

PUBLIC ART VISION BACK OF THE YARDS

SEPTEMBER 2023



PLANNING TEAM

CITY OF CHICAGO

The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) of the City of Chicago commissioned this report as part of the planning process to develop Public Art Neighborhood Visions for the INVEST South/West initiative.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL EVENTS (DCASE)

DCASE is dedicated to enriching Chicago's artistic vitality and cultural vibrancy. It provided oversight throughout the process.

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MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Over the last three years, Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) has invested unprecedented funding to support artists and the creative economy, and expand access and participation in the arts throughout Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. In collaboration with the Department of Planning and Development and the Department of Transportation, we've committed over \$12 million for public art in all ten neighborhoods of former Mayor Lightfoot's INVEST South/West initiative.

To determine where and how that funding manifests in new public art, we assembled a team of some of Chicago's most talented and most generous artists to develop Public Art Vision plans within each neighborhood that identify priorities for public art investments that create new and innovative uses of the public way. Through the Public Art Reimagining Tour with You (P.A.R.T.Y.), artists have led this planning process starting in Auburn Gresham, Austin, Bronzeville and Englewood, creatively bridging the complexity of government processes with authentic dialogue around community needs and dreams.

In this report, you'll find the results of months of rich conversations and workshops amongst artists, residents, business owners, elected officials, community organizers, and more. You'll learn how each neighborhood reflected about its past and present cultural identity, its visions for reshaping the visual landscape of central commercial corridors and beyond, and the role they envision for public art in contributing to those aspirations – including priority projects identified for the City to fund starting in 2023.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the incredible artist cohort whose energy, creativity and commitment has made P.A.R.T.Y. a meaningful and joyful experience: Englewood Arts Collective, Floating Museum, and Vanessa Stokes/VS Creative Consulting, along with planning and urban design firms Borderless Studio and PORT.

The future of public art is bright in Chicago, and we look forward to keeping the P.A.R.T.Y. going across south and west side neighborhoods.

Erin Harkey, Commissioner

Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events
City of Chicago

“Public art should bring people together and uplift spirits, elevate conversations, provide positive and inspirational images. It should remind people of their greatness and possibilities.”

INTRODUCTION: INVEST SOUTH/WEST + P.A.R.T.Y.

INVEST South/West is an unprecedented community improvement initiative by the City of Chicago that is strategically reversing decades of systemic public and private disinvestment within the city's West and South Side neighborhoods.

Initiated in Fall 2019 and supported by more than \$750 million in public funding, INVEST South/West is enhancing 12 commercial corridors in 10 neighborhoods with focused improvements that include new, mixed-use construction projects, the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, new plazas, small business grants, and related public realm improvements that restore neighborhood vitality and provide a catalytic foundation for ongoing public and private investment.

As of Fall of 2022, the City aligned more than \$2.2 billion in public and private investment, and has invested more than \$1 billion in public funding. The initiative is providing support for small businesses, creating public realm improvements, restoring historic buildings, and fostering equity and resilience where it's needed most.

DCASE also sponsored Artist-in-Residence programs in Englewood, Auburn Gresham, Austin, and Back of the Yards, where artists assisted City agencies and community stakeholders on projects that leverage local culture and creativity as part of integrated neighborhood improvement plans. P.A.R.T.Y. is an extension of these efforts.

The P.A.R.T.Y. team facilitated conversations with the Back of the Yards community and collected input and feedback related to:

- **WHAT:** Stories, themes, narratives, ideas
- **WHERE:** Site opportunities, types of spaces
- **HOW:** Art type, size, form

This process brought visibility to the multiple overlapping projects converging around neighborhood improvements such as public infrastructure investment by the City, private development and community-led initiatives that emphasized the need for continued alignment and coordination.

This integrated understanding helped to identify these three **goals for public art** project opportunities:

- **Amplify:** public art that contributes to planned or ongoing investment in neighborhoods
- **Revitalize:** public art that inspires and invites different activities through renewed identity of public places
- **Catalyze:** public art that catalyzes new investment and neighborhood improvements

Finally, community also expressed a strong support for a **multi-phased inclusive engagement process** that involves a broad spectrum of participation - from ideation to implementation of public art:

- Brainstorming and Idea Generation
- Prototyping and Feedback
- Activation and Programming

