



River Ecology & Governance Task Force

December 3, 2024 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Agenda

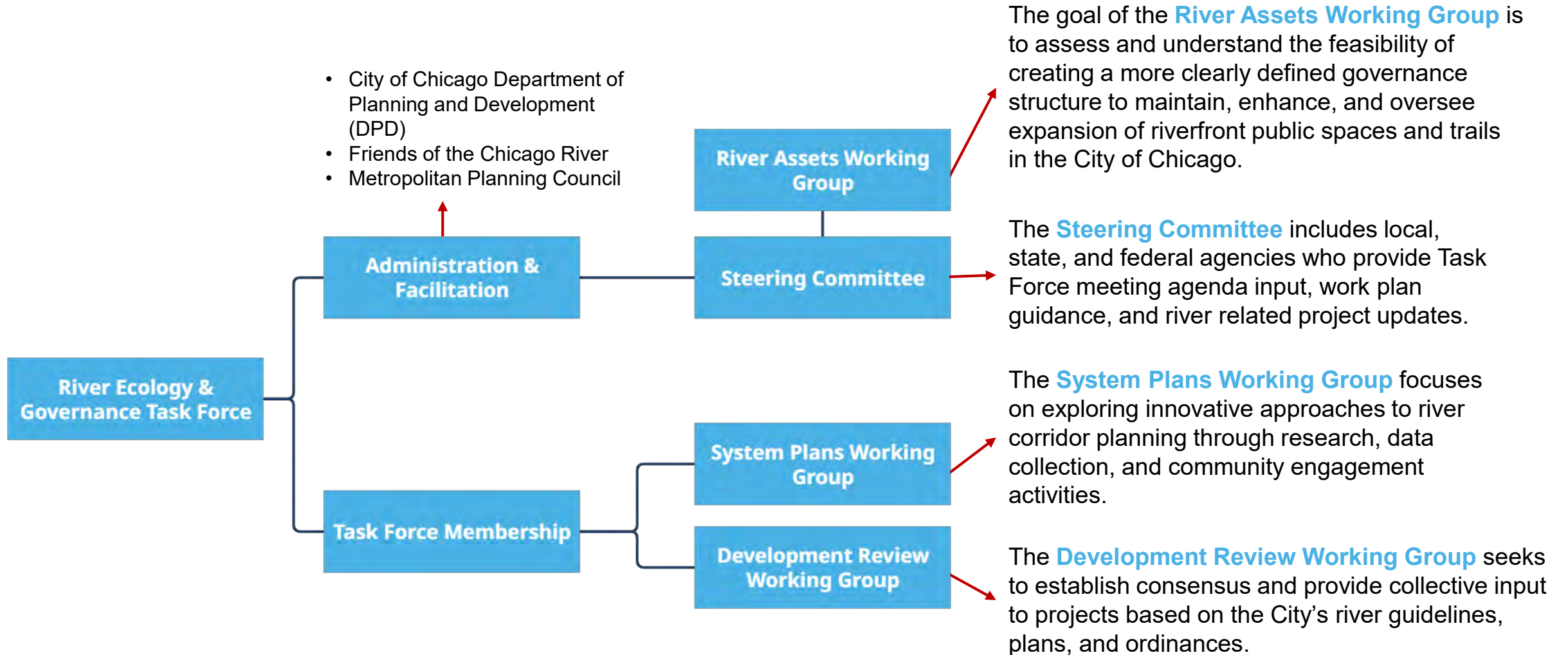
- 3:05 Task Force Short-Term Objectives and Short-term Goals
- 3:07 Small Group Discussion: Work Plan 2024 Outcomes and 2025 Objectives
- 3:55 River Assets Working Group Update and Discussion
- 4:22 Government Partner Project Updates
- 4:27 Project Challenges Check-In
- 4:30 Adjourn and 2025 Task Force Meeting Dates

Task Force Objectives

Transforming Chicago's unique waterway system into a **thriving and ecologically integrated natural asset**, capable of accommodating the needs of people, requires **coordinated planning**, investment and management.

