

ARMITAGE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR FRAMEWORK PLAN

Working Group Meeting #2 Summary Report – Armitage Industrial Corridor

Background

As part of the ongoing planning initiative to develop a land use framework plan for the Armitage Industrial Corridor (AIC), the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), in collaboration with Greater Northwest Community Development Corporation, UrbanWorks, SB Friedman and numerous key partners, hosted the second of two virtual Working Group sessions on October 28, 2024 from 4:00pm to 5:30pm, with a general discussion extending to 6:00 pm. This session provided an opportunity for working group members consisting of residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to review potential draft strategies and goals for the AIC.

The session was structured to encourage participants to collectively and individually share their ideas and feedback on the draft strategies and goals organized by topic.

The primary objective of this Working Group session was to foster a collaborative dialogue among participants and stakeholders, focusing on shaping strategies for the priority areas identified during Working Group Session #1. The session was organized around four major goals, each accompanied by specific draft strategies aimed at achieving them. Participants were invited to express their perspectives on each goal and the methods they believe would best align with the vision for the Armitage Industrial Corridor.

The session began with introductions from DPD staff and the consultant team, who outlined the roles of the working group members representing various businesses, organizations, and residents. This was followed by a recap of Working Group Session #1, noting what we heard from participants about the AIC. This also included a discussion of the Key Themes, draft goals and strategies for the framework plan. The discussion allowed participants to engage in dialogue and share their insights on each item.

Recap of What We've Heard from Working Group #1 and other engagement efforts

Support existing businesses and attract new businesses

- Continue programs which support existing businesses
- Ensure new businesses are compatible with context & uses of the surrounding area
- Consider negative impacts of businesses on the surrounding neighborhood

Activate vacant buildings in the AIC

- Open to variety of new uses including appropriately scaled mixed-use development, senior housing and business support services

Address environmental issues

- Air and noise pollution, flooding, truck traffic near residential areas

Improve infrastructure

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- Evaluate and improve truck traffic access points to reduce conflicts
- Safer pedestrian crossings and bike lanes
- Landscaped buffers in areas of conflicting uses
- Additional tree plantings on both sides of streets

Large and small businesses find the AIC appealing

- Local workforce availability
- Easy access to transit
- Relatively affordable buildings and rent

Despite a decrease in industrial uses, rising vacancy rates and an aging building stock, the AIC has demonstrated resiliency and adapted

- Industrial businesses continue to invest in and expand their operations (ex. Radio Flyer, Amped Kitchens)
- Recent leasing activity demonstrates demand for small-scale affordable industrial space
- Significant recent investments in institutional uses (schools, community centers) and residential
- Several vacant buildings and parcels remain

Participant Descriptions of AIC

Participants were asked to share three words that best described their vision for the AIC in the next 5 to 10 years. Common words used include:

Safety (3)

Vibrant (2)

Cleanliness

Growth (3)

Sustainable (2)

Destination

Beautification (2)

Prosperity

Thriving

Asset

Mixed use

Green Space

Community -minded

Innovation

Jobs

Access

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Draft Goals and Strategies and Summary of Feedback

Using the data collected from our engagement efforts and the market analysis, the following draft goals and strategies were presented to the Working Group for review and feedback:

1. Encourage and support the AIC to remain an active job center

Strategies

- A) Identify and establish appropriate conversion areas within the PMD boundary that can generate Industrial Corridor System Fee to be used to enhance the AIC (*Land use tools*).
- B) Identify and establish appropriate areas within the Industrial Corridor boundary that can convert to non-industrial uses (*Land use tools*).
- C) Review existing criteria for Planned Manufacturing Districts (PMD) and Industrial Corridors (IC) within Chicago Zoning Code to see how they address environmental issues (*Land use tools*).
- D) Continue to utilize DPD’s economic development incentive programs (TIF, TIF Works, LIRI, SBIF, Community Development Grants, tax incentives) to renovate and expand existing industrial businesses and attract appropriate new businesses to the AIC (*Economic Development Tools*).

