

OUR GREAT RIVERS HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



OUR GREAT RIVERS

Our Great Rivers is a collaborative, comprehensive 30-year vision for the Chicago region's waterways. The City of Chicago, the Metropolitan Planning Council and many other partners co-released the vision in 2016, after an extensive community engagement process that collected input from more than 6,000 people who live, work and play along Chicago's three rivers: the Chicago, Des Plaines and Calumet. Their ideas and desires were distilled into 26 distinct goals with the overarching vision to make our rivers more **Inviting**, **Productive**, and **Living**.

Through achieving these goals, Chicago's rivers will be transformed into destinations that are meaningful and exciting with opportunities for relaxation and recreation, but also teeming with wildlife serving as thriving ecosystems for plants, animals, and humans alike. Most importantly, our rivers will be part of their neighborhoods by attracting jobs and businesses, helping grow community wealth and maintaining the culture and integrity of their surroundings.

This vision frames goals by decade, making 2020 a milestone year and a perfect moment to celebrate the progress along our riverfronts achieved by community groups, environmentalists, developers, and government. Numerous nonprofit and community partners propelled these accomplishments forward through their work on programming, activations and implementation projects up and down the river system.

Many of these groups were part of the grant program funded by the Chicago Community Trust to create real, tangible change along the rivers. Multiple government agencies including the City of Chicago's Dept. of Planning and Development, Dept. of Transportation, and the Park District along with regional entities like the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the Forest Preserves and others collaborated to ensure that on-the-ground projects were also reinforced by policy changes. This document offers a snapshot of that progress over the past few years.

INVITING

Our rivers will be inviting: Enhancements to infrastructure, information and programming to make our rivers more intuitive, meaningful and exciting places to be, drawing more people for recreation, work and relaxation.

PRODUCTIVE

Our rivers will be productive: They have historically been and will continue to be working rivers that are transportation arteries, commercial corridors, and tourism generators.

LIVING

Our rivers will be living: From riverbeds to shorelines, plants, animals and people will co-exist in vibrant healthy ecosystems.

2020 GOALS

Although progress has been made on many of these goals, this snapshot highlights the significant accomplishments achieved for those marked with a check mark ✓

INVITING

- 1 Activities to draw people to our rivers ✓
- 2 Safe rivers and riverfronts
- 3 A unified brand and comprehensive wayfinding ✓
- 4 Real-time water quality information ✓
- 5 Water quality Plans for all river stretches



PRODUCTIVE

- 1 New vision for modern working rivers
- 2 New tools to support riverfront productivity ✓



LIVING

- 1 Active stewardship for every park and preserve
- 2 Ecologically sensitive shoreline development ✓
- 3 Aggressive management of invasive species
- 4 Expanded Chicago Park District Natural Areas



INVITING

1 Activities to Draw People to Our Rivers

Since *Our Great Rivers* was completed in 2016, there has been a surge of activity across the Chicago region's riverfronts. Residents and visitors are enjoying all our rivers have to offer, from grabbing a drink along the downtown's Riverwalk to biking across the Little Calumet along the Major Taylor Trail to taking the water taxi to Chinatown and stopping to admire the murals in Ping Tom Park.

The Riverwalk has experienced a significant increase in events, with the number quadrupling to more than 300 from 2016 to 2018. There has also been a rise in neighborhood events. The Chicago Community Trust created the *Our Great Rivers* grant and started funding local projects in 2017. These projects range from implementing physical improvements to hosting activations and other events. In 2018-2019 alone, partner organizations reported more than 3,000 people participated in the community-led programming.

2 A Unified Brand and Comprehensive Wayfinding

In 2019, the City of Chicago released The Chicago River Brand Standards and Guidelines as a comprehensive branding strategy for any new planned developments along the Chicago River.

This guide provides standards for the Chicago River and its branches within the city limits, outlining signage design and general parameters around identifying elements and overall aesthetics. Additional expectations for development signifiers were defined in the Chicago River Design Guidelines.

3 Real Time Water Quality Information

How do people know if it's safe to swim or fish in the river on any given day? In 2019, with funding support from the *Our Great Rivers* grant from the Chicago Community Trust, H2NOW Chicago was launched to install water quality sensors in all three branches of the Chicago River. This pilot project is led by *Current* in partnership with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and multiple other stakeholders.

The goal of H2NOW is to provide residents, visitors and outdoor recreation enthusiasts with real time water quality information to encourage river-based activities, as well as highlight the natural beauty of the waterway.

The innovative sensors collect hourly data on microbial pollution, which will provide a new level of insight into water quality compared to the monthly samples that are currently taken. This timely information and eventual public interface are game changers for making decisions about how and when to interact with Chicago's waterways.

Progress Stats

400% increase in events along the Riverwalk

More than 3,000 people attended riverfront events held system-wide in 2019

1 visual branding system and Riverwalk Logo

3 water quality sensors installed in 2019 in all branches of the Chicago River

17 organizations partnered to collect water quality data

PRODUCTIVE

4 New Tools to Support Riverfront Productivity

In 2017, Chicago's City government and other stakeholders investigated new and existing tools to promote riverfront development. World Business Chicago, the Council on Global Affairs, and the Chicago Mayor's Office jointly hosted other Mayors from five continents at the Urban Waterways Forum. This event fostered an international conversation about the future of urban waterways, and hosted discussions on how waterways can generate economic, environmental, and social benefits for cities.

Students from the University of Chicago's Harris School Policy Lab, along with Chicago Mayoral Fellows, researched different governance structures and financing mechanisms used in other riverfront North American Cities. Their findings focused on how coordination has occurred in different cities as well as the incentives that have been successful in increasing project implementation.

