

# Task Force Summaries

## Introduction

In June 2000, the Department of Planning and Development began a bold plan for Chicago's Central Area. The planning process has been guided by a Steering Committee comprised of leaders from the business, government, and civic sectors. A key role of the Steering Committee is to review vision, policy, and project recommendations that emerged from Task Forces organized around seven key areas:

- Office
- Residential
- Retail
- Tourism
- Culture and Education
- Transportation
- Urban Design

The task forces included over 120 experts and opinion leaders who are well versed in the state of downtown development.

This chapter presents the task forces' assessments of the key challenges and opportunities facing the Central Area.

## **Recommendations Emerging Across Task Forces**

#### The Civic Realm

- Expand the Central Area's Open Space system to include the Chicago River Corridor and new plazas, lakefront and neighborhood parks, and high-quality streetscapes.
- Develop the Chicago River Corridor as a shared amenity with public access, promenades, parks, and high-quality mixed-use buildings.
- Stimulate innovative design to reaffirm Chicago's reputation as a leader in great urban architecture.
- Support the growth and vibrancy of cultural and educational institutions to enrich life downtown.
- Add new public schools in response to actual demand. Education can be provided through innovative programming within existing cultural institutions and adaptive reuse of downtown buildings.
- Federal, state, and county funding should be focused on improving the urban environment, transit, leisure and convention tourism, and education in Chicago.

## Land Use and Districts

- Preserve and strengthen the distinctive character of unique buildings and districts, including historic buildings and districts.
- Extend the office core into the West Loop to better utilize the existing infrastructure, major commuter rail stations, highway access and availability of development parcels.
- · Direct and strengthen residential neighborhoods around the core office district.
- Emphasize office development within the West Loop, limiting residential development.
- Develop clear land use priorities for the development of large land parcels and rail yards
- Emphasize public access to the Chicago River, particularly in the Southwest Loop.
- Create a focused retail strategy for commercial streets that targets places for neighborhood, downtown, and contemporary retail.
- Preserve industrial development within Planned Manufacturing Districts and designated industrial corridors.
- Support transit-oriented development within neighborhoods and business districts.

#### **Transportation and Access**

- Improve downtown-to-airport connections.
- Improve east west connections in the Central Area south of Congress Parkway.
- Reconnect the north and south districts of the Central Area across Congress Parkway.
- Relate density of development to availability of transit.
- Support convenient public transit to and within the Central Area.
- Improve way-finding and connections between regional rail, rapid transit and bus systems, and available parking.
- Improve signage and programs to help residents and visitors navigate downtown.

Final Report June 2003

## DRAFT

## Office Task Force

## Chicago's downtown office district has many attributes that point to a strong future

- Its prominence as a share of the total metropolitan office inventory
- The large and growing residential presence in the Central Area
- The existence of other complimentary land uses including hotels, convention facilities, retail, cultural institutions, and institutions of higher education
- A good public transit and system

## It faces challenges, at the same time, including:

- A significant part of downtown Chicago's employment base is tied to the exchanges, institutions with an uncertain future
- Due to cumbersome and unpredictable zoning and building permit processes, costs associated
  with construction exceed those in the suburbs
- The cost of doing business in Chicago exceeds that of the suburbs because of higher taxes and labor rates, while certain services are inferior, particularly power

## Conclusions

- Parts of the downtown make sense for development of high-density office, given proximity to regional transportation hubs, other high-density office, and locational magnets like the courts and other government buildings.
- The West Loop, from Randolph on the north, Van Buren on the south, east to the River and west to the Expressway, is a logical location for office growth.
- Parts of the downtown are less appropriate for high-density office development as it can strain infrastructure and put pressure on other land uses that are important.
- Eliminate impediments to the downtown's competitiveness as an office location:
   streamline the building permit process
  - provide telecommunications infrastructure coordination through projects like Civicnet
     continue efforts to upgrade the Chicago public schools
  - improve public transit to the airports and circulation around the Central Area
  - encourage the provision of high-quality electricity in sufficient quantity to meet future demand.
- Encourage infrastructure investments in the Central Area, particularly mass transit improvements, that will allow the Central Area office market to capture 50% of regional demand for new space.

## **Residential Task Force**

## **Preliminary Recommendations**

- Develop downtown neighborhoods as safe and healthy places to live, with sufficient light within dwelling units, parks and green space, and attractive streetscapes.
- Provide a broad range of housing options in the downtown market for young workers, students, empty nesters, families, and the elderly.
- Promote affordable housing through the redevelopment of public housing, City of Chicago affordable housing programs and creative uses of TIF funds.
- Provide 100% accessible public infrastructure.
- Encourage mixed uses that support 24-hour, viable urban districts where appropriate.
- Direct high-density residential development near high-capacity streets and transportation facilities.
- Outside the core office district, develop the Chicago River as a vibrant, predominantly residential, mixed-use spine with continuous access to waterways, parks and plazas, and restaurants.
- Create a rich pedestrian experience, mixing historic character with new architecture in residential areas.
- Preserve significant historic buildings for a variety of neighborhood uses.
- Concentrate convenient retail development along targeted streets and intersections to meet residents' daily needs.
- Support market-driven demand as it develops.

