

ARMITAGE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR FRAMEWORK PLAN

SUMMARY REPORT - OPEN HOUSE FEBRUARY 4, 2025

February 11, 2025

Background

As part of the ongoing effort to develop a land use framework plan for the Armitage Industrial Corridor (AIC), the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), in collaboration with the Greater Northwest Community Development Corporation and key partners, hosted an open house at Radio Flyer HQ on Tuesday, February 4th, 2025 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. DPD sent emails to our contact database, sent postcards to all addresses within the AIC, and distributed electronic flyers to Aldermen Taliaferro (29th Ward), Villegas (36th Ward) and Mitts (37th Ward) and Greater Northwest Chicago Development Corporation (GNCDC).

A project website, hosted by DPD, contains all past meeting materials as well as the meeting flyer for this open house meeting: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/armitage-industrial-corridor-planning/home.html>.

The purpose of the open house was to summarize the outreach conducted so far, present draft goals and strategies, and gather valuable community feedback. This input will help refine the final goals and strategies and contribute to completing the overall AIC plan document.

This event marked the final public meeting in a public outreach series that began with the AIC kickoff open house in July. Throughout the process, multiple engagement opportunities were provided, including participation in community events like Galewoodstock, an Industrial Business Council (IBC) meeting, and two work group sessions. These efforts were designed to collect community input on the draft goals and strategies that were then presented at the open house.

Alder Taliaferro opened the event with welcoming remarks, setting the stage for discussions on the draft recommendations for the Armitage Industrial Corridor Plan. Following this, DPD staff delivered a brief presentation outlining the proposed goals and strategies while emphasizing the importance of attendee participation.

The draft goals and strategies are the following:

1. Support the AIC as a vital job center while adapting to changing market conditions
 - a. Expand the list of permitted and similar uses within PMD 15 to encourage redevelopment of vacant/ underutilized properties
 - b. Allow for a variety of uses in areas within the Industrial Corridor, outside of PMD 15, to encourage redevelopment of vacant/ underutilized properties
 - c. Propose rezoning the Mars site to its pre-PMD zoning designation and create a Conversion Area to allow for collection of fees for the IC System Fund
 - d. Prioritize use of Industrial Corridor Fee from Mars conversion for infrastructure or environmental mitigation improvements within the AIC

- e. Use existing financial incentives to support existing businesses and attract new businesses to the AIC (e.g., TIF, TIF Works, SBIF, IC System Fund, Community Development Grants, tax abatement incentives)
 - f. Encourage workforce training programs and partnerships between local schools, businesses, and community organizations including GNCCDC, World Business Chicago and other community-based non-profits
2. Enhance infrastructure to improve mobility, safety and sustainability
 - a. Continue planning, funding, and improving transportation, stormwater systems, and safety features
 - b. Pursue opportunities for vehicular access that reduce conflicts between the industrial corridor and surrounding residential areas
3. Preserve the historic identity of the Armitage Industrial Corridor
 - a. Collaborate with the community and businesses to highlight the corridor's historic identity
 - b. Promote building improvements, sustainable techniques, and renewable energy using incentives like TIF, SBIF, 6B tax abatement, and Community Development Grants where applicable
4. Improve communication between businesses and the community
 - a. Improve access to project information through DPD's website with links to resources on the Alder's and GNCCDC's platforms
 - b. Encourage open communication between GNCCDC, businesses, and residents, with support from City departments and officials, to tackle challenges in the AIC
 - c. Promote the establishment of a Neighborhood Business Development Center in the area to expand outreach to local entrepreneurs and businesses

Highlights of feedback received

64 people attended the open house and learned about the draft goals and strategies. Here is a summary of the feedback we heard from the community members that attended:

Transportation & Infrastructure

- The Metra rail system is underutilized; better signage (including bilingual options), advertising, and improved entrances—especially at Grand Ave and Hanson Park—could increase ridership. Suggestions included adding more frequent service at the Mars stop and promoting connections from the neighborhood to both downtown Chicago and out to Elgin
- Trains stopping at Oak Park Ave and Narragansett cause major traffic delays, with Austin Ave being the only underpass. Residents suggested improved pedestrian and bike access, including better wayfinding with Spanish language signage
- Expanding bicycle infrastructure, improving walkability, and connecting transit options (e.g., linking Metra with Oak Park Ave between North and Grand) were emphasized

- Strong support for extending the 606 Trail westward to improve access and connectivity
- The north side of Armitage near the Mars factory lacks sidewalks, curbs, and gutters, requiring improvements

Development & Land Use

- Strong community interest in repurposing the Mars site for public use—suggestions included a library, green space, arts education facilities (like Old Town School of Folk Music), and entertainment spaces. Concerns about industrial uses and opposition to additional housing developments were noted
- Zenith is considered an eyesore and safety concern, with calls for redevelopment into mixed-use office space, a community asset, or demolition. Some residents suggested maintaining industrial use due to its proximity to rail access. Others suggested redeveloping the building into a multi-tenant facility rather than a single business
- Interest in attracting arts and cultural organizations, with comparisons to the National Museum of Mexican Art, Pike Place Market (Seattle), and Rosemont Entertainment Center. A walkable entertainment district was suggested
- Encouragement of small-scale sustainable manufacturing, local hiring, and professional development opportunities. Requests for incentives for industrial retention and business growth
- Calls for interactive art installations celebrating industrial history, branding to make the area more welcoming, and greater involvement of schools and local institutions

