

EAST GARFIELD PARK: Growing a Healthy Community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EAST GARFIELD PARK

DOUGLAS PARK

East Garfield Park



Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance (GPCA)

Planning Task Force Chairs

We thank the more than 400 residents, community leaders, business owners and service providers of East Garfield Park, as well as our West Side neighbors in Austin, Humboldt Park, Near West, North Lawndale and West Garfield Park, and supporters from across the city who shared their stories and dreams and expertise with us and with each other. Their ideas, time and effort were invaluable in developing this plan, and this community will be much richer because of their contributions.

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During the winter of 1994, hundreds of exotic plants at the Garfield Park Conservatory froze and died when inside temperatures plunged to 25 degrees, the result of deferred maintenance, vandalism and neglect. Some outside the community thought it best to close the nearly century-old facility, but community and environmental leaders registered strong opposition and the Chicago Park District ultimately invested \$8 million for rehabilitation.

Out of the focus groups that rallied for the Conservatory's life, the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance (GPCA) was founded to establish the Conservatory as a neighborhood anchor. The Alliance helped attract a \$1.4 million grant from the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest fund to begin community and cultural programming and a subsequent \$1.4 million from the federal Empowerment Zone program to create public spaces for programs and events. The Alliance has helped the Conservatory become a premier destination for schoolchildren, gardeners and others interested in plants, horticulture and the environment.

The Alliance's strategic mission is to "grow community through the unique combination of people, plants and place." It has established community-linked programs and events, supported the Conservatory's collections and facilities and encouraged a "green revolution" in the community. Partners include the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener plant information clinic and

13-week training program, GreenNet; a coalition of greening-oriented nonprofit and public agencies that work together to preserve and improve green space in Chicago; and Growing Power, which offers a farm-to-city market basket that provides fresh produce grown by local farmers. These groups were also partners as the Alliance established a city-lot-sized, volunteer-staffed demonstration garden for community gardeners.

The Alliance is working with the Chicago Park District on two major initiatives:

- **Garfield Market Place** Anchored by the CityEscape garden center, Growing Power farm stand, and African Arts and Objects specialty gift shop, the Market Place includes vendors and artists selling gifts, artwork, plants, gardening accessories and food. It has attracted more than 50,000 visitors, generated \$175,000 in sales and hosted music events that showcase community talent.
- **New exhibit** The Alliance will design and help to install *Sugar from the Sun*, an interactive photosynthesis exhibit supported by the National Science Foundation. The exhibit will redefine how conservatories can be used to teach, inspire appreciation for plants and impact family learning.

The Alliance is committed to supporting an organic redevelopment of the neighborhood that transcends gentrification, enables longtime residents to stay and improves the quality of life throughout the community.

An Attractive, Family-Friendly and Vibrant Community

“Where there is no vision, the people perish...”



New housing can revitalize the community and help attract new retail stores.

As a diverse community of stakeholders, we envision that East Garfield Park will become an attractive, vibrant, family-friendly community whose residents are empowered and fully engaged in its sustainability.

The neighborhood will provide for our physical needs and also enrich our lives through its cultural heritage and inherent beauty and charm.

Our community will be characterized by attractive historic parks and cultural assets; quality homes with well-tended greenways and gardens; safe streets; a thriving and pedestrian-friendly business and retail district; excellent schools and educational opportunities for children and adults; healthy and creative recreation for teens; dependable city services; and convenient, accessible public transportation. Our neighborhood will be home to vibrant families, skilled professionals, hard-working citizens, active churches and many block clubs.

While we welcome community development, diversity and change, we also believe in respecting and protecting the rights of long-standing residents and businesses. They have weathered difficult times and should be full participants in the community's economic and social revitalization.

KEY PROJECTS



Expand educational options

Develop youth leadership, mentoring opportunities

Retain businesses and create jobs

Develop infill housing

Create vibrant retail districts

Redevelop Rockwell Gardens

Support arts and culture

Convene Garfield Park Community Development Council

Reuse vacant land

Maintain historic character

Preserve open space



Growing Neighborhood Seeks Role in Development



Historic homes on the community's boulevards are a notable strength.

Minutes away from downtown Chicago and well-served by transit lines and highways, our historic West Side neighborhood has caught the attention of developers and investors—and it is changing fast. This plan is our blueprint for managing and being a part of that change.

Named for the 185-acre park that serves as its western border, East Garfield Park is a 130-year-old community with big landmarks like the Golden Dome fieldhouse and Garfield Park Conservatory, and smaller ones like Edna's Restaurant on Madison, beautiful greystone homes and a mosaic-clad elevated station on the CTA Green Line.

Built to house workers in nearby factory corridors, East Garfield Park grew to a crowded peak of 70,000 people in 1950. Today, with far fewer factory jobs nearby and thousands of housing units lost over the years, there are just 20,800 people here—and 1,750 vacant lots. This represents an opportunity because it means we can build a new community that serves existing residents, honors its past and welcomes newcomers.

East Garfield Park has a unique potential to become a “green” neighborhood where gardens, landscape businesses and environmental land uses are commonplace. It can be a center of arts and culture as well, and a diverse community where people of many incomes

and backgrounds become neighbors. With its strong transportation resources and a growing population—new housing is going up on many streets already—the neighborhood can also support vibrant retail clusters to serve both neighborhood residents and those passing through.

Achieving this vision will require a new framework for discussing development issues and making decisions about what is best for the community. That is the first strategy of this plan: to create a Garfield Park Community Development Council. Much more will also be needed, from ambitious land-use planning to academic improvements at local schools, stronger opportunities for our youth and healthier individuals and families.

This plan provides a vision for what is possible and lays out eight strategies for achieving our goals. We encourage continued participation of the more than 400 people who contributed to this plan, and welcome new participants to join us as we work to shape a healthy and strong East Garfield Park.

STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS

STRATEGY 1 Create a framework for locally managed community development and enhance the capacity of residents and organizations to participate in that development.

- 1.1** Convene a Garfield Park Community Development Council.
- 1.2** Develop and publish a community resource guide.
- 1.3** Identify or establish community development, social service and organizing entities to capture the resources necessary to implement this quality-of-life plan.

STRATEGY 2 Establish a land-use framework to balance housing and commercial development, environmental uses and property ownership opportunities for residents.

- 2.1** Publicize the land-use framework developed for this plan and promote the framework as a guideline for development.
- 2.2** Develop strategies for re-use of the estimated 1,750 private and city-owned vacant lots in East Garfield Park.
- 2.3** Coordinate streetscape and landscape upgrades to establish a quality neighborhood image.
- 2.4** Increase and promote land and home ownership opportunities for community residents.
- 2.5** Preserve open/green spaces in the midst of land development.
- 2.6** Promote environmental stewardship and capitalize on the “green” resources and character of the community.

STRATEGY 3 Create and maintain affordable, quality housing options to accommodate needs of current residents and a socio-economically diverse population.

- 3.1** Manage growth and gentrification while addressing the need to rebuild positive relationships among neighbors.
- 3.2** Establish a housing resource center to address needs of homeowners and renters.
- 3.3** Promote development of high-quality in-fill housing to increase the local population, which in turn will attract new retail development.
- 3.4** Adopt design standards for new construction and promote the use of environmentally friendly technology.
- 3.5** Promote rehabilitation rather than demolition of all viable housing stock to preserve the quality and character of the community.
- 3.6** Create and promote housing options for the most vulnerable members of the community.
- 3.7** Promote local homeownership for residents and people who work in the area.

STRATEGY 4 Create revitalized and walkable business districts; strengthen and support local businesses; and develop opportunities for living-wage jobs.

- 4.1** Re-establish Madison Street as the community’s retail “Main Street.”
- 4.2** Develop Lake Street as a unique mixed-use “Green Corridor.”

4.3 Coordinate and expand city services, public transportation and infrastructure investment.

4.4 Ensure that local residents can benefit economically from community development.

4.5 Increase the prominence and visibility of the Garfield Market Place at the Conservatory Campus.

4.6 Revitalize and strengthen small-business owners, employers and entrepreneurs.

4.7 Develop a knowledgeable, competent workforce.

4.8 Improve relationships between local businesses and residents.

STRATEGY 5 Increase academic performance and expectation of excellence for students; develop and promote unique, quality educational options; and enhance adult learning opportunities.

5.1 Develop a Garfield Park “Educators Network.”

5.2 Re-establish a “Parents as Teachers First” program for area schools.

5.3 Develop a wider range of educational choices among elementary and high schools.

5.4 Develop anger management/conflict resolution programs geared toward students, parents and teachers.

5.5 Create one or more “community schools” that are open afternoons, evenings and weekends.

5.6 Establish community-based mentoring programs.

5.7 Create learning opportunities for adults.

5.8 Establish a neighborhood program that rewards academic achievements of young people and adults.

STRATEGY 6 Support community artists and build on local cultural assets to enhance the image of the community.

6.1 Develop a Garfield Park cultural arts coalition that promotes and expands the neighborhood’s arts offerings.

6.2 Emphasize art, culture and greening as core attributes of the neighborhood.

6.3 Develop a cultural arts “multiplex” facility to nurture the arts.

6.4 Utilize local artists to incorporate neighborhood culture and public art into community improvement projects.

STRATEGY 7 Support and promote the holistic health and well-being of the East Garfield Park community and its residents.

7.1 Use organizing to build community leadership and accountability.

7.2 Improve or expand services and programs that create healthy individuals and families.

7.3 Build on existing community plans to maximize assets and resources, minimize duplication and strengthen relationships.

7.4 Improve relationships between community residents and local police.

7.5 Create a safer environment on neighborhood streets and around schools and senior citizen buildings.

7.6 Promote the “power of green” by educating residents and others about the broad range of benefits that “greening” can bring.

STRATEGY 8 Engage youth in the life of the community and in every level of program planning and development.

8.1 Develop a forum to support positive interactions between youth and youth workers.

8.2 Create opportunities for leadership development and civic engagement.

8.3 Expand opportunities for recreation and creative expression.

8.4 Establish apprenticeships, internships, job-readiness programs, career counseling and job placement for youth.

8.5 Address health, safety and well-being issues of community youth.

8.6 Develop an annual youth leadership convention.

New Communities Program

NCP is a long-term initiative of Local Initiatives Support Corporation/Chicago to support comprehensive community development in Chicago neighborhoods. It seeks to rejuvenate challenged communities, bolster those in danger of losing ground and preserve the diversity of areas in the path of gentrification. Each effort is led by a neighborhood-based lead agency that coordinates programs among other local organizations and citywide support groups.

The program gives each of the lead agencies several resources: two full-time staff positions (an NCP director and organizer), technical support for planning and documenting the planning process, a pool of loan and grant funds distributed on a competitive basis for project seed money, and opportunities for learning from both peers and subject-area experts.

All NCP neighborhoods spend their first year undertaking a structured community planning process that leads to the quality-of-life plan, then move on to implementation. They are encouraged to be “doing while planning,” undertaking short-term “Early Action Projects” such as launching a youth program, opening an employment center, creating public art or sponsoring local health fairs.

NCP is designed to strengthen communities from within—through planning, organizing and human development. The comprehensive approach is designed to help broaden opportunities for local residents through better education, broader housing choices, safer streets, stronger personal finances and new economic opportunities. The strengthened community is better equipped to take advantage of larger market forces, attract new investment and enhance the overall quality of life.

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