

## Chapter 4: Greening and Arts

### NOTICE: Chapter Reorganization

Thank you for your interest in the North Lawndale Neighborhood Plan. In the interest of gaining valuable feedback from our stakeholders, we have made all chapters available for review ahead of our Open House on April 21, 2018. Please note that revisions will be made to this chapter and others based on input received during the public review period. It is also anticipated that this chapter will be split into two standalone chapters, one for Greening & Open Space and another for Arts & Culture. While we are in the process of developing additional content to ensure the efforts of the two NLCCC subcommittees represented in this chapter is accurate, we urge our stakeholders to provide comments on the strategies and actions provided in this draft. Thank you again and NLCCC looks forward to working with you to improve our community.

### Introduction

**Goal Statement:** We will promote arts and greening efforts to beautify our neighborhood while also serving to expand social and economic opportunities that encourage entrepreneurship, education, social engagement, and environmental stewardship.

*North Lawndale boasts incredible natural resources such as Douglas Park and a rich history of music, art, and culture. Yet many of the challenges that face our community also impact our ability to enjoy safe natural spaces, to participate in arts programming, and make it difficult to know and celebrate our community's cultural history. Vacant lots and sidewalks are often littered with trash, many of our recreation facilities are in need of upkeep and repairs, and residents lack awareness of many greening and arts programs throughout the community. We aim to leverage existing greening and arts assets and programming to provide further access to safe natural spaces and economic opportunities while fostering a sense of community pride and environmental stewardship.*

### Measures of Success

- 1) Percent of vacant lots transformed into active community spaces or open green space
- 2) Number of trash cans, street lights, trees, and planters added to the community
- 3) Two annual public arts and cultural events, two annual environmental events, percent designated exhibition space, and the creation of a multifunctional studio and performance space
- 4) Number of community participants engaged in arts and environmental programming

### Existing Conditions

“We have green space, we have amazing parks, we have the NL Greening Committee, we need residents to become active and feel ownership.” – Comment from Online Survey Participant

“Apart from Douglas Park, North Lawndale is pretty dry in comparison for green space. Want to see more local parks and Douglas Park improvements.” – Comment from Online Survey Participant

“We have great park space. It's our maintenance and the importance of including the community in beautification that is necessary.” – Comment from online survey participant

“Culture always brings community and this is a rich cultural area and that’s been lost so what we want to do is bring it back.” – Sheila McNary at 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Arts & Culture Festival  
(<http://www.austinweeklynews.com/News/Articles/8-11-2016/North-Lawndale-Art-Festival-showcases-local-talent-/>)

- Vacant lots were identified as potential assets by the community, with an emphasis on the ownership and reuse of vacant lots as sites for new housing, community gardens, playlots, and clean yards for nearby residents. Nearly 18 percent of North Lawndale’s land is vacant or dedicated to gardens and urban agriculture.
- The neighborhood’s beauty and aesthetic appeal remains a priority amongst neighborhood residents, and could be used to boost the community’s sense of pride by transforming vacant lots into community gardens. There are over 40 documented garden and agricultural spaces in North Lawndale including two operational urban farms and two apiaries.
- Douglas Park acts as North Lawndale’s primary community and cultural center and has, in recent years, hosted popular, large-scale events such as Riot Fest, Westside Music Festival, and the North Lawndale Arts Festival, that attract crowds from both a local and national audience.
- The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) opened a permanent classroom outside of its downtown campus in the Nichols Tower, the original Sears, Roebuck and Co. property, in 2016. SAIC offers arts education workshops and full courses for local residents, and their Artist in Residence Program collaborates with nearby communities around themes of social and civic engagement, public and community art, urban studies, and urban agriculture.
- North Lawndale has 15 percent tree canopy, one of the lowest in the city of Chicago, but will add 7,000 trees to the community over the next few years through the Oaks of North Lawndale partnership with SAIC.

