

# Our Response To Friends of the Parks' 'State of the Parks' Report

December 21, 2018

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

The Chicago Park District is thoroughly disappointed in Friends of the Parks' (FOTP) recent "State of the Parks 2018" report. The report is inaccurate and blatantly disregards important capital and programmatic gains that have been made in parks across Chicago. As a result of massive expansion of park acreage and facilities since 2011, 99.6 percent of Chicago residents are within a 10 minute walk of a park. Over the last eight years, the Chicago park system has seen unprecedented growth, including the acquisition of over 1,000 additional acres of park land, 355 renovated or new playgrounds, 35 new artificial turf fields and 16 new park field houses that are complete or now under construction. These gains have not gone unnoticed, as we were the largest municipal park agency in the nation to win the prestigious 2014 Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation Management, awarded by The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), which recognized investments made to create a brighter, healthier future for all of Chicago's children.

While we appreciate the necessity of civic groups that seek to educate citizens, this report demonstrates the opposite. In an attempt to make their organization relevant, FOTP intentionally cites old data and manipulates and distorts the analysis and methodology of current data to highlight its own agenda. Despite the claim of gathering and analyzing all available data, the report fails to consult the 2018 Trust for Public Land ParkScore and the Chicago Park District's 400+ page 2017 Master Plan, which is readily available on our website at [www.ChicagoParkDistrict.com](http://www.ChicagoParkDistrict.com).

FOTP's report is incendiary and divisive. It should be noted that the Chicago Park District prioritizes capital spending based on community needs, and not according to race. That said, we recognize the importance of dividing resources equitably. Below is a list of just a few of the notable investments that have been made in predominately African-American and Latino communities in the last three years:

- The \$19 million investment to create La Villita Park, a 22 acre site that was, at the time, the largest USEPA Superfund-to-Park conversion in a major American city. The park serves the Little Village and Lawndale communities. This was a brownfield that was converted into an accessible urban greenspace in a community lacking parkland.



- Ellis Park Community Arts and Recreation Center. The \$17.5 million new facility with more than 32,000 square feet includes the first publicly accessible public indoor swimming pool between Hyde Park and the South Loop, as well as basketball courts, a fitness center, studio, meeting hall, and music and theater performance spaces. The facility serves the Douglas and Oakland communities and is a gathering space for local community groups.
- Big Marsh Park in South Deering with over \$16 million in investment includes a habitat restoration of 240 acres and a 40-acre Bike Park. We will also break ground on a new environmental center there this winter. The site provides a number of diverse recreational opportunities and will be a hub on the southeast side of Chicago for education and programming around eco-recreation, nature, and Chicago's industrial history.
- Gately Indoor Track Facility in Roseland, which will be the first public indoor facility in Chicago dedicated to track and field. The \$56 million and 139,000 square foot facility will also feature a neighborhood based After School Matters location. This facility will serve neighboring schools while also serving as a regional destination for competitive sports meets (construction in progress).
- Addams Sports Complex, a new, \$28 million and 100,000 square foot multi-purpose indoor facility in the Near West Side Community. In partnership with the Chicago Housing Authority, this facility will house an indoor track, artificial turf field, basketball courts and several multi-purpose community rooms (construction in progress).

Perhaps most disappointing to the Chicago Park District is that FOTP senior level staff and board members meet monthly with senior level Park District staff. These meetings, which range 1-2 hours in length, have occurred on a fairly regular basis for the past several years. The meetings allow FOTP to bring up any issues they wish to address with Park District staff. The agendas from these meetings, created by FOTP, show they have never raised questions or concerns about global access to open space, disparities in service citywide, nor the other serious issues that they have leveled against the Park District in their report. If they had, we could have easily helped them interpret our programming or capital data or shared the 2017 Master Plan that provides a current overview of the state of the parks and an outlook for the future. The Master Plan already addresses many of the claims laid out in their report.



The Chicago Park District is committed to continually improving its service to Chicago residents and does not shy away from making necessary changes to meet that goal. We are not afraid of constructive criticism. Monthly meetings were set up specifically so that FOTP could raise issues of concern such that we could solve them together. Meeting with us monthly over several years, but never raising these issues, shows FOTP's agenda for what it is—an attempted smear campaign, rather than any real intent on improving the parks.

The Chicago Park District entered a consent decree for a period of six years, and it was lifted 30 years ago. The Chicago Park District of today is very different. More than 3,100 full-time and 3,700 seasonal professionals, employees of the Chicago Park District are dedicated to serving ALL Chicagoans every day. We invite you to review our response to the very flawed report issued by FOTP.

Sincerely,



Michael P. Kelly  
General Superintendent and CEO  
Chicago Park District



# CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT RESPONDS TO FOTP CLAIMS

## 10. Chicago needs more parkland.

The Chicago Park District continually advocates for and succeeds in acquiring new parkland for Chicago residents. In fact, **the Chicago Park District has acquired over 1,000 acres since 2011**. FOTP uses an outdated 2017 Trust for Public Land (TPL) report in its analysis. By comparison, a 2018 *City Parks Facts* analysis published by the TPL ranked Chicago 8<sup>th</sup> overall, ahead of New York City and Los Angeles, in meeting its resident's needs for quality parks and open space. It should also be noted, Chicago is the highest ranked city on TPL's ParkScore list among cities with more than one million in population.

FOTP chose only one factor to highlight from TPL's report—acreage. TPL actually uses four categories to determine ParkScore and Chicago scores very well in 3 out of the 4 categories. Chicago scores high in Access (outscored #1 ranked Minneapolis in this category), Amenities and Investment.

The acreage score in TPL's analysis includes median park size and percent of city area. FOTP chose to use percent of city area from 2017 in their report, but this ignores a larger point. Median park size and percent of city area metrics are biased towards smaller and newer cities, and biased against older cities like Chicago with large swaths of industrial land and other historically established land uses such as railroads. In many cases, land is being used for job-generation or is privately-owned, making acquisition of both large and contiguous parcels challenging.

Despite these challenges, the Chicago Park District persists in seeking out land acquisition wherever possible, whether it be partnering with organizations like Openlands to acquire property, or more often with governmental agencies to identify publicly-owned land where additional recreational resources can be acquired or added. The FOTP report states that the City of Chicago's overall open space is just under 13,000 acres, but the actual combined open space of the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserve District of Cook County and other open space providers is 14,113 acres. The FOTP report states that Chicago's overall open space per capita is 4.7 acres per 1,000 residents, but it is actually 5.24 acres per 1,000 residents.

When prioritizing land for new acquisition, the Chicago Park District follows the national guideline promoted by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), The Trust for Public Land, and the Urban Land Institute to ensure all residents live within a 10-minute walk (or 1/2 mile) of a park open space. To that measure, Chicago has reached 99.6%. See the Supplemental Information in this report for a map highlighting focus areas for acquisition in Chicago based on the 10-minute walk methodology.



**9. South Side parks of similar size and class to those on the North Side have significantly smaller budgets.**

This is another misrepresentation by FOTP and demonstrates a fundamental lack of knowledge on budgeting.

The total FY18 operating budgets are equitably allocated among the regions- Central \$29.7M, North \$29.9M and South \$30.2M- with equitable allocations among account classes (see table below).

Total FY18 fulltime equivalent positions are also equitably allocated among the regions: Central 578, North 571 and South 582. The FY19 budget has similar results.

<b>Sum of FY18 Adopted</b>		
<b>Region</b>	<b>Account Class</b>	<b>Total</b>
☐ <b>Central</b>	610000 Personnel Services	28,654,431.12
	620000 Materials and Supplies	536,769.08
	623000 Contractual Services	479,734.12
	624000 Program Expense	44,672.53
<b>Central Total</b>		<b>29,715,606.85</b>
☐ <b>North</b>	610000 Personnel Services	28,785,301.16
	620000 Materials and Supplies	617,148.00
	623000 Contractual Services	507,355.00
	624000 Program Expense	46,582.00
<b>North Total</b>		<b>29,956,386.16</b>
☐ <b>South</b>	610000 Personnel Services	29,000,164.70
	620000 Materials and Supplies	635,509.34
	623000 Contractual Services	482,590.72
	624000 Program Expense	71,998.52
<b>South Total</b>		<b>30,190,263.29</b>

Although budgets are crafted to reflect anticipated and estimated allocations by park, resources may be and often are, reallocated among parks, regardless of park class and region, based on need as long as there are not transfers between budget classifications (e.g., personnel to supplies appropriations). This allows the Chicago Park District to remain flexible to address needs districtwide and does not require the District to adhere to a static budget document.



**8. 50% of the money that the Chicago Park District budgets to subsidize the participation of needy youth doesn't get used.**

This is false and underscores the report's consistent failure to interpret the data correctly. This false claim also leads to damages in that it potentially impairs the District's ability to garner financial support through our Send a Kid to Camp campaign.

As in the past, the 2019 budget allocates \$3 million in financial assistance for programs year-round, on top of the built-in discounts of our tiered pricing structure which takes into account the socio-economic indicators of each community. To illustrate: the *pre-discounted* fee rates for our six-week summer day camp program at Maggie Daley Park, located downtown, is \$684 (\$3.80 per hour), Hermitage Park in the West Englewood Community is \$100 (\$0.56 per hour) and Fuller Park in the Fuller Park Community is \$90 (\$0.50 per hour). Demonstration of need reduces this rate by half. Demonstration of further need (hardship, as defined by Illinois state assistance qualifications) reduces this rate fully. The Chicago Park District remains well below competitor rates and, as always, no child will be turned away for an inability to pay. To that extent, we offer the following discounts: Financial Assistance, Hardship, CHA, Military and 'FirstFree' learn to swim among others. Page 40 of the District's FY17 audited financial statements reported total discounts of more than \$3M (see below). FY18 year-to-date results are on track to \$3 million as well.

	<b>General</b>	<b>Federal, state, and local grants</b>
Revenues:		
Property taxes	\$ 153,275	—
Tax increment financing	9,626	—
Personal property replacement tax	32,065	—
Investment income	1,764	269
Parking fees	5,757	—
Harbor fees	11,461	—
Concessions	3,691	—
Rental of Soldier Field	35,232	—
Rental of other property	818	—
Golf course fees	5,769	—
Recreational activities (net of \$3,056 in discounts)	14,223	—
Permits	15,711	—
Other user charges	7,250	—
Donations and grant income	2,016	19,018
Northerly Island	1,182	—
Miscellaneous	1,695	—
Total revenues	301,535	19,287



## **7. The Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners lack independence.**

While FOTP criticizes the diverse professional backgrounds represented among board members as “wholly separate from its parks,” the Chicago Park District considers this diversity an invaluable asset to our organization and the city. The Chicago Park District is a complex organization that deals daily with issues relating to construction, finance, law, human resource, community building and engagement, among others areas of interest. As with other Boards, we require a diverse group of strong leaders to effectively provide guidance and oversight on all park operations.

Appointments to the Board must be confirmed by the Chicago City Council. The Council does require that nominees have demonstrated relevant experience related to the management of the District’s financials and/or operation of parks, as well as a commitment to the pursuit of racial and social equity. Candidates are prominent leaders in their field of expertise and are vetted and interviewed based upon these high standards. The Chicago Park District currently has top leaders in the field of government law and communication, education, real estate and business finance, who volunteer their time to serve on the Board.

## **6. Park Advisory Councils are increasingly subjected to unilateral control by the park district... and it has become increasingly difficult for park stakeholders to apply meaningful influence over their parks or the district as a whole.**

We strongly disagree. The Chicago Park District is among one of the most democratic government agencies in Illinois and around the country. Through Park Advisory Councils (PACs), the District has created a hyper-localized level of democratic participation available for all of our 600+ parks. These advisory councils are self-governed and are ruled by their own set of bylaws.