## **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- · Determine the appropriate density, mix and location of new residential development.
- Develop clear zoning regulations to achieve the City's vision.
- Develop housing over the railyards on the west side of the river, south of Congress.
- Explore intermodal transportation in the Central Area (NEV).
- Encourage residential uses in character districts that are already low-rise.
- Organize auto and truck access during rush hours.
- Provide parking to meet real needs and include parking area in FAR requirements.
- Avoid overly dense development resulting from too much use of zoning bonuses on a single block.
- Provide tax credits and development transfer rights to landmarks and property improvements that benefit the public.
- Focus family residential development on the outer edges of the Central Area, where land is
  more affordable and available.
- Locate retail within targeted areas rather than requiring it in all new development.
- Explore the establishment of a "light manufacturing zone" for industry that would be compatible with residential development.

## Residential Task Force (continued)

### Innovative Ideas and Projects

- Build housing over the railroad tracks on the west side of the river.
- Re-design downtown public schools: offer after school programs, encourage "schools without
  walls" concept by offering classes at cultural institutions and other sites.
- Encourage downtown residents to use New Urban Vehicles, including electric or more compact cars.

## **Retail Task Force**

## Preliminary Recommendations

- The increasing aggregate buying power in the Central Area is increasing the demand for retail. The demand comes from a growing number of office workers, visitors, and residents.
- Retail needs a safe and secure environment. It needs to be accessible by foot, car, and public transit.
- A model is needed to determine how retailers' physical requirements can fit into the urban pattern
  of Chicago. Attention needs to be paid to traffic, signage, parking, building materials, and
  physical design.
- Retail can be used to support "places" such as parks, plazas, and the Chicago River Corridor by helping provide a program for such spaces.
- More after-work venues will keep workers and students downtown in the evenings to support local retailers.

## **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- What are priorities for the Central Area Retail Plan?
- What are the planning implications, and economic benefits, of office worker, resident, and visitor markets?
- What opportunities are created, and how can Chicago capitalize on them, for the expansion and diversification of the city's retail economic base by virtue of the transformations occurring to the South and West Loop districts? These include the emergence of new residential communities; the potential availability of land formerly used for warehousing, manufacturing, and railroadrelated operations; and development investments being made to McCormick Place, the Lakeside Press properties, Chinatown, Bronzeville, University of Illinois, et al.

- Are there any appropriate places for larger "big box" retailers in the expanded Central Area? If so, what guidelines should there be for siting, building design, parking, and delivery access?
- What type of retail development, if any, should be encouraged and discouraged along the OhioOntario corridor?
- Given the proliferation of hotels in the peripheral locations along the river, in Streeterville, and Illinois Center, should future hotels be encouraged closer to existing office and retail concentrations to maximize economic synergy and business visitor convenience?
- Is street congestion having a negative effect on the quality of retail experience for certain market
   segments?
- Should the City require ground-level retail in all new office buildings or just along targeted streets?
- What kinds of retail are needed in the Theater District?
- Should Block 37 incorporate significant "arrival" space and amenities for transit users?

### **Innovative Ideas and Projects**

- Create a Blues/Arts/Incubator Museum District in Motor Row along South Michigan Avenue near McCormick Place that begins to bridge Bronzeville with McCormick Place and the Loop.
- Create after-work experiences tied to transit nodes.
- Include additional visitor experiences along the Chicago River Corridor.
- Create multiple retail nodes that may help reduce traffic congestion and provide services closer to residences, such as in the South Loop area.
- Promote culturally diverse market/fairs for merchandise and food to showcase neighborhood merchants.

## **Tourism Task Force**

## **Preliminary Recommendations**

- The future health of Chicago's tourism industry depends on a blend of key components: hotels; attractions/product development; access and circulation; exhibit space; convention/business visitors; family visitors; sustainability; promotion and marketing; and theatres and product development.
- Look to international models for rapid transit. Heathrow to London is fast but costs \$25/person.
- Provide "seamless" transportation for visitors, beginning with airport arrival.
- · Improve transportation to museums, rail stations, and attractions
- Improve signage at airport and on transit
- Improve motor coach parking, since a full bus yields \$33,000 in visitor purchases.