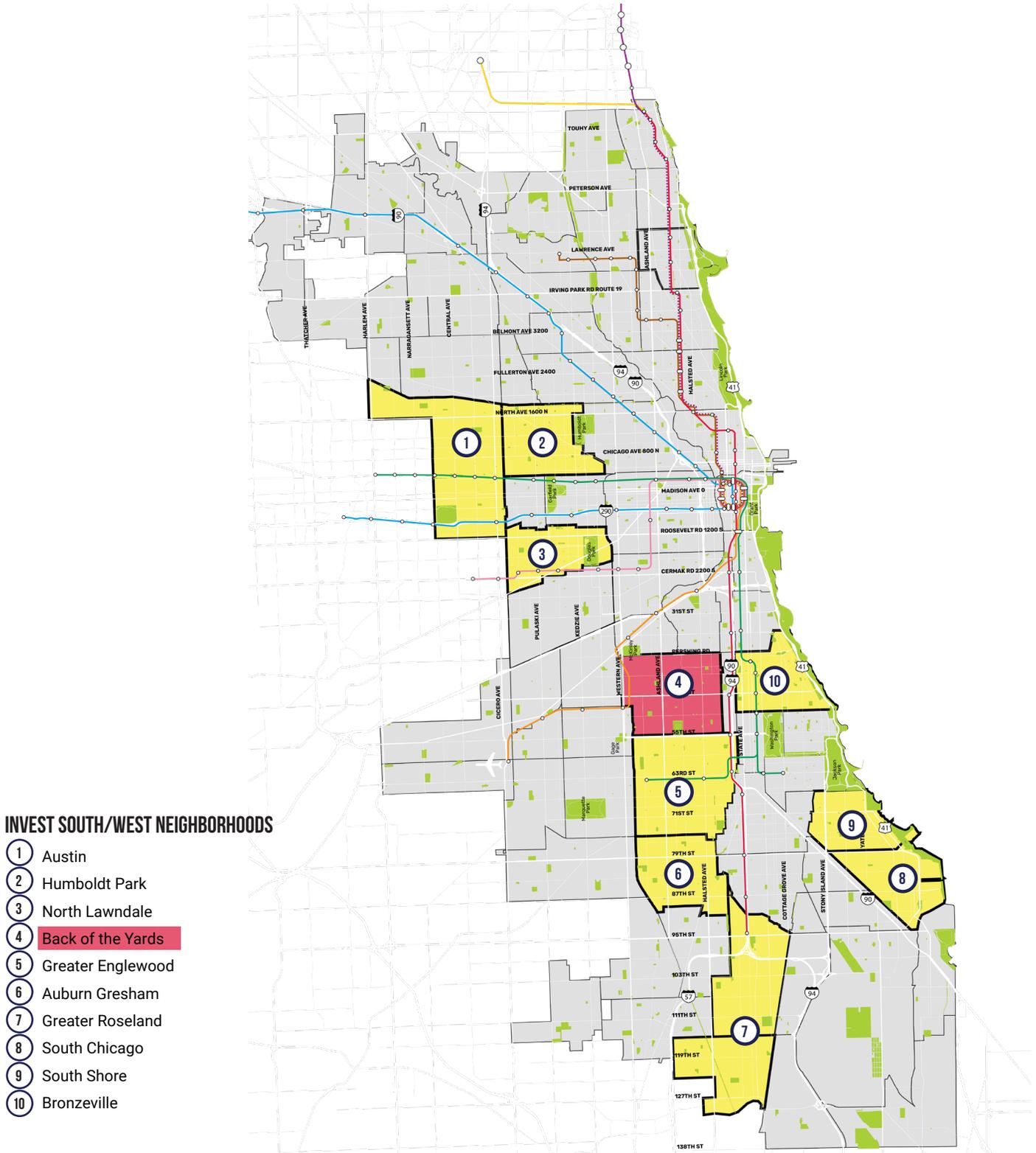


Figure 1-INVEST South/West neighborhoods
 Source: INVEST South/West 3-Year Update, November 2022 (chicago.gov)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This Public Art Vision Plan aims to widen the discussion regarding the role of public art in the lives, surroundings, and legacies of Chicago communities. The visioning process intentionally emphasized the necessity of public art investments. Public art, in addition to beautifying, can:

- Contribute to a neighborhood's vitality & safety
- Support economic development
- Create Unique Cultural Destinations
- Reflect Inclusive Processes

Public Art Requests for Proposals (RFPs) will include reference to these guiding principles – and emphasize engagement as an expected approach to create more inclusive processes that result in public art outcomes reflecting more meaningfully community identity and stories.

IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOOD LIFE & SAFETY

Public art can take different shapes to improve the safety and livelihood of communities. A few examples are activation of sidewalks with street furniture, traffic calming curb extensions and painting and diverse street lighting.

- Active Sidewalks
- Safe Pedestrian Space + Street Crossings
- Street Lighting



Rayobello, Graham Projects - Baltimore, MD

SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Public art can be a catalyst for economic development attracting visitors and encouraging new activities. Businesses benefit from attractive and creative public art interventions, and become more invested in public space improvements.

- Active Storefronts
- Creative Businesses
- Clear Wayfinding



Little Black Pearl Art & Design Center - Chicago, IL

CREATE CULTURAL DESTINATIONS

Distinct landmarks, gateways and signature sculpture pieces are some of the typologies that can turn a place into a cultural destination. Cities and neighborhoods around the world become destinations due to the presence of public art.

- Welcoming Gateways
- Memorable Landmarks
- Signature Public Art



Muddy Waters, Eduardo Kobra - Chicago, IL

REFLECT INCLUSIVE PROCESSES

Communities want to be involved in shaping the stories that are told through public art in their neighborhoods. Opportunities for community engagement could be designed in different phases during the creative and implementation processes.

- Brainstorming and idea generation
- Prototyping and feedback
- Activation and programming



Colors of Community, Dorian Sylvian - Chicago, IL

INTRODUCTION: BACK OF THE YARDS IN CONTEXT

Back of the Yards is a historically significant neighborhood located on the south side of Chicago. The neighborhood, which was named after the Union Stock Yards, is a working-class community that has seen its fair share of struggles throughout its history. Despite this, the residents of Back of the Yards have persevered and created a vibrant and tight-knit community that is known for its resilience and determination.

The neighborhood's history dates back to the late 1800s when the Union Stock Yards were established. The yards were the largest livestock market in the world and brought thousands of workers to the area. As a result, the neighborhood quickly became a hub of industry and commerce, with many businesses and factories opening to support the needs of the stockyards.

Throughout the early 20th century, the neighborhood continued to grow, but it also faced numerous challenges. In the 1930s, the stockyards began to decline, and by the 1960s, they had closed down entirely. This left many residents out of work and struggling to make ends meet.

Despite these challenges, the residents of Back of the Yards refused to give up. They banded together and fought for better working conditions, better wages, and better living conditions. This spirit of resilience and determination is still alive in the community today.

Today, Back of the Yards is a predominantly Latine community that is home to a diverse range of businesses, restaurants, and cultural institutions. The neighborhood is known for its vibrant street art scene, with many murals and installations celebrating the community's history and culture.

Back of the Yards is a neighborhood in Chicago that is well-known for its vibrant street art scene. The community has a long history of using public art as

a way to express its identity, celebrate its culture, and bring beauty and color to its streets. It is home to dozens of murals and public art installations, many of which are created by local artists. These murals cover a range of themes, from social justice and community empowerment to cultural heritage and identity.

Back of the Yards is one of the 10 priority areas selected as a part of the initial phase of INVEST South/West. Launched in October 2019, INVEST South/West's goal is to re-activate neighborhood cores that have historically served as focal points for pedestrian activity, shopping, services, transportation, public spaces and quality-of-life amenities for local residents. CDOT's corridor improvements are focused on 47th and Ashland, running from Damen Avenue east to Loomis Street along 47th Street, and from 43rd Street south to 49th Street along Ashland Avenue.