Park Advisory Councils are open and free to the public. Any Chicago resident or park patron can become a member of their local council. A successful Park Advisory Council has a great relationship with park staff including the park supervisor, the regional staff, administration staff, leadership and the Board of Commissioners. It is within this partnership that PACs are able to work on a variety of issues for their community and their park ranging from supplemental programming to capital projects.

PACs are self-governed and are ruled by their own set of bylaws. PACs conduct their own meetings, set their own agendas, and manage the day to day operations of their PACs, all in partnership with the Chicago Park District. The Park District in no way has “unilateral control”, but instead provides guidance and oversight. The Chicago Park District offers many training sessions for PACs, including the annual PAC Conference that covers a variety of topics like working with your elected officials, creating partnerships, creating social media messaging, and how to start a community garden.

In order to remain in good standing with the Chicago Park District, PACs are required to submit an annual report and officer update. This report provides general information about the 200+ PACs with the Park District, highlights the types of activities (if any) they are doing in their parks, and informs their goals for the year. The Park District also collects basic contact information from the officers in order to facilitate ongoing communications with the PACs.

Park Advisory Councils have access to staff members and are not dissuaded from testifying at budget hearings or speaking during the monthly Board of Commissioner meetings. PAC members and members of the public are invited to capital project meetings and have direct lines of communication with park staff including region and area managers, directors, and project managers. The Chicago Park District currently has 232 Park Advisory Councils. Patrons can learn more on the Park District website at: <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.php/get-involved/join-park-advisory-council>

Beyond PACs, community process is a key step in the design of all of our significant park projects, allowing public input to shape project designs and schedules. The South Lakefront Framework Plan planning process, for example, had more than 35 public and stakeholder meetings with more than 2,300 attendees.

Another example of robust and meaningful community participation in setting priorities and goals for park programs is the Re:Center Initiative at the Chicago Park District’s 15 Cultural Centers. At each Cultural Center, Park District staff worked with park patrons, local artists and community stakeholders on a three year process of mutual listening and co-creation. Each Cultural Center hosted a series of Listening Parties and Meet Ups to identify cultural priorities that are

unique to the community, followed by a year with an artist in residence and the development of a cultural committee to continue working on achieving the priorities identified at the start of the process. In this model, community members, artists, and park staff work together to envision Chicagoans as sustained cultural stewards of our parks.

Finally, the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners hosts monthly meetings and members of the public have the opportunity to address the Board and have their concerns heard. The meetings are streamed live, and video is posted on the website prior to the following meeting.

### **5. Multiple issues around crime too often lead to parks that do not contribute to the health of the community.**

We agree that crime is a pervasive problem in some neighborhoods of Chicago. The Park District does not shy away from this challenge, but instead is addressing it head on. Programming staff actively pursue programming and community partnerships to ensure our parks serve as a safe haven in the community for all users. In fact, the bulk of the Chicago Park District's free programs are aimed at positively engaging communities in high crime areas, year-round. These programs include Windy City Hoops, Summer Teen Sports League, 'Go Runs, Rollin' Recreation, ArtSeed, We Move Chicago, Young Cultural Stewards and more. Each are funded by the Chicago Park District.

Hamilton Park in Englewood is an excellent example of a park that serves as a vibrant hub for sports, arts and organizing in the community and enjoys an abundance of use by park goers of all stripes. In addition to providing programs found across the city, like the Park Kids after-school activities, day camp, and sports programs, Hamilton Park serves as one of the Park District's 15 Cultural Centers, and is home to the TRACE teen program (Teens Reimagining Art, Community & Environment), a job readiness and civic leadership program that cultivates creative activism in youth (ages 14–22). TRACE employs over 60 young people whose task is to collectively reimagine their roles as creative civic agents within their communities. The program is funded by the Park District's operating budget, and Park District staff have successfully sought grant funding to expand the program on the West Side in the Austin community. Hamilton Park also hosts partnerships with organizations such as the Chicago Children's Choir, Red Clay Dance Ensemble and New Horizons Ensemble.



The Chicago Park District is not a social service provider, however we enlist the assistance of community-based organizations and view partnerships as a way to expand programming and stretch Chicagoans' tax dollars to serve more parks throughout the city. The launch of the free Night Out in the Parks event series was in direct response to problems of violence in our communities. Among the 2,000 Night Out in the Parks events, that are offered year-round in parks citywide, the Chicago Park District has partnered with Collaboraction, a social issue-driven contemporary theatre, to present PEACEBOOK. The collaborative citywide festival of theatre, dance, music, visual art and spoken word focused on cultivating peace in Chicago. Afternoons included free community lunch, live music performances, inspirational speakers and a town hall discussion. In its seven events across the city, PEACEBOOK brought in 255 community artists, including Step Alive, a 20-member teen dance ensemble.

The Chicago Park District is also not a law enforcement agency. Park District employees work closely with the citywide law enforcement, local police districts and Community Area Policing coordinators who are dedicated to serving and protecting our parks.

#### **4. Programming for parks on the city's north side is significantly more robust than programming for parks on the south side.**

This is not the case. In fact, in 2018, the Chicago Park District received the Innovation in Social Equity award from National Recreation and Park Association lauding us for the Night Out in the Parks program, which brings over 2,000 free cultural events each year to parks in every neighborhood. Park programming ranges from sports, arts and culture, nature, aquatics, wellness, special recreation and more throughout each of the three regions to all communities citywide. According to the 2010 Census, roughly 38% of the city's population lives in the Chicago Park District North Region (parks north of North Ave), while 35% live in the Central Region (parks between North Ave and 51<sup>st</sup> street) and 28% live in the South Region (parks south of 51<sup>st</sup> street). Programs offered per region closely reflect these population percentages. In addition, for the past several years, the Park District has undertaken a direct initiative to grow programming in parks with lagging enrollments. Since 2013, the South and Central Regions have seen the largest program growth with 30% more programs being offered in South and 42% more programs being offered in Central.



In an effort to make certain that programming is accessible, the Chicago Park District offers thousands of free programs. The graph below shows the number of classes that were free in 2018:

REGION	#ENROLL	% WHOLE	#HOURS	% WHOLE	#CAPACITY	% WHOLE	#PROGRAMS	% WHOLE	% POPULATION BASED ON 2010 CENSUS
CENTRAL	49,365	43%	98,931	41%	82,470	33%	2,906	41%	35%
NORTH	29,760	26%	59,270	25%	78,171	31%	1,925	27%	38%
SOUTH	35,692	31%	82,288	34%	88,210	35%	2,253	32%	27%

Finally, FOTP’s attempt to demonstrate a disparity between program opportunities in two areas is highly misleading. The comparisons between the North Region 4 and South Region 2 are incommensurable. North Region Area 4 includes population dense neighborhoods such as Albany Park, Irving Park, North Park. South Region, Area 2 includes neighborhoods not quite as dense, such as Englewood, West Englewood, Auburn Gresham and West Chatham. Further, this analysis does not reflect programming hours and park-based community partnerships, which offer an additional 3,000 enrollments in the South Region Area 2 through dozens of community partners, including faith-based organizations, Junior Achievement, Teamwork Englewood, CAPS and Girls in the Game.



**3. Higher income communities were almost twice as likely to have their capital improvement requests approved than lower income communities.**

This is false. The Friends of the Parks analysis regarding capital requests is inherently flawed. The source they used, the capital request database (CRD), is not a robust dataset that can be used to evaluate capital spending across the city, and it is careless to use it as such. The CRD houses ideas from internal staff, local officials, and community members on capital projects they'd like to see around the District. The CRD is a reference tool to better understand community interests and park needs, but the CRD it is not a comprehensive source of capital projects. In fact, most approved capital projects are not ever entered into the CRD. It was never intended for that purpose.

Upon the completion of the Chicago Plays! Program, for example, the Park District reconstructed 327 playgrounds in neighborhoods all over Chicago. These playgrounds weren't all in the CRD. Emergency projects, such as a new field house boiler, would not be reflected in the CRD. Important capital projects, like new roofs and masonry, are jobs needed to ensure buildings can stay open for programming, but those jobs are rarely requested by a community group. Further, projects currently in discussion with the local community, like south side dog friendly areas, are not listed in the CRD as they are already underway.

A more accurate way to look at equity of capital projects is to review the projects that are actually being built around Chicago. See the Supplemental Information for maps of capital projects since 2011 showing how capital projects are dispersed throughout all community areas of Chicago.

Capital projects are approved based on relative priority (safety concerns, etc.), geographic distribution and availability of funding. The Chicago Park District does not approve capital projects based on the income of a community area. In fact, three of the largest current park projects are in community areas with household incomes below Chicago's median:

**Gately Indoor Track and Field** is in the Pullman Community Area (a predominantly Black/African-American community with a median household income 69% of the Chicago median).

**Exelon Recreation Center at Addams Park** is in the Near West Side Community Area (a mixed race community with a median household income 136% of the Chicago median). This project is also a partnership with the Chicago Housing Authority.

**The new park and Chicago Park District headquarters at 48th and Western** is in the Brighton Park Community Area (a predominantly Hispanic/Latino community with a median household income 68% of the Chicago median).

**South Lakefront Framework Plan** covers Woodlawn and South Shore Community Areas (predominantly Black/African-American communities with a median household incomes 45% and 50% of the Chicago median), and includes renovations of park access, golf, the Obama Presidential Center, park recreation, and site improvements.

## **2. Capital requests in black communities are approved at half the rate of those in white communities.**

As noted in the response to #3, this Friends of the Parks analysis is without value. FOTP poorly misused and misrepresented actual data. The CRD is not comprehensive of capital projects. Instead, a more accurate way to look at equity of capital projects is to review the projects actually built around Chicago. See the Supplemental Information for maps of capital projects since 2011 showing how capital projects are dispersed throughout all community areas of Chicago.

Capital projects are approved based on relative priority (safety needs, etc.), geographic distribution and availability of funding. The Chicago Park District does not approve capital projects based on the race of a community area. Included below is a table of the top 10 projects underway at the Park District, including the racial breakdown of a project's local community area according to 2010 Census Data.

Finally, evaluating capital projects only in communities of a predominant race excludes the majority of the city. According to 2010 Census Data, only 33 of the City's 77 community areas have a predominant race. Chicago is a melting pot of races and most community areas reflect that diversity.

Park Name	Region	Project	Community Area	% White	%Black/AA	%Asian	% Hisp/Latino
GATELY (JAMES)	SOUTH	Field house with indoor track	Pullman	7%	84%	0%	8%
PARK NO. 596	CENTRAL	New park development	Brighton Park	8%	1%	5%	85%
ADDAMS (JANE)	CENTRAL	Indoor Recreation Center	Near West Side	42%	32%	15%	9%
DUSABLE (JEAN BAPTISTE)	CENTRAL	Park development - new	Near North Side	72%	11%	10%	5%
JACKSON (ANDREW) and SOUTH SHORE CULTL. CTR	SOUTH	South Lakefront Planning Study	Hyde Park, Woodlawn, South Shore*	14%	77%	4%	3%
BIG MARSH	SOUTH	Ford Calumet Environmental	South Deering	5%	62%	0%	32%
WILLIAMS (DANIEL HALE)	CENTRAL	Field house - new	Douglas	10%	73%	13%	3%
CLARENDON COMM. CTR.	NORTH	Field house - major restoration	Uptown	52%	20%	11%	14%
RIVER	NORTH	Chicago River - Dam Removal	Albany Park and North Park*	34%	4%	17%	41%
MCGUANE (JOHN)	CENTRAL	Field house - major restoration	Bridgeport	35%	2%	35%	27%

\*Census data is an average for projects within more than one community area

**1. Latino communities have only about 197 acres of the parkland, by far the least of any racial group in the city.**

The Chicago Park District does not acquire property based on race nor should it. Rather, the Park District acquires properties based on the access methodology and is committed to making sure every Chicagoan regardless of their race or ethnicity is within a 10 minute walk or ½ mile of open space. Based on the 10 minute walk or ½ mile standard, Chicago is at 99.6% of residents living within this distance to open space. The District also acquires property utilizing the per capita methodology, which is based upon the number of residents per community area. The Chicago Park District continues to pursue open space opportunities based on the access and per capita methodologies, with a focus on those community areas with an open space need. Everyone is welcome in Chicago’s parks, so classifying park space as predominantly for one ethnic group as FOTP suggests is improper.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) provides frameworks for recreation agencies throughout the country to measure their performance on many fronts. The Chicago Park District achieved accreditation by NRPA’s Commission for Accreditation of Park Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). CAPRA accredits park and recreation agencies for excellence in operations and experiences and provides assurance to the public that the agency meets national standards of best practice. The Chicago Park District also achieved accreditation by the Illinois Distinguished Park and Recreation Agency (DPRA), which recognizes agencies for providing high quality recreation services.



