

City of Chicago
River Ecology and Governance Task Force
Development Review Working Group

Information and Materials in Preparation for Development Review Meetings
February 2024

About the River Ecology and Governance Task Force

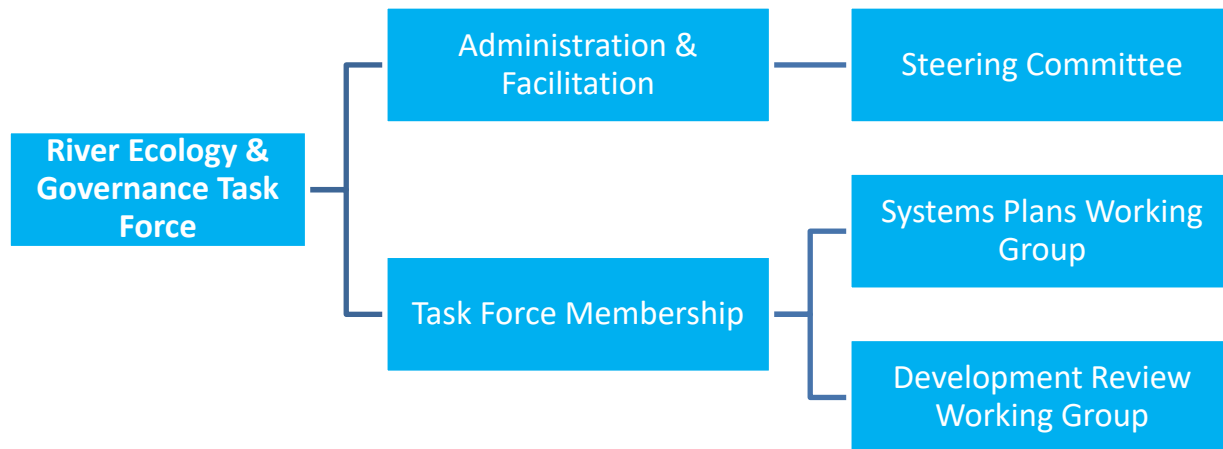
History and Context

For more than 100 years, the history of the Chicago and Calumet river systems was one of pollution and neglect; however, since the 1970s, Friends of the Chicago River and other waterway advocates have worked to repair harms and foster a remarkable transformation. Today, the river systems are cleaner and more accessible, supporting the resiliency, economic vitality and overall health of surrounding neighborhoods. Both river systems are also reemerging as valuable natural resources and ecological corridors with more than 75 species of fish and abundant wildlife. Recent river improvements, however, are not distributed evenly across the city, with some stretches still subject to pollution, flooding, erosion, and limited public access.

Key milestones involving the rivers' resurgence include City of Chicago regulatory achievements like the 1983 Waterways Ordinance; the 1990 Chicago River Design Guidelines and 2019 update; the 1999 River Corridor Development Plan; and the 2011 adoption of recreational water quality standards. In 2016, the City of Chicago, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) and Friends of the Chicago River engaged thousands of community stakeholders to create the "Our Great Rivers" plan, which outlines guiding principles for continued improvements. The River Ecology and Governance Task Force, formed in 2019, helps achieve common goals for the betterment of both systems.

The mayoral executive order that created the task force calls for the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to work with multiple agencies to support river issues and projects, including the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District. The task force consists of local, state and federal agencies, as well as environmental justice groups, nonprofit organizations, and residents interested in river planning and resiliency. MPC and Friends of the Chicago River provide leadership and administrative support for the task force.

Task Force Structure



Development Review Working Group

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force has a Development Review Working Group that reviews proposed construction projects that are located within 100 feet of both the Chicago and Calumet rivers. Subsequent to review, the group provides comments and input to the City and the development team. Proposed projects are typically part of proposed Waterway Planned Developments (PDs) that require review by the Plan Commission and City Council. The group reviews the proposals for conformance with the [Chicago River Design Guidelines](#) or [Calumet Design Guidelines](#), both of which prioritize amenities that enhance habitat, recreation, open space and trails for wildlife and people.

The working group seeks to provide collective river input and feedback to the City and other agency partners. Because working group participants do not fully represent the broader community, broad public engagement efforts led by the development team are required for all Waterway Planned Development projects.