The historic Back of the Yards neighborhood has long been anchored by the intersection of 47th Street and Ashland Avenue. 47th Street is a walkable, active street bustling with pedestrian activity that is home to a diverse array of mostly locally owned businesses and amenities. The plazas along 47th Street present a tremendous opportunity for the integration of public art that complement the design of these public spaces and further help to elevate the heart of the business district in the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

Summaries and videos of CDOT's previous public outreach on the Back of the Yards 47th Street Improvement project can be found on the project website:

<https://chicagocompletestreets.org/portfolio/invest-south-west-back-of-the-yards-47th-street/>

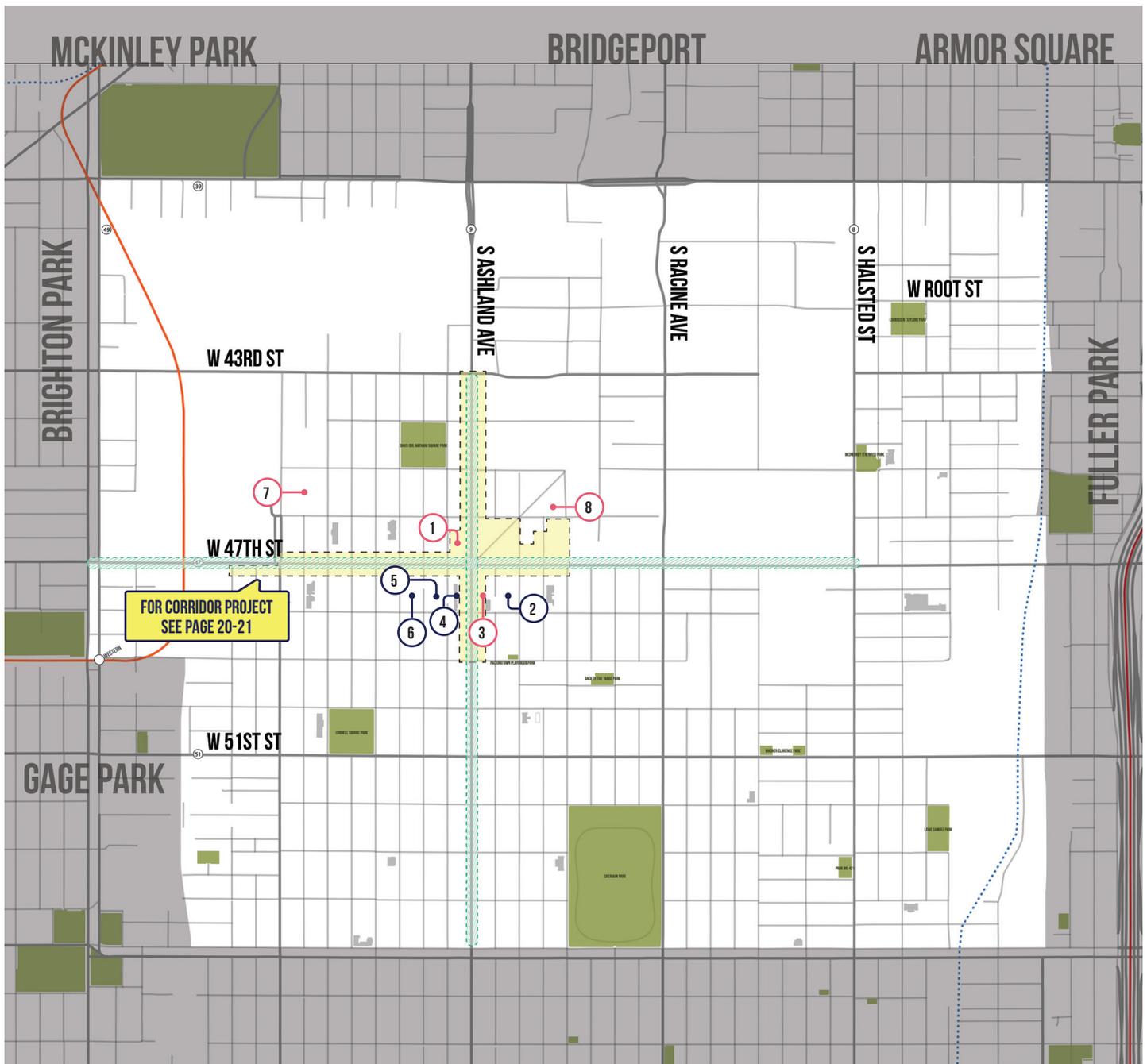


Figure 2-Neighborhood initiatives in Back of the Yards

Source: Invest South/West Development in Back of they Yards, City of Chicago, Mayor's Press Office (2023)

GRAPHIC LEGEND

- Neighborhood Initiatives
- ISW Corridor
- School
- Planned
- Implemented

NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

- 1 Rooted + Rising / Back of the Yards Library
- 2 United Yards Phase 2: Housing + Community Hub
- 3 United Yards Phase 3: Mixed Use
- 4 United Yards Phase 2: Affordable Housing + Senior Clinic
- 5 United Yards Phase 1: Housing
- 6 United Yards Phase 1: Health Center
- 7 Harvest Foods Group Production Facility
- 8 The Plant

INVEST SOUTH/WEST PRIORITY CORRIDOR: 47TH STREET

The INVEST South/West Priority Corridors for Back of the Yards includes the section of Ashland Avenue between 43rd Street and 49th Street and 47th Street between Hoyne Avenue and Loomis Street. CDOT improvements to the streetscape will include, but are not limited to, widened sidewalks and bump outs, new lighting, bike lanes, youth led seating designs referred to as peace circles, light-pole neighborhood identifiers and two priority corridor gateways.

DCASE will work closely with CDOT to complete these planned improvements in two phases which will shape the future vibrancy of the corridor. The planned CDOT improvements to the 47th Street Priority Corridor will ultimately create more public space, near-term opportunities for public art that can interpret Back of the Yard’s history and additional communal spaces that foster meaningful community interactions.

KEY PLACES LEGEND

- ① Back of the Yards Branch, Chicago Public Library
- ② San Miguel School
- ③ St. Michael Catholic Church
- ④ James Hedges School
- ⑤ Lara Augustin School
- ⑥ Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council
- ⑦ Holy Cross Catholic Church
- ⑧ William H. Seward Elementary School
- ⑨ St. Joseph Catholic Church
- ⑩ Iglesia de Jesucristo Rendencion
- ⑪ Plant Chicago Non-profit Organization
- ⑫ Caesar Chavez Multicultural Academic Center
- ⑬ Friend Family Health Center
- ⑭ Casa Catalina Food Pantry
- ⑮ University of Illinois Health Center

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

CDOT

-  Ashland Ave (Phase 1)
-  47th Street (Phase 2)

CATALYTIC PROJECTS

- ① United Yards Mixed Use Developments
- ② Quality of Life Plan
 1. Youth and educational programs at High School
 2. Integrate El Valor Inclusion Center into the neighborhood
 3. Sustainable redesign of Davis Square Field house
 4. Redevelop Aronson site
 5. Expand fitness options at all parks

