



BUILDING ON OPPORTUNITY

Vacant public housing land holds the key to community
investment and affordable housing

JANUARY 2024



About Impact for Equity

Impact for Equity (formerly BPI) is a public interest law and policy center that has been at the front lines of social justice in the Chicago region and Illinois for over 50 years. Known for its innovative and effective advocacy for racial and economic equity, today Impact for Equity is deeply engaged in advancing systemic change in housing, community building, and criminal legal system reform.

Impact for Equity attorneys serve as legal representatives for Chicago's public housing residents and applicants in the federal *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* lawsuit, which dates back to 1966. Impact for Equity attorneys continue to monitor and enforce the terms of a Settlement Agreement reached in 2019. Through *Gautreaux*, Impact for Equity staff have participated in stakeholder working groups created by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) at each of its mixed income communities in Chicago. These working groups include representatives from CHA, the City, developers, resident leaders, and in some instances representatives of community organizations.

Acknowledgments

Authors

Julie Elena Brown, Senior Staff Counsel & Director of Housing, Impact for Equity

Ashley Meeder, Polikoff-Gautreaux Fellow & Staff Counsel, Impact for Equity

Research, Graphic Design, Property Data, & Mapping

Ashley Meeder, Polikoff-Gautreaux Fellow & Staff Counsel, Impact for Equity

Mary McKillop, Intern, Impact for Equity

Alex Paulette Sommerville, Alex Paulette Graphic Design

Editing, Communications, & Administration

Cara Hendrickson, Executive Director, Impact for Equity

Nida Hasan, Communications Manager, Impact for Equity

We also thank Steven Vance and Chicago Cityscape for support with property data and mapping. Chicago Cityscape uses open data from various public sources, including the Cook County Assessor's Office (property classifications), the Cook County Clerk (parcel maps), and Dennis McClendon/Chicago CartoGraphics (historic maps). The maps in this report were made using Felt, a web-based mapping tool.

Contents

03 Overview

04 Chicago's Public Housing History

05 CHA Mixed Income Sites Today: Different Neighborhoods, Shared Potential

05 Chicago's Approach to Mixed Income Redevelopment

06 Overviews of Select CHA Mixed Income Sites

Robert Taylor Homes > Legends South

Stateway Gardens > Park Boulevard

Madden, Wells, and Darrow Homes > Oakwood Shores

Rockwell Gardens > West End

Julia C. Lathrop Homes > Lathrop

Cabrini-Green > Parkside and Other Cabrini Replacement

19 Building on Opportunity: Vacant Land, Vacant Buildings

21 How to Build on this Opportunity

21 Specific Recommendations



Overview

Beginning in the 1990s, thousands of units of public housing on hundreds of acres across Chicago were demolished with the promise that new, thriving communities would be built. While progress has been made toward this vision, it has been uneven and unnecessarily slow, leaving vast areas of land at several mixed income sites owned by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) vacant or underutilized during an increasingly acute shortage of affordable housing.

In just six mixed income developments (profiled below), nearly 110 acres of land is vacant, with an additional 22 acres of land home to only vacant buildings. This represents over 25 Chicago city blocks of land that could provide housing and complete communities to Chicago residents. Unless the current pace of development is accelerated, many CHA mixed income communities may not be completed for decades longer, leaving still unfulfilled the opportunity they present.¹

Chicago now has a chance to make a course correction by focusing on mixed income communities, prioritizing them, and streamlining the governmental processes needed to move development forward. Because they contain large areas of CHA-owned land, these communities present a two-fold opportunity both to address Chicago's need for affordable housing and, in most cases, to invest in under-resourced neighborhoods.

After more than 25 years, it is time to complete these communities and develop the housing and other resources that have long been talked about, but not yet fully provided. Now is the time to finish the job, bring closure to this decades-long endeavor, and strengthen these neighborhoods.

Chicagoans and their communities have waited long enough.

¹ This Report defines a Chicago city block according to the City's typical block dimensions of 660 feet by 330 feet.



Chicago's Public Housing History

For generations, public housing has been a fixture in some Chicago neighborhoods and part of community identity. Chicago's first public housing developments opened in 1938, and by the end of the 1960s, over 150,000 people lived in over 40,000 public housing apartments. As the federal court in the *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* public housing desegregation litigation found, the CHA and the City of Chicago determined the location and tenant assignment of public housing based on race, restricting most of its housing to Chicago's Black neighborhoods. Despite these unconstitutional government actions, public housing in Chicago was home to tens of thousands of families, and it generated stories not only of struggle and strength, but also of personal achievement and hope.

Over the years, changing federal housing policy, inadequate federal funding, institutional racism, poor management, and neglect led to a substantial deterioration in public housing buildings in Chicago and around the country. In 1989, Congress established the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, which proposed a nationwide plan that included identifying needed physical improvements and management changes, among other things.

As one response, Congress created a program called HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) that provided money for revitalizing public housing communities. It also required public housing authorities to assess large housing developments with more than 10% vacancy to determine whether demolishing those developments and providing their residents with rental vouchers for use in the private market would be cheaper than rehabilitating them. In Chicago, developments with thousands of public housing apartments failed that "viability" test.

Against the backdrop of these massive federal changes, Chicago launched the "Plan for Transformation" (Plan) in 2000. This broad effort to transform the CHA's public housing developments was announced jointly by the City, CHA, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). One of the Plan's most substantive goals was to demolish a dozen distressed high-rise public housing family developments and redevelop them as "mixed income communities" that included residents with varied income levels. In addition, the Plan would rehabilitate all of CHA's other properties, including thousands of senior apartments and non-high-rise family developments. Together, the Plan promised to redevelop or rehabilitate 25,000 units of housing over ten years. It would be supported by more than \$1.5 billion in funding from the federal government.

When the Plan was adopted, eligible residents forced to relocate were promised a right either to return to a rehabilitated or redeveloped public housing apartment or to receive a rent voucher to live in the private market.

Although the CHA reported completion of its promise to deliver 25,000 rehabilitated or redeveloped units in 2022, more than twenty years after the Plan was announced, not all has gone as originally anticipated. While nearly all of the public housing demolitions at around a dozen sites took place within a few years of the Plan's launch and a great deal of rehabilitation has been completed, redevelopment has moved at a drastically slower pace. In addition, CHA has broadened its geographic focus beyond its own footprint, and much "replacement" public housing has been built on land that is not in the mixed income communities, while large areas of land at those sites remain vacant. CHA has also replaced public housing with apartments under long-term leases in the private market and has significantly increased the amount of housing assistance it provides through Housing Choice Vouchers rather than at CHA owned or leased properties. As a result, the majority of CHA families now live in private housing with rent subsidies rather than in traditional public housing or mixed income housing on former CHA public housing sites.

Today, CHA has thousands fewer public housing apartments than it did prior to the Plan for Transformation and provides thousands more households with housing assistance through rent vouchers and long-term rental contracts, with an overall increase in the total number of households served since 2000. Obligations by CHA to remedy the discrimination found in *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* continue under the terms of a Settlement Agreement. That Agreement requires certain, specific development progress, along with provisions limiting CHA's ability to repeat mistakes of the past. In the context of Chicago's severe shortage of affordable housing, these requirements must provide a floor, not a ceiling, for CHA housing construction.

Chicago today has vast swaths of vacant land owned by its public housing authority, while tens of thousands of Chicagoans wait for housing assistance.



CHA Mixed Income Sites Today: Different Neighborhoods, Shared Potential

Chicago's Approach to Mixed Income Redevelopment

Chicago adopted an unusually ambitious program of mixed income housing to replace its demolished public housing. As a result, most redeveloped CHA sites include not only public housing, but also other rental housing and sometimes for-sale housing developed with the support of government programs designed to make it affordable for low and moderate income families (called “affordable housing”). They also commonly include non-subsidized, market rate rental housing and sometimes market rate for-sale housing.

To achieve this broad mix, CHA mixed income developments are created through public-private partnerships. CHA contracts with for-profit and not-for-profit developers to construct and manage the new communities. The developments typically involve many layers of public as well as private financing. Although limited, federal, state, and City funding sources are available for this purpose. These developments also typically require new zoning approvals and substantial new physical infrastructure like streets, sidewalks, sewers, and utility connections.

