

New Back of the Yards Library

Frequently Asked Questions

How did we get here?

Thanks to the efforts of community stakeholders and State Representative Theresa Mah, Chicago Public Library (CPL) received \$15 million to build a new branch library in Back of the Yards. Over the past year, the City has sought input and ideas from the community to help shape the future library and ensure that it meets the needs of library users.

CPL, with help from the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and the Office of the Mayor, have engaged the community in a number of ways, including a survey that received more than 300 responses, nine neighborhood roundtable meetings, and a listening session. A Visioning Workshop in September 2022 offered another opportunity for the community to provide input on a new library. The ideas articulated at previous events, as well as the September Workshop, have helped to guide the site selection process of the new library in Back of the Yards.

SITE SELECTION

What different sites were considered when deciding on a location for a new library?

Nearly a dozen sites were considered in Back of the Yards for the new branch library. At the end of this document is a summary of those sites and the pros and cons of each.

When will a site be selected for the new library?

After an extensive search for potential sites, and a year of community engagement, CPL has decided to locate in a mixed-use building being developed on the site of the former Aronson's Furniture Store, located at 4630 S. Ashland Avenue. The library will have its own entrance, open space, and dedicated parking spaces, will provide a full set of programs and offerings, and will be physically separated from the rest of the development. The remainder of the building will include offices for local nonprofits, retail space, community gathering space, a theater, and apartments that will be affordable at local income levels.

Why are you considering a mixed-use option instead of a stand-alone library?

Through the community engagement process, residents expressed their preference for both stand-alone and mixed-use library options. At the September Visioning Workshop that the City conducted, of those who expressed an opinion on the development model for the new library (stand-alone versus mixed-use) roughly half wanted to see a stand-alone building; the other half wanted the library to be located in a mixed-use building. Others did not express a strong preference either way and were more concerned with what types of programming and services the new library would provide.

There are a number of other benefits to a mixed-use location:

- It is more cost-effective to locate in a larger development
- It provides a built-in base of patrons when located with housing
- Being co-located with other services and organizations can enhance programming
- Mixed-use means more users and activity, which improves safety
- Some amenities can still be used by the community when the library is closed

Isn't building another mixed-use or co-located library just repeating the past? How would this be different from the current co-location in Back of the Yards High School?

It is important to stress that no matter where the library is located, what is being developed will be a full-sized, full-service library that offers expanded services and programming from previous locations. CPL understands that previous library offerings in Back of the Yards have not met the community's needs, and that residents are concerned that another co-located library will similarly not meet their needs. Previous libraries in Back of the Yards (both the former storefront location and current high school location) were smaller and did not offer the same level of amenities that the proposed new one will. The new library being developed will be spatially larger, and provide a full range of programming and services, regardless of whether it is located in a mixed-use development, or a stand-alone site. Additionally, CPL will own the library space, and there will be parking spaces dedicated to the library, regardless of whether it is in a mixed-use development or stand-alone.

What is the benefit of constructing the library in a central location?

CPL is committed to ensuring the new library is in a location that is safe and accessible to the broader Back of the Yards neighborhood and New City community. A more central location means more residents can access the library on foot or public transit, and a higher level of pedestrian and commercial activity around the library will also improve safety.

In addition to access and safety concerns, locating the library closer to other INVEST South-West investments helps to leverage the activity and users of these new businesses, services and residents, and will provide a deeper user base, given new housing units that are planned. Visitors to the library can take advantage of neighboring shopping and social service opportunities, and greater activity and visibility will discourage crime.

Why hasn't CPL developed any stand-alone models for consideration in Back of the Yards?

In fact, CPL has not developed any models at all, neither stand-alone nor mixed-use, for consideration. The concept for the Aronson's site was developed by a private developer and architect in a way that would provide space for a new library. Due to differences in potential sites and costs, CPL could not develop a design and program for the new library until a site had been selected. Past engagement has provided input that will help shape the final design and programming of the library, and future engagement is planned to continue to shape the library.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What sort of community engagement has the City conducted to inform this process?

Community engagement included a survey that received more than 300 responses, nine neighborhood roundtable meetings, and a listening session. A Visioning Workshop in September offered another opportunity for the community to provide input on a new library. The ideas articulated at previous events, as well as the September Workshop, have helped to guide the design and programming of the new library in Back of the Yards.

CPL has ensured that all materials and community engagement sessions have been bilingual and provided support for Spanish-speaking residents and stakeholders and has also tried to ensure that engagement is inclusive of all voices in the community. Outreach was conducted through mailing lists, social media, flyers, word-of-mouth, and through partner organizations in the community.

What stakeholder groups were engaged in the process?

Engaged groups include community members, INVEST South-West roundtable members, local businesses, social service agencies, community groups, and government agencies. The City conducted a survey between December 10, 2021 and January 10, 2022, both online and paper, that received 318 responses; held a listening session at the Davis Square Fieldhouse on July 26, 2022, that was attended by 80 stakeholders; held a visioning workshop at Back of the Yards High School on September 26, 2022, that was attended by 110 stakeholders, and presented and discussed the project at nine INVEST South-West neighborhood roundtables between November 2021 and November 2022.

How will the community continue to participate in the decision-making process around the new library?

CPL will launch a Stakeholder Advisory Group in the next month that will be engaged throughout design, construction and even after the library opens, to help shape decisions around programming and design.

What is the purpose of the Stakeholder Advisory Group?