EXISTING PUBLIC ART

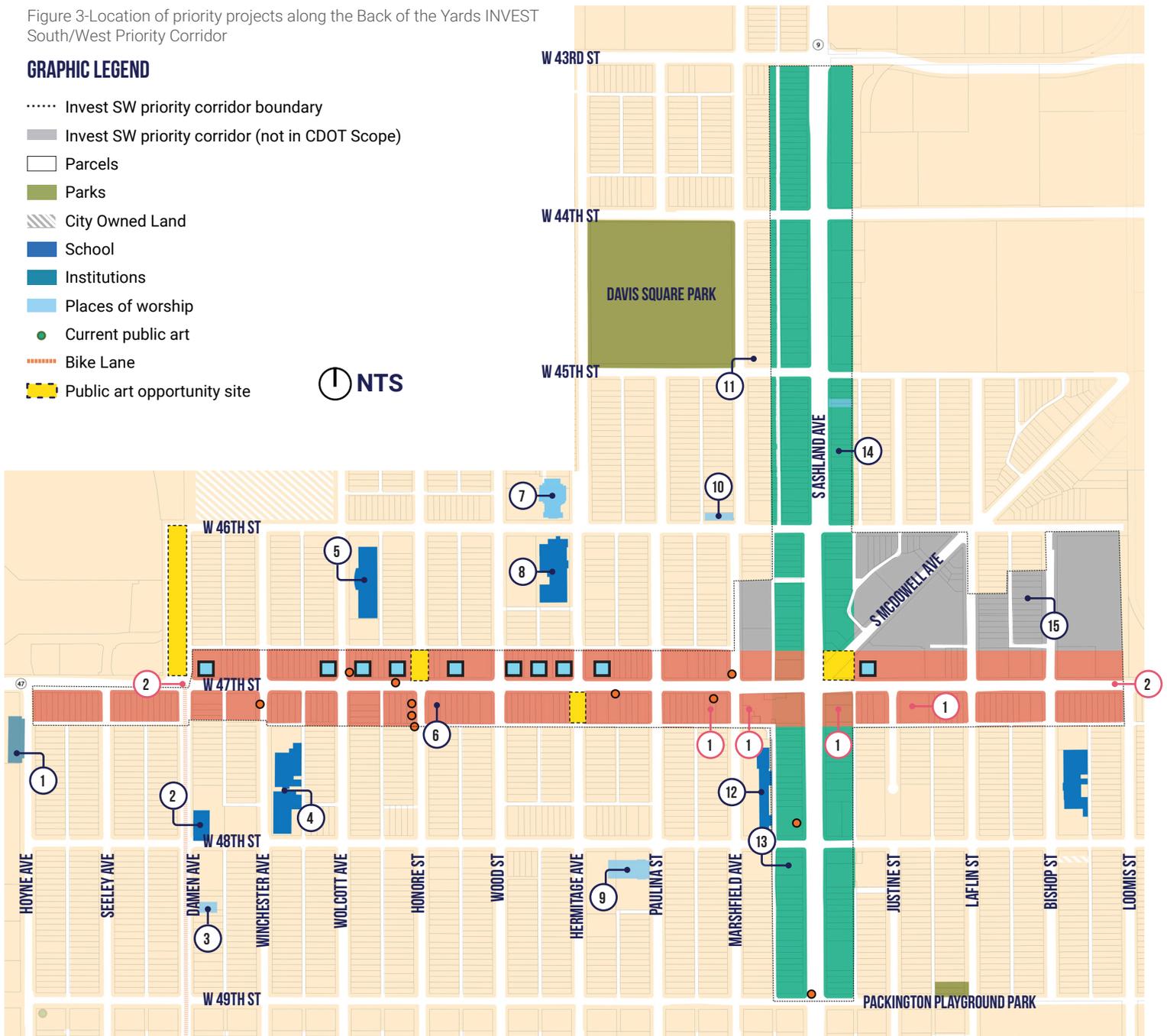
-  Murals
-  Sculptures
-  Infrastructure
-  Markers/Wayfinding

Figure 3-Location of priority projects along the Back of the Yards INVEST South/West Priority Corridor

GRAPHIC LEGEND

- Invest SW priority corridor boundary
- Invest SW priority corridor (not in CDOT Scope)
- Parcels
- Parks
- City Owned Land
- School
- Institutions
- Places of worship
- Current public art
- Bike Lane
- Public art opportunity site

NTS



BACK OF THE YARDS INVEST SOUTH/WEST PRIORITY CORRIDOR

WHAT WE FOUND: EXISTING PUBLIC ART NARRATIVES IN BACK OF THE YARDS

Cultural narratives are stories told by a group of people about themselves, their shared ideals, and their experiences. Cultural narratives influence the character of a location and impact the values of the people in that area. Identifying existing cultural narratives is the first step to understanding which untold stories should be represented in public spaces.

Back of the Yard's public art narratives are shaped by the strength and compassion of its community. By documenting existing public art in Back of the Yards, three main overarching themes have been identified to create cultural context for new public art:

- Unity + Community
- Cultural Pride
- Resilience

UNITY + COMMUNITY

Pieces that convey a desire to lean on the community and work toward a common goal.

CULTURAL PRIDE

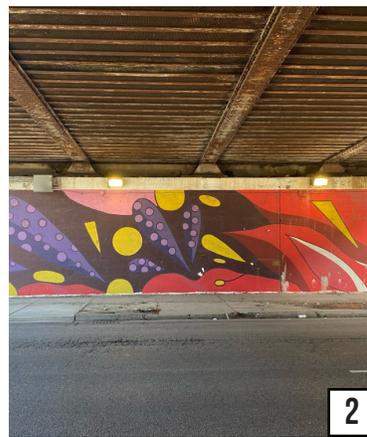
Art that reflects a deep sense of pride from the people that are part of the city's rich history.

RESILIENCE

Pieces that display a determination to positively build upon the life of the city.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

- 1 "Peace Mural" / One Summer Chicago Program
- 2 "We Grow Here Too" / Gloria Talamantes
- 3 "Una Mujer con Flores" / Luis Raul
- 4 "The Plant Mural" / Joe Miller

- 5 Pole Banners / Fernando Ramirez
- 6 "Welcome Home" / Matr + Brenda Macías-López
- 7 "Chicago Fire Department Memorial" / Edward Schonsett

WHAT WE LEARNED: STORYTELLING + THEME OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW PUBLIC ART

This event was hosted by CDOT on May 23rd, 2023, at Back of the Yards College Prep High School. The goals of this first event were to:

- Introduce the planning process and timeframe of this campaign, and the funding ready/available for investment in public art projects.
- Gather initial insights and input about themes, ideas, locations and types for public art possibilities.
- Inspire new possibilities for permanent public art through the public art catalog.

Some of the conversation questions and prompts included:

- Who and What should be honored in Back of the Yards?
- What would you like public art to do for Back of the Yards?

