizations conduct regular population counts of priority species. Native communities will be abundant and healthy—some species healthy enough to eat for the first time since the 1800s.

[Our rivers will finally and fully be back to what they once were: rivers.](#)

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- Establish an Adopt-a-Mile program for the rivers to generate revenue, recruit stewards and collect data.
- Create and implement habitat improvement plans for each stretch of the rivers.
- Expand the Grand Calumet River habitat and shoreline restoration into Illinois.
- Conduct Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management plans for the Little Calumet, Cal-Sag Channel, and Lower Des Plaines watersheds.
- Conduct a tree canopy and streambank naturalization study for riverfront areas.



Wildlife like muskrats could once again be commonplace in our rivers.

KEY PLAYERS

MWRD, Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, Morton Arboretum, Shedd Aquarium, Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources, Ill. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Park District, suburban communities, environmental advocacy organizations, property owners

Our rivers will be living.

From riverbeds to shorelines, plants, animals and people will co-exist in vibrant, healthy ecosystems.

Here's what that means to community members and stakeholders, in their own words.

“I originally got involved in the river through a social outing, not as a conservationist. Now I am a regular volunteer steward. If people can have fun on the river, and not just show up to clean a dirty riverbank, they'll grow to love it more.”

2020 GOAL Active stewardship of every park and preserve
page 46

“There are many opportunities for ribbons of nature that are easy to access from the city. We are surrounded by these conserved areas, which can be linked together through the rivers.”

2030 GOAL Expanded preserves and parks
page 52

“Don't forget the biotic needs. Remove dams and allow for the natural flow for aquatic life. Also, pay attention to pharmaceuticals that we are letting into the river through waste water treatment.”

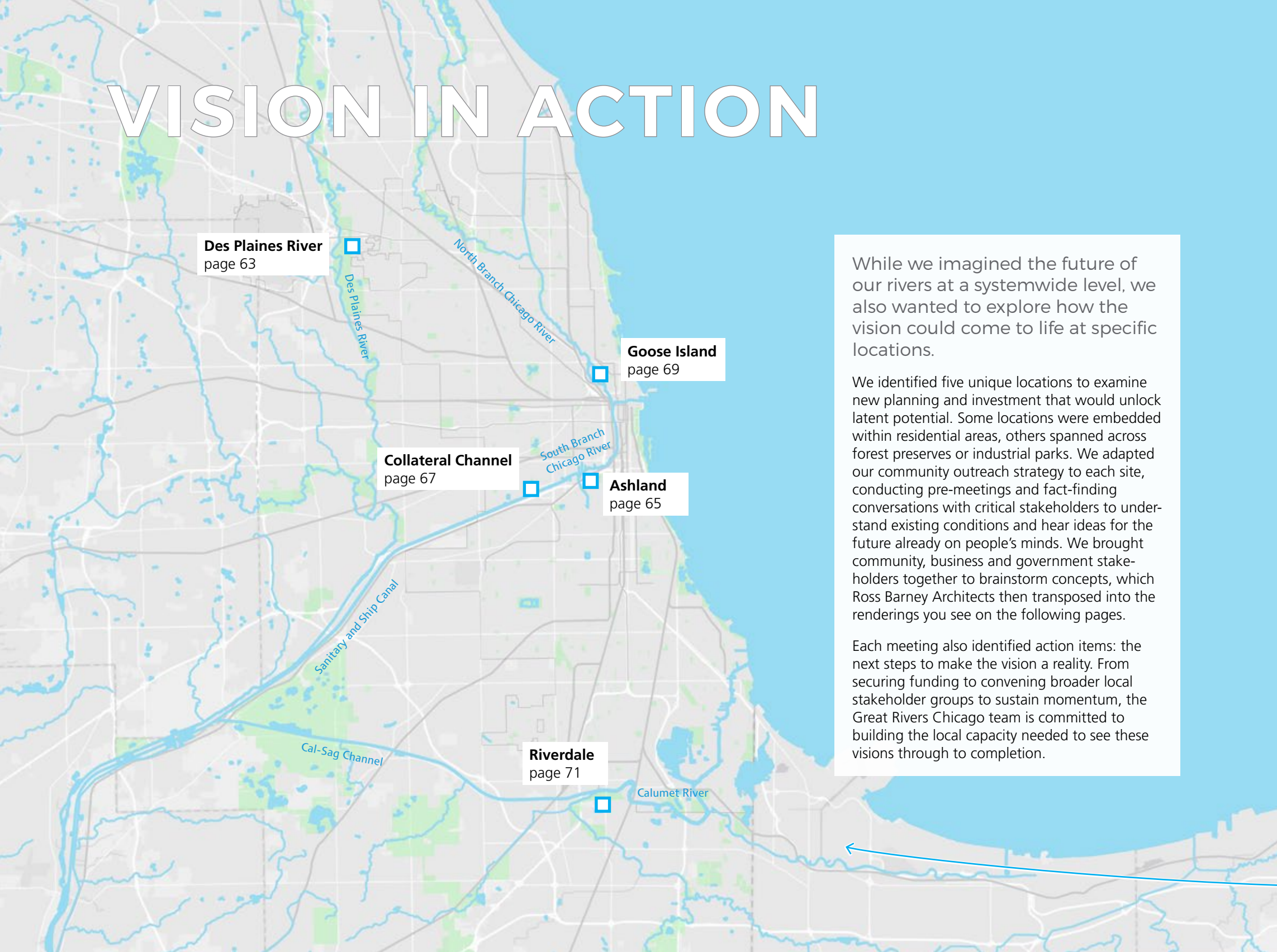
2030 GOAL Coordinated prevention of water pollution
page 54

“Keep the wild parts wild.”