The purpose of the Stakeholder Advisory Group is to establish a regular touchpoint with key implementation stakeholders and community members dedicated to the successful construction of a new library in Back of the Yards. It is also meant to keep critical stakeholders involved throughout the process to troubleshoot and resolve challenges. Finally, the Stakeholder Advisory Group provides another means of getting information out to the broader community.

Who will be responsible for hiring library employees? Will CPL prioritize hiring members of the community?

The library staff from the current Back of the Yards branch would move to the new location and any additional employees will be hired through the City of Chicago's hiring process. CPL posts jobs at chicago.gov throughout the year. Part-time page applicants are prioritized by zip code.

PROGRAMMING

What sorts of amenities and programming will be offered at the new library?

The new library will offer programs including early learning skill building for teens, English as a Second Language (ESL), financial literacy, STEM/STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics), Teacher in the Library, and others.

Will there be enough parking for staff and patrons?

CPL expects parking spaces to be available for library staff and patrons. In addition, one of the benefits of being in a central location in the community means more patrons can access the library on-foot or via transit.

Will the green space outside of the library be accessible for library patrons and the broader community, or will it be private to building residents?

The current design provides open space that is dedicated for the library itself, as well as open space that is accessible to both patrons and the broader community.

Will the library have its own security apart from the housing and rest of the building? Will security be available 24/7 or only while the library is open?

The library will have security during its hours of operation and works with the Chicago Police Department to ensure facilities are safe. The operator of the rest of the development anticipates having separate security for the property.

How will the space be divided between the library and the other services in the building?

During the engagement process, the community requested that there be an entirely separate entrance for the library. The developer and CPL have agreed to this and have also agreed that the space will be owned by CPL.

How will green space be integrated into the project?

The developer has committed to provide open space that is dedicated to library users, in addition to public green space that library patrons will also be able to enjoy.

Why is CPL diverting state funding to a housing development that does not align with CPL's model to increase CHA (public housing) units?

The mixed-use model in fact does align with CPL's model for new library development in Chicago neighborhoods. The proposed housing units would not be affiliated with the Chicago Housing Authority and would not be public housing. It would be housing available to local residents and affordable at income levels in the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

TIMING & NEXT STEPS



Why has it taken so long to build a new library in Back of the Yards?

In order to provide a library that meets the needs of the community, a robust community engagement process had to be completed. For instance, there were multiple considerations that needed to be reviewed to determine a site location such as building type/suitability, land acquisition, environmental issues, location accessibility, and others. The various community engagement opportunities provided additional information for decision makers to consider. The concerns expressed by the community regarding previous library offerings in the neighborhood influenced the robust community engagement process taken on by CPL with DPD and the Office of the Mayor. While the construction of this new library is a priority, the new Back of the Yards Library is also one of various endeavors currently taken on by CPL.

Site Selection (continued from page 1)

Several locations were explored for the library. For various reasons, these sites proved a poor match for a potential location, whether it was due to site size, cost, or remediation needs. In the end, the central location of the Aronson’s site made it the most attractive. The Aronson’s site also benefits from the ability to leverage built-in partnerships with other services and housing included in the mixed-use development.

The table below provides an overview of some of the sites in Back of the Yards that were considered for a new library, as well as a short explanation of why each site was not selected.

Site Location	Site Image	Reason Not Selected
<p>1400 W. 47th Street <i>Bishop Plaza</i></p>		<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient size - On commercial corridor - Existing building <p>Why not selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires site acquisition - Too large, and property owner unwilling to sell a portion of the site
<p>4612 S. McDowell Avenue</p>		<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquisition cost low - No demolition required <p>Why not selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires site acquisition - Not on a commercial corridor

1515 S. Justine Street



- Pros:
- City-owned land
 - On commercial corridor
 - Central location

- Why not selected:
- Site too small
 - Identified for another development project

4701 S. Damen Avenue
Former Checkers



- Pros:
- On commercial corridor
 - Proximity to high school

- Why not selected:
- Site too small
 - Requires demolition
 - Requires site acquisition

4700 S. Ashland Avenue
Goldblatt Building



- Pros:
- Central location
 - Sufficient size
 - Existing building

- Why not selected:
- Space not available
 - Requires a lease; CPL prioritizes owning the space

4410-4428 S. Ashland Avenue



Pros:
- Sufficient size
- On commercial corridor

Why not selected:
- Requires site acquisition
- Location not central; too far north
- Requires significant environmental remediation

1812-1820 W. 47th Street



Pros:
- On commercial corridor
- Central location

Why not selected:
- Site too small
- Requires demolition
- Requires site acquisition

4751-4765 S. Ashland Avenue



Pros:
- On commercial corridor
- Central location

Why not selected:
- Site too small
- Requires demolition
- Requires site acquisition
- Easement issue with school to the east
- Would displace existing businesses

1924 S. Wolcott Avenue



- Pros:
- City-owned
 - Large site

- Why not selected:
- Significant environmental remediation required
 - Location not central

4517 S. Ashland Avenue
Immaculate Heart



- Pros:
- On commercial corridor
 - Adaptive reuse of a contributing building

- Why not selected:
- Site too small
 - Requires site acquisition
 - Not yet decommissioned by the Catholic Church

4630 S. Ashland Avenue
Former Aronson's



- Pros:
- On commercial corridor
 - Central location
 - Sufficient size