

WE WILL CHICAGO

CO-CREATING AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

DECEMBER 2020

In September of 2020, the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) partnered with the City of Chicago on the pre-planning phase of *We Will Chicago*, the first citywide planning initiative since the 1960s. If done well, this plan can create an inclusive vision for Chicago, encouraging neighborhood growth and vibrancy, while addressing long-standing social and economic inequities.

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LOS ANGELES • MINNEAPOLIS
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SUCCESSSES

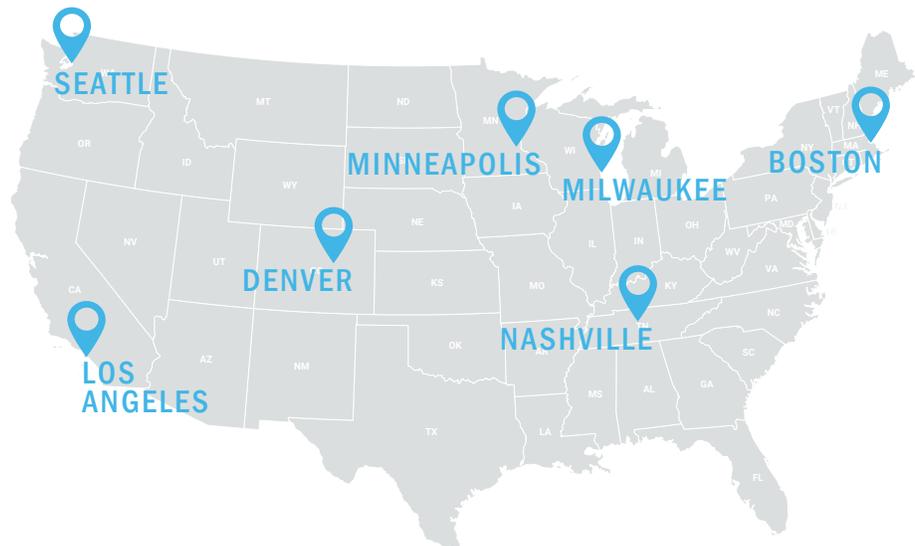
CHALLENGES

COLLABORATION

IMPLEMENTATION

RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR A STRONGER
CITYWIDE PLAN

Pre-planning activities around starting a new citywide plan have mainly focused on the central question, how should we begin? To help answer that question, MPC created a series of virtual workshops, which served as a venue for participants to hear from **other cities who had recently completed citywide plans**, and then in discussion with peers, to suggest principles and recommendations for creating a planning process in Chicago that is representative of its character and people. Citywide plans typically focus on topics like land use, housing, transportation and natural resources and a planning process can help align resources to achieve ambitious goals to make the city a better place to live for everyone.



“It is gratifying to learn that there is so much work going on across the country. We have so much we can learn from others, both in dos and don’ts.”

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

STRUCTURE

The planning learning exchanges, hosted in late September 2020, were structured as a four-part series. The first and last workshops convened the entire group of participants together and focused on visioning and defining recommendations collaboratively. The middle two workshops divided the group into peer cohorts based on their sector affiliation and included presentations from other cities and smaller break-out groups, where participants identified themes and recommendations.



PARTICIPANTS FROM CHICAGO

Workshop participation included a cross-sector group of representatives from:

- community-based organizations (CBOs),
- civic institutions,
- private sector,
- philanthropic sector, and
- government.

Because each of these sectors has a role to play in both the plan's creation and implementation, ownership of the plan is ultimately needed from everyone. For planning purposes, the size of the workshops were limited to allow for sustained and candid dialogue, but did include a mix of participants from across different topic areas and geographic boundaries.

“What has changed is my view on cross-neighborhood partnership. We have an opportunity here to build connections across the city so that the divide between north/south can be minimized.”

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Government

Mayor's Office
Department of Planning and Development
Chicago Department of Transportation
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
Department of Assets, Information and Services
Department of Family and Support Services
Chicago Transit Authority
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District
Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events
Chicago Department of Public Health
Department of Housing
Chicago Park District
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Chicago City Council
Plan Commission

CBO/Foundation

Grow Greater Englewood
Southeast Environmental Task Force
Grassroots Collaborative
Austin Coming Together
Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community
Latin United Community Housing Association
My Block, My Hood, My City
American Indian Center
Endeleo Institute
Alliance of the Southeast
The Chicago Community Trust
Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Field Foundation
MacArthur Foundation

Business/Civic

LISC
Elevated Chicago
Metropolitan Planning Council
Chicago United for Equity
Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance
Chicago Urban League
Chicago Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights
Trust for Public Land
United Way of Metro Chicago
Civic Consulting Alliance
Elevate Energy
Corporate Coalition
Civic Committee of the Commercial Club
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Related Midwest

PROCESS

The workshops provided a space for participants to hear from each other, as well as other cities, to begin articulating a vision for Chicago and what they would want out of a citywide planning process. Based on city presentations, they collaboratively outlined principles and recommendations with their peers on what the citywide planning process should include.