2040 GOAL Thriving river ecosystems
page 57



VISION IN ACTION



Des Plaines River
page 63

Goose Island
page 69

Collateral Channel
page 67

Ashland
page 65

Riverdale
page 71

While we imagined the future of our rivers at a systemwide level, we also wanted to explore how the vision could come to life at specific locations.

We identified five unique locations to examine new planning and investment that would unlock latent potential. Some locations were embedded within residential areas, others spanned across forest preserves or industrial parks. We adapted our community outreach strategy to each site, conducting pre-meetings and fact-finding conversations with critical stakeholders to understand existing conditions and hear ideas for the future already on people's minds. We brought community, business and government stakeholders together to brainstorm concepts, which Ross Barney Architects then transposed into the renderings you see on the following pages.

Each meeting also identified action items: the next steps to make the vision a reality. From securing funding to convening broader local stakeholder groups to sustain momentum, the Great Rivers Chicago team is committed to building the local capacity needed to see these visions through to completion.

Our Great Rivers is truly a product of the many ideas, suggestions and beliefs that Chicagoans hold for the future of our rivers. We met with hundreds of people where they use (or hope to use) our rivers to see the present and future through their eyes.

Despite the many forms our rivers take and their unique character in each neighborhood, we heard the same sentiments from residents from around the city and suburbs. People consistently told us about five key changes they would like to see for the future of our rivers:

- Better access
- More recreational opportunities
- Improved aesthetics, water quality and habitat
- More business and tourism along the rivers
- More job opportunities along the rivers

We asked people questions to better understand how they currently use our rivers today and how they would describe current conditions, real or perceived. We also asked residents about their vision for the future, and what opportunities or areas for improvements they had in mind. The most frequently mentioned words from these answers were:

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| • Recreation | • Biking |
| • Watercraft | • Pollution |
| • Trails | • Jobs |
| • Entertainment | • Wildlife |
| • Access | • Safety |

We asked a range of questions, in different formats, that produced qualitative answers. We recorded, coded and analyzed these responses in a database of community input. Learn more in the Appendix at greatriverschicago.com.

120 stakeholder engagement events



5 place-based design charrettes

VISION IN ACTION



9 community meetings



VISION IN ACTION DES PLAINES RIVER AT BRYN MAWR



Hidden in plain sight, the Des Plaines River and a 56-mile trail wind through forest preserves among hotels, offices and homes in Chicago and suburbs.

Ross Barney Architects

VISION IN ACTION DES PLAINES

NOW



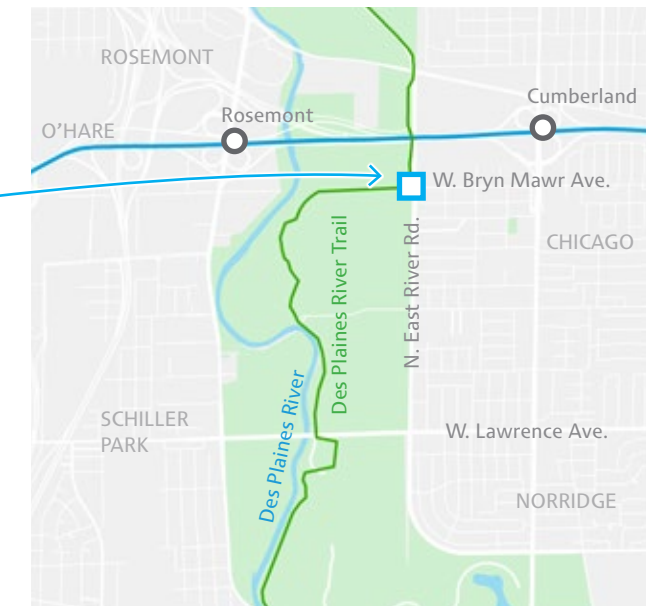
Google

FUTURE



Ross Barney Architects

The Des Plaines River Trail is accessible from Chevalier Woods, where Bryn Mawr ends at East River Road—but it's hardly obvious. New signs, branding and improved pedestrian facilities will make the trail more visible and accessible to visitors.



The Des Plaines River Trail will be well signed and well maintained

Nearby residents, office workers, hotel guests and weekend visitors from across Chicago and surrounding suburbs like Rosemont and Franklin Park will be enticed to escape to the natural environment of the forest preserve, trail and river.

