



CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE CENTER

WIN/WIN

The New Game Plan for Urban Stadiums

NOVEMBER 2025

LETTER TO THE READER

Multiple professional sports teams in town are pursuing new development simultaneously. This is a unique moment for Chicago, and a chance to rethink how we might craft a win-win for our teams and our communities. Economic development is the hallmark of a thriving city, and Chicago sports and their stadiums can play a huge role in this. This is an opportunity we must not squander.

For 60 years, the Chicago Architecture Center has helped Chicago navigate complex challenges at the intersection of design, development, and civic life, including catalyzing the establishment of Chicago's landmark preservation system, authoring the Board of Education's first design education curriculum, and helping reimagine the Chicago River as a public amenity through architectural tours that shifted public perception and political will. This stadium development report continues that tradition of leadership by offering frameworks and strategies to help Chicago seize an unprecedented moment and build for the next 50 years.

The Chicago Architecture Center brought together civic leaders, business executives, architects, and urban planners to understand what this convergence of new stadium planning means. We partnered with research experts in economics, sports-related development, tax policy, and public policy who provided critical analysis. We interviewed team officials and representatives, as well as developers, designers, and consulting firms with experience in this specialty industry.

Over three months, we studied stadium developments nationwide, analyzed what worked and what failed, and kept returning to something we already have: Wrigley Field and Lakeview. Not because it's perfect, but because it demonstrates a level of integration most stadium districts don't achieve—the ballpark and the surrounding neighborhood genuinely make each other better.

That insight became our foundation. Instead of treating stadiums as standalone facilities requiring public support, we propose thinking about them as anchors for thriving neighborhoods. We are terming this "The Chicago Model" and it follows a simple recipe: teams we love, playing in stadiums we love, anchoring communities we love.

This report explains what that means in practice and why the next 18 months could determine Chicago's development patterns for decades to come. The decisions involved are complicated, the money substantial, the timeline compressed. But the opportunity is extraordinary.

We're grateful to everyone who contributed their expertise and insights to this effort and a special thank you to working group chair and CAC trustee, Bob Rivkin. *(See page 4 for the full list of contributors and research partners.)*



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About the Cover Art

"Chicago Pride" by Zissou Tasseff-Elenkoff of All Star Press, a Chicago art gallery and print studio based in the Logan Square neighborhood. Their mission is to broaden the relationship and conversation shared with sports fans and artists throughout Chicago.

Contributors and Research Partners

About the Chicago Architecture Center

The Chicago Architecture Center (CAC) is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization. It originated in 1966 when a group of volunteers convened to preserve the historic Glessner House, a radical 1887 design inspired by medieval architecture that influenced future architects like Louis Sullivan and Mies van der Rohe. The CAC endures today as a civic institution that inspires people to discover why design matters through design education and leadership on contemporary built environment issues ranging from “missing middle” housing to adaptive re-use of old buildings to efforts to green the city.

Leitner Insights

Jeff Leitner facilitated the working group and led development of this report. He specializes in creating frameworks for complex civic challenges, with experience including developing USC’s doctorate in social innovation and partnering with organizations from the US Department of State to the Poetry Foundation on systems-level change.

This report is a non-partisan effort self-funded by the Chicago Architecture Center.

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Special thanks to Jorrie Jarrett
and Jacqueline Lopez.

Photo Acknowledgements

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The Battery Atlanta
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Barclays Center
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U.S. Cellular Field aerial
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Three Rivers Stadium aerial
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PNC Park (Joseph Peacock, 2016)

Soldier Field aerial
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Joe Robbie Stadium
(public domain, c. 2016)

Hard Rock Stadium
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The 78 development
(Vincent Alban/Chicago Tribune, 2024)

U.S. Bank Stadium
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United Center aerial
(iStock.com/franckreporter, 2013)

Oracle Park and Mission Rock
(courtesy Tishman Speyer and
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The former Michael Reese Hospital site
(Alex Garcia/Chicago Tribune, 2014)

Etihad Park
(courtesy New York City Football Club)

The Willets Point development
(courtesy S9 Architecture)

Chicago Has to Set the Terms

Multiple teams are simultaneously pursuing new facilities or major development projects—Bears, White Sox, Fire, Bulls, and Blackhawks.

The opportunity is now to rethink how we build communities with stadiums as an anchor and achieve a win-win for both teams and communities.

KEY POINTS

Cities need to grow to remain competitive, and Chicago is no exception. We have been looking at the issue of sports teams and stadium development the wrong way. Traditional stadium deals ask us: “How much public money does this team need?” We should be asking: “What infrastructure do these projects and surrounding neighborhoods need in this location? What do the existing community plans envision?” The stadium then becomes the catalyst for investments we should be making anyway. We need an approach focused on city building and positive planning that is fiscally sound.

The stadium is for some people, some of the time. The supporting infrastructure is for everyone, all of the time. This approach transforms the political equation. Instead of defending subsidies to billionaires, we’re investing in neighborhoods that happen to include stadiums. The good news is we’re starting to see this take

shape. At The 78, the Chicago Fire is privately financing its new stadium. The City should now invest in building the infrastructure the South Loop and Near South Side need to unlock the full benefits and development potential of the long-vacant site that will contain the stadium as its anchor. A similar plan should play out on the Near West Side where the Bulls and Blackhawks are privately financing transformations around the United Center campus. This should be the norm.

Where teams request public stadium financing (Bears, White Sox), that becomes one element in comprehensive neighborhood development, not standalone subsidies. This is standard practice for other large development projects, and stadiums should be handled in the same way. Professional sports teams are businesses and should be treated as such. Public infrastructure investment is not a gift to team owners—it’s leverage to arrive at a win-win for teams and communities.

The infrastructure we build—transit stations, streets, utilities, public spaces—will serve residents, workers, and visitors into the next century. While the teams might play games just part of the year, the infrastructure must work every day for residents and visitors to pay off as an investment.