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E) Support local job growth and encourage workforce training opportunities through collaboration with schools, businesses, the GNCDL LIRI, and World Business Chicago (WBC) (*Economic Development Tools*).

Highlights of Input Received:

- The deteriorating Zenith plant could accommodate light manufacturing or other uses compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.
- Area #3 (northeast section of the AIC is predominantly residential, and could be evaluated further to determine if that area is appropriate for future industrial uses.
- There is a desire for open space to build community connections.
- Suggestions were made to create business incubators and community kitchens, particularly for the 5501 W Grand space.
- The need for industrial spaces to appear safe and inviting, integrating better with the community, was emphasized.
- Discussions regarding the future of 5401 W Grand and 5501 W Grand is owned by ITW, who is planning on occupying 1 of the 2 buildings next year.
- Concerns were raised regarding environmental and safety issues at the vacant Zenith building 6001 W Dickens.
- Suggestions included potential developments that could incorporate children's spaces, given the proximity to schools.
- There were calls for the establishment of trade schools in the area. Note that Laborer's Training Center is serving the Armitage Industrial Corridor.
- A shift to non-industrial uses was supported due to high vacancy rates, with mixed-use developments viewed as beneficial for the community and tax base.
- Recommendations were made to include community spaces, such as libraries or recreational areas for families and young adults.
- The importance of incubators for small businesses was discussed.
- Development proposals must focus on creating inviting, safe spaces that blend with the existing community fabric while addressing both environmental concerns and the need for economic revitalization.
- Changes to areas like Mars and Zenith are viewed positively for benefiting the neighborhood.
- The need for more jobs and a robust tax base to support community growth was emphasized.
- Navigating the TIF grant process can be challenging; a hotline or chat support for quick questions would be beneficial.
- Not all businesses are aware of available programs; making information easier to access is essential.
- There is a need for grants focused on capital equipment investment.

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- The potential for an incubator that prepares local students for future opportunities through collaboration between schools and industrial hubs is emphasized (similar to what ITW is doing with ITW Speer Academy).
- Community events hosted by local leaders and non-profit organizations aim to engage residents and promote collaboration.
- Smaller nonprofits were valuable resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and could facilitate connections in the community.
- Seasonal festivals and local food markets were suggested as avenues for community engagement.
- Emphasis on integrating technology in after-school programs to introduce students to trade opportunities.
- Partnerships are being developed to place students in local businesses, providing internship opportunities and work experience.
- The Belmont Cragin area, with a significant population under 18, represents an opportunity for targeted training and job placement initiatives.
- Use of TIF funding is important in this area, with a suggestion for improved navigation of the application process.
- Collaboration between schools, businesses, and nonprofits is necessary to enhance job training opportunities.
- There is a call for more communication regarding available incentive programs and job training resources.
- Development should focus on building partnerships that support job training and economic development, ensuring that information about available resources and opportunities is clearly communicated to the community.

Goal 2 - Enhance the character and authentic history of the AIC

Strategies –

- A) Work with community and businesses to document and understand the historic identity of the AIC for both existing buildings and legacy businesses
- B) Explore incentives for preserving historic buildings and assisting legacy businesses

Highlights of Input Received:

- Development should focus on building partnerships that support job training and economic development, ensuring that information about available resources and opportunities is clearly communicated to the community.

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- Collaborate with the community and businesses to document the historic identity of existing buildings and legacy businesses.
- Explore incentives for preserving historic buildings and supporting legacy businesses.
- The JLO Metal Products site at 5841 W. Dickens is permanently closed and could be suitable for adaptive reuse.
- A call was made to identify additional legacy businesses beyond prominent ones like Mars, Radio Flyer, and Meskan.
- Review historical surveys conducted by the city to pinpoint significant buildings in the district for preservation.
- Engage with Historic Preservation agencies to assist in recognizing and documenting historic sites and structures.
- The ITW building at Grand Avenue and Central was highlighted as a significant structure worthy of preservation efforts. As well as Zenith, Meskan, Radio Flyer
- Emphasis on the importance of involving local residents and businesses in the preservation process to foster community pride in the area's history.
- Strong consensus on the need for a systematic approach to document legacy businesses and historic buildings.
- Advocacy for exploring incentives to encourage preservation efforts, recognizing that maintaining the AIC's historical character is essential for its identity and economic vitality.

