



# LITTLE VILLAGE / PILSEN

## RIVER CORRIDOR PROJECT





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Friends of the Chicago River



# ABOUT

The Pilsen-Little Village River Corridor Project was established in 2014 to develop a master plan that will result in a healthier, more accessible Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal corridor from Bubbly Creek to west of Pulaski Road on Chicago's southwest side. It is the goal of this project not only to improve the environmental quality of this section of the Chicago River System, but to elevate it to a cherished public amenity.

Haunted by a complex history of contamination and neglect, this 3.3 mile reach of river is also impacted by present day pollution from combined sewer overflows, storm water runoff, permitted industrial inputs, and a lack of public open space. Despite these challenges, the river, which is bordered by Bridgeport, Pilsen, Little Village, Brighton Park, Archer Heights, McKinley Park, and South Lawndale, presents a great opportunity for revitalization and community enhancement. A long term plan that results in clean water, capping or removing toxic sediments, eliminating odors, improving native landscapes, creating fish habitat, and developing open space would make the river safer for people and wildlife, and connect the river to the community.

The intent of this project is to view this long segmented section of the river as a single unit. This section of the river can serve as the organizing principle around which we may consider how to creatively establish a healthy recreational corridor, eventually bringing the same kind of attention and investment to it that other reaches have received. The project area starts at Bubbly Creek with Park 571 and Canal Origins Park and continues downstream to include the Canalport Riverwalk, the Richard J. Daley Boat Launch, the recently shuttered Fisk and Crawford sites, Parcel S, Park 553, the Collateral Channel and any other open spaces that can become part of the amenity mosaic.

Considering the recent announcement by the City of Chicago to invest over \$100 million in a downtown river-walk project, the time is ripe to address the remediation of the water and revitalization of the riverfront properties adjacent to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and even consider renaming it. Our goal is to ensure that the wider public is aware of its environmental condition, the need for access to riverfront public spaces for healthy recreation and leisure activities, and that they know they can be a part of the solution by advocating for change.

# HISTORY

## CHICAGO SANITARY AND SHIP CANAL

Completed in 1900 by the Chicago Sanitary District (now MWRD) to reverse the Chicago River, to prevent Chicago's waste from polluting its water supply, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal has long been neglected. For many decades this reach of the river system has remained severely contaminated. Vulnerable to industrial wastes and raw sewage, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal presents environmental dangers to surrounding community and is limited in its value as public open space and habitat for the wildlife that calls the river home. The canal's name is indicative of its reputation. Yet, times have changed and so has the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. Studies show that fish are now abundant here. In 2010 young channel cats were found, indicating the canal is becoming appropriate habitat for spawning. As the water quality has improved, the canal has also become more of a recreational asset. New public parks, boat launches, and riverwalks along the banks are drawing more residents out this section of the river than ever before. It is time to focus on the canal and making the kinds of investments that will truly transform it into a community asset.

## PILSEN

Pilsen is one of Chicago's oldest neighborhoods. The origins of the community stem from the same project that turned Chicago from a small frontier outpost into a the nation's "second city" - the building of the Illinois and Michigan (I & M) Canal. The South Branch of the Chicago river connects with the South Fork (now Bubbly Creek) along Pilsen's southern border. To the communities west, the river used to terminate in a series of marshy wetlands. Today these wetlands are replaced by concrete and the man-made Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal which replaced the I & M in 1900.

Ever since the construction of the I & M, Pilsen has been an immigrant, working class community, one of Chicago's most important "port-of-entry" neighborhoods.

In the late 19th Century, “Bohemian” (Czech) immigrants replaced the original Irish and German canal diggers. In the early 20th century Poles became the predominate group. But starting in the 1950’s it was Mexican immigrants that became dominant and gave the community its current culture and character.

Each ethnic group that has called Pilsen home have contributed a chapter to Pilsen’s two centuries of social, economic, political and environmental struggles. From the revolt of the Potawatomi in the 1812, to the Battle of the Viaduct in 1877, to the events leading up to the Haymarket incident in 1883, to the 1910 garment workers general strike, to the struggle for a neighborhood high school in the 1970’s, to the recent marches for immigrant rights, Pilsen has always been a community in struggle.

Today, Pilsen residents hope to turn one of those struggles, the decade long fight to close the Fisk coal fired power plant, into a new era in the neighborhoods history. The closure of Fisk in 2012 was a major victory for the people of Pilsen, but residents now hope to take the victory a step further by turning a piece of the Fisk property into Pilsen’s first point of public access to the South Branch of the Chicago river.

