



New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan

A Path for Transformation

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Contents

- 1 Executive Summary
- 2 Introduction
- 2 Opportunity Analysis Summary
- 5 Existing Conditions
- 15 Vision
- 38 Trail and Open Space Development Opportunities
- 40 Next Steps
- 42 Appendix

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Executive Summary

“Our neighborhood is ready for a new period of prosperity and hope. We’ve lived through many years as a poor and downtrodden South Side neighborhood, where community improvement efforts haven’t always produced results. We believe that era is over and that we, the residents and leaders of Englewood, are prepared to make a difference in the quality of life in our neighborhood.”

Teamwork Englewood | LISC / Chicago’s New Communities Program
Quality of Life Plan, December 2005

A Transformative Vision

The Englewood community’s vision for the New ERA (Englewood Remaking America) Trail is powerfully transformative. The trail is not merely a much needed recreational amenity that converts an unsightly railroad right-of-way to productive use, nor is it just a resource that will improve the health of residents or provide learning opportunities for children. It’s all of those things, of course. Its most significant value may well be the highly visible and highly tangible evidence it provides that the transformation of Englewood is underway and here to stay.

The evidence is not only symbolic, it’s also strategic. The New ERA Trail will be a community landmark and signature destination that enhances Englewood’s image and strengthens the confidence of residents and prospective investors. Project stakeholders believe the trail will become the focal point for a variety of public and private improvements along its two-mile length that will sustain a broad swath of the community environmentally, socially, culturally and economically for decades to come.

The success of the New ERA Trail is by no means certain. A variety of institutional leaders must commit to the project, and individuals at the grass roots level must be dedicated and courageous leaders. Project stakeholders acknowledge that the challenges are formidable; however, they believe the risk of doing nothing is even greater, and have committed to a process of continuous and incremental improvement that will bring the project to fruition over the course of the next decade.

The New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan

The New ERA Trail Advocates (NETA), neighborhood residents and community stakeholders participated in a six-month planning process to create the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan. Adoption of the plan will help government and business leaders create policy and allocate the resources needed to achieve its goal and objectives. In order to achieve the stakeholders’ vision, we strongly encourage the NETA and the City of Chicago to commit to the following vision recommendations:

Connect Community to the New ERA Trail

New connections that include attractive, convenient sidewalks and ramps will link users to the trail above and to gateway access points. New connections to the City bicycle trail system and future trails will facilitate trail access from the north and the south. In addition, a new wayfinding system will enhance visitor’s awareness of the trail and direct users to the trail from surrounding neighborhoods and the regions beyond.

Create Signature Features

New signature site features will be regional destinations with a unique identity that establish Englewood as a center place for green technology and green jobs. Urban agriculture/horticulture themed redevelopments will provide opportunities for education, job training and new food sources within the community. A Festival Plaza and Market will accommodate a variety of events and activities, including concerts and a farmers market featuring locally grown food. Existing and future locally owned businesses will serve the community.

All new signature features should showcase sustainable design techniques such as permeable paving, wind/solar energy generation and material re-use. In addition, public art works that greatly increase the trail’s appeal as a regional destination will enhance all signature features.

Include a Diverse Range of Other Features

In addition to signature features that promote sustainable design, a diverse range of classic recreational, educational, and historical interpretative features will provide much needed amenities for the local community and attract use of trail facilities on a daily basis.

Utilize Existing Infrastructure

Adaptation and re-use of existing building and railroad infrastructure will help the community achieve its goals for sustainable design and development. In addition, the re-use of existing infrastructure will provide cost savings during construction and preserve elements of the trail’s rail legacy.

Catalyst for Development

The vision for the trail strives to maximize the benefits provided to the community, and attract the interest of prospective investors. Attractive new gateway plaza parks anchor the trail on the east and west. In between, a number of potential redevelopment sites between 58th and 59th Streets are prime locations for businesses that promote green technology and development. Redevelopments including new residential, commercial and light-industrial uses will also support the trail. In addition, the trail will generate a number of public investments along its corridor that improve infrastructure and enhance the appearance of adjacent streets and neighborhoods. Collectively, the new development will create jobs and opportunities for job training that are vital to the community’s ongoing transformation.

The New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan is a significant accomplishment. To create the trail and leverage its full potential as a catalyst for development, the following critical tasks need to be addressed and/or advanced:

- Promote the community advocacy group
- Create a land use plan that identifies desirable patterns of development along the corridor
- Identify and engage the owners of properties adjacent to the trail
- Conduct environmental assessments
- Complete preliminary design (Phase I) and final design and engineering (Phase II) of the trail

The completion of the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan is a significant first step of a much larger process that will evolve over time. Patience, perseverance, enthusiasm and cooperation are necessary to build and sustain the momentum needed to ensure a successful outcome. The stakeholders hope that the Vision Plan will inspire leaders and those at the grass roots levels to become tireless advocates for this remarkable resource.

Introduction

Approach

In January of 2009, Openlands engaged Hitchcock Design Group to provide planning and design services for the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan.

Openlands is working with the City of Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning and the Englewood Community to create a multi-use trail as part of a larger community-wide Open Space Plan. Together, the New ERA Trail and Open Space Plan are one of a series of Green Legacy projects that are part of the 2009 Burnham Plan Centennial celebration. The intent of the trail is to provide safe neighborhood connections, showcase sustainable development and be a regional destination. New community gardens, signage, and recognition of cultural heritage through public art are also proposed.

Scope of Work

The New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan planning process included three distinct phases:

- 1) The Opportunity Analysis examined resources, stakeholder interests and contemporary practices. The Opportunity Analysis included a summary of the public workshops and an analysis of physical conditions and other resources. The Opportunity Analysis identified priority opportunities, preliminary goals and objectives and special considerations.
- 2) A conceptual framework plan was created from the findings of the Opportunity Analysis and Alternative Strategies were developed and presented to the community. Based on feedback received, a Preferred Strategy was selected to advance and refine. The Preferred Strategy was presented to Openlands and the public in a series of public open house meetings.
- 3) Under the direction of Openlands and City staff, recommendations were finalized and the Final Vision Plan was presented to the public. The entire planning process has been summarized in this New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan report as a reference to guide recommended public improvements and redevelopment initiatives, and as a marketing tool to attract investor interest.

Opportunity Analysis Summary

The best opportunities exist where contemporary practices, stakeholder interests and available resources converge. The Opportunity Analysis for the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan identified key planning objectives, priority opportunities and special considerations that guided the development of alternative strategies and, ultimately, the final recommendations included in this report.



Stakeholder Interests

The stakeholder groups with interests in the New ERA Trail are broad and diverse. Stakeholder groups identified during the planning process (participants and workshop summaries are in the Appendix of this report) include:

- Alderman Tone Foulkes, 15th Ward Office
 - Alderman Willie Cochran, 20th Ward Office
 - Alderman Pat Dowell, 3rd Ward Office
 - Alderman Joann Thompson, 16th Ward Office
 - Center for Urban Transformation
 - Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning
 - Chicago Department of Transportation
 - Chicago Park District
 - Department of Children and Family Services
 - Educational Institute
 - Englewood Community and Cultural Planning Council
 - Earle School
 - Family Focus
 - Friends of the Parks
 - Goodlow School
 - Greater Englewood Community and Family Task Force and its Sustainable Englewood Project
- Greater Englewood Garden & Open Space Association
 - Growing Home
 - Imagine Englewood If
 - NeighborSpace
 - New ERA Trail Advocates
 - Openlands
 - Providence House
 - Residents
 - Respiratory Health Association
 - Rowan Trees Garden Society
 - Sherwood Peace Association
 - Stay Environmentally Focusd' Inc.
 - Teamwork Englewood
 - The Active Transportation Alliance
 - Thresholds
 - Trust for Public Land
 - United Block Clubs of Englewood
 - Washington Park Conservancy

Contemporary Practices

Contemporary practices represent what other communities are doing with similar project developments relating to scope, scale, character and quality. Throughout the vision planning process, contemporary practices presented to the stakeholders and public to initiate the visioning process and develop ideas for the trail related to the following:

- Path and walkway materials
- Walls and slope stabilization
- Access types
- Plantings
- Structures
- Activities
- Gateway features

Resources

The proposed New ERA Trail is approximately two miles in length and will utilize the abandoned railroad embankment between 58th and 59th Streets. The western terminus of this study is Hoyne Avenue and the eastern terminus is Wallace Avenue. The following resources are illustrated and explained in more detail in the Existing Conditions section of this report.

- Population Density
- Vacant Property
- Open Space
- Cultural Resources
- Transit and Bikeways
- Bridges and Structures
- Access
- Trail Character

Goal

Create a signature linear park that connects the Englewood Community to public and cultural resources, is a catalyst for new sustainable development, and attracts regional visitors.

Objectives

Stakeholders identified six objectives based on key findings of the Opportunity Analysis that support the primary goal.

Develop convenient logical connections

Because the existing railroad embankment is inherently difficult to access, future investments depend on substantially improved connectivity. It is imperative that new attractive and convenient pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular connections link the New ERA Trail to existing transit and bikeways, downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

Create a Compelling Destination

The desire for community renewal has been well documented and the redevelopment of the abandoned railroad embankment as a public open space provides a perfect opportunity to play a role in the transformation of Englewood. Improvements to the embankment should be flexible enough to accommodate periodic events such as festivals and concerts, as well as regularly scheduled activities such as outdoor markets, family and social events, cycling, and other recreational uses.

