



04 VISION FOR NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSFORMATION

Residents of the Downtown/East Side community are focused on maintaining and enhancing their neighborhood. Chicago Heights has a strong community culture and pride. Residents see themselves as the ones who have the ability to make their situation better. Nonetheless, residents understand that some of their ideas are aspirational and that long-term commitments and significant resources from a variety of stakeholders and partners will be needed to make their vision a reality. While many residents are satisfied in their current situation, they do want nicer, more affordable and more energy efficient housing available in the neighborhood, a better education for their kids and a much easier shopping experience. They also want a neighborhood that is visually appealing, clean and full of life.

Chicago Heights residents in the target neighborhood prioritized meeting the needs of current residents. They don't want the focus to be only on attracting and addressing the needs of potential new residents. There is strong

interest in rehabilitating existing homes and demolishing abandoned buildings, which will benefit both existing and new residents.

Neighborhood residents want to make their housing and neighborhood better, more affordable and attractive. They want to ensure proper maintenance (and expansion) of existing assets, such as parks and community centers, so that they can take full advantage of them. Residents also feel strongly that new recreational trails and paths, street beautification and supportive services for the elderly are needed. Better lighting is also important.

Residents remember that the Downtown/East Side was once a neighborhood of choice and opportunity; many would like to bring it back to those days. LaDonna Blevins, a long-time Chicago Heights resident and Resident Ambassador said it well:

“Growing up in Chicago Heights was the best. I wish I was a kid again. Everybody knew everybody. The store owners knew us and our families. The teachers used to come to our houses. It seemed like we were outside playing all the time. We played in the parks. We played hopscotch, double dutch and rode our bikes everywhere. There were apple trees and berry trees. It was very safe but when the street lights came on, you had to be home for dinner. No questions asked. Hopefully we can bring the community back to when I was a kid.”

*- LaDonna Blevins,
East Side Resident*



Vision Map

DOWNTOWN / EAST SIDE VISION



The Downtown/East Side is a clean, attractive, safe and inviting neighborhood.

- » Demolition of vacant buildings continues
- » Street lighting is upgraded
- » Community safety partnerships grow
- » Housing is improved through rehabilitation and new construction
- » New neighborhood amenities are added to meet needs of a growing neighborhood
 - Park/play fields/walking paths
 - Community center
 - Early childhood center
 - Black-owned businesses
- » Economic development obstacles are overcome



Public housing is transformed so that it is a community asset.

- » Interim renovation and beautification investments are made to improve livability and enhance visual curb appeal
- » A new community center accommodates a range of activities and programs
- » New mixed-income housing located south of Lincoln Highway brings public housing residents closer to existing neighborhood assets
- » Public housing residents are no longer isolated or living in close proximity to active industrial uses
- » Children are safer because they no longer have to cross Lincoln Highway to get to school



Residents are self-sufficient and have easy access to amenities and services to meet their daily needs.

- » Transportation options are known and used
- » Food security (grocery stores/food pantries/mobile food options) is the norm
- » Health care access is improved
- » New business development improves choice
- » Investment in youth is a priority
- » Educational opportunities improve family outcomes
- » Gathering places and programs are available to residents
- » Neighborhood-based self-sufficiency resources are promoted and used