

Chicago, Illinois

Various neighborhood, community development, and racial justice movements mobilized in the postwar period to check Mayor Richard J. Daley's (1955-1976) attempt to transform Chicago on a postindustrial basis in the face of many signs of urban decline. The city was also the birthplace of community organizing along the model developed by Saul Alinsky. A political breakthrough occurred in the 1980s under Mayor Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, who responded vigorously to local organizing and community development groups. His death by a heart attack early into his second term cut short many of these opportunities, but Mayor Richard M. Daley (1989-2011) accommodated and even encouraged some forms of community-based and urban sustainability practice during an even longer tenure than his father. His 2008 climate action plan leveraged the work of various environmental justice, urban forest, bicycle and similar groups. Growth machine and "financialization" dynamics, however, have remained strong, as have persistent problems of police violence in communities of color.

Background

- *form of government*: mayor/council (aldermen), with strong traditions of aldermanic privilege and machine politics
- *population*: 2.7 million as of 2018; roughly 30 percent non-Hispanic white, 33 percent African American, 30 percent Latino or Hispanic, and five percent Asian
- *geography and land area*: approximately 227 square miles, on Lake Michigan and the Chicago River

Postwar urban struggles

The postwar period was one of intense conflict over land use, especially in creating a coherent "Loop" out of the tangle of railroad yards; also over freeway planning and University of Illinois-Chicago campus placement; and neighborhood transformation and conflict accompanying large in-migration of southern blacks into segregated neighborhoods and large public housing projects.

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Harold Washington mayoralty (1983-1987)

- *background:* Washington was a black politician from the South side who had risen steadily through the Daley machine to become U.S. Representative from the First District in 1980.
- *election:* he won the Democratic mayoral primary in a three-way race with 36 percent of the vote. This secured him victory in the general election of April 1983, though on a much narrower basis than would have typically been the case in this heavily Democratic city. Washington's disillusion with the machine, however, was evident much earlier, and his campaign brought together white liberal reformers, black civil rights and empowerment organizations, and a broad array of black, white, and Latino neighborhood groups and institutions within the community development field.
- *neighborhood and local industrial development:* Washington's *Chicago Works Together* (1984) first sketched a way forward, though without much input from neighborhood groups. In *Chicago Works Together II* (1987), neighborhood and community development groups, as well as labor and business groups threatened with further deindustrialization, had some 18 months to contribute ideas.

- *community forums*: while Washington did not formalize neighborhood planning boards (for fear of aldermanic capture), he engaged local residents. Elizabeth Hollander’s group of planners utilized the mayor’s presence at community forums to directly engage the questions and suggestions of ordinary residents, which he did with great verve for hours on end, typically with key professional staff on hand to add expertise to these democratic conversations. Washington came early, often to a reception before the forums, and stayed as late as local people wanted, or until almost everyone else had drifted back to their homes for the evening.

With grace and humor he engaged more skeptical, even hostile neighborhoods, some in white ethnic districts on the Southwest side openly resisting his agenda on the council. He then planned bus tours for them, with aldermen and press in tow, to demonstrate how new neighborhood investments through a general obligation bond could improve their streets, sewers, and sidewalks as well.

These engagement practices helped create enough public pressure to finally break the logjam on the council to approve the bond, and then led to formalizing neighborhood planning through multi-stakeholder processes, including homeowners, renters, local businesses and institutions, as well as aldermen.

- *information as community power*: Washington’s planners developed a strategy for sharing neighborhood-specific information with local residents. Two of the mayor’s “affirmative neighborhood information” group members – Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight – soon went on to elaborate the “assets-based community development” (ABCD frame and toolkit, one of the most influential toolkits in grassroots urban, environmental justice, and healthy community work in subsequent years.
- *council wars*: Edward “Fast Eddie” Vrdolyak and Ed Burke led a majority group of 29 of the 50 aldermen to ferociously oppose Washington’s proposals in what was widely referred to as the “council wars.” This resistance was only broken with a federal redistricting ruling and a special election in early 1986 that shifted power on the council.
- *re-election, then heart attack*: Washington was re-elected in April 1987, but died suddenly of a heart attack in November. Opportunities for political and institutional change were thus truncated.
- *criticism*: To many, Washington appeared administratively ineffective. To others, following a widely read post-mortem series by John McCarron, urban affairs writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, many community groups pursued an unrealistic ideal of inner-city industrial renewal not only out of misplaced idealism, but also because of narrow organizational self-interest that would sacrifice downtown growth and undermine more effective employment strategies for those they claimed to serve.