- How could public art projects represent and respond to community needs?
- How could they amplify or catalyze YOUR current projects and initiatives?

Neighborhood residents and stakeholders provided a broad range of ideas and input about what they would like to see reflected in public art in their community. These insights are organized in three main categories representing possibilities for themes and storytelling shaping public art projects. These themes will be shared with artists as part of the Request for Proposals and project implementation process.

IMMIGRATION HISTORY + DIVERSITY

“Our immigrant roots should be honored and uplifted”

“Teach other about the history [...] from stockyards (industrial past) to immigration”

“The diversity in our community should be honored”

COMMUNITY + BELONGING

“Change the narrative about the neighborhood and create sense of pride in living here”

“Family-friendly and encouraging of activities, interaction”

“Brighten the neighborhood [...] bring people to shop, hang out, and connect with art”

RESILIENCE + SAFETY

“Promote community safety [...] foster positivity and community strength”

“Functional and colorful public art with positive messages [...] incorporate nature”

“Build on our community strength and resilience”

BACK OF THE YARDS VISION BOARD + PROPOSED PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITIES

The Public Art Catalogue was a key part of the engagement toolkit used to elicit input from the community about what types of public art they prefer and why. This catalogue compiled nearly 50 examples of implemented public art projects located in Chicago, the U.S. and the world.

The list below includes images of public art projects to demonstrate an example of how each theme might guide the design or creative process for a public art installation.



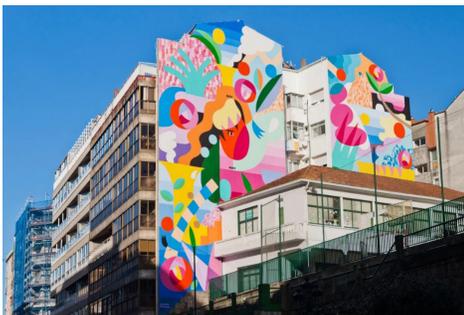
EL ARBOL DE LA VIDA
Margarita Cabrera / San Antonio, TX



AUTUMN (...NOTHING PERSONAL)
Teresita Fernandez / Cambridge, MA



SECOND LINE
Jamex / Einar De La Torre / Los Angeles, CA



LOS FRUTOS DEL MAR Y MONTANA
Zosen Bandido / Vigo, Spain



LA PAZ ES NUESTRA
Oscar Gonzalez (Guache) / Bogota, Colombia



ETNIAS
Eduardo Kobra / Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



MI CASA
Esrawa + Cadena / Mississauga, Canada



ELECTRIC STREET
Drew Billiau + David Guinn



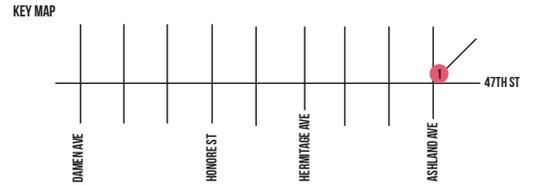
GATHERING PAVILLION
Architecture 2480 / Glen Ellyn, IL

47TH ST PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY SITE 1

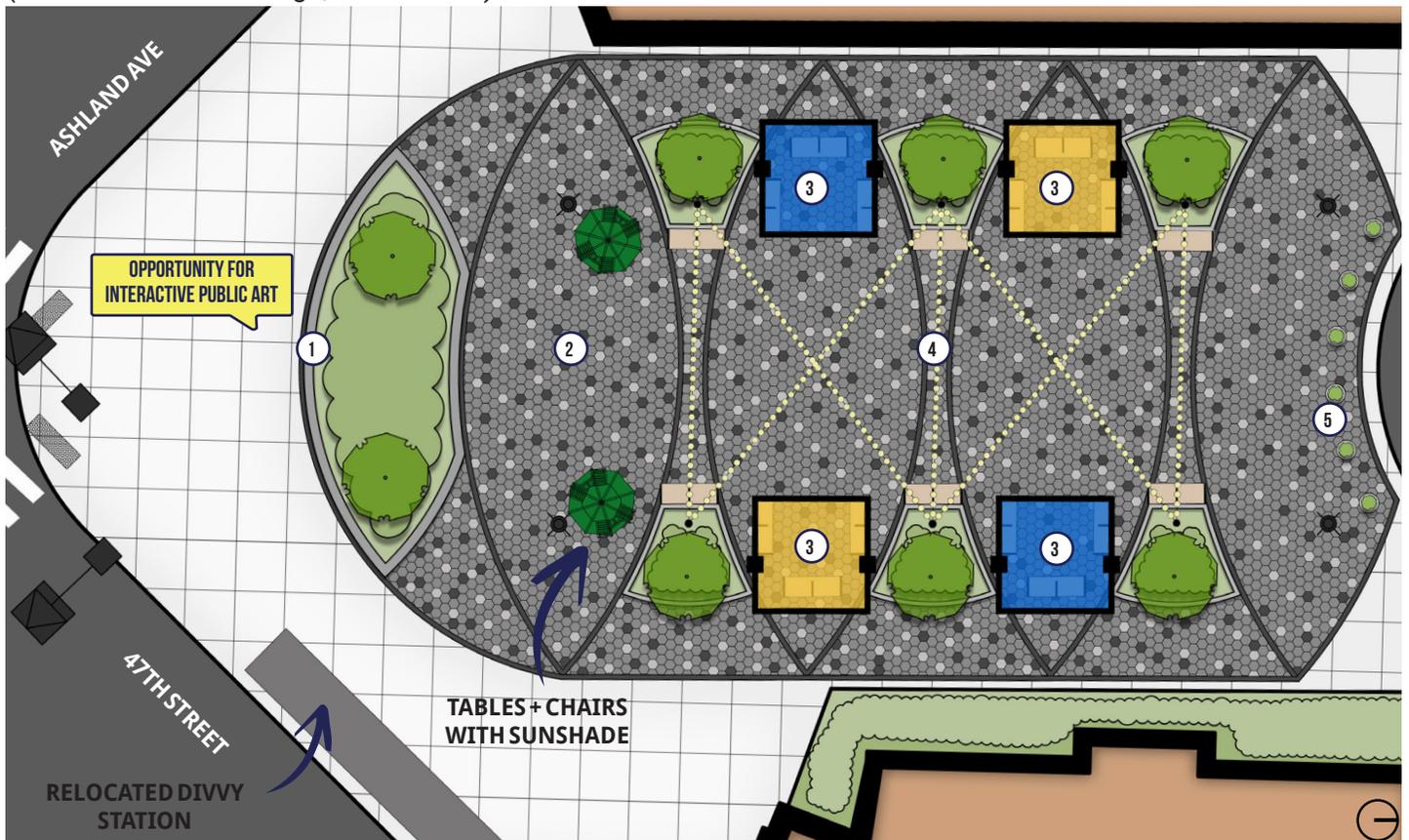
MCDOWELL PLAZA - ASHLAND AVE & 47TH ST

As part of the ISW Streetscape improvements, CDOT is working with Back of the Yards to renovate and revive the identity of several plazas along the 47th Street priority corridor.