In addition to achieving the National Recreation and Parks Association CAPRA accreditation, the Chicago Park District participates and utilizes many of the NRPA programs and resources. Superintendent and CEO Michael Kelly currently serves as the Treasurer on the NRPA Board of Directors.

NRPA released its “2018 Performance Review: Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks” document to help park agencies determine how they rated in various categories relative to other park agencies nationwide. Despite providing useful tools in this regard, NRPA readily notes the following:

“You will note that this report does not include national standards. The reason is simple: no two park and recreation agencies are the same. Different agencies serve different residents with unique needs, desires and challenges. As communities vary in population and their ability/willingness to fund park and recreation amenities, so too should their park and recreation agencies. A successful agency is one that tailors its services to meet the needs and demands of its community.” (2018 Performance Review, Executive Summary)

NRPA goes on to provide general information on median number of residents per park facility, and provides a sliding scale of residents per facility based on city density.

However, a straight facility per population per square mile is less helpful in Chicago where population densities vary greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood. In keeping with the ½ mile/10-minute walk designation to an open space, the Park District uses a level of service designation which ensures that whether a resident lives in a dense neighborhood or not, they have a right to access open space and facilities.

In terms of other facilities, FOTP claims that facilities are inadequately distributed. This is false.

The level of service standards are as follows:

- ½ mile for open space
- 1 mile for a basic facility (playground, courts like basketball and tennis, ball fields)
- 2 miles for a field house
- 3 miles for a swimming pool

See the Supplemental Information for maps of Park District amenities by service level.

The accreditation agencies—CAPRA and DPRA—concurred with this approach in the Chicago Park District’s recertification process.

In addition, unlike FOTP, which uses one statistic to make broad generalizations, the Chicago Park District diligently analyzes land use in the city and consults with partners and other government agencies about how and where to partner to provide more acres of open space and/or programming to Chicago residents in areas of need. The Park District analysis incorporates not just Park District open space and amenities, as FOTP does. The Chicago Park District recognizes that there are many open space and recreation providers in the City.

The Park District acknowledges the many acres that the Cook County Forest Preserve District, City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, NeighborSpace, Illinois International Port District, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources also provide in terms of open space. As a responsible steward of scarce tax payer dollars, it is essential to have a proper and accurate analysis of land use in the City. The FOTP’s playground map, for instance, not only fails to recognize large areas of industrial areas in the City where active industries would preclude residential use and adding recreational resources, it also shows only the 517 Park District playgrounds (355 of which have been renovated in the past eight years). The Park District itself takes a different approach, also acknowledging where CPS has 362 playgrounds. (See Playground Map in the Supplemental Information). Not doing so could lead to irresponsible spending and duplication of resources. The Park District identifies true areas of need by recognizing all of the resources provided through the multiple partnerships and sister agencies and then targeting those true areas in need for new or improved facilities and/or services.



## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

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## PARK AND OPEN SPACE ACCESS

- ⇒ The Chicago Park District manages over 600 parks comprised of 8,830 acres.
- ⇒ The FOTP report states that Chicago's overall open space is just under 13,000 acres but actually the combined open space of the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserve District and other open space providers is 14,113 acres.
- ⇒ The FOTP report states that Chicago's overall open space per capita is 4.7 acres per 1,000 residents but it actually is 5.24 acres per 1,000 residents.
- ⇒ The Chicago Park District has acquired over 1,000 acres since 2011.
- ⇒ The 2018 Trust for Public Land (TPL) ParkScore ranks Chicago out 8th out of 100 cities, ranking higher than New York and Los Angeles.
- ⇒ There are 4 categories in the TPL ParkScore that comprise the overall score: Acreage, Investment, Amenities, and Access.
- ⇒ In 3 of these 4 categories, Chicago scores very well. Chicago scores higher than Minneapolis (rank #1) in the Access category, ties for Amenities, and is 1 point below in the Investment category. However, Chicago scores many points below in the Acreage category.
- ⇒ The Acreage category is comprised of 2 measures: Median Park Size and Park Land Percent of total City Area.
- ⇒ The Median Park Size is not a fair measure for large park districts. It values parks of a larger size accounting for “the importance of larger destination parks that serve many users who live farther than a ten minute walking distance.” ([www.parkscore.tpl.org](http://www.parkscore.tpl.org)) In Chicago, however, smaller mini or pocket parks are very important to a neighborhood fabric. In fact, a 2014 economic impact study found that Mini parks (playgrounds or small playlots), which represent 25 percent of all parks in Chicago, have the largest economic impact to property values within 0.15 miles of a park, increasing those property values by 2.8 percent on average.
- ⇒ Park Land Percent of City Area is also a difficult measure for a City developed in the 19th century as an industrial city and railroad hub. Land acquisition in some community areas is very challenging. Industry provides the livelihood for some residents and cannot be displaced for park land, nor should people be forced from their homes for the purpose of providing open space for the remaining residents.
- ⇒ The Park District is committed to providing open space opportunities for residents in every community area in the City of Chicago, based on the access and per capita methodologies, with a focus on those community areas with an open space need.
- ⇒ The Park District has converted former industrial sites to park land when feasible like the 22 acre La Villita Park in South Lawndale and the future acquisition of a 17 acre site at 48th and Western in Brighton Park.



# PARK AND OPEN SPACE ACCESS

⇒ The Chicago Park District strives to provide accessibility to open spaces and facilities for Chicago residents. Accessibility is based upon distance, and is quantified in a level of service standard. The accepted level of service standard for an open space is a half mile/10 minute walk. This is the minimum standard. The level of service standard for a basic facility (playground, basketball and tennis courts, ball fields) is 1 mile. The level of service for a field house is 2 miles and the level of service standard for a swimming pool is 3 miles.

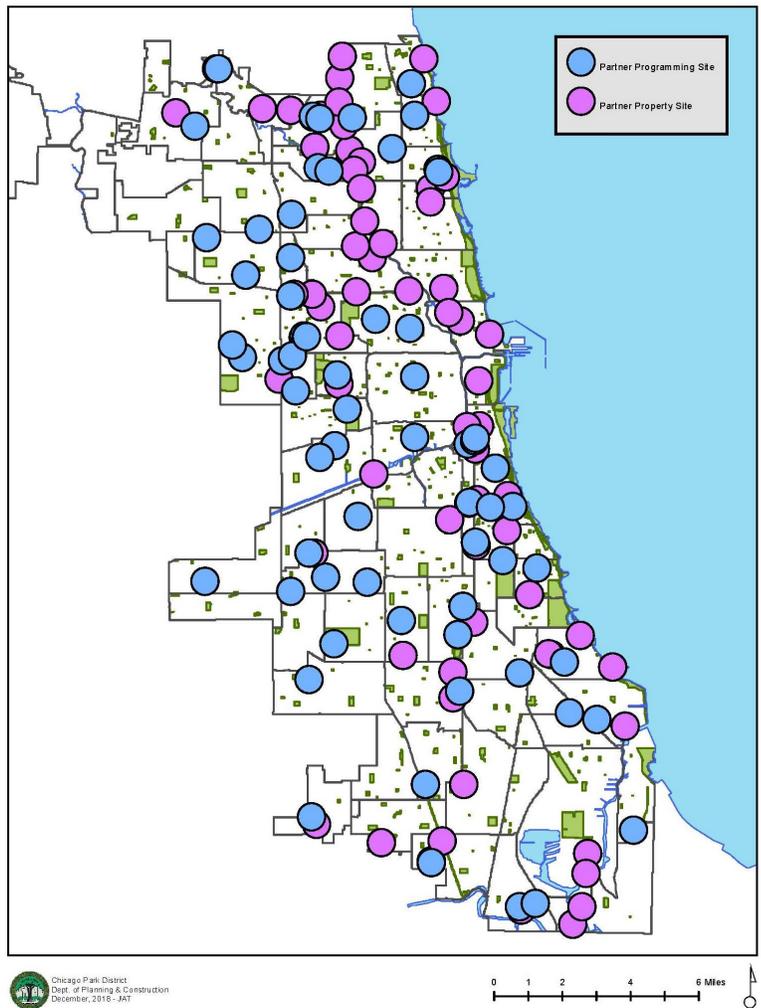
⇒ The District offers a variety of facilities throughout the city. The District surpasses many of the level of service standards for the aforementioned facilities.

⇒ To further enhance and expand recreational opportunities for Chicago residents, the Park District partners with the following governmental agencies:

- A. Chicago Housing Authority
- B. Chicago Public Schools
- C. City of Chicago
- D. Chicago Transit Authority
- E. Cook County
- F. Illinois Department of Transportation
- G. Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

⇒ In addition to partnerships for land acquisition, there are programming partnerships. The most extensive partnership is with the Chicago Public Schools.