## LITTLE VILLAGE

Like Pilsen, Little Village has also witnessed tremendous community and ethnic transformations throughout the decades. During the early twentieth century Little Village was located at the outskirts of the city. With the expansion of industrial production outside of the central business district, Little Village quickly became a central site of manufacturing in Chicago. Anchored by an industrial corridor that stretches along the north side of the Chicago Shipping and Sanitation Canal, the community was home to several large scale factories, including the Crawford Coal power plant. During the era of industrialization, Little Village was predominantly populated by European immigrants.

Beginning in the 1960s and 70s many people of Mexican descent moved into the community. Currently, Little Village is a thriving Latino community with almost 90,000 residents living in five square miles. Unfortunately, many families live at or below the poverty level; 98% of the school children in

public schools qualify for the free lunch program. Thirty percent of Little Village residents are under 18, and thirty-one percent are undocumented. Due to population density and histories of de-industrialization, the community severely lacks open space and has hundreds of brownfield sites. Little Village is also bordered by a major expressway and is exposed to toxic fumes from thousands of diesel trucks that pass through the area everyday.

Despite the many challenges that families in Little Village face, the community has fought hard for environmental justice. In 2012 neighbors successfully organized to close down the Crawford coal power plant – which was the source of respiratory and health problems in the neighborhood for so long. In 2014, community members are turning their attention to the environmental conditions of the Collateral Channel and the development of open space in the area. For many decades the 31st Collateral Channel has remained severely contaminated and is the source of great embarrassment. Vulnerable to industrial wastes, and raw sewage, the waterway presents great environmental dangers to surrounding community members.

## BUBBLY CREEK

The long time environmental degradation of Bubbly Creek, or the South Fork of the Chicago River's South Branch, has everything to do with the historic use of the area. What once was a wetland, the area Bubbly Creek would eventually occupy was dredged in the 1800's to dry out the surrounding area for the purpose of development by diverting flow to the Chicago River. In the early 1900's this location lied in close proximity to the Chicago Stockyards, Chicago's growing meatpacking industry. The meatpacking industry used the channel as a dumping ground for animal waste products. The continuous buildup of this material resulted in the condition to which the creek owes its name. As the organic material decomposed it started to de-gas, releasing bubbles of methane and hydrogen sulfide that floated up to the surface—and still do.

A century later, Bubbly Creek continues to live up to its name. Other than rainwater, the vast majority of the flow channel receives comes from combined sewer overflows, which can rush out of the Racine Avenue Pump Station (which lies at the south end of the channel) at 6,000 CFS during strong storm events.

## HISTORY



The specific conditions of the creek have rendered it a challenge for remediation but federal support, in the form of a study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (due out this summer), brings new hope to the waterway's clean up. New water quality standards are pending before the Illinois Pollution Control Board under rulemaking R2008-009 regarding portions of the Chicago River system.

## LITTLE VILLAGE COLLATERAL CHANNEL

The Collateral Channel in Little Village shares many of the same problems that plague Bubbly Creek. In a study of the channel the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District notes, "Due to historical industrial, municipal, and CSO discharges into the Collateral Channel, the water and sediment have been compromised to the point where the waterway is no longer usable by humans or wildlife. The flow within the upper channel is stagnant 99% of time." Over the past decade the Collateral Channel received some attention and preliminary efforts were made to remediate the waterway. Unfortunately, these initial steps were soon stalled. Due to its smaller size, there is now hope that once a solution is developed to manage the remediation of Bubbly Creek, it may be scaled down to suit the needs of Collateral Channel.

Unlike Bubbly Creek, little has been done to allow for public access and recreation at this site. Due to the poor water quality of the waterway, there are days in the summer when the scent of the channel becomes unbearable. The highly anticipated Park 553 will be constructed across from the dead end of the channel at 31st street. This park will bring desperately needed green space and recreational area to a long-deserving neighborhood and it would be a shame if the smell caused to be it unusable and potentially unsafe. The Collateral Channel provides a unique opportunity to create fish and bird habitat and transform into a natural oasis.