In addition to serving local needs, the community also clearly desires some kind of regional attraction in order to enhance the local economy. Possible regional attractions include urban agriculture, demonstrations of sustainable practices and a venue for large scale festivals and other special events.

Promote Genuine Sustainability

The New ERA Trail should demonstrate genuine sustainability, not only environmentally but also culturally and financially.

Environmentally the design and programming of the trail should be for four-season functionality and take into account the best practices of environmental sustainability in constructed features and future maintenance requirements.

Culturally the trail should reflect the community’s unique vision in features, uses and programming so that it is timeless and enduring.

Financially the trail should strengthen and support the community and other established businesses and activities. Development and operational costs should be offset through revenue generation of facilities or activities and by stimulating economic development in the community.

Accommodate Safety and Security

Several areas of the trail have low visibility; therefore, the success of the New ERA Trail depends on improved safety and security measures. Recommended safety and security measures include lighting, guardrails, emergency call boxes, security fencing, appropriate vegetation, community involvement and an increased number of users that includes neighborhood monitors or guides.

Construct it incrementally

Because the New ERA Trail is such a large and complicated project, construction of the trail must occur in phases. The phasing and budgets should be coordinated with funding opportunities and availability, as well as other scheduled improvement projects.

Hospitality

The New ERA Trail should be inviting and accessible to all. A variety of amenities such as benches, restrooms, drinking fountains and shade will make the trail comfortable for users.

Opportunities

Stakeholders identified five priority opportunities that support the community’s goal and objectives.

Connect Community to the New ERA Trail

- Connect to the City bikeway system
- Wayfinding
- Gateway access points
- Secondary access points
- Connections to future planned trails and open space

Create Signature Features

- Urban agriculture/horticulture
- Green energy and development interpretation
- Sustainable design
- Festival Plaza
- Public art
- Natural habitat

Include a Diverse Range of Other Features

- Recreation
- Education
- History
- Community involvement

Utilize Existing Infrastructure

- Railroad embankment
- Railroad artifacts
- Bridge abutments
- Buildings
- Vacant land

Catalyst for development

- Urban agriculture/horticulture
- Public open space
- Complimentary trail and green development businesses
- Local businesses



Special Considerations

Special considerations that must be addressed in order to accomplish the preceding opportunities include:

Limited Access

Although the New ERA Trail is over two miles in length, providing an accessible way to the top of the embankment for park users, police, public safety and maintenance equipment and personnel may be challenging at access points that are adjacent to private property. For the most part, the trail property line falls at the toe of the embankment and rises at over a 2:1 slope to the top at an elevation approximately 16’ above street grade. Providing access to the trail where adjacent to privately owned land could potentially involve expensive retaining walls to integrate a ramp into the side of the embankment. Another alternative would be to acquire property at key locations or negotiate an easement with the adjacent property owners to allow access from the street.

Land Ownership and Jurisdiction

It is our understanding that the railroad owns the trail embankment. An important next step in bringing the New ERA Trail from vision to reality is securing the use of the property through easement, lease or acquisition. The railroad should be contacted to confirm land ownership and to begin negotiations.

In addition to the railroad property The New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan outlines several gateway and secondary trail access points. Adjacent property owners should be identified to determine if encroachment onto their property will be necessary to access the trail. In addition to private landowners, proposed trail access points at public streets will fall under the jurisdiction of the Chicago Department of Transportation. Potential improvements on City owned land, including the proposed Market and Festival Plaza will fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning. Access points at Bontemps School and Hermitage Park will include the participation of the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Park District.

Environmental Assessment

As a requirement of property acquisition or development of publicly owned lands, an environmental assessment must be conducted to determine the potential for environmental contamination. Based on the level of contamination, remediation and environmental clean up of the site to public use standards may be a significant portion of the overall project development costs. An environmental assessment can guide project development and phasing of environmental clean up.

Funding

It is our understanding that there is no budget currently allocated for the development of the New ERA Trail; however, the project is a good candidate for state and federal grants as well as local appropriations for recreation and economic development.

Potential funding sources include:

- Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)
- Illinois Bicycle Path Grant Program
- Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
- Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Program (OSLAD)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
- Private foundations
- Local appropriations
- Stimulus funding
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Maintenance and Operations

It is our understanding that the New ERA Trail may ultimately fall under the ownership and jurisdiction of the Chicago Park District. Therefore, the Park District should be involved throughout the planning and development process so that designs meet the appropriate standards.



Existing Conditions



Study Area

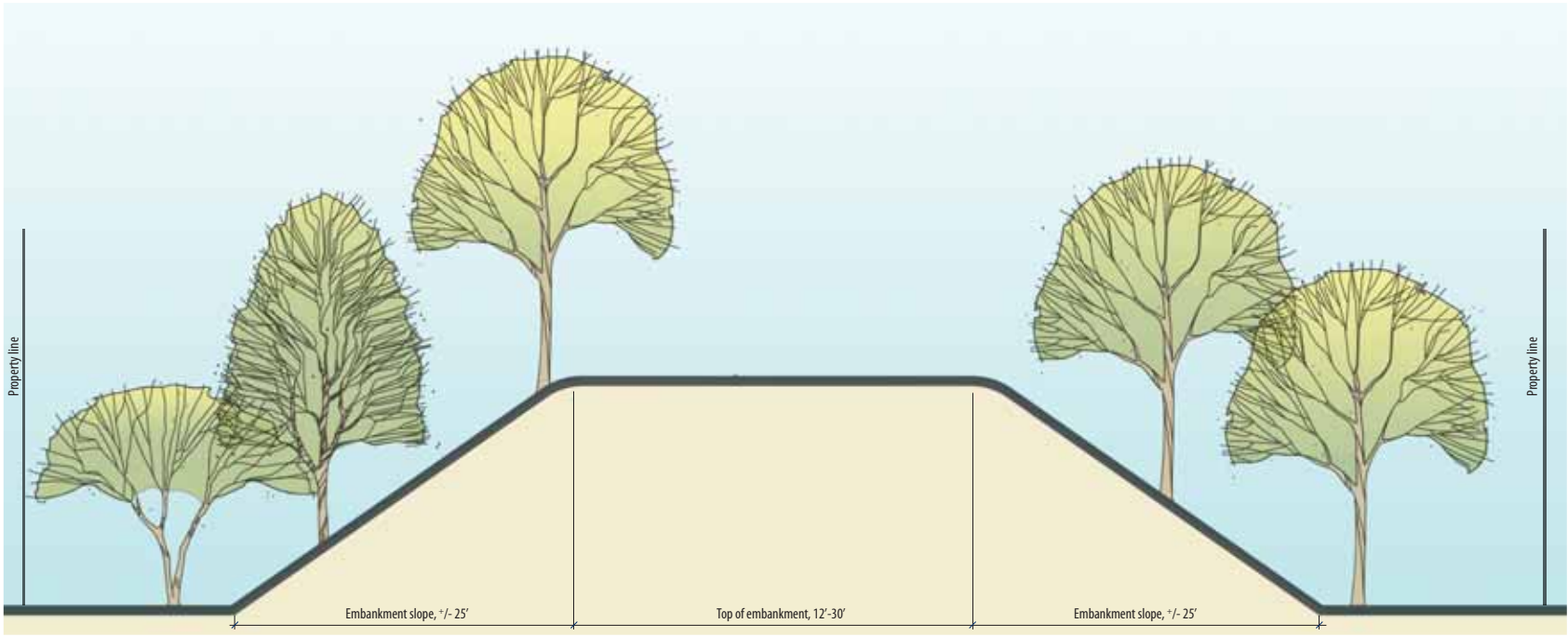
The proposed location of the New ERA Trail is about seven miles south of downtown Chicago in the Englewood and West Englewood neighborhoods.

The trail, in gray above, will utilize approximately two miles of an abandoned railroad embankment. The existing right-of-way is approximately 80 feet wide. The top of the embankment is approximately 16 feet above street level and the width of the level, developable land on top varies from 12 feet to 30 feet wide. The embankment slopes are roughly 20 to 25 feet wide and rise at over a 2:1 slope to the top.

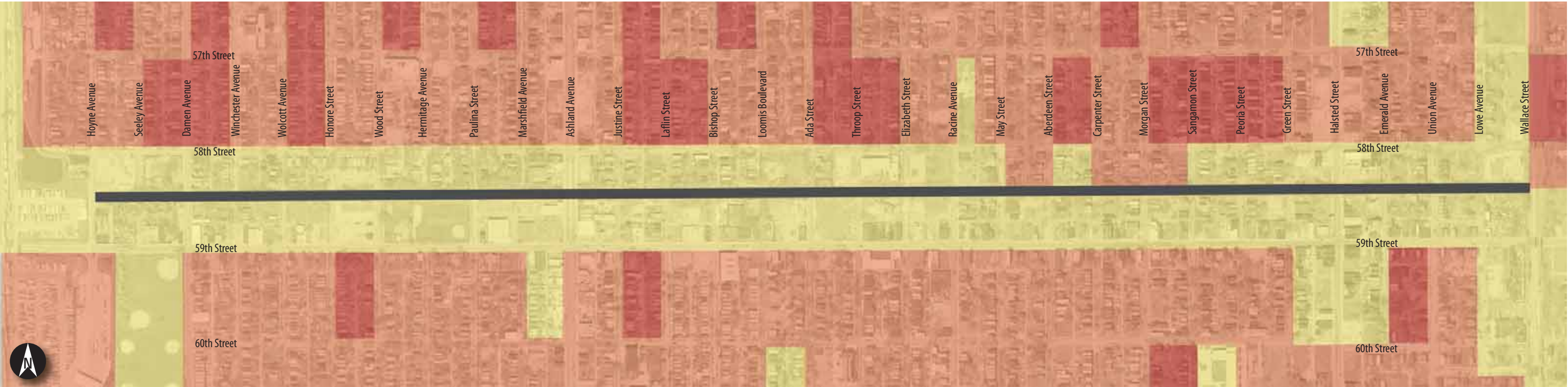
A survey of the property and embankment needs to be conducted to determine actual dimensions and boundaries of the property prior to design and engineering of the trail.



