

We Will Chicago Research Team Kickoff Conversation

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MEETING GOAL

Introduce participants to We Will Chicago leaders and each other; outline what was accomplished in Phase I of the effort, the goals for Phase II and guiding principles for moving forward.

WHERE WE ARE



Step 1

We Are

Setting the Stage



Step 2

We Have and Need

Develop A Policy Toolkit



Step 3

We Will

Set Policy Framework

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 | Acknowledging the harm done by past Chicago planning efforts, in particular to communities of color, will be key to moving forward with We Will.
- 2 | Taking part in We Will represents a unique opportunity for Chicagoans to have their voices heard and make a direct impact on what their city will look like.
- 3 | Learning from the failures and successes of planning over the years has informed the guiding principles for We Will.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

"We ask that you bring your full and authentic selves, that you bring all of your passion for Chicago and very importantly, your open minds, which will help We Will to very directly address the needs of people who live, work, and raise family in this city that we love."

Commissioner Maurice Cox | Chicago Department of Planning and Development

"Reckoning is necessary. Reckoning is urgent. And make no mistake, it is about disrupting systems of oppression."

Emilia Chico | Research Lead for Lifelong Education

"How do we celebrate Chicago's planning history and legacy while also acknowledging its harm?...this process will look different, it will feel different, and that's why we're all here today. This is the work we're here to do."

Marisa Schulz | We Will facilitation lead

"Equity is all of our collective jobs."

Candace Moore | Chief Equity Officer, City of Chicago

NOTES

KICKOFF AND INTRODUCTION

Lilliane P. Webb of Rudd Consultants, one of the firms providing facilitation for We Will, kicked off the meeting with information on how to access interpretation, notes on tech troubleshooting and “zoom etiquette.”

Department of Planning & Development Commissioner Maurice Cox thanked and congratulated participants on their selection for the process, “what we believe will be a once-in-a-lifetime endeavor.”

“We are starting Phase 2 of what is a three-year planning process, we’re starting tonight,” Cox said, “And your lived experiences, your insight, your willingness to think deeply about the needs of our city will be invaluable to the progress we hope to make over the next months ahead.”

Phase 1 started last August with small-group conversations that produced the plan’s seven pillars and its guiding principles of equity and resiliency. Phase 2 will further explore those themes, Cox explained, with a particular focus on a historical reckoning component that will consider how Chicagoans can move beyond some of the undesired consequences of many previous planning efforts. “So ultimately We Will’s volunteers—you—will help produce the policy frameworks for Phase 3 of the process which will lead to the final plan of action.” Participants’ work will “resonate city-wide for years to come” in areas from land use and zoning to equitable public financing strategies and annual budgets.

At the conclusion of Commissioner Cox’s comments, Webb asked participants for their consent for the meeting to be recorded, and threw out an icebreaker question for attendees to answer in the chat box: What’s your favorite Chicago “hidden gem”?

WE WILL OVERVIEW

After a description of more Zoom tools and what to expect with breakout rooms, Juan Sebastian Arias and Skyler Larimore from the Mayor’s Office policy team gave an overview of the planning process.

Addressing the question “Why plan?”, Larimore said that the value of good planning cannot be understated. She repeated that this was a “historic” opportunity to “craft a vision for the future of Chicago.” Citywide plans can be blueprints to “create a city that works for everyone.” She also stated that citywide plans are common, so “the fact that Chicago hasn’t had one since 1960 is an anomaly.”

A chart was shown: “Where We Are in the Planning Process.” Arias summarized what’s been accomplished in Phase 1: principles (the north star of the plan), themes (a roadmap for our process) and pillars (key quality-of-life drivers to be addressed).

The 5 themes of We Will Chicago were developed in a series of workshops:

- *Historical reckoning and trust building*

“This includes understanding the legacies of past plans, policies and practices and how they harmed communities, often communities of color, and benefited others.”

- *Systematic evaluation of equity impacts*

The Chicago Department of Public Health is developing an assessment tool that can be applied to recommendations developed as part of the plan.

- *Accessible and meaningful community engagement*

This plan should be created with residents and community members and have multiple channels for that engagement.

- *Accountability through shared metrics and transparency.*

“We know that you can’t impact what you don’t measure,” so there will be a public-facing dashboard to support accountability.

- *Sustained inter-agency and cross-collaboration.*

This speaks to “breaking down silos in government” to give a whole-government approach to the plan.

The seven pillars are “critical quality of life areas that we’ll be focusing on.”

- Arts & Culture
- Economic development
- Environment, climate and energy
- Housing & Neighborhoods
- Lifelong learning
- Public health and safety
- Transportation and infrastructure

Larimore provided an overview of the many stakeholders to be engaged in this phase: the advisory committee of 33 individuals and organizations selected from the open application process this spring; one pillar research team for each major topic, also consisting of individuals and organizations selected through the application process. She also gave an overview of project management—the City of Chicago team, facilitation consultants, research and artists.

Arias gave an overview of the “public engagement channels.” They include artist/organizer team engagement events; community partner engagement events; a “meeting in a box” toolkit; and virtual forums like websites and surveys. He also gave an overview of the racial, geographic and gender breakdown of volunteers.

"We're not starting from a blank slate," Arias said. Research teams will be reviewing past plans.

