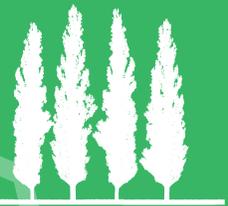
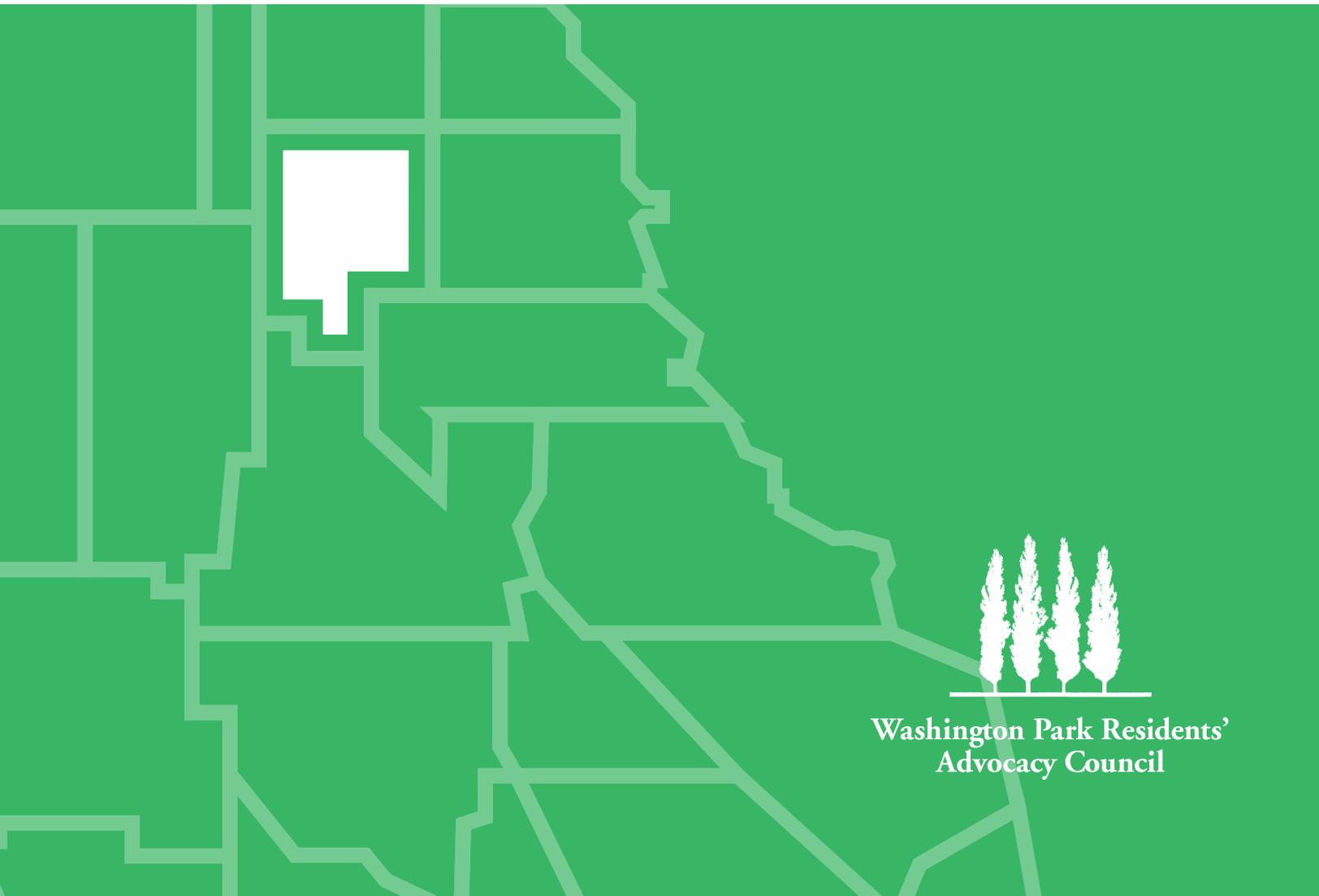




THE WASHINGTON PARK HOUSING DATA PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

AUGUST 2020



Washington Park Residents'
Advocacy Council

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**Washington Park Residents’
Advocacy Council**

The Washington Park Residents’ Advocacy Council (WPRAC) advocates for the residents of Washington Park (Community Area 40) in the areas of housing, education, economic development, safety, health and wellness, community empowerment, and sustainability. WPRAC’s mission is centered on Washington Park residents building and sustaining the community through knowledge, skills, resources, values, and commitments.

A LETTER FROM THE COMMUNITY

Dear Reader,

As the leader of Washington Park Residents' Advocacy Council (WPRAC), I am pleased to share the enclosed report, designed to help inform and guide the future of a Chicago community that I and many others proudly call home and work hard to improve every day.

Washington Park is a Black community on the South Side of Chicago with a rich history and spirited group of residents who seek positive change in our community, while also preserving our past. We are proud of our community's history and assets—a beautiful 372-acre park, historic homes, wide boulevards, vibrant churches, and cultural treasures such as the DuSable Museum of African American History and the annual Bud Billiken Parade, still the largest Black parade in the nation.

We also have great respect for our future, as reflected by our “Respect Life” campaign, launched in partnership with the Washington Park Advisory Council in 2016. The campaign, which is intended to build connectedness and increase peace through “Respect Life” signage posted throughout the neighborhood, is a visual reminder of what is often missing in our daily obligations: R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Respect for ourselves, our families, friends, neighbors, and our community.

Our community is excited to welcome the Obama Presidential Center to Chicago's South Side, recognizing the extraordinary opportunities this world-class anchor institution promises to bring to its host community of Woodlawn and neighboring communities including Washington Park. On the eve of this development, WPRAC believes that now is the time to harness this momentum and use it to build on our community's many assets and strengthen its future.

After reviewing a recent study conducted by Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors (WECAN) to help plan for Woodlawn's future, WPRAC approached the University of Chicago Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) to seek support for a similar study for Washington Park—a study to help determine the facts about current community conditions and guide plans for our community's future. The resulting partnership with the

University builds on previous work we have done together in Washington Park and leverages institutional resources to potentially support and catalyze the recommendations in this plan going forward.

Through participation in OCE's Community Programs Accelerator (CPA), WPRAC secured resources and partners to help collect, analyze and interpret detailed housing and other vital neighborhood data. WPRAC then used this data and analysis to identify challenges, opportunities, strategies, and recommendations for Washington Park's next chapter. Not surprisingly, we found that Washington Park has its own unique challenges and opportunities, different from other nearby communities.

Today, I share a summary of this important work and a loud call for action to partner with others at this critical juncture to make this plan a reality. Over the years, our community has seen or produced many reports and community plans. Yet, most have gathered dust on the shelves. This time, we intend to act—paving the way for a stronger future, while preserving our history and protecting our present.

Cecilia A. Butler
President
Washington Park Residents' Advocacy Council

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The “South Side Housing Data Initiative: Washington Park Project” is intended to build on the many strengths of the Washington Park community by identifying key housing-related challenges in the community through intensive data collection and analysis, and recommending policies to address those challenges.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS

The project consisted of the Washington Park Parcel Survey, integrated with analysis from more than 20 publicly available datasets. This resulted in detailed parcel-level data, maps of community conditions, and five key findings:

- **Neighborhood Hypervacancy:** Washington Park exists in a state of severe hypervacancy, with more than 170 acres of inactive property in the form of vacant lots, vacant homes, and other vacant structures. Although the staggering degree of vacancy can signal a challenging loss of market confidence, over 50% of this vacant land is publicly-owned, representing a prime opportunity for community redevelopment.
- **Financially Vulnerable Renters:** Washington Park is primarily a community of low-income renters, of whom 58% are housing-cost burdened, paying more than 30% of their income toward rent. The community also has a higher residential rental vacancy rate and higher eviction rate than the rest of the city, reflecting the financial vulnerability of existing residents.
- **Very Low Homeownership Rate:** Only 13% of Washington Park residents are homeowners, of whom 40% are burdened by housing costs, further impacting neighborhood stability.
- **Lack of Private Development Despite South Side Growth:** While adjacent neighborhoods have experienced increased private development activity in recent years, Washington Park has been largely left behind. Although the market has begun to slowly move, data shows limited development activity in the neighborhood.
- **Unhealthy Built Environment:** Health outcomes in Washington Park are among the worst on Chicago’s South Side, and challenges in the built environment likely aggravate poor health conditions for residents.

SUMMARY OF WASHINGTON PARK RESIDENTS’ ADVOCACY COUNCIL’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Washington Park Parcel Survey and additional data analysis were designed to assess the built environment with a focus on housing, but the findings show that challenges go beyond housing and require broader solutions. The following recommendations, which reflect that important dynamic, are intended to build upon the existing strengths of Washington Park, harness the growth coming to adjacent neighborhoods, reimagine what is possible, and rebuild an equitable future for the Washington Park community.

REIMAGINE: Embark and align upon a future vision that transforms Washington Park from its current state of severe hypervacancy into a healthy environment with an active residential and commercial real estate market, open to a diverse group of residents and visitors.