## Key Findings

North Lawndale is home to numerous cultural venues, historic landmarks and districts, and a wealth of community service providers. These assets serve as a source of community pride and could provide anchors for plan recommendations moving forward. North Lawndale has numerous ties to the Chicago Blues and west side music scene, and has hosted prominent music and arts festivals in recent years. Furthermore, there are numerous organizations, such as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Firehouse Community Arts Center, that are providing local residents with cultural experiences and arts education.

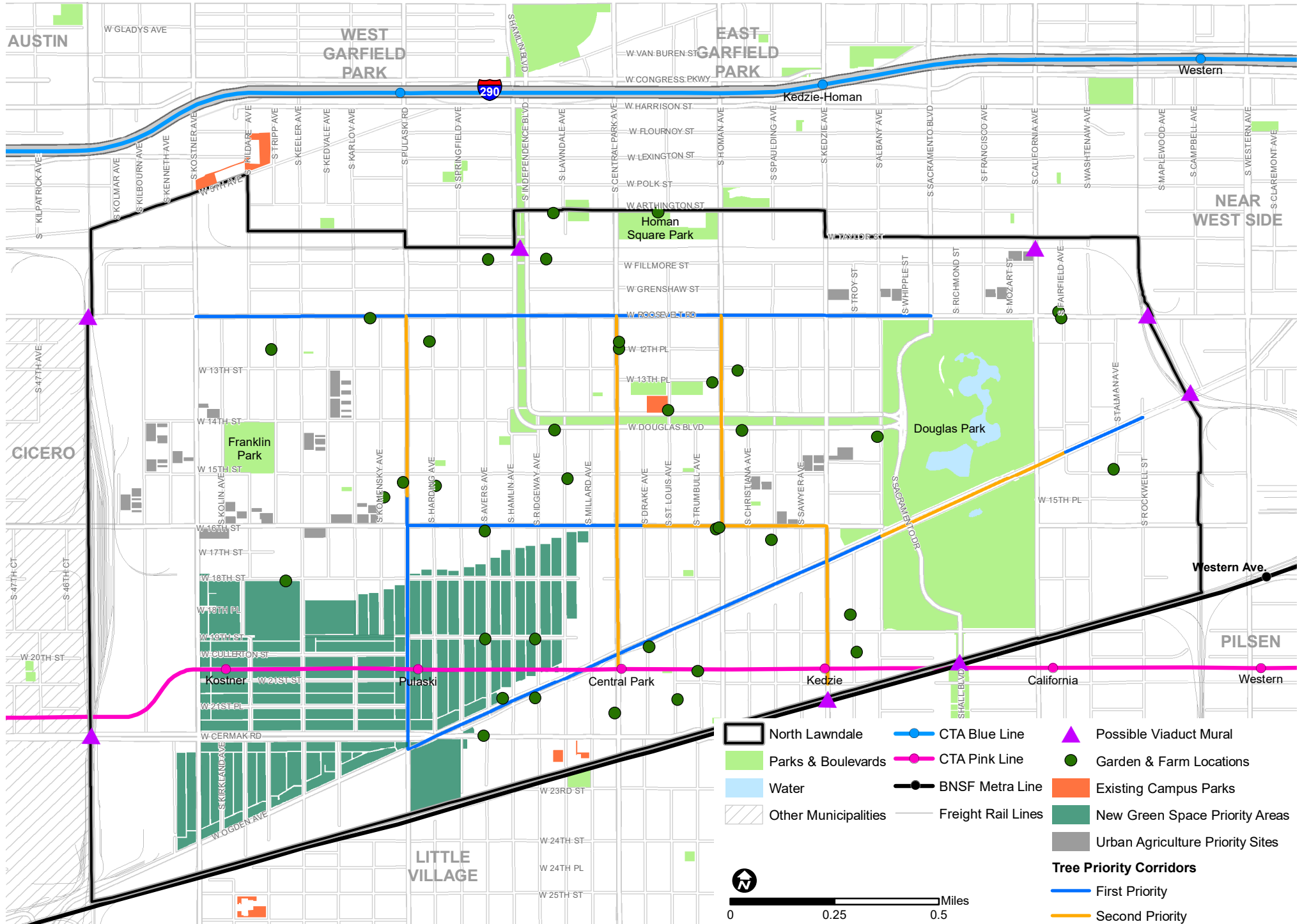
**Community gardens are valued community assets and desired by residents in combatting blight.** At NLCCC’s 2016 Planning Conference attendees shared that the installation of community gardens on vacant lots is one of the top three actions for addressing vacant lots in North Lawndale. Local community groups and institutions have planted numerous plots across North Lawndale as a tool to activate vacant lots and beautify the neighborhood, 19 of which are community gardens, 15 of which are dedicated to beautification of the area, and 2 of which are urban farm operations. The majority of these spaces are considered food productive and were established by nonprofit groups. NeighborSpace, for example, is an urban land trust that acquires land and provides basic insurance, access to water, and links to support networks so that community groups can focus on gardening.