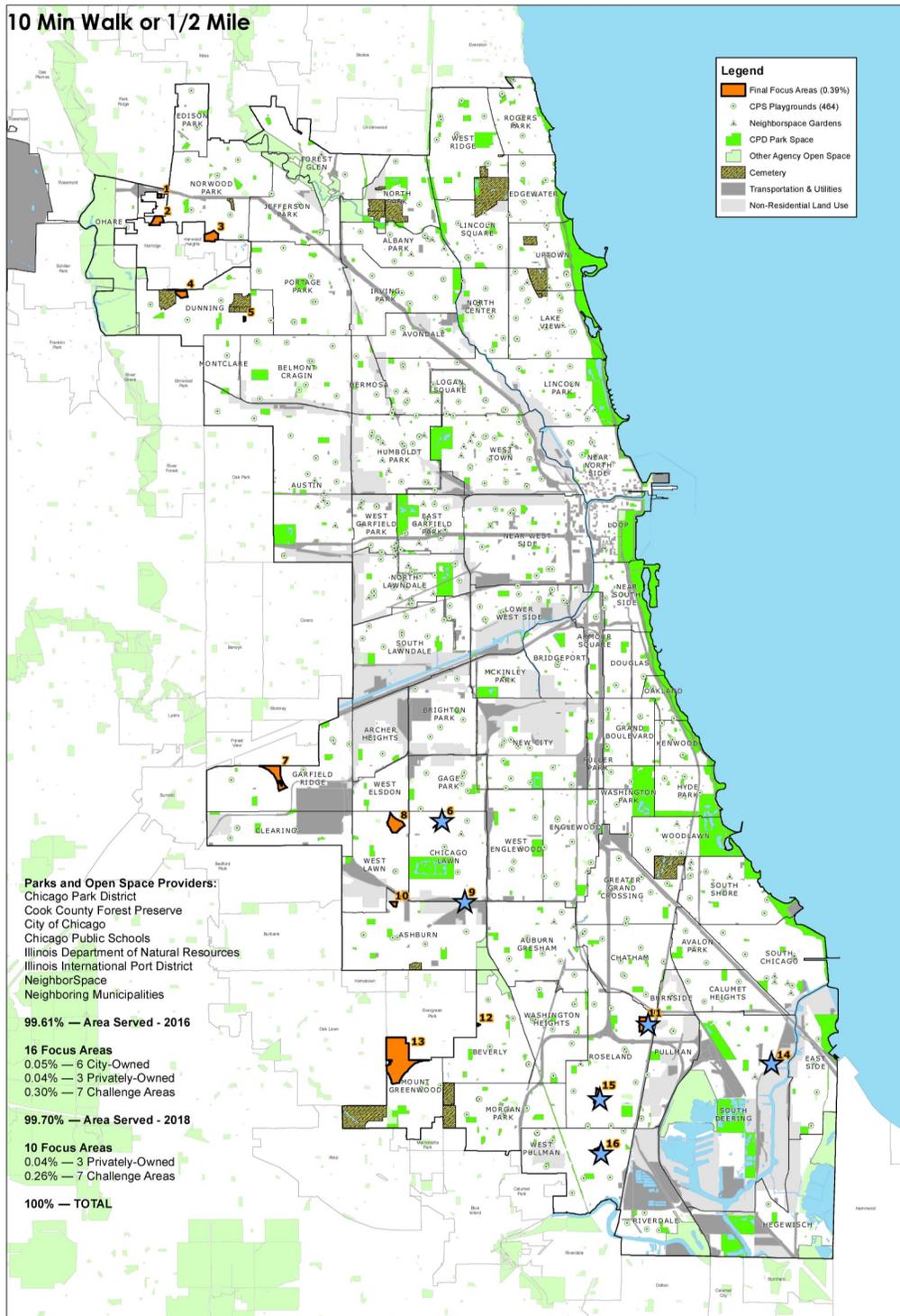
Partnerships



Chicago Park District  
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December, 2018 - JAT

# PARK AND OPEN SPACE ACCESS

- ⇒ The level of service for an open space is a half mile/10 minute walk.
- ⇒ 99.6% of Chicago residents live within a 10 minute walk or 1/2 mile within an open space.
- ⇒ The Park District's 2017 Master Plan lays out a two-pronged approach to increase open space for Chicago residents. A short-term goal of the 10 min walk, and a long term goal of 2 acres per 1,000 residents.



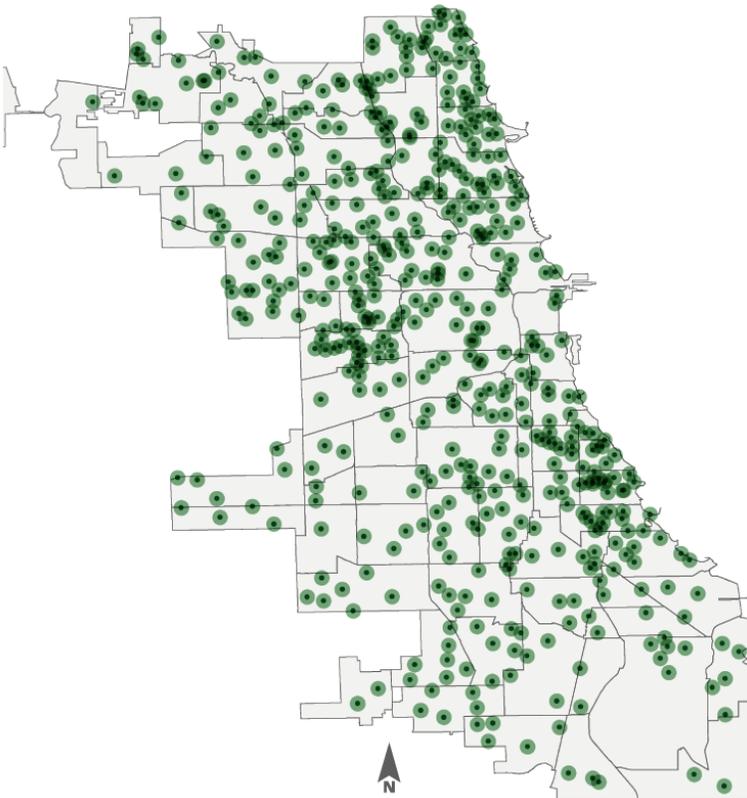
# PLAYGROUND ACCESS

The Chicago Park District bases facility access upon level of service standards for facility types. For playgrounds, the level of service standard is 1 mile. The Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Schools both provide publically accessible playgrounds that provide recreational opportunities for residents.

## FOTP ANALYSIS

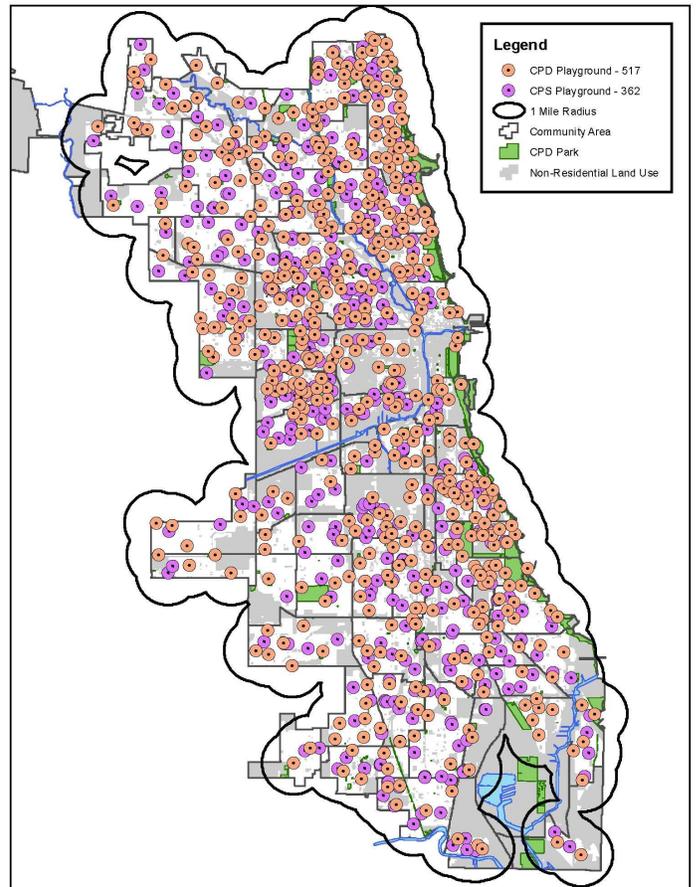
## CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT ANALYSIS

Figure 8: Playground Access



Playground Access

1 inch = 15,000 feet



Chicago Park District  
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December, 2018 - 301

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

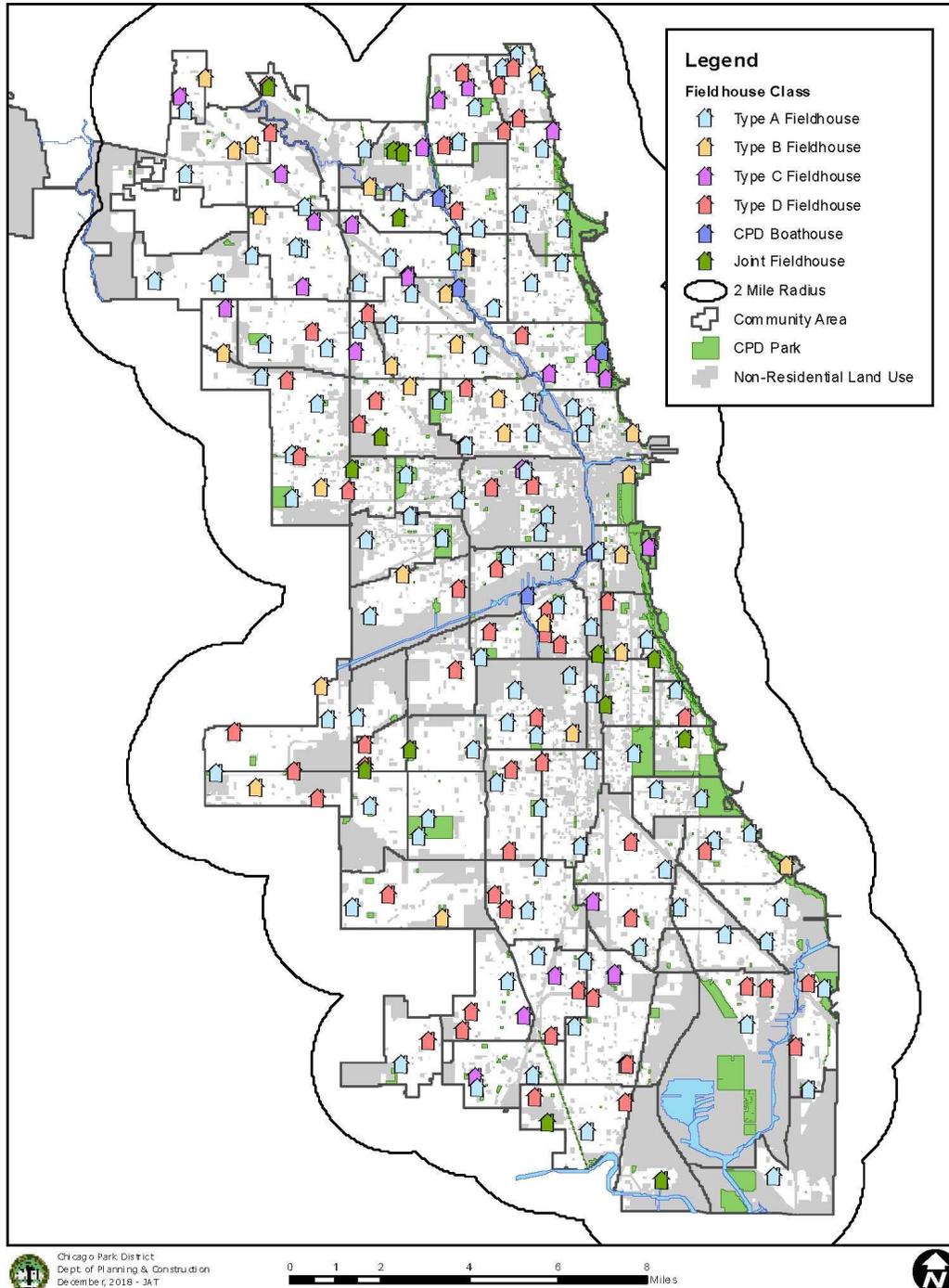


# FIELDHOUSE ACCESS

For fieldhouses, the level of service standard is 2 miles. The Chicago Park District surpasses this level of service standard.