- **Community Planning Process:** Develop a collective vision for the neighborhood, including approaches to strategically repurpose vacant land and design a healthier environment.
- **Community Census:** In preparation for a community planning process, conduct a Community Census to gather data directly from residents to better understand their housing needs, as well as other needs.
- **Urban Landscape Design:** Design an urban neighborhood plan that incorporates a variety of elements needed for a healthy neighborhood ecosystem and celebrates Washington Park’s location as an important urban gateway.
- **Rebrand the Neighborhood as a Place of Affordability and Innovation:** Engage in a community marketing campaign to draw in new residents and provide safe homes for residents who may be priced out of adjacent neighborhoods, while building on important neighborhood history.

EQUITABLY REBUILD: Rebuild the neighborhood in a way that protects and meets the economic and housing needs of existing residents, while repopulating the neighborhood and building opportunities for economic advancement.

- **Community Housing Fund:** Work with the City to establish a new short-term Community Housing Fund to invest in the housing needs of existing Washington Park residents and help spark new development.
- **Housing Resource Center:** Fund a centralized Housing Resource Center to serve residents of Washington Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore.
- **Strategically Reactivate Vacant City Lots:** In collaboration with city government, undertake a proactive effort to strategically reactivate vacant city lots and repurpose land, in alignment with the community’s articulated vision.
- **Partner with the Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA):** Work with the CCLBA to acquire undeveloped and unproductive properties and land, particularly those that are privately-held, and put them back to productive use in a way that supports the community’s vision.
- **Innovate New Housing Models:** Explore models to meet existing resident needs, while strategically leveraging opportunities to develop new markets in partnership with local anchor institutions.
- **Preserve Existing Affordability:** Preserve existing housing affordability by collaborating with the Preser-

vation Compact to develop and implement a focused Washington Park strategy, utilizing a variety of tools to preserve existing affordable rental housing units.

- **Create Jobs and Amenities:** Attract and support development of businesses that create jobs and provide much-needed neighborhood amenities.



Aerial view of the Washington Park community

OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH SIDE HOUSING DATA INITIATIVE: WASHINGTON PARK

Launched in 2015, the South Side Housing Data Initiative provides community-based organizations with parcel-level data to inform policy and program strategies to help low-and moderate-income residents maintain their housing in real estate markets experiencing or anticipating rapid change.

In 2019, Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors (WECAN) and its partners completed the Woodlawn Housing Data Project, an extensive data collection effort that resulted in a detailed analysis of the neighborhood’s housing conditions. Following the project’s success, the Washington Park Residents’ Advocacy Council (WPRAC) approached the University of Chicago Office of Civic Engagement’s (OCE)’s Community Programs Accelerator (CPA)¹ to request a similar housing study for the Washington Park neighborhood.

In 2019, residents from the Washington Park community and students from the Harris School of Public Policy worked together to design and conduct the Washington Park Parcel Survey (WPPS), which collected detailed data about the neighborhood’s built environment, with an eye toward the housing landscape. The project has resulted in extensive data collection and analysis, enabling WPRAC to better understand current neighborhood conditions, confirm perceptions, and identify issues and opportunities. The project also provides a solid foundation from which WPRAC was able to develop a set of policy recommendations that are set forth later in this report.

¹ The Community Programs Accelerator (CPA) provides capacity building services and facilitates access to a range of University resources to contribute to community-based efforts. CPA aims to build the organizational resilience, programmatic strength, and capacity of community-based nonprofits and leaders serving the South Side. Participating nonprofits remain independent of the University of Chicago. The Community Programs Accelerator does not play a role in the policy recommendations of WPRAC or other participating nonprofits.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Washington Park neighborhood is a historic South Side Black community that once boasted a vibrant and diverse population, with rich cultural treasures. Although it has experienced decades of disinvestment, the neighborhood's residents are spirited, resilient, and interested in bringing progress, innovation, safety, and positive change to the community. Over time, residents have engaged in a variety of local partnerships with the University of Chicago and University of Chicago Medicine, both long-time neighborhood anchor institutions. Today, as the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) prepares to arrive in the neighboring Woodlawn community, the residents of Washington Park want to harness expected growth in adjacent neighborhoods to reclaim their own neighborhood's glory and build on its many assets to strengthen its future.

In the late 1800s, Washington Park was one of Chicago's earliest ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods. Major transportation and cultural resources shaped a vibrant community, and the neighborhood's 372-acre park offered a valuable community asset. Mansions were built along the neighborhood's wide boulevards, offering beautiful architectural treasures. While working-class households enjoyed proximity to the nearby railroad and meatpacking industries, cable car and elevated train routes allowed workers of all professions to easily reach Chicago's central business district.

Washington Park was transformed into a predominantly Black neighborhood by the 1930s, following a construction boom at the turn of the century and the Great Migration. By the middle of the 20th century, Garfield Boulevard—the main neighborhood thoroughfare—was one of many thriving, Black cultural and commercial hubs on Chicago's South Side and its residents created a rich cultural scene. Today, Washington Park is home to the DuSable Museum of African American History and hosts the annual African Festival of the Arts. The neighborhood is still home to the annual Bud Billiken Day Parade, a tradition that began in 1929 and remains the nation's largest and oldest Black parade, bringing together people from all over the country while fostering a sense of pride for neighborhood residents.

Yet history has not always been kind to Washington

Park. Among other challenges, it was home to one of the nation's highest concentrations of public housing high-rises in the Robert Taylor and Washington Park Homes, which were eventually demolished in the 1990s and early 2000s, leaving large swaths of vacant land and displacing thousands of residents. The nation's foreclosure crisis and Great Recession of 2008 soon followed, stalling redevelopment efforts and resulting in additional vacancy. The cumulative effect has created ongoing challenges of abandonment and disinvestment.

In more recent years, hope for rebuilding has come and gone. In 2009, Washington Park was named the site of the proposed Olympic Stadium and Olympic Aquatics Center in Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Summer Olympics, a vision that sparked a short-lived real estate boom. Losing the Olympic bid, coupled with the impact of the Great Recession, left Washington Park extremely vulnerable, as many residents and investors left the neighborhood. Shortly thereafter, Washington Park again found itself a contender to be the site of the OPC, which promises to become a world-class museum and public gathering space that celebrates our nation's first African American President and First Lady Barack and Michelle Obama. Jackson Park was selected as the final site, and although Washington Park proper wasn't chosen, the community's proximity to Woodlawn means it will be a neighbor to the OPC and looks forward to welcoming the institution to Chicago's South Side.



Dancers in a Bud Billiken Day Parade. Photo credit: Curtis Morrow/Wikimedia Commons

THE WASHINGTON PARK PARCEL SURVEY

To create the Washington Park Parcel Survey (WPPS), students from the Harris School of Public Policy developed an approach to surveying every parcel of land in Washington Park using Landgrid, a digital parcel-based mapping tool. Harris students sought input from residents on survey design and process. In 2019, SSHDI coordinated several “survey days” during which Harris students and youth from the Washington Park neighborhood worked in small teams to survey every parcel of property in Washington Park. Neighborhood youth were compensated for each surveying session.

The teams used mobile phones equipped with the Landgrid app, which provided a parcel map of Washington Park, with each parcel identified by its official Property Index Number (PIN), and a set of survey questions regarding land and building use, occupancy, and physical conditions for each parcel. Prior to surveying, each team received a brief project overview, training on

how to survey using the app, a map outlining a specific geographic area of Washington Park to survey, and guidance for answering survey questions. Responses were uploaded in real-time to Landgrid’s web platform, where results could be immediately visualized. Survey questions and results are listed in the appendix to this report.

The following pages provide key demographic information for Washington Park; summarize the data collection, analysis and findings; and express WPRAC’s call for action. WPPS results are from 2019 and are therefore point-in-time data, although high-level findings are consistent with publicly available data. Underlying data and analysis, including citations to sources relied upon and other details, are available at <http://historicsouthsidecommunitysurvey.com>.

FOCUS AREA: WASHINGTON PARK

Washington Park is Community Area 40 of Chicago’s 77 Community Areas, located in the southeast section of the city, roughly 1.4 miles west of Chicago’s Lakefront and 4.5 miles south of Downtown’s Loop. Roughly one-third of the 1.48 square mile (947 acres) community area is covered by Washington Park (the Park), named after George Washington. The Park is home to the historic Washington Park Fieldhouse, the DuSable Museum of African American History, as well as General Richard L. Jones Armory and Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts.

The street boundaries of Community Area 40 are 51st Street to the north, King Drive to the east, 63rd Street to the south, and railroad tracks to the west, plus the Park itself—situated to the east of King Drive. Washington Park’s community area is bordered by six community areas: Englewood and Fuller Park to the west, Grand Boulevard to the north, Hyde Park to the east, and Woodlawn and Greater Grand Crossing to the south.

