

CHICAGO SOUTHWEST: Making Connections

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CHICAGO SOUTHWEST

Chicago Southwest



Planning Task Force

We thank the more than 300 residents, community leaders, business owners and service providers who shared their stories and dreams with us and with each other. Their ideas, time and effort were invaluable in developing this plan. We especially commend you for daring to build new relationships that will create a revitalized Chicago Lawn.

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|--|--|
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| David Andrade <i>St. Rita of Cascia Church</i> | Rami Nashashibi <i>Inner-City Muslim Action Network</i> |
| Martin Atilano <i>St. Gall Church</i> | Paul O'Toole <i>Marquette Elementary School</i> |
| Thom Bamford <i>Marquette Bank</i> | Corina Pedraza-Palominos <i>Southwest Youth Collaborative</i> |
| Jeff Bartow <i>Southwest Organizing Project</i> | Amina Peterson <i>Inner-City Muslim Action Network</i> |
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| Victor Harbison <i>Model Bungalow Block</i> | Imelda Salazar <i>St. Mary Star of the Sea Church</i> |
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| Harriette Mimms <i>15th Ward</i> | |

A Partnership to Bring People Together

Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC)

Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC) was founded in 1974 as a natural outgrowth of organizing efforts to hold banks accountable for community disinvestment. Recognizing early on the powerful impact of racial change in the neighborhood, GSDC's work as a community development corporation has always included efforts to bridge racial and cultural differences.

The mission of GSDC is to "organize to generate residential, institutional, commercial and industrial revitalization that creates local benefits resulting in an improved quality of life for Southwest Chicagoans." GSDC works to increase the quality of homeownership and residential tenancy; the viability of local businesses and business investment, and other economic opportunities for Southwest Chicagoans. GSDC markets the community to homebuyers, investors and businesses and strives to organize and collaborate with others to thwart the negative forces that lead to community deterioration.

One of the most successful community development organizations in Chicago, GSDC has been responsible for \$500 million invested or retained in the neighborhood over the last 30 years. Projects include the retention of the Nabisco Plant, which produces 22 million Oreo cookies a day; bringing in plastic-molder StyleMaster to a previously underutilized site; opening a Jewel grocery development of which GSDC is one-third owner; attracting a multiplex

cinema; building senior housing including Lawn Terrace, which also houses a day care and several small businesses; developing single family rehabs and mixed-use buildings; and conducting foreclosure prevention work.

Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP)

SWOP was founded in 1988 as the Southwest Catholic Cluster to promote racial integration and diversity in Chicago Lawn. It was reorganized in 1995 as the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) when other churches and institutions were invited to join. SWOP now has 29 dues-paying member institutions representing 35,000 families and individuals. SWOP works with its member organizations to engage families in public life, develop leaders and identify and strategize around issues impacting the community's quality of life. Current work includes: organizing around such issues as predatory lending; immigrants' rights; violence reduction; improving health care and KidCare access through United Power for Action and Justice; citizenship classes; and conducting candidates' forums, voter registration drives and other activities to raise political awareness.

An Attractive, Safe and Inviting Place



The 6400 block of South Fairfield was the city's Green Bungalow Model Block, showcasing environmental improvements.

Because we love Chicago Southwest and want to stay here, we envision a community that in five years will be one of the top 10 most desirable neighborhoods in Cook County.