**Current initiatives can spur community involvement and coordination.** There are many community groups and institutions that plan, coordinate, and promote recreation activities in North Lawndale. However, many feel that there is a need to strengthen the sense of ownership and resident involvement. Activities that keep families connected, encourage residents to become active participants in recreation, and promote stewardship of open space are needed to effectively increase the quantity and improve the quality of parks and recreation in North Lawndale.

**Park maintenance and environmental quality are top concerns.** Community members expressed a need for improved park maintenance in North Lawndale and concern over environmental impacts as a result of large-scale events in Douglas Park. Community members consider Douglas Park a community gem and is one of 15 North Lawndale parks maintained by the Chicago Park District. The upkeep of park infrastructure, including walking and biking paths, the Douglas Park Field House, and improved lighting for safety were identified as issues to address in North Lawndale’s neighborhood plan.

Douglas Park is North Lawndale’s focal point for recreational activities and leisure space, but residents would like more parks with facilities throughout the community. Despite the presence of Douglas Park, community members would like increased programmable parks and open space with recreational amenities closer to their homes. While most open spaces are located in the community’s central, northern, and eastern areas, residents of North Lawndale’s southwest corner may face greater difficulty in accessing nearby open space relative to other community members who live elsewhere.

# North Lawndale Greening and Arts Framework



## Map: Greening & Arts Framework

This map illustrates our community's existing greening and arts assets as well as where investments should be prioritized to further the goal of beautifying our neighborhood.

**Existing Community Gardens.** Current spaces include community gardens, farms, and campus park program sites.

**Existing Campus Parks.** Asphalt school playgrounds that were transformed into spaces with lawns and playgrounds through the Campus Park Program.

**Tree Priority Corridor.** We identified streets where our community should prioritize as we plant trees through the Oaks of North Lawndale initiative. While we hope to plant trees throughout the neighborhood, we should prioritize planting trees along these streets first.

**Possible Viaduct Mural.** In celebration of North Lawndale's sesquicentennial in 2019, we hope to paint a number of gateway murals celebrating our community's history at the identified locations.

**New Green Space Priority Areas.** While North Lawndale is fortunate to have access to beautiful open spaces such as Douglas Park and Franklin Park, there are some areas of our community that are within a short walking distance of green spaces. We will prioritize the addition of any new open space in these areas.

**Urban Agriculture Priority Sites.** These represent large clusters of vacant lots within Zone 3 of the Land Use Framework where urban agriculture land uses should be prioritized.

**Urban Agriculture Secondary Sites.** These represent large clusters of vacant lots within Zone 2 of the Land Use Framework where community gardens should be encouraged. More intense urban agriculture should also be considered when no nearby sites within Zone 3 are appropriate and available for use.

## Strategy 1: Invest in existing spaces and create new spaces where artists can safely and profitably create, learn, display, and perform their craft.