Aspire to, and realize no later than 2040, inland waterways in Chicago that are **inviting, productive and living**, that **support wildlife in-stream and on their banks**, and that **contribute to our city's resiliency**

River Ecology and Governance Task Force 2024 Structure Diagram



Current Task Force Work Plan

Goal #1: Review current polices and create recommendations to strengthen them

Goal #2: Inform near-term planning opportunities to advance collective priorities

Goal #3: Develop criteria to prioritize projects for identified funding opportunities

Goal #4: Ensure process for development reviews is followed and continues to improve new riverfront developments

Goal #1: Review current polices and create recommendations to strengthen them

December 2023 REGTF Survey Results:

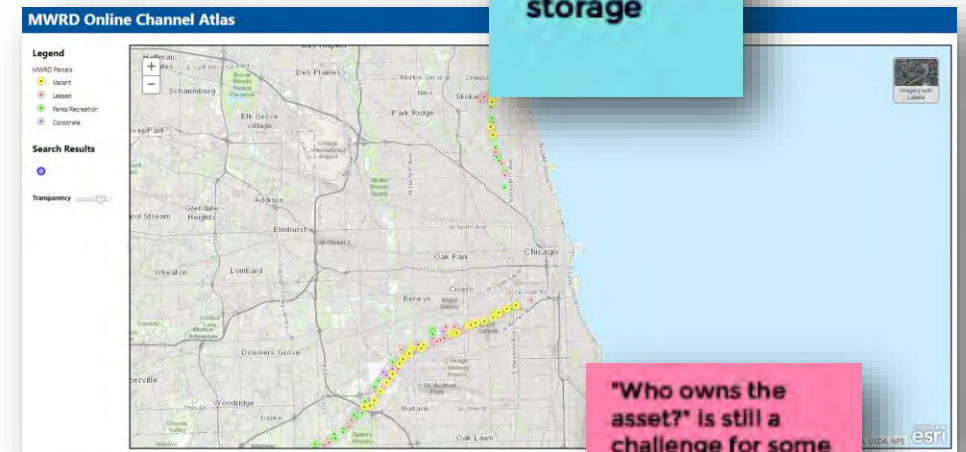
1. **Improving access to river edge (21)**
2. Funding (aligning opportunities with investment and resources) (13)
3. Green Infrastructure and Stormwater Policy (12)
4. Zoning and Use restrictions along the river (11)
5. Plan Implementation (Community, Citywide) (10)
6. Reduce pollutants that affect the river (8)
7. Design guidelines (8)
8. Wildlife protection (8)
9. Chicago Cumulative Impacts Assessment and Environmental Justice Action Plans (7)
10. USACE navigable channel recommendations (5)
11. Implement stormwater/water quality educational signage around Chicago's waterways (4)
12. Plan updates (2)

Goal #1: Review current polices and create recommendations to strengthen them

System Plans Working Group

Exploring River Access Through....

- ✓ Collecting barriers and opportunities for future improved access
- ✓ Researching ownership conditions for land along the river system
- ✓ Discussing our current urban water trail system
- ✓ Examining case studies and success stories that can serve as a model for improved river access



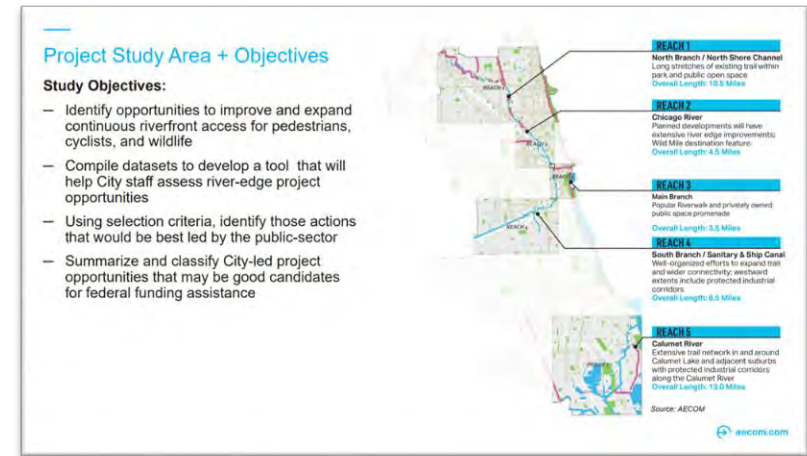
"Who owns the asset?" is still a challenge for some property owners or stewards of public spaces (e.g. some entities aren't in the business of owning bridges)



Goal #2: Inform near-term planning opportunities to advance collective priorities

CDOT: River Edge Access Study ✓

- We've received regular updates and Task Force input opportunities throughout 2024, the tool is now finalized.