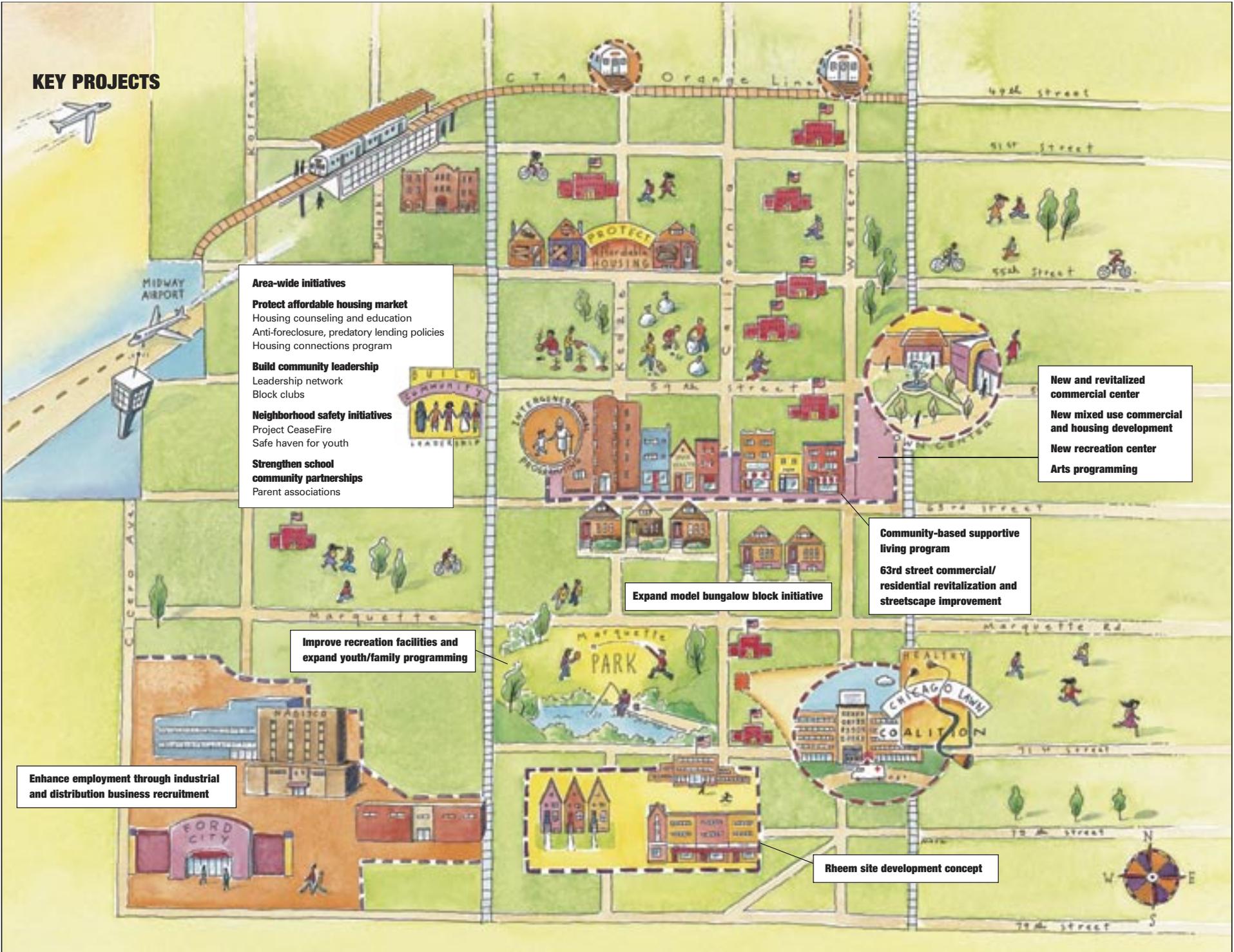
Chicago Southwest will have stable homeownership and no abandoned buildings, high quality health care accessible to all residents, great parks with excellent facilities and programs, outstanding schools and a wide assortment of cultural, sports and educational after-school activities for children and youth.

It will have a thriving retail and industrial sector bringing jobs to the neighborhood and making 63rd Street among the most popular multi-ethnic dining and shopping destinations in the city.

Chicago Southwest will be an attractive, safe and inviting place to live for families of diverse racial, religious, ethnic, socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds, with something to offer individuals of all ages.

It will be a place where residents, key leaders and stakeholders from community institutions and the public and private sectors know each other and work together, holding each other accountable in keeping this community thriving.

