



## **River Ecology and Governance Task Force Summary | March 9, 2021**

The meeting began at 3:00PM via a Zoom conference call. MPC and DPD staff introduced the meeting agenda that was shared prior to meeting kickoff. Christina Harris with MPC shared the three topics for break-outs to occur later in the meeting to allow participants to select which topic they were interested in throughout the first half of the meeting. The three topics were:

- System-wide Goals and Metrics
- Industrial Corridor Planning
- Planning Assistance to States (PAS) Restoration Framework

Participants were encouraged to select a topic based on their interest, expertise, and the following brief summary presentations in the next approximately 30 minutes so they could be placed in break-out groups for discussion.

Participants were also given a few minutes to complete the Task Force Survey which was emailed prior to the call and shared in the chat.

### **INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATIONS**

#### **I. Planning Assistance to the States Restoration Framework Update**

Chuck Shea, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Shared presentation for Chicago Rivers Restoration Framework Plan, PAS Study

Highlights from presentation:

- This plan was previously on hold, but is now 'very actively' restarting and beginning outreach to potential stakeholders
- USACE role is to provide support to non federal agency (City, Park District, Forest Preserve, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District), Goal of PAS is to develop a comprehensive planning framework for Chicago River System
- Expected completion by Dec 2021
- PAS includes Chicago River and Calumet River, does not include Des Plaines. Note 'waterways' include public land adjacent to waterways, does not include private land beyond potential minor coordination
- Major Steps:
  - Existing Conditions and identify problems
    - Stakeholder and partner outreach

- Inventory existing data/studies
  - Access ecosystem restoration and flood risk management opportunities
    - Formulate measures to address problems and opportunities
    - Build on existing or prior restoration activities
    - Identify opportunities for connecting existing and planned riverfront developments and recreation
  - Evaluate Public health impacts (Chicago Department of Public Health as a likely partner)
    - Develop a toolkit and training to build capacity among community groups
    - Explore options for leveraging resources to conduct more in depth health impacts assessments
  - Identify programs/authorities and funding to implement opportunities
- PAS does not guarantee implementation, or starting a specific project, the goal is to create a framework plan as the next step towards implementation
- Right now simply gathering existing data, not planning on gathering new data (ex. Sampling in field) but would like to ID where there are data gaps

## II. Development Reviews and the Task Force

Kathy Dickhut, Department of Planning and Development (DPD)

Christina Harris, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC)

Discussion as well as shared presentation from Kathy Dickhut; Industrial Corridor Framework Plans

Highlights from introduction discussion:

- There is an interest from DPD for the task force (REGTF) to weigh in on development and land use issues, Inclusive of both development reviews and land use in industrial corridors along the riverfront
- These two categories will inform the other two break out discussion groups:
  - System-wide Goals and Metrics e.g., development reviews
    - Ensuring that developments meet current guidelines
    - Task force to develop their own goals and metrics that could go beyond what has been articulated in design guidelines, What are principles across the system as a whole?
  - Industrial Corridor Planning
    - Questions for discussion include; Where/how does the task force weigh in on industrial corridor planning? The city and DPD are trying to be proactive, who should be at the table? How might this work? Etc.

Kathy Dickhut (DPD) transitioned to sharing slides re: Industrial Corridor Framework Plans.

Highlights from presentation:

- 26 Industrial Corridors, 14 PMDS
- No longer looking at individual corridors i.e. north branch, looking at groupings of corridors considering 'how do these act together'
- Freight Planning Studies Underway:
  - Chicago Rail Futures Study II, Southwest Industrial Corridor Transportation Support Services

- Understanding differences between southwest side vs far south side industrial corridors, i.e. far south side is not exclusively freight like the south west side

## **BREAK OUT GROUP DISCUSSION AND SHARE OUT**

Participants were sent to break out groups based on their own self selection. The break out groups were organized into three topics; *System-wide Goals and Metrics*, *Industrial Corridor Planning*, and *Planning Assistance to States (PAS) Restoration Framework*. Each topic included 2-3 breakout groups for a total of 8. Each break out group included a facilitator, facilitators were selected from task force member organizations including the Metropolitan Planning Council, Department of Planning and Development, Friends of the Chicago River, and Alliance for the Great Lakes. Break out group discussion lasted approximately 30 minutes and a brief amount of time was allowed to share out to the larger group. Following are the key takeaways from each topic area.