The old stadium approach won't work. Decades of research show that stadium subsidies don't grow local economies—they shift entertainment spending from one place to another place. Meanwhile, Chicago faces a budget deficit of more than a billion dollars, as does the State of Illinois, and regional transit shortfalls will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars when Federal COVID relief expires. We can't afford the old model.

Coordinate everything, transform Chicago. Chicago will need to spend billions in coming years on Near South Side transit, Near West Side infrastructure, and Museum Campus improvements regardless of stadium decisions.

These are neighborhood needs, not team demands. South Side communities have needed better transit for decades. The Museum Campus requires access improvements whether or not the Bears stay. The Near West Side deserves infrastructure investment as it continues to attract new development. And large vacant sites, if developed, could help to address our acute housing shortage and increase the tax base.

Pursued in a vacuum, stadium negotiations each extract concessions from limited public resources. Ad hoc stadium deals yield modest outcomes—maybe more bus service here, some job training there. We propose better coordination through a planning entity, such as a re-imagined Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA), which could coordinate an expanded vision by leveraging the stadium investment to build transformational infrastructure: upgraded rapid transit lines to better connect venues and neighborhoods, thousands of

housing units including affordable options, street grid extensions that unlock development potential, utility investments sized for full neighborhood build-outs. If re-conceived as a redevelopment authority, these inevitable infrastructure investments could catalyze comprehensive neighborhood development—getting more value from our collective pot.

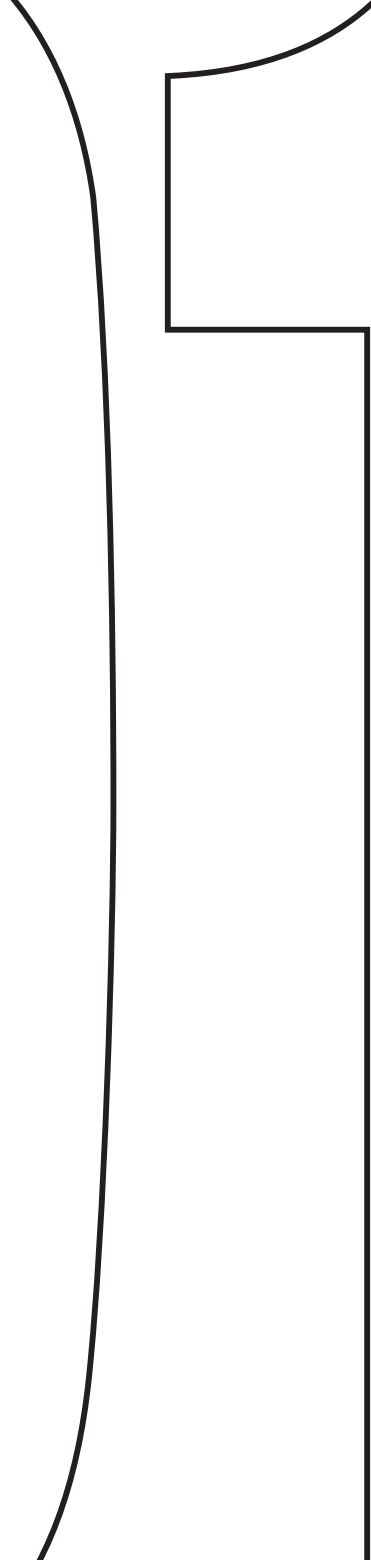
The infrastructure we build now will shape Chicago through 2100. These aren't stadium costs—they're city building investments that stadiums help accelerate. The alternative is spending the same money inefficiently, one project at a time, with no coordination and limited neighborhood transformation.

Passing this reputational test could boost economic development. How Chicago handles this complexity becomes a public test of capabilities. Major corporations considering relocation are watching how cities coordinate sophisticated projects. Investors

evaluate these matters, too. And when several different mega-development negotiations happen simultaneously, nearly everyone's watching.

Public leadership, then genuine partnership. Cities typically react to team proposals. Reverse it. City government establishes the vision: what should this neighborhood become? What does the community really need? Recruit teams to then compete to deliver comprehensive development, not just venues. Structure deals so both sides share upside and risk—when neighborhoods thrive, teams get engaged fans; when teams win, neighborhoods attract more investment.

SECTION



Why This Moment Matters

Chicago faces an unprecedented moment in stadium district development. Five professional sports teams are simultaneously pursuing new facilities or major development plans. Each stadium project alone would reshape neighborhoods and require significant infrastructure investment. Taken together, they can spur positive development patterns across the city for the coming decades.

Chicago has never faced simultaneous stadium decisions of this scale. In the past, we handled a new major sports facility once every couple of decades, allowing full attention and resources for each negotiation. The economics of sports has changed since Chicago built our current stadiums 30 years ago. The political landscape has shifted. And we've learned a lot about leveraging development dollars, sports subsidies, and public benefits. Understanding all this—and what's at stake—is essential when making these critical decisions.

Five Teams, Unprecedented Convergence

Five men’s professional sports teams are actively pursuing new stadiums or campus expansions. All these plans require significant infrastructure investment—likely billions of dollars for transit upgrades, new streets, utilities, and public spaces. These aren’t isolated real estate transactions. They’re collectively reshaping major sections of the city: the Museum Campus, the Near West Side, the Near South Side, and potentially Chicago as a whole.

	CURRENT HOME	LEASE EXPIRES	STATUS	FINANCING
BEARS	Soldier Field	2033	TBA/ Considering move to Arlington Heights	Seeking public subsidies
WHITE SOX	Rate Field	2029	TBA	Seeking public subsidies
FIRE	Soldier Field	2028	Chicago City Council approved new stadium build at The 78	Financing construction privately
BULLS AND BLACKHAWKS	United Center	N/A Co-Owners of Stadium	Chicago City Council approved new planned development around the United Center	Financing construction privately



Sports Creates Unique Conditions



Chicago's relationship with its teams makes things possible. This isn't sentimentality—it's the political economy of major infrastructure investment.

