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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT JOINS ALDERMAN JASON ERVIN, GARFIELD PARK RITE TO WELLNESS COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS, AND LOCAL RESIDENTS TO BREAK GROUND AT COMMUNITY PLAZA AND ROLLER RINK IN WEST GARFIELD PARK**

*New Plaza represents City's first major infrastructure investment under the Neighborhood Activation Initiative*

**Chicago-** Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot joined Alderman Jason Ervin (28<sup>th</sup> Ward), City departments and agencies, and members of the Garfield Park Rite to Wellness Collaborative to break ground on a vacant lot that is being transformed into a new Community Plaza and Roller Rink in West Garfield Park as part of the Mayor's new Neighborhood Activation initiative. Neighborhood Activation is a focused violence prevention and community investment initiative that combines community direction and aspirations and City services and assets to implement programs, social services, and changes to the built environment at a hyperlocal block level.

"Neighborhood Activation serves as my administration's latest commitment to enhancing public safety and builds on our comprehensive summer safety strategy," said Mayor Lightfoot. "By making investments at the block level in communities that are facing high levels of violence, we are able to give our most vulnerable residents the resources they need to stay engaged and stay safe. Only by driving resources where they are needed most, with input from community members, can we truly eliminate the scourge of violence from our city."

According to statistics, West Garfield Park ranks seven out of the top 15 neighborhoods experiencing gun violence, and from January 1 – May 31, 2021, West Garfield Park had the highest rate of fatal and non-fatal shootings relative to the population of all community areas in the city. Additionally, the community is in the top five when it comes to neighborhoods experiencing narcotics sales and opioid addiction. The Neighborhood Activation initiative builds on Mayor Lightfoot's all hands on deck approach to public safety and seeks to address the root causes of violence by bringing a whole of government response to the community through the provision of social services, job programs, and opportunities for residents of all ages, and changes to the physical landscape.



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“We are committed to providing quality spaces and programs to communities throughout Chicago to keep kids safe and engaged throughout the summer,” said Chicago Park District Superintendent Michael Kelly. “Our team is hard at work building the Community Plaza and Roller Rink as well as delivering summer program and events including camps, activities for youth and teens and family events like Movies in the Park on weekly basis.”

Over the last nine months, the Mayor’s Office has partnered with several Chicago organizations including, renowned architecture and urban design firm Studio Gang and the Goldin Institute, a non-profit organization that supports community-driven social change. Both Studio Gang and the Goldin Institute donated their services to design and conduct a robust community engagement process in West Garfield Park, resulting in proposals for community-driven neighborhood changes.

“Design has a critical role to play in uplifting communities and making our cities more equitable and resilient,” said Studio Gang Founding Partner Jeanne Gang. “Working with the people who know Garfield Park best—its residents—to imagine the future of their neighborhood has been incredibly rewarding. We’re proud to help our home city of Chicago to invest in the safety and prosperity of this community.”

Building on Studio Gang’s 2017 work for the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice in New York, and the local peace-building knowledge from the Goldin Institute’s Chicago Peace Fellows program, the team researched the history of the neighborhood, the built environment, and existing initiatives in the community to suggest ways that design interventions could support community members’ aspirations, uplift the good work that is already happening, and identify opportunities for additional investment that could address the root causes of neighborhood violence.

“We are proud to break ground on the Garfield Park Community Plaza and Outdoor Roller Rink, which is a direct result of the community engagement sessions hosted by GPWC,” said TJ Crawford, Director of the Garfield Park Rite to Wellness Collaborative. “Over and over, residents shared fond memories of roller skating as children on Madison, and how much that was part of the community’s history and what it represented as an indicator of the community culture. We’re excited about the Community Plaza and what it represents, and we are determined to ensure that this is just the first step of many. We are laser focused in our mission to improve health, wealth, and overall wellness for the people of Garfield Park. This space has utility, yet it is also a symbol that identifies the increased investment, greater educational and employment opportunities, increased economic viability, personal



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and spiritual uplift that HAS to come along with it...all through the lens and practice of authentic Black culture.”