We would like to expand opportunities for artistic expression and businesses in our community. We will build upon efforts already happening in North Lawndale, and will work to make our neighborhood a place where artists can thrive and create their work profitably. We hope these efforts beautify our community, provide jobs, and connect residents with their neighborhood's culture and history.

### 1.1 Create an inventory of existing venues in North Lawndale.

Our community is home to a number of artists, yet there are few well-known locations within the community where artists can practice their art. To better facilitate the production and performance of art within our community, we will create a detailed online inventory of locations (including hours of operations, any necessary permits, etc.) within North Lawndale where artists can perform and display their work.

### 1.2 Create a coalition of artists in the community to identify arts needs and create a semi-annual networking event for local artists.

The NLCCC Arts and Culture committee has recently started an effort to organize the many different artists within North Lawndale into a single coalition of local artists. This coalition will communicate regularly to strategize and work together to advocate for the arts needs of our community. By speaking with one voice, this coalition of artists will better leverage resources to create a dynamic hub for creative practices that benefit the neighborhood's residents, businesses, and visitors. We will create and host a semi-annual networking event for people interested in doing artistic work within our community, as well as for Chicago-based arts-related anchors such as Cinespace Chicago Film Studios, with the hope that this will spur collaboration amongst North Lawndale artists and local arts institutions to create more arts-based business opportunities. This coalition of Lawndale artists will act as an implementer for many of the arts and culture recommendations listed in this chapter.

### 1.3 Support the North Lawndale sesquicentennial event in 2019.

Founded in 1869, our neighborhood will celebrate our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. To mark this momentous occasion, in collaboration with the North Lawndale Sesquicentennial committee we will support events that celebrate our community's history and culture throughout the 2019 year. We will ensure that artists from throughout the community contribute to the events, public art, and time capsule that will be hosted and created throughout the sesquicentennial celebration. We will also integrate the history of the community within branding and marketing efforts for the community discussed in **Chapter 2: Economic and Workforce Development**.

#### 1.4 Continue to expand arts and culture events and programming.

We will build upon the success of the North Lawndale Arts & Culture Festival to 1) continue to expand the length and scope of the existing festival, and 2) create additional arts & culture programming throughout the year. Started in August 2016, the North Lawndale Arts & Culture Festival has quickly expanded into a weekend program with local vendors, an education fair with STEAM/STEM organizations, and a lineup of three days of music and entertainment that celebrate North Lawndale’s personal cultural expression and heritage. We will continue to grow the existing arts and culture festival to highlight the cultural resources and talents within our community, support local business, and connect North Lawndale youth to educational opportunities. Furthermore, we aim to continue this programming by creating a series of communitywide arts and culture events (such as a holiday festival and an open studio night), that builds upon the existing arts and culture programming at the Douglas Park Cultural Center and SAIC’s Homan Square facility, throughout the year.



#### 1.5 Create an art district with artist live/work spaces that creates arts programming for the community and attracts visitors from outside the community.

Building off the success [of SAIC’s arts programming at Nichols Tower](#), we aim to create an art district with artist live/work spaces in our neighborhood. The presence of an art hub with studio space and artists’ lofts will give the North Lawndale arts community a home base for the arts community and will create an environment conducive to the creation and teaching of art in our neighborhood. As recommended in **Chapter 1: Housing Action 3.4**, the proposed North Lawndale Land Use Committee will support potential future public and private initiatives to bring artists’ lofts and studio spaces to the

community and should work to ensure that it is built in a manner that addresses the needs of local artists and works to expand art in public spaces.

### 1.6 Create a multi-use art venue in North Lawndale and encourage the development of other performance spaces in the community.

Our neighborhood lacks a venue with the necessary audio-visual equipment for musicians to record and/or perform their work in front of an audience, creating a barrier for the conversion of creative talent into a viable means of making a profit. Numerous artists within our community desire a performance space, along the lines of The Promontory venue in Hyde Park, where patrons can attend a live performance in a space with a liquor license. Furthermore, artists in our community also want this multi-use art venue to have gallery space where local artists can display their visual art. To attract the highest number of visitors, this new multi-use art venue should be accessible by transit and would ideally be located near the Central Park or Kedzie pink line stations. While this multi-use indoor art venue is our first priority, we also work to promote additional performance spaces, both indoor and outdoor, throughout North Lawndale so that our artists have spaces to profitably display their craft and we can celebrate our community's culture.