This includes McDowell Plaza, which aims to improve public seating, create spaces for gathering and community events, enhance landscaping, and implement public art.



(Draft CDOT Plaza Design, March 2023)



LEGEND

- ① Concrete seatwall planter with understory plantings
- ② Decorative pavers + open area for flexible uses
- ③ Shade shelter with geometric panels + bench grouping
- ④ Festoon poles + string lighting
- ⑤ Precast concrete SSA planter pot

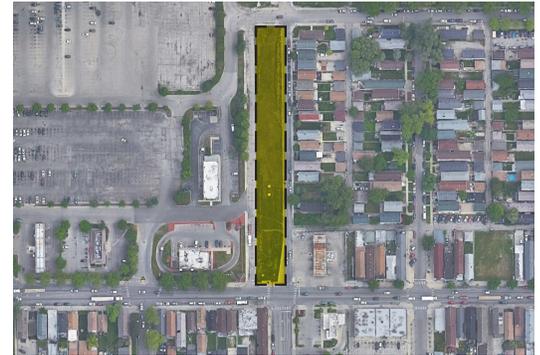
Source: CDOT

47TH ST PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY SITE 2

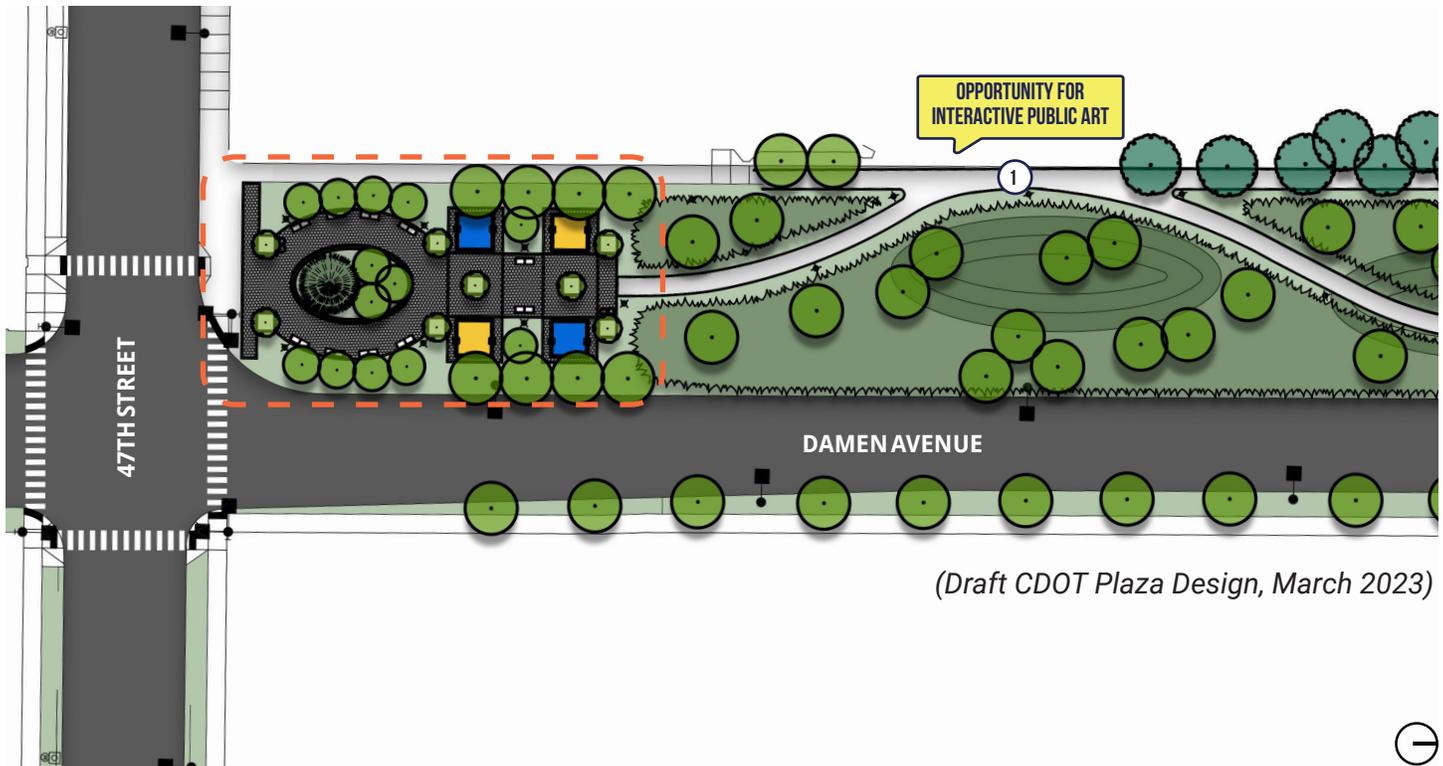
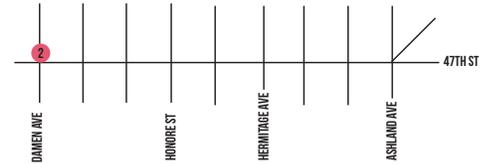
DAMEN PLAZA - DAMEN AVE & 47TH ST

As part of the ISW Streetscape improvements, CDOT is working with Back of the Yards to renovate and revive the identity of several plazas along the 47th Street priority corridor.

This includes Damen Plaza, which aims to improve public seating, create spaces for gathering and community events, enhance landscaping, and implement public art.



KEY MAP



(Draft CDOT Plaza Design, March 2023)

LEGEND

- ① Concrete walkway + pedestrian lights



Source: CDOT

47TH ST PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY SITE 3

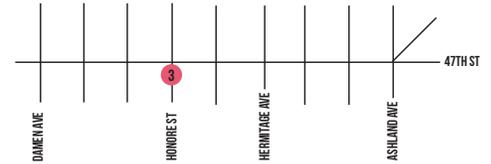
HONORE PLAZA - HONORE ST & 47TH ST

As part of the ISW Streetscape improvements, CDOT is working with Back of the Yards to renovate and revive the identity of several plazas along the 47th Street priority corridor.