In a city with 77 community areas, sports provide rare common ground. You don't need to have deep Chicago roots to feel the electricity when the Bulls take the court. When five million people flooded Grant Park for the 2016 Cubs championship parade, it demonstrated something profound about Chicago's desire for collective experience. No political movement or cultural festival brings the city together at that scale.

This shared emotional investment creates both economic power and political will. The Bears are worth \$8.8 billion, the Bulls \$5.8 billion, the Cubs \$4.6 billion. These valuations are what happens when an entire city invests meaning into its teams and the teams in turn invest in their assets.

That value demonstrates teams' capacity to finance their own facilities. And the public passion these teams generate creates political conditions where smart major infrastructure investments around stadiums become possible.

When sports matter this much to this many people and create belonging at this scale, they enable extraordinary investments. Chicago is fortunate in that we have owners who are one of us—they live here and are not anonymous investors. They are family businesses. Stadium developments in Chicago aren't just real estate deals—they're investments in the connective tissue that holds together a complex, diverse, sometimes divided city. The Chicago Model discussed in this report recognizes this unique condition and harnesses it for comprehensive neighborhood development, not just facility construction.

What's at Stake

Immediate financial exposure

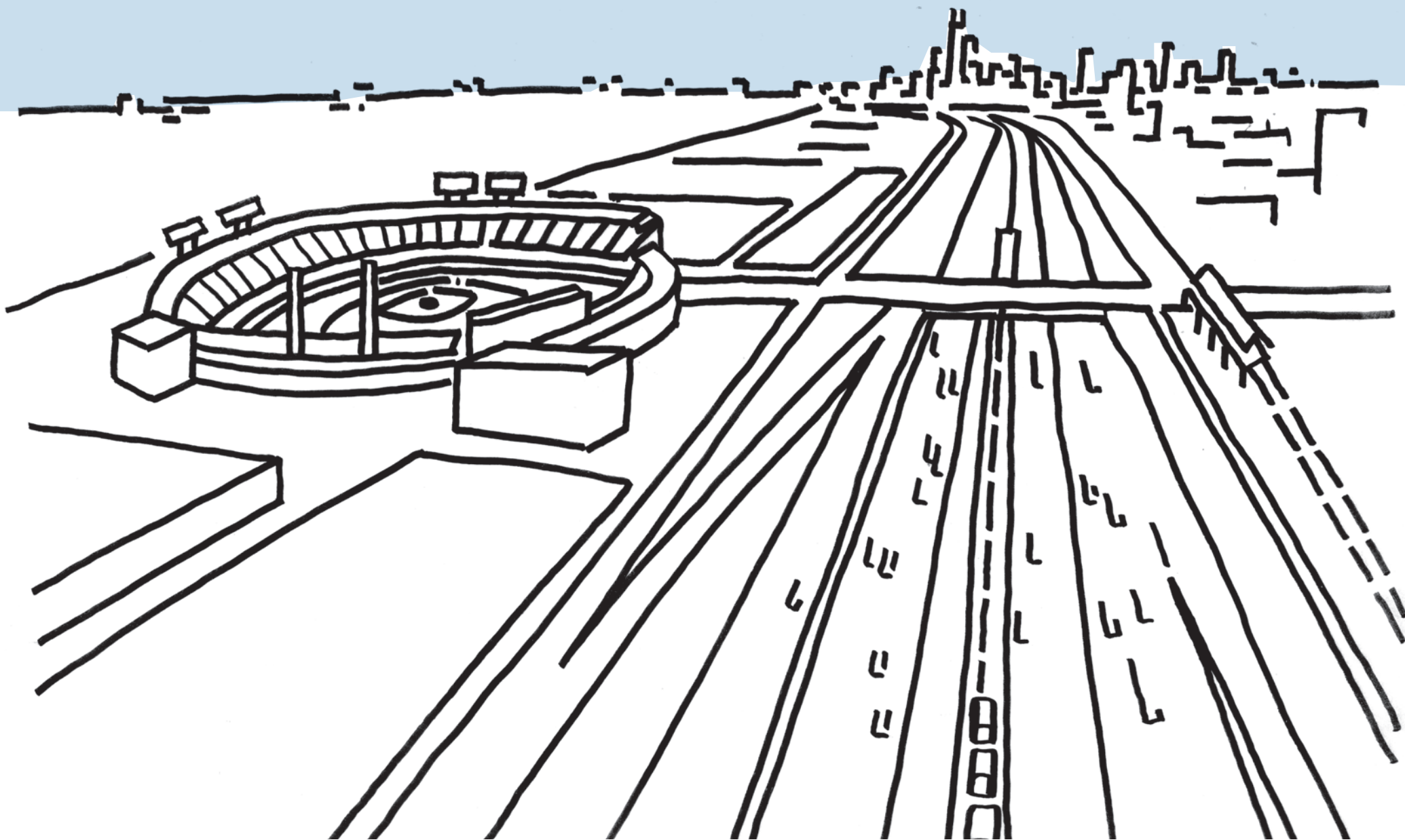
According to agency records, the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA) carries nearly \$400 million in debt on Rate Field and Soldier Field. If we lose the teams, taxpayers are still on the hook. In years when rent and fees from sports leases fall short, the City of Chicago is obligated to make up the difference from hotel tax revenues.