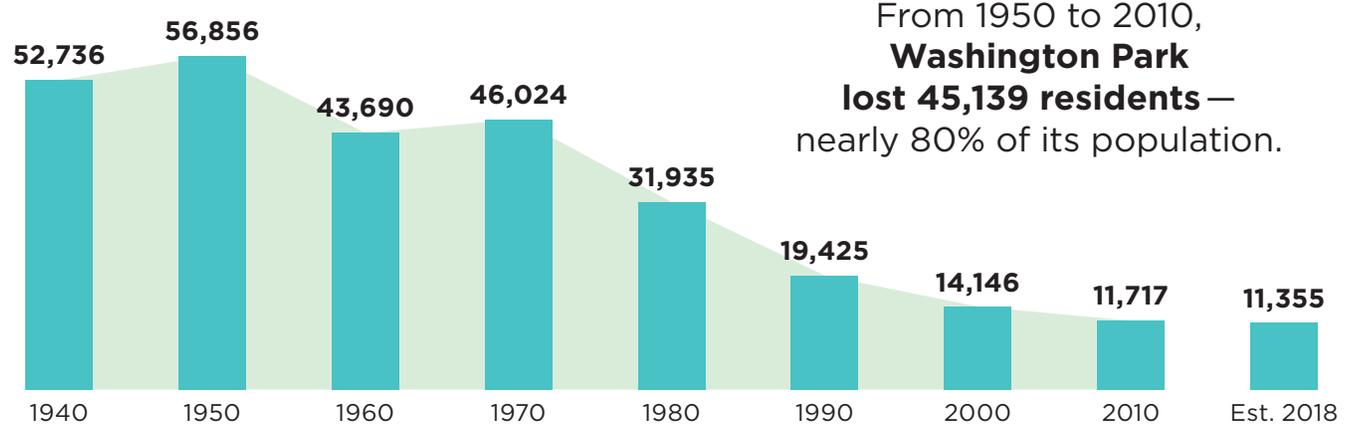
Street boundaries for the purpose of the Washington Park Parcel Survey (WPPS) were adjusted slightly. First, the Park was excluded. The survey area was also extended west to the Dan Ryan Expressway (Interstate 90/94), including small sections of Englewood and Fuller Park, and south to include a small section of Greater Grand Crossing. WPRAC requested these adjustments to reflect a more natural geographic boundary.



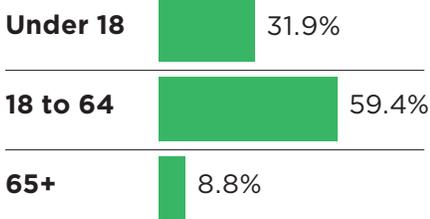
2018 WASHINGTON PARK DEMOGRAPHICS

Source: American Community Survey and the United States Census, U.S. Census Bureau.

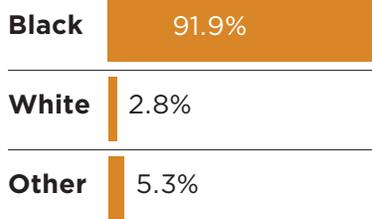
POPULATION BY YEAR



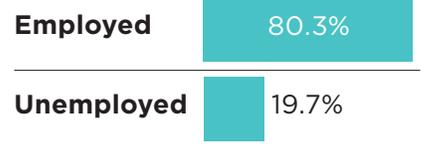
AGE



RACE



EMPLOYMENT



ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2018 USD)



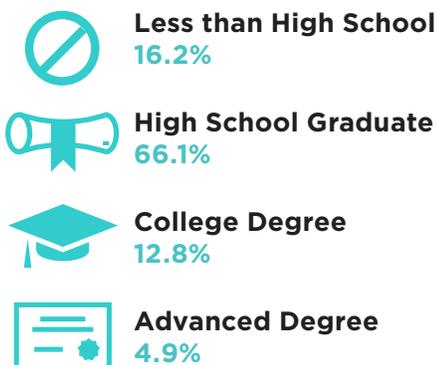
Median household income:

\$27,279

Individuals living below the poverty line:

37.51%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



HOUSEHOLD



*A household that uses 30% or more of its total income for housing-related costs is considered housing burdened.

SURVEY RESULTS

- Washington Park comprises 2,881 parcels, of which 1,266 (44%) include a structure, and 1,615 (56%) do not include a structure.
- Vacant land is widespread. Many blocks have more vacant parcels than built parcels.
 - Of the 1,615 parcels in Washington Park without a structure, 73% are vacant lots. Vacant lots make up over 163 acres of non-contiguous land in the survey area. The remainder include parking lots, railroad parcels, small parks, gardens, or attached lots.
 - 67% of vacant lots are unmaintained, and 42% show signs of illegal dumping of trash and other waste.
- Most parcels with structures are residential. Of the 1,266 parcels with a structure, three-quarters are residential, 9% institutional, 8% commercial, and 3% industrial.
 - Residential 2-6 unit properties are the most prevalent building type, comprising more than 50% of residential structures in Washington Park.
 - Multifamily 7+ unit apartment buildings are the second most common, accounting for 25% of the housing stock.

- Single family homes account for 21% of residential parcels.
 - Properties in Washington Park are overwhelmingly constructed of high-quality materials, such as brick (66%) and Greystone (17%).
- At least 82% of all structures are visibly occupied.
 - Industrial buildings are the most commonly vacant.
 - 16% of residential structures are unoccupied or possibly unoccupied.



UChicago student volunteers and Washington Park youth survey the neighborhood, August 2019.

BOX 1: PUBLICLY-AVAILABLE DATASETS INTEGRATED WITH PARCEL SURVEY RESULTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

- Affordable Housing Sites
- All Affordable Rental Housing Developments
- Building Permits
- City-Owned Vacant Land Inventory
- Troubled Buildings Initiative (TBI) + Vacant Building Registry (VBR) Database
- Vacant Properties by Community Area

COOK COUNTY

- Cook County Land Bank Properties
- Cook County Tax Sale Properties
- Cook County Scavenger Tax Sale
- Lake 92 + Hyde Park 70 Township Tax Data

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- Assisted Housing Programs by Census Tract
- Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) by Census Tract
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Programs in Washington Park
- Multifamily Assistance and Section 8 Database
- Subsidized Housing Units by Census Tract

INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING STUDIES AT DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

- Foreclosure Auctions in Chicago Community Areas
- Foreclosure Filings in Chicago Community Areas
- Housing Composition in Chicago Community Areas
- Property Sales in Chicago Community Areas

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

- Vacant Buildings by Census Tract

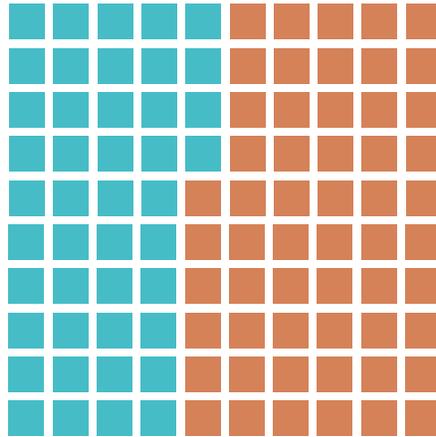
OTHER

- MAPSCORPS Businesses in Washington Park
- Redfin Property Sales in Washington Park

WASHINGTON PARK PARCEL SURVEY RESULTS

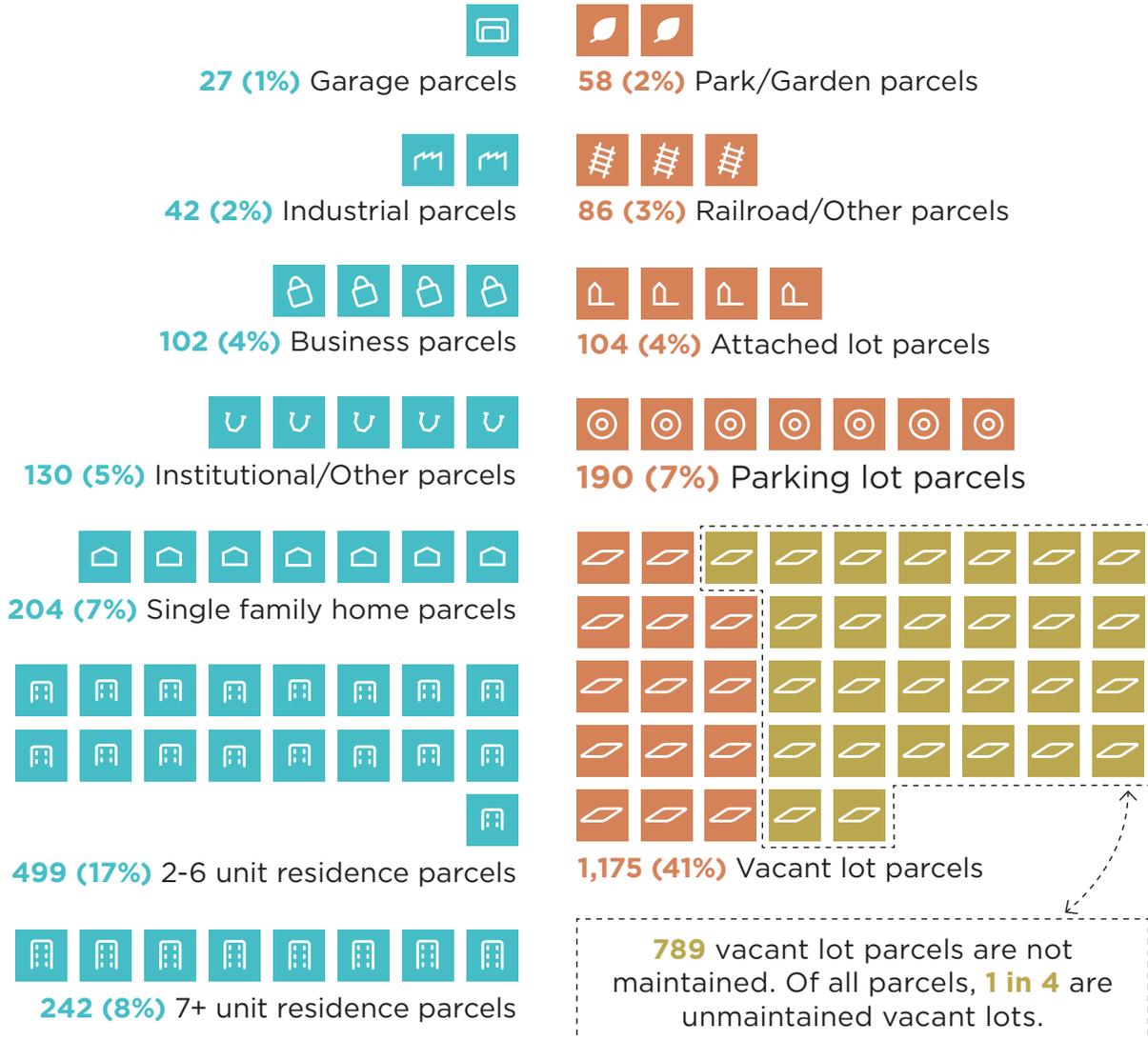
OUT OF **2,881** TOTAL PARCELS...