Over more than twenty years, CHA's redevelopment program has proceeded slowly, starting with a small number of sites and spreading gradually across the city, adding sites and new phases a few buildings at a time. As a result, the dozen or so sites being redeveloped are at very different stages, from nearly finished to just getting underway. Some 2,500 replacement public housing apartments have been developed in mixed income communities on and around twelve former public housing sites.

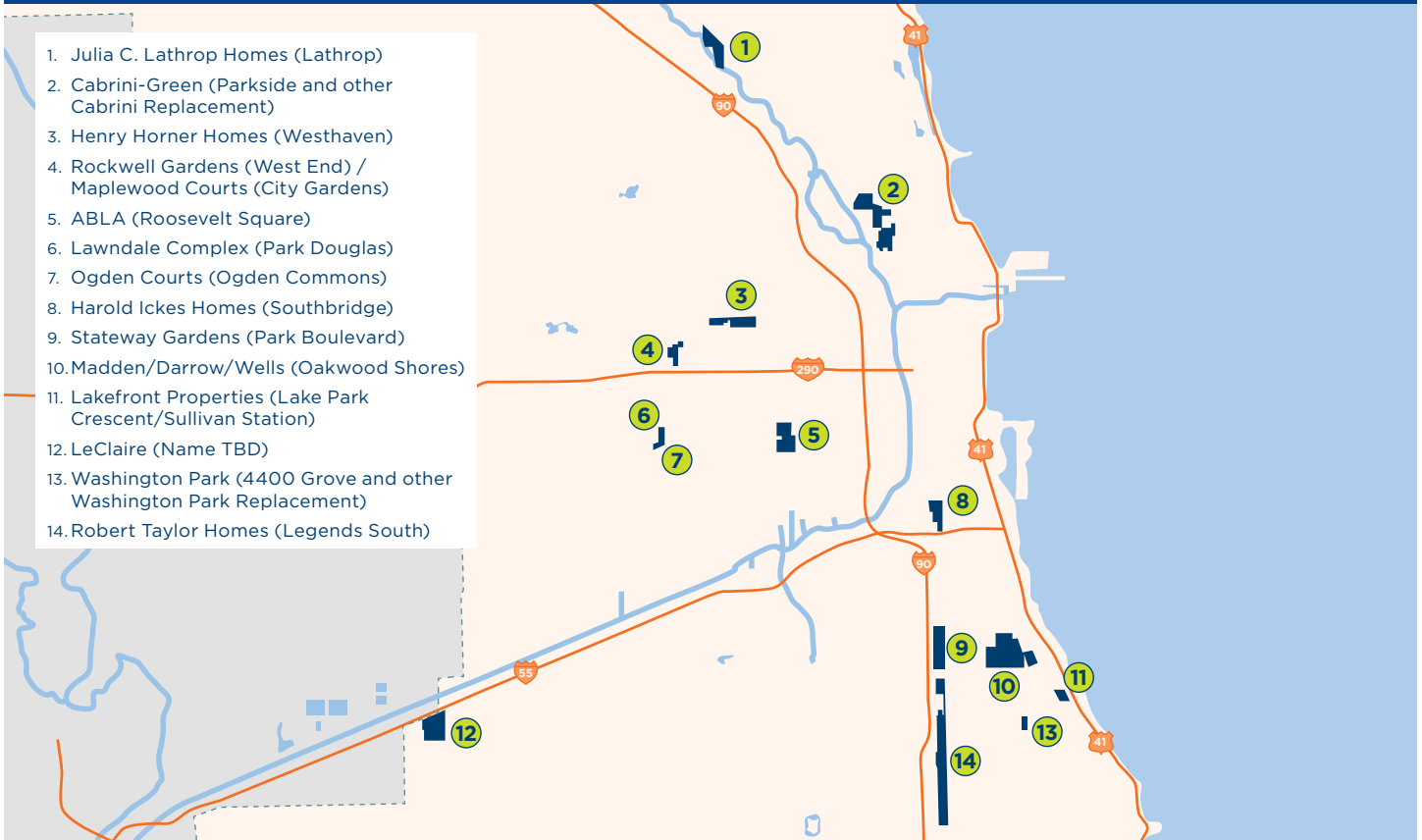
Thriving communities, of course, need more than just housing. Urban planners and community developers frequently use the term “complete communities” to describe places that meet the diverse needs of all residents. Several basic elements are present in such a community, although the form and shape may vary greatly depending on the needs and priorities of a community's residents. Along with safe, affordable housing, a complete community includes access to transportation and quality education, jobs, health and social services, and shared spaces for connection. These elements often take the form of schools, libraries, grocery stores, retail that provides goods and services, parks and recreation facilities, and amenities that support artistic, spiritual, and cultural needs.

In addition to these physical structures, communities that feel “complete” and inclusive also incorporate building community among the people that live and work there. At its core, community building creates a sense of togetherness and helps empower residents to promote their individual and collective well-being. This work requires robust engagement and investment by all members of a community, and it needs to be accounted for in planning processes, budgets, and ongoing operations. The CHA's mixed income communities vary greatly as to how “complete” they are and how welcoming and inclusive they feel.

One of the most important ways to engage communities is to involve people who live and work in the community in the planning process. Most CHA mixed income communities have overall plans that were created with some degree of community engagement, either through site-specific working groups that include resident and community representation or in some cases through robust community planning processes. These plans often include many of the needed community components. Quite a few of these plans are, however, old and outdated.



FORMER CHA DEVELOPMENT SITES WITH MIXED INCOME REDEVELOPMENTS



Overviews of Six CHA Mixed Income Sites²

This report profiles six of the CHA redevelopment sites, representing different communities across Chicago with large vacant parcels of land and/or vacant buildings. Together the sites were once home to tens of thousands of public housing residents, but progress towards their redevelopment and the nature of the surrounding communities vary greatly. Much of the groundwork needed for additional housing development has already been laid at these sites. Nevertheless, they all have substantial areas of land that are empty fields or are filled with vacant buildings.

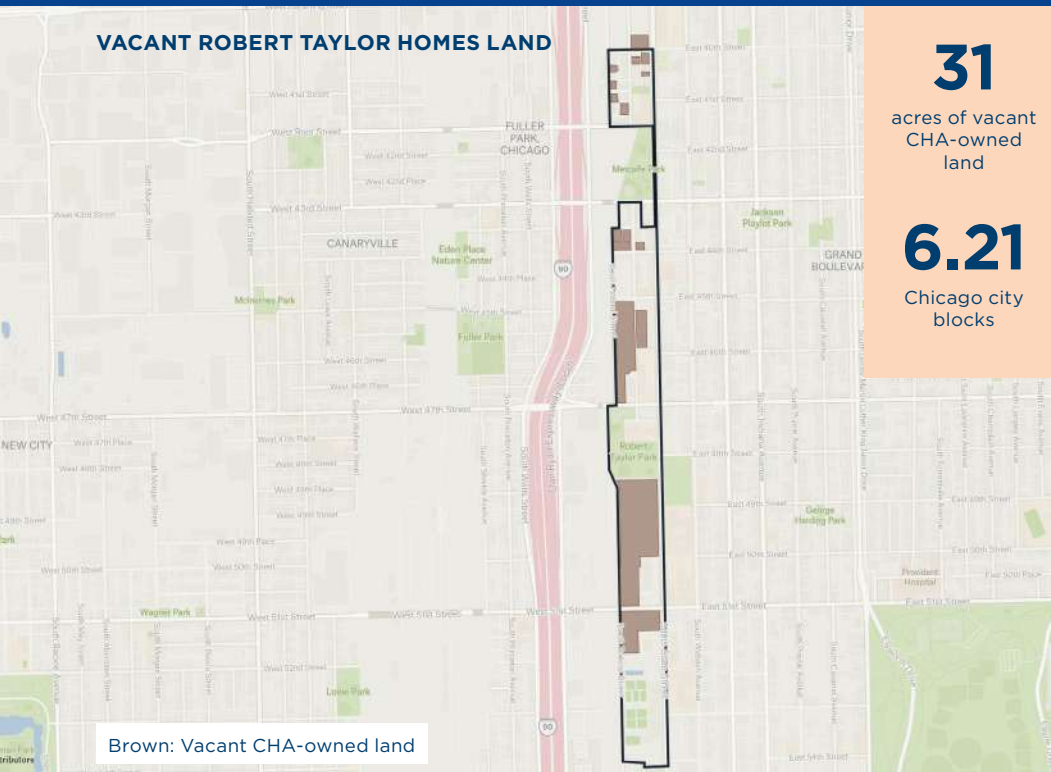
The six sites were chosen to highlight some of the unique challenges and opportunities present at CHA-owned sites. Together, these sites have nearly 110 acres of vacant land and an additional 22 acres of land with vacant buildings, an equivalent of over 25 Chicago city blocks that could provide housing and complete communities to Chicago residents. Other CHA mixed income sites not profiled here include a substantial amount of additional vacant CHA land yet to be developed. If thoughtfully and expeditiously completed, CHA mixed income sites could provide thousands of homes and important community resources and amenities.