Research teams will start meeting monthly; advisory committees will begin monthly meetings after August.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

The meeting broke out into different virtual rooms for participants to get to know each other.

HISTORICAL RECKONING AND PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

Emilia Chico, research lead for lifelong education, presented a section on Historical Reckoning and Past Planning Efforts. They began with some background about themselves and a land acknowledgement. "Reckoning is necessary. Reckoning is urgent. And make no mistake, it is about disrupting systems of oppression."

Reckoning involves reflecting on our past (what can we learn from our collective history?); reclaiming our present (how are we seeking to heal from moments of historical reckoning?) and reimagining our future (what do we want our city to look like?).

Chico spoke of how communities acknowledge traumatic pasts and engage in reckoning work, like racial truth and healing transformation circles. The plan can build a future that centers the lived experiences of all Chicagoans, especially those who have been excluded from these kinds of conversations.

A HISTORY OF PLANNING IN CHICAGO

Marisa Schulz, a facilitation lead for We Will, gave a presentation on Chicago's history of planning. "In phase 1 we did do an inventory of plans from the last 25 years...[including] more than 300 plans and growing." She noted that "by reviewing the intent and impact of these plans, we bring a historical reckoning framework to this process."

She started with the 1909 Plan of Chicago, also known as the [Burnham Plan](#). This included the widening of Chicago's streets and boulevards over the next few decades.

Until the mid-fifties, Chicago had a decline in office development, and experienced "white flight" to the suburbs. "As a result, the focus of the early to mid-fifties was on rebuilding downtown." Highway construction and urban renewal displaced families, including immigrant communities from the near west side to make way for the creation of the UIC Halstead campus.

Christina Harris from [Metropolitan Planning Council](#) gave more insight into how this displacement fostered distrust among communities and planners.

Schulz continued that in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was a continued focus on downtown and the central area of the city, to the detriment of neighborhood planning. Developers and private sector actors played a large role in planning and policy.

In the early 1960s, Mayor Daley launched a [comprehensive planning effort](#). He wanted it to be large-scale like Burnham's but it "didn't have enough teeth" and wasn't fully transformed into policy. The planning process "lacked significant community engagement and so as a result it wasn't very popular and ultimately was never approved by City Council."

In the 1970s there was more of a focus on regulatory planning. The 1972 Lakefront Plan of Chicago was a positive result of this decade; it protected the lakefront as a public space.

The 1980s saw a shift to economic/equity-based planning. The Chicago Central Area Plan was drafted and used the 1992 World's Fair as a catalyst; neighborhood groups were opposed, saying it would do little for communities. Mayor Harold Washington's administration ultimately scrapped the plan.

Lesley Roth, principal at Lamar Johnson Collaborative, a research lead for the Environment, Climate and Energy pillar, spoke briefly about how beautification and landscape efforts were important during this time.

In the late 1990s to 2000s, there were middle-range and neighborhood plans. These included community input/engagement processes and meetings with the hopes of regaining trust. These efforts had "mixed implementation results."

Kate McMahon from Chicago Department of Public Health mentioned Chicago's [life expectancy gap](#) by race and neighborhood as an example of an outcome of Chicago's past planning efforts.

The last two decades have seen quality of life planning, including plans led by community organizations, SSAs and neighborhood chambers. "[INVEST South/West](#) continues to commit city resources to the south and west sides of Chicago with unprecedented community engagement," Schulz said.

She introduced Chicago's Chief Equity Officer, Candace Moore.

GROUNDING AND DEFINITIONS:

Moore said she is guided by the principle that "words mean something." To that end, she presented definitions for the following terms:

Healing

Resiliency

Equity

Equity was described as both an outcome and a process. An "Equity Statement of Principles" for We Will will be released soon. A further definition for "racial equity" was given as well, including how equity must take into account the social construction of race, and an analysis of systemic racism.

"If equity is a future state, what is it going to take to get there?" Moore asked. It will take guiding principles, she said, including "build[ing] a culture of inclusion and diversity" and "deepen[ing] our spectrum of engagement."

Moore asked participants to ask themselves the question: "What is one commitment you can make to live out the equity statement of principles?"

BREAKOUT ROOMS

Participants headed into breakout rooms once more.

RESOURCES

We Will Research Team Kickoff Presentation (July 28, 2021)

https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/we_will/we_will_documents/2021-7-28-WeWill-PillarMeeting1-Presentation.pdf

We Will Chicago

<https://wewillchicago.com/>

Chicago Dept. of Planning & Development

<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd.html>

Timeline: Key Moments in Chicago Planning

<https://www.chipublic.org/timeline-key-moments-in-chicago-planning/>

"No Small Plans"

<https://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/no-small-plans/>

"Planning Chicago" by D. Bradford Hunt and Jon DeVries

<https://bookshop.org/books/planning-chicago/9781611900804>

NEXT STEPS

Participants should:

- Complete the survey in follow-up emails;
- Look out for reminder emails sent out one week in advance;
- Let facilitators know in advance if participants cannot make a meeting;
- Join early or stay late to chat informally with one's team;
- Preview norms discussion; and
- Complete homework: Check out the We Will website.

Meeting #2 will be held the week of August 9, 2021.