1,266 parcels (44%)
have structures



1,615 parcels (56%)
don't have structures

100 squares total | each square = 1% of parcels (rounded)



Note: Due to rounding, percentage totals do not equal 100%.

WASHINGTON PARK PARCEL SURVEY RESULTS

VACANT LOTS

- Vacant lots **cover approximately 163 acres of the neighborhood's total 575 acres**, equal to about a quarter of a square mile.
- There is **more vacant land in Washington Park than land used** for all forms of residential housing put together.
- 67% of vacant lots (covering 110 acres of land) are **not maintained**.
- 42% of vacant lots show signs of **garbage dumping**.



BUILDING OCCUPANCY

At least 82% of all structures in Washington Park are visibly occupied. The proportion of unoccupied buildings is at least 11%, and may be as large as 17%.



Industrial buildings are the most commonly vacant, with 38% of buildings in this category recorded as unoccupied or possibly unoccupied. Sixteen percent of residential structures are unoccupied or possibly unoccupied.

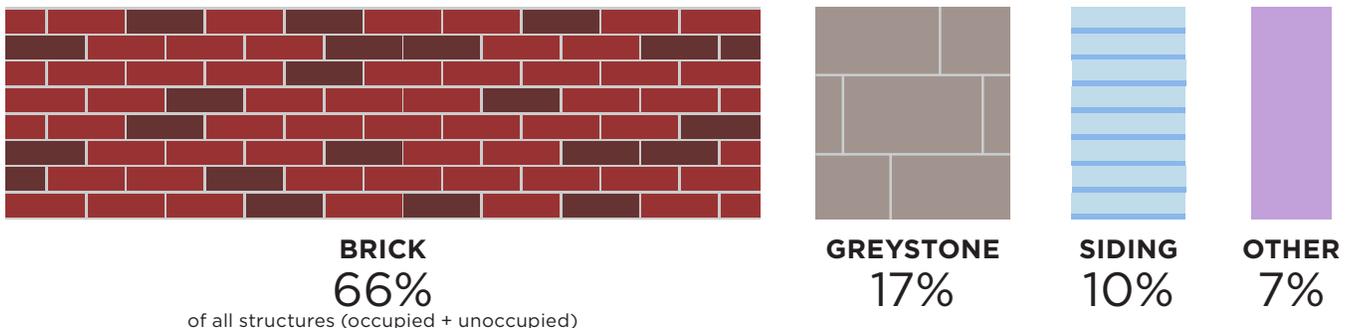
UNOCCUPIED STRUCTURES

- 80% of unoccupied structures are visibly in need of repair.
- 10% show signs of fire damage.
- 14% have been boarded up.



BUILDING MATERIALS

The structures in Washington Park tell the story of more than a century of development. As times changed, construction materials changed as well.



FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

After completing the WPPS, more than 20 publicly-available datasets on Washington Park were analyzed and integrated with the base layer of survey data. (See Box 1 on page 7.) The additional analysis allowed for a pinpointing of key trends affecting the community and neighborhood residents, resulting in solid empirical grounding for five key findings that validate observations shared by many residents.

- **Neighborhood Hypervacancy:** Washington Park exists in a state of severe hypervacancy, with more than 170 acres of inactive property in the form of vacant lots, vacant homes, and other vacant structures. Although the staggering degree of vacancy can signal a challenging loss of market confidence, over 50% of this vacant land is publicly-owned, representing a prime opportunity for community redevelopment.
- **Financially Vulnerable Renters:** Washington Park is primarily a community of low-income renters, of whom 58% are housing-cost burdened, paying more than 30% of their income toward rent. The community also has a higher residential rental vacancy rate and higher eviction rate than the rest of the city, reflecting the financial vulnerability of existing residents.
- **Very Low Homeownership Rate:** Only 13% of Washington Park residents are homeowners, of whom 40% are burdened by housing costs, further impacting neighborhood stability.
- **Lack of Private Development Despite South Side Growth:** While adjacent neighborhoods have experienced increased private development activity in recent years, Washington Park has been largely left behind. Although the market has begun to slowly move, data shows limited development activity in the neighborhood.
- **Unhealthy Built Environment:** Health outcomes in Washington Park are among the worst on Chicago's South Side, and challenges in the built environment likely aggravate poor health conditions for residents.

In addition to conditions identified via these findings, health and economic impacts driven by COVID-19 and property damage caused by recent civil unrest signal a potentially longer recovery for the community.

FINDING 1: NEIGHBORHOOD HYPERVACANCY



Throughout Washington Park, the prevalence of vacant land and vacant structures is simply striking. Nearly every block in the WPPS survey area features at least one vacant lot; on many blocks, vacant lots outnumber lots with structures.

In planning terms, “hypervacancy” refers to a vacancy rate at or above 20%, including buildings and lots. Forty-four percent of the parcels in the WPPS survey area featured inactive properties (1,175 vacant lots and 137 vacant structures), placing Washington Park firmly in the severe hypervacancy category (greater than 30%).

Hypervacancy oftentimes signals years of disinvestment and population loss, and its conditions can impact resident quality-of-life and sense of well-being. When the state of vacancy defines the neighborhood's character, it can also signal a loss of market confidence, further deteriorate market conditions, and create obstacles in attracting investment. Although faced with these challenges, Washington Park is also home to a significant amount of publicly-held vacant land, representing opportunities for a broader approach to community and economic development within the neighborhood.

SURVEY CONFIRMS SEVERE HYPERVACANCY

The Washington Park Survey Area contains more than 170 acres of inactive property in the form of vacant lots, vacant homes, and other vacant structures. For scale, that equals an area greater than 123 football fields. The vast majority of vacant lots and structures are residential parcels, resulting in a patchwork appearance of underutilized space throughout the community.

More than half (56%) of Washington Park's parcels lack a structure. Although some of these parcels are attached lots, parks, or parking lots, 1,175 parcels are vacant lots, accounting for a striking 41% of the neighborhood's parcels. Of these vacant lots, 67% were unmaintained, contributing to neighborhood blight and increasing concerns about public safety. Although some efforts are underway to put vacant lots back to productive use via



The Dr. Margaret Taylor-Goss Burroughs mural on the Washington Park Fieldhouse. Photo credit: Cecilia Butler

community gardens and parklets, the efforts are dwarfed by the sheer volume of vacant land.

Only 44% of parcels in the survey area include a structure; between 10 to 16% are unoccupied. Of the neighborhood's 137 vacant structures, over 80% are in visible need of repair. Many properties are unboarded and open to trespassers. Additionally, the neighborhood is marked by a high residential rental vacancy rate of 14.5%, compared to a citywide rate of 6.32%. The surplus of units further contributes to the hypervacant character of the community.

DRIVERS OF VACANCY

Hypervacancy in Washington Park is the cumulative result of population loss, arson, deferred maintenance, demolition, and property abandonment that followed several key moments in history.

In 1968, properties vandalized shortly after the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were later demolished, leaving vacant lots throughout the community. In the 1990s and early 2000s, after the Chicago Housing Authority demolished the high-rise Robert Taylor Homes and Washington Park Homes as part of CHA's Plan for Transformation, large swaths of the neighborhood that had been home to the thousands of residents became vacant. When the Great Recession arrived in 2007-2009, hundreds of additional residents lost homes to foreclosure and left the community. The cumulative resulting vacant lots have remained unutilized for decades.

While the CHA began redevelopment of Washington Park Homes in 2017, redevelopment of Robert Taylor Homes into Legends South occurred north of Washington Park. In 2014, the CHA sold a portion of the vacant land from the former Robert Taylor Homes in Washington Park, totaling 13.5 acres, to XS Tennis. The CHA still maintains ownership of additional vacant lots in the neighborhood.