Fieldhouse Access

1 inch = 15,000 feet

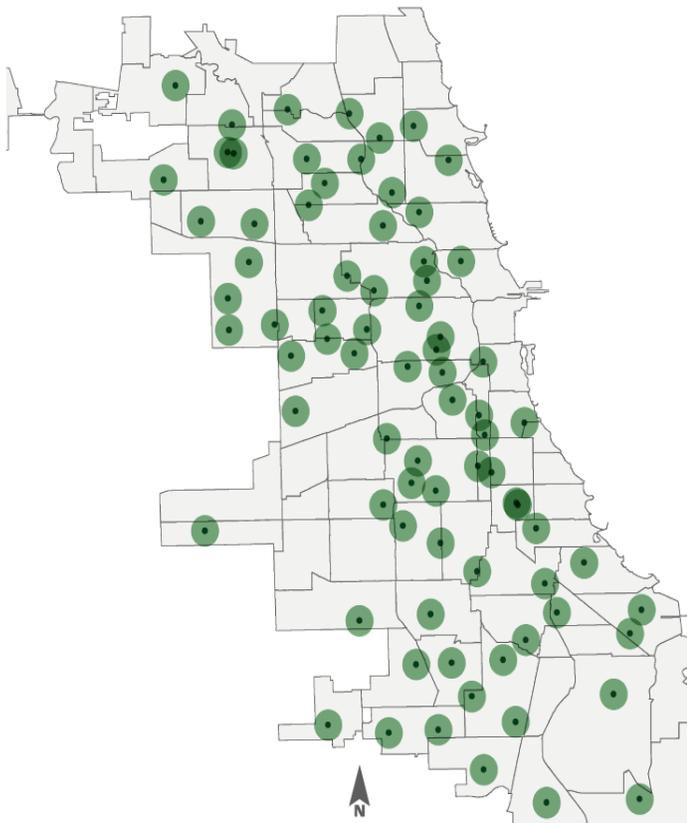


# SWIMMING POOL ACCESS

For swimming pools, the level of service standard is 3 miles. The Chicago Park District partners with Chicago Public Schools to provide additional locations. As the swimming pool map with a 2 mile buffer indicates, swimming pools surpass the 3 mile level of service standard.

## FOTP ANALYSIS

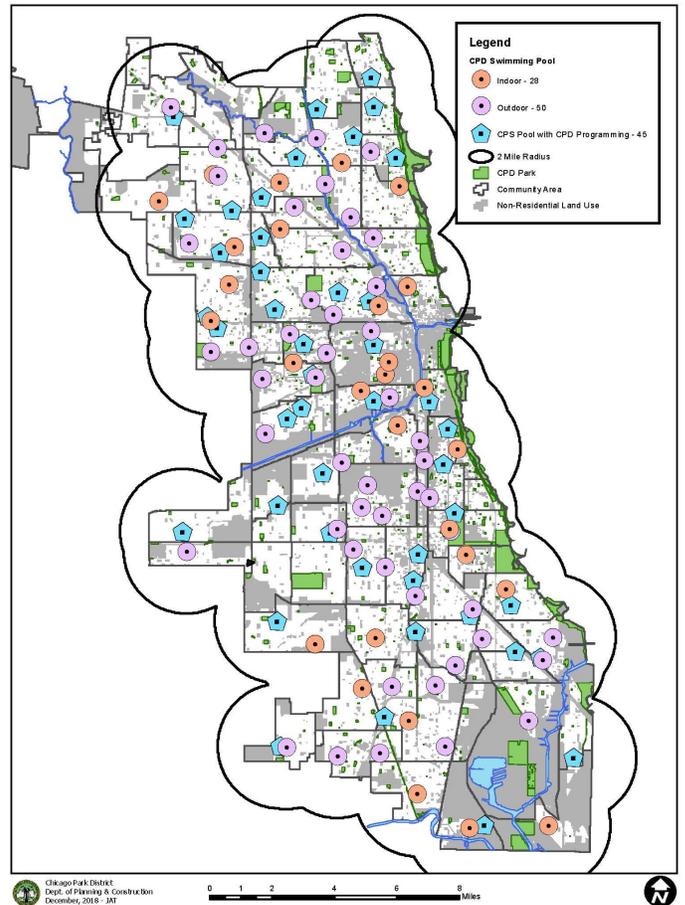
Figure 5: Swimming Pool Access



## CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT ANALYSIS

Swimming Pool Access

1 inch = 15,000 feet

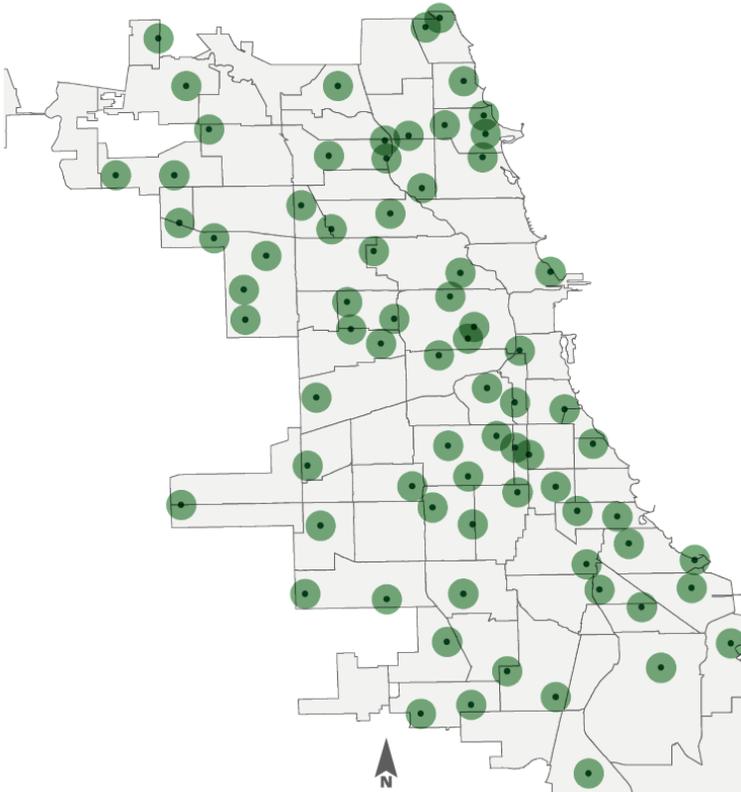


# FITNESS CENTER ACCESS

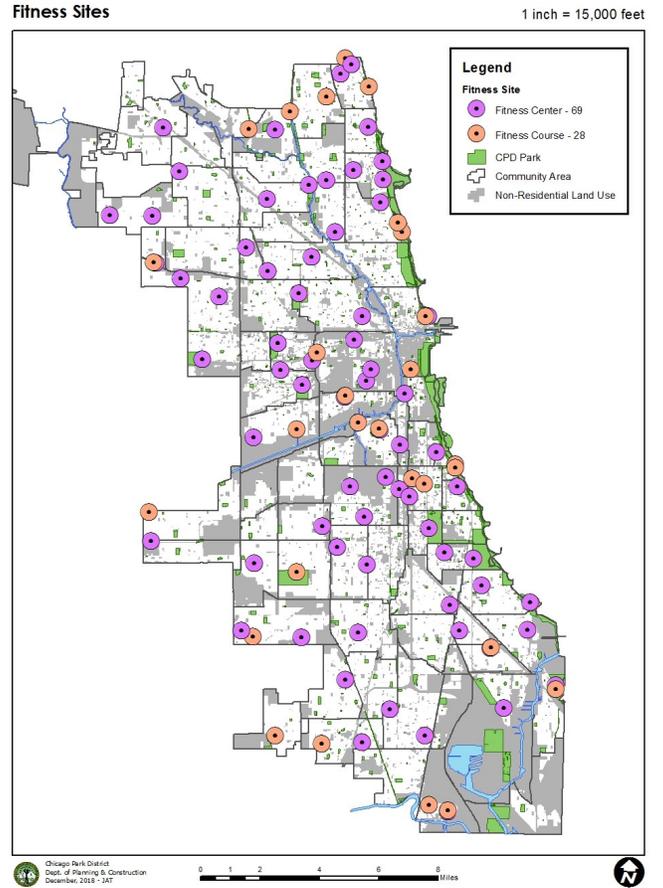
Within the Chicago Park District are 69 indoor fitness centers and 28 outdoor fitness facilities. Forty-two (42) of these facilities offer wheelchair accessible equipment. Additionally, there are 147 gymnasiums, 21 boxing centers and 11 gymnastic centers, which feature a wide variety of active programming.

## FOTP ANALYSIS

Figure 6: Fitness Center Access



## CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT ANALYSIS

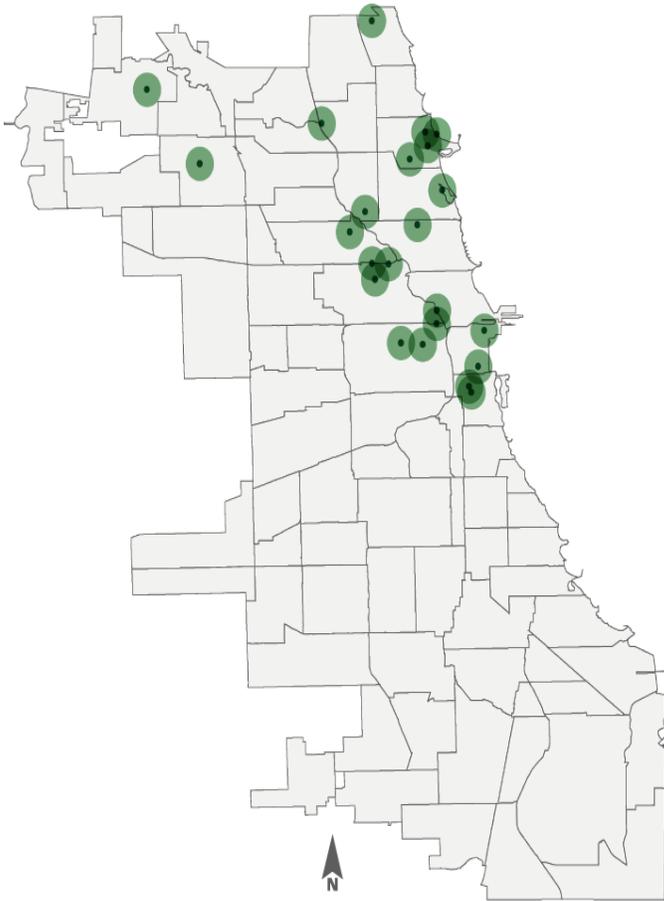


# DOG FRIENDLY AREAS

Dog Friendly Areas (DFA) are community initiated facilities, whereby a community group raises funds and is committed to maintain the facility. Recently, there has been community interest in creating more dog friendly areas in the south side of Chicago. In response, the Park District has completed one new DFA in Calumet Park and has six additional DFAs planned for 2019. We will continue to work closely with community groups interested in a new DFA to identify additional locations for this amenity on the south side of Chicago.

## FOTP ANALYSIS

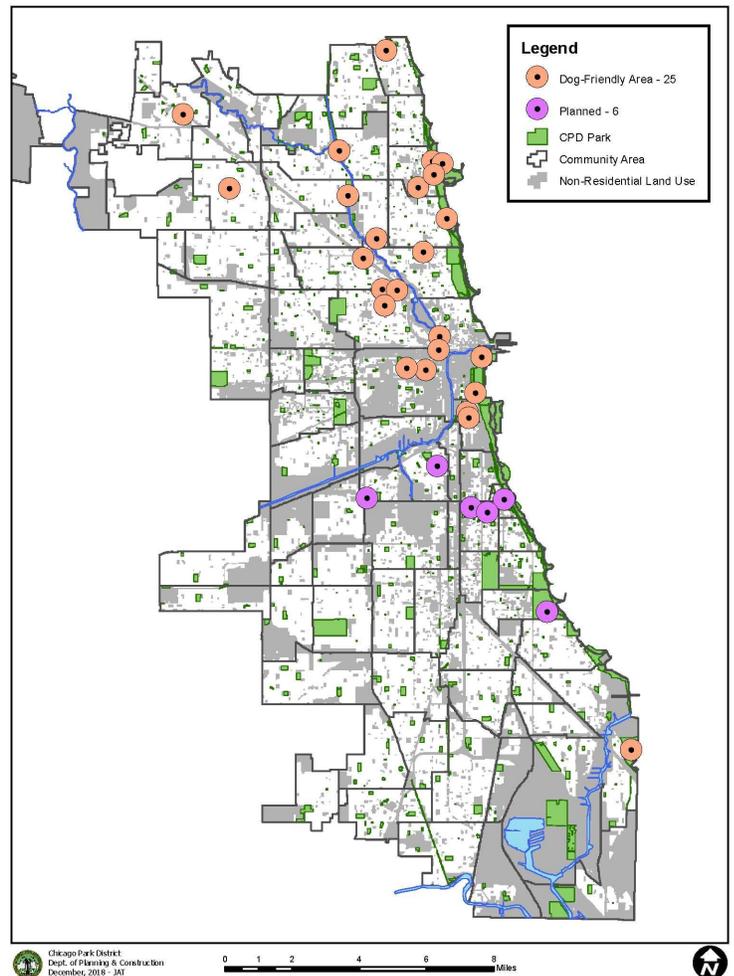
Figure 7: Dog-Friendly Area Access



## CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT ANALYSIS

Dog-Friendly Areas

1 inch = 15,000 feet



# CAPITAL PROJECTS

Capital projects are approved based on relative priority, geographic distribution, and availability of funding. The Chicago Park District does not approve capital projects based on race or income of a community area. To illustrate, the four major projects in progress at the Park District are the following:

**Gately Field House** is in the Pullman Community Area (a predominantly Black/African-American community with a median household income 69% of the Chicago median)

**Exelon Recreation Center at Addams Park** is in the Near West Side Community Area (a mixed race community median household income 136% of the Chicago median)



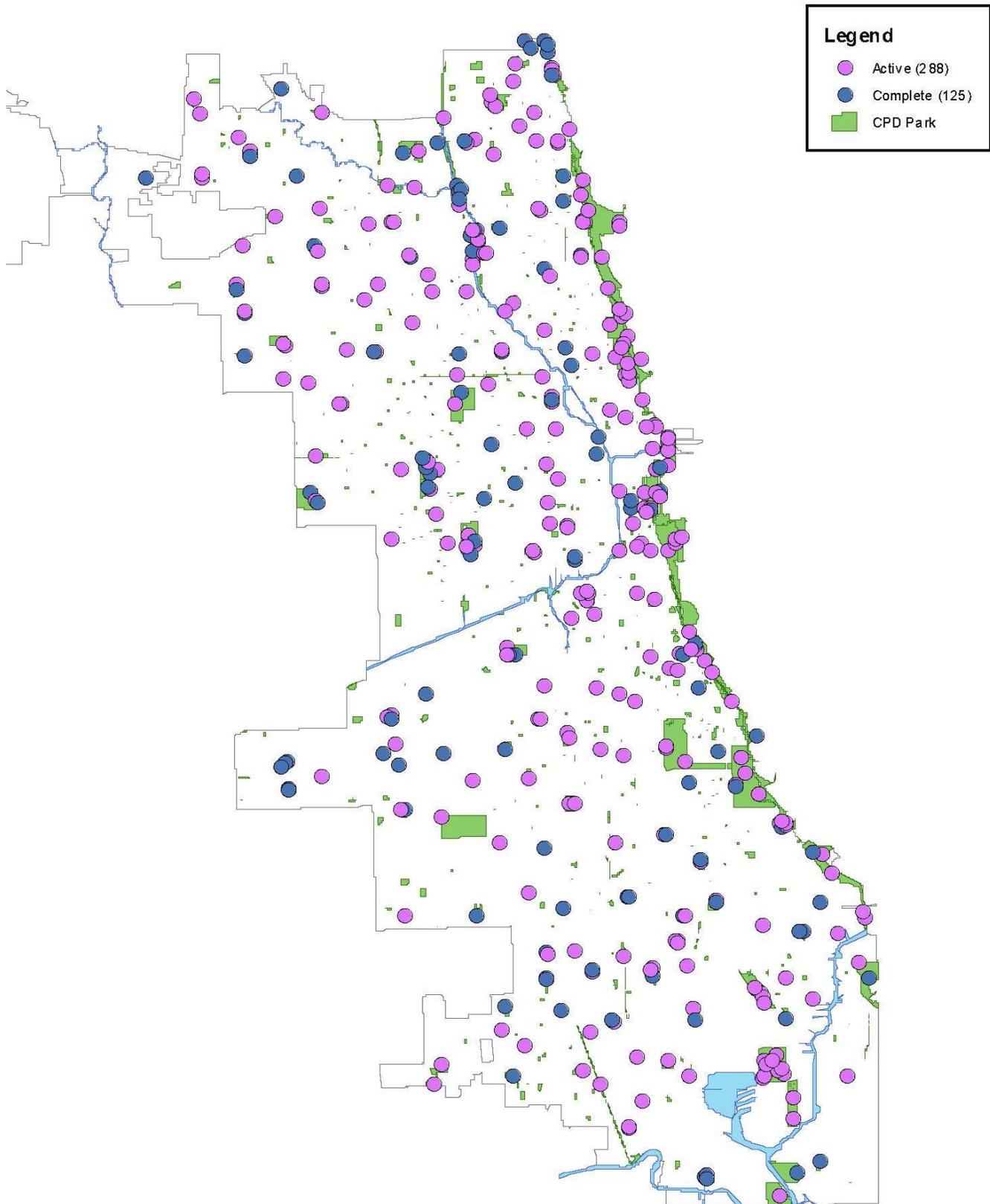
Rendering of Gately Field House in Pullman Community Area.

**The new park and headquarters at 48th and Western** is in the Brighton Park Community Area (a predominantly Hispanic/Latino community with a median household income 68% of the Chicago median)

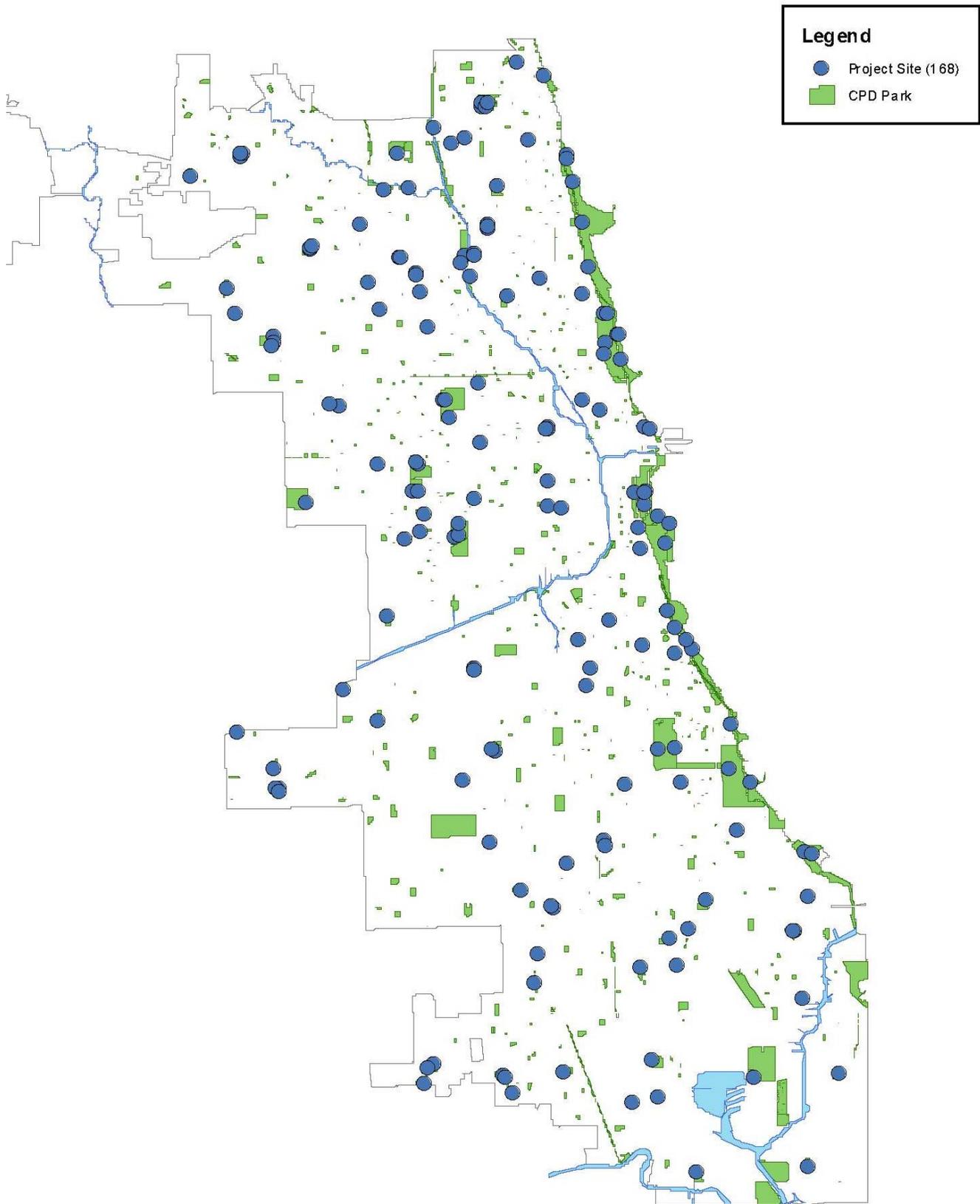
**South Lakefront Framework Plan** is in the Woodlawn and South Shore Community Areas (predominantly Black/African-American communities with a median household incomes 45% and 50% of the Chicago median)



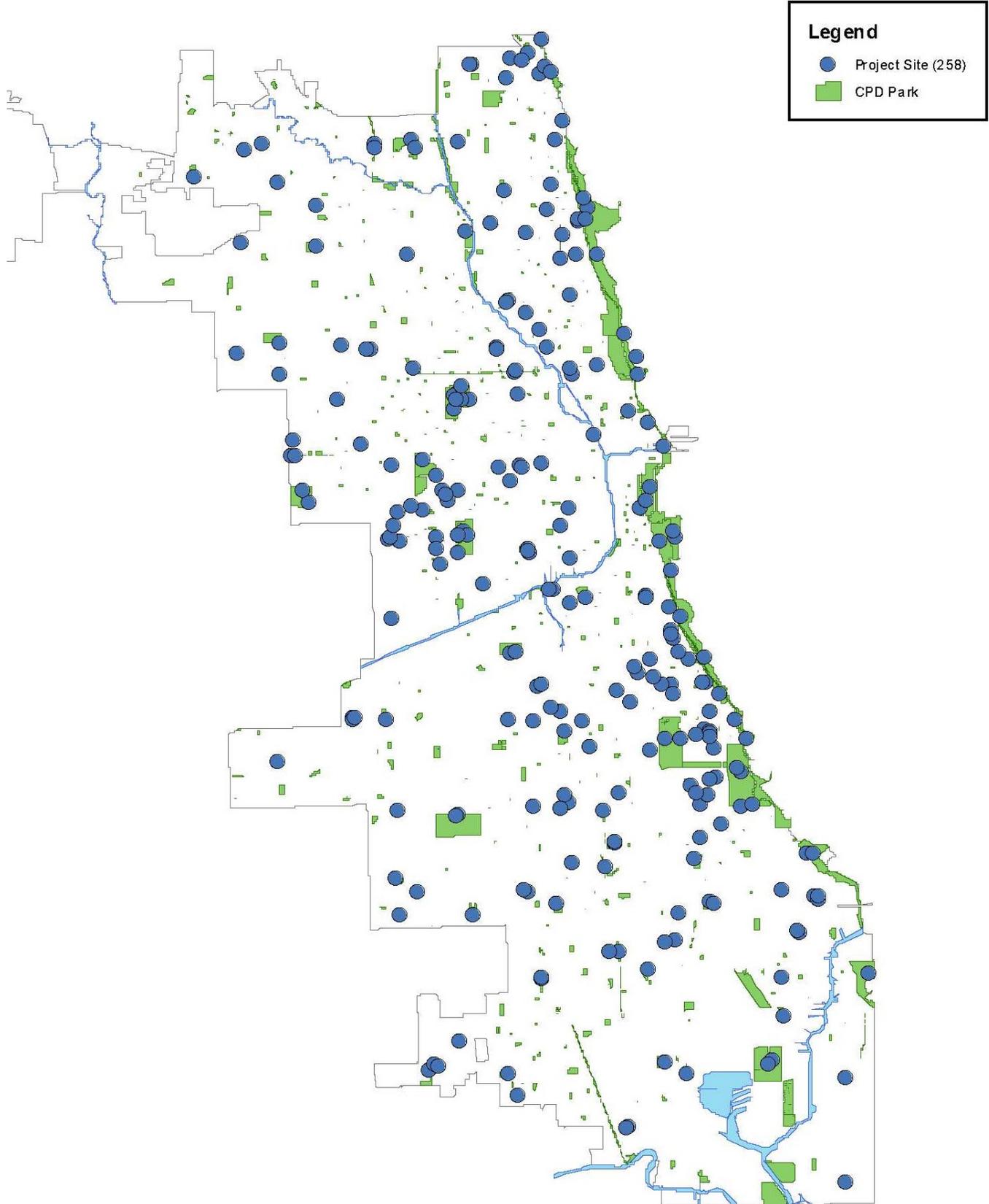
# PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS 2018 and ACTIVE



# PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS 2017



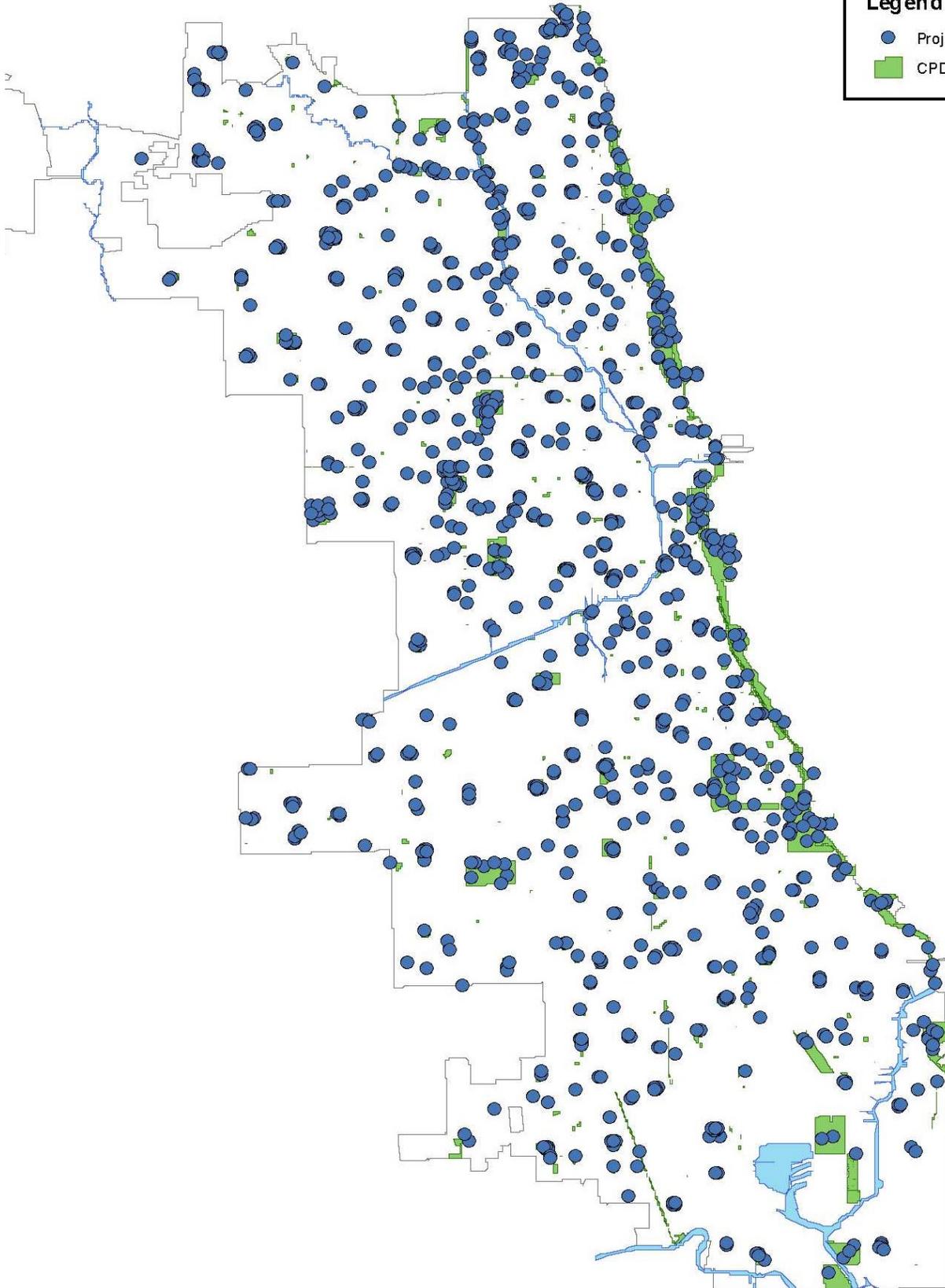
# PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS 2016



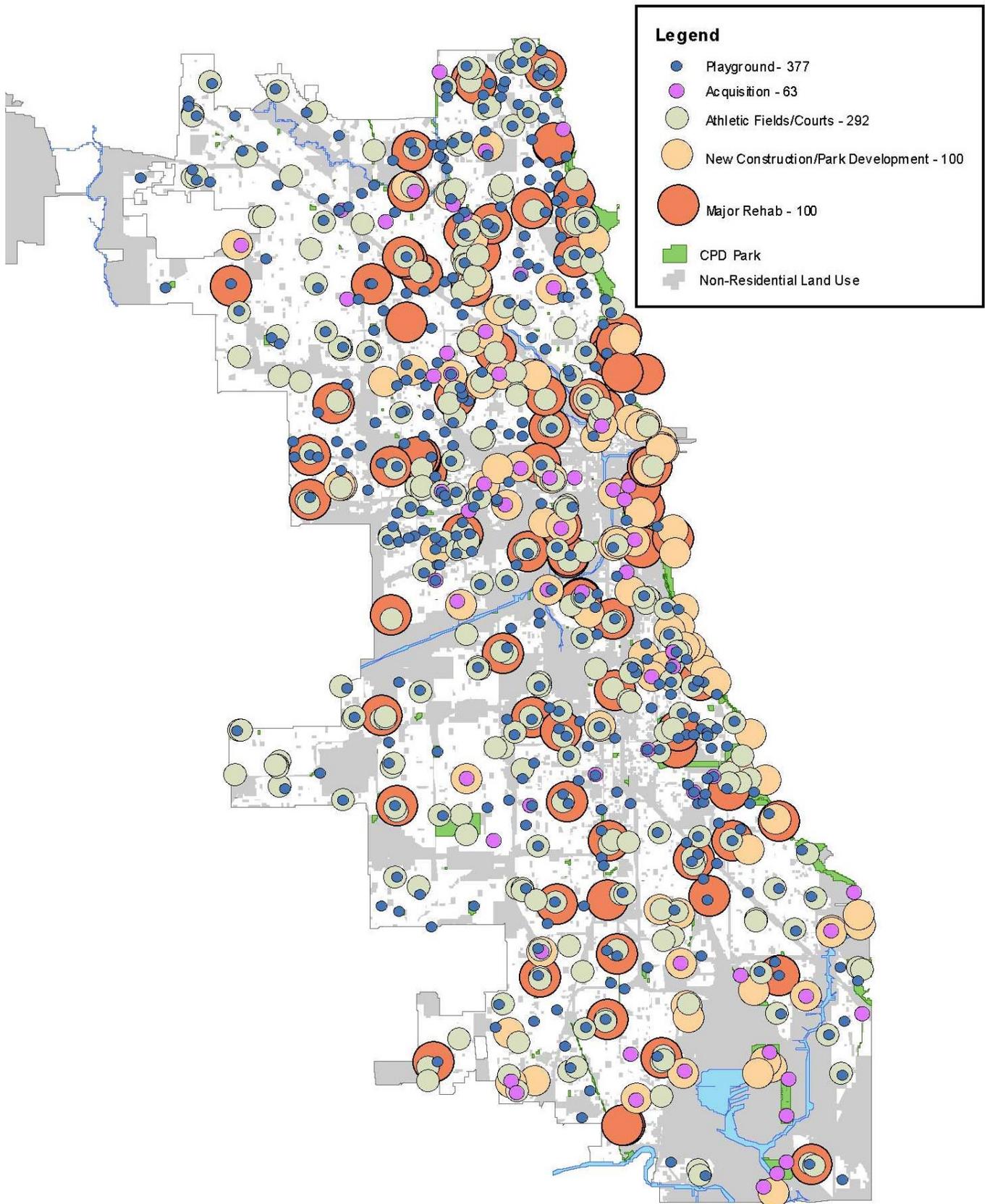
# PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS 2011-2015

## Legend

- Project Site (1 331)
- CPD Park



# PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS 2011-2018 BY SUBPROGRAM



## ADDENDUM

### Other FOTP Errors and Omissions (and a few points of agreement!)

**Pg. 4 - FOTP REPORT:** “In many ways we are proud to recognize the impressive achievements and incredible mission of the Chicago Park District. To maintain over 880 acres of parkland across nearly 600 parks while facilitating over 26,000 activities is an extraordinary work.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** We agree!

**Pg. 5 - FOTP REPORT:** “Special thanks for this report go to the primary investigator and author, Friends of the Parks Policy and Program Associate Daniel La Spata.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The report conveniently fails to disclose that the "primary investigator and author" is currently running for elected office. This is far from an independent analysis, but rather politically charged propaganda orchestrated in bad faith. The Chicago Park District welcomes and encourages a true outside and independent analysis of our data. Existing independent reviews of the Chicago Park District are available from the Trust for Public Land, National Recreation and Parks Association, The Civic Federation, and the annual audits of Chicago Park District finances.

**Pg. 16-17 - FOTP REPORT:** “Figure 4: Distribution of Chicago’s Parks by Park Class”

**PARKS COMMENT:** FOTP’s park classification scheme is arbitrary and often incorrect. For example, they classify only a handful of parks as entirely natural areas, but the Chicago Park District has 99 natural areas incorporated within parks around the city such as Northerly Island, Montrose Point and Dunes, and Horner Park riverbank. In addition, the FOTP map is confusing, as it labels most parks as orange, which is a color not reflected on their legend.

**Pg. 21 - FOTP REPORT:** “Increase Park Acreage in Underserved Communities... The park district should make every effort to purchase and develop new parkland, focusing on segregated high-poverty community areas with less than 4.5% of their total land devoted to parks. Both the current Building on Burnham plan and the emerging redevelopment of the city’s industrial corridors represents excellent opportunities, particularly along the Chicago River. Friends of the Parks’ Last Four Miles campaign to extend the Lakefront Path to the boundaries of Chicago, also represents an excellent opportunity for the park district to pursue.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** While the Park District strongly advocates to increase public open space across the city, and generally supports the extension of the Lakefront Trail, those communities are not underserved. Here FOTP hypocritically states the Park District isn’t investing in communities of need while also advocating for the Park District to focus attention on the acquisition of parkland in Lincoln Park and along the Lakefront.

**Pg. 25 - FOTP REPORT:** “While the [Budget] process is detailed and deliberate, it is questionable whether there is adequate space for resident input or sufficient power and influence ascribed to their input.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The online form requesting public input is available on our website’s landing page during budget season and highlighted at the public hearing. The public may also contribute comments via phone call, email, or postal mail at any time or present testimony at any monthly board meeting.