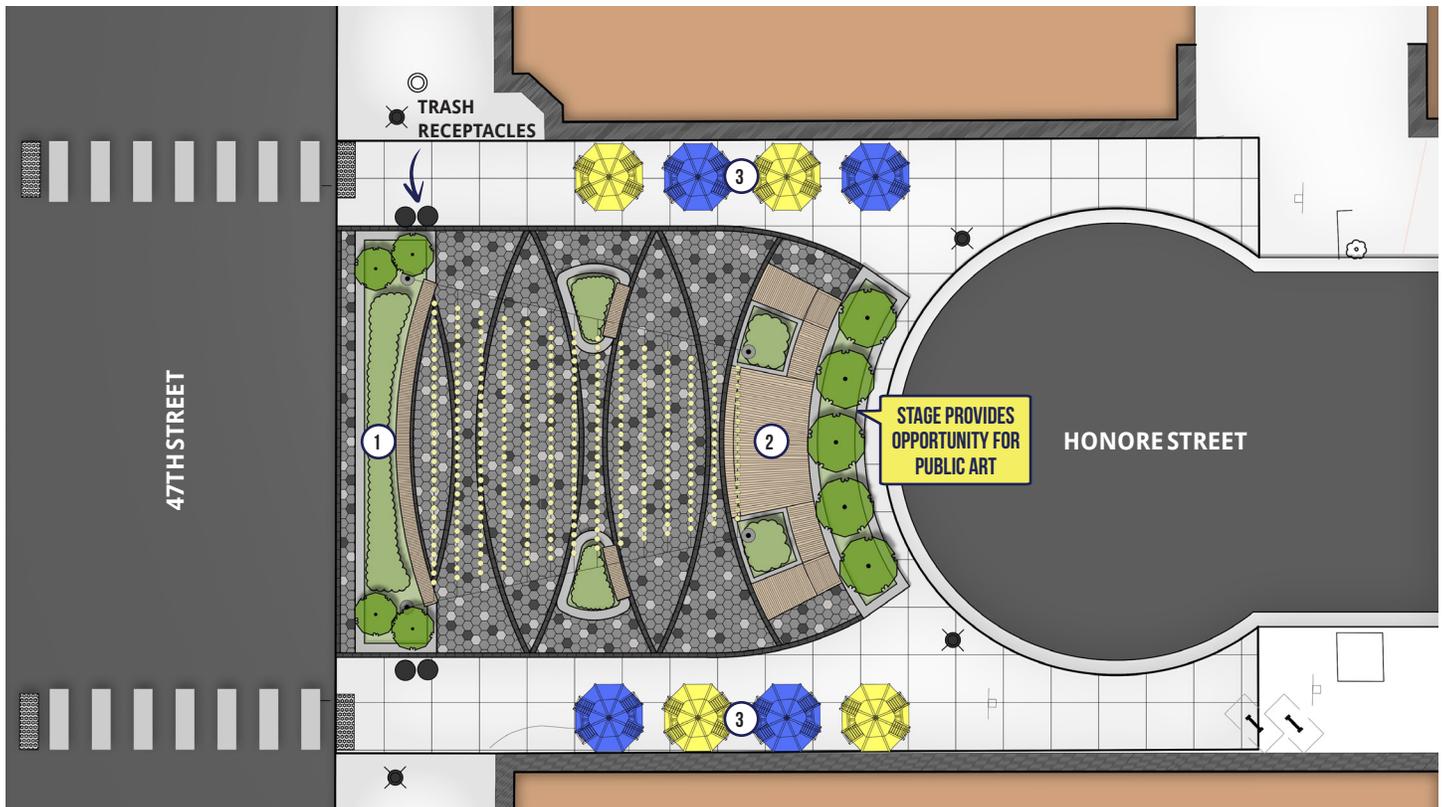
This includes Honore Plaza, which aims to improve parking conditions and public seating, create spaces for gathering and community events, enhance landscaping, and implement public art.



KEY MAP



(Draft CDOT Plaza Design, March 2023)



LEGEND

- ① Concrete seatwall planter with understory plantings
- ② Stage
- ③ Table + chairs with sunshade

Source: CDOT

47TH ST PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY SITE 4

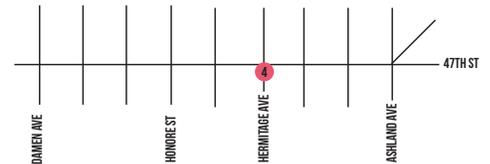
HERMITAGE PLAZA - HERMITAGE AVE & 47TH ST

As part of the ISW Streetscape improvements, CDOT is working with Back of the Yards to renovate and revive the identity of several plazas along the 47th Street priority corridor.