- Connect downtown to the neighborhoods. Visitors from Europe are used to staying in neighborhoods. (This would be easier if transit were seamless.)
- Build on the "huge" opportunity to link international shoppers to the Central Area
- Develop more attractions around McCormick Place.
- Improve cross marketing opportunities with between the City and State.
- · Promote the lakefront outside downtown as a major tourist asset.
- · Identify alternative locations for tour boats to relieve crowding of the river and locks.
- Develop and promote weekday visitor attractions to extend stays after big shows.
- · Publicize events must well over a year in advance in promotional brochures.
- Encourage economic diversity on North Michigan Avenue in case of a downturn in the economy.
- Improve access to and movement around North Michigan Avenue.
- Emphasize the more efficient use of existing sources of funds rather than the creation of new ones.
- Improve first quarter activities to boost occupancy in Central Area hotels by 15%.
- Encourage the City to continue to pursue mega-events.

## **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- Continue to look at third airport opportunities, at Peotone or Gary as, according to a Booz Allen study, O'Hare will run out of capacity in 2018 if the economy continues to grow.
- Determine how to create a \$100 million/year fund to build infrastructure.
- Study express trains to Midway and O'Hare with baggage check-in at a downtown location.
- · As the West Side is grows, locate family hotels near the train stations.
- Explore new museum concepts, including: transportation; architectural remnant park; maritime; large equipment; high-tech electronics; music using Grammy material stored in New York.
- Look at Passenger Facility Charges to enhance the arrival/departure experience.
- Study the need for a connection between Midway and O'Hare.
- Look at international models to increase tourism, including more multilingual tours and a focus on cultural attractions and natural features.
- Include the tourism industry on decisions involving use of the amusement tax and MPEA dollars.
- Increase the supply of inexpensive long-term remote parking.
- Establish a transportation fund with tourism taxes.
- · Determine what entertainment amenities new downtown residents want.
- Determine the best locations for the next 1,000-room hotel. Would it be near McCormick Place?
- Determine the future demand for 1,500 2,000- room hotels.
- · Assess how to stimulate affordable hotel development and preserve it for families.

## Innovative Ideas and Projects

- Create a series of islands possibly as a National Park to extend the use of the lakefront.
- · Redevelop the Franklin Point site as a place for family hotels or an amusement park.
- Make the Chicago Auto Show the product introduction event for national and international automakers to show Chicago to the world.
- Stage events like London's Chelsea Garden Show in Millennium Park.
- Develop a system of kiosks providing up-to-the-minute visitor information.

## Culture and Education Task Force

## **Preliminary Recommendations**

### ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

- Downtown institutions can play a stronger role to familiarize children and teens with the resources of the Central Area to make the downtown a tool for urban learning.
- Partnerships with corporations and institutions can strengthen and broaden programs for learning.
- The growing demand for local schools can be met through the adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

- Support the health and presence of central area educational institutions.
- Encourage downtown institutions to develop programs for life-long learning for all Chicago residents.
- · Encourage more efficient use of land through shared and mixed-use facilities.
- Encourage educational institutions and their buildings to reflect and relate to the urban fabric.
- Create a committee of government, businesses, and schools as a communications device to develop new programs. Foster links between government, businesses and schools so Chicago stays "ahead of the curve" in higher education.
- Foster links between businesses and cultural and educational institutions to increase availability of
  resources to businesses.

## Culture and Education Task Force (continued)

#### CULTURE

- Elevate Chicago as a regional cultural center. This can help to change attitudes toward the importance of the city overall for the nine million residents of the metropolitan area.
- Make the health of culture a regional issue with more regional contributions (not just property taxes).
- Cultivate the diversity of content and scale of cultural attractions.
- Make art and culture elements a component of mixed-use nodes in the South and South West Loop.
- · Locate new museums and cultural places strategically to encourage developing areas.

#### POP CULTURE

 Encourage new entertainment destinations for central area residents, including the clustering of music clubs and galleries.

#### THEATER

· Find ways to showcase non-Loop Chicago theaters in appropriately scaled venues.

#### LIBRARIES

· Create new, smaller libraries using the Chicago Public Library Express model

### **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- How does the City showcase Chicago artists in infrastructure projects?
- How do we define and expand the importance of public art?
- What is the potential impact of the expansion of non-profit ownership of buildings on the local tax base?

### Innovative Ideas and Projects

- Create a CPS-supported arts high school in the Central Area.
- Develop a shared preparation and construction facility for theaters and performing arts organizations.
- Develop a shared rehearsal space for performing arts organizations.
- Create a digital Technology Center so technology tools are available to local artists.
- Create a museum incubator, perhaps in the Motor Row buildings.
- Develop new museums such as a Museum of the City of Chicago, Musical Heritage Museum, outdoor museum along the Chicago River, or a Chicago Communities Museum.