## Strategy 2: Utilize our available green spaces and vacant lots to promote cohesion, develop North Lawndale as a hub for the greening industry, promote healthy living, and environmental awareness.

We will continue to transform underutilized sites throughout our neighborhood into pleasant and productive green spaces. We will make our existing community gardens more accessible and enjoyable to North Lawndale residents, while continuing to promote urban agriculture businesses as an economic development initiative.

### 2.1 Provide information on gardens and parks in a centralized location and identify organizations to adopt and maintain existing green spaces.

A number of community members and organizations dedicate their time creating and tending to community gardens and parks throughout North Lawndale. However, it can often be difficult to know the hours of operation and how to get involved with these existing green spaces in our community for interested residents. Building off of the community gardens map created as a part of the North Lawndale Existing Conditions Report, we will host this map along with accompanying information for each of the community gardens in our neighborhood on the NLCCC website so residents can take advantage of these community green spaces. Furthermore, we will conduct outreach to block clubs, churches, and local organizations to empower these groups to be responsible for the cleanliness for certain blocks in our community.



## 2.2 Curate cultural experiences in green and open spaces so that people become aware of spaces.

We would like to create a series of events in our community gardens and parks to make people more aware of these spaces and to foster community stewardship of these resources. The [Oaks of North Lawndale](#) kickoff event on September 23, 2017 with artist Pedro Reyes’ “Palas por Pistolas” (Guns Into Shovels) work, is the perfect example of the type of cultural events we would like to encourage in our community’s green spaces. This event brought members of the community together to transform pieces of weapons into shovels, which were then used to plant trees in Homan Square. These types of events illustrate the power of bringing the neighborhood together to exercise our stewardship over our community and environment.

## 2.3 Create a welcoming business climate to foster the success of the North Lawndale greening industry.

Home to businesses and organizations such as Sweet Beginnings, the Hive Chicago, the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Windy City Harvest Youth Farm, the CCA Academy Urban Agriculture program, and the upcoming launch of the Farm On Ogden facility, our community boasts a budding urban agriculture industry. We aim to nurture existing and future greening businesses, such as U-pick berry patches, orchards, urban farms, apiaries, farm-to-table restaurants, and nurseries, in North Lawndale by providing a supportive environment where these businesses can flourish. In the near-term, we aim to leverage the

expertise of our partner organizations and local universities to provide local trainings on horticulture, landscape design and maintenance, the benefits of neighborhood beautification, beekeeping, food safety, business management, conservation, and other topics as determined by urban agriculture business owners and members of the local greening industry. We will also take advantage of CCA Academy’s commercial kitchen and the Farm on Ogden’s design as a community hub to have a centralized entity and location for sharing information with local urban agriculture entrepreneurs.

As more urban agriculture and greening industry businesses open shop in our community we will create a greening business association to further support the needs of this emerging local industry. We will connect potential local food entrepreneurs to the resources of The Hatchery, a new food business incubator slated to open in 2018 just to the north of our community in East Garfield Park, as we aim to encourage the development of new food businesses in North Lawndale.

#### 2.4 Encourage the development of larger urban agriculture enterprises on contiguous vacant parcels in high-vacancy areas.

As mentioned in Housing Strategy 2.3, we will continue to encourage the development of urban agriculture businesses in our community, especially in areas located within Zone 3 of the Land Use Framework where there are large amounts of existing vacant land. Urban agriculture businesses (such as orchards, farms, and apiaries) can provide a near- and mid-term land use that improves the appearance and safety of zone 3 areas that have been significantly impacted by vacancy, while also providing green jobs in our community. To accomplish this goal we will prioritize adding new urban agriculture businesses within the urban agriculture priority sites identified in the Greening and Arts Framework Map.