Generational development opportunity

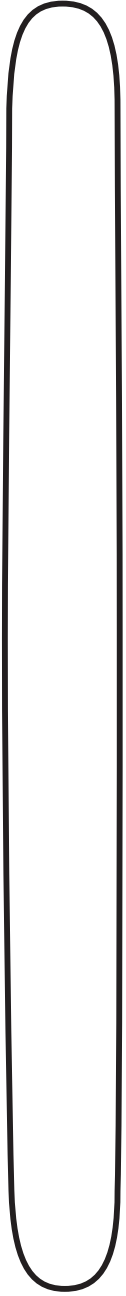
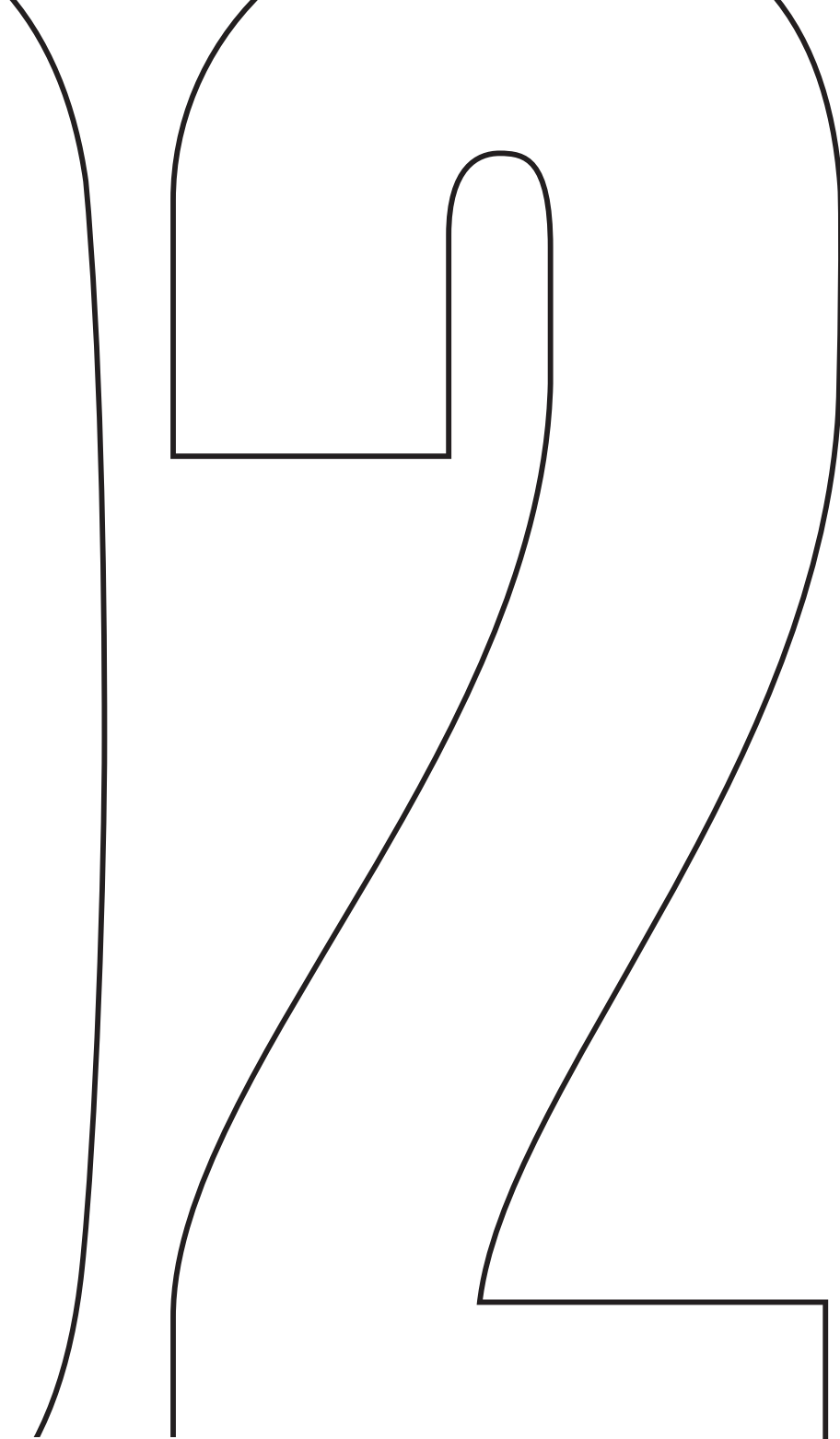
The sites involved—Soldier Field and the Museum Campus, Rate Field, The 78, and the United Center campus—are major parcels whose development will determine how their surrounding neighborhoods evolve for the next several decades. The transit lines and stations we build or don't build, the housing we enable or limit in these places, the commercial corridors we create or abandon, all of it flows, in very large part, from these stadium decisions.

Future opportunities

Women's professional basketball, soccer, and hockey leagues are expanding rapidly, and the teams are seeking to control their own venues. Esports (multi-player video game competitions) require purpose-built facilities. Major international sporting events choose cities based on infrastructure quality and execution capability. These opportunities don't go to cities without modern stadiums and proven partnership models. The decisions we make now demonstrate whether Chicago can build for the future or confirm suspicions that we are straining to sustain our position.



SECTION



The Chicago Model

Stadium development in Chicago has followed a familiar flawed pattern. Teams propose facilities. Cities evaluate costs and benefits. Communities negotiate mitigation measures. We focus on the stadium itself—its revenue potential, its amenities.

The Chicago Model offers a different approach where stadium development and community development are inseparable and planned together from the start. To understand why this matters and where it fits in the evolution of American stadium development, we first examine how stadium districts have been conceived in the past, then we analyze why urban versions like Wrigley Field and its surrounds work well. Finally, we detail the design principles that underpin thriving stadium-anchored communities.

How Stadium Development Evolved

American stadiums have moved through distinct chapters, each reflecting how people lived, how cities evolved, and how teams made money. Understanding this evolution helps explain where The Chicago Model fits and why it represents the next stage.