KEY PROJECTS



Area-wide initiatives

Protect affordable housing market
 Housing counseling and education
 Anti-foreclosure, predatory lending policies
 Housing connections program

Build community leadership
 Leadership network
 Block clubs

Neighborhood safety initiatives
 Project CeaseFire
 Safe haven for youth

Strengthen school community partnerships
 Parent associations



New and revitalized commercial center

New mixed use commercial and housing development

New recreation center

Arts programming

Community-based supportive living program

63rd street commercial/residential revitalization and streetscape improvement

Expand model bungalow block initiative

Improve recreation facilities and expand youth/family programming

Enhance employment through industrial and distribution business recruitment

Rheem site development concept



SUMMARY

To Build a New Community, We Begin with Relationships



We are newcomers, long-time residents and neighborhood leaders choosing to make our neighborhood a safe and vibrant place.

We have decided to stay—and to get to know one another. Despite the abandoned houses that dot some blocks, the gang presence and the unfamiliar faces, we are encouraged by the affordable bungalows and apartments, the possibility of finding a job nearby and the growing signs of revitalization. We are newcomers, long-time residents and neighborhood leaders committed to creating a safe and vibrant community.

Chicago Southwest—which centers on the community of Chicago Lawn and includes portions of Gage Park, West Lawn, West Elsdon and north Ashburn—is adjacent to Midway International Airport and includes the Greater Southwest Industrial Corridor. It is home to Marquette Park, the “green bungalow block” of environmentally-friendly rehabbed homes and dozens of religious institutions, community-based organizations, public and Catholic schools, ethnic restaurants and businesses.

We are a multi-cultural community where residents are of African, Mexican, Middle Eastern and European descent—arguably the most culturally diverse group of neighborhoods on the South Side. Yet we are not without racial tensions and economic challenges. We must address low-performing schools, violence and crime, a troubled housing market and many other issues.

After years of economic and demographic change, we are struck by a lack of connectedness in our neighborhood. We recognize the need to build new relationships with one another and with the organizations and institutions that help keep Chicago Southwest viable.

This Quality-of-Life Plan was developed with participation of more than 300 residents and dozens of institutions. We believe successful transformation of Chicago Southwest into a new community hinges on the continued commitment, engagement and vision of our residents and institutions, on our ability to connect and build positive relationships, and on our capacity to cultivate new leaders who are representative of the new stakeholders in our neighborhood. We are up for the challenge.

STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS

STRATEGY 1 Promote stable investment and protect our affordable housing market

- 1.1** Launch the New Communities Housing Connection to protect new homeowners.
- 1.2** Strengthen and implement anti-foreclosure policy and assist homeowners with advice and education about financing and foreclosure risk.
- 1.3** Build a new network of landlords, tenants and homeowners to improve relations and hold absentee landlords accountable.
- 1.4** Launch an initiative to reduce local rent increases that result from use of Section 8 vouchers.

STRATEGY 2 Establish an active town center by revitalizing the 63rd Street commercial district

- 2.1** Redevelop the Sears/Jewel/cinema shopping center as a Town Center.
- 2.2** Create a revitalized pedestrian-oriented district on 63rd St. from Western to Rockwell.
- 2.3** Enhance the 63rd and Western district with compatible and coordinated developments nearby, such as artist live/work facilities, mixed-use development and in-fill housing.

STRATEGY 3 Strengthen and sustain leadership and community commitment

- 3.1** Connect leaders and organizations and provide regular forums to discuss community issues.
- 3.2** Increase community participation in local, State, and Federal elections.
- 3.3** Strengthen bonds between old and new generations of Chicago residents.
- 3.4** Champion civil rights and broader human rights through our strong tradition of community activism.
- 3.5** Promote intercultural understanding and respect in our community with special importance given to building relationships with the Muslim and Middle Eastern community.