Improved pedestrian access with clearly-marked crosswalks and signs, trail entrance kiosks and wayfinding from surrounding street grids, transit stations, office parks and hotels will foster easier connections between neighbors, neighborhoods and nature.

Clearly-marked access points will be frequent and inviting

Various points along the east and west side of the Des Plaines River would benefit from easy access by foot or by bike, facilitated by new investments in bridges and signage telling visitors where they are in the Des Plaines River and Trail system, and what amenities they can explore along the way.

VISION IN ACTION ASHLAND AT BUBBLY CREEK AND CTA ORANGE LINE



At the mouth of Bubbly Creek and the origin of the historic I&M Canal lies a dormant parcel that could become a riverfront destination and transit hub.

CTA Orange Line
Ashland Station



Ross Barney Architects

A mixed-use development will create a vibrant hub of activity

This vacant lot is a prime location for mixed-use development featuring housing, retail and riverfront recreational opportunities, and could serve as a model for other riverfront parcels.

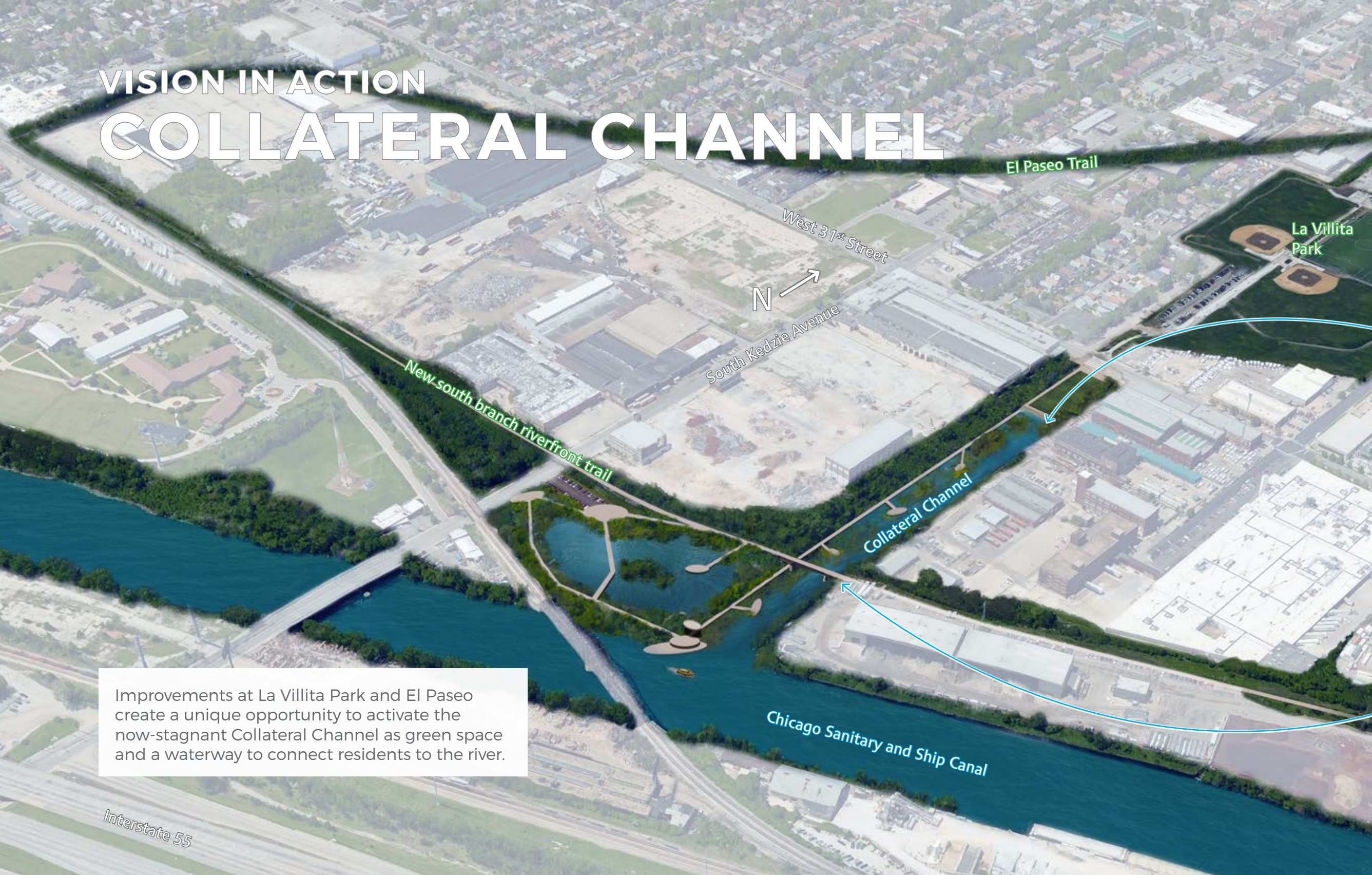
Imagine this as a potential gateway for residents, nearby employees and visitors alike to enjoy the surrounding river-oriented activities and amenities: birdwatching from Canal Origins Park, rowing from Eleanor Street boathouse, commuting via water taxi, or exercising along a new riverfront trail.