Urban Stadiums (1900s-1930s)

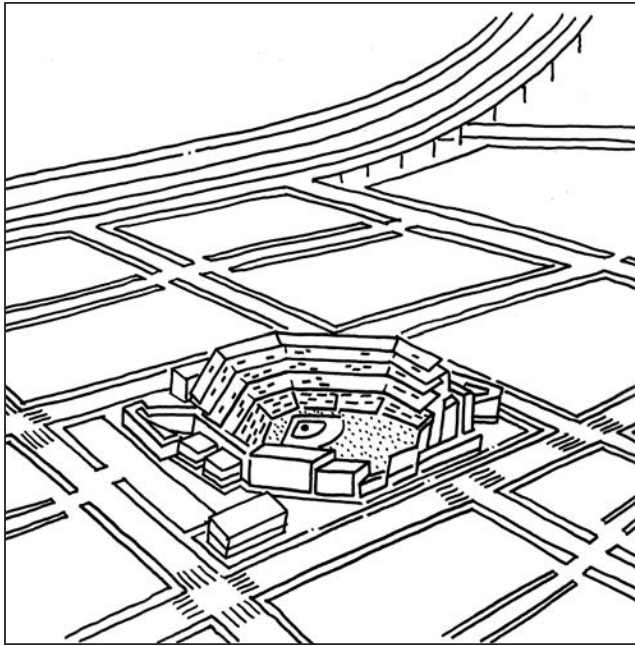
In the beginning, stadiums were city buildings. Wrigley Field, Fenway Park, Forbes Field, and the original Yankee Stadium occupied regular blocks in workaday neighborhoods. Fans arrived by transit or walking. Teams depended on gate receipts. The stadium served its purpose on game days while the surrounding neighborhood went about its business.

Stadium Islands (1950s-1990s)

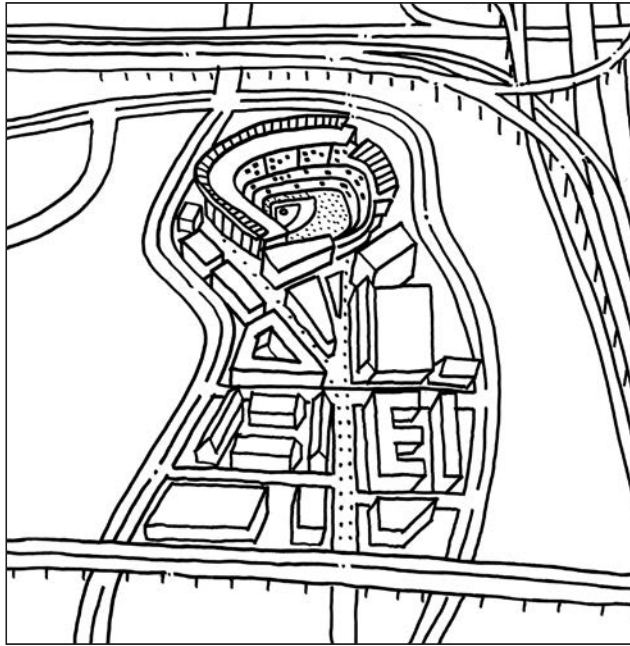
The post-War period changed everything. As Americans moved to suburbs and reorganized around automobiles, stadiums followed suit. The **stadium island** emerged: new facilities surrounded by vast parking lots, cut off from neighborhoods, accessed primarily by car. These venues adopted similar designs because they accommodated multiple sports and, increasingly, functioned as television soundstages. Broadcast revenue was becoming the real business of professional sports. Stadium as TV studio mattered more than stadium as place. This model dominated for decades. Cities accepted isolation as the price of modern facilities.

Entertainment Districts (2010s-present)

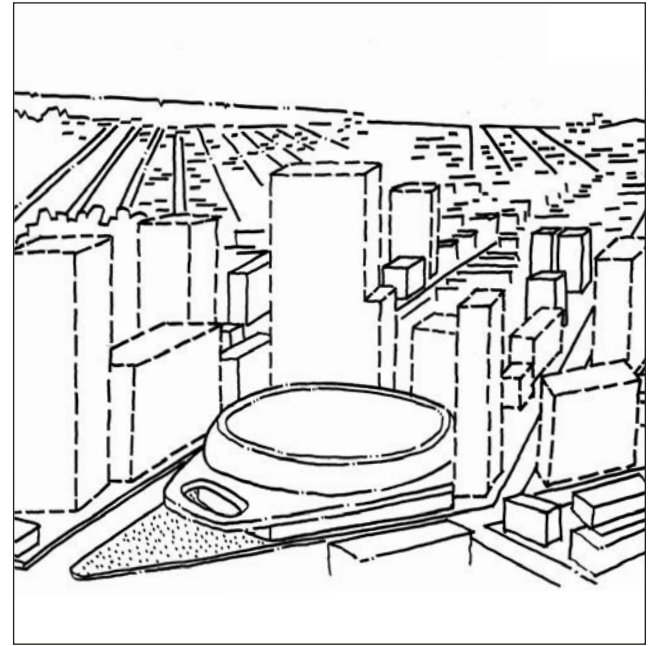
Recent decades have brought another shift. The splashy arrival of Camden Yards in Baltimore undoubtedly rekindled a general interest in more singular, place-based stadium designs. But when broadcast rights began splintering, teams really started paying more attention to the in-person game day experience. They wanted to capture every dollar fans spent from arrival to departure. The **stadium as mall** emerged: teams controlling entire entertainment districts with restaurants, bars, and hotels. Better still, these privately held developments generate income that falls outside league revenue-sharing formulas.



Stadium Island



Stadium as Mall



Stadium as Urban Anchor



Rate Field, Chicago



The Battery, Atlanta



Barclays Center, New York City

SECTION 02 The Chicago Model

The Battery Atlanta and Truist Park, home of the Braves, exemplifies this entertainment district model and has become the template teams nationwide have been emulating. When the team relocated from downtown Atlanta to suburban Cobb County in 2017, they developed 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use space they would own and operate. The result is a year-round destination with more than 60 restaurants and retailers, hotels, apartments, office spaces, entertainment venues, and several parking garages generating revenue 365 days a year, not just during baseball season. Financially, it's been enormously successful for the team. The development creates real activity and vitality.

But The Battery Atlanta model has important limitations for dense legacy cities like Chicago. It works in suburban greenfield locations where a single developer can acquire large parcels, control comprehensive development, and not be required to manage impacts on surrounding areas. The Braves owned the land and could plan the entire district around their interests. In urban areas with existing neighborhoods, established street grids and transit infrastructure, myriad property owners, and layers of community stakeholders, this approach doesn't translate. Large single-owner developments can feel exclusive rather than welcoming, manufactured rather than organic, separated from surrounding communities by ownership boundaries rather than integrated into the city.