Zoning Call-out Box: In 2011, the City of Chicago adopted an [amendment to the Chicago Zoning Ordinance](#) that expands and defines the use of community gardens and urban farms in many parts of the city. This zoning amendment has helped to streamline and simplify the process of creating productive landscapes in the City of Chicago, and we commend the City for this change. Many areas identified as Urban Agriculture Priority Areas in the Greening & Arts framework map are in portions of the community zoned as Residential (R) or B1 & B2 business districts that do not allow for urban farms, only allowing community gardens under 25,000 SF in size. Pursuing urban farming as envisioned by this plan will entail rezoning in certain areas of the community, and it is unclear if the City of Chicago is amenable to those changes. We will need to engage the City in ongoing conversations about changes to the current zoning districts in North Lawndale to allow for the expansion of urban farming where appropriate in our community.



[2.5 Continue to activate vacant lots throughout the community by transforming them into community gardens and parks.](#)

The North Lawndale GROWs committee has been extremely successful at partnering with NeighborSpace to transform vacant lots into community gardens. We will continue to seek opportunities to use this tried and true method to convert vacant parcels, especially in zone 1 and 2 areas of the community, to beautify our community, foster related economic opportunities, and promote new developments. The [NeighborSpace website](#) outlines how to become a community-managed open space, and the GROWs committee will continue to support and give guidance to organizations looking to open a community garden in North Lawndale.

### Strategy 3: Empower residents and organizations to create artistic, beautifully landscaped, clean, and environmentally diverse streetscapes.

We will continue to empower and enable residents to beautify our neighborhood. We aim to foster community pride and stewardship by ensuring our neighborhood is clean, safe, and green. We hope that as residents learn to take care of our neighborhood's streetscapes, their sense of community pride will grow. Furthermore, we want to display our community's history and culture for residents and visitors to learn about and celebrate this history.

#### 3.1 Create a youth-led neighborhood litter and recycling campaign.

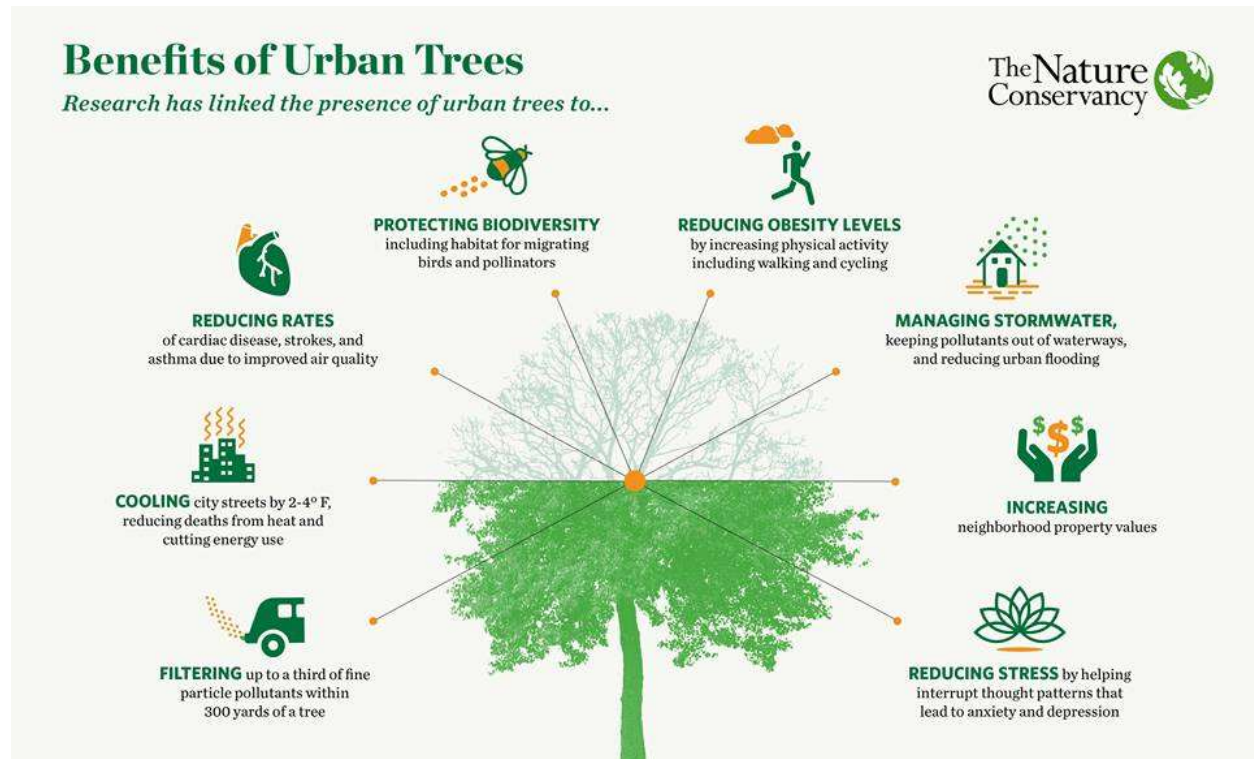
We can help beautify our neighborhood by empowering residents to decrease the amount of litter in our community. Clean streets will make our community safer, will promote neighborhood pride, and will encourage more people to live healthier lifestyles by making it more attractive to spend time outside. We believe that the young people within our community possess the drive, enthusiasm, and creativity to lead the charge on this issue. We will help facilitate partnerships between North Lawndale schools, youth organizations, and non-profit organizations that work with youth to create a youth-led litter and recycling campaign to encourage neighbors to keep their blocks trash-free and to organize trash clean-up events.

