



The Chicago Central Area Plan

Preparing the Central City for the 21st Century

Draft Final Report to the Chicago Plan Commission

May 2003



This is no little plan. This is a plan for urban greatness.

The Central Area Plan is a guide for the continued economic success, physical growth, and environmental sustainability of Chicago's downtown for the next 20 years. It is driven by a vision of Chicago as a global city, the "Downtown of the Midwest," the heart of Chicagoland, and the "greenest" city in the country.

This plan responds to the successful transformation of downtown Chicago over the last 20 years, while exploring the Central Area's potential for office, residential and commercial growth over the next two decades.

As the plan is enacted over time, it will serve to strengthen our downtown economic engine, expand our parks and open spaces, and improve and extend our rapid transit systems.

The Central Area Plan makes real connections – between people and their jobs, the urban and natural environments, and downtown and the rest of Chicago's neighborhoods.

This framework for our future is the product of nearly three years of hard work by a number of dedicated Chicagoans. I thank the Central Area Plan Steering Committee of government, business and civic leaders who reflected on our past, assessed the challenges ahead, and created a responsive and visionary plan for our future.

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Prepared by
The City of Chicago
Department of Planning and Development
Department of Transportation
Department of Environment

Preface

This is no little plan. This is a plan for urban greatness, as measured by the pride, prosperity and quality of life of Chicago's people. This is a plan to expand downtown's economic engine, which generates revenue for civic improvements in every ward and jobs to support families in every neighborhood. This is a green plan to enhance the state's fastest growing residential community and the metropolitan region's shared cultural treasures. This is a plan that advances Chicago's historic commitment to build the world's greatest city. This is no little plan.

Only two of America's big cities enjoy the benefits of having commerce concentrated downtown, but only Chicago has room to grow. And grow it shall, as the City in a Garden remains a work in progress. Chicago has historically and uniquely fused the green of environmental enhancement with the aesthetic of architectural statement, to create a central area that invites all its people to come together as one to work, shop, live and play.

Growth means "more," and more needs managing. Managing more commuters, more buildings, more residences, more visitors. At this huge scale good management requires bold ideas brilliantly executed. Doing this kind of confident, visionary city-building for the benefit of all our people has exemplified the spirit of Chicago in each of its preceding five generations.

This generation faces a moment of destiny in which we shall either stride boldly to the forefront of the world's great cities, or begin an inexorable decline into the company of the also-rans. Ultimately we will measure our success in the health and happiness of life in the neighborhoods, one family at a time. But let us be clear that it is a healthy, vital and prospering central area that provides a necessary economic underpinning for our aspirations.

We believe that the people of Chicago take pride in their downtown. Indeed, we believe that they love it. This is a plan for them, for us. It is a plan that captures and leverages Chicago's emerging leadership across a broad front of city-building initiatives. This is no dream, but a blueprint. This is not a concept, but an inventory of specifics to be executed over time.

This is no little plan. Let's go build Chicago together, as we have always done - according to plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chicago's Central Area in 2020

DRAFT

Chicago's Central Area in 2020

The Vision

Chicago's Central Area in 2020 will be known worldwide as a beautiful, dynamic urban center that is the hub of business, higher education and culture for its region. It will have the greenest downtown in America, known for its outstanding lake and riverfront, parks and greenways, its exceptional public transportation, and for its policies promoting innovative architecture and environmentally-sustainable design and practices. It will be a vibrant, walkable, place where people work, live, play and celebrate. It will attract and serve people from every Chicago neighborhood, as well as visitors from around the nation and the world.

A Guide to Growth

Central Chicago is poised for dramatic growth with billions of dollars in economic benefits to the city, region and state. This growth, which is good for the city and smart for the region, can only be sustained if the Central Area builds on the special qualities that make it one of the world's greatest places to work, live and play. This plan is designed to guide this growth, taking advantage of the Central Area's strengths: its economic diversity, its central location, and its renowned quality of life.

Building on Success

The hub of a great region

Chicago will maintain its position as the vibrant business and transportation center of the Midwest, by concentrating growth in an expanded downtown commercial core, and continually improving transportation systems. Downtown growth benefits the region by maximizing return on infrastructure investment, and minimizing costly sprawl.

Business success depends on quality of life

Good planning is good business. The Central Area's vibrant mix of uses, transportation, walkable neighborhoods, open spaces, waterfronts, and design excellence, will continue to make downtown Chicago a great place to do business.

The best of the past is the foundation for the future

Building on Chicago's legacy of exceptional architecture and spectacular parks means preserving landmark buildings and districts, enhancing the lakefront and riverfront, creating new parks, and encouraging innovative new design that respects people and contributes to great street life.

Downtown is everyone's neighborhood

Downtown, one of the world's great urban places, belongs first and foremost to the people of Chicago. People from all neighborhoods and all walks of life will come together here to work, play, access services, shop, learn, and celebrate their rich cultural traditions.

A green city is a healthy city

Chicago will be the international model of a sustainable city. Its commitment to transit first, use of renewable power and green technologies, smart energy management, environmentally-sound building design, and attention to its open spaces and waterfronts, will make it the greenest city in America.