The following profiles are listed by the name of the demolished public housing development, followed by the name of the mixed income community developed on its site.

² All descriptions of former public housing sites and calculations of vacant land in this report were created using publicly available sources, including the CHA's website (www.thecha.org), Chicago Cityscape, and the second edition of *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago* (Devereaux Bowly Jr., *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2nd ed. 2012)).

In some cases, we are aware of additional adjacent land owned by other public entities, such as the City of Chicago, Chicago Parks District, Chicago Transit Authority, and Chicago Public Schools. Even though some of these parcels are likely to be used for housing, we have not included them in our maps or calculations of vacant land. Additionally, we have not represented as vacant land that the CHA has publicly approved for development or that contains phases already under construction. As a result, our maps are a conservative representation of CHA land available for housing.

ROBERT TAYLOR HOMES > LEGENDS SOUTH



THE OPPORTUNITY

The City and CHA can fill an area equivalent to over six Chicago city blocks with thousands of units of mixed income rental and for-sale housing, as well as amenities that respond to community priorities. There is currently no publicly available overall plan for the vacant Robert Taylor Homes land and no community planning process has taken place.

Robert Taylor Homes, completed in 1962, was comprised of 28 virtually identical high-rise buildings. It was part of the State Street Corridor of large, concentrated public housing developments on Chicago's South Side and sat directly south of Stateway Gardens, another very large public housing high-rise development. Today the sites are separated by a large block of vacant land and an unused train viaduct. At its peak, Robert Taylor was the largest public housing development in the world, home to over 27,000 people living in the development's 4,300 units. The 95-acre site was only two blocks wide, but it was nearly two miles long, running from Pershing Road to 54th Street. Demolition began in 1997 and was completed in 2007.

In 2005, CHA and its development partner completed the first phase of Legends South, a multi-phase mixed income development located both on the former Robert Taylor Homes site and in the neighborhood to its east. In total, just over 1,000 mixed income units have been built, but only 319 are on-site, all at the north end of the site, in phases named Hansberry Square and Savoy Square, after legendary local figures. As a result, vast areas of CHA land along the two-mile stretch that Robert Taylor's high-rises once occupied remain vacant.

In addition to housing, Legends South on-site development includes a community garden, two community centers, and a Chicago Botanical Garden community farm and job training center. Metcalfe Park is located between the two on-site phases, and the XS Tennis Center on the southern end of the site provides programs with slots available for CHA residents. There are, however, few options for retail or grocery shopping in the area and many of the nearby schools were closed without replacements. The site has access to multiple Red and Green Line CTA stations, but due to its large size, walking to the nearest station might take 20 minutes or more.

The lack of community resources and amenities is compounded by the staggering amount of vacant land along State Street. The former Robert Taylor Homes site has more empty land than any other former public housing site profiled here. While a new phase of Legends South is being planned to add 61 mixed income rental units, it has been delayed for several years.



ROBERT TAYLOR HOMES (2000) PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ROBERT TAYLOR HOMES (1962-2007)

- 4,300 CHA units designed for families and built across 28 high-rise buildings
- 20,000 of the 27,000 residents who lived at Robert Taylor during peak occupancy were children
- The site occupied two miles of the State Street Corridor, a series of public housing developments along four miles of South State Street backed up against the Dan Ryan Expressway and the Metra train line



HANSBERRY SQUARE (2011) PHOTO: LLBA ARCHITECTS

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: LEGENDS SOUTH

- Several off-site phases have been completed, but to date there are only two on-site phases: Hansberry Square and Savoy Square, both named after local legends
- Hansberry Square and Savoy Square together provide 319 mixed income rental units
 - 143** CHA units
 - 118** affordable units
 - 38** unsubsidized units
- Both developments included plans for for-sale units, but none have been built
- A new on-site phase with 61 mixed income rental units is planned
- but not yet under construction, and progress has been very slow
- The redevelopment includes a two-acre on-site farm with programs for training in sustainable urban agriculture, created in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture and the Chicago Botanic Garden, two on-site community centers and a community garden
- There are limited options for retail, grocery shopping, schools, and some other community amenities



VACANT LAND, ROBERT TAYLOR HOMES SITE (2023)
PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT LAND

- Construction started at the north end of this vast site; over 30 acres of CHA-owned land between 45th and 54th Street are vacant
- Several vacant lots intended for for-sale housing are also interspersed between the occupied rental buildings at Hansberry and Savoy and community members have expressed frustration over the stalled for-sale development

STATEWAY GARDENS > PARK BOULEVARD

VACANT STATEWAY GARDENS LAND

17

acres of vacant
CHA-owned
land

3.43

Chicago city
blocks

THE OPPORTUNITY

With attention and investment, this empty land could be filled with rental and for-sale housing for thousands of people and other amenities as identified by the Park Boulevard community, such as the long-promised park and recreational space. The overall plan for this site is many years old and was developed without significant community input.

Brown: Vacant CHA-owned land

Stateway Gardens, constructed between 1955 and 1958, included eight ten- and seventeen-story high rise buildings and provided over 1,600 apartments. It sat along South State Street, directly north of the Robert Taylor Homes' towering high-rises. At their peak, Stateway Gardens and Robert Taylor Homes made up the largest continuous block of public housing in the world, and like Robert Taylor Homes, demolition of Stateway Gardens' high-rise buildings was completed by the end of 2007.

Today, the 33-acre site is home to Park Boulevard, a mixed income community with rental and for-sale units. Just under 500 units have been built on the former Stateway Gardens land, but several hundred more have been proposed and await construction. Some of the newly constructed buildings include ground floor retail shops, and there is a small park and playground tucked amid the housing. Park Boulevard is surrounded by several notable Chicago institutions, including the Illinois Institute of Technology, Guaranteed Rate Field baseball stadium, a public library housed in the historic former offices of the Chicago Bee newspaper, and several national and local retailers. Park Boulevard is also a short walk from CTA stations on the Red and Green Line, a Metra station, and stops along a CTA bus line that runs north to Navy Pier and south to the 95th/Dan Ryan Station on the Red Line.

Despite these amenities, plans for larger community and recreation spaces have stalled. Chicago Public Schools abruptly closed Crispus Attucks Elementary School in 2008, and it remained vacant until it had deteriorated beyond repair, leading to its demolition in 2021. Plans to develop a full-service grocer have come and gone with no results. Similarly, housing development has hit many roadblocks, and as a result, several blocks on the south end of the site are still completely vacant.



STATEWAY GARDENS (1998) PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

STATEWAY GARDENS (1955-2007)

- 1,644 CHA units in ten- and seventeen-story high rise buildings
- Stateway Gardens was part of the State Street Corridor and the 33-acre site sat directly north of Robert Taylor Homes



PARK BOULEVARD PHOTO: PARK BOULEVARD IIB



PARK BOULEVARD PHOTO: FITZGERALD ASSOCIATES

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: PARK BOULEVARD

- 475 mixed income rental and homeownership units have been built on the former Stateway Gardens site
 - Some local and national retail, university facilities, and Chicago institutions are on or near the site
 - Park Boulevard residents have access to bus routes, two CTA lines, and a Metra line
 - Plans for larger community spaces and a full-service grocer have stalled
- Rental**
- 173** CHA units
 - 119** affordable units
 - 78** unsubsidized units
- Homeownership**
- 25** affordable units
 - 80** unsubsidized units