More fundamentally, The Battery Atlanta model optimizes for team revenue, not neighborhood vitality. That's not a criticism; it's simply what it is. Teams control these developments because control generates revenue and revenue is how they are measuring success. But cities should measure success differently:

Does the stadium serve residents beyond ticket holders?

Does it strengthen surrounding neighborhoods?

Does it create public value commensurate with its public investment?

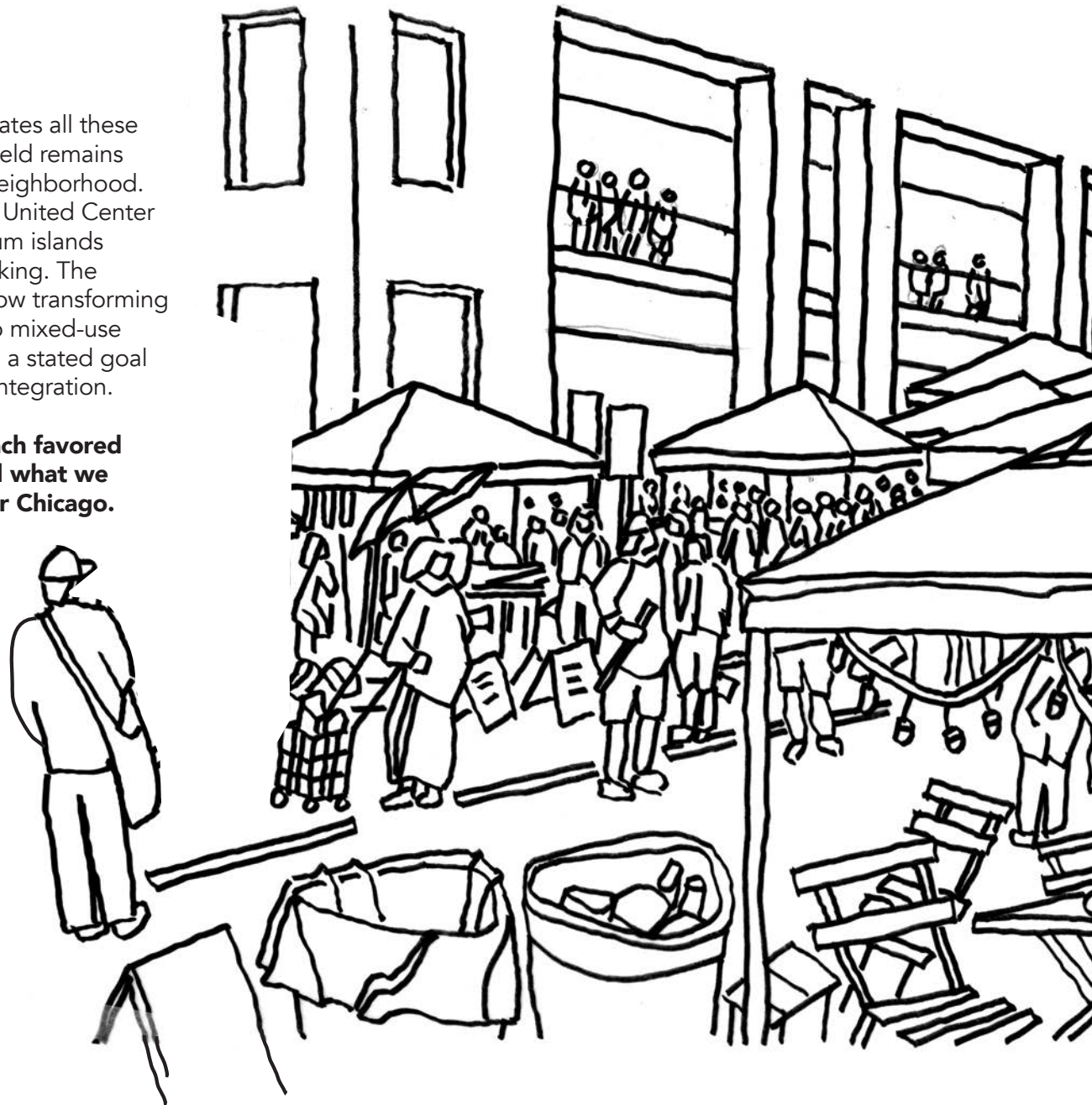
The Chicago Model acknowledges what works about The Battery Atlanta approach—year-round activation, mixed-use development, comprehensive planning—but with a preference to adapt it for dense urban contexts where public infrastructure investment should catalyze broader neighborhood development, not just team-controlled districts.

Emerging Urban Integration (2010s-present)

Recognizing the ready-made energy and infrastructure offered by cities, teams are also now partnering on urban integration. Brooklyn treated Barclays Center as urban infill within an existing neighborhood rather than a singular destination development. San Francisco's Oracle Park sits alongside the new Mission Rock development that's sprouting up on a formerly industrial waterfront site. These aren't replicas of team-controlled entertainment districts; they're attempts at authentic neighborhood integration where the stadium is one element in a comprehensively planned community.

Chicago demonstrates all these models. Wrigley Field remains embedded in its neighborhood. Rate Field and the United Center are currently stadium islands surrounded by parking. The United Center is now transforming its parking lots into mixed-use development, with a stated goal of creating urban integration.

This is the approach favored for the future and what we are advocating for Chicago.