Community & Social Priorities

- Strong opposition to new apartment buildings due to concerns about school overcrowding and loss of industrial jobs. However, some support for more housing options, including apartments, was noted
- Calls for soccer fields, an interactive garden, a conservatory (similar to Garfield Park), an urban farm, and roller/ice skating rinks. A recreation center was suggested as an alternative to more housing
- Desire for a robust community process in Mars site redevelopment to avoid automatic approval of developer proposals. Support for a community benefits agreement
- Continued flooding at Nashville is raising concerns about the structural integrity of nearby buildings (Petra & Hollum); street improvements are scheduled for 2026

Economic & Business Considerations

- Desire to maintain industrial land near rail access, attract manufacturing (e.g., electric car parts factory), and provide space for small service providers. Concerns about industrial-to-residential conversion being irreversible

- Interest in attracting small businesses, cafes, and quick-stop shops near train stations. Some residents requested penalties for landlords of abandoned properties
- Calls for professional development opportunities, including involvement from colleges and trade schools. Suggestions to recognize local industrial labor history

The key themes emerged from the feedback:

- Stronger transit connections and bike/pedestrian-friendly improvements
- Balanced redevelopment with a mix of business, cultural, and recreational spaces
- Community-led planning with transparency and long-term sustainability
- Preserving industrial jobs while enhancing neighborhood livability

Next steps

The public input will help refine the AIC plan's goals and strategies and support the development of the final document. An informational meeting with the Chicago Plan Commission is scheduled for March 20th to present the plan, with a draft release targeted for April 1st and adoption anticipated by May 15th, 2025.

Transcribed comment board submissions:

- Soccer dome and green space
- No more apartment buildings
- Maybe quik stops, cafes right next to train drop off
- Conservatory similar to Garfield Park or Oak Park
- Can we attract the arts like National Museum of Mexican art or Polish art
- Would like to see something similar to the Rosemont Entertainment Center!
- Urban living and green space is good
- Library
- Converting industrial to residential is a poor choice because that chance can never be reversed, causing more school overcrowding and no opportunity for working near where we live
- No apartments – Only business and recreation for community that already exists
- Is micro manufacturing being taken into consideration i.e. Mhub, Workshop 4200
- Library – No apartments – Like greenspace – Leave Mars façade
- Interactive garden
- Mars should cancel their plans and keep the factory active
- Would like to see walkable entertainment district – less residential – no more community centers
- Can we have an opportunity to have an urban farm / green house?

- Do not forget small bay industrial 5000 Sq ft less than 10% of new construction – Small service provider need space – JLB BRIT Properties
- How will these spaces encourage professional development? (Variety of roles, opportunity for growth, skills development, etc.) – Involving colleges, trade schools, etc.
- The arts for children and adults
- No more apartment buildings
- Turn Mars in to something like Pike Place market on Seattle or Findlay Market in Cincy
- More housing options including apartments density
- Hoping we can keep the industrial corridor for as much manufacturing as possible and lure companies to the area!
- Zenith is 10 ¾ acres abandoned
- Zenith plant is dangerous and eyesore
- Large sites near rail should be maintained contiguous and marketed to medium industry who need rail access
- Dining and entertainment district, as well as small companies creating more jobs
- Something similar to the Old Town School of Folk Music!
- I am happy to see the nature and green production areas at the Mars site
- Recreation – Maybe a recreation center – Roller skating rink – Ice skating rink
- Manufacturing – Electrical car parts factory
- There should be a penalty for abandoned properties left and unused by owners
- Community benefits agreement
- Area 3 – Future use should also include small scale sustainable manufacturing – JLB BRIT properties
- No schools or apartments – More community center institution? Like the Old Town School of Folk Music. Garden/ trail
- Consideration must be given to incremental development. Small projects = large improvements – JLB BRIT Properties
- How can we make it so that wayfinding in the community is available in Spanish with this plan
- Bike friendly streets
- Increase Metra @ Mars service schedule
- Bicycle infrastructure and connect to 606
- Option 3 preserve access to Austin from Narragansett – Only under tracks route when trains stuck
- Metra – Bilingual signage, promote entrance locations especially on Grand / Central (signage of Grand)
- Promote that Metra takes you downtown and/or out to Elgin
- How will these opportunity areas provide uses that encourage the use of public transportation?
- Full time Metra stop @ Mars
- How will the AIC connect to surrounding areas, particularly Grand Ave? Walkways to encourage pedestrian traffic?
- Metra – social media advertising to promote Metra within neighborhood

- More bicycle infrastructure in the corridor
- Please connect mass transit with Oak Park Ave between North and Grand
- Bike and walking friendly
- Extend 606 all the way to Oak Park Ave
- Access to focus area 2 would need to be managed well around senior center & Shriners children's hospital
- Is there a local hiring requirement? Local procurement?
- Bike/ rollerblade trail
- How will employees be highlighted in history? Unionizing efforts, personal history
- Can there be an interactive art installation that talks about the history of industrial area
- What community branding will be considered to make the area more welcoming?
- How can we get the schools more involved?
- More ways to keep the community engaged