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Richard M. (“Rich”) Daley mayoralty (1989-2011)

- *election*: after two interim mayors, the eldest son of the former mayor, was elected for a regular (albeit initially two-year) term in 1989 and then proceeded to serve for the longest of any Chicago mayor in history, until he voluntarily stepped down in 2011.
- *governing strategy*: Rich Daley, while further distancing from machine politics, utilized concentrated power to further transform Chicago into a world-class city, tourist mecca, and “city of spectacle,” in close alignment with the business community. In doing so, he utilized complex instruments of financialization across a range of powerful real-estate institutional field actors to fuel a speculative bubble, while imposing “collateral environmental damage” from energy waste and construction debris dumped especially in low-income communities of color.

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Sustainability initiatives: in a variety of arenas, and then with a climate action plan of 2008 under Daley.

Trees and forests

Restoration and stewardship in city and county preserves go back several decades, and were leveraged further under Daley.

- *Chicago Wilderness*: is a regional alliance that began its restoration work in the late 1970s as the Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN), led by Steve Packard, and continued under the umbrella of the Illinois Conservancy and then Chicago Audubon, until becoming a separate nonprofit in 1996.

VSN engaged as many as 5,000 volunteers from neighborhood associations, garden clubs, Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, and unaffiliated citizens interested in hands-on work and drawn to becoming “citizen scientists” of restoring prairies as they once existed before large European settlement.

In the late 1990s, its work became quite controversial, however. Some neighborhood groups questioned its methods, such as controlled burns in familiar wooded areas where people walked their dogs. They also questioned its democratic legitimacy to speak for communities or, indeed, to speak for nature. Some asked: who were these volunteers to

think that they could define ecological, aesthetic, and recreational meanings? The city thus declared a moratorium on its work for several years.

However, the U.S. Forest Service's North Central Research Station facilitated a research process that was relational and deliberative among the opposing groups. Researchers explored the perspectives of opposing sides in the controversy, who then listened to each other, accompanied each other on visits to restored areas, clarified their core values, and fashioned common ground. The city's assistant commissioner on natural resources (Suzanne Malec-McKenna, later commissioner of the department of environment), who was also a founding board member of Chicago Wilderness, help to broker new relationships.

Chicago Wilderness began to further enrich its repertoire by stressing active discovery and storytelling in the construction of personal and civic identities in relation to nature.

It is now comprised of several hundred member organizations, ranging from homeowner and park associations, advocacy coalitions, land trusts, friends groups, and local chapters of several multi-tiered environmental associations (Sierra Club, Audubon, Izaak Walton League, National Parks Conservation Association, The Nature Conservancy).

It also includes corporate groups, cultural and educational organizations (Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, Lincoln Park Zoo, university programs), and the Center for Neighborhood Technology, as well as city, county, state, and federal forest, park, and other land use and natural resource agencies. Many of them have provided resources in the form of staff, space, volunteers, information, and grants. Its leadership focus on climate change has been land conservation (hence carbon sequestration), groundwater, green infrastructure, and biodiversity, which it links to its environmental education commitment to Leave No Child Inside.

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- [*Friends of the Forest Preserves*](#): founded in 1998 to protect Cook County forest preserves through ecological restoration and a volunteer conservation corps. They remove invasive species, restore hydrology, and conduct prescribed burns. They also coordinate, support and promote volunteer workdays year-round to maintain and restoring native species. Also serves as fiscal sponsor of Chicago Wilderness.
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Bicycling

The Chicagoland Bicycle Federation built civic capacity from the mid-1980s onwards; city agencies and mayors responded with increasingly robust plans.

- [*Active Transportation Alliance*](#): a nonprofit advocacy organization for walking, biking, and public transportation. Founded in 1985 as the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, it renamed itself in 2008 as it officially incorporated pedestrian and transit advocacy into its mission.

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The city also worked for more than a decade with a local friends group and the [Trust for Public Land](#), which convened extensive neighborhood visioning and design charrettes, to convert the old Bloomingdale Line through four ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods on the Northwest side into [The 606](#), a festive yet functional bike trail, walkway, and park. Federal transportation dollars from ISTEA (1991) and successor laws funded this and other projects.

Brownfields redevelopment

The Chicago Brownfields Initiative, launched in 1993 in response to the unintended consequences of the federal Superfund's cost and liability design that delayed cleanup, proceeded to help remediate dozens of contaminated sites on some 13,000 acres as of 2006 that had been the source of blight, crime, and health hazards, especially in communities of color.

With multi-stakeholder participation that frequently, though not consistently or by municipal code, included a neighborhood association, faith group, and/or community development corporation, the initiative also spurred redevelopment in the form of affordable, subsidized, and market-rate housing, factories and jobs, parks and open space, community and job-training centers, family and Head Start centers, and tax revenues from those projects that revived market activity directly and indirectly – though not without some tendencies towards gentrification, especially in the larger housing developments.

EPA and its Region 5 office in Chicago showcased the city in helping to build a municipal brownfields movement nationwide, which was also a central actor in EPA's Community Action for a Renewed Environment and collaborative environmental justice (EJ) grants programs.

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Sustainability and climate planning:

The Chicago climate action plan began as a nonprofit initiative in 2006, but with agreement of mayor Daley it was reconceived as an official city planning process.

The lead person within government was Sadhu Aufochs Johnston, whom Daley had moved from head of the department of environment into the mayor's office as his chief environmental officer,

while he also personally challenged his entire cabinet at an off-site retreat to “green every department or find other jobs.”

The key catalyst in the civic and philanthropic community, however, was Adele Simmons, who as founder of the Global Philanthropy Partnership (GPP), served as co-chair of the task force with Johnston. As head of the MacArthur Foundation for a decade (1989-1999), she brought global stature and local relationships. Julia Parzen facilitated the climate planning process.

Within the city, Joyce Coffee was tasked to coordinate teaching across some 40 city agencies. She, along with Johnston, Malec-McKenna, and Karen Hobbs, constituted a core group of change agents.

Key civic actors in the process included Chicago Wilderness (above) and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT):

- [Center for Neighborhood Technology](#): founded by Scott Bernstein in 1978, CNT published *The Neighborhood Works* magazine for two decades, which helped to diffuse innovative toolkits and pragmatic “neighborhood technologies” across a broad range of Chicago community development groups and local business networks struggling to come into compliance with environmental regulations (dry cleaning, electroplating, metal finishing), and to develop sustainable manufacturing practices and energy efficient buildings in low-income neighborhoods.

The EPA’s Design for Environment program funded CNT to help catalyze a national voluntary network for multi-stakeholder small manufacturing projects such as these, which included business owners, shop-floor workers, unions, neighborhoods, and professional designers. CNT offered one-stop energy conservation services to some 150 community-based nonprofits, and provided research within environmental justice coalitions, as in the case of battles around siting of waste incinerators and recycling alternatives.

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Other community-based initiatives

Community policing

The Daley administration crafted the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) in the early 1990s, in conjunction with neighborhood activists in the citywide Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), founded in 1981. Once the mayor recognized the strategic political opportunity presented by community policing in a city with growing black and Hispanic voters and a declining white population through the 1980s, Daley invested considerable city, state, and federal resources – with a very robust independent evaluation unit at Northwestern University – to ensure broad outreach to all neighborhoods, significant training for both police officers and neighborhood leaders, and administrative coordination across all city agencies whose activities could contribute to neighborhood safety.

The core philosophy of CAPS is that policy and communities coproduce public safety. Police must learn to collaborate with ordinary citizens, as well as various stakeholders, such as landlords, shopkeepers, and clergy. The department was decentralized into 279 beats. In the early years of rollout, CANS collaborated in joint community-police trainings provided to 11,700 residents in 1,065 training events.

The policy design included local beat meetings and district advisories that enabled significant civic participation, democratic deliberation, and joint problem solving among residents and beat officers. By 2003, monthly beat attendance average between 6,300 and 7,500 participants.

The policy design also incentivized engagement by specific kinds of nonprofits within and across neighborhoods whose agendas and styles were well aligned with issues of family safety, child development, neighborhood cleanup, and local business revitalization.

Recent policing crises have prompted a renewed call for community engagement and community policing as a “core philosophy infused throughout the CPD.” Mayor Lori Lightfoot, elected in 2019, had chaired the Police Accountability Task Force that had proposed various reforms in 2016.

Among a broad range of analyses and recommendations, the report noted the years of recent neglect and disinvestment in CAPS, including significant budget cuts in the late 2000s. It proposed to reverse this with several structural changes, renewed emphasis on beat work, further outreach to youth, enhancing “civilian organizing staff,” and

involvement of the community in police training (an early design feature), including ABCD and restorative justice skills.

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Last revised: 7/30/20