**Pg. 25 - FOTP REPORT:** “The first public forum, held at Fosco Park, raises questions around accessibility for the public, particularly where transportation, childcare, and translation are concerned.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The public forum is held at Fosco Park specifically for its accessibility, proximity to public transportation and parking. Children are welcome and often participate. The Park District provides a Spanish language translator and a sign language interpreter.

**Pg. 25 - FOTP REPORT:** “Those who did report attending did not feel heard in a meaningful sense or that their concerns were adequately addressed, an experience that was more discouraging than democratic.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** Many speakers provide commentary thanking the Chicago Park District for being one of the few bodies that still holds public hearings, and the Park District CEO regularly engages and responds on the spot to patron concerns either directly or via park staff in attendance.

**Pg. 25 - FOTP REPORT:** “The final budget hearing was held downtown at the park district’s offices at 11:30 a.m., a timing and location that may have discouraged participation from park stakeholders. It was also held only a week before the final vote, which was most likely too late for any feedback to lead to substantive changes.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The final hearing is set per code standards. After the 6-month window of opportunity to provide public input, this hearing is the final opportunity for many to participate . It is not meant to be a hearing for new ideas.

**Pg. 26 - FOTP REPORT:** “Expected gross revenue from permits was up 40% since FY2013 to \$17.1 million, as the park district has more heavily marketed private event opportunities within the parks.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The predominant source of this revenue is Lollapalooza.



**Pg. 26 - FOTP REPORT:** “In previous years, Corporate Sponsorships were a separate line item in the budget’s revenue summary, accounting for \$2.1 million in 2017.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** While the aggregations were updated in the FY18 budget for consistency across financial documents, the Park District also included a new much more detailed account level breakdown in the line item appropriations and the budget summary with two years of budget data .

**Pg. 26 - FOTP REPORT:** “Park activists continue to grow wary of the conflict between corporate interests and residents as customers of the park district and the potential imbalance between its pursuit of revenue generating assets and its recreational and environmental mission.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** This observation lacks a recommendation for how to replace this revenue to the Park District. FOTP continues to have the position to increase land acreage and programming, but provides no suggestions on how to increase the revenue necessary to fund improvements and operations.

**Pg. 27 - FOTP REPORT:** “In addition, pension contributions have increased by 32.6% since FY2017 to a total of \$27.6 million.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The increase in pension contributions is necessary due to pension reform needed to stabilize the fund.

**Pg. 28 - FOTP REPORT:** “The park district also creates individualized budgets for certain parks within the district, outlining staffing positions, both hourly and salaried, as well as the materials, supplies, and services residents can expect to find. However... None of the city’s mini-parks, nature preserves, or passive parks have budgets, as well as only 33% of neighborhood parks...”

**PARKS COMMENT:** Parks with dedicated staffing are reflected on separate park pages in the annual budget appropriations. Resources expended at unstaffed parks are reflected under the related functional departments (e.g., Department of Natural Resources, Facility Maintenance, Special Recreation, etc). Adding park pages to apportion the function expense would add 400+ pages to the line item budget.

Further, it is misleading to state that many parks “do not have budgets”. Parks without staffed facilities are maintained and programmed by citywide operations. Operational functions such as landscape maintenance are centralized for efficiency and to maintain consistent standards across the city. This is true for all parks, both staffed and unstaffed. These functions are shown in the Park District’s operational budget under the operational departments. The map on page 29 is very misleading in its indication that resources are not provided to many parks. Parks shown in red do not have staffed facilities, but still receive the same level of operational support as parks shown in green.

**Pg. 28 - FOTP REPORT:** “There is also a significant difference in how lead staff are allocated and funded. Parks with individual budgets are commonly assigned either a Playground Supervisor or Super of Recreation.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** All staffed parks in all regions have a budgeted playground or park supervisor. There are no staffed park locations that do not have a supervisor.

**Pg. 28 - FOTP REPORT:** “Big Marsh Park - Despite accounting for nearly 300 acres of parkland, users of the far South Side’s Big Marsh Park will not find an individual budget for the park within the Park District’s annual Budget Appropriations document. Even looking online would not reveal that their park is supervised by Trumbull Park, creating unclear expectations around maintenance, programming, and staffing. It is one of almost 380 parks that lack a specific annual budget.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** This new park is still in development without a permanent staffed facility. Programming resources in FY18 were budgeted under Culture, Arts, and Nature/Department of Natural Resources and in the FY19 budget are under Outdoor and Environmental Education. Big Marsh is not supervised by Trumbull Park and funding for operations and maintenance do not come through Trumbull Park’s budget.

**Pg. 30 - FOTP REPORT:** “... total revenue in the 2017-2021 five year plan of \$237.2 million.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** FOTP’s report references 2-year old information. The 2019-2022 Capital Improvement Plan was available before the release of the FOTP report. It can be found at

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/about-us/departments/operations/planning-and-construction/capital-improvement-plan>

**Pg. 30 - FOTP REPORT:** “Two weeks after raising this issue, the Park District Board of Commissioners voted to eliminate the Implementation Committee entirely.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The Park District works on an ongoing basis to update its Code and ensure accuracy and relevancy. Included in latest update to the Code, language about an “Implementation Committee” was removed. Per Board Meeting testimony, the Park District could not find any record for decades showing that this committee ever existed. The code was updated to better reflect current practices.



**Pg. 30 - FOTP REPORT:** “While the plan does not list how many dollars are allocated to specific projects or which have been completed, we have been able to obtain records of capital improvement requests from the past two years.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** A list of all capital projects completed and active since 2011 is on the Park District website and can be found at <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/about-us/departments/operations/planning-and-construction/capital-improvement-plan>.

**Pg. 30 - FOTP REPORT:** “The District’s Code mandates that it “will hold a minimum of 10 community meetings to solicit public comment” on the development of the plan. Unfortunately the district’s meeting calendar makes no mention of such forums.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** A scheduled public hearing is only one way to obtain public input. Public input on the capital plan is extensive and ongoing throughout the year. The Park District obtains input through postings on its website, the annual budget hearing, monthly board meetings, emails, letters, phone calls, meetings with local stakeholders (including alderman and PACs), and internal staff recommendations. The number of meetings annually held to discuss projects in the capital plan far exceeds 10.

**Pg. 31 - FOTP REPORT:** “Table 4: Twenty Largest Park Budgets By Total Spending Per Resident, 2017.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** Another simple error in the report by FOTP. In keeping with 2017 data, we have the following corrected information:

Chicago Population - Using 2010 Census Data – 2,695,598

2017 Operating Budget \$449,407, 628 = \$166.72/resident



**Pg. 33 - FOTP REPORT:** “The park district must re-consider its increasing reliance on privatized contracts and events and whether a re-balancing of revenue sources could ensure equitable staffing and services while reducing corporate influence on park spaces.”

**PARKS COMMENT:** Revenue derived from rentals support the operating fund which in turn funds all parks. There are no parks that are self-sustaining through their rental fees. All parks are heavily funded by property taxes which make up nearly 60% of all resources. Rentals and permits generate only 4% of all resources with large scale events such as Lollapalooza representing almost half. If rental and permit fees were designed to fund only the park at which they were generated, the Park District would have extreme disparity in park funding with Grant Park receiving the vast majority of the revenue generated and neighborhood parks with little to no rental activity receiving none. It is the District’s approach to equitably allocate the total rental and permit revenue among all parks and operations through the formal budget process. In fact, designating funding as suggested by this claim is the exact manner in which parks could become underfunded.

**Pg. 38 - FOTP REPORT:** “When the business of the meeting is being conducted, including any contracting or policy decisions, the public must content themselves to listen...”

**PARKS COMMENT:** This statement suggests that the public is burdened by listening to the business being conducted by the Park District rather than being informed in an open process.

**Pg. 46 - FOTP REPORT:** “From a grudging acceptance under Superintendent Ed Kelly (no relation to current superintendent Michael Kelly)...”

**PARKS COMMENT:** That’s correct! Ed Kelly and Michael P. Kelly are not related.

**Pg. 46 - FOTP REPORT:** “Reports from the FOTP and Civic Federation in 1991,1995, and 1998...”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The Civic Federation reviews the Chicago Park District budget annually, including FY19. Their Analysis and Recommendation can be found at <https://www.civiced.org/library/gov/chicago-park-district-247>.

**Pg. 47 - FOTP REPORT:** “In a broader sense, park stakeholders deserve more genuine power and influence... with matters being debated by the board...”

**PARKS COMMENT:** When policy decisions are being considered, the public is allowed to participate in those deliberations by giving testimony on the issue. This year the Board instituted a 45-day notice period for public input before voting on any changes to the District’s code policies. This allows the public and advisory council members additional time and opportunity to weigh-in on these decisions thereby strengthening participation.

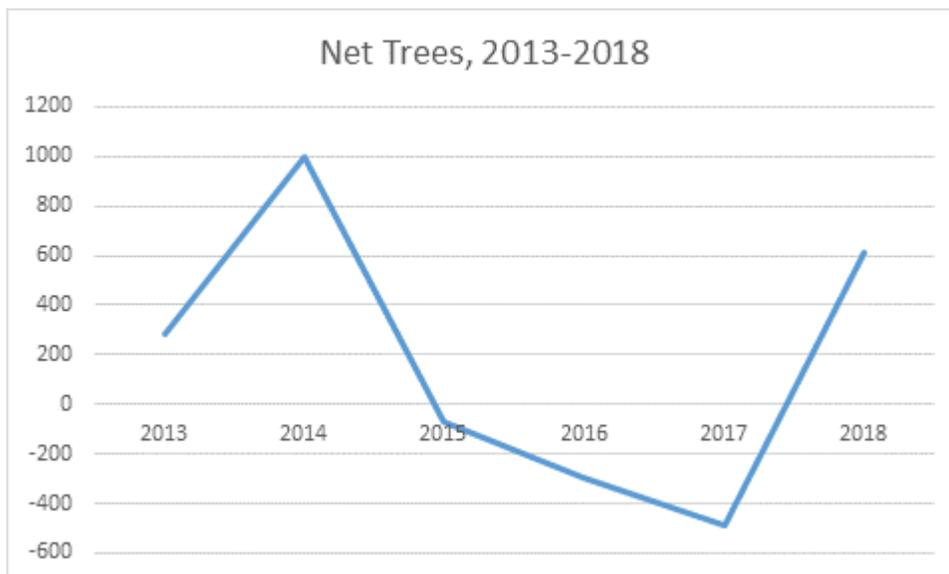
**Pg. 56 - FOTP REPORT:** “Figure 13: Chicago Crimes by Location, 2001-2018”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The graph provided shows that crime in Chicago parks is relatively very low compared to other land uses in Chicago.

**Pg. 71 - FOTP REPORT:** “Figure 19: Net Trees, 2013-2018”

**PARKS COMMENT:** The assertion that the Chicago Park District has a net loss of trees is incorrect, according to the very same data that the FOTP report cited. Data shared with Friends of the Parks show that the Chicago Park District removed 18,622 trees during the period of August 2013 through July of 2018 and planted 19,881 trees – a net gain of over 1,000 trees. A corrected Figure 19 is below.

It is true that the Park District lost a significant number of trees during this time period due to the Emerald Ash Borer epidemic. However, the Park District doubled their tree planting efforts through a systematic removal and replacement program that started in 2014. The Park District plants approximately 3,750 trees per year, with a focus on diversifying the urban forest for resilience against climate change, tree diseases and pests.



**Pg. 75 - FOTP REPORT:** “Call for Parks’ Inclusion in the next Illinois Capital Budget”

**PARKS COMMENT:** We agree. State funding has historically been a source for park funding. The Chicago Park District supports the State of Illinois in continuing to fund important park projects and programs, especially through IDNR and DCEO.