Improved access will draw people to the river

Improved pedestrian access and connections from the nearby Ashland CTA Orange Line station, buses on Ashland Avenue and 31st Street, and a water taxi stop would welcome residents of Pilsen, Bridgeport, McKinley Park, Chinatown and beyond to this historic place along the South Branch.

A new pedestrian bridge over Bubbly Creek will improve access to and from the part of Bridgeport on the east side of the creek.

VISION IN ACTION COLLATERAL CHANNEL



Improvements at La Villita Park and El Paseo create a unique opportunity to activate the now-stagnant Collateral Channel as green space and a waterway to connect residents to the river.

VISION IN ACTION COLLATERAL CHANNEL



Green space on the Collateral Channel will create a new connection to La Villita Park and El Paseo

For residents today in Little Village, the Collateral Channel is notorious for its odor, rather than its potential as an inviting riverfront. By addressing odor issues and creating open space for recreation like family picnics, the Collateral Channel could become a major hub of riverfront use that would connect the community to their river and adjacent park and trail amenities.

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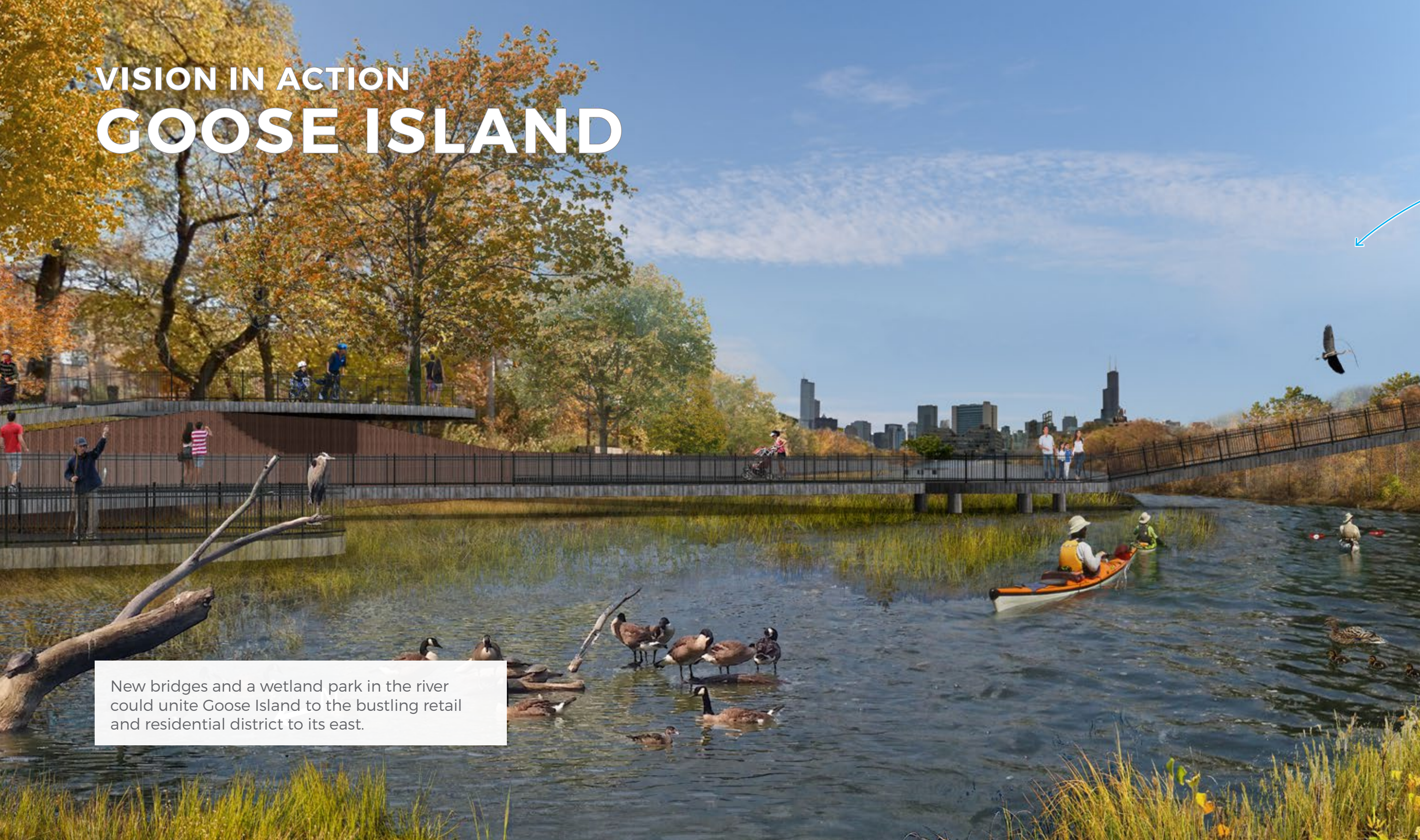