IMPACTS OF UNMAINTAINED VACANT LOTS AND STRUCTURES

The compounded impacts of hypervacancy can affect the well-being of neighborhood residents, hinder neighborhood safety by creating magnets for crime, and devalue adjacent properties. Lost property tax revenue can also have a lasting impact on the community, even while city government continues to bear the financial cost of keeping the area safe and clean.

The real estate market can also cease to function. For example, vacant lots that result from property demolition are more likely to be abandoned than reused because there is little market demand for new construction. Or, properties may only sell to investors at rock-bottom prices while the neighborhood itself experiences concentrated poverty, unemployment, and public health concerns.

Population loss can also prohibit momentum in creating change. Washington Park's current population is just over 11,000 residents, compared to more than 56,000 residents

at its peak in 1950. Population loss makes it difficult to attract and retain commercial businesses that could provide jobs and goods and services to residents. Fewer residents also translate into fewer resources within or flowing to the community that could be used to rebuild the neighborhood.

VACANT LAND AS OPPORTUNITY

The vacant lots, however, can also be an asset because they offer an opportunity for rebuilding. Although Washington Park's vacant land is owned by both public and private sector actors, public sector agencies own nearly half of the inventory and can be key partners with the community on pursuing a vision for the neighborhood's future.

As of 2020, the City of Chicago owned 593 of the 1,175 vacant lots within the Survey Area, including some CHA parcels. While the vast majority of these lots are non-contiguous, cumulatively they make up over 55 acres of land. In fact, out of all 77 Community Areas in Chicago, Washington Park has the greatest percentage of vacant parcels owned by the City of Chicago. The Cook County Land Bank Authority also owns a fluctuating number of unoccupied structures within the survey area that are often listed for sale.

This vacant land represents an important neighborhood asset that community members and partners can utilize to improve neighborhood housing, resiliency, and health. The significant degree of publicly-owned land also offers Washington Park residents an opportunity to work together with public sector agencies to reflect on models from other cities and explore creative ways to jump-start the neighborhood's housing market. Although implementation will not always be easy, the fact that so much land is already publicly owned eliminates some time-intensive activities, such as identifying and contacting private property owners and acquiring vacant lots for rebuilding.

It must be acknowledged that, within this environment, any community rebuilding effort must consist of multiple institutions working together toward a common vision. No one institution can address the high concentration of vacant buildings and vacant lots on its own, particularly when the neighborhood's conditions are also correlated with concentrated poverty, health challenges, and unemployment. Opportunities exist for partners to leverage the vacant land as an asset for neighborhood planning.

FINDING 2: FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE RENTERS



Washington Park is primarily a neighborhood of low-income renters, more than half of whom are rent-burdened. The community also has a higher residential rental vacancy rate and higher eviction rate than the rest of the city, signaling the financial vulnerability of existing residents and contributing to the neighborhood's character of severe hypervacancy.

NEIGHBORHOOD OF COST-BURDENED RENTERS

In 2018, 86.1% of Washington Park's residents (9,782) lived in a rental unit, compared to 51% of renters citywide. Given the neighborhood's high unemployment (19.7%) and poverty (37.5%) rates, it is unsurprising to find that the significant majority of residents pay a large portion of their income toward rent. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), in 2018, 58% (2,269) of rental households in Washington Park were rent-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income for housing, and 35% (1,387) were severely rent-burdened, paying 50% or more of their income for housing. Citywide, this compares to 47% rent-burdened households and 24.6% severely rent burdened households.

Further, nearly one in ten residents of Washington Park is over the age of 65, and senior heads of household account for 13.4% of the rental households in the neighborhood. Senior residents are more likely to be retired or no longer working full-time, tending to rely on Social Security, pensions, and other forms of fixed income to afford rent and maintain their quality of life. They must also balance housing costs with potentially higher medical expenses and services that they can no longer perform themselves.

GREATER RISK OF EVICTIONS

The prevalence of rent-burdened households in the Washington Park neighborhood means that households are especially vulnerable to unexpected changes in their ability to pay rent. Because housing costs make up such a substantial proportion of monthly budgets, a rent increase, job loss, wage reduction, illness, or other disruptive life event can simply make rent payments hard or impossible to reach.

The resulting vulnerability translates into a higher rate of evictions in Washington Park, which has implications for the impacted residents as well as for the neighborhood. The average eviction rate across Washington Park census



Lorraine Hansberry Mural on 51st St. between King Drive and Calumet Ave. Photo credit: Cecilia Butler

tracts is 3.3% per year, which is three times higher than the 1.1% eviction rate for the City of Chicago. Not only can the eviction process be traumatic for the household, but the greater number of evictions can further hypervacancy conditions within the neighborhood.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND RESIDENTIAL VACANCIES

As previously noted, although Washington Park's rents are slightly below the citywide median, the neighborhood is marked by a high residential rental vacancy rate. Although vacancies may be due to a variety of factors, in some cases, rent levels remain out of reach for low-income households.

Washington Park's 2018 median monthly rent was \$958, compared to a citywide median of \$1,077. Although some residents believe rent levels should be lowered to offer relief to community residents, rent is typically driven by the cost of owning and operating a rental property. Many properties in Washington Park were built in the 20th century, meaning that building owners face high costs of building maintenance, while also managing rising property taxes and other costs.

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING OPTIONS

The federal government has a variety of programs designed to subsidize the cost of rental housing for low-income households. Of Washington Park's rental units, 1,446 units (38% of its housing stock) currently receive some form of subsidy. Of these, 42% of the units are supported by Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which include a 15-year or 30-year affordability restriction on a portion of units. Of the remaining units, 18% are supported by FHA financing, and 40% of the units are supported by Housing Choice Vouchers, which are awarded to the tenant regardless of the neighborhood in which they reside. Given the high percentage of financially burdened renters in Washington Park, sustaining the current level of subsidized housing is important. At the same time, creating new housing options for a greater range of income levels is equally critical.

FINDING 3: VERY LOW HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE



Washington Park is a neighborhood with a significantly low rate of homeownership. Although owner-occupants comprise only a small portion of the Washington Park community, they represent an important part of the neighborhood's social fabric. Yet more than 40% of the homeowners are housing cost-burdened, and while risks faced by homeowners are different from those faced by renters, they are no less severe.

LOW HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE

Washington Park's homeownership rate is 13%, compared to 45% for the City of Chicago. A low rate of homeownership in the neighborhood is indicative of individual financial capacity to be approved for a mortgage as well as systemic obstacles that have prevented individuals from purchasing homes and building equity over time.

Generally speaking, homeownership can indicate a degree of neighborhood stability, as the households tend to stay in place for a longer period of time. Also, homeowners often play an active role in community building and neighborhood efforts.

HOMEOWNER TENURE

The median year of home purchase in Washington Park was 2004. Of the 623 owned homes in Washington Park, 30% were purchased in or prior to the 1990s, representing long-time neighborhood residents. However, 39% of

homes were purchased in the 2000s, when the housing and mortgage lending market operated in a riskier environment, and 31% were purchased in the 2010s, following recovery efforts from the Great Recession.

COST-BURDENED OWNERS

Like neighborhood renters, Washington Park homeowners face high housing-related costs. In 2018, 43% of Washington Park homeowners (263 households) were cost-burdened, paying 30% or more of their household income towards housing in the form of mortgage payments, property taxes, insurance, utilities, and ongoing maintenance. Although most homeowners in the community are of working age, 22.6% had a head of household 65 years old or older, likely living on a fixed income.

Some cost-burdened owners may face a higher risk of foreclosure if they are unable to continue supporting these costs, including increased taxes and fees or continued home maintenance needs. Renters who are having difficulty paying rent may choose to move to another unit or neighborhood, but homeowners cannot easily move in response to substantial financial pressure.

Losing long-time homeowners in Washington Park could have large implications for the community, including less stability for remaining residents and the potential for additional vacancies.

FINDING 4: LACK OF PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT DESPITE SOUTH SIDE GROWTH



While adjacent neighborhoods such as Woodlawn and Hyde Park have experienced increased private development activity in recent years, Washington Park has been largely left behind. Although notable community investments have recently been made and the market has begun to slowly move, data shows limited development activity in the neighborhood. Given Washington Park's share of vacant land, much more could be done to strategically stimulate growth in a way that supports a community vision.

RECENT INVESTMENTS

Recent investments have successfully resulted in new cultural and recreational neighborhood amenities that benefit current residents and increase community appeal, as well as continued affordable housing investments.

In 2013, The University of Chicago joined the Washington Park community in a new Arts Block project located on East Garfield Boulevard between South Prairie Avenue and South Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, which combines University-led initiatives, programming by cultural organizations, and private investments from entrepreneurs. In addition to providing venues for art, entertainment, and education, the Arts Block has the potential to become a socioeconomic driver for Washington Park.

Additionally, in 2014, the CHA sold 13.5 acres of vacant land from the former site of the Robert Taylor Homes to XS Tennis, resulting in a state-of-the-art indoor/outdoor tennis facility. The \$16.9 million facility is a key neighborhood asset, providing Chicago's underserved youth with an enriching safe haven and positive pathway to college through a community-based tennis and academic enrichment program. The Sweet Water Foundation has also recently invested in a transformative space within Washington Park, unveiling a model of "Regenerative Neighborhood Development" including a commercial farm, community garden, and other spaces on the site of formerly abandoned land and properties.