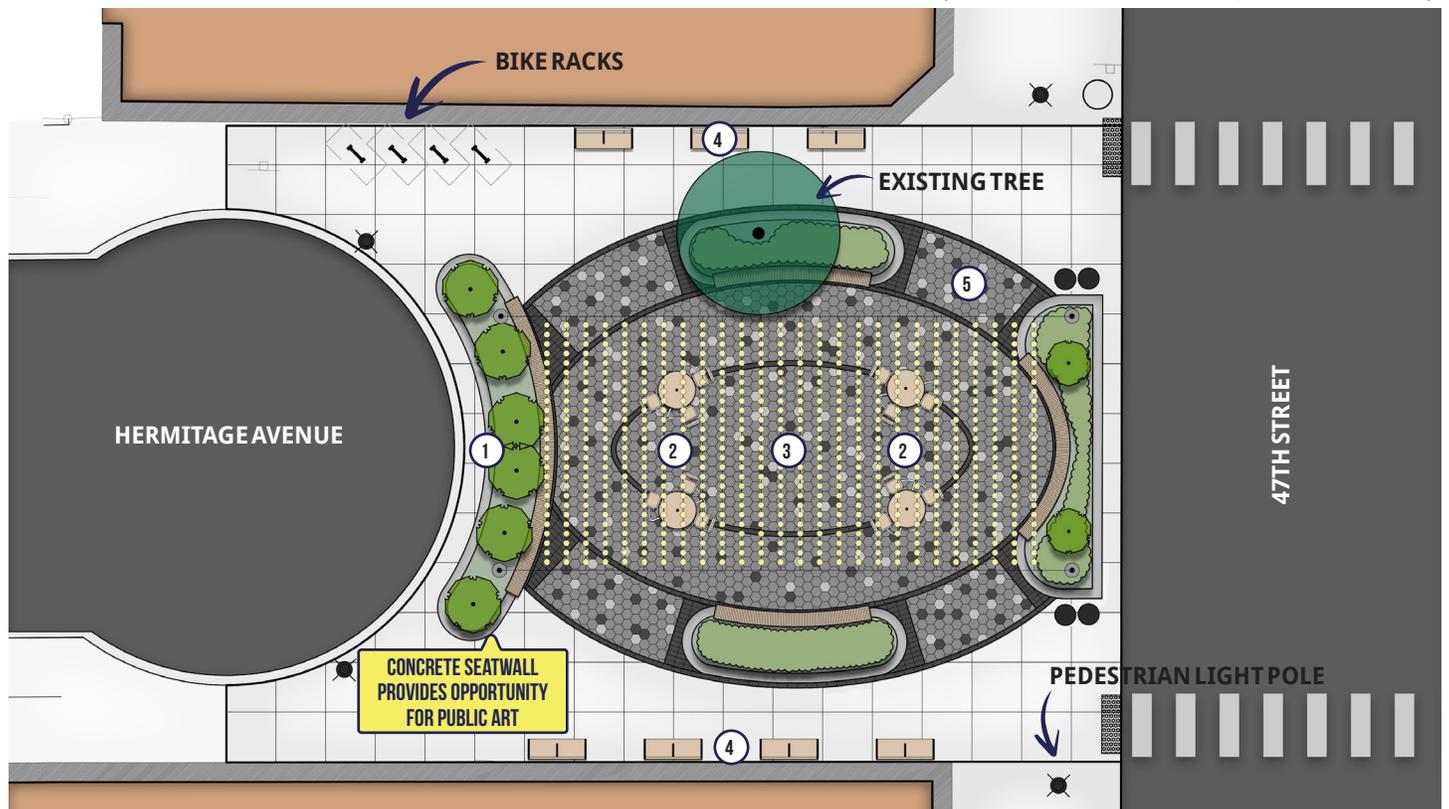
This includes Hermitage Plaza, which aims to improve parking conditions and public seating, create spaces for gathering and community events, enhance landscaping, and implement public art.



KEY MAP



(Draft CDOT Plaza Design, March 2023)



LEGEND

- ① Concrete seatwall planter/traffic barrier + bench topper with trees + understory plantings
- ② Table + chairs beneath string light canopy

③ Festoon poles + string lighting
- ④ Benches

⑤ Decorative pavers + open area for flexible uses

Source: CDOT

WHAT'S NEXT HOW TO STAY INVOLVED

Based on the planning and engagement process, DCASE will work with City departments, elected officials, and community partners to help steward implementation of recommended projects.

Additionally, DCASE has existing resources to stay updated and connected regarding upcoming public art opportunities:



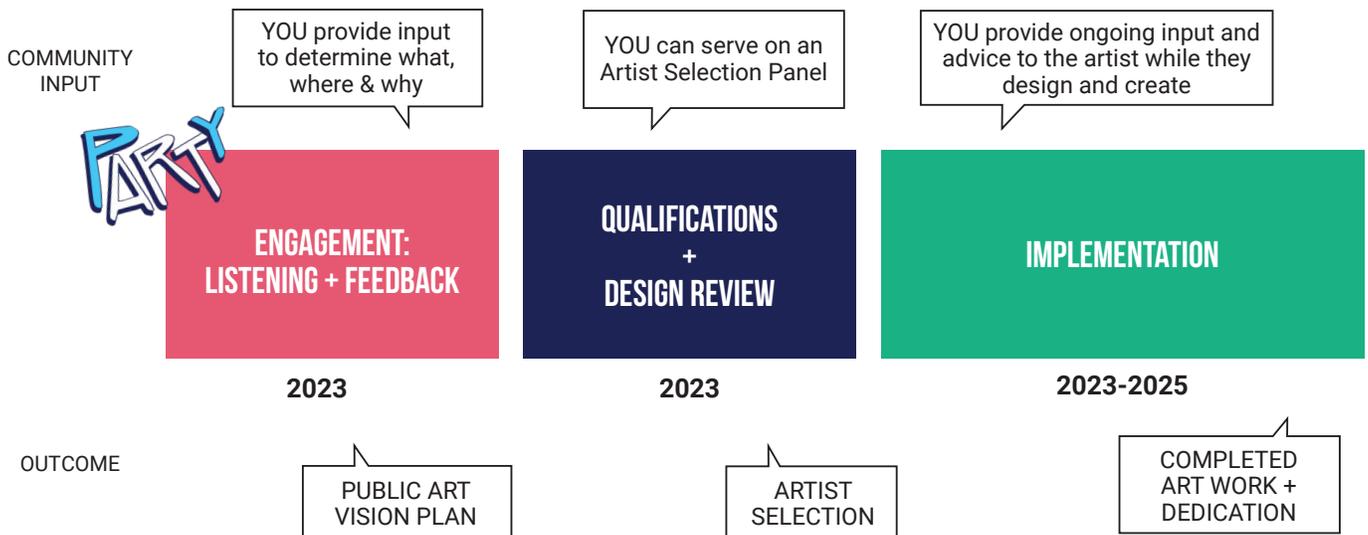
If you are an **artist**, make sure you are DCASE's mailing list to receive RFQ/RFP notifications.

Sign up visiting bit.ly/DCASEnewsletter or scan this QR code.



Visit chicago.gov/publicartparty and:

- Sign up to be considered to participate in **artist selection panels**.
- Find about **project updates**, plan documents, and stay connected.



“Public art should capture the heart & soul of the community. It should tell the story of our people and instill a sense of pride for the community.”

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-INVEST South/West neighborhoods

Figure 2-Neighborhood initiatives in Back of the Yards

Figure 3-Location of priority projects along the Back of the Yards INVEST South/West Priority Corridor

REFERENCED ARTWORK

"Peace Mural" - One Summer Chicago

"We grow here too" - Gloria Talamantes

"Una mujer con flores" - Luis Raul

"The plant mural" Joe Miller

Pole banners - Fernando Ramirez

"Welcome home" - Matr + Brenda Macias-Lopez

"Chicago Fire Department Memorial - Edward Schonsett

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Great Cities Institute Back of the Yards Community Plan

<https://greatcities.uic.edu/uic-neighborhoods-initiative/back-of-the-yards-community-plan/>

CDOT Complete Streets

Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT)

<https://chicagocompletestreets.org/portfolio/invest-south-west-back-of-the-yards-47th-street/>

Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council

<https://bync.org>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Chicago and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) commissioned this report to develop a framework for Back of the Yard’s Public Art Vision. The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) have been key in this process, and coordination with them will continue in pursue of strategic alignment of implementation efforts, funding and resources.