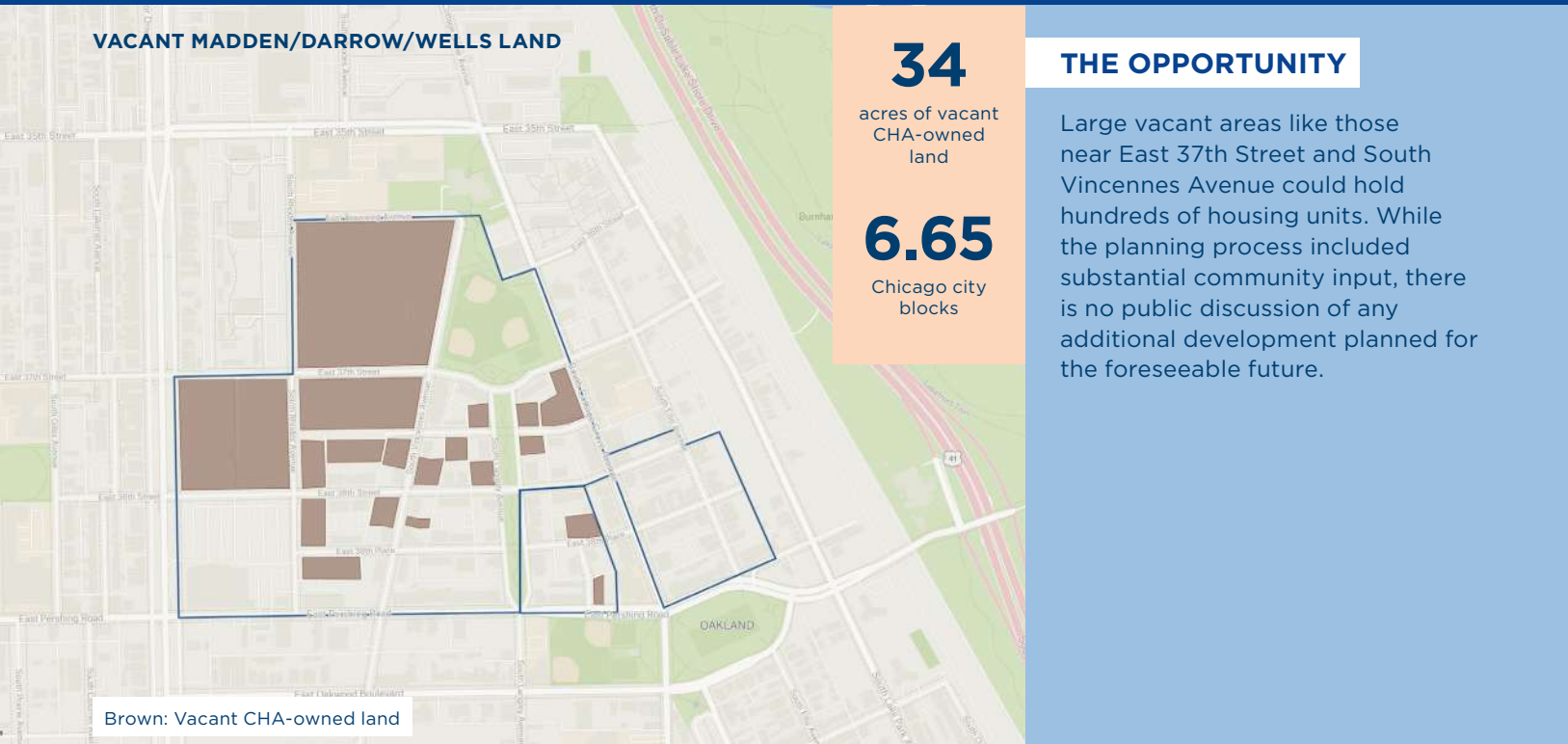


VACANT LAND, STATEWAY GARDENS SITE (2023)
PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT LAND

- Over 17 acres at the south end of the site are vacant
- Some for-sale housing phases have been delayed and the lots intended to hold those homes sit vacant

MADDEN, WELLS, AND DARROW HOMES > OAKWOOD SHORES



Oakwood Shores is part of the Bronzeville neighborhood, just a few blocks west of DuSable Lake Shore Drive and Lake Michigan. The public housing developments on the site were the Ida B. Wells Homes, Ida B. Wells Extension, Clarence Darrow Homes, and Madden Park Homes. Demolition of this housing began in 2002 and by 2011, the last residential buildings—two row houses on South Vincennes Avenue—were torn down.

The redevelopment project at Oakwood Shores includes over 900 units of mixed income rental and for-sale housing on the former public housing site and in the surrounding area. Oakwood Shores development has included important non-housing community elements. The site now includes a community center, social service and medical facilities, the Ida B. Wells National Monument, a grocery store, and a bank. Two schools - Doolittle Elementary and the University of Chicago Charter School's Donoghue Campus —and two public parks—Mandrake Park and Ellis Park—are adjacent to the site. The site also includes the Ellis Park Arts and Recreation Center, operated by the Chicago Park District, which offers an indoor swimming pool, a fitness center, multi-purpose spaces, an outdoor event space, and programming for all ages.

Despite these amenities, retail and public transportation options are limited and vacant lots across the site provide a clear reminder of what is yet to be built. According to the Oakwood Shores Redevelopment Plan of 2018, over 34 acres were then still vacant. A small amount of development has since taken place, providing about 100 additional mixed income rental units. However, plans to build for-sale housing on currently vacant lots have been on hold since 2008, and the northwest side of the site is still entirely vacant.



IDA B. WELLS EXTENSION PHOTO: THE CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

MADDEN, WELLS, AND DARROW HOMES (1941-2002)

- 3,232 CHA units spread across a 94-acre site
- Four developments contained row houses, low-rises, mid-rise and high-rise buildings



OAKWOOD SHORES (2009) PHOTO: THE CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: OAKWOOD SHORES

- Redevelopment on site includes 916 units of rental and for-sale housing
 - Rental**
 - 279** CHA units
 - 246** affordable units
 - 223** unsubsidized units
 - Homeownership**
 - 66** unsubsidized units
 - 8** CHA Choose-to-Own units
 - Senior**
 - 76** units
- Construction on two three-story walkup buildings, providing 51 mixed income rental units will be completed soon
- A Master Plan, released in March 2018, provides a comprehensive set of planning strategies for residential, retail, and commercial development and a Quality of Life Plan, created with extensive community input
- The redevelopment includes relatively new retail and commercial options, including a new full service grocer and a bank branch, and several multi-use community spaces, such as an arts and recreation center operated by the Chicago Park District and a programmed community center for Oakwood Shores residents

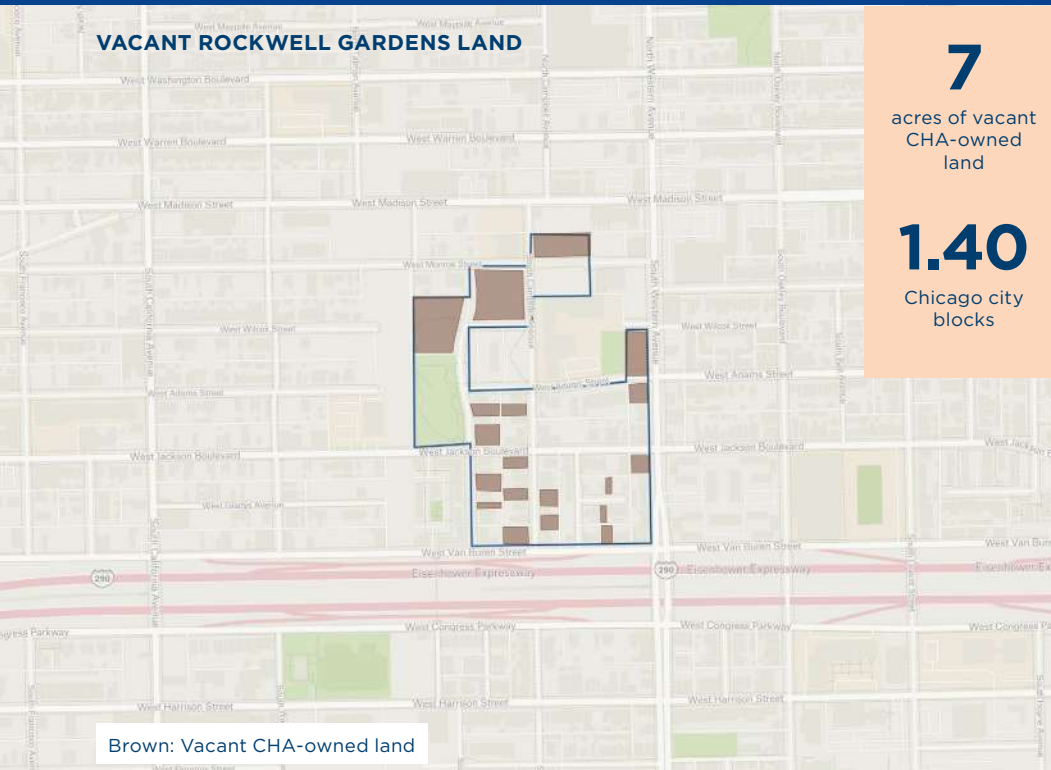


VACANT LAND, IDA B. WELLS EXTENSION SITE (2023)
PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT LAND

- Over 34 acres, or nearly seven Chicago city blocks, of vacant land on the northwest side of the site and several in-fill lots on the developed portion of the site
- For-sale development has been on hold since 2008 and Oakwood Shores community members have identified building for-sale housing as a high priority

ROCKWELL GARDENS > WEST END



THE OPPORTUNITY

Several blocks of vacant land overwhelm the relatively small site and serve as stark reminders of the housing and investment that are still missing. There has been no community planning process for this site, and the current plan is long out of date.