Creating flow in the channel will address odor and promote aquatic life

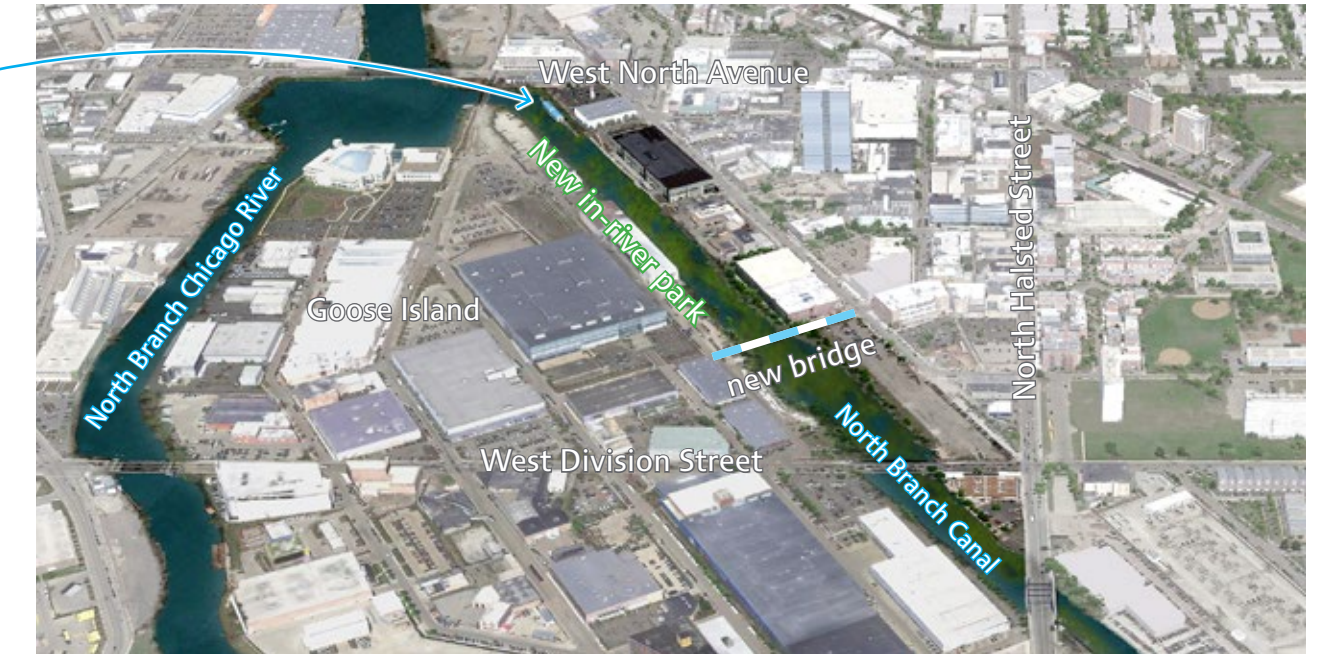
The Collateral Channel of the future could be one of better water quality, healthy wetlands and thriving ecosystems. It could be the principal access point to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal for both boats and riverfront trail users.

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VISION IN ACTION GOOSE ISLAND



New bridges and a wetland park in the river could unite Goose Island to the bustling retail and residential district to its east.



Ross Barney Architects

A non-navigable channel could become a wetland park and natural playground

Along the southwestern bank of the Chicago River sits the shallow North Branch Canal, which is off-limits to large barges and boats. With the right mix of tough and attractive native plant species, the channel could support a thriving, biodiverse wetland with migratory birds, waterfowl and turtles.