To serve current neighborhood needs, affordable housing developers remain active in Washington Park. In 2017, St. Edmund's Redevelopment Corporation completed a senior housing development and a townhouse and apartment complex. Coppin AME Church and Interfaith Housing Development Corporation partnered on two affordable housing properties for low-income families. In 2019, KLEO Art Residences opened a mixed-use development with housing, retail, community space, and artist studios along the Garfield Boulevard corridor.

In 2019, the Chicago Transit Authority completed the Garfield Gateway Project, a major modernization of the historic Green Line rail station that not only benefits transit riders, but will also help contribute to revitalization of the Garfield Boulevard area.

MARKET MOVEMENT BUT LIMITED DEVELOPMENT

Washington Park has also experienced slow and quiet movement in market activity. The number of days that properties remain on the market before sale has dropped annually from an average of over 4,000 days in 2007 to an average of less than 500 days in 2018. Data from the online real estate company, Redfin, also shows an increase in average property sales prices in Washington Park since 2015. Further, according to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University (IHS), sales in Washington

Park per 100 residential parcels have outpaced Woodlawn since 2010, with the exception of 2016.

The market activity, however, has not yet translated to new construction or private development. While Woodlawn has seen a significant increase in building permits, Washington Park's building permit activity has fluctuated over the same time period while remaining relatively low.

Together, these observations may suggest that private speculators are acquiring and holding land or buildings to see if future opportunities for development in Washington Park emerge several years down the road. In the meantime, the lack of activity raises the risk that regional demand for new development near the OPC's new home could bypass the neighborhood.

FINDING 5: UNHEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Since the early 2000s, medical organizations including the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have explored the social determinants of health, or the economic and social conditions that influence differences in health status. Such work has led to a saying that a person's zip code can have a greater influence on health and life expectancy than genetic code, given neighborhoods with high poverty rates, increased air pollution, lack of access to healthy food, and insufficient green space. The difference in health outcomes has been highlighted by studies conducted by the NYU School of Medicine and DePaul University's Chicago Life Expectancy project.

Washington Park is no exception. In fact, health outcomes in the Washington Park community are among the worst on Chicago's South Side, and the Washington Park Parcel Survey identified challenges in the built environment that likely aggravate poor health conditions for residents.

RESIDENT HEALTH OUTCOMES

According to the Chicago Health Atlas, life expectancy for Washington Park residents is 69 years of age, compared to 82 years in neighboring Hyde Park and 77 years citywide. Additionally, 43% of adults in Washington Park are obese and have high blood pressure. In contrast, Hyde Park has a 15.4% adult obesity rate, with 18% of adults with high blood pressure. Many

environmental conditions that characterize the neighborhood likely contribute to these conditions, negatively impacting resident health and well-being.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTANTS

Washington Park residents are subject to a disproportionately high burden of air and noise pollution, primarily driven by the neighborhood's proximity to the Dan Ryan Expressway and two rail yards of the Norfolk Southern Railway.

The Dan Ryan Expressway, marking the neighborhood's western edge, carries 14 lanes of traffic, and the continuous high-volume vehicle throughput is a major source of air pollution. The Norfolk Southern Railway—the largest container freight network in the eastern United States—operates two of its four Chicago container classification yards in or near Washington Park. The 63rd Street yard covers 2.9 square miles along the southern tip of the neighborhood, and the 47th Street yard covers 3.2 square miles, just over the Dan Ryan Expressway. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Chicago freight yards can be sources of pollution, particularly from diesel exhaust, that may cause or contribute to lung and heart disease.

Compared to occupied census tracts across the country, according to the EPA, Washington Park's maximum diesel particulate matter levels are higher than 96% of other areas; its maximum fine particle pollution is higher than 97% of other areas; and its maximum traffic noise volume is 100% higher than other areas.

Some residents have raised questions about possible health impacts in the southwest section of Washington Park associated with existing ComEd facilities at that location.

INSUFFICIENT TREE CANOPY

Trees and vegetation can typically help reduce air pollution by directly removing pollutants, reducing air temperatures, and reducing building energy use in and near parks. Although Washington Park is home to a 372-acre park, insufficient tree canopy in the rest of the neighborhood means not enough vegetation exists to offset pollution experienced by the community.

Specifically, according to the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, Washington Park's tree canopy coverage is approximately 18%, much of which represents trees located in the park, rather than along residential streets. As a whole, even including the Park, Washington Park has less coverage than Woodlawn (21%), Englewood

(23%) and Hyde Park (26%). And although the park serves as a natural air filter, Chicago's westerly prevailing winds cause the park to filter air moving into Hyde Park, rather than air going into Washington Park's residential areas.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the environment in which someone lives can impact how physically active a person might be. Washington Park Parcel surveyors informally observed a built environment that discourages physical activity. Specifically, the lack of sidewalks or existence of poorly-maintained sidewalks decreases the likelihood that residents will utilize them for walking or biking, thereby contributing to sedentary habits that can drive poor health outcomes.

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING HEALTH

The median year that residential buildings in Washington Park were built is 1947, meaning that half of the neighborhood's buildings are at least 73 years old. Given the age of the building stock, a high proportion of buildings in the neighborhood may be at higher risk of environmental issues such as lead paint, asbestos, mold, pests, water intrusion, and other environmental pollutants that can present health hazards to occupants, particularly young children. Lead contamination in water service lines also exposes residents to health hazards, and buildings in communities such as Washington Park have been disproportionately exposed to this issue.

Although the EPA banned the use of lead paint in 1978 and the use of asbestos in 1989, 74% and 80% of Washington Park's current housing stock predates such rulings, respectively. Although some building owners may have remediated such conditions over time, it is likely that a portion of the existing stock still poses risks to its inhabitants. If properties are demolished, lead paint and asbestos can also present significant health hazards to nearby residents if the structures are not properly abated and fugitive dust mitigation measures are not properly implemented.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES: COVID-19 AND CIVIL UNREST OF 2020



Although this report was shaped by the Washington Park Parcel Survey conducted in 2019, it would be remiss to overlook the health and economic impacts expected in Washington Park from

COVID-19 and property damage caused by civil unrest in the first half of 2020. The combined impact of these events increases the health and economic risks faced by neighborhood residents and signals a potentially longer recovery for the community, absent protective measures.

As more data surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic become available, daunting statistics show that majority-minority zip codes are among the hardest hit neighborhoods across the country, and Chicago is no exception. At publication of this report, Washington Park shares many of the high-risk characteristics of the most impacted neighborhoods in term of COVID-19-related cases or deaths such as unemployment and health care access, resulting in a greater number of people with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and high blood pressure.

In addition to the health impacts, many households who were already financially vulnerable may be experiencing a loss or reduction of income due to stay-at-home orders. As a result, the high percentage of residents throughout Washington Park who are already financially vulnerable may be at increased risk for eviction or foreclosure. COVID-19 also laid bare a digital divide that further segregates Washington Park from the rest of the city. With libraries and schools shut down, 44% of Washington Park households lacked internet for months, putting school children behind in their studies and underscoring a challenge for residents of all ages. Furthermore, following local protests over the killing of George Floyd, neighborhood looting caused property damage in Washington Park, including in a key commercial retail corridor.

Although new government and philanthropic resources and policy interventions have recently become available, the cumulative impact of these events makes the road to recovery longer and more daunting for communities, such as Washington Park. The City of Chicago began working with community organizations to slow the spread of COVID-19 and improve health outcomes in communities of color that have been most heavily impacted, including providing temporary relief from evictions for those whose finances have been impacted by the pandemic. In response to the economic downturn driven by the pandemic, the University of Chicago provided \$1.3 million to address food insecurity needs for residents, and grant support to community-based organizations, and businesses across the nine-neighborhoods adjacent to its South Side campus.

WASHINGTON PARK: WHY NOW?

Given the anticipated arrival of the Obama Presidential Center in the Woodlawn community and the subsequent development activity that has recently accelerated in neighboring areas, the Washington Park Residents' Advocacy Council believes the time is now to build on the Washington Park community's strengths, harness momentum, and pursue opportunities for equitable growth and development. The neighborhood refuses to be left behind. Residents want to reclaim the neighborhood's glory by reimagining what is possible, building upon its assets, and rebuilding its future.

Although Washington Park faces a variety of challenges that are highlighted in the pages of this report, one of its greatest assets is a spirited group of residents and organizations who want to bring progress, innovation, safety, and positive change to the community. Community members are justifiably proud of Washington Park, and are active and outspoken in fighting to build on its heritage while advocating for its strong future. In addition to their organizing efforts, they recognize the opportunity to leverage the vast amounts of vacant land into a new future and build upon assets such as their historic homes and wide boulevards; cultural treasures, such as the DuSable Museum of African American History, Bud Billiken Parade, and African Festival of the Arts; and recent investments, such as the ArtsBlock, XS Tennis, Sweet Water Foundation, and modernized public transit infrastructure.