The former public housing community Rockwell Gardens had a footprint of about 15 acres in Chicago's Near West Side Community Area. Despite its relatively small size, Rockwell Gardens and the adjacent CHA property, Maplewood Courts, held eleven mid- and high-rise buildings with over 1,100 units for CHA residents. The high-rise buildings were demolished between 2003 and 2006, and the mid-rise buildings, originally intended to be repaired and rehabilitated, were demolished in 2014.

To date, only 280 rental units have been rebuilt on the footprint of Rockwell Gardens and Maplewood Courts. City Gardens, a mixed income rental development now on the Maplewood site, has 76 units, completed in 2017. West End mixed income development, with 204 units, sits on part of the former Rockwell Gardens land, but there has not been any new construction there in over a decade.

With the Eisenhower Expressway to the south and a train viaduct to the west, West End can feel isolated from adjacent neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the area is relatively close to downtown and offers easy access by car, CTA Blue Line, and multiple major CTA bus routes. Its proximity to an industrial corridor and the Illinois Medical District offers access to thousands of potential jobs for adults, and recently developed park provides a recreational space for children. Although it took years of community advocacy, a full-service grocery store and a large, national pharmacy are now located only a few blocks away.

Other community amenities are, however, still missing. Neighborhood public schools, including an on-site elementary school, closed and reopened to serve specific, narrower needs for the city-wide high school population. Other community-oriented facilities have closed without replacement. Home ownership units, part of the original plan for the site, have not been developed.



ROCKWELL GARDENS (1987) PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ROCKWELL GARDENS (1961-2006)

- Rockwell Gardens and the adjacent CHA-development, Maplewood Courts, had eleven mid-rise and high-rise buildings with 1,100 CHA units
- Rockwell Gardens filled approximately 15 acres and Maplewood Courts was one city block



JACKSON SQUARE AT WEST END
PHOTO: THE CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: WEST END

- 280 mixed income rental units on the footprint of Rockwell Gardens and Maplewood Courts, an adjacent CHA development
- Minimal development in over a decade
- A relatively new full-service grocery store, national pharmacy, new public park, and public transportation are somewhat close to the site, but other common community amenities are missing

147 CHA units
98 affordable units
35 unsubsidized units

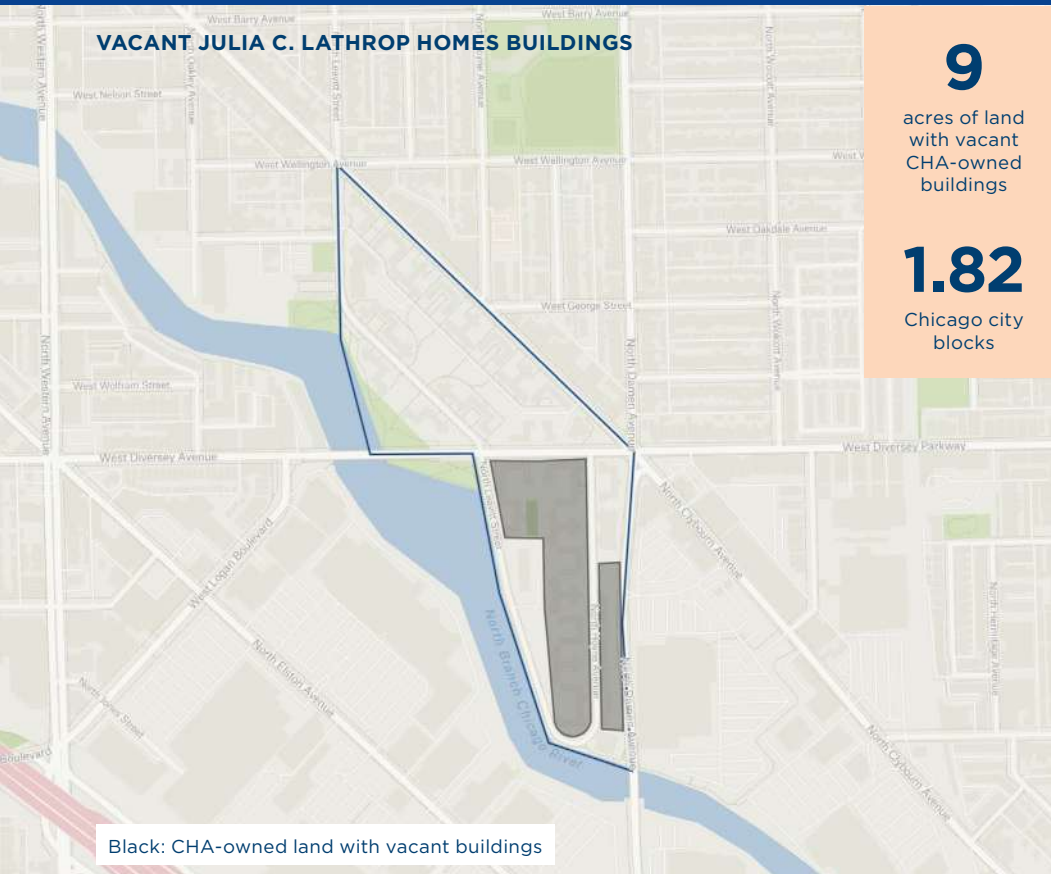


VACANT LAND, ROCKWELL GARDENS SITE (2023)
PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT LAND

- Nearly half of Rockwell Gardens' 15-acre site is still vacant
- Affordable for-sale housing, part of the original plan for the site, is still missing and needed in this West Side community

JULIA C. LATHROP HOMES > LATHROP



THE OPPORTUNITY

The neighborhood offers very little affordable housing, even to those with moderate incomes, while the site holds hundreds of apartments in vacant and boarded up buildings that continue to deteriorate as they sit empty. Some are planned to be rehabilitated, but others have sunk too far into disrepair and will need to be demolished. Instead of housing families, these buildings have remained unused for many years and their unavoidable presence on the site creates a challenging dynamic for people who now call Lathrop home. The original Lathrop redevelopment plan is many years old and the increasingly deteriorated status of the vacant buildings and success of the historic rehabilitation on the north side of the site call for an updated plan.

Lathrop, formerly Julia C. Lathrop Homes, sits along the north branch of the Chicago River, about four miles north and west of the Loop. Construction of the historic brick buildings began in 1937 and the two-story row houses and three- and four-story apartment buildings filled over 35 acres of a previously vacant, semi-industrial neighborhood. There is a high-rise CHA senior building built along the river in 1959, but it is not part of the redevelopment planning. To date, very little demolition has occurred at Lathrop. Historic rehabilitation of many of the original 925 units began in 2012, and those not yet rehabilitated are vacant and boarded up.

The first phase of the redevelopment, 414 units completed in 2019, renovated 16 existing buildings north of Diversey Parkway and added a new six-story, 58-unit apartment building south of Diversey. This phase restored the Great Lawn, a large grassy area on the property designed by famous landscape architect Jens Jensen, built a new river walk along the Chicago River, and added space for a retail tenant in the restored administration building. The second phase, completed in April 2023, brought back an additional 74 units. Plans for the rest of the site have not yet been finalized. Several community art projects have beautified the site, including one that used historic and new resident-created mosaics to build benches, and two new playgrounds have been built.