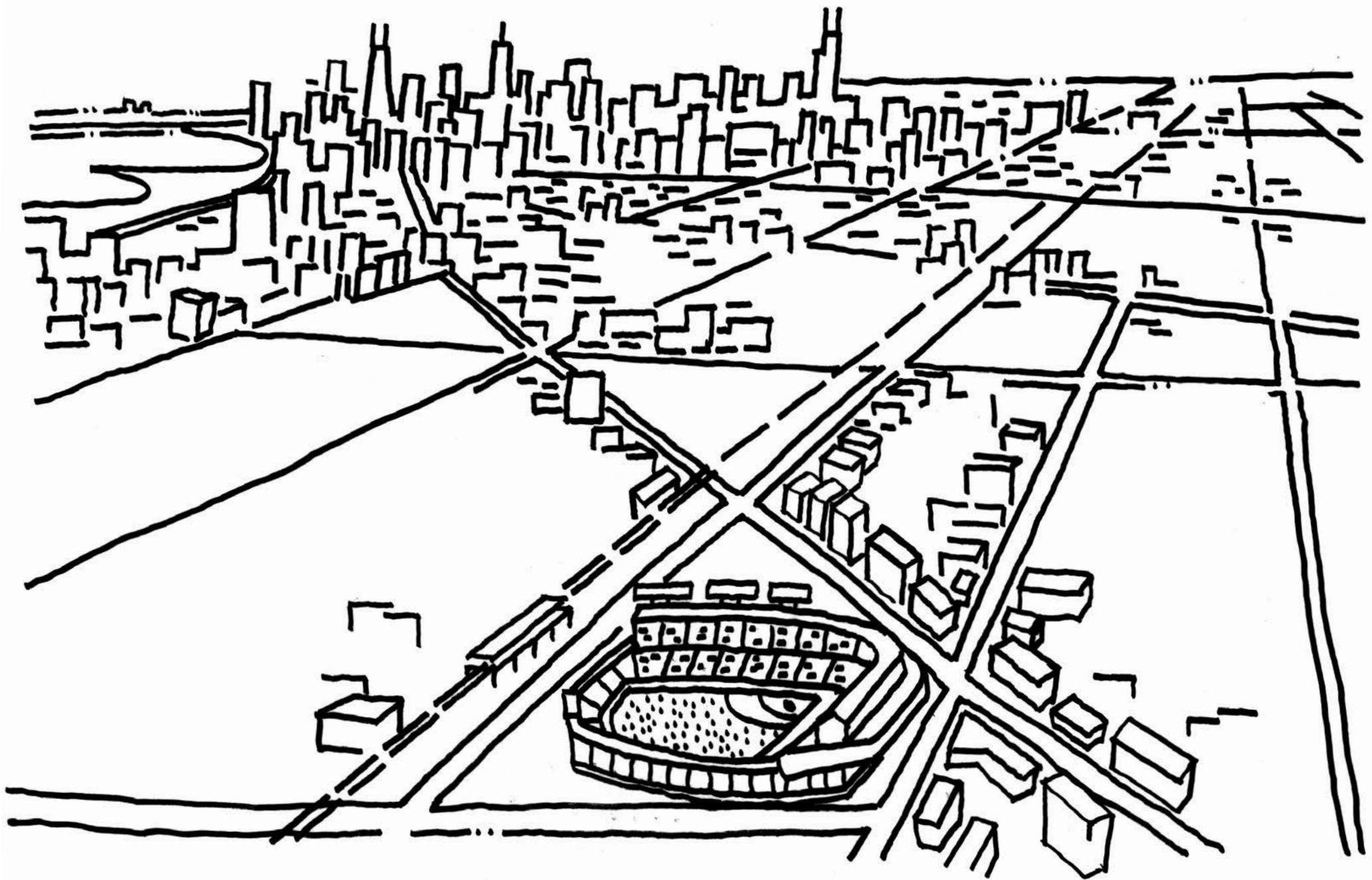


Wrigley Field and Lakeview: The Model in Practice

We looked at stadium projects across the country for an approach that would work in Chicago. And we found a local example among others: Wrigley Field. But to really understand Wrigley, you have to consider its relationship to the surrounding Lakeview neighborhood.

Streets run directly to the stadium entrance. Crowds gather on Waveland and Sheffield before first pitch, the energy building as game time approaches. Tourists photograph the marquee in winter when there's no baseball for months. Neighbors grab drinks at Murphy's Bleachers whether there's a game or not. While it's surely not for everyone, more than 5,000 people live in Wrigleyville year-round because they do find it a desirable neighborhood, not because their lives require proximity to the ballpark.

On the 270-plus days without baseball, restaurants remain busy, shops stay open, life continues. The neighborhood has its own rhythm independent of the game schedule. When the Cubs play, game days amplify energy that already exists. Much of the time, you can't tell where the ballpark crowd ends and the neighborhood bustle begins. That blurred boundary, that seamless integration, is the point.



SECTION 02 The Chicago Model

This relationship defines
The Chicago Model: **Teams we love, playing in stadiums we love, anchoring communities we love.**

Each element depends on the others. A competitive team in an inadequate facility struggles to reach its potential. An excellent stadium isolated from the city creates limited value and likely only on game days. A team the neighbors merely tolerate is far from optimal. Success requires all three working together.

Stadium discussions typically focus on facility amenities and revenue generation. Cities evaluate costs and projected economic impacts. Communities negotiate traffic mitigation and job programs. Most stadium development treats the facility as the primary concern, with surrounding development as secondary.

The Chicago Model makes community central to stadium development. It plans stadium and neighborhood together from the start, aiming to create places where people choose to live, work, and spend time regardless of game schedules. The stadium and team energize and uplift the community. The community provides context and vitality for the stadium, and cheers on the team. This bond creates value neither could generate alone.



Six Principles of The Chicago Model

Our analysis reveals six design principles that work together to create thriving stadium-anchored communities through a neighborhood development and city planning lens. These strategies overlap and reinforce each other. Transit enables density. Density supports walkability. Walkability desires connectivity, which helps to animate public spaces. Public spaces foster community. Community deepens over time. Each principle matters and creates value, and their interplay results in community vitality.

These aren't revolutionary concepts but they are proven tenets for urban transit-oriented developments. The insight is recognizing that sports stadiums can anchor and activate a city neighborhood rather than stand in isolation.

