



# A FRAMEWORK PLAN FOR THE SOUTH BRANCH PARKS

DECEMBER 2018



Cover Image: Grace Madden

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DECEMBER 2018

## **A planning document for:**

The community surrounding the South Branch of  
the Chicago River

Chicago Park District

City of Chicago Department of Planning and  
Development

11th Ward Office

25th Ward Office

## **Authored by:**

South Branch Park Advisory Council

SmithGroup

## **With planning partners:**

Metropolitan Planning Council

Friends of the Chicago River

Active Transportation Alliance

CannonDesign

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# A LETTER FROM THE SOUTH BRANCH PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL

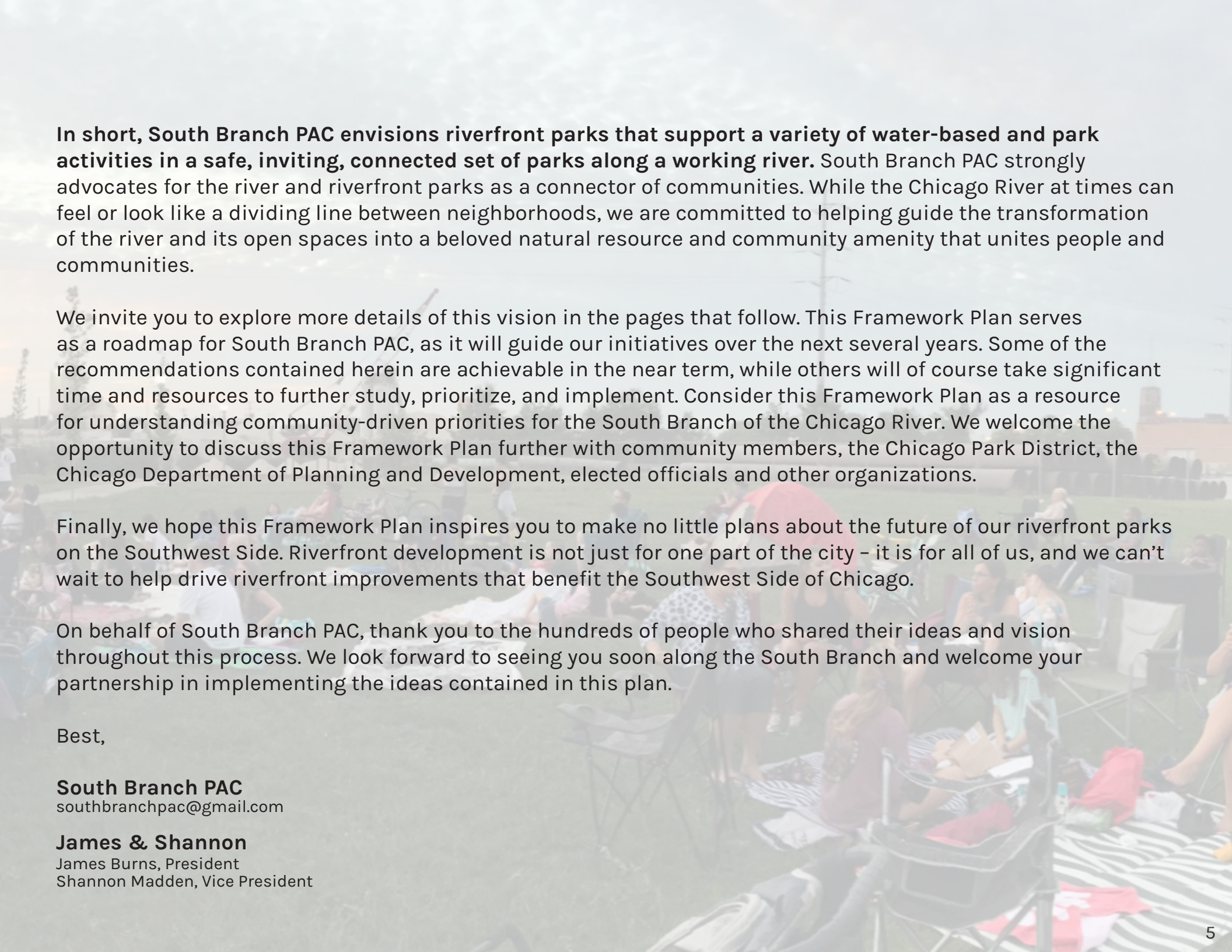
Dear Neighbors,

We are excited to share this Framework Plan for the South Branch Parks with you. This plan outlines a community vision for three parks stewarded by South Branch Park Advisory Council (PAC) along the South Branch of the Chicago River. We are grateful for the hundreds of community members, park users, and others who contributed their ideas and helped make this Framework Plan a reality.

When we established South Branch PAC in 2016, we were excited about making Park 571 an inviting public space for the local community in addition to some of our city's finest rowing teams. As our volunteer organization has grown and matured over the last three years, our interests have increasingly aligned with broader city initiatives to revitalize the Chicago River and its shorelines, and make them more accessible.

As residents of Bridgeport, Pilsen, McKinley Park, and Brighton Park on the Southwest Side of Chicago, we know first-hand what exciting opportunities await us along the Chicago River. Just as we have seen Chicago's downtown riverwalk become a recreational and economic development success, our PAC is committed to the continuing transformation of the South Branch into a dynamic, inviting space for residents, park users, visitors, and local businesses.

Over the past year, the PAC has engaged the community surrounding the Eleanor Street Boathouse at Park #571, Canal Origins Park, and Canalport Riverwalk in a dialogue to share thoughts and ideas about the Chicago River and these local parks. Through our Visioning Workshop in March 2018, our annual Boathouse Party in June, other events, and surveys throughout the year, nearly 500 people shared what they would like to see in our riverfront parks. We then analyzed the community input, identified the themes that emerged, and presented those themes back to the community for validation. We are pleased to present those themes and implementation recommendations here in this plan.



**In short, South Branch PAC envisions riverfront parks that support a variety of water-based and park activities in a safe, inviting, connected set of parks along a working river.** South Branch PAC strongly advocates for the river and riverfront parks as a connector of communities. While the Chicago River at times can feel or look like a dividing line between neighborhoods, we are committed to helping guide the transformation of the river and its open spaces into a beloved natural resource and community amenity that unites people and communities.

We invite you to explore more details of this vision in the pages that follow. This Framework Plan serves as a roadmap for South Branch PAC, as it will guide our initiatives over the next several years. Some of the recommendations contained herein are achievable in the near term, while others will of course take significant time and resources to further study, prioritize, and implement. Consider this Framework Plan as a resource for understanding community-driven priorities for the South Branch of the Chicago River. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this Framework Plan further with community members, the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, elected officials and other organizations.

Finally, we hope this Framework Plan inspires you to make no little plans about the future of our riverfront parks on the Southwest Side. Riverfront development is not just for one part of the city – it is for all of us, and we can't wait to help drive riverfront improvements that benefit the Southwest Side of Chicago.

On behalf of South Branch PAC, thank you to the hundreds of people who shared their ideas and vision throughout this process. We look forward to seeing you soon along the South Branch and welcome your partnership in implementing the ideas contained in this plan.

Best,

**South Branch PAC**  
southbranchpac@gmail.com

**James & Shannon**  
James Burns, President  
Shannon Madden, Vice President



Photo: Grace Madden

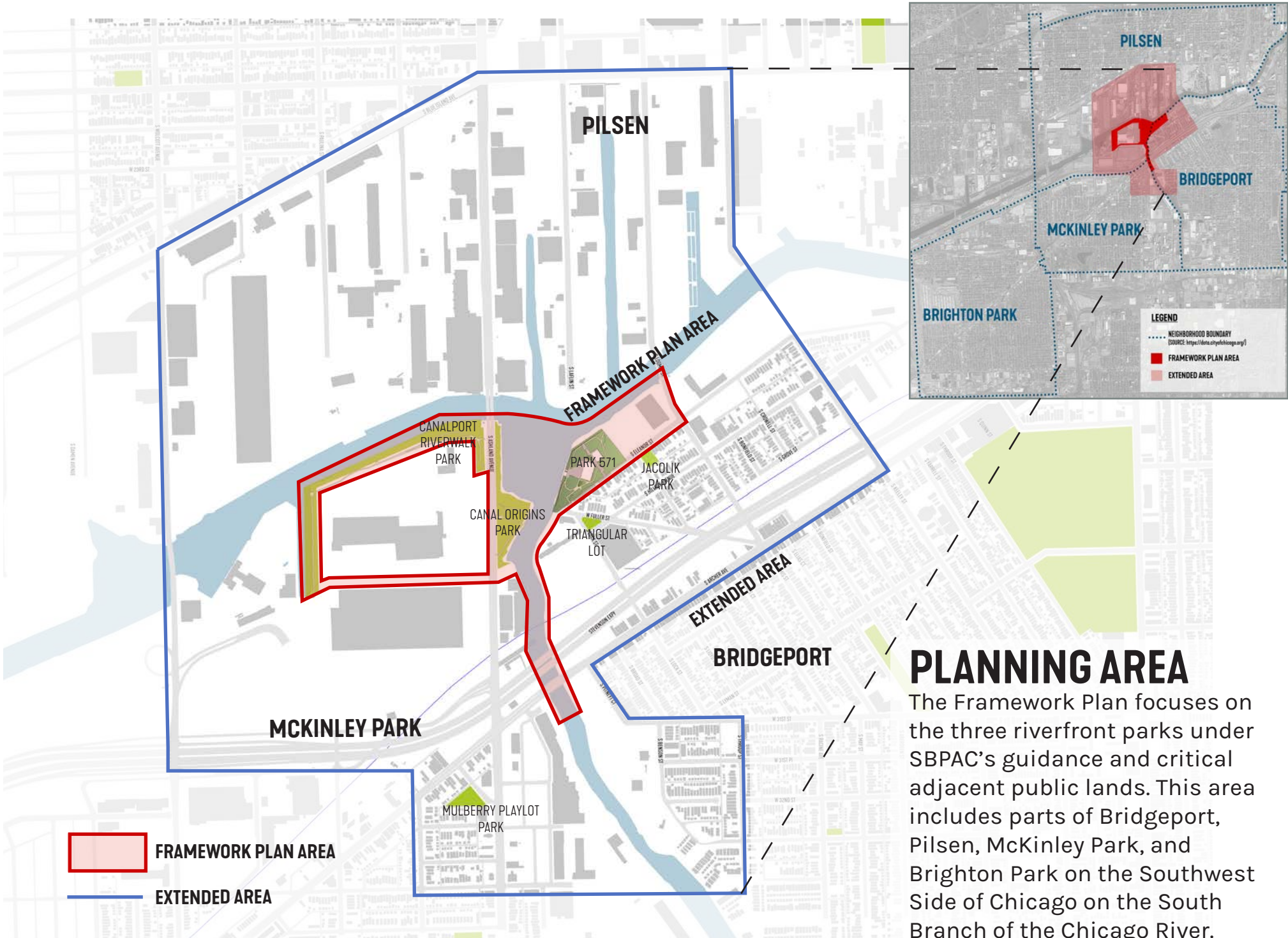
# WHY A FRAMEWORK PLAN?

A "framework plan" is a guide and support tool for the Chicago Park District in scheduling, planning and funding future park improvements. Its value comes not only as a planning document, but also from the process of creating it, which solicits and gathers ideas from a broad cross-section of its community. This report documents that process for the parks stewarded by the South Branch Parks Advisory Council (SBPAC): Park 571, Canal Origins Park, Canalport Riverwalk Park, Jacolik Park, Mulberry Playlot Park, and the triangular lot bounded by Fuller Street, Lock Street and Hillock Ave. This serves as an archive for ideas and opportunities in those parks and will be a guide for how the parks can better integrate with the existing neighborhoods and future development.

The Eleanor Street boathouse and associated programming has been a wild success. In less than 2 years, Park 571 has gone from obscurity to an active and vital center for the community. As Park 571 has grown in popularity it has brought new awareness to the Chicago River South Branch and Bubbly Creek, while recent river-centric planning efforts (Our Great Rivers, Chicago River Trail Action Plan) have captured the interest and imagination of the city at-large.

The South Branch Framework Plan is intended to bolster the role of the river in four community areas: Bridgeport, Brighton Park, McKinley Park, and Pilsen. The plan identifies and documents implementable strategies at a critical time for the PAC and its community in advance of future development being planned along the South Branch.





**FRAMEWORK PLAN AREA**

**EXTENDED AREA**

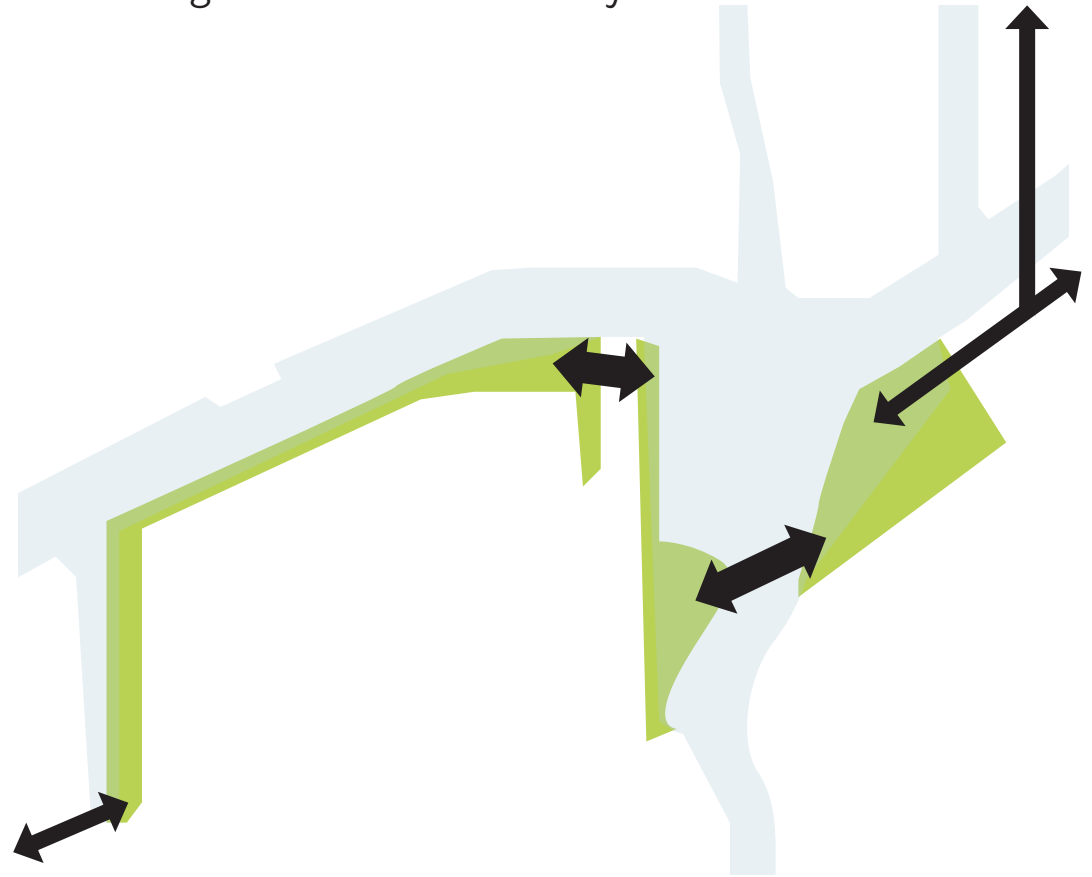
## PLANNING AREA

The Framework Plan focuses on the three riverfront parks under SBPAC’s guidance and critical adjacent public lands. This area includes parts of Bridgeport, Pilsen, McKinley Park, and Brighton Park on the Southwest Side of Chicago on the South Branch of the Chicago River.

# WE ENVISION RIVERFRONT PARKS THAT SUPPORT A VARIETY OF LAND AND WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES IN A SAFE AND CONNECTED SET OF PARKS.

## 1. CONNECT THE PARKS TO EACH OTHER AND THE NEIGHBORHOODS.

Strategies that close the gaps that disconnect the riverfront parks and allow them to function as one while retaining their individual identity.



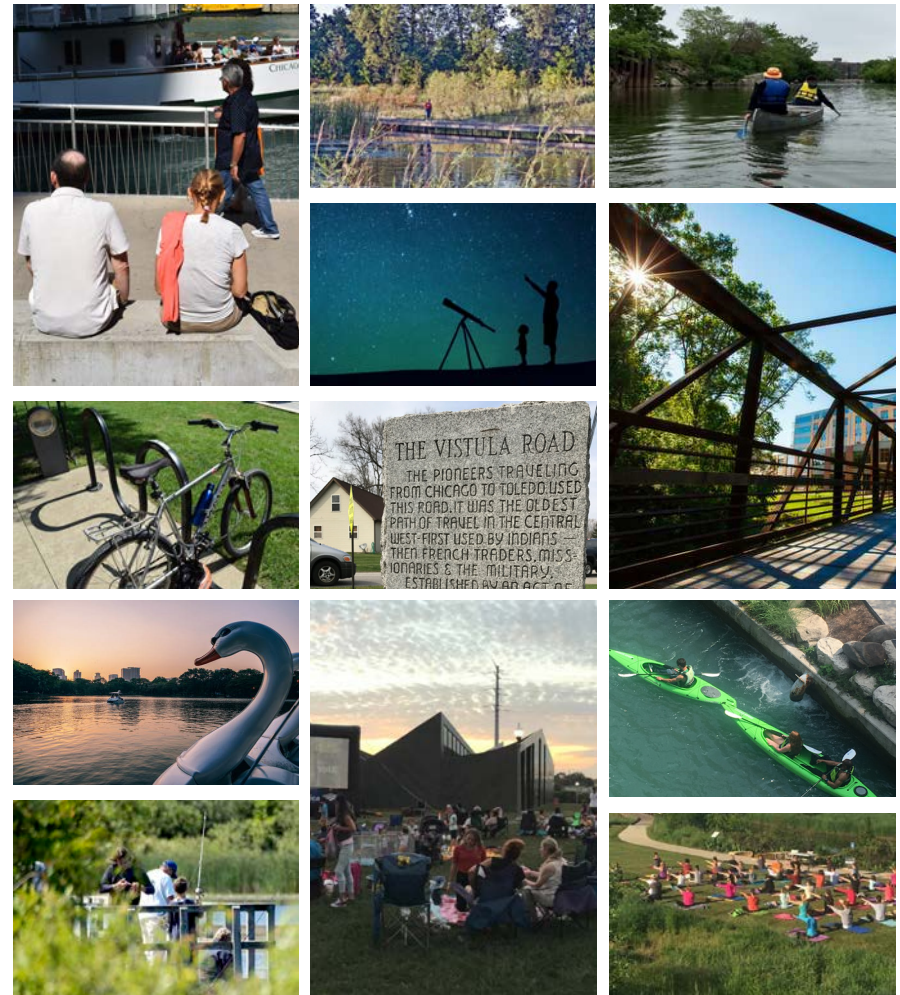
## 2. A LIFE ENHANCED BY BEING NEAR AND ON THE WATER.

Strategies that reveal the river, connect neighborhoods to the water, and increase accessibility of experiences on and near the water.



## 3. A WIDE RANGE OF PARK USES.

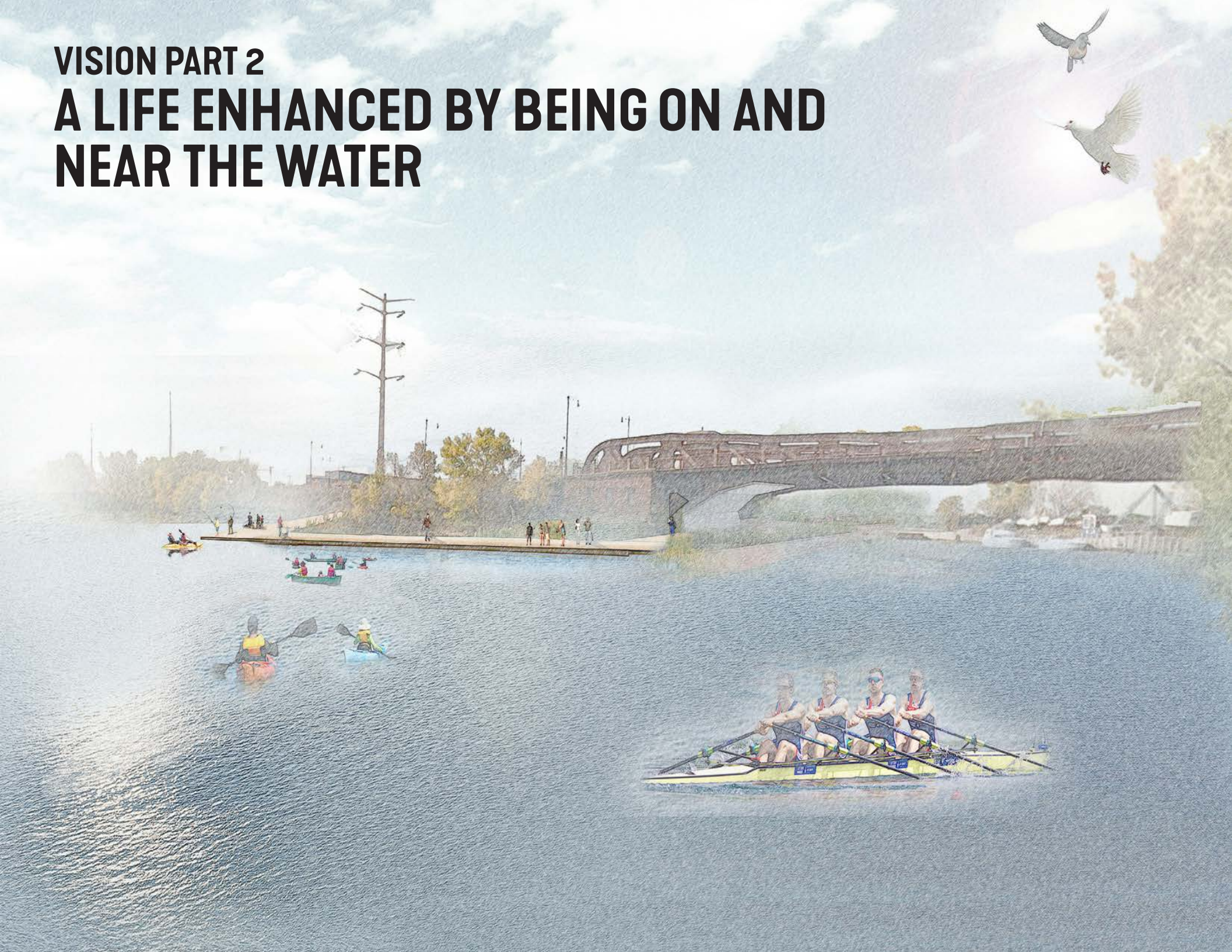
Strategies that add new, desired activities to the parks, both on the land and in the water.



# VISION PART 1 CONNECTED PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOODS



**VISION PART 2**  
**A LIFE ENHANCED BY BEING ON AND NEAR THE WATER**



# VISION PART 3 A WIDE RANGE OF PARK USES



The table below summarizes the themes and recommendations collected throughout the SBPAC’s outreach and planning efforts. Red dots indicate the parks in which each strategy is viable. Page numbers are provided for reference within the Framework Plan.

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>LEVEL OF EFFORT</b> (cost + complexity)	<b>PARK 571</b>	<b>CANALPORT RIVERWALK PARK</b>	<b>CANAL ORIGINS PARK</b>	<b>PAGE NUMBER</b>
<b>1. CONNECTED PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.</b>					
<b>1.1 CONNECT TO CHICAGO RIVER TRAIL</b>	LOW	●	●	●	23
<b>1.2 CREATE A CROSSING AT BUBBLY CREEK</b>	HIGH	●		●	24
<b>1.3 IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR PEOPLE ON 29TH STREET</b>	MID		●	●	25
<b>1.4 PROVIDE SAFE AND DIRECT OPTIONS FOR CROSSING ASHLAND</b>	HIGH		●	●	26
<b>2. A LIFE ENHANCED BY BEING NEAR AND ON THE WATER.</b>					
<b>2.1 DIVERSIFY WATERCRAFT</b>	LOW	●	●		29
<b>2.2 MAKE THE DAMEN SLIP A USABLE PART OF THE PARK</b>	MID		●		30
<b>2.3 DESIGN AND PLANT FOR GOOSE CONTROL</b>	LOW	●	●	●	32
<b>2.4 IMPROVE WATER QUALITY</b>	LOW-MID	●	●	●	33
<b>3. A WIDE RANGE OF PARK USES.</b>					
<b>3.1 USE PARK SPACES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES</b>	LOW	●			35
<b>3.2 EXPLORE ANNEXING ADJACENT PROPERTY</b>	HIGH	●			36
<b>3.3 IMPROVE LIGHTING AND SIGHTLINESS FOR SECURITY</b>	MID	●	●	●	38

# PLANNING PROCESS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public projects require public input. The framework planning process began with the community through a series of sessions designed to solicit, collect and verify ideas for improving their parks.







PARTICIPANTS BY THE NUMBERS:

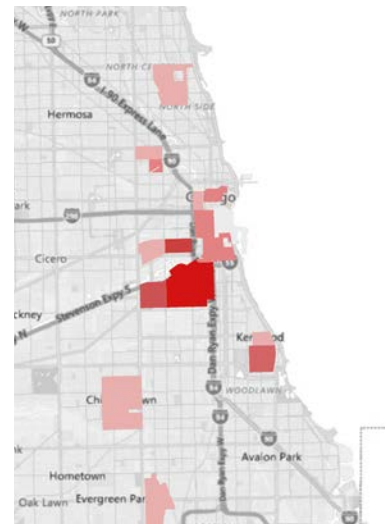
**100+** ATTENDEES

**16** NEIGHBORHOODS

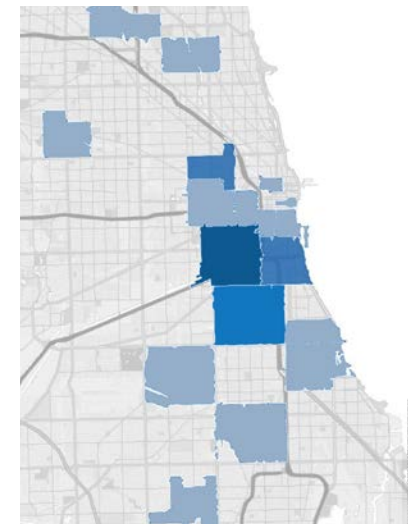
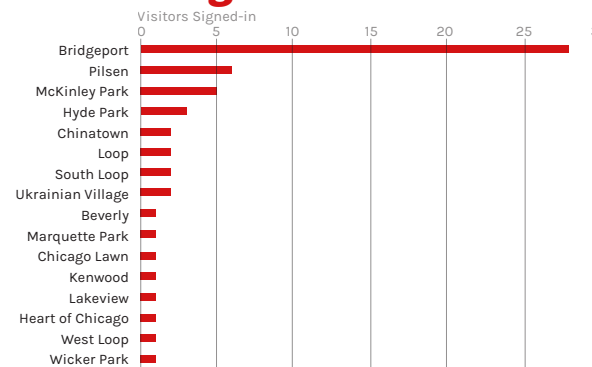
**16** ZIP CODES

## VISIONING WORKSHOP

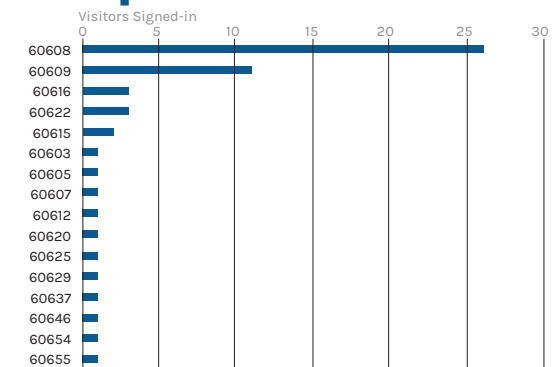
In March 2018, SBPAC hosted a visioning workshop at the boathouse, open to the public. The meeting was widely advertised in print, web and radio, and in English, Spanish and Chinese to attract a wide range of stakeholders from nearby communities.



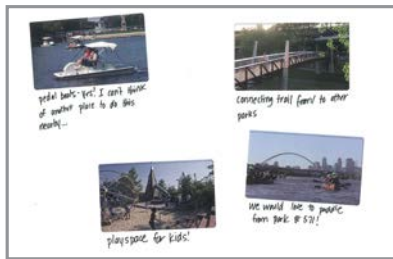
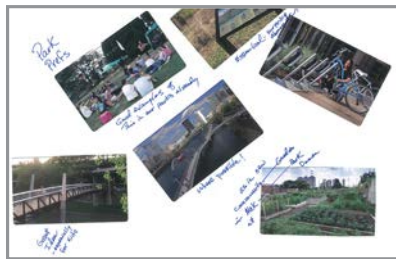
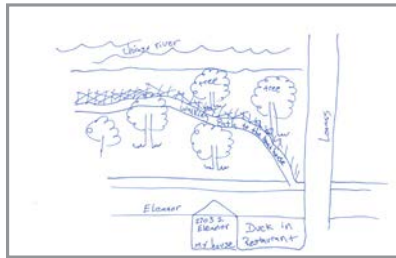
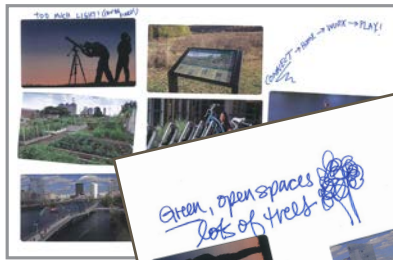
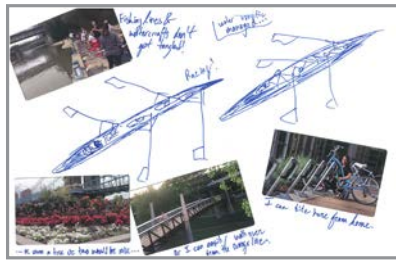
**Neighborhoods**



**Zip Codes**



At the Visioning Workshop in March 2018 we invited visitors to engage with planning and waterway experts and to generate ideas for their parks. The exercises were designed to allow different types of participation to be comfortable for each person. Participants could choose to share ideas through smartphones, images, written words, maps, or person-to-person dialog.



## 41 COLLAGES CREATED

At the "Build A Park" station visitors created collages of their ideal programmatic mix for a neighborhood park.



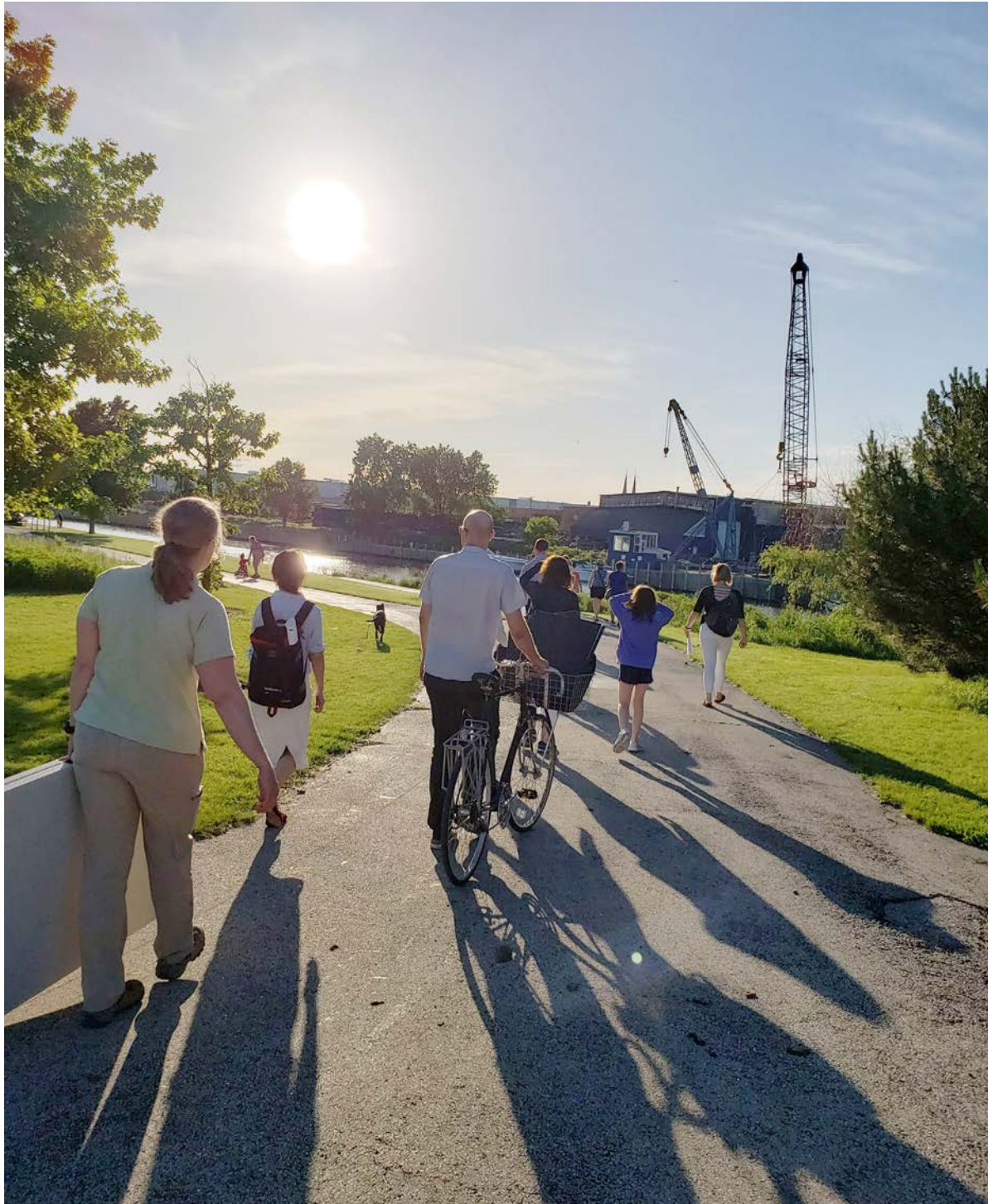




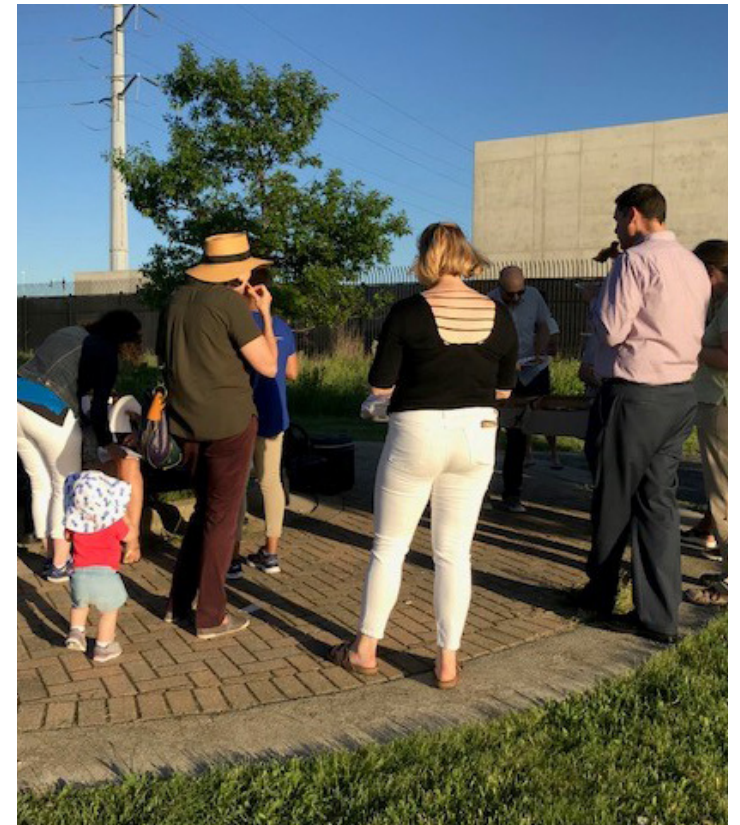
## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK + VERIFICATION: BOATHOUSE PARTY

The annual Boathouse Party at Park 571 on Saturday June 2 presented an opportunity for public review and feedback of the draft framework plan in the actual environment while demonstrating and/or trying the current and future park activities. Approximately 200 visitors tried canoes, rowing, rode bikes, learned about aquatic ecology and boat safety, danced and ate local food.





A second round of review and feedback occurred later that month on Wednesday June 13, 2018. Participants met at the Canal Origins Park with ecology and history docents and walked through the Canalport Riverwalk Park. They discussed the parks and River, shared their vision and ideas, and reviewed the draft framework plan over pizza and a beautiful sunset view over the river.

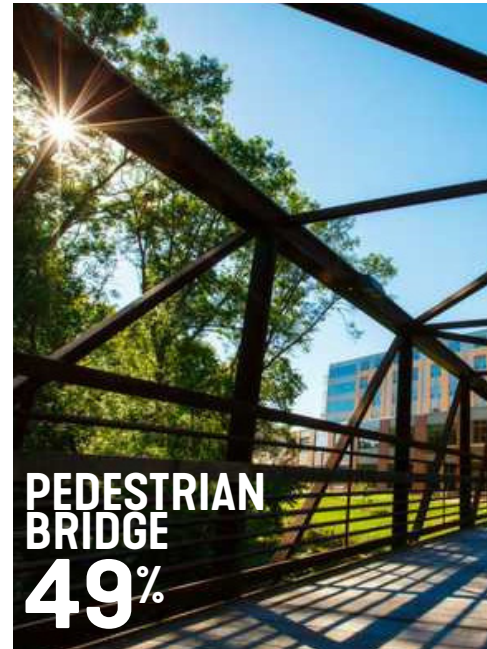


# A COMMUNITY VISION FOR THE PARKS

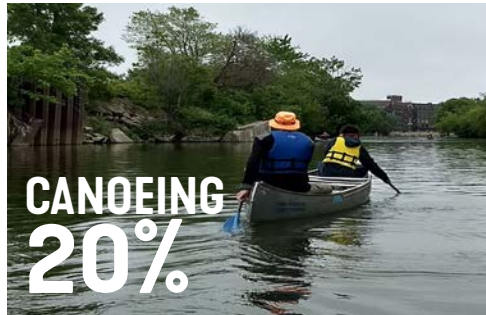
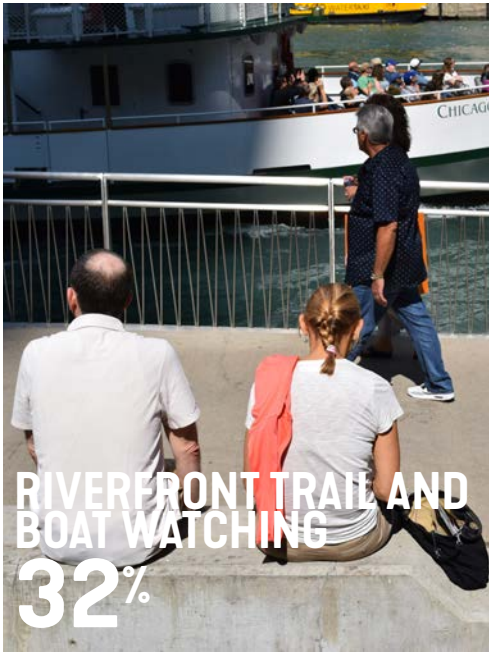
The input and analysis fed a three-part Vision for the South Branch Parks, each framed through a sentence describing the desired future conditions. The three statements are each an umbrella for a subset of features and program identified by participants in the public workshop.

The percentages associated with the images on the right represent the percentage of "build a park" collages upon which each item appears, as a measure of public popularity for each. These are the most requested features/program from that exercise.

## 1. CONNECTED PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.



## 2. A LIFE ENHANCED BY BEING NEAR AND ON THE WATER.



## 3. A WIDE RANGE OF PARK USES.







# CONNECT TO THE CHICAGO RIVER TRAIL 1.1

As the Chicago River Trail extends southwest along the South Branch, the parks will connect to the trail. The area around Bubbly Creek could very well be a temporary terminus before later trail phases are built to the west. Engineering studies should be undertaken to study where a trail from downtown and Chinatown meets Loomis and how best to connect to and through Park 571. A trail may pass under the Loomis Bridge and along the river side of the park, and/or along Loomis Ave to Eleanor Street, which could be an economic boost to current and future businesses surrounding Loomis and Eleanor. In addition to physical connections to these trails, the addition or relocation of a Divvy station at Park 571 should be explored.



## POTENTIAL FUNDING KEY

- |  |   |  |                        |
|--|---|--|------------------------|
|  | TIGER, CMAQ or other alt. transportation grants |  | Brownfield remediation |
|  | Ecology/ecosystem restoration grants            |  | Tied to Development    |
|  | Waterfront/Coastal                              |  | Private donation       |



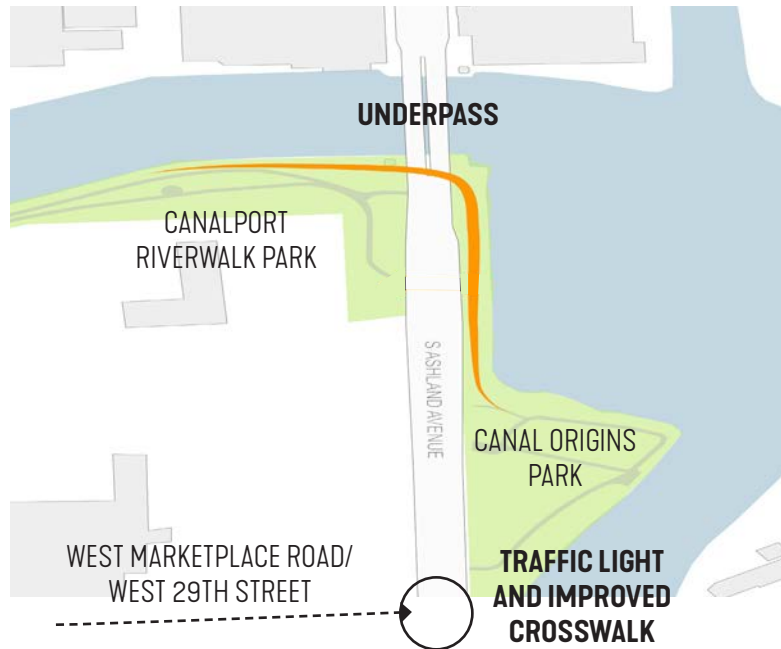
# IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR PEOPLE ON 29TH STREET 1.3

Work with the property owners of the 29th Street corridor to explore a safer, more walkable and bikeable environment along the edge of 29th Street south of the QTS Data Center. This will connect the signaled crosswalk at Ashland with the end of the trail at Canalport Riverwalk and create a walking and biking loop for park users.



# PROVIDE SAFE AND DIRECT OPTIONS FOR CROSSING ASHLAND 1.4

Create safer and more direct connections between Canal Origins and Canalport Riverwalk Park consistent with the City of Chicago's Vision Zero Plan. Move the Ashland Crosswalk to the north side of the intersection with 29th Street, and improve the crosswalk to be a shorter, more sheltered crossing for walkers and bikers, with paved bumpouts in the parking lane and a center median with a refuge island.





In addition to the improved crosswalk, a connection under Ashland Ave will be a recreation amenity as well as a prime observation spot for activity on the water. This type of path has already proven to be a huge success under several bridges in downtown Chicago.

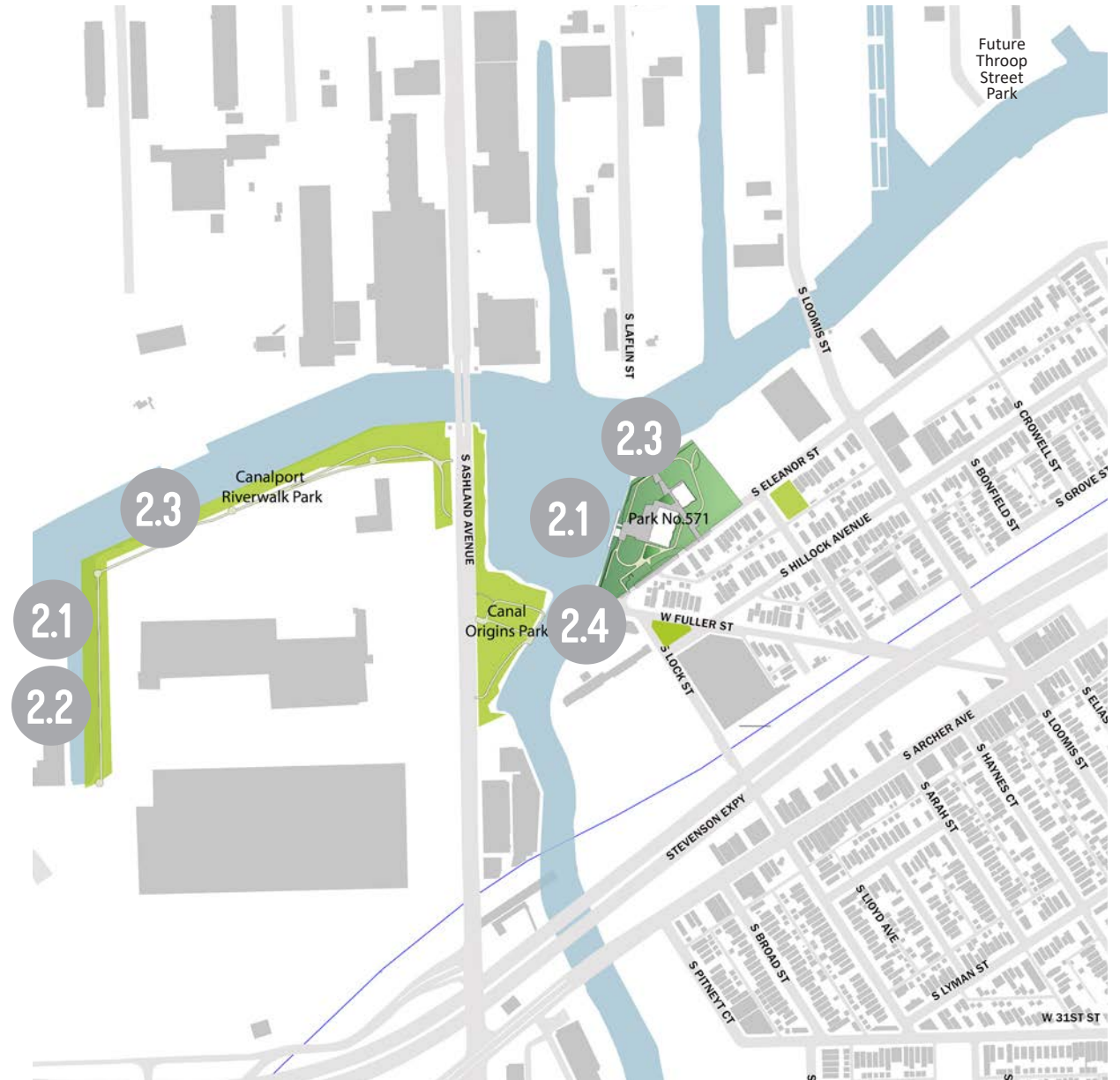
## VISION PART 2

# A LIFE ENHANCED BY BEING ON AND NEAR THE WATER

Remove the impediments -- real and perceived -- that discourage residents from experiencing the river more frequently: improve access, clean the water and shoreline, and create more ways for people to enjoy the water.

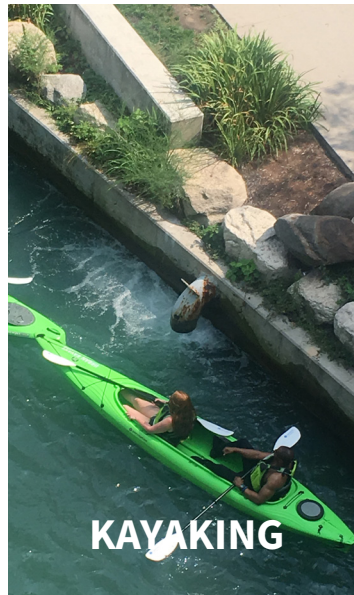
## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Diversify Watercraft**
- 2.2 Make The Damen Slip A Usable Part Of The Park**
- 2.3 Provide Goose Control Along The Riverfront**
- 2.4 Improve Water Quality**

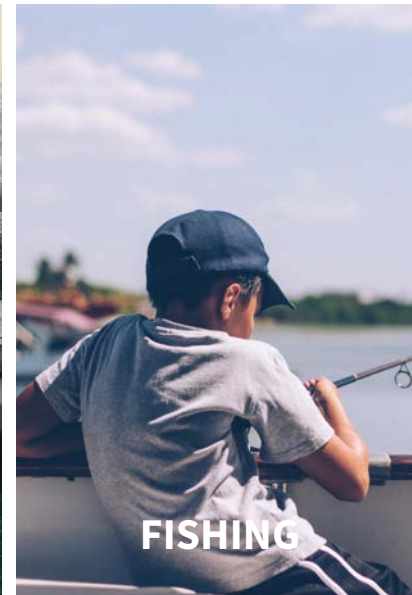


# DIVERSIFY WATERCRAFT 2.1

The popularity of the rowing at Park 571 has made that program an unqualified success for local crews. However, due to limited dock space, storage, and hours, there are few opportunities for other types of boating that would attract a different set of community members. A more specific community canvassing should be conducted to understand the demand, and new places to dock in Canal Origins and Canalport Riverwalk Park should be considered so as not to conflict with current boat uses.



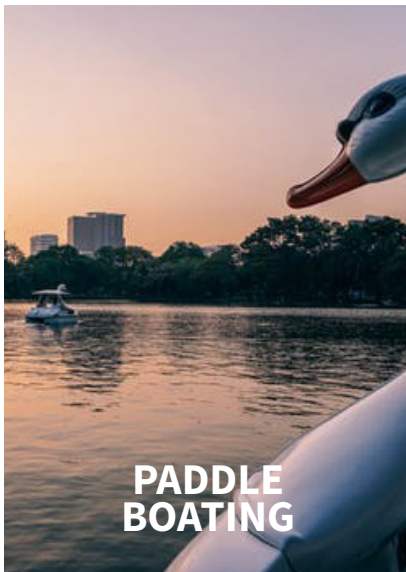
**KAYAKING**



**FISHING**



**CANOEING**



**PADDLE BOATING**



**PONTOON BOATING**



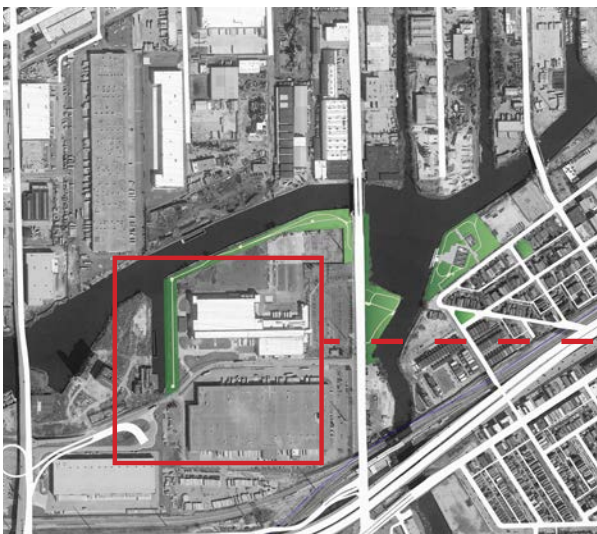
**WATER TAXI**



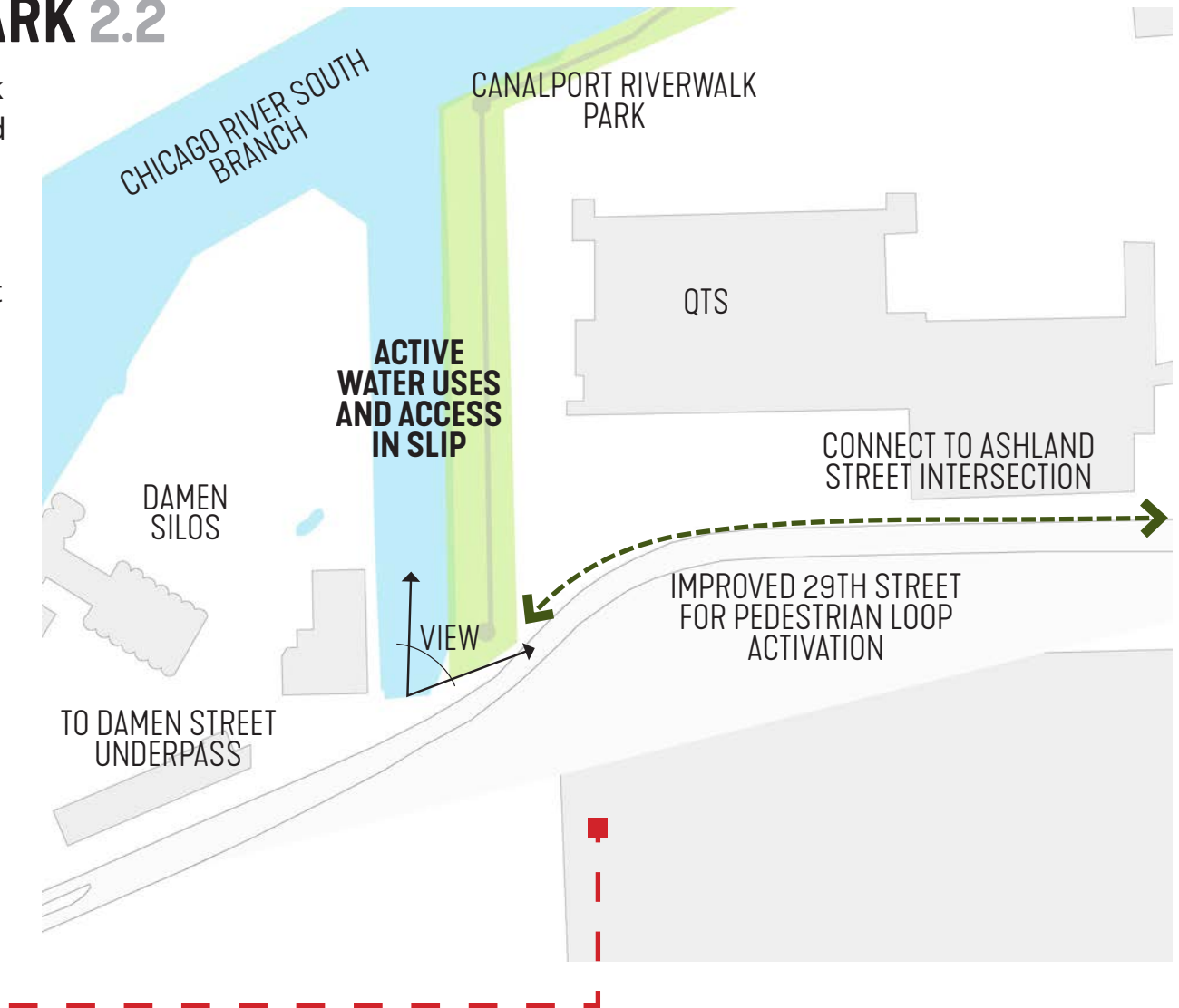
**WATERFRONT SEATING**

# MAKE THE DAMEN SLIP A USABLE PART OF THE PARK 2.2

The slip between Canalport Riverwalk Park and the Damen Silos site should become an active waterway for park use. The addition of a dock, boat storage or other water recreation amenities can be a magnet to attract users further into the park, broaden community access to the water in general and create space for new water craft (2.1) without adding congestion to the Park 571 Turning Basin.



EXISTING CONDITIONS







**DAMEN SILOS SITE**

**ACTIVE WATER USES AND ACCESS IN SLIP**

**ENHANCED LANDSCAPE PLANTING AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT**

**IMPROVED 29TH STREET PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FACILITIES**

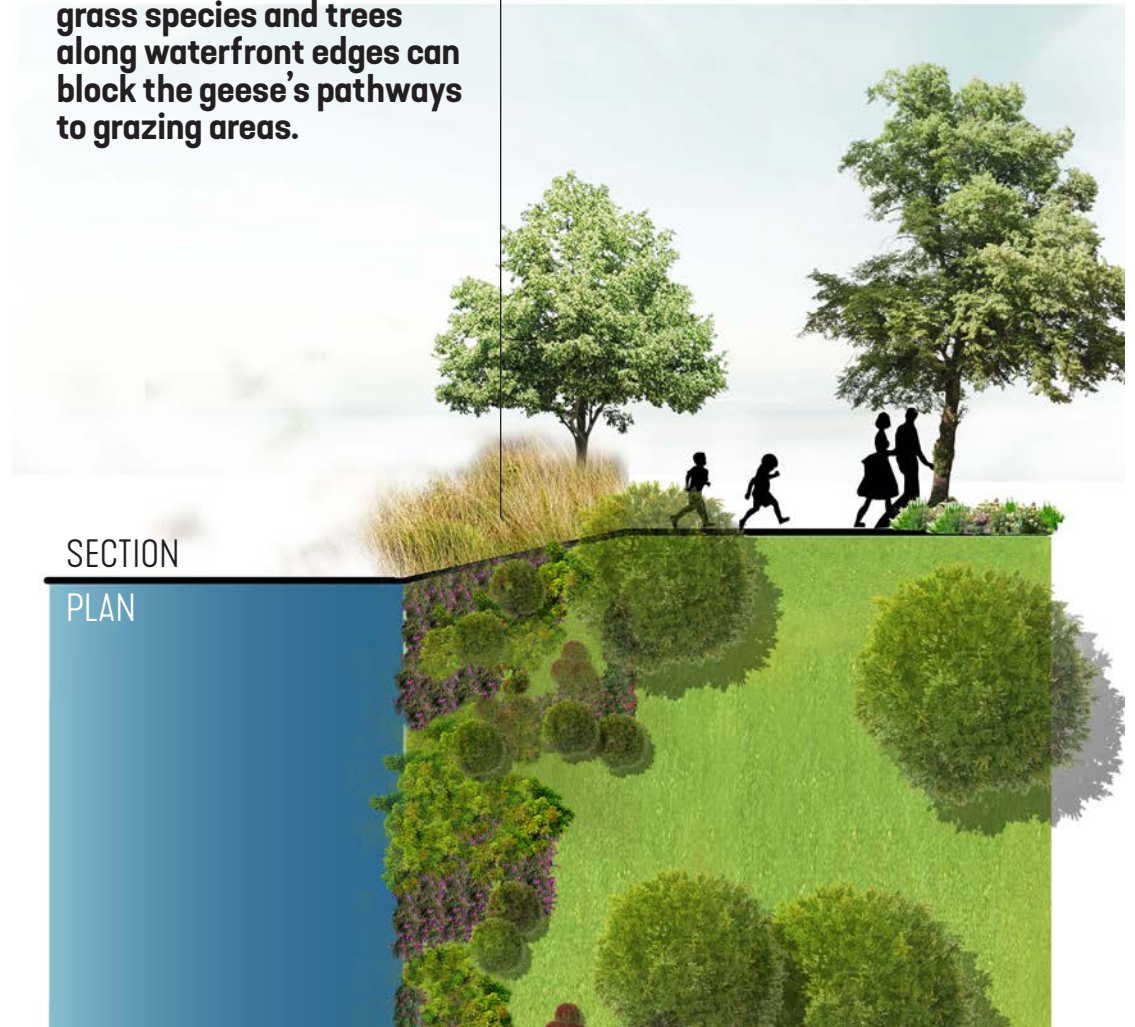
**CANALPORT RIVERWALK PARK** Using the Damen Slip for recreation, in combination with 29th Street Improvement (1.3) and linking to the river trail (1.1, 1.2), can activate the west end of Canalport Riverwalk Park and mitigate the perception of remoteness and insecurity there.

# DESIGN AND PLANT FOR GOOSE CONTROL 2.3

Naturalize the riverfront edges where possible to deter geese. A buffer planting of native riparian species should be designed to prohibit geese from making easy and quick transitions between water and turf lawn, while still maintaining views to the water and without inhibiting human use of the parks.

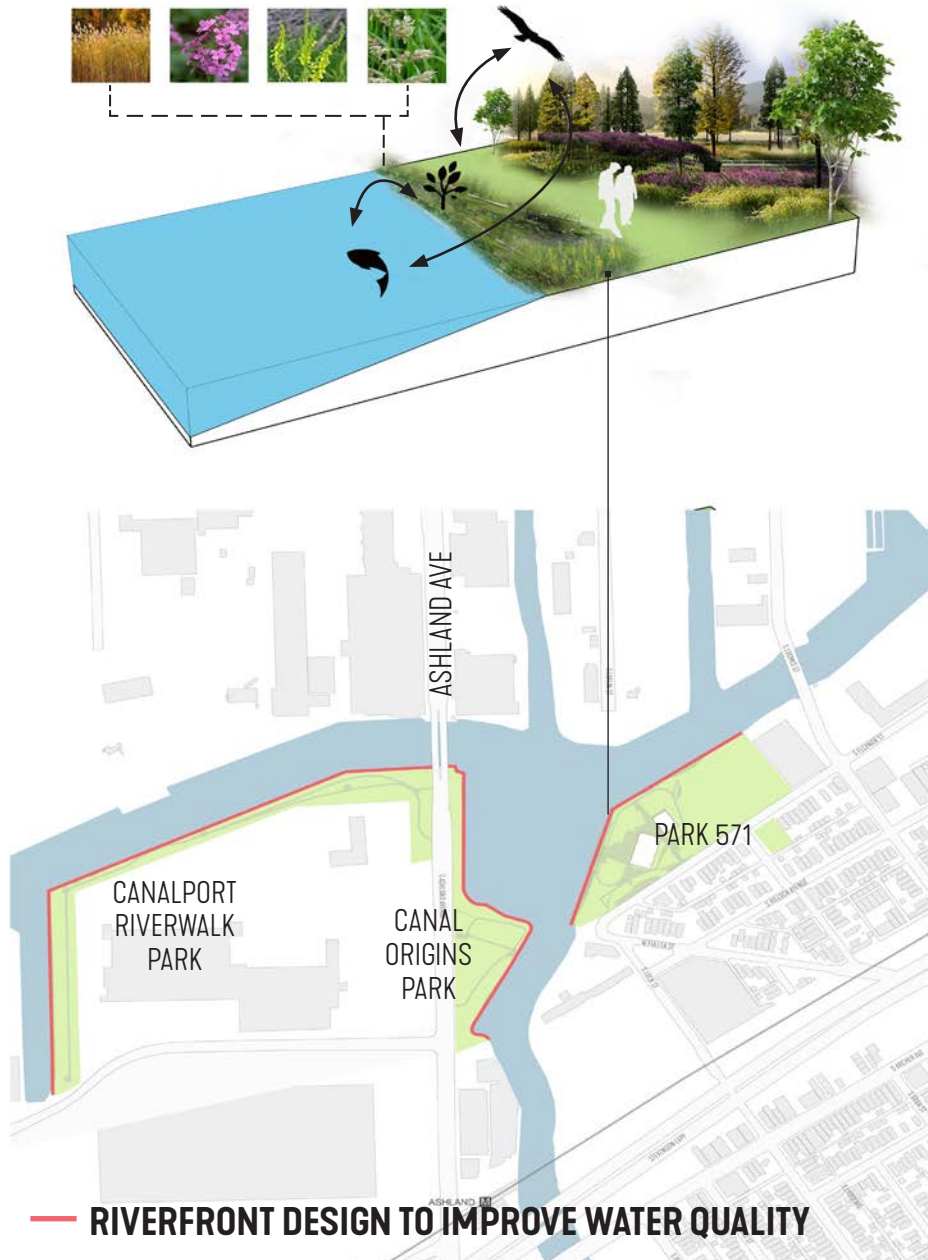


**Planting medium height grass species and trees along waterfront edges can block the geese's pathways to grazing areas.**



## IMPROVE WATER QUALITY 2.4

Thickened riparian edges for goose control (2.3) can simultaneously help to improve water quality by acting as a primary filter for stormwater runoff from the park into the river. In tandem with a strategic system of stormwater best management practices (BMPs), the naturalized edges could have a direct impact on the quality of water here and downstream by trapping sediment and filtering pollutants from stormwater that drains across the surface of the parks into the river. They also foster an environment conducive to aquatic life which in turn provides greater ecological diversity and sporting opportunities. The existing stormwater engineering of the parks should be studied in detail to identify prime locations for BMPs where they can be the most effective.



# VISION PART 3

## A WIDE RANGE OF PARK USES

Good parks support the daily life of their neighbors and provide a range of activities that scale to the needs and schedule of users: whether it's spending the whole day in the park or having a 5 minute sit at the edge while waiting for a bus. These strategies target the ways people want to use and access the parks.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Use Park Spaces For Neighborhood Amenities**
- 3.2 Explore Annexing Adjacent Property**
- 3.3 Improve Lighting And Sightlines For Security**



# USE PARK SPACES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES 3.1

The Eleanor Street side of Park 571 can be more of a daily amenity for its neighbors. While currently a front yard for the boathouse that is used during special events, the landscape here should be enriched with seating and planting and connective pathways that will add scale, interest and dynamic spatial experience to this side of the park. This development would also overlap with other recommendations in this report (1.1, 2.4, 3.2).



# EXPLORE ANNEXING ADJACENT PROPERTY 3.2

The lot due east of Park 571 is ideally situated to become part of the park should it become available. Its size would significantly increase the programmable footprint of the park, and open the park to new or expanded uses like stargazing, youth soccer, or larger audience movie nights. The building could be positioned to work with the park and neighboring businesses to create a community engagement and economic development zone. The PAC should work with the City, Park District and local economic partners to further explore ways to use this land to enable Park 571 to meet existing demand.





**PUBLIC MARKET**

**FLEXIBLE RECREATION LAWN**

**PROMENADE**

**NEIGHBORHOOD COMMONS** Integrate community, local business and flexible recreation lawn.



## IMPROVE LIGHTING AND SIGHTLINES FOR SECURITY 3.3

Locate more lighting in the parks to improve security, specifically at Canalport Riverwalk and Canal Origins. Additional consideration should be given to the underpasses along Lock Street, which is a critical pedestrian connection between Park 571 and the Ashland CTA Orange Line Station. A study of the lighting and sightlines in and around the parks should be conducted to create a lighting masterplan that would meet Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) recommendations and support best practices for public space design.



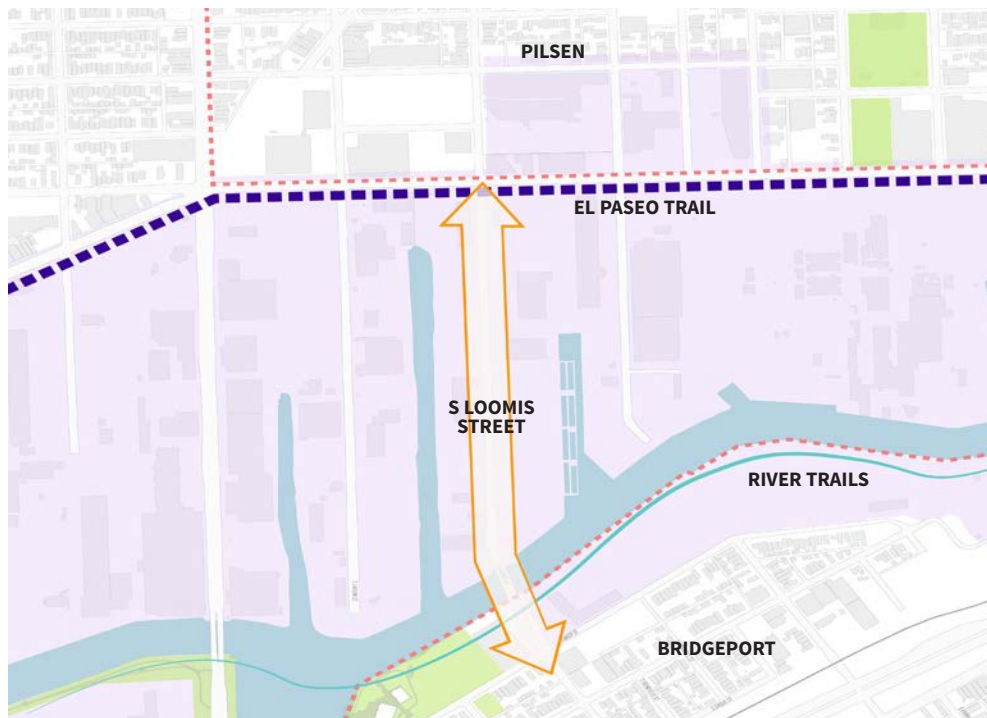


**APPENDIX**  
**EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES**  
**SITE ANALYSIS**  
**ARCHIVE OF DATA COLLECTED AT PUBLIC MEETINGS**



# LOOMIS STREET CONNECTION BETWEEN EL PASEO TRAIL AND RIVER TRAIL 4.1

The current residential areas of Pilsen and Brighton Park are separated from the river by a large and inhospitable industrial zone. Loomis Street is called out in CDOT's Streets For Cycling 2020 Plan as a neighborhood bike route identified for infrastructural improvements such as dedicated greenways or bike lanes. With the introduction of the El Paseo Trail in Pilsen and the river trail, it becomes doubly important as a connector both of neighborhoods and major trails.

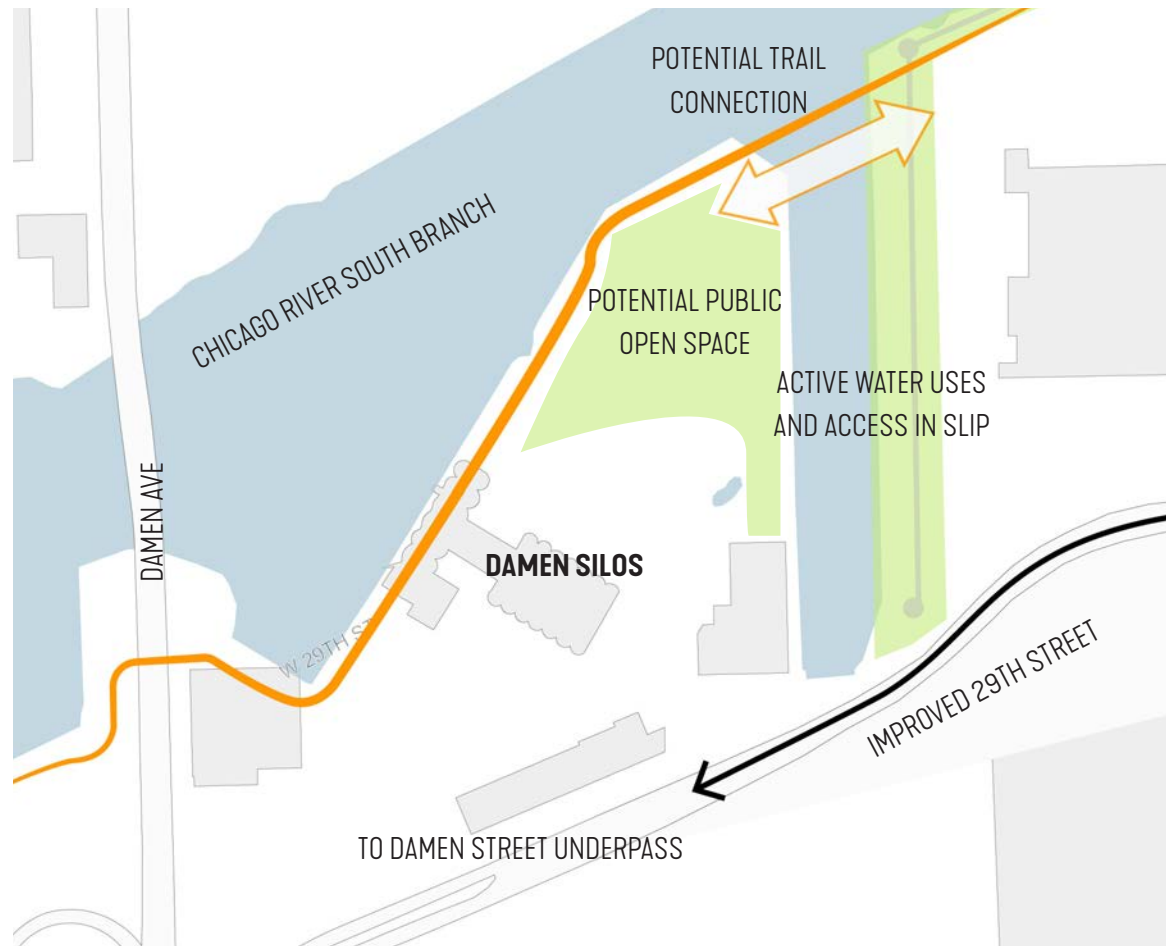


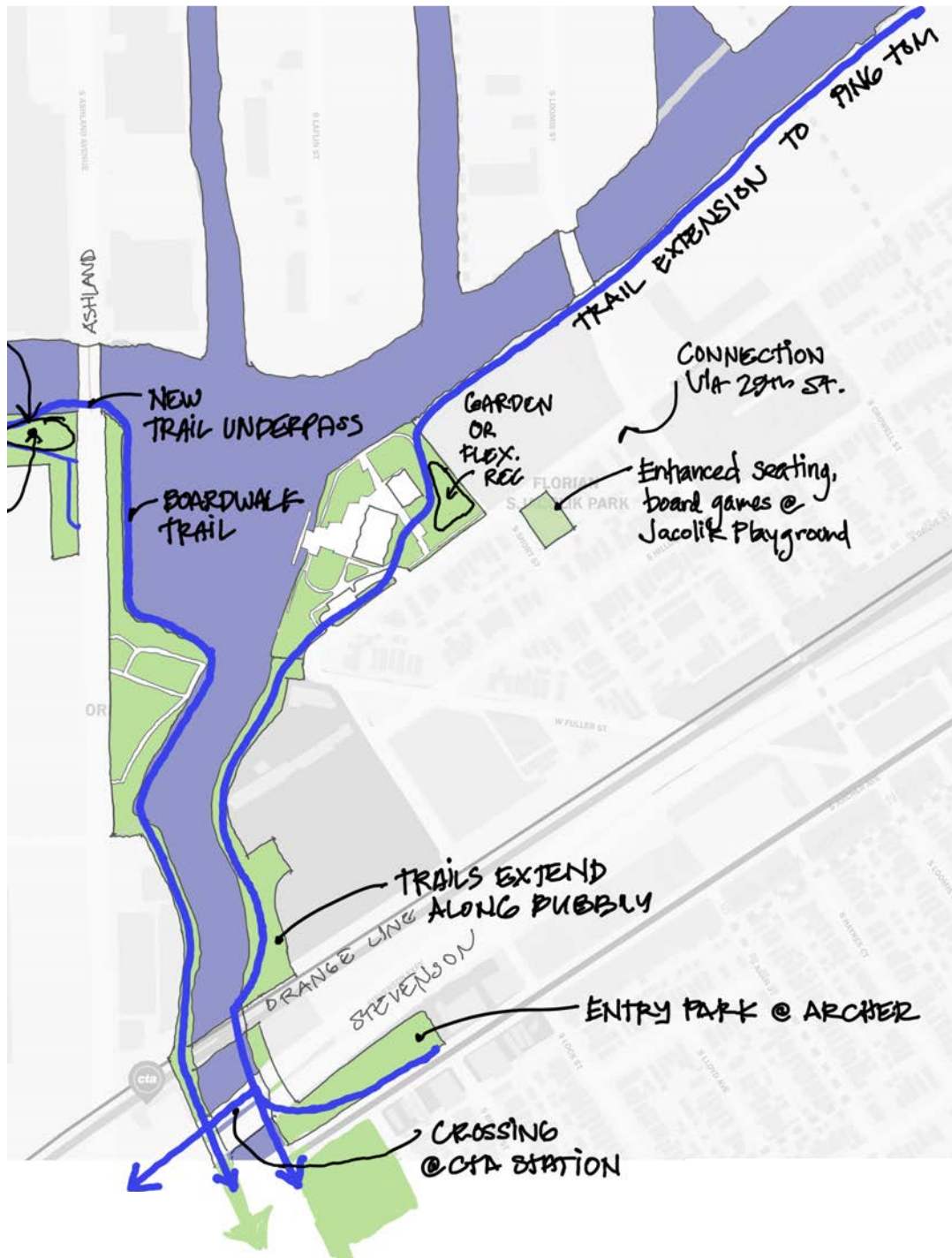
## DAMEN SILOS 4.2

This parcel and its landmark grain silos are currently vacant but are periodically targeted for redevelopment. Their future is unknown but development here--mixed use residential, hotel/marina--would have the gravity to be a cultural icon, and as such publicly-accessible open space should play a role in its future. Whatever happens here will have a direct and major relationship with Canalport Riverwalk Park, the riverfront trail, and the other South Branch Parks.



Photo: Kenneth Spencer/Flickr CC BY-NC 2.0





## BUBBLY CREEK RIVERWALK/ PITNEY SITE DEVELOPMENT 4.3

The former People’s Gas site on Pitney Court Site south of Archer Ave, on the East Bank of Bubbly Creek, is currently vacant. Development here would add another puzzle piece to the riverwalk along Bubbly Creek, of which there is currently about 1/4 mile of paved trail south of 32nd Place. As waterfront parcels are developed, they will necessarily include additional pieces of the riverwalk within their site boundaries, as mandated by the City. As this Bubbly Creek Riverwalk materializes piece by piece, parcel by parcel, the gap at the abutments for the CTA Tracks, Stevenson Expressway and S Archer Ave will become more glaring and should be addressed, possibly in coordination with this Plan’s call for a crossing at Bubbly Creek (1.2).



## CROWLEY SITE REDEVELOPMENT 4.4

The Crowley Marina site is among other various nearby sites that are in states of transition and could see major redevelopment in coming years. With each will come another piece of the River Trail and a dramatic change to the context of the South Branch Parks. The PAC should be part of the planning process for these transformations and consider how each can influence and connect the South Branch Parks and other nearby open spaces like Ping Tom Park and Palmisano Park.



## THROOP STREET PARK 4.5

The City's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is currently studying this 1.5 acre portion of the Fisk Coal plant as the the site for a Public Park. Given its proximity to the South Branch Parks, this new park may be incorporated into the oversight of the PAC, and its design and development should consider this relationship and physical connectivity..

SITE PRIORITIZATION



Source: (City of Chicago GIS Data Portal, 2011 and cmapDATA, Land Use Inventory, 2005)

# SLIP DISTRICT 4.6

The slips that are opposite the river from the South Branch Parks are a unique feature along the Chicago River, and bring the water close to Pilsen residents precisely where they are most disconnected from the mainstream of the river. As this area continues to evolve away from water-dependent land uses, these slips should be considered an open space resource for connecting Pilsen to the river and recreational usage.

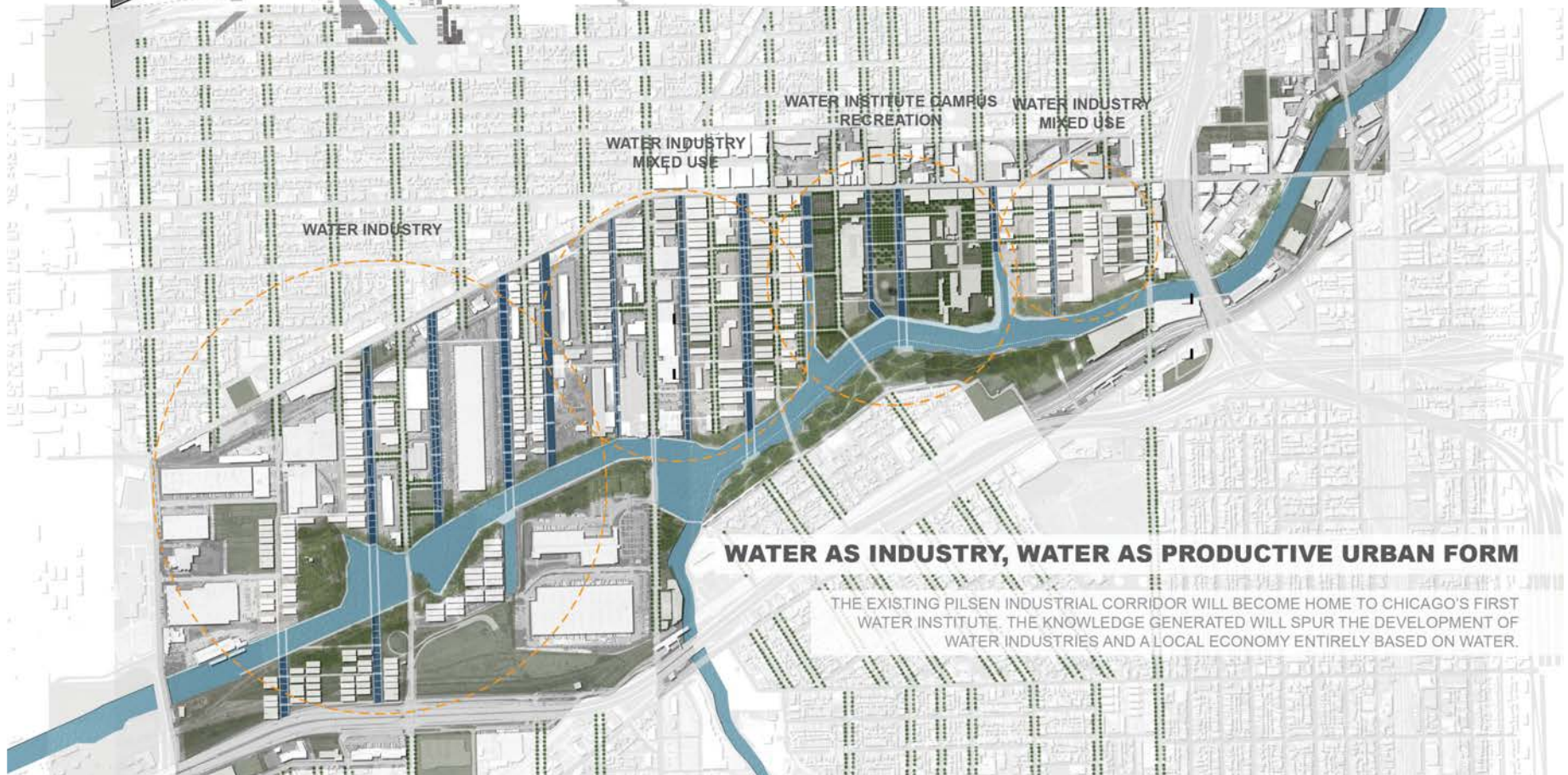
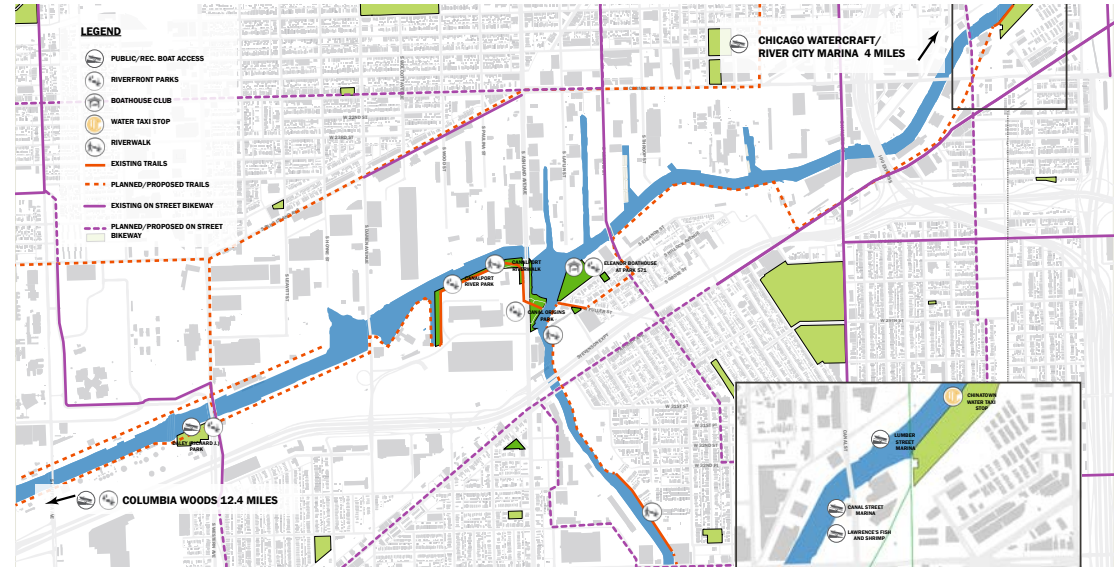


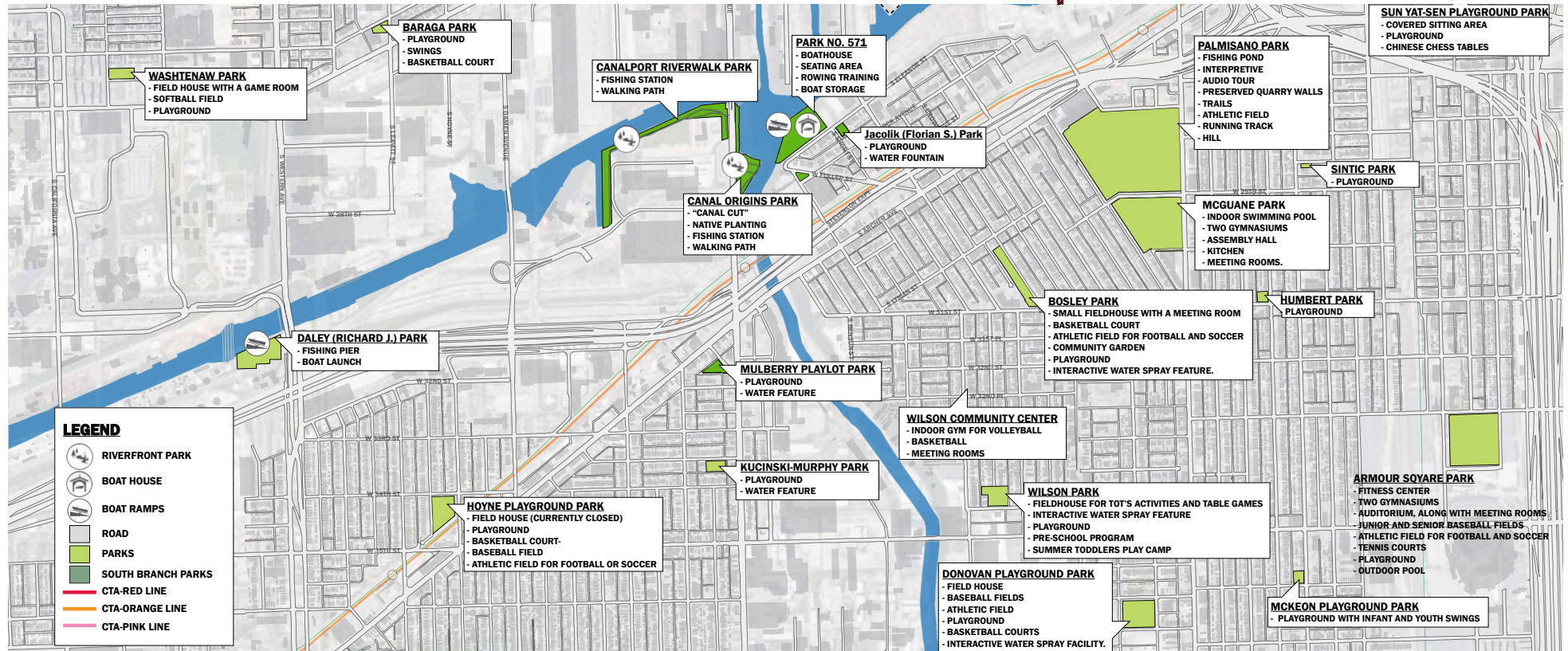
Image: Nina Chase, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Slip District: Chicago's Testing Ground For Water Industry

# PLANNING PROCESS SITE ANALYSIS

In addition to the public input, the planning team analyzed the area through focus topics central to the planning themes: A) Access points for recreational water use, B) Available park programming in the immediate vicinity, C) Connectivity issues between the parks and residential areas and D) Current land use trends and future development.



A. Recreational Water Use

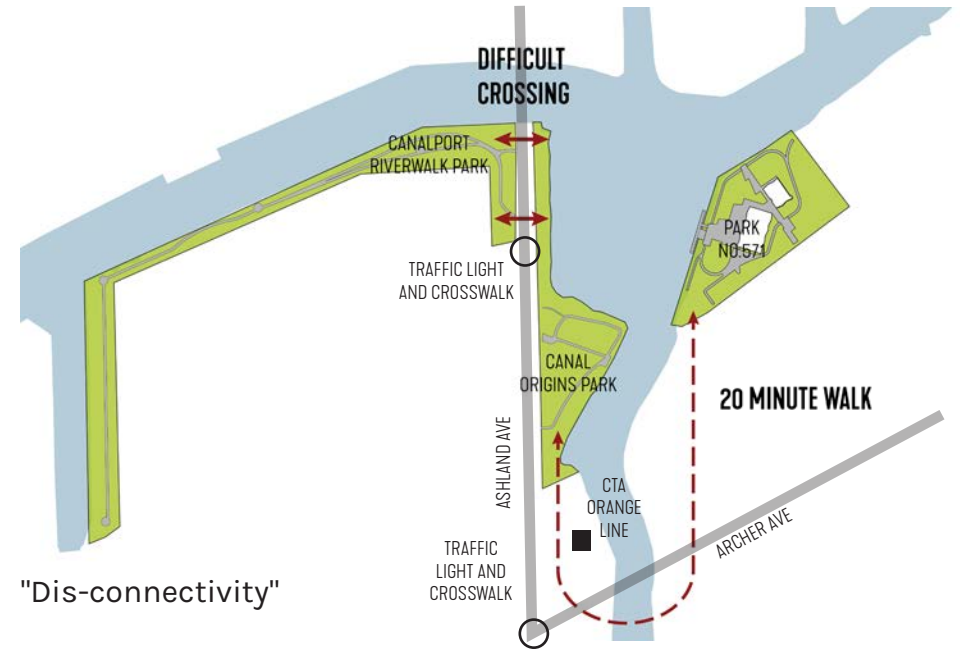


B. Nearby Park Programming





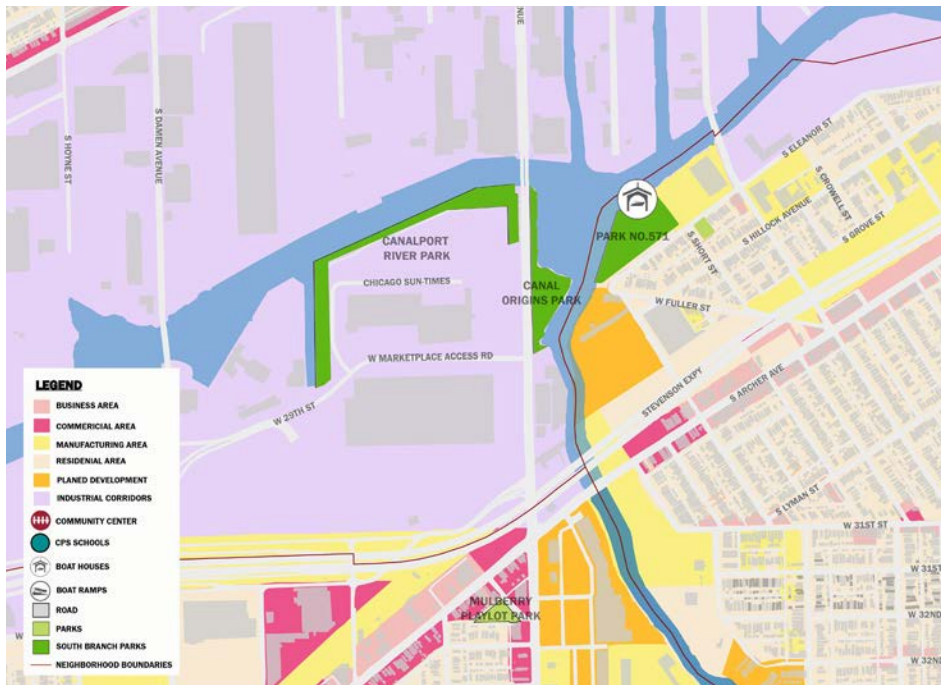
C. Connectivity



"Dis-connectivity"

The lack of safe, direct pedestrian connections between the parks was identified as a primary problem. Despite being only 150 feet from each other, Park 571 and Canal Origins Park are about a 20 minute walk from each other for an able bodied adult--for others it would be even longer, on uneven, narrow sidewalks and under dark bridges.

Ashland Avenue, a busy 4-lane truck route, separates Canal Origins and Canalport Riverwalk Park. A signaled crosswalk exists here but still presents inhospitable conditions and could be improved to better condition the walk.



D. Land Use







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