Lathrop, located in the wealthy Lincoln Park neighborhood, has a desirable location along the Chicago River and numerous amenities on and around the property. Residents can enjoy over ten acres of outdoor spaces as well as an on-site childcare center, Boys and Girls Club, wood shop and cafe, and proximity to many shops and restaurants.



JULIA C. LATHROP HOMES (1937) PHOTO: CHICAGO TRIBUNE

JULIA C. LATHROP HOMES (1937-2012)

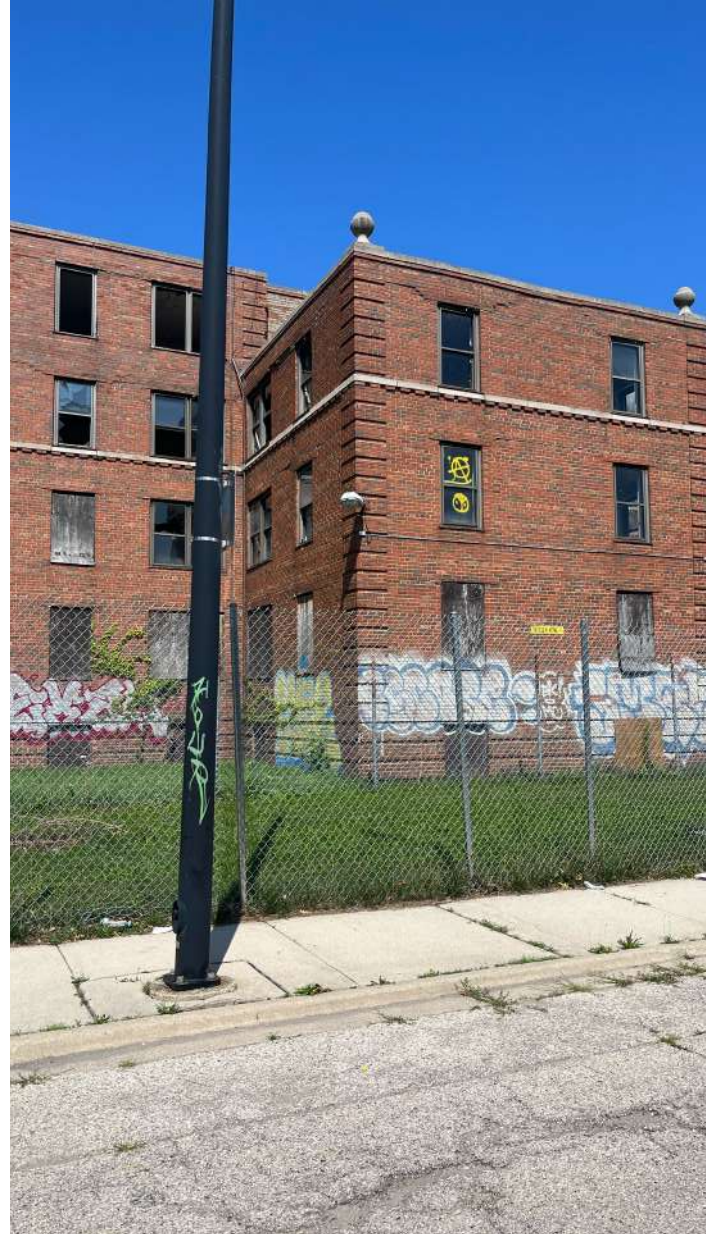
- 925 CHA units in two-, three-, and four-story walk-up buildings across the 35-acre site
- On the National Register of Historic Places



LATHROP (2022) PHOTO: RELATED MIDWEST

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: LATHROP

- 488 mixed income rental units have been built or rehabilitated
- 179** CHA units
- 116** affordable units
- 193** unsubsidized units
- A new, six-story elevator building provides accessible units and options for those who prefer an elevator
- Plans to redevelop or rehabilitate the remaining several hundred vacant units and build additional buildings are under discussion
- A Boys and Girls Club, childcare center, playground, wood-working shop, river walk, boat launch and café are all on the site
- Located in an amenity-rich neighborhood, retail options are abundant

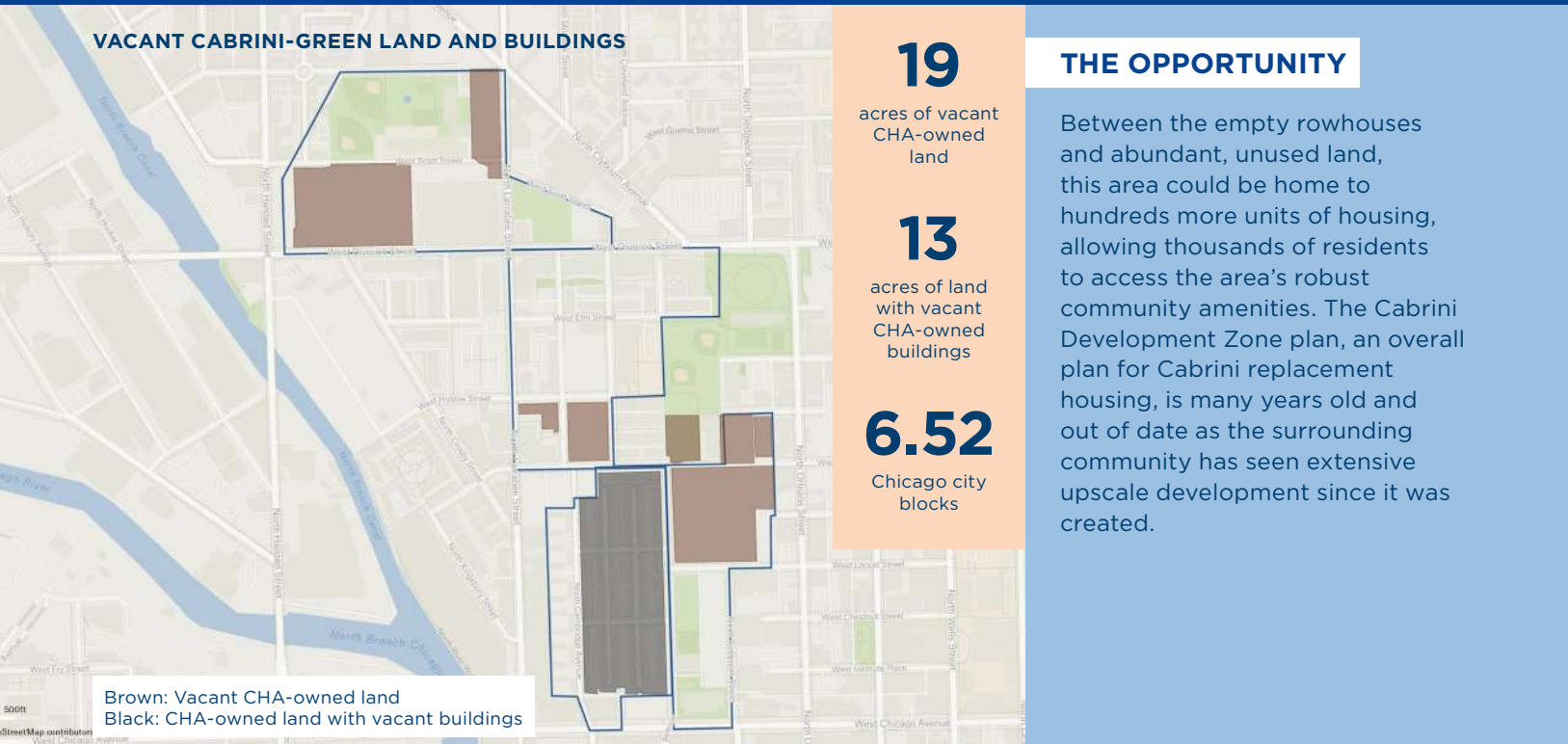


VACANT BUILDINGS, LATHROP SITE (2023) PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT BUILDINGS

- Most of Lathrop's public housing buildings are being rehabilitated rather than demolished, so there is currently no vacant land available for redevelopment
- Nearly nine acres of land south of Diversey Parkway are filled with vacant and boarded up buildings

CABRINI-GREEN > PARKSIDE AND OTHER CABRINI REPLACEMENT



Families began moving into the Near North Side's Frances Cabrini Homes in 1942. Construction of the original two- and three-story Frances Cabrini Rowhouses was followed by the Cabrini Extension (seven-, ten-, and nineteen-story buildings) and then the William Green Homes (fifteen- and sixteen-story buildings). At its height, this development occupied 70 acres of land and was home to over 15,000 residents who lived in more than 3,600 units. The first Cabrini-Green high-rise was demolished in 1995, and the last fell in 2011. One hundred forty-six of the original Rowhouses were rehabbed and are occupied, but the remaining 440 units are vacant and await revitalization through either rehabilitation or redevelopment.