Back in 2007-2008, when Chicago was in the early stages of preparing its bid to host the 2016 Olympics, residents

organized into the Washington Park Consortium via LISC Chicago's New Communities Program and produced a visionary plan with 10 action items for the future. The process united neighborhood groups and civic leaders to articulate next steps for community improvement. After Chicago lost the bid in 2009, the plan, which marks the most recent community planning effort, was put on hold and momentum stalled. Years later, residents became hopeful that the OPC would be in Washington Park proper, bringing investment directly to the neighborhood. After Jackson Park was selected as the final site, Washington Park residents were disappointed, yet stand ready to welcome the institution with open arms. Most recently, Washington Park was excluded from Mayor Lori Lightfoot's INVEST South/West initiative, despite its many similarities to the other selected neighborhoods. Without financial partnership from public and private investors, efforts to build a future with more opportunity for growth will continue to stagnate.

Washington Park residents are resilient and driven by a sense of urgency. As they welcome the OPC to Chicago's South Side, Washington Park residents are proactive and strategic in their efforts to rebuild their community. Presently, the Washington Park Residents' Advocacy Council is ready to work with the public and private sectors and others in the community to reclaim and rebuild the neighborhood by harnessing growth in adjacent areas to fuel equitable development, and working toward repopulating the neighborhood, improving overall neighborhood health, and enhancing quality-of-life for local residents—both existing and new residents.



Panorama of the Fountain of Time. Photo credit: Conrad Lee/Wikimedia Commons

WPRAC'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the parcel survey and subsequent research, WPRAC developed the following set of policy recommendations designed to help the neighborhood reimagine, rebuild, and grow equitably toward a more promising future. Although the Washington Park Parcel Survey and accompanying analysis were designed to assess the built environment with a focus on housing, its findings show that the community's challenges reach far beyond the scope of housing alone, and the recommendations reflect this important dynamic.

WPRAC's recommendations are informed by the independent research and analysis conducted by student volunteers from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and technical assistance provided by Loveland Technologies, but the policy recommendations in this report are solely those of WPRAC and do not reflect the views of Loveland Technologies, the University of Chicago or any entity of, or person employed by or affiliated with the University.

*Ryan Priester, previous Director of the Community Programs Accelerator, with Washington Park youth.
Photo credit: Cecilia Butler*



REIMAGINE

RECOMMENDATION #1

Implement a collaborative community process to establish a collective vision for the neighborhood.

Request Alderwoman Pat Dowell, Alderwoman Jeanette Taylor, and the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to immediately initiate an open, transparent community planning process that results in a collective vision, refreshing the 2009 Washington Park Consortium plan and/or developing a new strategy to transform the neighborhood from its current state of hypervacancy into a healthy environment with an active real estate market. WPRAC could potentially seek funding for technical assistance to support planning efforts through the LISC New Communities Program, United Way Neighborhood Network, or other entities. The resulting process should establish community priorities; reimagine uses for the significant amount of vacant land; contemplate a healthier neighborhood design; include strategies to attract businesses that can provide much-needed jobs and amenities to the neighborhood;

and ensure all strategies contemplate equitable opportunities to benefit existing residents. As part of the process:

- Work with representatives from the Mayor’s Office, City Department of Housing, City Department of Planning and Development, Cook County Land Bank Authority, and Cook County Bureau of Economic Development.
- Prioritize the re-envisioning and re-imagining of future uses for the significant amount of vacant spaces, with a focus on various types of real estate development opportunities, while also exploring spaces for stormwater collection or urban agriculture.
- Brainstorm innovative approaches to specific housing needs that can offer creative concepts for accessible or veterans’ housing, meet the needs of existing residents, offer solutions to others outside of the neighborhood, and be developed on existing vacant land.
- Advocate for Washington Park to be selected as a target area for existing City efforts that would support implementation of the vision, such as the City’s Micro Market Recovery Program (MMRP) or a pilot area for a revamped single-family home building program.
- Although housing may be core to the vision, identify and prioritize commercial uses that could bring jobs, affordable retail, and other much-needed amenities to the neighborhood, such as a grocery store, public library, dry cleaner and pharmacy.
- Address other community needs, such as technology access (beyond cell phones), which has become increasingly critical for students and workers alike in the post-COVID era.
- Implement a plan with projected funding streams and a framework for monitoring and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION #2

In preparation for the community planning process, conduct a Community Census to better understand the housing and other needs of existing residents.

To augment the findings of this report and gather direct feedback from Washington Park residents, conduct a Community Census to best understand the needs and desires of existing residents, particularly senior citizens who often live on fixed or no income, and households whose health, employment, or financial situation may have been impacted by the current global pandemic. Particularly given today’s constantly

evolving environment, a Community Census could be an important tool in identifying the rapidly-changing needs of individual households and neighborhood trends that are challenging to pinpoint via a survey of the built environment. A Community Census, like those undertaken by Jackson/Clark Partners in several Pittsburgh neighborhoods, will allow for a better understanding of the type of housing and other social needs of residents and inform the development of new programs or initiatives to address those needs. Results from Jackson/Clark’s Larimer Community Census helped lead to a \$30M Choice Neighborhoods award from HUD.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Engage with urban landscape designers during and after the planning process to establish a neighborhood design that addresses environmental challenges, prioritizes health outcomes for residents, and highlights the community’s location as an important urban gateway.

Given the health risks posed by the neighborhood’s location and built environment and their long-term ramifications, urban landscape designers could help the community develop an intentional plan that considers a variety of elements needed for a healthy neighborhood ecosystem. Such elements include healthy and inclusive spaces that minimize the impact of air pollution outside of the park, encourage physical activity, and proactively address environmental and health hazards. Building on the recent modernization of CTA’s Garfield Park Green Line rail station, such a design could also specifically contemplate more beautification efforts along Garfield Boulevard, a main thoroughfare which also serves as an urban gateway from the Dan Ryan Expressway toward the eventual location of the OPC.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Rebrand the neighborhood as a place of affordability and innovation.

Engage in a community marketing campaign that builds upon important neighborhood history and positions Washington Park as a welcoming and affordable option, including for residents of Woodlawn and Hyde Park. Residents of these rapidly developing neighborhoods may no longer be able to afford their own housing costs or may want to pursue affordable homeownership options

in an adjacent neighborhood that is not too far from home. Additionally, if new approaches to housing development are explored as part of the community vision, Washington Park could be positioned as a place for housing innovation.

EQUITABLY REBUILD

RECOMMENDATION #5

Work with the City to establish a new short-term Community Housing Fund to invest in the housing needs of existing Washington Park residents and help spark new development.

The new, time-limited fund would serve as a centralized resource to strategically invest in the needs of OPC's host communities. Although specifics of the Fund would need to be further developed in a way that reflects community priorities, its centralized funding could support priorities identified via a new community plan and/or a variety of programs that have proven successful in the past but have been discontinued or scaled back due to decreases in public or philanthropic funding. For example, the fund could support:

- Emergency Rental Assistance for rental tenants experiencing a temporary event that challenges their ability to pay rent.
- A targeted Home Repair Grant Program available to longtime homeowners facing extensive need for home repair or to landlords interested in maintaining affordable rental units for longtime residents. Eligibility requirements could include income guidelines and/or length of neighborhood tenure.
- Down payment assistance programs targeted to existing residents who have financial capacity to transition to homeownership or to residents of adjacent neighborhoods of Woodlawn and Hyde Park who are exploring opportunities for affordable homeownership in the general vicinity.
- Development incentives specific to Washington Park, such as pre-development planning or beautification grants to new properties in the neighborhood.
- A community marketing campaign designed to attract new residents to the neighborhood as Washington Park seeks to repopulate.

Creating a centrally administered Housing Fund offers an opportunity to centralize fundraising efforts. Capital could be raised from a variety of sources, including a collection of interested philanthropic foundations, individual major gift donors, or other sources. Public funds could also be contributed and earmarked for implementation of initiatives within a specific geographic zone or for a specific demographic of residents.

The fund's governance and administrative structure could be modeled after similar funds, such as the "Fund for Chicago's Neighborhoods," established by a coalition of Chicago-based philanthropic funders in response to Chicago's 2016 Olympics Bid to ensure existing residents of Washington Park and surrounding neighborhoods would not suffer adverse consequences from Olympics-related investment in their communities.

RECOMMENDATION #6

Fund a centralized Housing Resource Center to serve residents of Washington Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore.

To provide a centralized access point to longtime neighborhood residents, fund a single location that:

- Acts as a clearinghouse by centralizing all housing assistance resources in a single location where longtime homeowners and renters can obtain credible, trustworthy, and reliable assistance with housing needs and questions, particularly information about tenant's rights, in partnership with the Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO) and access to free housing counseling or sliding scale legal assistance.
- Maintains a real-time database of neighborhood housing properties and real estate transactions to monitor market activity and the preservation of subsidized affordable units.
- Executes community organizing strategies to increase community participation and engagement in neighborhood development and enable longtime residents to speak with a single unified voice on neighborhood housing issues.
- Creates and distributes customized toolkits for longtime residents of the host communities to offer an easy-to-understand package of resources, such as a "Renters' Toolkit" to remind rental tenants of their rights and direct them to assistance if they fear that their building is at-risk of being converted to condos or sold to an outside speculator; a "Homeowners'

Early Intervention Toolkit” for homeowners who are concerned they are at risk of losing their home to tax sale or foreclosure; and a “Homeowners’ Repair Toolkit” to direct homeowners to programs, resources, and contractors to help keep their homes in good working order.

RECOMMENDATION #7

Implement a proactive effort to strategically reactivate vacant City lots and repurpose land, in alignment with the community’s vision.