### **I. Industrial Corridor Planning (Groups 1 & 8) Key Takeaways:**

*How should industrial corridor planning processes be scoped for both the far south and southwest? How do we bring people together? What does the community and stakeholder engagement process look like? How can we make this inclusive? Who should be engaged? What information is needed? What should be included?*

- Build on lessons from previous planning processes in the North Branch and Little Village ensuring that a broad amount of stakeholders are involved
- Partner more deeply with community groups, River accessibility is highly desired
- Data accessibility is needed. The Calumet Connect Data Book provided public health data that has been missing from corridor planning in other areas. The City should play a role in making this data more transparent and accessible.
- Each process should have guiding principles and core priorities that are agreed upon by community residents and stakeholders and then can be used to hold the City accountable.
- Economic development in industrial corridors should focus on proactively attracting and recruiting industrial development that align better with community and public health needs. Acknowledge and recognize where the market is headed and acknowledge with the community wants and look for where they intersect.
- Create shared principles about development that focus on wealth and health building, etc for industrial corridor planning.
- Public engagement should take into account different neighborhood dynamics and communities and not just be about checking a box. Genuine engagement is not possible if the starting point is “we need a place to put a business, what do you think.” Need to start with common ground/principles to build out a vision for what the industrial corridor should be and then create a plan to attract businesses.
- Industrial owners need to be engaged. How to get them involved? Incentives that can help them make their businesses more sustainable.

## II. System-wide Goals and Metrics (Groups 3, 5, & 6) Key Takeaways:

*What are the broader goals / metrics that the Task Force can align around for looking at the rivers as a system and should be included in reviews of new site developments? What is not included in the current design guidelines that Task Force members would want to see?*

- Riverfront design guidelines lack “teeth”. No real incentive for developers to do more than the bare minimum.
- More holistic approach to zoning is needed. Overlay district for the river? This should include not only land use but also habitat (birds and other wildlife).
- Overall need for an inventory of conditions with data more accessible to communities.
- Greater transparency needed in the design process for development. Invite community residents and stakeholders into the process sooner so it feels less like a “done deal” regardless of community input. Developers should also directly respond to input.
- System-wide principles and goals:
  - Jobs worth having
  - Air quality concerns
  - Connectivity
  - Traffic / safety concerns
  - Neighborhood context and consistency
  - Filter: Is this something that must be by the water?
    - Could still allow for industry that makes use of the water
  - City livability (especially emerging from the pandemic)
  - Environmental Impact Assessment framework
- Overlay zoning and Burnham plan for rivers.
- Potential for economic analysis of riverfront access - and triple bottom line accounting.
- Broader system-wide planning should occur alongside local planning. Minimum standards that apply to all sites but allow for local standards driven by local, neighborhood and site specific needs.
- Vision for future development areas versus prioritization for natural areas.
- Defining the river more broadly, with a focus on the watershed. Precedent for this in other cities?
- Lakefront protection ordinance or overlay zone as a model.

## III. Planning Assistance to States (PAS) Restoration Framework (Groups 2 & 4) Key Takeaways:

*What supporting data exists and what should be included for the PAS study? How can the data be gathered? How should the study team work with the Task Force?*

- Need an understanding of the data sets available from different agencies, departments as well as other nongovernmental stakeholders
- Potential for a crowd-sourced reporting tool
- Project review not just through an economic lens. What are the other frameworks that can apply?
- Task Force can help lay groundwork for next steps after the study and can be a place for updates and review
- Army Corps has a crowd-sourced reporter tool that will be shared with the Task Force
  - Cell phone data and iNaturalist

- Need to identify the best pathways for the Task Force to provide input and on what input should be provided
- Different data sets from both government and other stakeholders that need to be collected by Army Corps
- Additional stakeholder engagement needed on how people perceive and use the river?

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30pm