The proposed New ERA Trail is just west of Interstate 90/94 about seven miles south of downtown Chicago.



Existing Conditions - typical railroad embankment cross section



Population Density

The map above shows the population density per census block for the year 2000. Few people live directly adjacent to the abandoned railroad embankment because of the primary land uses being commercial and light industrial along 58th and 59th Streets. Population densities increase north of 58th Street and south of 59th Street.

The low population densities and vacant land indicate that potential redevelopment opportunities exist along the 58th and 59th Street corridors.

Legend

0-68 people per census block

68.1-178 people per census block

178.1-317 people per census block

Railroad embankment



Areas along the trail with the lowest population density often have light industrial and commercial buildings.



Areas along the trail with a mid-level population density contain a mix of land uses and vacant property.





Areas along the trail with the highest population density are primarily residential and have very few vacant lots.



Vacant Property

There are approximately 18 acres of vacant property between 58th and 59th Streets (area within dashed line) that provide redevelopment opportunities. A land use plan that identifies desirable patterns of redevelopment along the corridor should be created. Large vacant areas are ideal for gateway and festival areas.

Legend

-  Vacant property
-  Railroad embankment



Vacant property at the northwest end of the railroad embankment could be developed as a primary gateway and festival area.



Vacant property centrally located along the south side of the railroad embankment is an ideal location to build a festival plaza and market.



Vacant property at the northeast end of the railroad embankment could be developed as a primary gateway and festival area.



Open Space

The proposed trail is within walking distance of the following public open spaces:

Chicago Park District Parks

- Hermitage Park
- Lindblom Park
- Moran Park

Chicago Public School District Campus Parks

- Bontemps Campus Park
- Hope High School Campus Park

Connections to these open spaces from the trail need to be identified as plans develop. In addition to connecting all of these existing open spaces, the trail will provide new open space in the form of a linear park through the community.

Legend

- Chicago Park District Park
- Chicago Public Schools, Campus Park
- Railroad embankment



Lindblom park provides Englewood residents with a variety of recreation opportunities.



View of Hermitage Park from the top of the railroad embankment.



View of Bontemps Elementary School Campus Park from the top of the railroad embankment. Bontemps Campus Park improvements have been scheduled for 2009.





Cultural Resources


Culture is an important part of the Englewood community. Many schools, churches and other institutional uses are located near the proposed trail. Connections and relationships with these resources should be identified as plans for the trail develop.


Residents expressed concern about the limited amount of existing public services, specifically fire and police stations. Safety measures such as emergency call boxes, security stations and police presence along the trail need to be coordinated with the City during the final design of the trail.


Legend


 Food Production and Distribution


 Fire Station

 School

 Railroad embankment

 Police Station

 Library

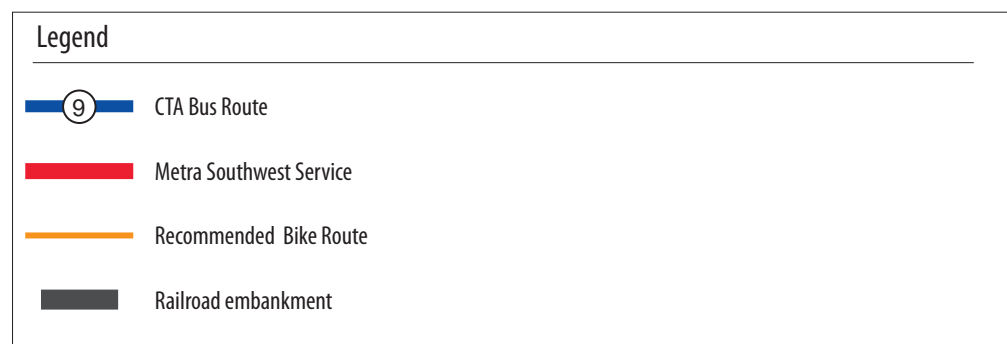
 Church



Growing Home is on Wood Street directly to the north of the railroad embankment.



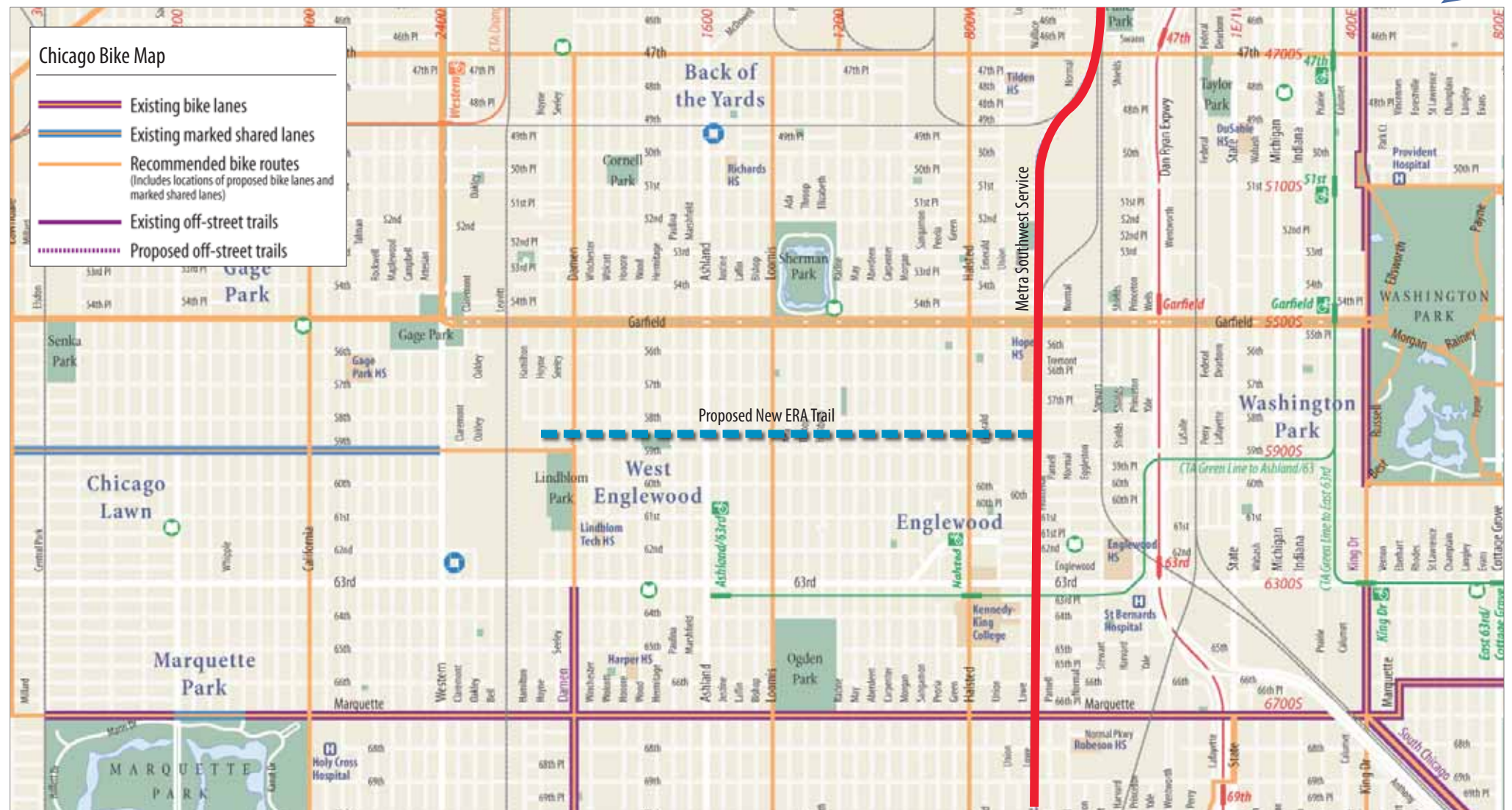
View of the railroad embankment from the existing Bontemps School playground. Bontemps Campus Park improvements are scheduled for 2009.



Transit and Bikeways

CTA Bus Routes 8, 9, 44, 48 and 59 serve the Englewood community. CTA Red and Green line trains also service the community. Bike routes recommended by the Chicago Department of Transportation are Halsted Street, Loomis Boulevard, and Damen Avenue.

Convenient and logical connections to existing transit and bikeways are critical to the success of the New ERA Trail and funding opportunities.



The above plan identifies where the proposed New ERA Trail will fit into the existing bikeway network.



Bridges and Structures

There are 27 existing bridges along the embankment. Four of the bridges are steel and the remaining 23 are concrete. Upon visual observation, the bridges appear to be in good condition. At minimum, minor repairs such as cleaning and painting need to be completed during construction of the trail. Engineering and environmental inspections may uncover additional repairs that are needed. Railings, fencing and guardrails will be required at all bridges and trail access points.

In addition to the bridges, there are several railroad spurs and artifacts along the embankment such as concrete spurs, embankment walls, and signal equipment that could be incorporated into the final design of the trail.