Many of the units intended to replace Cabrini-Green public housing have been built off site rather than on the land where the high rises stood. The main source of on-site replacement housing is a multi-phase mixed income development called Parkside of Old Town. To date, Parkside includes just under 600 rental and for-sale units for public housing, low- and moderate-income, and market rate residents and homeowners. The plan for the final phase of this portion of the site was announced in July 2023. The CHA also recently approved development of an on-site, mid-rise building at the corner of Oak and Larrabee streets and a large off-site development at Clybourn Avenue and Larrabee Street. There are still, however, dozens of acres of vacant land that, given this site's location, present extraordinary opportunities for residents.

Unlike most former public housing sites, the Cabrini-Green land sits among some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Chicago. It is surrounded by grocery stores, shopping complexes, public parks, schools, recreational facilities with programming for youth, and luxury market-rate housing. The area is also easily accessible by car, bus routes, and train lines.

Despite the vibrant nature of the surrounding community, however, much of Cabrini-Green's site feels abandoned. Parkside currently fills several city blocks, but it sits directly north of blocks of vacant, boarded up rowhouses, and the entire eastern portion of the site, totaling nearly two full Chicago city blocks, sits vacant and without a detailed plan for development.



CABRINI-GREEN (1988) PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

CABRINI-GREEN HOMES (1942-2011)

- 3,609 CHA units housed 15,000 people at peak occupancy
- 70-acre site held 586 rowhouse units and 23 mid- and high-rise buildings



PARKSIDE OF OLD TOWN (2016) PHOTO: FITZGERALD ASSOCIATES

REDEVELOPMENT TO DATE: PARKSIDE AND OTHER CABRINI REPLACEMENT

- 738 mixed income rental and for-sale units have been completed on-site, including rehabilitation of 146 of the original rowhouses for CHA residents
- CHA also recently approved a large, multi-phase development at Clybourn Avenue and Larrabee Street, which will be located on land that is off-site and not owned by the CHA, but was identified 20 years ago as land for Cabrini-Green replacement
- The community surrounding the Cabrini-Green site is one of Chicago's wealthiest and contains abundant commercial and community amenities
- on-site: Parkside Phase 5 (99 apartments) and a project at Oak and Larrabee streets (78 apartments)

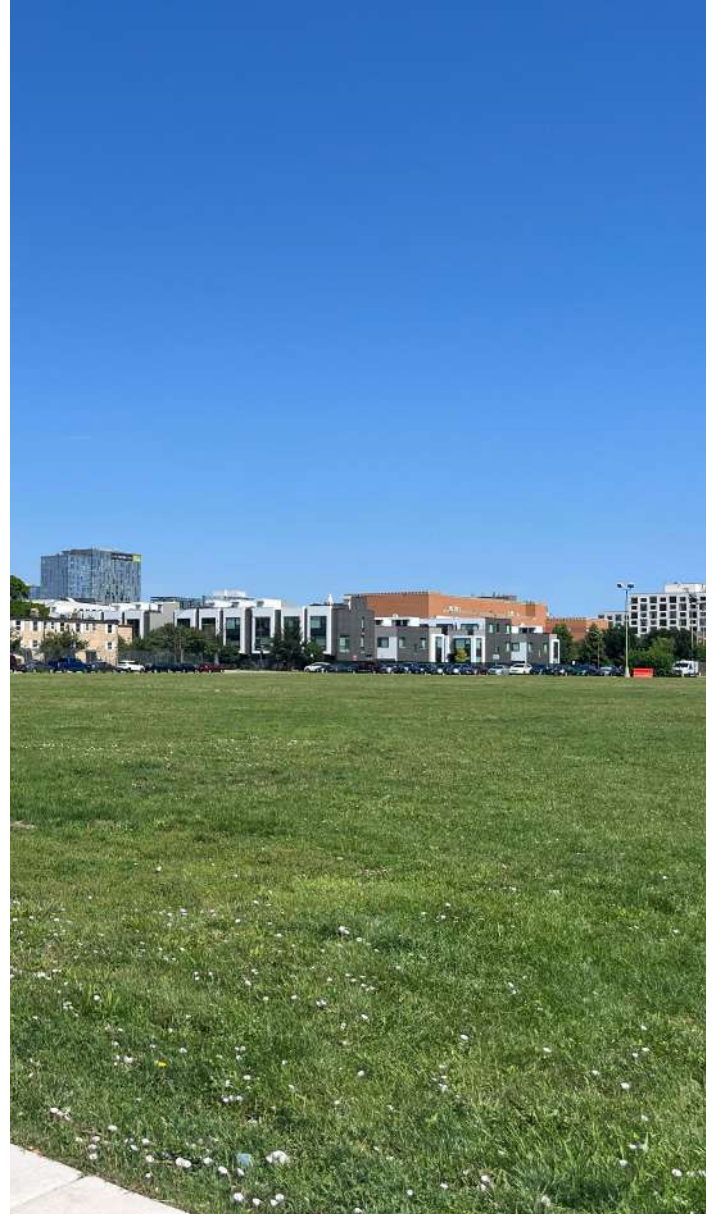
Rental

182 CHA units
148 affordable units
91 unsubsidized units

Homeownership

171 unsubsidized units

- Much additional Cabrini-Green replacement housing has been located off-site in the surrounding community
- CHA recently approved construction of two additional mixed income rental buildings



VACANT LAND, CABRINI SITE (2023) PHOTO: IMPACT FOR EQUITY

VACANT LAND AND VACANT BUILDINGS

- Nearly 20 acres of CHA-owned land is vacant on the former Cabrini-Green site
- Several blocks of vacant, boarded-up buildings contain 440 former rowhouse units
- The vacant eastern portion of the site does not have a detailed development plan



Building on Opportunity: Vacant Land, Vacant Buildings

The years-long persistence of vacant CHA land and buildings in and around recently developed mixed income communities is a challenge, but it also presents a particularly strong opportunity to both invest in specific under-resourced communities and address the city's critical need for more affordable housing. By working in an effective partnership with the CHA and local communities, the City could substantially change the landscape and accelerate its response to the affordable housing crisis in Chicago.

The sites profiled above represent just some of the huge swaths of vacant CHA land and buildings across the city. Most of the planned mixed income developments on former public housing sites are only partially complete or have not yet begun construction. While a number of factors, some outside of CHA or the City's control, have contributed to the slow pace of development and the continuing vacancy, the City and CHA's changing priorities, policies, and practices are responsible to a substantial degree for the current state of affairs.

The City recently acknowledged some of these factors in its application for HUD's Pathways to Removing Obstacles grant and identified existing and anticipated work to streamline processes for affordable housing development.³ Its assessment of the barriers to affordable housing development described in the application was informed by the expressed challenges local developers and community leaders have experienced. The City's proposal to streamline its processes through a "Green Tape Initiative" and a corresponding executive order, issued in December 2023, are both in accord with a growing chorus for change.⁴ However, the unique context of the partially developed CHA sites across the city requires a specific geographic focus, stronger coordination effort, and faster timeline than the City has so far proposed.