# MAPS

## LAKE MICHIGAN







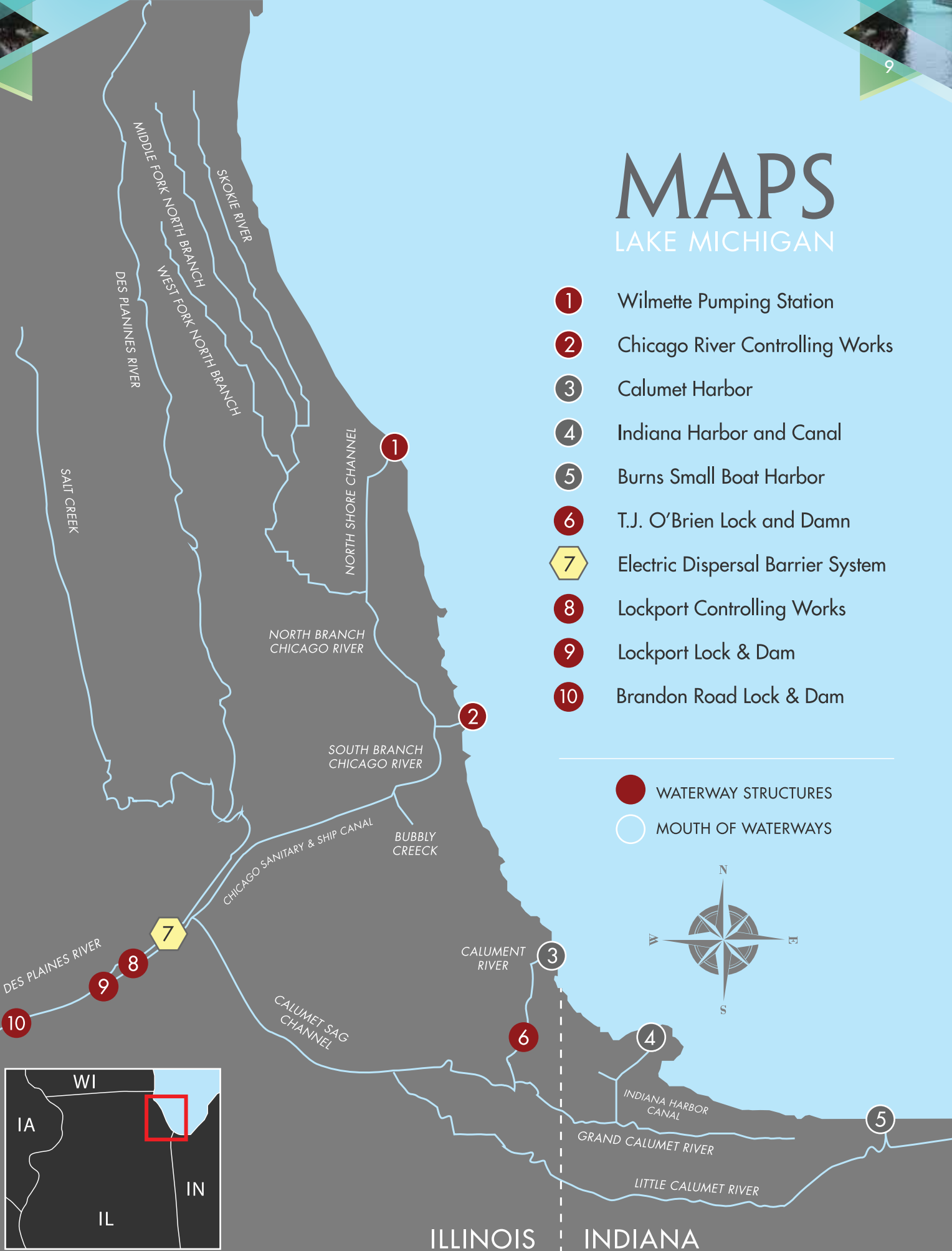
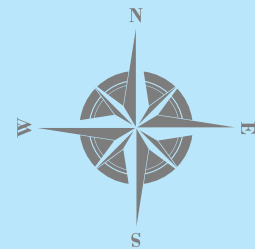
# MAPS

## LAKE MICHIGAN

- 1 Wilmette Pumping Station
- 2 Chicago River Controlling Works
- 3 Calumet Harbor
- 4 Indiana Harbor and Canal
- 5 Burns Small Boat Harbor
- 6 T.J. O'Brien Lock and Dam
- 7 Electric Dispersal Barrier System
- 8 Lockport Controlling Works
- 9 Lockport Lock & Dam
- 10 Brandon Road Lock & Dam

 WATERWAY STRUCTURES

 MOUTH OF WATERWAYS



ILLINOIS

INDIANA

31ST STREET

31ST STREET

# MAPS

CHICAGO CANAL

COLLATERAL CHANNEL

SOUTH SACRAMENTO

SOUTH KEDZIE AVENUE

CHICAGO SANITARY AND SHIP CANAL



STEVENSON EXPRESSWAY

# RESOURCES

## **Our Liquid Asset, The Economic Benefits of a Clean Chicago River**

[www.chicagoriver.org/news/2013/5/investing-in-the-chicago-river-pays-us-back](http://www.chicagoriver.org/news/2013/5/investing-in-the-chicago-river-pays-us-back)