Legend

C

Concrete bridge

S

Steel bridge

Railroad spur or artifact

Embankment wall

Railroad embankment



Concrete bridges need to be inspected for structural integrity, however, they appear to be in good condition upon visual observation. At minimum, minor repairs such as cleaning and painting are needed.



Remains of the old railroad can be found in several places along the project site. Many of these artifacts are old spurs.



All of the steel bridges in the project site are located at the east end.





Access

Currently, there are no easy access points to the proposed trail; however, the community identified several potential access points during the visioning process. Desired access points include: Hoyne Avenue (western terminus), Damen Avenue, Wolcott Avenue, Wood Street, Paulina Street, Ashland Avenue, Loomis Boulevard, Throop Street, Racine Avenue, Morgan Street, Halsted Street and Lowe Avenue (eastern terminus).

Costs will be a determining factor in deciding the final number and locations of access points because each ramp will be a significant investment. Ramps need to be designed for a 16 foot elevation change, requiring nearly 320 linear feet of ramp to meet the preferred accessibility standard of a 1:20 slope. Where property restrictions exist, access could potentially involve expensive retaining walls to integrate a ramp into the side of the embankment.

Legend

-  Potential access point
-  Railroad embankment



The west end of the railroad embankment slopes down to street level and will not require major infrastructure to provide access.



The majority of the identified access points have an existing condition similar to the image above. These access points will require ramps to allow users access to the top of the trail.



The image above is typical of how visitors at street level will view the trail above. Visual cues such as ramps and signage will need to be incorporated to let visitors know that they have arrived at the trail.



Trail Character

There are three distinct zones based on the overall character of the embankment.

Zone 1 feels the most remote with concrete bridges and dense vegetation which limits visibility to the top of the trail. Its close proximity to Lindblom and Hermitage Parks and width (up to 30 feet) makes it an ideal stretch of the trail for recreational activities such as cycling, rollerblading and jogging.

Zone 2 has a flat developable trail width of up to 30 feet, concrete bridges and thin vegetation which allows high visibility of the trail. It is adjacent to some large areas of vacant property that provide development opportunities such as a central gateway. The sparse vegetation in zone 2 also provides opportunities for use of the embankment

for recreational activities such as sledding and community activities such as outings for gardening and nature clubs.

Zone 3 has a narrow trail width, steel bridges and a moderate amount of vegetation that allows views to the top of the railroad embankment; however, the solid steel bridges limit views. The flat developable trail width, about 12 feet, limits the amount of activity that can occur on top of the trail. This zone is best suited for passive activities such as walking and a gathering area at the far east end.



Zone 1



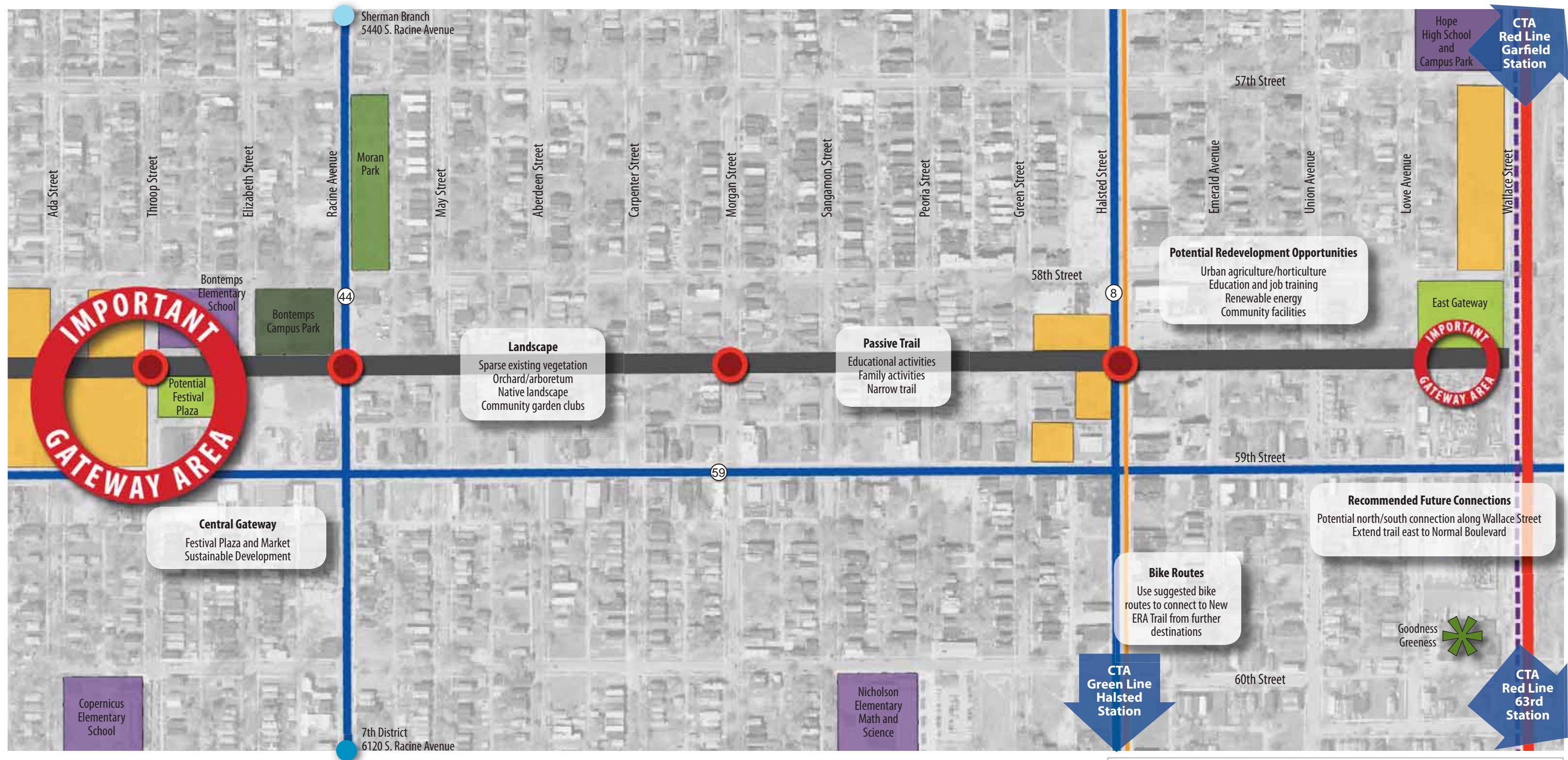
Zone 2



Zone 3



Vision



Legend			
	Park		Potential Access Point
	Campus Park		Police Station
	Food Production and Distribution		Library
	Fire Station		CTA Bus Route
	School		Metra Southwest Service
	Potential Redevelopment Opportunity		Recommended Bike Route
	Gateway/Festival Plaza		Recommended Future Trail

Vision

Connect Community to the New ERA Trail

The New ERA Trail will be difficult to see and currently has no access points. The success of the future improvements will be highly dependent on visitors' awareness of the trail before they reach it and on their ability to easily understand to access it by a variety of modes.

It is imperative that attractive and convenient pedestrian and bicycle connections comfortably link the users to the trail above as well as to the existing and future City bikeway systems. In addition, a wayfinding system should enhance awareness and guides visitors to the trail and nearby destinations. Attractive gateway and secondary access points are especially important.