The Community Plaza and Roller Rink were proposed by community members as a way to create safe community spaces and youth programming opportunities for residents. In the short-term, the City’s goal is to activate the vacant lot at 4008 West Madison this July with a temporary outdoor Roller Rink and multi-purpose space, to be available to the public all summer. The long-term goal is to have permanent lighting, furniture, a stage, and outdoor activity space, when it reopens in June 2022.

“The Community Plaza is something that is absolutely needed in West Garfield,” said Alderman Jason Ervin (28<sup>th</sup> Ward). “It will bring more foot traffic to this street, help the businesses in the area, and create a safe space for families and children.”

In addition to the Community Plaza, Neighborhood Activation looks broadly at West Garfield Park and has involved departments across the City working collaboratively to meet community needs and maximize impact. The Chicago Park District, Department of Transportation, Chicago Public Library, Department of Public Health, Department of Family & Support Services, Assets & Information Services, Department of Planning & Development, Chicago Police Department, Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events, the Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership, and the Department of Housing have all made important contributions to this initiative. A full list of activations in West Garfield Park can be found below, which the City looks forward to continuing to build upon over the summer.

“The Community Plaza represents a crucial early success for the community of Garfield Park that sets the stage for activating more key locations based on local ideas to build a more vibrant and peaceful neighborhood,” said Travis Rejman, executive director of Goldin Institute.

In addition, community anchors Legler Regional Library and Melody Elementary School continue to build upon recent improvements to their facilities to provide supplemental resources in connection with the Neighborhood Activation initiative.

"By building these spaces for our youth and their families, we can create positive and lasting change in our most vulnerable communities," said CPD Superintendent David O. Brown. "These investments in our neighborhoods is an investment in a safer Chicago."

### **West Garfield Park Activations Completed**



## **Infrastructure**

- Development of Community Plaza on Madison and Pulaski; will open for roller skating and other health and wellness activities in July
- Planting of 37 trees in the area
- Construction of pedestrian islands on Madison Street to promote pedestrian safety when crossing streets
- Banners developed in partnership with community members posted on both the façade and fences of Legler Library
- Installation of Community-designed banners on the 4000 block of Madison and along the Pulaski corridor
- Resurfacing of paths in Garfield Park
- New Space to Grow playground and track at Melody Elementary School
- Regular Operation Clean missions, “City service blitzes” to fix broken streetlights, sweep streets, repair potholes, address damaged buildings, remove unwanted graffiti and clean empty lots

## **Programs**

- 230 new youth summer program slots in East & West Garfield
- 150 slots in the New Greencorps jobs training program for youth at 3 area high schools, which exposes youth to careers and service projects in sustainability fields including, bicycling and horticulture
- Chicago Park District summer camps for youth 6 to 12 years old at Melody Elementary School and Garfield Park begin June 28 and go through August 6. The 6-weeks of summer fun will include sports, arts, fitness, and outdoor activities traditionally offered at camp
- Chicago Park District will host Movies in the Park events every Friday night July 9 through August 6 at Melody Elementary School and will move to the Community Plaza once it opens
- Expansion of CPS Safe Passage program to promote safety
- Monthly free, fresh produce market hosted by Legler Library in partnership with Greater Chicago Food Depository
- Youth Community Ambassadors program, where young people are trained and compensated to interview friends and family members connected to Garfield Park to better understand local history, challenges, and aspirations
- Coordination with My CHI. My Future. to connect young people in the neighborhood with meaningful out of school opportunities

## **Direct services**

- Social worker stationed at Legler Library to connect residents to services through a partnership with Amita Health
- Targeted outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness to connect them with services and supports



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- Strategic deployment of street outreach workers from the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago and MAAFA in West Garfield to interrupt violence, de-escalate conflicts, and promote peace
- Coordination of street outreach and victim services to ensure those impacted by violence have access to services and supports

**In progress**

- Grand opening of Community Plaza in July
- Improvements to the alley adjacent to Legler Library alley to re-direct foot traffic
- Beautification of 15 city-owned vacant lots in the area
- Increased substance use outreach to connect those with substance use disorder
- Construction of new interactive fence around new Space to Grow playground at Melody Elementary school
- Mural and street art program in partnership with local residents
- Facilitation of business development, including new health & wellness center, grocery store, restaurants, fitness programs, and bank
- Artist in Residence program at Legler Library in partnership with DCASE
- Design and beautification of Legler Library reading garden

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