Goal 3 - Maintain and improve infrastructure in the AIC to support the industrial businesses and surrounding neighborhood

Strategies –

A) Continue to plan for and fund necessary infrastructure improvements that support the businesses & surrounding areas (ex: road, bike lanes, stormwater, and safety improvements)

B) Consider prioritizing the use of landscaping treatments in appropriate areas to buffer conflicting land uses with proceeds from the IC fee

Highlights of Input Received:

- Continue planning for and funding necessary infrastructure improvements, including roads, bike lanes, stormwater management, and safety enhancements.
- Consider prioritizing landscaping treatments to buffer conflicting land uses funded by the infrastructure fee.

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- Areas around Cortland and Narragansett, extending west to Oak Park, experience significant flooding during rain events, impacting accessibility.
- Participants noted that improvements to the sewer system are planned for 2025-2026 as part of the capital improvement plan.
- The Chicago Tree Initiative was highlighted as a potential resource for planting more trees to help absorb stormwater.
- Bioswales and retention ponds were discussed as effective solutions for managing drainage and reducing flooding, with examples noted from Elmwood Park.
- The possibility of implementing green alleys was proposed, where residents can petition for these installations through their Alderman.
- Suggestions were made to include community input on specific infrastructure improvements needed, such as curb cuts, rain gardens, and permeable pavements to mitigate urban heat and manage water runoff effectively.
- The idea of planting fruit trees at Sayre Park was introduced to enhance community green spaces.
- Participants expressed a strong desire for collaborative efforts to enhance infrastructure that supports both industrial businesses and the surrounding community.
- There is a recognition of the need for sustainable practices, such as utilizing permeable surfaces and enhancing green spaces to improve overall resilience against flooding.

Goal 4 Improve communication about activities and opportunities within the AIC between the businesses and surrounding neighborhood

Strategies –

A) Increase environmental sustainability efforts in the AIC and surrounding neighborhood by encouraging newly planted trees in the public right of way, environmental approach to renovation of existing buildings and new construction, and use of renewable power supply

B) Improve community access to projects within the AIC with a website maintained by DPD with links posted on the Alder's and LIRI's website

Highlights of Input Received:

- Increase environmental sustainability efforts by promoting newly planted trees, sustainable renovation practices, and renewable power use.
- Improve community access to AIC projects through a DPD-maintained website with links to Alder and LIRI resources.
- Encourage GNCD (LIRI) to facilitate discussions between property owners to identify alternative access points and routes for trucks to reduce conflicts, example is truck congestion at 1800 block of N Major Ave and will get worse when 1819 N Major is leased up. Trucks blocking access to Startek Glass. Potentially create a new access point from Homer Ave.

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- Foster communication between LIRI, businesses, and residents to address unique issues and strengthen relationships.
- The importance of improving communication through the DPD website was emphasized to keep the community informed about activities and opportunities in the AIC.
- The GNCDL plans to apply for NBDC status to expand outreach to community and entrepreneurial startups.
- Participants were reminded of the Community Development Grant opportunities available for small, medium, and large projects, with deadlines approaching.
- There is a strong desire for enhanced communication and collaboration between the AIC and the surrounding community to address concerns and improve relationships, particularly regarding issues such as truck idling and staging on residential streets.

Additional Discussion

- There was a suggestion to involve DPD's Historic Preservation division and others to assist in architectural preservation plan for the AIC.
- Participants discussed the ongoing flooding issues in the area east of Narragansett, particularly around Cortland and Amundson Park. The need for stormwater management solutions was emphasized, with specific mention of the Green Alley program.
- The Green Alley program was highlighted as a potential tool for improving infrastructure, with each ward eligible for one Green Alley project per year. It was suggested to follow up with local Aldermen to request the AIC is a focus of this initiative.
- Questions arose about utilizing TIF funding and Participatory Budget dollars for green alley projects. Participants were encouraged to contact their Aldermen regarding the use of these funds and whether the ward had previously engaged in green alley projects.
- Participants expressed a desire for clarity regarding the number of projects planned and whether specific streets, particularly those affected by flooding, would be included in future documentation and planning.