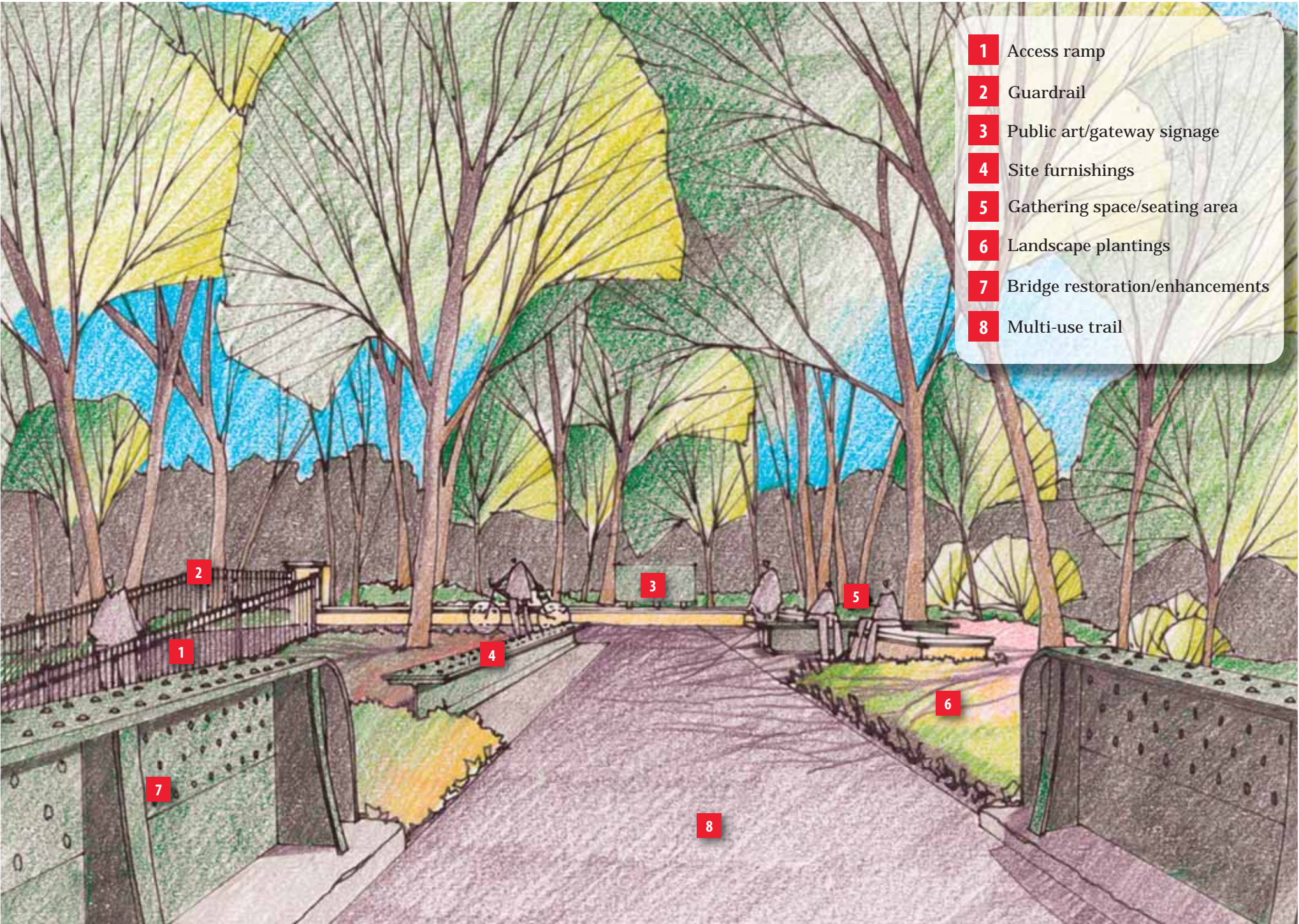
Gateway Trail Access

Gateway trail access points will be located at the ends and middle of the New ERA Trail as shown below. Gateway access points will include new open space and/or festival plazas. Improvements recommended at gateway trail access points include:

- Pedestrian lighting
- Emergency call boxes
- Drinking fountains
- Restrooms
- Site furnishings
- Landscape plantings
- Gateway signage
- Public art
- Recreational amenities
- Bridge restoration/enhancements



Existing condition - Lowe Avenue looking east



Proposed gateway trail access - Lowe Avenue looking east



Gateway trail access points are recommended at the west and east ends of the trail and in the center between Ada and Elizabeth Streets.

Secondary Trail Access

The community has identified eight cross streets where they would like to have secondary trail access points, as shown on the following page.

Each secondary trail access point will be a significant investment in new infrastructure. The trail will be approximately 16 feet above street level. This change in elevation will require ramps that are about 320 feet long to meet the preferred accessibility standard of a 1:20 slope.

Given that the access ramps are so costly to construct, it is important to keep in mind that not every secondary trail access location that the community identified is necessary for the success of the trail.

Improvements recommended at secondary trail access points include:

- Lighting
- Retaining walls
- Access ramps
- Fencing at approaches
- Guardrails
- Bridge railings
- Bridge signage at access streets
- Bridge restoration/enhancements
- Landscape plantings
- Emergency call boxes



Existing conditions looking southwest on Halsted Street



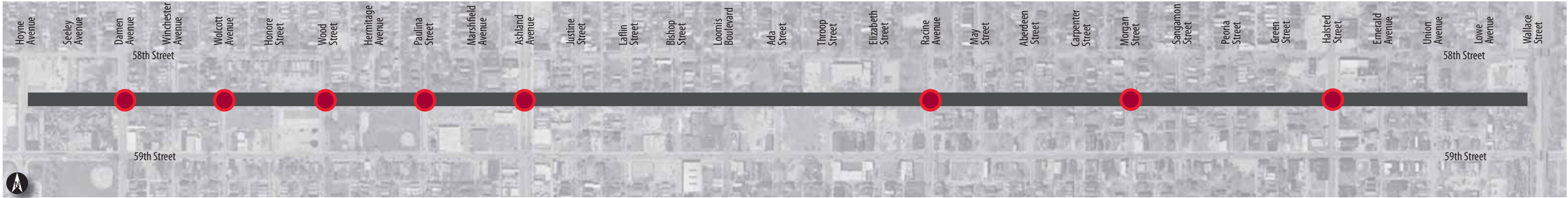
Secondary trail access looking southwest on Halsted Street



Existing conditions looking northeast from Hermitage Park



Secondary trail access looking northeast from Hermitage Park



Eight cross streets where residents would like to have secondary trail access points were identified during the visioning process.

Trail access, wayfinding signage and gathering space

These images demonstrate a variety of different ways that other communities have incorporated access points, wayfinding signage and gathering spaces into trail projects.



Contemporary Practices
In areas with limited property, ramps will be very long and require retaining walls in order to provide access to the trail.



Contemporary Practices
Access ramps should be wide enough for two-way pedestrian movement and maintenance equipment.



Contemporary Practices
Access ramps may be more graceful and meandering in locations where more property is available to accommodate the ramp.



Contemporary Practices
Gathering spaces may include shade structures and seating.



Contemporary Practices
Seating, trash receptacles, signage and restrooms should be included in the design of the gateways.



Contemporary Practices
Gateway areas should include plenty of open space for gathering and activities.



Contemporary Practices
Adding signage to the bridges along the proposed New ERA Trail will help visitors identify the trail from cross streets.



Contemporary Practices
Consider the consistent use of colors, materials and logos in the development of the trail's signage and identity.



Contemporary Practices
Wayfinding signage can be built into the trail and provide direction to users.



Contemporary Practices
Wayfinding signage helps to guide users to and from the trail.



Contemporary Practices
Wayfinding signage can be small but still very effective.



Contemporary Practices
Signage and paving materials inform trail users which areas of the trail are active and which areas are for passive activities.

Create Signature Features

The New ERA Trail provides a spectacular opportunity for new, signature site features that will give the site, and by extension, the Englewood community, a unique image and identity within the region. These include urban agriculture/horticulture, green energy and development interpretation, festival areas and public art.

Signature Site Features

A centrally located redevelopment forms the central gateway and core of the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan. As signature features of the trail, these spaces are intended to be regional destinations with a unique identity that includes urban agriculture/horticulture, green energy and development interpretation, festival spaces and public art.

Vacant land along 59th Street between Ada and Throop Streets provides a potential redevelopment opportunity site. The best use for the land needs to be determined during the creation of a land use plan for the trail corridor. Regardless of the determined land use, the site should be a sustainable development that showcases green energy and development. Hardscape areas, including parking lots, should be permeable paving. All landscaping should be native planting and some areas may be rain gardens, bioswales and green roofs to assist with stormwater management on the site. Cultural sustainability will be achieved through the reflection of the community's vision in a timeless and enduring use of the site. Financial sustainability occurs with new economic development within the community. In addition, the proposed Festival Plaza and Market across Throop Street will provide an opportunity for the sale of locally grown food.

A large railroad spur near the center of the trail could be remodeled and expanded into a four-season market building that houses a produce store and other locally owned shops and restaurants. In addition, restrooms, information kiosks, a security station and an administrative office could be located in the Market. The remainder of the site is the Festival Plaza. The Festival Plaza can comfortably accommodate festivals, events, live performances and public art.

Moving out from the core of the trail, urban agriculture/horticulture sites will utilize vacant land for garden plots, orchards and other food production and distribution facilities.

The following illustrations are intended to demonstrate the broad, overall character of the Vision Plan recommendations.



Urban Agriculture/Horticulture

The images below provide inspiration for the urban agriculture component of the trail.



Contemporary practices
City Farm located at Division Street and Clybourn Avenue in Chicago, Illinois



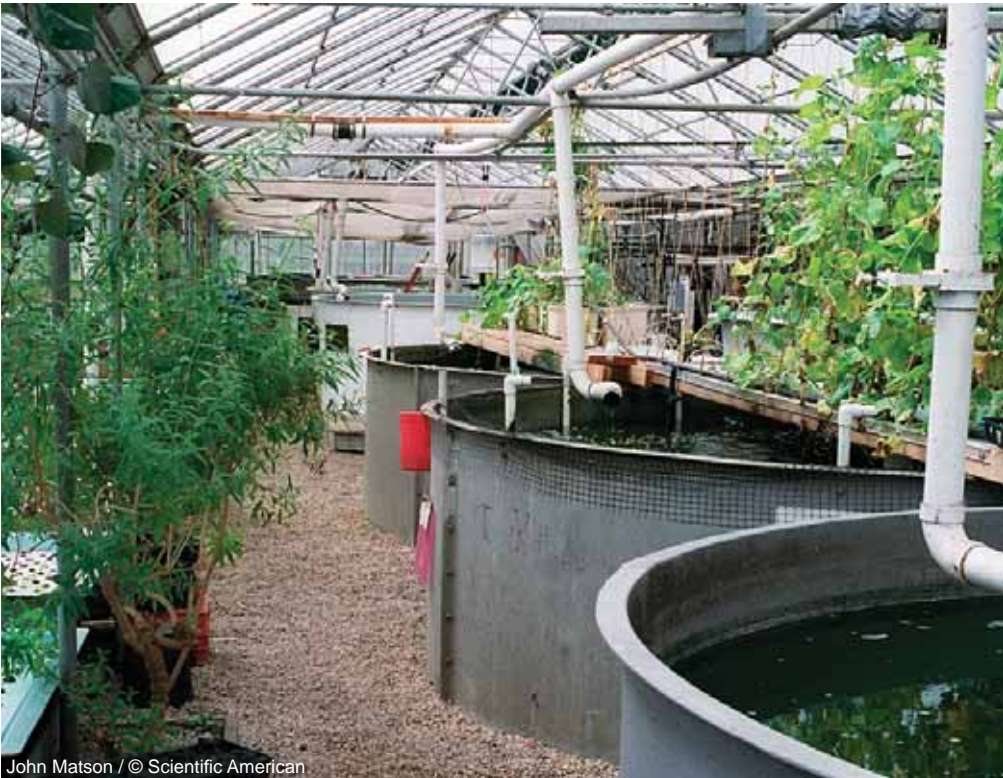
Contemporary practices
Seattle Market Gardens in Seattle, Washington



Contemporary practices
Produce is often grown in hoop houses.