#### 3.2 Place permanent, secure trash cans throughout the neighborhood that can double as public art.

We can simultaneously promote neighborhood beautification efforts and foster a sense of neighborhood pride by increasing the number of secure trash cans throughout the neighborhood, especially along main roads. These trash cans should be firmly secured to the ground, should be regularly emptied, and can double as community-created art installations. Trash cans designed to be firmly secured to the ground will incur a cost beyond what the city typically provides for, and will entail a discussion with the alderman's office. The North Lawndale Coalition of Artists (Strategy 1.2) will partner with the Alderman's office and the Department of Streets and Sanitation to secure funding and to mobilize local artists and community members in the creation and placement of these trash cans.

#### 3.3 Plant trees throughout the neighborhood via the Oaks of North Lawndale project to achieve Arboretum Status.

With 15 percent tree canopy coverage, North Lawndale has one of the lowest tree coverage of any of the neighborhoods in the City of Chicago. To help address this issue, our community is fortunate to have received the commitment from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to plant 7,000 trees throughout North Lawndale over the course of the next few years. Increased tree canopy coverage has been linked to [numerous health and social benefits](#), including improved air quality, lower crime rates, temperature reductions, reduced stress levels, and a whole host of other benefits. Furthermore, these trees will be grown within the North Lawndale community and will allow some residents to develop and hone urban agriculture skills while fostering a sense of environmental stewardship. Additionally, these trees will allow North Lawndale to work towards [Arboretum Status Accreditation](#) which will highlight our community's natural assets and serve as a helpful marketing tool. While ongoing input on the location of these trees will be necessary, we will prioritize planting trees along commercial corridors in our community (16<sup>th</sup> Street, Ogden, and Roosevelt Rd) and in zone 1 areas.