Next Steps

The DPD team will continue to refine the preliminary goals and strategies, with plans to host a public meeting in early 2025 to review the updates.

Information regarding stipend payments was provided by UW.

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List of Invitees and attendees

Name	Organization	Type	WG 1 Attendance	WG 2 Attendance
Tom Startek	Star-tech Glass	Business	Yes	Did not attend
Darius Augustine	Alpina Manufacturing	Business	Yes	Yes
Stephanie Lee	Meskan Foundry	Business	Yes	Yes
Cezar Daniel Jordan	Moovers	Business	Yes	Yes
Tom Cesario (CFO)	Radio Flyer	Business	Yes	Yes
Perry Abbasi	Attorney	Business	Yes	Yes
Adam Schneiderman	Strauss Realty	Business	Yes	Yes
Deborah Smith	Strauss Realty	Business	Yes	Did not attend
Norman Hoffberg	Petra & Holum	Business	Yes	Yes
Tom Drebenstedt	Galewood Neighbors Association	Residential	Yes	Yes
Steve Green	Galewood Neighbors Association	Residential	Yes	Yes
Pastor John Zayas	Grace and Peace Church	Residential	Did not attend	Did not attend
Michael D Nardello	Resident	Residential	Did not attend	Yes
Walter Adamczyk	Resident	Residential	Yes	Yes
Dr. Milka Ramirez	En Las Tablas Performing Arts	Residential	Yes	Yes
Andre McKennie	Resident	Residential	Yes	Did not attend
Austin Carr	Intentional Sports	Residential	Yes	Did not attend
Daisy Rivera	Resident	Residential	Yes	Yes
Sarah Cunningham	Galewood Neighbors Association	Residential	Yes	Yes
Charlie Byrne	Galewood Neighbors Association	Residential	Yes	Yes

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Edgar Lara	DPD tech assist - map, scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Eric Van Dreason	DPD tech assist - map, scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Todd Wyatt	DPD speaker, support	DPD	Yes	Yes
Bradley Roback	DPD speaker, support	DPD	Yes	Yes
Brian Hacker	DPD tech assist backup breakout room assignments, scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Carmen Martinez	DPD scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Benji Corpuz	DPD Zoom support, scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Ravi Thakker	UW Zoom support, scribe	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Maria Pellot	UW Speaker, lead Topic 1, 3	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Kari Berg	UW Speaker, lead Topic 1, 3	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Carmen Vidal-Hallett	UW scribe	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Fran Lefor Rood	SBF speaker, lead Topic 2	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Caren Kay	SBF speaker, lead Topic 2	Consultant	Yes	Yes
Josh Langen	DPD scribe	DPD	Yes	Yes
Claudia Perez	LIRI scribe, assist w/ questions	GNCCDC	Yes	Yes
Ryan Richter	CDOT assist w/ questions	CDOT	Yes	Yes
Megan Miller	Metra assist w/ questions	METRA	Yes	Yes
Susan Martinez	CDPH assist w/ questions	CDPH	Yes	Did not attend
Kajie McMullen	29th Taliaferro assist	29th Ward	Yes	Yes
Vanessa Valentin	36th Villegas assist	36th Ward	Yes	Yes
Jason M	CTA	CTA	Yes	Did not attend
Raymond Valadez	36th ward	36th ward	Yes	Did not attend
Emma Mitts	37 th ward	37 th ward	Yes	Did not attend
Jim Harbin	DPD - City	City	Yes	Did not attend
Alaina Bridges	CDOT	CDOT	No	Yes
Liam Purkey	CTA	CTA	No	Yes

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Jalen Boney	World Business Chicago	WBC	No	Yes
Zoe Saphir	World Business Chicago	WBC	No	Yes
Carla Agostinelli	West Central Assoc (Chamber)	WBC	No	Yes