Contemporary practices
Wood Street Urban Farm, a Growing Home farm site in Englewood, is Chicago's first year-round urban farm.



Contemporary practices
The aquaponics greenhouse above is a form of sustainable agriculture that combines aquaculture and hydroponics in a system where fish waste provides the nutrient water in which plants can grow, and plants act a natural filter system cleaning the water the fish live in.



Contemporary practices
Orchards are one of the many opportunities for food production along the New ERA Trail. In addition to an orchard at urban agriculture sites, fruit trees can be planted along the trail embankment in areas with room to accommodate additional vegetation.



Urban agriculture horticulture prototype

- 1** Garden plots
- 2** Lighting
- 3** Orchard
- 4** Access ramp
- 5** Permeable paving
- 6** Signage
- 7** Site furnishings
- 8** Multi-use trail
- 9** Landscape plantings



- 1 Market building
- 2 Festival Plaza
- 3 Lighting
- 4 Wind energy
- 5 Bridge restoration/enhancements
- 6 Permeable paving
- 7 Signage
- 8 Public art
- 9 Guardrail
- 10 Landscape plantings

Festival Plaza
Proposed view - Throop Street looking southeast

Festival Plaza and Market

A Festival Plaza with a four-season Market will create excitement and encourage activity along the New ERA Trail by hosting a variety of events, local businesses and showcasing the urban agriculture and green development vision for the trail.



Existing Conditions
View looking southeast from Throop Street



Contemporary Practices
Festival Plaza and dining space



Contemporary Practices
The Market will provide trail users with a place to shop, dine and rest.



Contemporary Practices
The Festival Plaza should be a distinct gateway for the New ERA Trail.



Contemporary Practices
The Market will provide indoor retail space for local businesses.



Contemporary Practices
Locally grown food can be sold at the Market.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is very important to the community. The New ERA Trail design could implement some of the various sustainable techniques illustrated below.



Contemporary Practices
Solar panels can be mounted to the side of buildings to provide energy for the site.



Contemporary Practices
A green roof can be installed on the top of the market building for stormwater management controls and to reduce heating and cooling costs of a building.



Contemporary Practices
Bioswales collect rainwater runoff from impervious surfaces.



Contemporary Practices
Permeable paving and native planting reduce stormwater runoff.



Contemporary Practices
Spiral wind turbines placed on top of poles or buildings are a great way to generate energy for small sites. These turbines are available in different colors and could also be used as an art installation.



Contemporary Practices
Cisterns for rain water harvesting can store water to be used at urban agriculture/horticulture sites.

Public Art

Public art is a great way to get the community involved in the New ERA Trail and interpret history. There are endless possibilities for the incorporation of public art into the trail. The images on this page represent a few of the ways that other communities have included public art in projects.



Contemporary Practices
Large sculptures will help visitors easily identify gateway areas along the trail.



Contemporary Practices
Sculptural elements will help visitors identify gathering spaces.



Contemporary Practices
Wall murals can interpret the community's history and/or provide community improvement activities for nearby schools and local artists.



Contemporary Practices
Artists can be commissioned to create sculptural art pieces for the trail.



Contemporary Practices
Railroad artifacts can be incorporated as art to tell the story of the railroad's history.



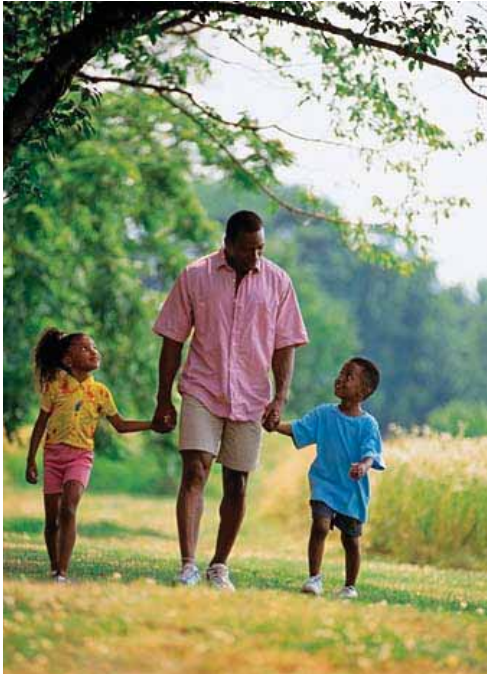
Contemporary Practices
Mosaic tiles provide a great opportunity to interpret the community and its history through art.

Include a Diverse Range of Other Features

The image for the New ERA Trail should be extraordinary and memorable, not only celebrating Englewood’s rich history through interpretive features, artifacts and displays, but also by creating excitement through programming and activities. The improvement of the trail should signify a new era for the Englewood community culturally, technologically, and environmentally, while embracing and celebrating the community’s past.

Activities

The design of the trail should create a high quality environment in which to live and play. The trail’s programming should do the same by providing diverse opportunities. The common activity themes identified during the visioning process are recreation, education and community involvement.



Recreation

Create a multi-use trail that connects existing park facilities and promotes regular physical activity. The final design should address how active and passive activities will coexist. Active recreational opportunities include but are not limited to walking, running, biking, and skating. Passive activities include picnics, performing arts and enjoying nature.

Education

Create programs that will work with local schools to fulfill educational requirements and benefit the community. In addition to educational requirements, the trail provides space for schools to meet physical fitness requirements while keeping students off the streets and safe from vehicles. Interpretive signage and art can tell the history of the community and/or explain what is occurring on a particular site, especially sustainable initiatives.

Community Involvement

Establish community clubs for walking, running, gardening and clean up and beautification activities that will increase community involvement and safety along the trail. In addition, the gateway access points provide space for new community events such as farmers markets, block parties and festivals.

Utilize Existing Infrastructure

The history of the railroad and the Englewood community can be preserved and interpreted through the re-use of existing infrastructure where possible. In addition, utilizing existing infrastructure will assist in accomplishing the community’s goal of sustainable development practices.

Existing Infrastructure

The railroad embankment provides a tremendous and rare opportunity to convert existing infrastructure into two miles of uninterrupted open space in an urban environment while preserving some of the railroad's history and contributing to the community's efforts to be more sustainable. Below are some suggestions on how to utilize some of the existing infrastructure in the study area.



Railroad Artifacts

The large spur near the center of the study area could be remodeled and expanded into a four-season Market Building that will serve the community, trail users and Festival Plaza.

Smaller spurs along the trail should be considered for use in public art installations and historic interpretation sites. Another option for these spurs is to use them as structural foundations for access ramps to reduce costs and disturbances to existing vegetation. A complete structural review needs to be completed prior to designing these artifacts as foundations.



Bridge Abutments

Bridge abutments could be used for wall murals, providing an opportunity for public art along the trail. Similar to how levels of a parking garage are often identified by an object that falls into an overall theme, the bridge abutments could be assigned a theme that helps users identify where they are along the trail.

Vacant Property and Buildings

Vacant property and buildings should be considered as locations for restrooms, security stations, food vendors and businesses that support the trail. Youth centers and history museums were suggested during the visioning process. Some of the buildings directly adjacent to the trail, if acquired by the City, could eventually have elevators that provide access to the top of the trail.

Catalyst for Development

In addition to serving local needs, the community also clearly desires some kind of regional attraction in order to enhance the local economy. Possible regional attractions supported by the trail include urban agriculture, sustainable practices such as wind and solar energy, and a venue for large scale festivals and other special events.

The trail itself is the spine of a much larger area between the 58th and 59th Street corridors in which all improvements relate to one another. The trail, in conjunction with other corridor improvements, will serve as a catalyst for transformation and development.

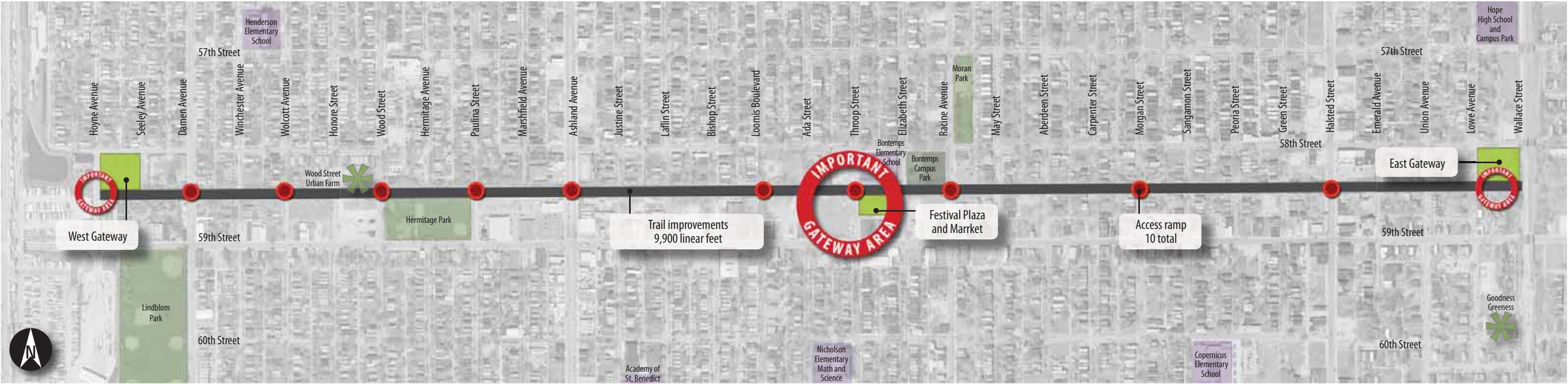
The trail is also one component of a community-wide Open Space Plan coordinated by Openlands with multiple community partners. The trail and the community-wide plan are Green Legacy projects of the 2009 Daniel Burnham Centennial celebration.