Development Review Working Group Meetings

Meetings are hosted virtually by DPD and facilitated by Friends of the Chicago River and MPC. A wide range of organizations may participate in meetings, including area residents and businesses that may be impacted by a proposal. Regular participants include a variety of river related organizations, advocates, agencies, and community representatives such as:

- Active Transportation Alliance
- Audubon Society
- Calumet Collaborative
- Chicago Park District
- City of Chicago Department of Transportation
- Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community
- Current
- Friends of the Chicago River
- Hollywood North Park Community Association

- Illinois Environmental Council
- Lincoln Park Zoo
- Metropolitan Planning Council
- North Branch Works
- North River Commission
- Openlands
- Riverside Neighbors
- Shedd Aquarium
- Sierra Club
- South Branch Park Advisory Council
- Southeast Environmental Task Force
- The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
- University of Illinois Chicago
- Urban Rivers
- Volunteer professionals that serve on Friends of the [Chicago River's Planning Committee](#)

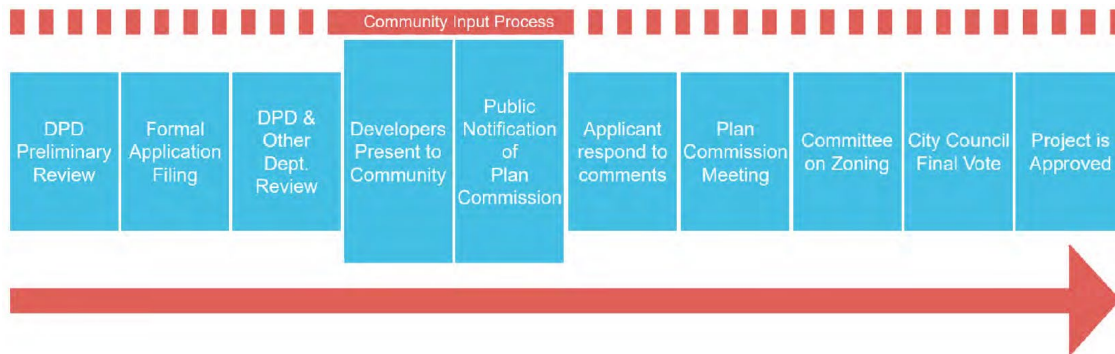
Meeting Structure and Process

The working group meets monthly, as needed, to review proposals. Meetings follow the below general structure:

1. DPD introduces and provides any relevant context for the development proposal.
2. The development team delivers a 20- to 30-minute presentation (see below for areas to emphasize in the presentation).
3. The working group asks questions to clarify the information that is presented.
4. When there are no more clarifying questions, the development team exits the virtual meeting and the working group discusses the proposal and compiles feedback. Working group facilitators document comments and provide an online form to make sure each participant gets a chance to submit input.
5. Within two weeks after the meeting, the comments are compiled by the task force leadership and submitted in a letter format to the DPD, which forwards the letter to the development team, any relevant agency and/or elected officials, and task force leadership. The letter is also uploaded to the task force website. Recommendations noted in the letter are advisory and not legally binding; however, the development team is expected to provide DPD with responses to each recommendation.

Process, Presentation Expectations and Emphasis Topics

River Ecology and Governance Task Force development review meetings occur during the “Community Input Process” for PDs and other impacted developments.



Source: *Chicago River Design Guidelines*

Each meeting allows for a presentation by the development team highlighting how the proposal addresses the river supportive requirements and goals of the City’s guidelines. Many of the questions that arise during meetings concern the below topics:

- Detailed site landscape concepts, particularly for the river’s edge.
- Landscape planting details that outline the species, location and the amount of vegetation planned for the site.
- Information regarding any existing landscape on the site and how that will be addressed in the design.
- Information regarding the stormwater management strategy for the site.
- Information about any environmental pollution remediation concerns, requirements or needs.
- Other sustainable best management practices planned for the site, such as green roofs or green stormwater infrastructure.
- Information about wildlife hazard mitigation strategies such as light pollution and bird friendly design principles.
- Details about proposed river edge access points and trails, and how they connect to surrounding areas.
- Information on proposed changes to riverbanks and structures, including bank naturalization efforts.
- For Chicago River projects, a copy of the completed Chicago River Design Guidelines checklist showing options that will be used for the proposed development.

Reference Resources and Links:

- [Chicago River Design Guidelines](#)
- [Calumet Design Guidelines](#)
- [Our Great Rivers Vision Plan](#)
- [Friends of the Chicago River - Developer Resource Guide](#)
- [Bird Friendly Design Chicago](#)