## **Chicago River Corridor Development Plan**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/chicago\\_river\\_corridordevelopmentplanandguidelines.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago_river_corridordevelopmentplanandguidelines.html)

## **US Army Corps of Engineers' webpage for Bubbly Creek**

<http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorksProjects/BubblyCreek.aspx>

## OTHER RESOURCES:

If you have suggestions that should be added to this list of important links and documents, please send them to [krice@chicagoriver.org](mailto:krice@chicagoriver.org)

## PEOPLE:

### **Friends of the Chicago River, Action Plan for the Chicago River**

[www.chicagoriver.org/upload\Friends\\_of\\_the\\_chicago\\_River\\_DC\\_2007.pdf](http://www.chicagoriver.org/upload\Friends_of_the_chicago_River_DC_2007.pdf)

### **NPS, Canoe and Kayak Launch Design Guide**

[www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/launchguide.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/launchguide.pdf)

### **Chicago River Water Trails**

[www.openlands.org/Biking-Hiking-and-Paddling-Trails/Paddling-Trails/chicago-river-water-trails.html](http://www.openlands.org/Biking-Hiking-and-Paddling-Trails/Paddling-Trails/chicago-river-water-trails.html)

### **Getting to the Chicago River (Trails)**

[www.chicagoriver.org/upload/Getting%20to%20the%20River.pdf](http://www.chicagoriver.org/upload/Getting%20to%20the%20River.pdf)

### **Chicago Riverwalk**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/supp\\_info/chicago\\_riverwalk.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/supp_info/chicago_riverwalk.html)

### **Michigan Avenue Fish Hotel**

[www.wrdenvironmental.com/projects/MichiganAvenueFishHotel.html](http://www.wrdenvironmental.com/projects/MichiganAvenueFishHotel.html)

## WILDLIFE:

### **Chicago's Nature and Wildlife Plan**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/chicago\\_nature\\_andwildlifeplan.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago_nature_andwildlifeplan.html)

### **Native Plant Use and Value**

[www.epa.gov/greenacres](http://www.epa.gov/greenacres)

### **Center for Neighborhood Technology, Natural Resource Conservation Solutions**

[www.cnt.org/natural-resources](http://www.cnt.org/natural-resources)

### **Chicago Wilderness, Biodiversity Recovery Plan**

[www.chicagowilderness.org/pdf/biodiversity\\_recovery\\_plan.pdf](http://www.chicagowilderness.org/pdf/biodiversity_recovery_plan.pdf)

### **Chicago Wilderness, Atlas of Biodiversity**

[www.chicagowilderness.org/pdf/atlas\\_of\\_biodiversity.pdf](http://www.chicagowilderness.org/pdf/atlas_of_biodiversity.pdf)

### **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning: Environment and Natural Resources**

[www.cmap.illinois.gov/providers-directory/environment-and-natural-resources](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/providers-directory/environment-and-natural-resources)

### **From Stockyards to Spawning Beds**

[www.chicagoriver.org\crb\upload\RiverRenewalBooklet\\_lores.pdf](http://www.chicagoriver.org\crb\upload\RiverRenewalBooklet_lores.pdf)

### **The Sustainable Sites Initiative**

[www.sustainablesites.org/pilot](http://www.sustainablesites.org/pilot)

## GENERAL:

### **Chicago River Agenda**

[www.chicagoriver.org\crb\upload\Chicago%20River%20Agenda%20reduced.pdf](http://www.chicagoriver.org\crb\upload\Chicago%20River%20Agenda%20reduced.pdf)

### **Chicago Climate Action Plan**

[www.chicagoclimateaction.org](http://www.chicagoclimateaction.org)

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE:

### **USEPA Green Infrastructure Case Studies**

[www.cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/greeninfrastructure/gicasestudies\\_specific.cfm?case\\_id=60](http://www.cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/greeninfrastructure/gicasestudies_specific.cfm?case_id=60)

## WATER:

### **Green River Pattern Book**

[www.blueisland.org/wp-content/uploads/calumet-river-handbook-20090116-calumet-river-web-opt.pdf](http://www.blueisland.org/wp-content/uploads/calumet-river-handbook-20090116-calumet-river-web-opt.pdf)

### **City of Chicago Water Agenda**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/water/provdrs/commis/svcs/wateragenda.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/water/provdrs/commis/svcs/wateragenda.html)

### **City of Chicago: Water Conservation**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/water/supp\\_info/conservation.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/water/supp_info/conservation.html)