This research is now assisting Chicago's River Ecology and Governance Task Force with reviewing different incentive programs, such as Open Space Impact fees and River Edge Redevelopment Zone program

LIVING

5 Ecologically Sensitive Shoreline Development

In early 2019, the Chicago Plan Commission officially adopted revised Chicago River Design Guidelines, which update and replace an older, outdated version from 2005.

These guidelines create new design standards for riverfront habitat, public accessibility and use, with an expectation that all new development within 100 feet of the river will enhance their frontage for all users.

Highlights from the guidelines includes the retention of a minimum 30 foot setback from the river for most projects, which is increased to 60 feet along Bubbly Creek, with an overall emphasis on walking and biking trails and ensuring that developments improve the shoreline of the river to encourage wildlife habitats and a healthy river ecosystem.

The guidelines also include a *Menu of Improvement Items*, a section that outlines a wide range of possible upgrades new developments should implement. The potential improvements are arranged into three categories: Nature, Recreation and Connectivity, and examples are provided so they can be easily integrated into projects.

Progress Stats

15 case studies identified financial tools used in other cities

17 Mayors participated at the urban waterways forum

60 foot setback required along Bubbly Creek to rebuild riverbank

3 categories of menu of improvement items: nature/recreation/connectivity

ONGOING PROGRESS

In addition to making progress on a number of the 2020 goals, there have also been major accomplishments from community and civic projects as well as government and private sector actions that were not anticipated when *Our Great Rivers* was released in 2016. These other significant achievements should also be celebrated as they collectively move Chicago forward in realizing the collective potential of its rivers and riverfronts.

PLANNING AND POLICY INITIATIVES

1 River Ecology and Governance Task Force

Former Mayor Rahm Emanuel kicked off 2019 with an Executive Order creating the Chicago River Ecology and Governance Task Force.

This Task Force was an outgrowth of the Implementation Committee started in 2016 after the release of *Our Great Rivers*. The Task Force consists of local, state and federal government agencies, civic and community organizations, and local institutions.

Currently there are five working groups: Science and Design; Community Connections; River Trails; Volunteers and Stewardship; and Funding & Coordination. The Task Force and its working groups have subsequently met several times to develop and review working goals for each group.

2 US Army Corps of Engineers Restoration (USACE) Framework Plan

The USACE, with support from the Chicago Department Planning and Development and the River Ecology and Governance Task Force, will develop a Chicago Rivers Restoration Framework Plan. The study tasks and deliverables to be developed in the plan include an inventory of existing conditions, determining restoration potential and environmental impacts, and identifying new and existing project connection opportunities. The Restoration Framework Plan is projected to be completed by the end of 2020.

3 Funding for City of Chicago Riverfront Projects

In January 2020, the Chicago City Council approved the Open Spaces Initiative, which provides funding for public access along several sections of the Chicago River.

\$1.4 million in Open Space Impact Fees will be used to construct the first section of the 'Wild Mile' riverside park along the North Branch Canal. Coordinated by the Department of Planning and Development and managed by community partners, including Near North Unity Program, Urban Rivers, and NeighborSpace, the project will include construction of a two block floating boardwalk along the canal's east bank.

The initiative will also fund two plans with \$40,000 each in Open Space Impact Fees, the Chicago River Edge Access Study and the South Branch Parks Feasibility Study. The plans will inventory existing public access and identify potential access opportunities and priorities on the North and South Branches of the Chicago River. Both plans will be coordinated by the Chicago Department of Transportation and supported by \$160,000 grants from the Illinois Department of Transportation.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECTS

4 The Chicago Community Trust Our Great Rivers Grant

The Chicago Community Trust's *Our Great Rivers* grant funds community-led riverfront projects across all three of Chicago's rivers. These projects span planning and programming, demonstrate alignment with the *Inviting*, *Productive*, and *Living* pillars of the *Our Great Rivers* vision, and address the Trust's focus areas of sustainable development, arts and culture, public health and economic development.

In 2018, 10 riverfront projects were funded by the CCT Our Great Rivers grant. Following the success of the inaugural grantees, the Trust funded 11 projects in 2019, four of which were new to the cohort. In spring of 2020 CCT is expected to announce the next round of community-led projects as members of the third cohort funded by the *Our Great Rivers* grant.

Funded projects continue to demonstrate creative and unique approaches to river activation and highlight a hunger for cultural inclusion along the riverfronts.

Progress Stats

15 projects
funded between 2017 and 2019

\$50,000 to \$150,000
grant funds awarded per project



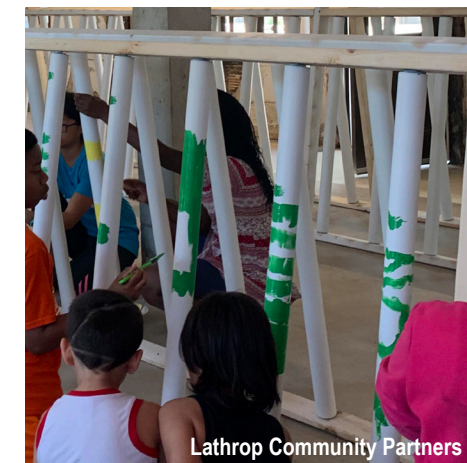
African American Heritage Water Trail



Major Taylor Trail Improvement



NW Portage Walking Museum



Lathrop Community Partners



El Paseo Community Council



H2NOW Chicago

GREAT RIVERS CHICAGO


2020

2019 RIVERS CHAMPION SPONSORS


COMCAST AMD Family Fund

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