(Source: The Nature Conservancy, <https://global.nature.org/content/funding-trees-for-health>)

### 3.4 Create gateway murals and a walking tour that teach the history of the neighborhood.

Our community has a rich history, with historic resources such as Route 66, the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s push for fair housing in the north, the Central Park Theater, the original locations of Cobra Records and George's Music Room, and many others. However, much of this history is not visually celebrated in the community and many residents are not aware of this source of local pride. We aim to nurture community pride by celebrating this history through the creation of gateway murals on viaducts at the entrances to the community, paired with a designated walking tour route that highlights historic sites throughout North Lawndale. We will work with CDOT and the owners of the railroad viaducts at desired mural locations to sign indemnification letters that will allow for the long-term installation of these public murals that acknowledge North Lawndale's history and welcome visitors into our community.



#### Strategy 4: Create and maintain welcoming, safe, and high-quality parks and recreation areas throughout the community.

We are lucky to be home to numerous formal park spaces managed by the Chicago Park District including Douglas Park, which is a great asset to our community. However the presence of such a large regional park within our community conceals the fact that some areas in the Southwest portion of the neighborhood are not within a short walk to a park. We need to invest in improvements to our existing facilities while simultaneously opening new facilities to serve areas of our community that are not close to recreation spaces and do not meet the City of Chicago’s Park District service area standards as outlined in the [CitySpace Plan](#). Together, these strategies will allow more people in our community to benefit from the Chicago Park District resources in our community.

##### 4.1 Repair, maintain, and improve the facilities at Douglas Park, Franklin Park, and other public park spaces in North Lawndale.

Our public parks are some of our neighborhood’s greatest community assets, yet upkeep of park infrastructure requires greater attention. While Franklin Park has benefited from the recent investments of new basketball courts and a boxing ring, many of our park facilities are in need of repair, including the Douglas Park historic Field House, walking paths, and bike paths. Furthermore, to increase the safety and patronage of our parks, we need to invest in better lighting and signage so that residents can easily navigate and utilize these open spaces. These enhancements will allow North Lawndale parks to increase their capacity to host regular community events and larger regional and national events. The Douglas Park Advisory Council, the Douglas Park Cultural Center Council, and the Chicago Parks District should continue their coordination to achieve these goals.

#### 4.2 Transform vacant lots into playlots and identify opportunities to create a new park space to benefit underserved areas of the community.

While our community has access to 220 acres of open space, most of that park space (174 acres) is concentrated in Douglas Park. To increase park access to residents throughout the community, the Chicago Park District should explore options for creating new park space with programming to serve the park-poor areas in the southwestern portion of North Lawndale. Furthermore, we will engage with the Chicago Park District to identify funding (potentially through selling vacant city-owned parcels) and prioritize parcels for the conversion of vacant lots into playlots, especially in zone 1 and zone 2 areas where infill housing development is also being prioritized. Should new residents locate in these areas as envisioned, the need for new park space will only grow.

#### 4.3 Improve public safety and maintenance of Independence and Douglas Boulevards.

To increase the safety of Independence and Douglas Boulevards, we will work with community members and the Chicago Park District to ensure that these public areas are fastidiously maintained and cleaned as an expression of community ownership and to dissuade illicit activities. Similarly, the walkways and common areas within the boulevards should be well lit, installing additional lighting as necessary. We will encourage the residents who live along the boulevards to report any illegal activities.

#### 4.4 Increase participation and awareness of programming for teenagers and seniors at the Douglas Park Cultural Center.

The Douglas Park Cultural Center provides numerous programming opportunities for the residents of our neighborhood, however, it can be difficult to access the cultural center for those who do not live in the immediate proximity of the park and do not drive. Our community will increase participation in cultural center activities by improving signage and exploring additional transportation options to and from the cultural center for youth and seniors. Similarly, most programming participants that currently utilize the resources available at the Cultural Center hear about these events and opportunities via word of mouth. The newly formed Douglas Park Cultural Center Council aims to increase the awareness of programming by publicizing events and classes through community partners and by posting information throughout the community.

## Implementation Matrix

*[The final phase of the planning process will identify lead organizations and project partners for each action included in the plan. If you or your organization would like to be involved in implementing the plan, please [contact NLCCC](#) and indicate which Chapter, Strategy, or Action your group is interested in supporting.]*