

# River Ecology and Governance Task Force

06/06/23 | 3 pm to 4:30 pm

## MEETING SUMMARY

### Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began at 3 pm with participants introducing themselves in the chat. Approximately 40 members of the Task Force attended the meeting.

### Task Force Goals and Objectives Review

The group began with a refresher on the Task Force objectives and the broader role of the Task Force. The Task Force is focused on transforming the waterway system into a thriving and ecologically integrated natural asset through coordinated planning, investment, and management. Ultimately, the goal is to have an inviting, productive, and living waterway system that contributes to the city's resiliency. The Task Force allows for coordination amongst multiple types of partners to achieve common goals, provides for dialogue on ongoing issues and challenges impacting the river system, and provides a place to share successes in advancing progress.

### Short-Term Goals: 2021 – 2022 and Revision Recommendations

Results from the member survey taken during the March Task Force meeting were shared with the group to discuss recommendations for revisions to the short-term goals. Approximately 80% of respondents believed that that Task Force met or nearly met the goals for *Create principles for a systemwide and neighborhood focused approach to waterways*, *Inform near-term planning opportunities*, and *Standardize a process for reviewing riverfront redevelopment projects*. Around 75% of respondents felt that the Task Force met or nearly met the goal around *Review current policies and creating recommendations to strengthen them*, while only 60% of respondents believed the Task Force met or nearly met the goal for *Develop criteria to prioritize projects for funding opportunities*.

Three goal revision recommendations were presented for discussion by Task Force members.

- Keep existing goal: *Review current policies and create recommendations to strengthen them* and update the goal with new policies, like USACE navigable channel recommendations, which was a suggestion from one of the Task Force members that completed the survey.
- Keep existing goal: *Inform near-term planning opportunities to advance collective priorities* and update the opportunities. A couple of examples for consideration would be around including the CDOT Access Study and Industrial Site Guidelines.
- Keep the existing goal: *Develop criteria to prioritize projects for identified funding opportunities*. This goal would remain as is because it had the least amount of progress. There was some discussion about this goal related to near-term funding opportunities and how the Task Force could better align on capacity to receive federal funding for projects.

### Our Great Rivers Progress

At each of the quarterly meetings in 2023, the Task Force will be reviewing progress on the [Our Great Rivers](#) Vision. Our Great Rivers was released in 2016 and was a vision developed through a community-focused process that articulated 26 goals to create a Chicago River system that is inviting, productive, and living. This meeting focused on two goals from the Inviting category that connect to mobility and accessibility of our rivers and riverfronts. They are: Continuous Riverfront Trails, and Easy Access from all Neighborhoods. Task Force members presented initiatives that they are working on related to these goals. This included presentations from the Chicago Department of Transportation, Epstein, and the McKinley Park Development Council.

### Project Updates

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) shared updates on planning efforts for the *South Branch Parks Connectivity Study*, the Riverwalk extension, and the Weber Spur Trail. All three projects are ongoing in different stages including community outreach and surveying, engineering analysis, and stakeholder negotiation.

Epstein shared a preview of the *Big Marsh East Side Connectivity Plan* which includes recommendations for improving multimodal transportation on roads adjacent to Big Marsh Park as well as detailed cost estimates for the proposed improvements.

McKinley Park Development Council presented objectives for the recently funded *South Branch Connectivity Plan* which will analyze existing conditions and create a plan for a connected pedestrian/bike path along the South Branch of the Chicago River near Bubbly Creek.

### **IEPA Triennial Review of the State's Water Quality Standards**

Friends of the Chicago River provided background on the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's (IEPA) [Triennial Review of Water Quality Standards](#). IEPA is seeking input on what to prioritize and which standards to revise as part of its review. It is anticipated that this process will not conclude until 2024. Friends of the Chicago River and Prairie Rivers Network are looking for partners with technological expertise on water quality standards to begin drafting feedback and input with plans to begin convening interested parties in the coming months. A link to an [online survey](#) for public feedback was also shared with the Task Force.

### **Chonkosaurus**

Urban Rivers shared thoughts on the giant snapping turtle taking up residence in the Wild Mile. Although the snapping turtle as long made that area its home, sometimes these sightings become magnified and capture the public interest. Overall, the river system could use more habitat so that wildlife has a broader area it can call home.

### **Adjourn**

Upcoming dates for 2023 Task Force and working group meetings were provided to members:

- Development Review Working Group: June 13, 6 pm – 7:30 pm (cancelled)
- System Plans Working Group: July 19, 12 pm to 1 pm
- Task Force Meeting: September 12, 3 pm – 4:30pm

The meeting concluded at 4:30pm.