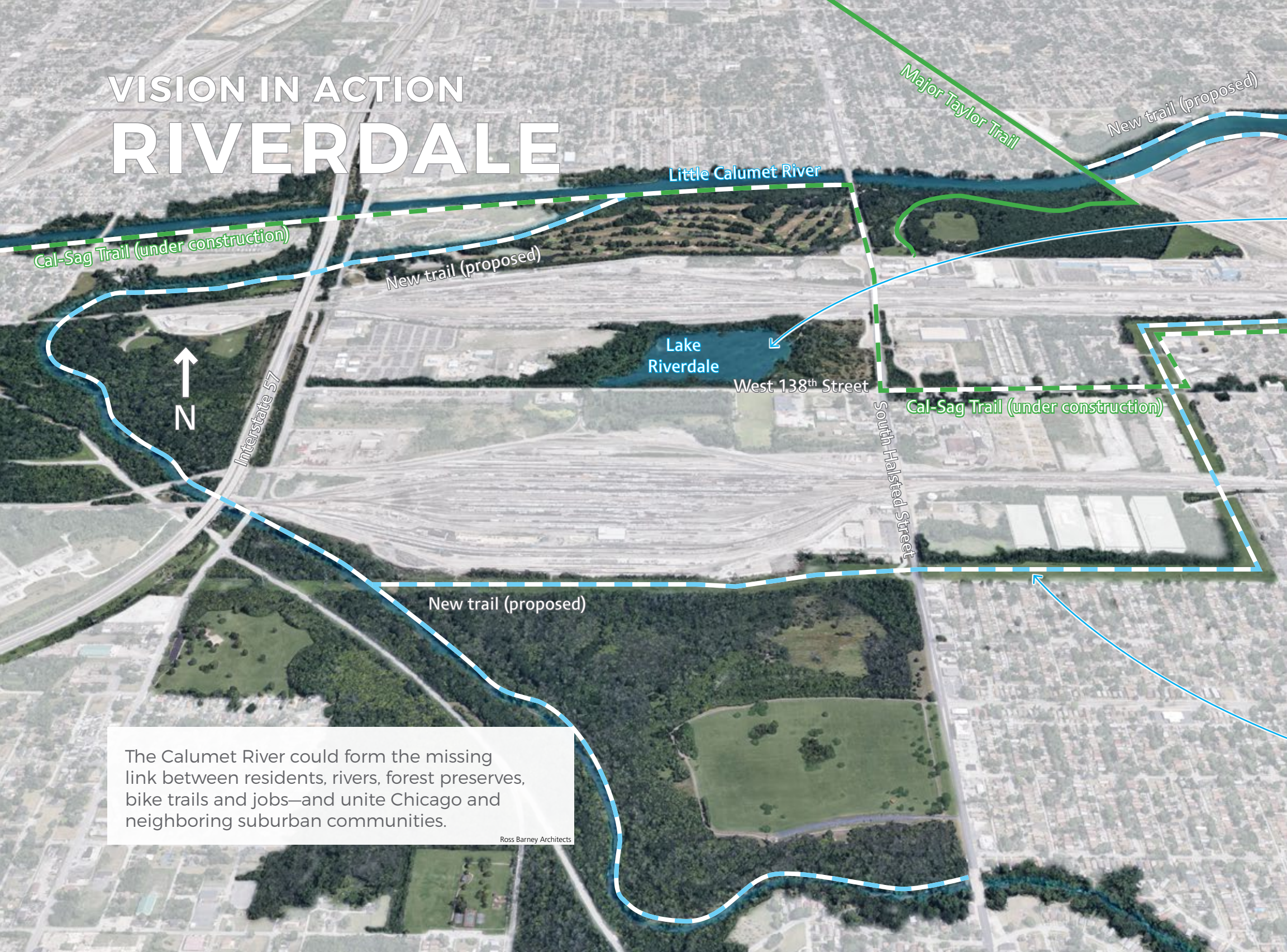
This stretch of water that forms the east side of Goose Island would be an ideal spot for novice and expert kayakers, fisherman and birdwatchers alike seeking a quiet, natural playground for recreating on the river.

Enhanced pedestrian, bike and transit accessibility could move people to and through Goose Island

From North Avenue to Division Street, there is ample opportunity to create better access for the residents, retail and office workers around Goose Island to more easily cross the channel and connect to surrounding transit and riverfront amenities. A pedestrian and bike-friendly bridge, clearly marked access points and new river-facing development similar to the existing riverwalk at Whole Foods could invite people in.

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VISION IN ACTION RIVERDALE



The Calumet River could form the missing link between residents, rivers, forest preserves, bike trails and jobs—and unite Chicago and neighboring suburban communities.

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VISION IN ACTION RIVERDALE

Activating Lake Riverdale will create an inviting, thriving natural area

Just north of 138th Street between Halsted Street and Ashland Avenue is Lake Riverdale, largely out of sight and reach to residents. This open marsh could be restored to ecological health to provide ecosystem services such as managing stormwater and alleviating the urban flooding incidents in the area.

Imagine a healthy, living marsh that welcomes residents to stop by and enjoy the outdoors. Lake Riverdale could become another active and vibrant point of recreation with the other rich natural assets and forest preserves existing amidst the Riverdale industrial corridor.



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Moving people to and through the Calumet River system will connect people, places and nature

Activating open spaces like the dormant land under ComEd power lines could enhance an emerging network of trails in Riverdale along with the Major Taylor Trail, Cal-Sag Trail and Burnham Greenway, where the Little Calumet River system becomes a transportation amenity instead of a barrier.

By improving street grid connections, signage and wayfinding, the Calumet River and riverfront trails could connect people, places and employment opportunities for the residents and workers in the Village of Riverdale. Neighbors in Blue Island, Chicago (including Altgeld Gardens), Calumet Park, Dixmoor and Dolton would also benefit.



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COORDINATION

Many actors—governments, nonprofit organizations, property owners, community groups—have a stake in and some control over our rivers. Coordination is key.

However, coordination is not the full responsibility of any of those key players. On specific projects—for example, a new boat launch, new park or lock repair—recent history has proven that key players in managing Chicago’s rivers can coordinate well. But for broader initiatives and concepts—marketing the rivers, ensuring accessibility, handling litter—coordination is often lacking. What’s more, many issues cross political boundaries: Barge traffic, stormwater, endangered and invasive species, even cyclists simply do not confine themselves to the borders of a single municipality. Thus, even the Mayor’s Office of the City of Chicago is limited in its ability to coordinate the many players and activities needed to consistently and thoroughly transform our rivers.