Extraordinary growth in every sector

The growth envisioned in this plan will bring more than \$534 billion in economic benefits to the Chicago metropolitan area, with huge increases in tax revenues to the city and state. This growth will occur in all sectors throughout the Central Area.

The Economic Engine

Chicago is America's only big city that has room to grow its downtown commercial core. Downtown will attract more than 180,000 new jobs by 2020 - double the number of jobs presently in suburban Schaumburg, and equivalent to eight new Sears Towers.

Quality Living

By 2020, more than 140,000 residents will live in the Central Area - that's like adding the current population of Evanston, and represents a 69% increase. New development and adaptive reuse of existing buildings will lead to more than 36,000 new dwellings. Public and health care facilities will also expand to serve this growth.

Tourism and Culture

By 2020, 35 million conventioners, tourists and other visitors will visit the Central Area annually. New attractions will include an expanded McCormick Place and more than 160,000 square feet of expanded museum and cultural facilities. Ten thousand new hotel rooms will be added to accommodate these additional visitors.

A Place to Learn: Higher Education

More than 95,000 students will attend the Central Area's institutions of higher learning by 2020. The addition of more than 3 million square feet of new classroom, dormitory and administrative space will enhance the vibrant mix of Central Area experiences.

The Marketplace: Retail

More residents, workers and visitors mean many more people shopping. By 2020 there will be more than more than 7 million square feet of new retail space in the Central Area. Although this will be mainly in lower floors of larger, mixed use buildings, some exclusively retail buildings may also be developed along State Street, Michigan Avenue, or Roosevelt and Canal.



Figure i
In 2020 Chicago will have an expanded central business district framed by green civic gateways including a park over the Kennedy Expressway.



The Guiding Themes

Extraordinary growth requires extraordinary planning. The pace of business and residential development in the last two decades demonstrates that people want to be in the Central Area. This plan is designed to bring even more jobs and residents in the next 20 years.

Three guiding themes organize this plan:

Theme 1 - Development Framework

Direct growth to create a dynamic Central Area made up of vibrant and diverse mixed-use urban districts.

- Extend the highest density office core into the West Loop around transit stations, services and the Chicago River
- Develop high-density, mixed-use corridors which extend from the expanded Loop and are linked to transit
- Support a diverse collection of livable neighborhoods and special places
- Preserve and strengthen the Central Area's world-renowned architectural and cultural heritage
- Strengthen Industrial Corridors and Planned Manufacturing Districts
- Direct the growth of the Central Area's educational institutions and provide opportunities for lifelong learning
- Promote and strengthen the Central Area's world-class cultural assets

Theme 2 - Transportation

Strengthen connections to keep the Central Area easy to reach and get around.

- Make transit the first choice for people coming to the Central Area
- Improve the quality of the pedestrian environment
- Efficiently manage traffic circulation and parking to prevent gridlock
- Encourage alternative modes such as bicycles and water taxis
- Increase CTA and Metra capacity to bring workers to the Central Area.
- Improve national and international connections.

Theme 3 - Waterfronts and Open Spaces

Expand and connect waterfronts and open spaces to create great public places.

- Strengthen the Lakefront - Chicago's great public space
- Develop the Chicago River as a premier public place and continuous open space system
- Create the next generation of urban and neighborhood parks to support the growing population
- Complete the Central Area's framework of richly landscaped streets and boulevards

Connections for Successful Growth

To build on the qualities that make Central Chicago one of the best places in the world to do business, work, live, play, and learn, this plan emphasizes the connections between its three guiding themes. Connections mean that development, transportation, open space, and growth all build upon and support each other.

PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS

People from all parts of the region, the nation and the world will reach the Central Area easily, and move rapidly between its different districts. The plan envisions a city where people will be able to walk or bicycle along the waterfront all the way from Chinatown to North Avenue Beach. Chicago's workforce will be educated near centers of employment, and workers can choose to live near their jobs or reach them easily by public transit.

CONNECTING PEOPLE

The Central Area is a meeting place for people from all over Chicagoland, the nation and the world. It is the heart of a vibrant region, and one of the world's great crossroads. This plan is designed to keep Chicago connected to the world as a center of the global economy with an internationally-renowned quality of life.

The Plan

The following document is organized in 6 chapters.

- Chapters 1 and 2 provide background information about the context for planning and the process, and provide a detailed economic and physical assessment of the Central Area.
- Chapter 3 lays out the vision and three guiding themes of the plan, and sets the stage for Chicago to become the greenest city in America.
- Chapter 4 provides detail on the plan's three guiding themes: Development Framework; Transportation; and Waterfronts and Open Spaces.
- Chapter 5 outlines specific recommendations for the three major districts: the Expanded Loop; the South Loop and Near South; and the Near North. This chapter shows how the vision and guiding themes will shape these geographic areas.
- Chapter 6 outlines implementation strategies.
- Detailed recommendations from task forces on specific issues are included in an appendix.