Contemporary Practices
A variety of developments and activities can support the New ERA Trail and serve as regional attractions.



Trail and Open Space Development Opportunities



Trail Development Opportunities

Trail Improvements \$7,000,000

- 9,900 linear feet of trail
- Site clearing, demolition and removals
- Bridge restoration/enhancement
- Pedestrian lighting
- Basic trail paving, 10' trail width
- Enhanced trail paving, 25% of total paving
- Site furnishings
- Landscape plantings
- Native planting
- Wayfinding signage
- Interpretive signage
- Public art
- Recreational amenities

Access Ramps \$5,500,000

- 10 access ramps
- Site clearing, demolition and removals
- Excavation and grading
- Lighting
- Structural concrete walls and footings
- Structural concrete ramp, 10' width
- Guardrail
- Bridge signage at access streets

* The total cost of trail development opportunities does not include property acquisition or environmental remediation.

Open Space Development Opportunities

East Gateway \$1,750,000

- Site clearing, demolition and removals
- Mass grading
- Pedestrian lighting
- Emergency call boxes
- Site water service and drinking fountain
- Site sewer and stormwater management
- Basic paving, 20% of site
- Enhanced paving, 10% of site
- Site furnishings
- Topsoil
- Landscape plantings
- Lawn seeding, 60% of site
- Gateway signage
- Public art
- Recreational amenities

West Gateway \$1,750,000

- Site clearing, demolition and removals
- Mass grading
- Pedestrian lighting
- Emergency call box
- Drinking fountain and site water
- Site sewer and stormwater management
- Basic paving, 20% of site
- Enhanced paving, 10% of site
- Site furnishings
- Topsoil
- Landscape plantings
- Lawn seeding, 60% of site
- Gateway signage
- Public art
- Recreational amenities

Festival Plaza and Market \$3,250,000

- Site clearing, demolition and removals
- Mass grading
- Decorative lighting
- Emergency call box
- Site water service and drinking fountain
- Site sewer and stormwater management
- Basic concrete paving
- Permeable unit paving
- Permeable alley paving
- Concrete curb and gutter
- Planter curbs
- Site furnishings
- Topsoil
- Landscape plantings
- Gateway signage
- Public art
- Market building

* The total cost of open space development opportunities does not include property acquisition or environmental remediation.



Next Steps



Next Steps

Implementation of such a large and complicated project may seem a daunting task, especially as resources and funding are limited by challenging economic times. However, reaching the finish line with a trail that meets the project goal and objectives is attainable with the leadership and commitment of the partner organizations. In order to turn this vision into reality, the following steps need to be completed:

1) Formalize the New ERA Trail Advocates (NETA)

With the completion of the New ERA Trail Community Vision Plan, the stakeholders and public have established a clear vision for the program, design and quality of the improvements. Moving forward, the success of bringing the project to fruition will require establishing a group of individuals, the NETA, responsible for representing the community’s interests, including:

- Vocal advocacy with community
- Enlist support of City and State leadership
- Create promotional materials
- Provide outreach for stewardship and programming
- Oversee short term development improvements
- Ensure project goal and objectives are met
- Ad hoc review of schematic design
- Manage private fundraising

2) Complete a Land Use Plan

The City is pursuing a land use plan for economic redevelopment along the trail corridor. If the trail is, in fact, the spine of the corridor, then the vision plan goals and objectives should be carefully considered every time a decision is made regarding the proposed land uses in the corridor. This will help guide the design of future facilities and improvements, and it will ensure that proposed improvements support one another as well as compliment the vision established by the community.

3) Land Ownership and Environmental Assessment

Acquisition of the railroad property and development opportunity sites enables many of the significant investments envisioned by the Vision Plan. Productive dialogue must be established and maintained with property owners to ensure that acquisition opportunities are prioritized and accomplished in the most timely and cost effective manner possible. In addition, environmental assessment will determine if environmental remediation will be necessary prior to use of the land. Once land ownership has been secured, the NETA should immediately organize community events for land stewardship to create excitement about the project and increase community involvement. Stewardship activities can be as simple as trail clean up days and creating a mulch path that will make the trail usable during design and engineering phases of the project.

4) Phase I and Phase II Engineering

Once the first phase projects are confirmed and funded, the next step is to finalize the design and engineering required for construction. Under normal circumstances, the design and engineering process can take six to twelve months to complete, depending on the complexity of the project. Preliminary design (Phase I) and final design and engineering (Phase II) define the scale, character and quality of the improvements and can be used to leverage grants and other funding sources.

5) Redevelopment Projects

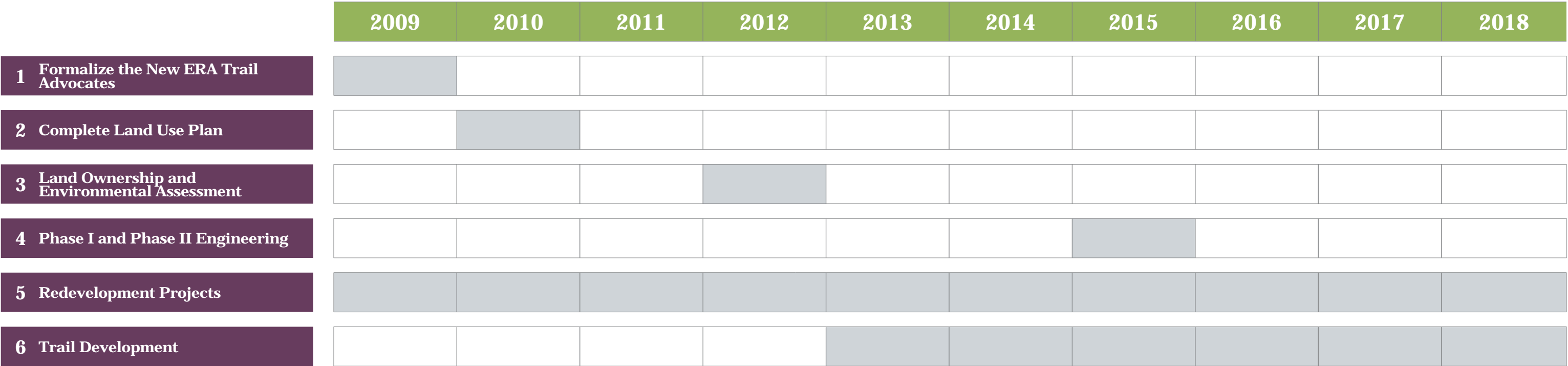
The focus of this Vision Plan has been on the development of a trail. Before a public trail or linear park can be developed, the land adjacent to the railroad embankment must begin to be redeveloped. The land use plan discussed in step two will inform and provide direction for a series of redevelopment projects that can be undertaken by the private, public and non-profit sectors individually and in partnership. An example of a partnership redevelopment is the Wood Street

Farm, developed and managed by the non-profit Growing Home Inc., with financial assistance and land provided by the City of Chicago and local philanthropic organizations. Other suggestions for redevelopment opportunities may focus on themes such as:

- Urban agriculture
- Education and job training
- Renewable energy
- Community facilities

6) Trail Development

The New ERA Trail is a large and complicated project and will likely be constructed incrementally. Whenever possible, the construction of the trail improvements should be coordinated with other corridor redevelopment projects. Together, the trail and redevelopment projects will be a catalyst for the community’s ongoing transformation efforts by providing a diverse range of opportunities for the community as outlined in this Vision Plan.



The diagram above illustrates a general timeline in which each of the steps outlined above can be completed.



