Downtown Loop Site, Chicago
331-355 S. Plymouth, 12-26 W. Van Buren

This site is located in Chicago’s downtown area, next to all of the city’s transit lines and multiple higher education institutions. The city is seeking redevelopment of this site to build upon the growth trend of the central area. For the last six years, Chicago has led the country in corporate expansions and relocations, and more than half of the city’s jobs are located downtown. Employment growth has been particularly strong since 2010, generating nearly 134,000 jobs mostly in service industries such as health care and technology. Chicago also had the fastest growing downtown population of any U.S. city, increasing 50% since 2000, and double the national growth rate.

The site includes several city-owned parcels for sale and a 4-level garage structure at 331 S. Plymouth Court that would need to be demolished for a new mixed-use development proposal. The city-owned parcels are next to Pritzker Park, which was initially established as a temporary park when the Harold Washington Library opened in the early 1990s. The park was dedicated to Cindy Pritzker to commemorate her efforts for the construction of the library and her support of Chicago Public Libraries. In 2008, the park was improved with $1.2 million in Tax Increment Financing funds and transferred to the Park District.

The site is located next to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) elevated train station which serves the Orange, Brown, Green, Pink, and Purple lines. There are also underground CTA train stations for the Red and Blue lines at State and Dearborn Streets.

There are several higher education institutions in close proximity to this site including the University of Illinois at Chicago’s John Marshall Law School, DePaul University, Columbia College, the School of the Art Institute, Roosevelt University, and Robert Morris University. Directly west of the site is the landmarked Fisher Building for rental housing and the landmarked Old Colony Building for student housing.

The site is located next to State Street’s historic retail corridor. Chicago's retail sales increased 3.5% last year as consumers are shifting spending from goods to experiences. A few blocks east of the site is Millennium Park, which was recently named the Midwest region’s top tourist attraction and draws an estimated 25 million visitors annually. Chicago’s tourism industry set a record last year with almost 58 million visitors.

Expected program:
The expected program will be drafted in partnership impacted city agencies such as the Department of Housing, Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Libraries, and the Chicago Transit Authority. The City will then present the draft program to the community to gather feedback before finalizing the program elements and site development requirements.

Expected timeline:
The specific site requirements are expected to be finalized together with partner agencies, stakeholders, and community outreach by the end of Q1 2020. The competition will include two phases, an Expression of Interest phase, and an RFP phase with a winning team expected to be announced in early 2021.
Site Ownership and Parcel Information:
City-owned parcels for sale (in red on map):
17-16-235-029-0000
17-16-235-007-0000
17-16-235-008-0000
17-16-235-022-0000

Site Area: approximately 15,965 square feet
Zoning: DX-16

Ward: 4th Ward, Alderman Sophia King

Type of property transfer intended:
The City is seeking a development team to redevelop the site, and to transfer the city-owned parcels. The City intends to sell the city-owned parcels to the winning bidder. However, agreement to transfer site ownership would also be subject to additional reviews and approvals such as zoning entitlement, any city financial assistance applications, and permits. The site ownership transfer would then follow the City’s negotiated sale process, which requires final approval from Chicago’s City Council and Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Presentation of the site

Previous Planning Documents

Several planning documents reference this downtown area, and specifically State Street and Pritzker Park. In the Vision for Greater State Street document completed in 1997, the plan considered the idea of reshaping the park, removing the parking garage structure, and redeveloping the site as a quadrangle for an academic campus. The 2003 Central Area Plan encouraged mixed use and high density developments in this area, along with integrating sustainable design. The 2009 Central Area Action Plan identified recommendations to strengthen Chicago as an environmentally sustainable city and to create dynamic, pedestrian-oriented streets with public amenities.
Context Information

In terms of residents in the Loop, the average household size is 1.7, compared to the 2.6 for the city average. Many of the residents are young professionals, with a high median household income of $105,066, and over 80% of adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher. The majority of residential units in the Loop are rental units and rent costs have been rising, from $2.19/SF in 2010 to $2.93/SF in 2018. Given the higher cost of living in the Loop, respondents should expect the site’s program will include an affordable housing component.

This area of the Loop experiences vibrant activity during weekdays and weekends with theaters, offices, residences, hotels, and has a variety of beverage and dining options. Based on pedestrian counters installed by the Chicago Loop Alliance, State Street had over 99 million pedestrians in 2018. However, the pedestrian count reduces southbound, so respondents should expect the site requirements to include incorporating placemaking features and the type of ground-floor uses that will draw pedestrians to this southern section of State Street.

The Harold Washington Library is the central library for the Chicago Public Library system. This post-modern designed building was opened to the public in 1991, and was designed by Hammond, Beeby, and Babka, using reinterpreted elements from local historic buildings. Respondents should anticipate that the site’s redevelopment will need to consider access and visibility of this library building.

Specific climate risks and environmental challenges

According to U.S. Climate Data, Chicago has 2611 annual hours of sunshine and the average annual precipitation is 33.2 inches with 120 days per year of precipitation. The average temperature is close to 50°F with average highs in July of 81°F and average lows in January of 18°F.

About half of the precipitation in Illinois comes from short and intense thunderstorms during the warmer months of the year and the Chicago region experiences an average of 8-10 days a year with over an inch of precipitation (data from June 2015 Report for the Urban Flooding Awareness Act by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources).

As typical of many older cities in the country, Chicago has a combined storm and sewage utility system. To help manage excessive storm water, developments in Chicago are regulated by the city’s Storm Water Ordinance.

In accordance with the Reinventing Cities competition goals, the City will expect an exemplary project for this site that will highlight the City of Chicago’s commitment to address climate change. The project should seek to deliver a greener way of life by providing a resilient urban development. Respondents will need to demonstrate that the design of the site and building(s) will deliver, at minimum, a carbon-neutral project.