DPD: Calumet Design Guidelines and Land Use Update (Ongoing)

- We've received updates at recent Task Force meetings, we will continue discussing this policy update together in 2025.



Goal #3: Develop criteria to prioritize projects for identified funding opportunities

- ✓ Formed a new REGTF River Assets Working Group that includes participation by all key relevant agencies and City departments as well as other relevant partners such as substantial riverwalk private property owners / public easement holders and land trusts.

As part of the River Assets Working Group we:

- Researched case studies from other similar cities' regulatory and funding models.
- Based on findings from these case studies, we identified potential new strategies for diversifying and prioritizing funding for river related capital improvements and maintenance.
- We also proposed strategies for improving planning, coordination, funding, and implementation efficiency to advance river edge projects.
- We will continue to refine the proposed strategies into a work plan in early 2025.

Goal #4: Ensure process for development reviews is followed and continues to improve new riverfront developments

- Provide development teams with the “*Chicago Rivers – Partner-Gathered Context Information*” document developed in the 2023 System Plans Working Group meetings. ✓
- Provide clarity to developers about process and role with the Task Force Development Review Working Group ✓
 - [Located on REGTF Development Review Working Group webpage](#)
- Track how feedback has informed changes to riverfront development and create a checklist to ensure process is followed. ✓
- Conducted formal reviews and provided joint comments on DuSable Park and QTS Data Center expansion as well as multiple development advocacy informal coordination discussions. ✓



Small Group Discussion: Work Plan 2024 and 2025 Objectives

Small Group Discussion Topics: Work Plan 2024 and 2025 Objectives

- Review the goals, objectives, tasks, and priorities that came out of work planning in 2023.
- Are these still the right goals and objectives?
- What needs to be changed or added?
- What emerging river needs should be considered to include for next year?
- What new goals and objectives should the Task Force consider as priorities for 2025?



River Assets Working Group 2024 Recap and Discussion

River Assets Working Group

Goal:

Evaluate and understand the feasibility of creating a more clearly defined governance structure to maintain, enhance, and oversee expansion of riverfront public assets in the City of Chicago.



We are exploring:

1. The challenges that river assets are facing today (maintenance, funding, permitting)
2. Case studies for how different public, private, and quasi-public spaces are managed and maintained (what is working, what isn't?)
3. Create a work plan to explore restructuring the governance of existing and future river edge assets

River Assets Working Group – Workshop #1

Define the Purpose, Responsibilities, and Opportunities

What are challenges that organizations are facing with creating and managing river assets?

Lack of ownership clarity / unique ownership conditions

“Many organizations and jurisdictions, would help to have clarity of ownership responsibilities”

Funding / \$\$\$

“Public funding for capital river investments”

Planning

“Identifying best uses of spaces holistically, encourage bigger river investments that are more creative and impactful”

Maintenance

“Need for funding for maintenance and clearly defined agency/organization for maintenance of spaces”

Complex Permitting

“Can be challenging and time consuming for new organizations, small business, and community groups to permit innovative river projects”