VISIONS

During the first workshop, participants were asked two questions that focused on connecting individual visions to what the planning process could achieve. For both questions, answers were collected via Mentimeter, an interactive presentation tool that allows for real time feedback and responses that can be documented and presented back to all participants. The first question, “What is your vision for Chicago” yielded 109 responses. These responses were summarized into 13 thematic visions, highlighted to the right.

What is your vision for Chicago?

- A city where all people and all **communities have power**, are **free from oppression**, and are strengthened by **equitable access** to resources, environments, and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being.
- An inclusive and equitable city where everyone has true **opportunity to thrive and participate in the economic and civic life of the city**, with access to housing, transportation, and jobs—regardless of where you live, your race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation.
- A Chicago that is **responsive and accountable** to all communities—particularly communities of color—and creates systems that allow for **power sharing in decision-making** with government and elected officials.
- A city that exists within a broader region and **prioritizes health, safety, wellness, and inclusive economic growth**, especially for communities that have experienced disinvestment and inequity.
- A city that acknowledges, reckons with, and is accountable for **past injustices and racist practices**, and structures and **works toward reconciliation through actions**.
- An equitable and sustainable city that is a **model for addressing climate change** and protecting its natural resources.
- A city that **embraces the future** and innovates.
- A city where residents, activists, community organizations, philanthropy, government, and the private sector **collectively solve problems and address needs, knowledge, and resources**.
- A city in which **community desires and needs drive planning**.
- A Chicago where **public schools are equitably funded**, students have great schools in their own communities, and **parents and students have shared power** in determining what happens to schools in their neighborhoods.
- A city where leadership decisions made across different sectors (government, business, community, and other institutions) are **transparent, inclusive, and equitable** so that sustainability, public health, environmental impacts, and economic opportunities are balanced across the city.
- A city where **beneficial, equitable investment is made** in people, places, and physical infrastructure and **prioritizes BIPOC communities**.
- A Chicago that actively **dismantles structural racism, racial segregation, and inequity** and becomes a global leader in health, climate resiliency, and cultural success, allowing for wealth building for all but also intentionally promoting wealth building within BIPOC communities.

PROCESS TO ACHIEVE VISION

The second question, “How can this citywide planning process help achieve that vision?” yielded 94 responses. These responses were organized into 13 thematic clusters, highlighted to the right.

TAKEAWAYS FROM OTHER CITIES

Each city’s process was different but shared some overlapping themes, such as interagency/ interdepartmental and cross-sector collaboration, community and public engagement, and accountability for implementation. After each city presentation, participants, working in groups, shared what they found successful about how other cities created and implemented their plans and what they thought were challenges.

“It is best for everyone—community, business and equitable development—if this is seen as the peoples’ plan.”

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

How can this citywide planning process help achieve that vision?

- **Center voices that have been historically excluded** from the process and marginalized. Make sure the process is **accessible to everyone** and **meets people where they are**—not only in a physical location (grocery stores, hospital lobbies, beauty and barber shops, gas stations, corner stores, and front stoops) but also by using the **language and communication tools** that are the most appropriate for different types of participants.
- Identify priorities and synthesize various ideas into a **coherent vision** that can be advanced.
- **Learn from past planning practices**, and do not commit to the same tactics that have harmed people or failed before.
- Acknowledge and **reckon with history** to create a **trust-building** exercise that can serve as a form of **healing**. This includes land acknowledgment and an understanding of the **sovereignty of Native peoples**.
- Define and then center equity and inclusivity in the process, including an assessment of **who benefits and who is harmed** as part of the decision-making to promote sharing of power between city leadership and other partners.
- Build on Chicago’s assets and authentically engage in an **iterative process to develop solutions at appropriate scales** (local, regional, state, and federal) by concretely defining the problems and root causes, as well as new opportunities.
- **Dream big and capture creative ideas**. Incorporate art and other forms of active, creative engagement.
- Incorporate regular accountability to the plan and communities by creating **metrics and goals to be used in decision-making**, as well as building in the structures and processes for consistent accountability to occur related to plan progress.
- Ensure true **community ownership of the process**, rather than just providing input on the plan. Create a process that builds accessibility into its design so that it is accessible to all participants, particularly those with disabilities.
- Clearly communicate what **topics and policies the plan will address** and how the plan will and will not impact capital investments; city budgetary decisions; decision-making power; and collaboration among city agencies and departments, other institutions, and partners in the public and private sector.
- Integrate strategies and priorities from **existing neighborhood plans**, including acknowledgment of previous efforts led by communities or partnerships, as well as the provision of resources to communities to develop their own plans. Plans are assessed and reviewed with an equity lens.
- **Educate community members on the planning process**, its goals, and true value to residents and stakeholders to ensure ownership and support of the plan.
- Structure a process that aspires for consensus but **allows open and honest conversation** and models ways to work productively with tensions and civil disagreement, while **protecting and welcoming protest and dissent** as part of the rules of engagement.