### **City of Chicago River Corridor Development Plan**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/chicago\\_river\\_corridordevelopmentplan.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago_river_corridordevelopmentplan.html)

### **City of Chicago: Center for Green Technology**

[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/doe/provdrs/ccgt.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/doe/provdrs/ccgt.html)

### **IEPA: Non-point Source Unit (Stormwater Management)**

[www.epa.state.il.us/water/watershed/nonpoint-source.html](http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/watershed/nonpoint-source.html)

### **Lake County Stormwater Management Commission: BMP Publications**

[www.lakecountyil.gov/Stormwater/Publications/BestManagementPractices.htm](http://www.lakecountyil.gov/Stormwater/Publications/BestManagementPractices.htm)

### **Lake County Stormwater Management Commission: North Branch Watershed Page**

[www.lakecountyil.gov/Stormwater/LakeCountyWatersheds/NBChicagoRiverWatershed.htm](http://www.lakecountyil.gov/Stormwater/LakeCountyWatersheds/NBChicagoRiverWatershed.htm)

### **USEPA: Stormwater Management Program**

[www.cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program\\_id=6](http://www.cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=6)

### **USEPA: Clean Water Act Module (Tutorial)**

[www.epa.gov/watertrain/cwa](http://www.epa.gov/watertrain/cwa)

### **USGS Water Alert: Instant Information Sign Up**

[www.water.usgs.gov/wateralert](http://www.water.usgs.gov/wateralert)

### **USEPA: WaterSense - Test your knowledge and learn more**

[www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense)

# RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

The City of Chicago illustrates the value of the Chicago River in the Chicago Zoning Ordinance by requiring all new development within 100 feet of the Chicago River be subject to special review and approval by the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development, the Chicago Plan Commission, and the City of Chicago Council. In addition, the ordinance requires that new developments be set back a minimum of 30 feet from the river. In the case of Bubbly Creek, this setback is increased to a minimum of 60 feet. These required setbacks were put in place for the specific purpose of stormwater management and environmental protection of the river and its banks.

Unlike other locations in the waterway system, Bubbly Creek requires a setback that is two times larger than that of the rest of the river. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's Racine Avenue Pump Station is located at the end of Bubbly Creek. The combination of the design of the City's sewer system and Bubbly Creek's unique usage history, require special accommodations so that there is an improvement in functionality and water quality. During heavy storm events, 14 pumps drain 30 square miles of some of the most densely populated area of the county. This immense amount of water commonly includes Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's), adding untreated sewage to the already poorly drained creek. To reach this point, the riverbank must be rebuilt. The reservation of additional green space along Bubbly Creek will be used to implement healing stormwater management practices that will provide a critical opportunity to improve the water quality of the creek.

Setting a development back from the river doesn't mean the space is left alone. To rebuild the riverbank, the soil needs to be held in place, meaning that there should be a considerable amount of vegetation. Not only do roots hold soil where it is, but they help water infiltrate into the ground instead



of pooling on the surface. Plants native to Illinois are especially suited to this task due to their lengthy root systems. When completed, the setback along Bubbly Creek will have the look and feel of a public park, with gardens of native plants, shrubs, and trees, swales to capture stormwater, and a multi-use Riverwalk trail. Not only will the setback aid in the improvement of the water quality of Bubbly Creek and the surrounding environment, but it will also provide much needed green space and public access to the Chicago River to the surrounding community for generations to come.

## RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT



# GALLERY

## BUBBLY CREEK



# GALLERY

## COLLATERAL CHANNEL





# GALLERY

## RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT



# GET INVOLVED

**For more information and to learn how to support this project please contact the following partner organizations:**

(LVEJO)

LITTLE VILLAGE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION

Contact: Antonio Lopez, Executive Director

Email: [alopez@lvejo.org](mailto:alopez@lvejo.org)

Website: [www.lvejo.org](http://www.lvejo.org)

(PERRO)

PILSEN ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS AND REFORM ORGANIZATION

Website: [www.pilsenperro.org](http://www.pilsenperro.org)

FRIENDS OF THE CHICAGO RIVER

Contact: Maddie Mahan, Policy and Planning Specialist

Email: [mmahan@chicagoriver.org](mailto:mmahan@chicagoriver.org)

Website: [www.chicagoriver.org](http://www.chicagoriver.org)

CHICAGO LEGAL CLINIC

Contact: Keith Harley, Environmental Law Program Director

Email: [kharley@kentlaw.iit.edu](mailto:kharley@kentlaw.iit.edu)

Website: [www.clclaw.org](http://www.clclaw.org)