Kick Off Meeting: April 29th

River Assets Working Group – Workshop #2

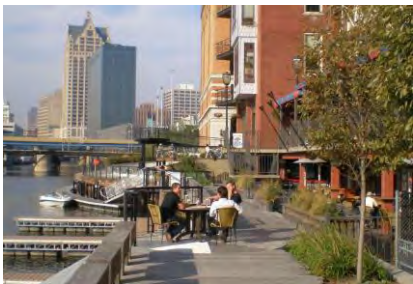
Case Studies Presentation



Great River Passage



Detroit Riverfront Conservancy



Milwaukee RiverWalk



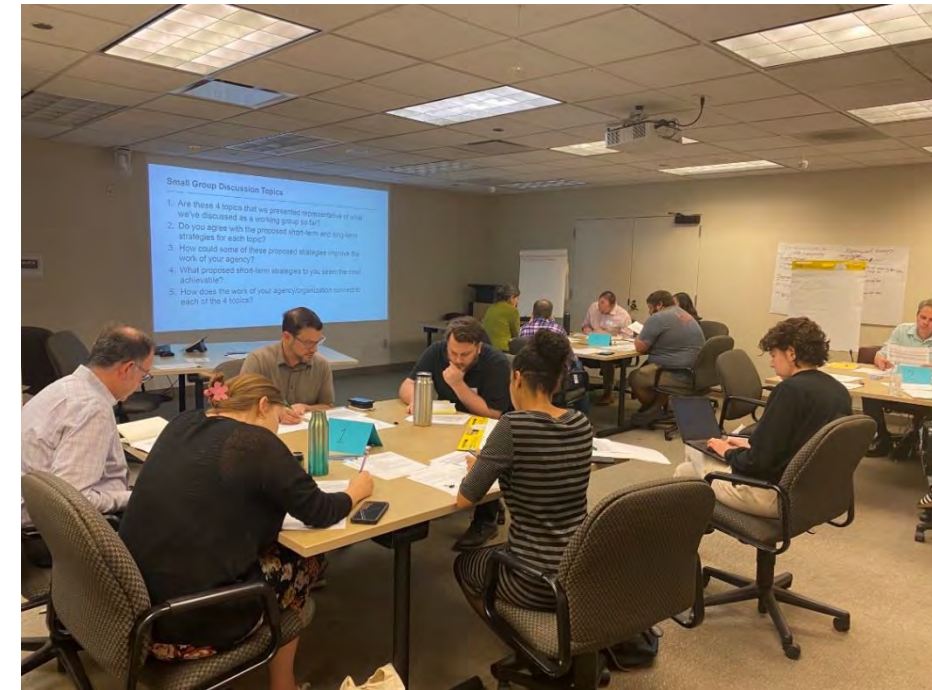
Hudson Park River Trust

ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES	GREAT RIVER PASSAGE	HUDSON PARK RIVER TRUST	DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY	MILWAUKEE RIVERWALK
Coordinated Ownership	X	✓	✓	X
Facilities Management / Maintenance	X	✓	✓	✓
Permanent Governing Authority	✓	✓	X/?	✓
Intergovernmental Collaboration	✓	✓	✓	X
Planning / Visioning	✓	✓	✓	✓
Streamlined Permitting/Enforcement/TA	X/?	X	✓	X
Private Public Partnerships	X	✓	✓	✓
Diversified Funding	✓	✓	✓	✓

River Assets Working Group – Workshop #3

Desired improvement areas that were shared throughout our workshops and Task Force discussions are:

1. **Planning and Visioning:** A need for a river system wide plan to provide a clear future strategy for additional investments
2. **Clear Responsibilities and Information Transparency:** Strengthened cross-agency coordination, clarity for who is primarily responsible, specific staff contact, and a repository of river related information
3. **Facilities Management and Maintenance:** Systems and standards for maintenance that help protect existing river asset investments for the future
4. **Diversified and Coordinated Funding for Capital Investment and Maintenance:** Expand the diversity of available funding for river investments by expanding opportunities for PPP and coordinating across government partners



Proposed Strategies to Address Challenges: Planning and Visioning

Short-term (< 5 years)

Long-term (> 5 years)

Barriers, Challenges, and Gaps We've Heard:

Existing land use regulations are outdated and not aligned with river potential and desires



Potential Strategies:

- **Undertake City-wide river plan consolidation process** to gather identified visions, priorities, and goals into a comprehensive River Corridor Action Plan.
- **Adopt a timeline for regularly updating river related ordinances, guidelines, and policies.**



Potential Strategies:

- **Create a river corridor district to guide the further investment** in private and public river edge land, using the Lakefront Protection ordinance as a precedent.
- Modernize the Waterways Ordinance to align with a River Corridor Action Plan.

Proposed Strategies to Address Challenges:

Clear Responsibilities and Information Transparency:

Short-term (< 5 years)

Long-term (> 5 years)

Barriers, Challenges, and Gaps We've Heard:

- Challenges determining ownership and jurisdictional considerations
- No designated city agency staff solely focused on rivers related projects
- Time consuming to figure out responsibilities and authorities across gov. departments



Potential Strategies:

- **Identify staff to navigate the process** by advising and reviewing public river projects for compliance
- **Establish and river related information clearinghouse** (website) to provide public facing information about mapped jurisdiction, ownership, and permitting requirements related to Chicago's rivers.