Developing vacant CHA land will make much needed housing available to lower- and moderate-income residents and help address Chicago's affordable housing gap. Even though CHA has increased the number of subsidized housing opportunities it provides to residents,

³ Department of Housing, *Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Chicago Housing Initiative (PRO-CHI)* (2023) https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/doh/supp_info/PRO-CHI.html

⁴ David Doig, Raul Raymundo, Hellen Shiller & Richard Townsell, *The Solutions for Chicago's Housing Problem Already Exist*, Crain's Chicago Business, Aug. 28, 2023, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/craains-forum-johnsons-first-100-days/speedier-way-stimulate-housing-and-job-growth-opinion>; Editorial, *More than 500 new residences planned for the Cabrini area*, Chicago Sun Times, Jul. 18, 2023, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2023/7/18/23798033/cabrini-green-redevelopment-new-residences-larrabee-clyborn-chicago-housing-authority-editorial>; David Roeder, *North Lawndale housing development facing delays over city rules*, Chicago Sun Times, Jul. 17, 2023, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2023/7/17/23795290/north-lawndale-housing-development-facing-delays-city-rules>; Allison Clements, Opinion, *It's an extremely difficult environment for affordable housing. Here's how Mayor Johnson can make it better*, Crain's Chicago Business, Jul. 11, 2023, <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/opinion/mayor-brandon-johnson-can-help-ease-affordable-housing-opinion>.



tens of thousands of people still experience housing instability. The need for subsidized and other affordable housing is enormous, and the stock of affordable housing is diminishing. In 2020, a City report acknowledged that Chicago is 120,000 units short of the affordable housing needed while, according to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, a significant number of lower-cost rental units, many of which were “naturally occurring” affordable housing rather than subsidized housing, have been lost.⁵

For the CHA sites in resource-rich areas, prioritizing affordable and public housing development would provide urgently needed housing options there for low- and moderate-income residents. In those communities, especially in the Cabrini area, luxury and other expensive unsubsidized housing abounds. Mixed income developments can take advantage of the high unsubsidized rent these markets can command to provide financial support for building more affordable housing. Such affordable housing would not likely be constructed without public-sector involvement; the CHA land is crucial for this to happen there. Lathrop and the former ABLA area present a similar opportunity to advance equity and promote affordable housing in a resource-rich area.

At most of the CHA mixed income sites, developing well-resourced communities is critical to providing

overdue investment in these neighborhoods. Failing to prioritize these developments threatens the progress that has been made and risks allowing the challenges that arise from decades of disinvestment to become further entrenched. The long-standing vacant land and buildings, often coupled with a lack of neighborhood resources and amenities, challenge the success of the mixed income development that has already occurred on CHA sites. Languishing development and slow development timetables can result in a negative spiral. However improved housing and related building amenities may be, many people are living adjacent to vacant land in communities that lack the full array of resources to make them thriving communities of choice in the way that was originally imagined.

While the persistent vacancy is a challenge, it is also an opportunity. The land is available and intended for housing. Furthermore, partially completed developments at these sites include some needed infrastructure and amenities in addition to housing. As a result, they provide an excellent platform on which to build and opportunities to engage communities in planning for their redevelopment.

⁵ Department of Housing, Inclusionary Housing Task Force Staff Report (2020) https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/doh/ihtf/doh_ihtf_report.pdf. Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, Key Housing Challenges in the City of Chicago (2023) <https://www.housingstudies.org/blog/key-housing-challenges-city-chicago>.



How to Build on this Opportunity

While community members and public and private entities have already invested substantial time, effort, and money in redeveloping CHA mixed income communities, many are languishing in part because the City's and CHA's priorities have been inconsistent through changing administrations.

Moreover, the City and CHA planning and development processes take an unnecessarily lengthy time and can require repeated plan revisions, and development is often delayed for other reasons. When delays occur, development costs can skyrocket and public dollars may be left “on the table” (for example, pandemic resources or available funds for infrastructure), leaving less money available for future housing development.

On the other hand, in many cases, developers are already in place, and a number of sites have current development plans from which to work. When these developments do well, there is a potential for great synergy. Completing these mixed income communities can provide an increased quality of life for everyone who lives and works in the community and the surrounding neighborhood, and a cycle of reinvestment can take root.

If it adopts the following recommendations, Chicago has an opportunity to make a significant course correction by refocusing and prioritizing these communities once again. It can bring closure to this decades-long endeavor and meet the needs of thousands of Chicagoans.

Specific Recommendations

1. Direct existing and new funding to complete the CHA mixed income communities on an expedited timeline.

The City has a range of economic development and housing development needs in many locations, and each recent administration has changed its priorities for City funding.

This administration should focus on completing the CHA mixed income communities and re-prioritize them for City funding. Not only should the City provide its own development funding at these sites, including its tax credit, tax increment financing, Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund, tax exempt bonds, and other housing development funds, but it should marshal support for these sites to receive other public and private financing.

The CHA is the primary driver of development on CHA land. The City should direct CHA to prioritize completing these sites in accordance with community-driven plans and require it to develop clear, expedited timelines to do so.

- > The City should re-prioritize the CHA communities for funding until they are completed.
- > The City should direct CHA to prioritize completing these sites in accordance with community-driven plans and require it to develop clear timelines to do so.
- > The City should announce this priority focus by the end of the first quarter of 2024.



2. Update neighborhood development plans and focus on community building.

Given the investment already made to redevelop the sites of demolished public housing, and the opportunity that the vacant land and buildings present, the City should prioritize its housing and economic development planning efforts on completing these sites, grounding them in an authentic community engagement process.

While CHA has some plans in place for many of these sites, most of them are outdated. Because each partially developed site lies in a unique community with its own history and current circumstances, a community-driven neighborhood plan should guide development.

Planning and development of these sites should include community building and resident engagement beginning with the start of the planning process and continuing through construction, leasing, and the ongoing management of the development.

- > The City should lead, or require the CHA to lead, an authentic community planning process for each of the sites that does not have an up-to-date, community-driven development plan in place.
- > Community engagement and community building should be built in from the start of the planning process, through construction and leasing, and throughout the life of the development.
- > Community-driven plans should be completed for all sites by the end of the third quarter of 2024.

3. Appoint a coordinator and streamline City approval and oversight processes to expedite construction.

One of the key impediments to timely development on CHA sites has been the time, effort, and expense necessary to navigate the many layers of City of Chicago approvals, permits, and inspections. This includes not only pre-development approvals, such as zoning, financing, and building permits, but also inspections required prior to leasing apartments. City departments have not coordinated their efforts, and many layers of bureaucracy have made obtaining all the necessary approvals for development and City financing a years-long process. When City departments are involved in infrastructure for streets, alleys, water, and sewers, this can also add substantial delay. Reportedly, development processes in other cities are not as byzantine as those in Chicago.

The more difficult it is to navigate the City bureaucracy, the more costly it is and the more difficult it is to attract the necessary private partners for mixed income development, and the longer the delays in producing much-needed housing. There is precedent in Chicago for coordinating and streamlining the development process for CHA mixed income sites, but that effort has long ago fallen away.

In 2023, the City announced a “green tape” initiative to improve several city-wide processes. In December 2023, Mayor Johnson issued an executive order requiring several departments to propose changes to streamline processes that impede housing and commercial development. The executive order also establishes a Director of Process Improvement tasked with managing the implementation of the proposed changes. As it undertakes broader, city-wide challenges, the City can immediately accelerate development processes for CHA mixed income sites. The City should identify a high-level appointment to coordinate City departments and sister agencies (including CHA, CPS, Illinois Housing Development Authority and Chicago Park District) as needed to eliminate bureaucratic hurdles and ensure that all departments and agencies are working together to expedite the development process specifically at CHA mixed income sites.

3. Appoint a coordinator and streamline City approval and oversight processes to expedite construction. (*continued*)

- > The City should streamline its approval and oversight processes and appoint a high-level coordinator to proactively oversee the City's approvals and necessary permits for development specifically on CHA mixed income sites.
- > The City's coordinator for CHA mixed income development should be appointed by the end of the first quarter of 2024.
- > A coordinated and streamlined approval and oversight process to complete the CHA mixed income sites should be developed and announced by the second quarter of 2024.

4. Provide transparency of development priorities at mixed income sites across the city.

Currently, the CHA and the City work with developers at multiple mixed income sites to generate proposals for development, but CHA does not move forward with all of those proposals in a timely way. Instead, CHA and the City select some developments to move forward ahead of others after considering limited resources.

A lack of transparency around the City and CHA's priorities creates uncertainties for developers about whether their projects will be supported and in what timeframe. This can lead to wasted time and resources, with the result that fewer dollars are available for housing. The lack of transparency around priorities also leaves neighborhood residents with uncertainty about when development will occur in their communities. CHA should provide transparency on its website for community residents and for the development community regarding sequencing and timelines for development priorities across the city.

- > The City and CHA should make their priorities transparent for developers and for communities, and attention and funding should be focused on the developments that will proceed first.
- > CHA should publicly announce its priorities respecting specific sites and communities and ensure sites are not competing against each other.
- > By the end of 2024, the City and CHA should announce a timeline for completing the CHA mixed income communities, after community plans are completed.



Impact for Equity

25 E Washington Street
Suite 1515
Chicago, Illinois 60602

www.impactforequity.org
312.641.5570 | info@impactforequity.org