Yet, coordinated planning, investment and management is a fundamental necessity for achieving Our Great Rivers. Coordination needs to be somebody’s job. An existing entity may be able to handle coordination, but it is equally likely that a new entity will need to be created and empowered to pursue this vision.

We interviewed the leaders of river and riverfront visioning processes from 10 U.S. cities. While each process was unique, common themes emerged when it came to coordinating implementation:

- Political champions help, but they come and go as administrations change. A formal, independent institution is vital.
- The institution responsible for coordination can be a single unit of government, an intergovernmental partnership, a private entity (either for-profit or nonprofit) or a hybrid. Each city or region must find its own way, but an intentional process is needed to determine the optimal institution.
- Early successes in implementation are helpful to show the public the potential of the plan.
- Dependable revenue streams are helpful to continue implementation, and more importantly, for maintenance.
- Having a clearinghouse for projects helps keep people and ideas organized and moving.
- Public outreach can never, ever stop.
- Strong philanthropic support is critical.

By 2017, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Mayor’s Office of Chicago, the Leadership Commission and many partners must determine the optimal coordination structure and entity to marshal resources, shepherd projects and initiatives to completion, and continue to engage the public. This institution must be able to work across political borders.

CASE STUDIES

AURORA, ILL.

VISION

Public—City of Aurora

IMPLEMENTATION

Public-Private—City of Aurora, Aurora Civic Center Authority, Seize the Future

Majority of funding came from grants; \$8M came from the Ill. River Edge Redevelopment Zone Program.

FORT WAYNE, IND.

VISION

Public—City of Fort Wayne

IMPLEMENTATION

TBD

They are considering creating a 501(c)3 to serve as the management and fundraising arm once the projects are completed. They are also considering creating a commission to oversee and select projects.

GREENVILLE, S.C.

VISION

Public-Private—Clemson University’s Center for Community Growth and Change with joint sponsorship from the City and County of Greenville

IMPLEMENTATION

Public—City of Greenville

The plan recommended that, at this point in the overall process, a separate managing entity is not appropriate to oversee the implementation of the Reedy River Master Plan.

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

VISION

Public—City of Los Angeles

IMPLEMENTATION

Public-Private—L.A. Cooperation Comm., L.A. River Corp., Friends of the L.A. River, L.A. Mayor’s Fund

The plan proposed a joint planning authority as governing entity: L.A. River Revitalization Corporation (nonprofit overseeing financing and implementation of projects), and L.A. River Foundation (nonprofit fundraising arm). Yet, the current governance structure is different than proposed.

MILWAUKEE, WIS.

VISION

Private—Milwaukee Greenway Coalition

IMPLEMENTATION

Public-Private—River Revitalization Foundation

The Milwaukee Greenway Coalition created the position of a director, who is housed within the River Revitalization Foundation. The Coalition still exists and its partners help implement and raise funding for projects. The director is responsible for overseeing implementation of the plan.

NEW ORLEANS, LA.

VISION

Private—Greater New Orleans Inc.

IMPLEMENTATION

TBD

The plan calls for a Regional Water Management Authority. This has not yet been created but there is a strong regional collaborative.

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

VISION

Public—City Planning Dept.

IMPLEMENTATION

Public—City Planning Dept.

Implementation was public, but included the Waterfront Management Advisory Board, a private group of stakeholders appointed by the mayor. Led by new position of Director of Waterfront and Open Space within City Planning Dept.

PITTSBURGH, PA.

VISION

Public-Private—Pittsburgh Riverlife Task Force

IMPLEMENTATION

Public-Private—Riverlife

Riverlife is responsible for implementing projects and securing necessary funding. The funding came from philanthropic and city and state funding.

SEATTLE, WASH.

VISION

Public—Central Waterfront Committee and City of Seattle

IMPLEMENTATION

Public-Private—City of Seattle Office of the Waterfront and Friends of the Seattle Waterfront

Both the Office of the Waterfront and Friends of the Seattle Waterfront were created based on the recommendation of the Committee. The City also created a new Local Improvement District to pay for the costs of the project.

ST. PAUL, MINN.

VISION

Public—City of St. Paul

IMPLEMENTATION

Public—Dept. of Parks and Recreation

The Plan proposed a division within Parks and Rec. Dept. called “The Great River Passage” because it will have its own revenue stream from a concert venue and parking. It also will have its own executive director.

LOCAL GUIDANCE

It is vital that local stakeholders form the foundation for a regional rivers coordination system, whatever form the latter takes. A handful of local implementation advisory committees should be established in order to be stewards of the Our Great Rivers vision, as well as spokespeople for local concerns. The heads of these committees would be part of the regional rivers coordination system, and each local committee would represent a distinct stretch of the rivers. Depending on the specific geography, these local committees could include City Council members, suburban elected officials, Park Advisory Council members local businesses, youth, faith-based organizations, and more. In essence, they would reflect the distinct users and would-be users of that stretch of river.

By 2017, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Mayor's Office of Chicago, the Leadership Commission and many partners must determine how local implementation committees would be formed, managed, funded and intertwined with the regional coordination structure above.