Appendix



Participants

Krystal Alfred

Vice President of Block Club

Ken Arellano

Resident

Yvonne Armstrong

CRC

Cynthia Bell

Active Transportation Alliance

Jack Blue

Resident

Ed Brychel

Rowan Trees Garden Society

Lisa Burwell

West Englewood Library

Ruth Butler

Action Now

Marion Coleman

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Bernetta Coleman-Vance

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Terina Cranshaw

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Iona Davis

Teamwork Englewood

Annie Davis

Resident

Patricia A. Davis

Resident

Sunday Davis

Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children

Pamela Dominguez

Chicago Opportunity for Peace in Action

Alonzo Dunlap

Chicago Park District

John Ellis

Rowan Trees Garden Society

Alderman Toni Foulkes

15th Ward Office

Lorne C. Green

20th Ward Office

Emanuel Hall

Resident

Daniel Harper

Resident

Jean Carter Hill

Imagine Englewood If

Freddie Jarrell

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

John Paul Jones

Greater Englewood Task Force/NETC

Larry Jones

Resident

Lonetta Jones

Resident

Prentiss E. Jones

Block Club

Madiem Kawa

Washington Park Conservatory

Laurel Lipkin

LL Consulting

Teresa Llorente

Rowan Trees Garden Society

EvAngel MamaDee

Resident

Cornell Maney

Resident

Tonya McDaniel

Resident

Barbara Miller

Resident

Johnnie Muhammad

Teamwork Englewood

Kenneth A. Murfay

Lindblom Math and Science Academy

Molly Myers

Lindblom Math and Science Academy

Deborah Payne

Sherwood Peace Association

Bernard Perry

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Cordia Pugh

Resident

Pat Devine-Reed

Emerald House

Martha Rufus-Ross

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Wendell Springs

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Gregory W. Vance

Stay Environmentally Focusd'

Michelle Wielgosz

Lindblom Math and Science Academy

Orrin Williams

CUT / Growing Home

Timothy White

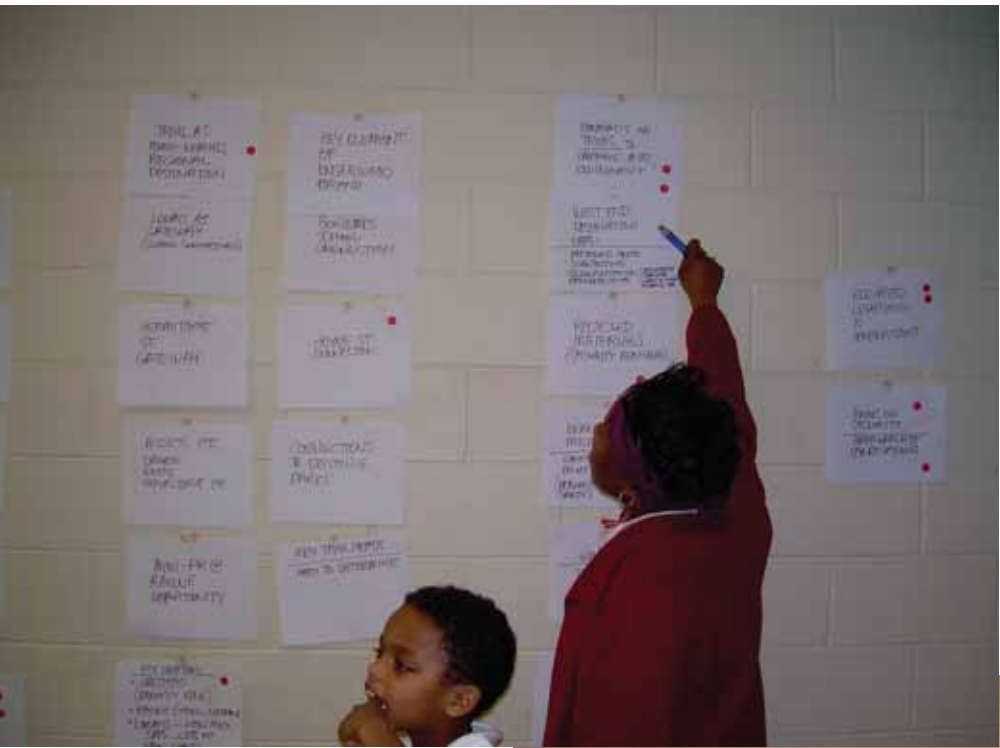
Lindblom Park

David Young

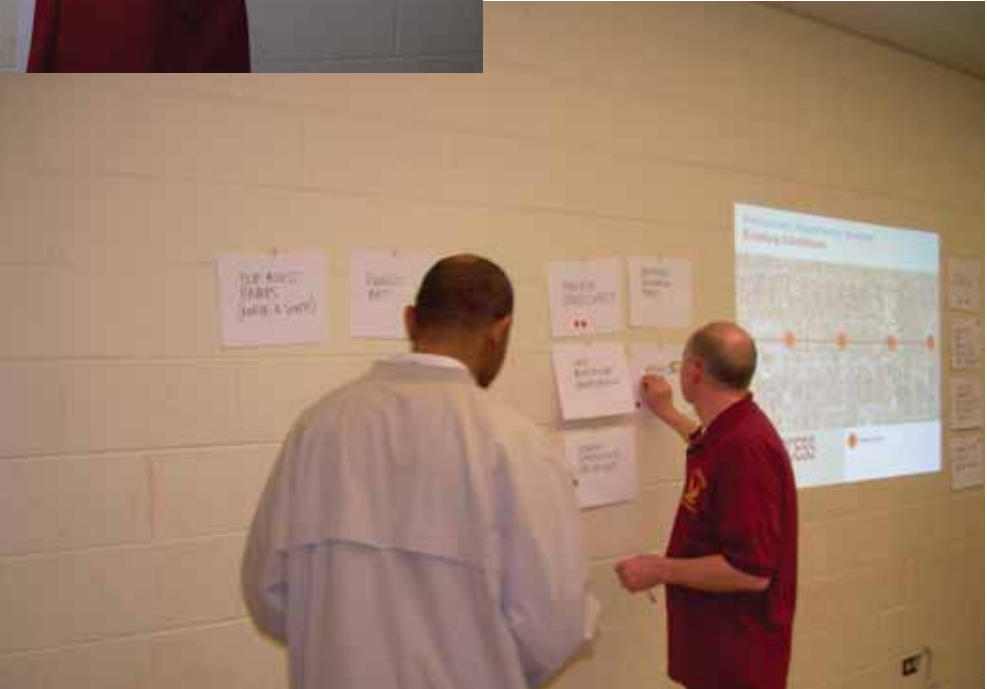
Resident

Tyehimba Young

Transitions Plus



Workshop participants identified their vision priorities following a brainstorming session.



Public Workshop Summary

Following is a summary of the public workshop for the New ERA Trail held at Lindblom Park Fieldhouse on February 26, 2009. Vision ideas were grouped into common areas of interest with dots placed on vision ideas or common areas of interest by the participants to demonstrate priorities.

Programming (17 dots total)

- Historical educational opportunities along trail (3 dots)
- Fitness and exercise facilities (3 dots)
- Public art (2 dots)
- Olympic training site (2 dots)
- Sled hill for children (2 dots)
- Educational activities (2 dots)
- Block club participation (2 dots)
- Skateboard park (1 dot)
- Local participation in implementation
- Rock climbing
- Family activities

Landscape / Natural Environment (14 dots total)

- Englewood microclimate great for fruit trees, especially peaches (4 dots)
- Arboretum (4 dots)
- Prairie landscapes (2 dots)
- Emphasis on trees to improve air environment (2 dots)
- Maintain desirable trees (1 dot)
- Urban gardening synergies (1 dot)
- Low maintenance landscaping

Sustainable Development (7 dots total)

- Wind turbines (wind farm could promote eco-tourism, solar panels (3 dots)
- Catalyst for green business district on 59th Street and other major streets (2 dots)
- Sustainable design and materials (1 dot)
- Recycled materials, security fencing (1 dot)
- Environmental destination as a theme
- West end destination opportunities: recycling center, composting, building/construction recycling center, deconstruction services

Safety (6 dots total)

- Elevated lighting is important (3 dots)
- Focus on security, appropriate landscaping (3 dots)

Access and Circulation (4 dots total)

- Key locations: Halsted Street, Kennedy King College, Racine Avenue (trail narrows), and Loomis Boulevard (new market opportunities and a lot of open land) (1 dot)
- Connections to existing parks (1 dot)
- Hoyne Street connection (1 dot)
- Trail as multi neighborhood and regional destination (1 dot)
- Flip access ramps north and south
- Bontemps School connection
- Lumber Company building at Ashland Avenue and 58th Street as a gateway
- Loomis Street gateway, school connections
- Hermitage Street gateway
- Access points at Damen Avenue, Wood Street, and Hermitage Park
- Mini park at Racine Avenue
- Need to determine key trailheads

Public Buildings / Development (4 dots total)

- Public restrooms (3 dots)
- Catalyst for 59th Street redevelopment (1 dot)
- Architectural element that is easily identified with the Englewood Community

Additional Feedback

- Trail should promote bird, butterfly and wildlife habitat
- Consider embankment for sledding, climbing and skateboarding
- Include historical markers along the trail
- 59th Street could be redeveloped with “Green” business and manufacturing
- Interpret water in the design (harvesting, cisterns, rain gardens, features)
- Consider bicycle repair shop/station
- Include drinking fountains and food vendors
- Community operated kiosks for food/drinks
- Make the trail a regional attraction
 - Showcase green initiatives
 - Green energy
 - Green business district
 - Urban agriculture
- Programming
 - Walking
 - Picnics
 - Festivals
 - Performance arts
 - Performance permits
 - Youth facility
- Landscape / Natural Environment
 - Hermitage Park improvements
 - Fencing around gardens to protect gardens and for aesthetics
 - Access and Circulation
 - Bike routes
 - Racine corridor is a critical connection between parks
 - Connection to Normal Street
 - On street?
 - Over Metra tracks?
 - Signage?
- Public Buildings / Development
 - Security stations for city, state and county police
 - Restaurant
 - Hotel
 - Indoor sports facilities
 - Youth facility
- Safety
 - Convenient access for police
 - Need people presence
 - Police on bikes
 - Security stations
 - Lighting
 - Animal control, health and safety issue
- Priorities
 - Where is funding available?
 - Minimum of one mile length for kick-off
 - Support – consider ward limits
 - Schools – more contingency opportunities
 - West Englewood currently has more momentum
 - Momentum at Hermitage Street, Wood Street and Bontemps
 - Halsted Access





Hitchcock
Design Group

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