STRATEGY 4 Create a safe neighborhood by investing in marginalized youth and young adults and building positive resident/police relations

- 4.1** Provide alternatives to gang life through non-traditional education programs such as alternative schools and GED preparation.
- 4.2** Establish safe havens for gang members in need of a non-threatening environment.
- 4.3** Research viability of local community justice panels to address minor offenses.
- 4.4** Provide job opportunities and other assistance for youth seeking alternatives to gang life.
- 4.5** Improve communication and relations with the 8th District Police, the community, and other City agencies to identify and solve neighborhood crime problems.

STRATEGY 5 Increase access to comprehensive health care, including preventive, primary and mental health services, for residents of all ages regardless of income and immigration status

- 5.1** Assess community health care needs and implement strategies to address these needs through the Healthy Chicago Lawn initiative.
- 5.2** Support the expansion or creation of new community health centers.
- 5.3** Increase public health programs at local schools.
- 5.4** Increase mental health care services and resources in the community.
- 5.5** Provide shelter for the homeless and others in need of emergency or transition housing, including families with boys over age 13.
- 5.6** Expand and strengthen health screening, education and prevention programs.

STRATEGY 6 Create better recreational and social opportunities for youth

- 6.1** Improve Marquette Park facilities and expand youth programming.
- 6.2** Establish year-round, structured youth activities and programs.
- 6.3** Develop new recreation facilities such as a bowling alley, roller rink, tech center or skateboarding park.
- 6.4** Expand resources available at branch libraries in Chicago Lawn and West Lawn.

STRATEGY 7 Expand the local employment base, prepare residents for employment, and improve access to jobs

- 7.1** Redevelop the Rheem industrial site and vacant land at Gateway Park.
- 7.2** Retain Solo Cup at the former Sweetheart Cup facility and utilize adjacent parcels for expansion of jobs at this site.
- 7.3** Provide assistance to entrepreneurs establishing new businesses and to existing local businesses seeking to expand.
- 7.4** Increase employment and internship opportunities for local youth and for those re-entering the workforce by leveraging public subsidies for employers.
- 7.5** Create internship and job opportunities for youth through stronger relationships among high schools, employers and non-profit organizations.
- 7.6** Publicize and promote existing job training opportunities and certificate programs.
- 7.7** Pass legislation to expunge or seal the records for minor, non-violent offenses to help ex-offenders re-enter the workforce.
- 7.8** Increase access to college through application assistance and other programs.
- 7.9** Establish a Center for Working Families to increase residents' access to employment services, financial education and other programs that increase household income.

STRATEGY 8 Improve local schools and strengthen their role in the community

- 8.1** Build and strengthen parents associations.
- 8.2** Establish and achieve annual education goals.
- 8.3** Partner with neighborhood schools to promote and implement the “community schools model” that opens the schools on afternoons and weekends.
- 8.4** Work with CPS to end the negative effects of overcrowding in our schools.
- 8.5** Establish new daycare and pre-school facilities.

New Communities Program

NCP is a long-term initiative of Local Initiatives Support Corporation/Chicago to support comprehensive community development in Chicago neighborhoods. It seeks to rejuvenate challenged communities, bolster those in danger of losing ground and preserve the diversity of areas in the path of gentrification. Each effort is led by a neighborhood-based lead agency that coordinates programs among other local organizations and citywide support groups.

The program gives each of the lead agencies several resources: two full-time staff positions (an NCP director and organizer), technical support for planning and documenting the planning process, a pool of loan and grant funds distributed on a competitive basis for project seed money, and opportunities for learning from both peers and subject-area experts.

All NCP neighborhoods spend their first year undertaking a structured community planning process that leads to the quality-of-life plan, then move on to implementation. They are encouraged to be “doing while planning,” undertaking short-term “Early Action Projects” such as launching a youth program, opening an employment center, creating public art or sponsoring local health fairs.

NCP is designed to strengthen communities from within—through planning, organizing and human development. The comprehensive approach is designed to help broaden opportunities for local residents through better education, broader housing choices, safer streets, stronger personal finances and new economic opportunities. The strengthened community is better equipped to take advantage of larger market forces, attract new investment and enhance the overall quality of life.

For more information

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