Potential Strategy:

- **Consolidate ownership** for river-related land into a single entity or create standard conservation easements that apply to all private projects

Proposed Strategies to Address Challenges: Facilities Management and Maintenance



Proposed Strategies to Address Challenges: Diversified and Coordinated Funding for Capital Investment and Maintenance





River Assets Working Group
Exploring Implementation in Chicago
Mentimeter Activity

Project Updates

- **Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development**
 - Calumet Design Guidelines kicked-off and in process of conducting focus group meetings, gearing up for the launch of the working groups later in December and the first public meeting in early 2026.
 - PsiQuantum planned development was approved by the Chicago Plan Commission.
- **Chicago Dept. of Transportation**
 - South Branch Riverwalk design is in procurement stages.
 - Western Ave bridge construction expected to start Q2 2025. Chicago Ave bridge over Chicago River construction expected to start Q2 2025. Both Division St bridges over North Branch Canal and Chicago River construction is expected to start Q2 2025. Chicago Ave and Division St bridges are all designed to accommodate future riverwalk extension.
- **Chicago Dept. of the Environment and Dept. of Public Health**
 - RFP responses were due in November for the update to the City's Green Stormwater Infrastructure Strategy. The strategy update will be completed by October 1, 2025.
 - Cumulative Impacts Ordinance will be advanced next year in 2025.

Project Updates

- **Forest Preserve District of Cook County**

- The Des Plaines River Trail Bryn Mawr Ave. to Lawrence Ave. section has been completed and showcases 1000 feet of boardwalk in a section near the river that frequently floods, a pedestrian bridge to take trail users over Lawrence Ave., and a re-route of the trail to drier ground as the original trail was typically unusable due to wet conditions. The Rosemont Bridge that connects to the Stevenson Convention Center has been completed by the Village of Rosemont.
- Construction at Beaubien Woods includes a boat launch, picnic shelter, fishing rails, seating walls, art installation and a future restroom; habitat restoration is also ongoing. The City is considering an exit and entrance for the red line extension at Beaubien Woods.
- The Tam O'Shanter dam (on the north branch of the Chicago River) has been removed; FPCC worked together with IDNR on this.
- An opening date for the Caldwell Woods Wellness Center on Devon and Milwaukee and the river on the North Branch is planned for January 2025.

Project Updates

- **Chicago Park District**

- DuSable Park is still in design. Presentation to Plan Commission for review and approval anticipated for early 2025.
- Advancing TIF funded projects at River, Kiwanis, and Legion Parks.
 - River Park – upgraded ADA launch, programming storage space and individual kayak and canoe lockers. Currently in discussions with local artists to paint new with river-centric flora and fauna.
 - Legion & Kiwanis – shoreline stabilization and pathway restoration is complete. Vegetation management to continue through December. This will include some large invasive tree removals as well as seeding, and tree and shrub planting.
 - Ronan Park – Global Gardens improvements complete, new water line installation in progress, pathway improvements complete. Vegetation management this month include additional hazard and large invasive tree removals, seeding, and planting.

- **Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago**

- The first phase of work on a flood relief project in Robbins was completed, and the second phase was kicked off. The project will address overbank flooding through a new stormwater park and pond, along with improvements to Midlothian Creek.

REGTF – River Questions Google Form

- Reminder - New form for directing river related questions:

<https://forms.gle/TB6m2CocpmYdBgew6>



Do you have a question for the facilitators and/or government partners of the City of Chicago River Ecology and Governance Task Force?

Please complete the below form to submit your question, comment, or suggestion. The purpose of this form is to provide a way for REGTF participants to submit questions and/or discussion topics that were not covered as part of our regular workshops. Friends of the Chicago River and the Metropolitan Planning Council (the REGTF co-facilitators) will work to direct your river related questions to the appropriate contact to receive an answer and/or will include the topic in future meeting agendas. To help us in this task, please be as concise as possible in your questions and limit each submission to one topic.

REGTF 2025 Quarterly Meeting Dates

- March 18, 2025
- June 3, 2025
- September 16, 2025
- December 9, 2025