KEY THEMES

The inputs from each of these group discussions was synthesized to create an overall list of key takeaways. From this list, five major themes emerged as a way to organize the takeaways. These themes were presented back to the broader group for overall discussion to ensure that they captured the sentiments of participants, and were revised based on feedback. These themes were further refined after the workshop series by a smaller working group of participants. This group conducted a prioritization exercise to understand which of the larger list of takeaways within each theme was most important to tackle first. Here is what the workshop participants would like to see out of the process and implementation of *We Will Chicago*:

THEME 1: Historical Reckoning & Trust Building

Establish a process that acknowledges and reckons with the impacts of Chicago's past inequitable planning and implementation processes by serving as a form of mediation and builds from this awareness to center on fostering and maintaining trust.

PRIORITY TAKEAWAYS

- Acknowledge and reckon with the impacts of Chicago's history, including intentional residential segregation, health equity, and climate justice. This includes stolen land, past exploitation, who has had influence, white supremacy, ableism, etc.
- Construct a citywide plan as a process of trauma mediation due to the city's history of inequity, violence, suppression and segregation, as well as ongoing impacts of the pandemic. This trauma is significant in communities of color, and they should be prioritized.

THEME 2: Centering & Embedding Equity as a Value & Principle

Ensure that equity is front and center throughout the planning process by leading with vision and values, building cultural awareness among city staff, and co-creating a transparent set of indicators to measure progress and outcomes.

PRIORITY TAKEAWAYS

- Define equity, emphasize an equity lens from the start, and establish a shared set of indicators to measure progress and outcomes.
- Build cultural awareness among city staff by bringing in third-party trainers for trainings on equity and on understanding and analyzing systemic racism.

THEME 3: Community Engagement

Create an accessible, robust, and meaningful engagement process to ensure diverse, deep, and broad participation and to provide community organizations and residents with the tools and resources required for them to help lead and participate in the process.

PRIORITY TAKEAWAYS

- Establish pathways to bring nontraditional voices and groups that have been historically marginalized to the table. Determine how to move beyond consulting to achieve power-sharing on what gets included in the plan and how the process is run.
- Form partnerships with BIPOC organizations and organizers to ensure they are co-creators of the plan and direct beneficiaries of plan outcomes.
- Create a governance structure that allows community members and residents to define their roles in the planning and implementation process and provide them with the financial resources to participate and lead.
- Design a fun, accessible, consistent, and meaningful engagement process that meets people where they are geographically—public spaces, schools, and places of worship—as well as through languages, communication tools, and a consideration for accessibility needs for individuals with disabilities.

THEME 4: Accountability

Structure a transparent, equitable process that results in a plan with clearly-defined metrics, recommendations paired with identified budgets and resources, review cycles, and the ability to implement in tandem with neighborhood-specific plans.

PRIORITY TAKEAWAYS

- Provide the plan with legal “teeth” so it is enforceable; gets implemented through policy change, staffing, budgeting, etc.; is not just another document; and can withstand political changes and pressure.
- Create regular and ongoing mechanisms to ensure equity and accountability to the community through co-created metrics in both the planning process and implementation. Metrics should be co-created by government, civic, business, and community partners.
- Establish a defined scope, resources, timeline, and implementation outcomes for the full plan. Identify specific projects/goals and define appropriate scope, resources, and timeline at the project-level to recognize that some projects, for example, will need more time than others.
- Create a standard that allows neighborhood plans and the citywide plan to work in tandem for implementation, while allowing for flexibility for neighborhood-specific goals.

THEME 5: Interagency and Cross Collaboration

Create a sustained structure for city departmental and agency collaboration throughout the planning and implementation process and ensure that stakeholders across sectors, geographies, and topical areas are engaged from the beginning to establish collaboration, data sharing, and sustained involvement in the creation and implementation of the plan.

PRIORITY TAKEAWAYS

- Create a cross-departmental and whole government approach for sustained collaboration and data sharing.
- Be inclusive in engaging different stakeholders across sectors (government, community, civic, philanthropic, academic). Ensure small businesses and minority-owned businesses are engaged, as well as businesses that are distributed geographically across the city

To see the entire list of takeaways as well as additional recommendations, and actions created to support continued planning efforts, read the [Peer Workshops Appendix](#). For more information about any of these recommendations or the workshop process contact Christina Harris, Director of Land Use and Planning at MPC, charris@metroplanning.org.

WHAT'S NEXT

These workshops provided an opportunity to learn from other cities and collaboratively define and structure what participants want to see from the *We Will Chicago* planning process. As the process progresses, MPC hopes that these key themes will set the stage for an equitable and sustainable citywide plan and be used to design an inclusive and implementable process, ensuring broad participation across different sectors, and clearly defining roles and needs for a diverse group of stakeholders.