TRANSFORMATIVE REVENUE

Coordination is important; so, too, is securing resources to implement. Our rivers need investment to flourish. Given other critical city needs—schooling, policing, transportation infrastructure, debt responsibilities—asking taxpayers to invest in our rivers at the scale and consistency needed to really make a difference is a tall order. At the same time that we explore the optimal structure for institutionalizing coordination, we also must consider potential revenue sources dedicated to our rivers.

Through our extensive stakeholder outreach in this visioning process, several criteria for revenues emerged:

- All users of the rivers must contribute, and those that use and benefit from the rivers the most should contribute the most.
- The benefits of investment will be shared by communities upstream, downstream and across the banks from Chicago. Ideally, some new revenues will be regional in nature.
- The source of the revenue must be related to use or protection of the rivers.
- Investments and expenditures made with these new revenues must be determined through transparent processes with ample opportunity for public scrutiny and input.
- Maintenance and operations must be funded as robustly as initial capital improvements.
- Multiple revenue options are likely necessary.
- They must add up to enough money to make a true, lasting difference.

The questions of revenue and coordination are intertwined, i.e., the optimal coordination institution is one that can best manage available revenues. Ideas suggested by members of the community through our outreach process included a Special Service Area throughout the riverfront of the city, a fee on boat rentals and tours, a small fee on water and sewer bills linked to stormwater improvements that will ultimately enhance downstream water quality, and even a portion of revenues from a casino, should Chicago ever build one. Many of these merit further investigation, and there are likely many other options worth consideration.

While it is premature to offer a recommendation here, a full and comprehensive study of revenue options that meet the criteria above must be one of the immediate next steps. By 2017, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Mayor's Office of Chicago, the Leadership Commission and many partners must determine the optimal revenues to support implementation of Our Great Rivers, and be on the path to creating those new revenue streams.



Kate Joyce Studio

Our rivers need us, just as we need them.

They need property owners, business leaders, elected officials, real estate developers, philanthropists, teachers, students, paddlers, boat captains, crane operators, advocates and artists to work toward our vision for the future of Our Great Rivers. We need water, solace, movement, nature, and places to connect with each other and ourselves. For too long, these bonds between our rivers and ourselves have been broken. Thanks to a relative few tireless advocates and resource managers, driven by their commitment to the potential of our rivers, we have begun to mend past and present transgressions. We have created truly great new spaces and experiences along our rivers that give us all reason to strive for more. To go the rest of the way, to restore the bonds between us and our great rivers, we need you—we need all of us.

Our great rivers can rejuvenate communities and ecosystems, connect us to nature and build our economy. Our great rivers can be inviting, productive and living. That's your vision, Chicago. This document suggests many ways we can all get started today. Yes, government will need to lead on activities such as ending combined sewer overflows, reinvigorating sustainable riverfront productivity, even just putting signs on bridges. But the onus is on everyone, from local residents to business leaders, philanthropy to government, to advocate, ensure sufficient revenues, and hold ourselves and our elected officials accountable. This simply will not happen without persistence, drive, enthusiasm and a shared belief that we can build a future that is better than the present.

So join us. Make the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines your rivers—collectively, our great rivers—by shaping their future.

GLOSSARY

AERATION

Adding oxygen to water to support plant and animal life.

BIOSWALES

Landscaping that removes pollution from water that runs through it. An example of natural infrastructure.

CISTERN

An underground water storage tank.

COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW

In older cities such as Chicago, the sewers that carry human waste are shared with those that carry rain and other runoff. During heavy rainfall, sewers fill to capacity and overflow into rivers and lakes, releasing untreated human waste and making the water unsafe. MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan will reduce the frequency of combined sewer overflows by expanding the capacity of sewers and storing the rain/sewage mix until it can be treated.

DREDGING

Cleaning a riverbed or harbor by removing mud, weeds or other material.

EFFLUENT

Liquid waste or sewage discharged into the river.

EASEMENT

A right to use land owned by someone else.

HYDROELECTRIC

To generate electricity from the flow of water.

INSTREAM

Within the flow of the river.

NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION

Contaminants carried into lakes and rivers by rain, melting snow or other runoff. Nitrogen from fertilizer and drugs from improperly disposed medication are common sources.

PERMEABLE PAVING

Pavement that reduces pollution and flooding by allowing water to seep through and return to the ground under it, rather than collecting and running elsewhere.

RIPARIAN

On or near the river shoreline.

SIDESTREAM

A manmade diversion of the main river flow, typically for a specific purpose like treatment.

WATERSHED

The area in which all rain and other surface water drains to a common feature, such as a river.

WAYFINDING

Knowing where you are and how to get to where you want to go. Also refers to signs or systems that help you do this.

Explore this map—and the whole vision—in more detail at greatriverschicago.com

GREAT RIVERS CHICAGO



Reconnecting Chicago and our rivers



Reconnecting Chicago and our rivers

OUR GREAT RIVERS

A vision for the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines Rivers

The first-ever unifying and forward-looking vision for all three of Chicago's rivers



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning