



To: Chicago Economic Recovery Taskforce

Re: An Economic Recovery for Public Health and Our Environment

The Illinois Environmental Council and our partners are grateful for your leadership during these unprecedented times, and we stand ready to do anything we can to support the efforts to combat this pandemic and protect communities throughout Chicago.

COVID-19 is impacting all of us, but we know it is disproportionately impacting people of color and low-income communities in the same way that these communities already suffer the greatest cumulative burdens from toxic pollution and climate change. Whether it is inadequate housing, high utility bills, or lack of green space-- these challenges only add to the burdens of sheltering-in-place and this pandemic. There is no denying that climate pollution and water, food, and energy insecurity are worsened by this pandemic. And there is no denying that environmental injustices for decades have led to higher rates of illnesses in communities now facing a greater likelihood of COVID-19 impacts.

The Illinois Environmental Council encourages the City of Chicago to ground any legislative, administrative, or economic stimulus response in the principles that those actions (1) provide immediate relief to communities most at risk, (2) protect public health, (3) and support a strong economic recovery that protects the environment and improves quality of life. It is critical to invest in solutions to these crises that boost a sustainable economic recovery, have the principles of justice and equity at their forefront, and deliver a cleaner, more resilient economy for all Chicagoans.

Providing Immediate Relief to Communities Most at Risk

Communities and people should be the center of relief efforts. We must provide robust assistance for environmental justice communities facing cumulative impacts from multiple pollution sources along with other communities experiencing the greatest COVID impacts.

Clean Affordable Water and Energy Security Now

The Mayor's moratorium on water shut-offs was an essential action to protect communities, but we must do more to ensure that residents of our city have access to clean water, heat, and power.

- Announce an immediate and permanent extension of the moratorium on water shut-offs
- Waive late fees, collections and repayments for one year
- Expand coverage and extend the utility billing relief program that was announced last fall
- Restore service through reconnections and provide immediate funding for emergency potable water distribution
- Provide immediate assistance to community members facing flooding and sanitary sewer risk



Clean Air and Pollution Prevention

The disparities of COVID-19 cases and deaths along racial lines is shameful. Yet for too long Chicago has allowed parallel disparities to exist for environmental pollution and related respiratory and other illnesses, maintaining policies that contribute or even encourage such disparities. Our City must do better to protect communities at greatest from environmental risks and those facing heightened COVID risks right now.

- Extend the suspension of demolition activities at the Hilco-Crawford site through the end of the shelter-in-place order
- Review industrial sites operating under the shelter-in-place order and suspend any non-essential activity
- Suspend a proposal to purchase new diesel buses, and recommit to a 100% electric bus fleet by 2030
- Announce a moratorium on new and expanded uses in EJ communities

Food Accessibility and Assistance for Workers

Our food chain workers are on the frontlines of providing essential services; but are largely doing so without being provided the protections they need. Additionally, more Chicagoans are facing food insecurity, and urban growers are struggling to sustain their businesses.

- Provide gardens and farms affordable access to water for the 2020 growing season
- Provide clear, written, and uniform guidance on farmers market operations from the Mayor's Office to both organizations operating markets as well as all departments and agencies that regulate and/or issue permits to farmers markets in the City of Chicago
- Provide additional support to organizations hosting farmers markets in Chicago so they can adapt their markets for adequate social distancing, including financial support for personal protective equipment, handwashing stations, and instructional signage
- Provide necessary protections to food supply chain and urban farm workers
- Contribute financially to emergency meal distribution efforts that support both local food producers and local food businesses, especially those that are owned and operated by black, indigenous, and people of color

Public Transit and Safe Streets

Our workers performing essential jobs during this time rely on public transit and safe streets, and these systems and their frontline workers need protections in order to provide safe and reliable service. Ensuring robust transit service is critical for our society to continue functioning and provides a critical pillar of sustainable transportation. **A separate letter that was sent to CTA, Metra, Pace and RTA is [linked](#).**



- Emergency assistance funding to protect transit workers and riders
- Maintain critical mass transit routes, and prioritize racial equity, especially with regard to any service changes
- Continue to identify and implement best practices nationally and globally for regular cleanings, boarding processes, distancing on vehicles, rear-boarding, etc
- Apply a racial equity lens and provide transparency on stimulus spending: Make plans and criteria for spending federal stimulus dollars publicly available and open for public comment.
- Designate “slow streets” on some neighborhood streets to provide a pop up network of safe bike/walk corridors
- Define some new pop-up dedicated bike lanes along key transportation corridors. These and “slow streets” can serve as pilots for future long-term upgrades to the bike network
- Provide additional space to enable walking while social distancing in neighborhoods that need it, such as along retail corridors or where there is insufficient park space
- Implement quick Vision Zero tactical urbanism projects to improve pedestrian safety given more people are walking for transportation at the same time vehicle speeding has increased

Protecting Public Health for the Long-Term

Beyond immediate actions the City can take, there are greater needs to protect the public health of communities throughout Chicago. A stronger safety net, enhanced oversight and transparency, and equitable access to our resources is the only way we can protect the public health for the long-term.

Enforcing our Environmental Laws and Preventing Environmental Harm

While the federal administration uses this opportunity to give polluters a pass, the City of Chicago must be vigilant in enforcement against polluters. Without appropriate oversight, our city cannot protect its residents from environmental triggers that increase the risk of dying from COVID-19 and other diseases.

- Establish and adequately fund a Department of Environment, with authority to develop environmental policy, enforce and comply with regulations, optimize inter-agency collaboration, and promote an equitable and accessible environment
- Require cumulative health and environmental considerations when providing permits in environmental justice communities, including but not limited to industrial corridors
- Increase city inspection and enforcement training and staffing capacity for environmental violations at industrial sites in Chicago, including fully staffing inspectors authorized in the Department of Public Health budget

Clean Air For All

- Reform zoning and planning processes for industrial areas such that public health and cumulative environmental impacts are evaluated, communities have robust opportunities for public input into decisions at the Department of Planning and the Plan Commission



- Initiate initial assessments of cumulative impacts in environmental justice communities, disparate distribution of heavy industry by race/ethnicity/income, and contribution of zoning and related policies to these issues
- Initiate a community and cross-agency planning process to move forward with the City's commitment to a 100% clean energy future
- Align all energy procurement and distribution contracts with the City's 100% renewable energy commitments
- Provide deeper energy efficiency services and financing for people and community organizations who have a history of struggling to pay their bills. Add cooling for vulnerable populations such as seniors to avoid heat-related illness this summer

Clean Water For All

- Develop adequate flood mitigation assistance for Chicago residents, especially low-income communities and communities of color that suffer a disproportionate burden of flooding
- Comply with existing NPDES permits to reduce combined sewer overflows which impacts people including those who fish for sustenance
- Increase data and transparency on water affordability, shut-off and reconnection policies
- Prohibit any partial lead service line replacements and continue providing filters to households with lead line disruptions
- Ensure the City has an accurate accounting of households without water, and continued efforts to ensure water rates are affordable.
- Continue to support and advocate for funding for a shoreline reevaluation study

Accessible Open Spaces

Parks and open spaces had a variety of needs before the COVID-19 outbreak. Deferred maintenance, inequitable distribution of open spaces, and qualified 'green' workforce shortages all challenged Chicago's ability to provide world-class recreational options to its residents. These challenges still exist and are compounded by requirements that will make social distancing in outdoor spaces necessary for the indefinite future.

- Map green job training and apprenticeship programs and create and provide physical workspaces for green job hubs throughout the City
- Create youth employment programs and expand green job training into CPS and City Colleges curricula
- Inventory shovel-ready open space/green infrastructure projects and coordinate their completion with community members
- Target contaminated land for remediation into productive uses
- Design and retrofit areas as flexible open spaces where communities can safely gather



- Coordinate with Federal agencies and Members of Congress to apply for prospective funding through future conservation corps programs, Land and Water Conservation Fund grants, and other funding opportunities
- Transform city-owned vacant lots with turf grass to food forests, community gardening spaces or native plant habitat
- Plan, implement, and maintain living barriers (trees & shrubs) around diverging land uses.

Supporting a Strong Economic Recovery

Chicago can rebuild our economy for a strong and resilient recovery by supporting a growing clean energy economy and investing in our public infrastructure. A sustainable path forward that can create thousands of jobs in the City is not only possible, it is imperative. This moment in time is ripe for the systemic change that is needed to put people and communities first.

Investing in Clean, Affordable Water

Studies consistently show that water infrastructure investment is a major economic boon. For every billion dollars invested in the infrastructure, significant returns can be expected:

- Develop and implement a plan for lead service line replacement. Replacing all lead service lines in Chicago could create many jobs but it could also lead to financial savings from improved health and secure livelihoods.
- Increase investment in green infrastructure, and incorporate green infrastructure in capital improvement projects
- Develop workforce support to train marginalized residents in water infrastructure trades

An Inclusive Blue Economy

In addition to investments in water infrastructure, Chicago's recovery could be fueled by a drive to build a globally significant inclusive blue economy: heavy water users, utilities, and the researchers and entrepreneurs building new ways to manage and deliver water more effectively.

- Make the Blue Economy a pillar of Chicago's strategic economic initiatives, integrated into neighborhood development and tech initiatives.
- Identify pathways to good jobs within the utilities and industries that are heavy water users (food and beverage, manufacturing) and work to diversify the water workforce;
- Support the small businesses and startups inventing new solutions to use and manage water more effectively, and work to improve access to entrepreneurship and training to reach across neighborhoods and demographic groups.

A Vibrant Local Food Economy

COVID-19 has demonstrated that our existing food system, with its long and rigid supply chains, is not designed to weather disturbances due to economic market disruption or public health crisis. Moreover, the threat to the current food system's stability continues to grow as climate change



increases the frequency and intensity of major weather events. Supporting our urban growers and local producers will create a resilient economic recovery and provide greater food security.

- Support the continued development of a Good Food Purchasing Program for the City
- Target investments in regional food system infrastructure that will support a more localized, decentralized, and transparent food supply chain
- Adopt an appropriate business license for urban farm enterprises that allows them to execute their business and production plan to sell whole, unprocessed fruits and vegetables to their target markets, whether on-site or off-site to wholesale and retail customers
- Allow Urban Farm Businesses to operate in residentially zoned areas
- Create a flat permit rate for urban farms (applied to for-profit businesses) for affordable and season-long access to hydrants. The permit should include an exemption for sewer rates and tax, since urban farms retain water and reduce the load on surrounding sewers.
- Apply the existing nonprofit water exemption to hydrant use for nonprofit farm operations.
- Keep community garden hydrant permit rates as is, but align permit language with zoning ordinance that allows for incidental sales at community gardens.
- Allow water to be used for both irrigating and washing produce.
- Allow for a variety of water-saving irrigation methods to be used with hydrant water, beyond sprinklers.
- Establish Urban Agricultural Areas where disadvantaged growers can operate with reduced tax property taxes, lower utilities fees, and greater security.

An Equitable Clean Energy Future

Now more than ever we need to move forward with a resilient clean energy future that prioritizes clean energy in communities most impacted by air pollution, and prioritizes job creation and wealth building in those same communities.

- Finalize a community-driven plan to reach 100% renewable energy future for Chicago
- Utilize Municipal Electricity Aggregation (MEA) to purchase clean energy for Chicago residents and support the development and procurement of new, local clean energy
- Improve access to and use of energy efficiency and beneficial electrification programs, with a focus on low-income Chicagoans
- Work with the state of Illinois to ensure low-income weatherization programs target those most impacted by COVID-19 and seek additional funds to increase energy efficiency investments for increased health benefits, reduced energy use and increased cost savings

Clean Transportation, Clean Air

Transportation emissions have eclipsed the power sector in greenhouse gas contribution to climate change, while continuing to worsen local air quality. It is clear that clean transportation options, including public transit and bike and walk infrastructure, is essential, but is not equitably prioritized throughout our city and our region.



- Provide funding for the CTA to transition the bus fleet to 100 % electric by 2030.
- Build out at least 100 more miles of dedicated bike lanes, building on lessons learned from temporary installations as part of the COVID-19 emergency response
- Develop comprehensive marketing program promoting cycling for transportation during summer 2020 as a safe transportation alternative during COVID era
- Dedicate a \$20 million Safe Streets Fund in the city budget for better lit crosswalks, curb protected bike lanes, bus stop bump-outs, and other safety infrastructure.
- Develop and implement a plan for building a network of at least 50 new miles of transit priority streets by 2023 with dedicated bus lanes and transit signal priority.
- Move the scooter pilot program to a permanent, long-term program, with a citywide scale and increased fleet size.
- Explicitly remove police enforcement as a strategy from the Vision Zero Chicago traffic violence reduction plan
- Study tolling of all lanes of Lake Shore Drive and prioritization of transit as a travel demand management strategy to reduce single occupant vehicle use and incentivize transit use.

The City and this taskforce has an opportunity to build back better: to provide immediate relief for impacted communities, protect public health and address inequities, and put Chicago on the path for a sustainable green recovery. Thank you for your consideration of these items, and please reach out if we can be of assistance as we stand ready to be partners in this work.

Signed,

The Illinois Environmental Council

Active Transportation Alliance

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Chicago Recycling Coalition

Elevate Energy

Environmental Law and Policy Center

Friends of the Chicago River

Metropolitan Planning Council

Natural Resources Defense Council

Openlands

Respiratory Health Association

Sierra Club Illinois Chapter