## Transportation Task Force

## **Transportation and Access Guiding Principles**

- Encourage a balanced transportation system, making it convenient for commuters, shoppers, visitors and others to use transit, walking, biking, taxi or private auto.
- Maintain or increase transit's share of trips as downtown grows.
- Make the transportation system more user friendly through better signs, communication, etc.
- · Scale new development to be compatible with transportation capacity
- Maximize the utility of the existing transportation system.
- Maintain or upgrade the existing transportation system to a consistent level.

#### Preliminary Recommendations

- Improve intermodal connections between transit services, especially rail to bus.
- Use new technologies to improve traffic in the downtown.
- · Improve transit access between major rail systems and major activity centers.
- When multiple modes serve a land use, give preference to transit first.
- Expand and modernize the transit system to provide better service from outlying areas to and within the Central Area.
- Extend the street grid network into developing areas, including the South Loop.
- Improve the management, capacity and connectivity of the existing roadway system.
- Devise a parking strategy that is consistent with available street capacity and avoids negative impacts on transit and pedestrians.
- Encourage bike use by improving downtown bicycle facilities.
- Improve downtown's "walkability" by fixing inadequate or missing pedestrian connections.
- Extend the pedway system to high-volume transit stations.
- Improve transit connections between downtown and the airports.
- Provide consistent, even-handed, long-range enforcement of traffic and pedestrian regulations.

## **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- Consider zoning solutions to address the spatial mismatch between convention and hotel locations.
- · Identify funding sources for transit improvements and expansion.
- Determine appropriate locations and quantity of new parking. In particular, what is the appropriate ratio of parking spaces to dwelling units in new Central Area residential development?
- Define the role of private sector transportation (taxis, water taxis, motorcoaches and motorcoach parking, jitney buses, valet services).
- · Develop consistent training and deployment of traffic aides.
- Determine the need for a hierarchy of uses for the Transportation System.

## **Innovative Ideas and Projects**

- Continue bridge improvements: Wacker Drive Reconstruction; over the Chicago River at Jackson, Monroe; over the Kennedy at Lake, Van Buren, Jackson, Randolph; over Metra/ ICRR at Monroe.
- Develop a transportation circulator system in the Central Area.
- Develop the South Loop Connector, extending Wells and Wentworth streets from 18<sup>th</sup> Street to Roosevelt Rd.
- Create new street furniture including bus shelters.
- Develop Traffic Signal Interconnect Systems and a Traffic Management System.
- Promote selective reduction of parking meters to improve traffic flow and lower short term parking rates.
- Emphasize shared loading zones and restrict deliveries in peak hours.
- Site driveways to avoid vehicular conflicts with pedestrians.
- Provide charter bus parking.
- Tighten valet parking regulations.
- Engage building management involvement in managing perimeter traffic
- Improve the taxi system, including driver training, more cab stands, etc.
- Promote the use of clean fuel buses.

## Urban Design and Open Space Task Force

## **Preliminary Recommendations**

- Expand the Central Area's renowned system of public spaces the lakefront, Michigan Avenue, Wacker Drive and State Street – to encompass the Chicago River and a new system of neighborhood parks and open spaces lined by high-quality streetscapes.
- Develop the Chicago River as Chicago's second premier waterfront, with shared public spaces such as promenades, parks and outdoor cafes, and as a quality address for new commercial and residential development.
  - Create high-quality entryways and corridors to heighten the experience of arrival into the Central Area.
- Develop ground floors with transparent faces to maximize the visibility of active uses and to improve the quality of the streetscape.
- Re-connect downtown pedestrian and roadway networks by removing and/or relocating barriers presented by railroads.

### **Areas Needing Further Discussion and Research**

- Manage the appropriate mix of residential development to promote livability and to avoid land-use conflicts.
- Focus new residential development on strategic renovation and reuse of historic buildings.
- Create parking strategies and identify new locations for non-accessory parking.
- Plan for the preservation of landmark buildings and special character districts.
- Establish specific design and location requirements for new types of parking-dependent retail.

## Innovative Ideas and Projects

- Extend the concept of "civic realm" to include creative new uses for rail corridors and highway infrastructure, such as decking over the expressways.
- · Create new open space along railroad rights-of-way.
- Repair multi-level streets such as east Wacker Drive to improve connections.
- Move railroad staging yards out of the Central Area to create new development and open space opportunities.
- Extend the street grid over the Chicago River south of Congress.
- · Redevelop the St. Charles Air Line for new transit, green space, and/or recreational uses.

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# Acknowledgments and List of Illustrations

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## Acknowledgements

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Arthur Anderson LLP Goodman Williams Group Real Estate Planning Group The Lambert Group Panto-Ulema Ed Zotti

## Special Thanks

Duncan Associates TransSystems Corporation DLK Architecture Donald Hey

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