Especially because of the large proportion of vacant lots in Washington Park that are already owned by the City of Chicago, a targeted and strategic effort to reactivate publicly-owned vacant lots in Washington Park could be a productive strategy to bring new investment to the neighborhood, benefit current residents, and put exempt properties back onto the tax rolls. Such an effort should be informed by the larger community vision articulated in the community planning process and prioritize a more holistic, strategic approach to development, rather than one-off efforts that further the patchwork nature of the neighborhood’s fabric.

As part of the analysis undertaken for this project, Harris students evaluated a small subsection of Washington Park to demonstrate how inactive, tax-exempt lots can be a tool to transform blocks or entire neighborhoods. Their analysis assessed 30 City lots that currently bring in zero property tax revenue; they demonstrated the 30 lots had the potential to bring \$1 million to \$1.5 million in revenues, while adding \$10 million to \$14 million in property value to the neighborhood.

Additionally, as previously noted, out of all 77 Community Areas in Chicago, Washington Park has the greatest percentage of vacant parcels owned by the City of Chicago—over 20% of its parcels. Some of these lots include those owned by the CHA. That is why Washington Park should be a priority area in any City efforts or partnerships to sell or redevelop vacant lots to support neighborhood revitalization. Collaboration can accelerate revitalization efforts and ensure that new developments can meet the needs of existing residents, while welcoming development to the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION #8

Partner with the Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA) to acquire undeveloped and unproductive properties and land, particularly those that are privately-held, and put them back to productive use in a way that supports the community’s vision.

The CCLBA is a natural partner for collaboration, particularly because it has access to a variety of tools and strategies that allows it to acquire properties, liens, notes or deeds; extinguish delinquent taxes and liens; and transfer the properties to responsible parties for redevelopment.

According to the CCLBA FY2019 Activity Report, the CCLBA significantly increased its inventory of vacant land during the past year. It plans to continue such strategies, including by participating in the Cook County Scavenger Sale, an auction of properties whose property taxes have been unpaid for at least three years and were not purchased at the Cook County Annual Tax Sale. Historically, people participating in the Scavenger Sale have used the sale as a speculation tool, and the process has resulted in a concentration of tax-delinquent parcels in distressed neighborhoods that need redevelopment the most. The Activity Report illustrates that the CCLBA is already pursuing a number of tax certificates in the Washington Park neighborhood, making it uniquely placed to be a partner in Washington Park’s own redevelopment efforts.

RECOMMENDATION #9

Innovate and explore new housing models to meet existing resident needs, while strategically leveraging opportunities to develop new markets in partnership with anchor institutions.

For example, more ADA-accessible units or properties with universal design are needed in Washington Park to serve physically disabled and mobility-challenged residents. Opportunities for such developments could be explored not only for existing residents, but in conjunction with neighboring medical institutions serving patients and their families receiving short-term care nearby, University of Chicago students or faculty members in need of an ADA-compliant unit, or others. Opportunities to repurpose vacant properties along the neighborhood’s

commercial corridors could be explored as mixed-use buildings with commercial use on the first floor and accessible residential units upstairs. Additionally, a great need exists in Washington Park for housing that serves female veterans with children. A development specific to this population could serve a local need while potentially attracting others to the neighborhood.

Another potential new housing model could include the use of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), otherwise known as basement units or granny flats, for which the City of Chicago is currently considering an ordinance. According to the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), 20% of Washington Park's 2-4 unit properties are owner-occupied. Upon passage of the ordinance, owners with access to resources to rehab or develop a basement unit could be well-positioned to offer an innovative new housing model while serving as an additional source of income for the owner.

RECOMMENDATION #10

Preserve existing housing affordability by collaborating with the Preservation Compact to develop and implement a focused Washington Park strategy, utilizing a variety of tools to preserve existing affordable rental housing units.

The Preservation Compact was formed in 2007 to respond to growing losses in the region's supply of affordable rental housing. Through the initiative, leaders from a variety of disciplines come together to identify the most pressing affordable rental housing problems, devise solutions, and implement on-the-ground strategies that can assist developers, owners, tenants, government officials, and nonprofit organizations in ensuring safe, affordable housing far into the future.

Development and implementation of a Washington Park-specific strategy that is conducted in partnership with WPRAC and other neighborhood stakeholders could address the range of issues faced by at-risk renters within the neighborhood, including government-subsidized affordable units and maintenance of naturally occurring affordable housing units to ensure they remain affordable for the long-term.

RECOMMENDATION #11

Attract and support development of businesses and affordable retail that create jobs and neighborhood amenities.

Although the Washington Park Parcel Survey was conducted with an eye toward housing needs, the survey results and related analysis clearly show that the neighborhood could easily accommodate and would greatly benefit from development or rehabilitation of commercial space to provide jobs to local residents while offering important amenities that are currently lacking, such as a grocery store, dry cleaner and pharmacy. Although Washington Park is not a targeted neighborhood in the City's INVEST South/West initiative, other valuable opportunities exist to market sites for new development as a part of community rebuilding.

For instance, as the OPC opens in the adjacent Woodlawn neighborhood, the potential for Washington Park's commercial retail market, particularly along the Garfield Boulevard commercial corridor, is an area of great opportunity. Although the corridor is now largely vacant, a study conducted for the Obama Foundation in anticipation of the OPC determined that, each day, an estimated 30,000 vehicles travel on Garfield Boulevard and another 5,000 commuters access one of Garfield's two CTA "L" stations, making Garfield Boulevard one of the highest trafficked corridors on Chicago's South Side. Now is the time to begin attracting businesses who can offer jobs and amenities to current residents, while recognizing the potential for expanded market buying power in the future.

Additionally, every parcel of Washington Park is within a Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ), a tax incentive program that was enacted into federal law through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. The program is designed to encourage long-term equity investments in real estate projects and operating businesses located in census tracts throughout the nation that have received a QOZ designation. The program enables a wide range of private investors to realize a tax benefit by investing in local businesses that will create jobs or in development projects that support a broader community vision. Although the incentive is time-limited, Washington Park is well-poised to market a development plan, project, or local business opportunity to investors seeking a long-term return on investment.

CONCLUSION

WPRAC’s mission is, and has always been, to advocate for the residents of Washington Park, with a focus on building and sustaining the community through knowledge, skills, resources, values, and commitments. This report has helped to provide the knowledge needed to forge a meaningful path forward. The community is proud of its strong heritage and driven by a sense of urgency—refusing to be left behind during this historic juncture in South Side history. WPRAC stands ready to proactively work with others to help reclaim and rebuild the community by reimagining and rebuilding its future, repopulating the community, welcoming new faces, and enhancing the quality-of-life for residents who live there today. The time to act is now.



DuSable Museum of African American History. Photo credit: Cecilia Butler

APPENDIX

2019 WASHINGTON PARK PARCEL SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES (2,881 PARCELS SURVEYED)

As part of the Washington Park Parcel Survey (WPPS), small teams of students from the Harris School of Public Policy and youth from Washington Park worked together to survey every parcel of property in Washington Park using mobile phones equipped with the Landgrid app. The Landgrid app provides a map with each parcel identified by its official Property Index Number (PIN) and a set of survey questions for each parcel. Responses were uploaded in real-time to Landgrid's web platform, where results could be immediately visualized and later analyzed. All Washington Park Parcel Survey (WPPS) questions and answers are listed below.

1. Is there a building on the parcel? (2881)
 - a. Yes, 1266
 - b. No, 1615
2. Is the building occupied? (1266)
 - a. Occupied, 1044
 - b. Possibly Occupied, 76
 - c. Unoccupied, 137
 - d. Under Construction, 9
3. What material is the building made from? (1266)
 - a. Brick, 841
 - b. Greystone, 211
 - c. Siding, 89
 - d. Other, 125
4. What is the building used for? (1,266)
 - a. Housing, 983
 - b. Business, 102
 - c. Industrial, 42
 - d. Institutional, 119
 - e. Unknown, 20
5. What housing subtype is this building? (983)
 - a. Single Family Home, 204
 - b. Residential 2-6 Units, 510
 - c. Multifamily Apartments, 7+ Units, 242
 - d. Garage or Shed, 27
6. What condition is the structure in? (1266)
 - a. Good condition, 1133
 - b. Needs repairs, 133
7. Is there fire damage? (133)
 - a. Yes, 14
 - b. No, 119
8. What is the level of fire damage? (14)
 - a. Minor, 3
 - b. Moderate, 8
 - c. Major, 3
9. If unoccupied, is the building boarded up or open to trespass? (137)
 - a. Boarded up, 19
 - b. Open to trespass, 118
10. If no building, what is this lot used for? (1615)
 - a. Vacant lot, 1175
 - b. Parking lot, 190
 - c. Park, 25
 - d. Garden, 33
 - e. Attached lot, 104
 - f. RR Tracks or Other, 88
11. Is the lot maintained? (1615)
 - a. Yes, 739
 - b. No, 876
12. Is there dumping on the site? (876)
 - a. Yes, 364
 - b. No, 512



The General Richard L. Jones Armory. Photo credit: Cecilia Butler

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WPRAC is a Chicago, Illinois-based non-profit organization and has no affiliation with Loveland Technologies or the University of Chicago.

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Washington Park Residents'
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