Principle 1

Transit First and Always

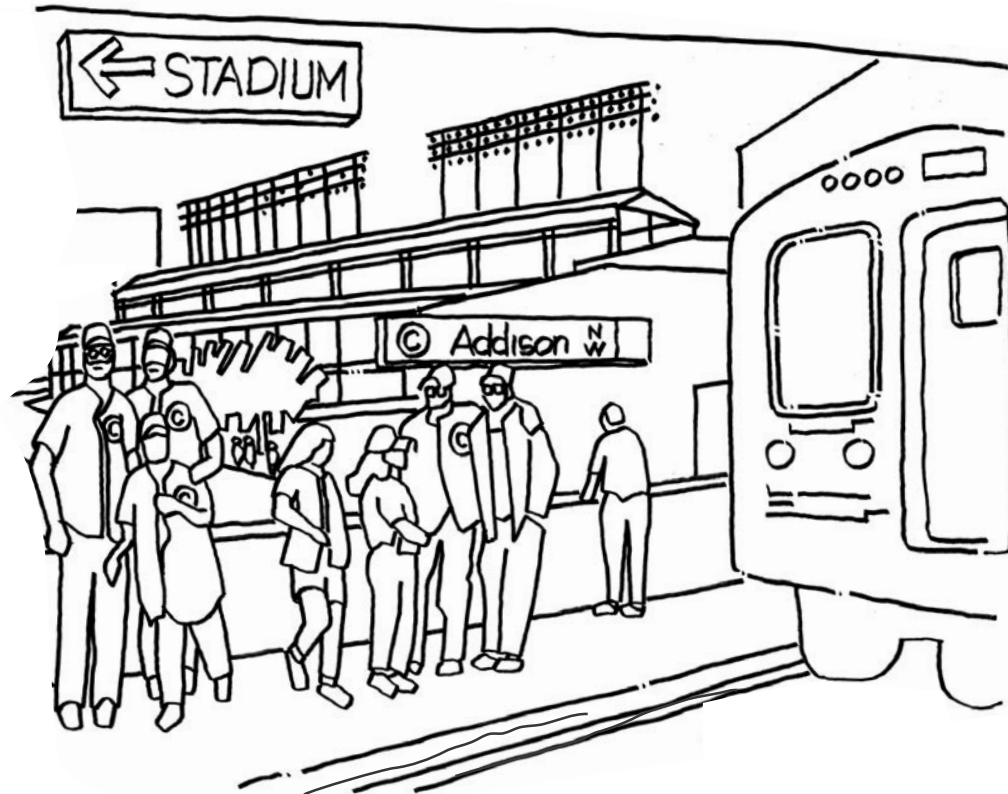
Transit access determines whether stadiums function as public assets or exclusive destinations. Transit shapes who can attend games, how surrounding areas develop, and whether stadium investments benefit the whole city or only those with cars.

The evidence is clear: United Center's parking demand dropped from 85% to 45% of on-site capacity as rideshare and other transit options expanded. The facility was built with 6,500 parking spaces but now needs only 3,000-4,100, depending on the popularity of a given event. As transportation options diversified, more people chose alternatives to driving. The pattern holds across all large venues: better transit means less parking dependency.

Locating facilities near existing transit infrastructure is a first best move. Planning for transit from the start, rather than treating it as an afterthought, makes the

difference between integration and isolation. Transit makes the density of vibrant mixed-used districts work. The key is designing for multiple modes—rail, bus, bike, pedestrian—and building in flexibility for future improvements. Today's rideshare might become tomorrow's autonomous shuttles, but the fundamental need for non-car access remains constant.

Parking will remain necessary for some, but it shouldn't dominate. Design the parking garages that are deemed necessary with active ground floors to maintain a more dynamic public realm and with generous floor-to-ceiling heights to aid future conversion to other uses. Surface lots should not be on the scale of superblocks but instead subdivided into sizes that connect to the surrounding street grid; when future redevelopment of the lots does come, this early move makes it much more likely that whatever is built will fit nicely into a lively urban district plan.



Principle 2

Density Changes Everything



Density separates urban stadiums from stadiums that happen to be in cities. It's the difference between a facility surrounded by empty space and a venue sewn into a living neighborhood. Density creates activity that makes places feel safe, welcoming, and alive—not just on game days but every day.

The key is mixed uses at different scales working together. Apartments above bars provide patrons. Offices next to restaurants generate weekday activity. Parks near shopping streets offer respite and opportunities to connect. Each use serves a purpose, and none dominates. Not every person does the same thing, but every person contributes to the overall street life. This diversity means the neighborhood functions well at different times for different reasons. Game days add to the existing baseline energy rather than creating all the energy.

Housing matters most for creating real neighborhoods. Residents put down roots, know their community, and give care to local issues and local property in ways that commuters and visitors don't. They're invested in making the neighborhood work because they live there. Without housing, stadium districts become business zones that sit empty on non-game days and after hours. With housing, they stay alive because people are always coming and going.

Traditional urban forms support this density best. Regular street patterns and blocks of standard width and depth make development straightforward. Windows overlooking sidewalks provide natural surveillance. Ground floors designed for retail or other active uses ensure the street stays lively. Sidewalks and alleys cede space for deliveries and service providers that enable buildings to function. These elements are proven approaches that work; they've been tested for generations.

Principle 3

Walkability as Foundation



Urban stadiums succeed when walking to them is part of the experience. This distinguishes city stadiums from suburban facilities where arrival is mere logistics. The journey through an urban neighborhood—stopping for drinks, running into friends, joining growing crowds—builds anticipation and extends the experience beyond the venue itself.

True walkability requires more than sidewalks. It needs interesting storefronts that give people reasons to slow down and look around. Shade trees for comfort. Good lighting for safety and visibility. Places to rest because not everyone moves at the same pace. Protection from traffic so walking is not anxiety-inducing. Destinations worth reaching. Each element matters, and together they determine whether people choose to walk or default to driving.

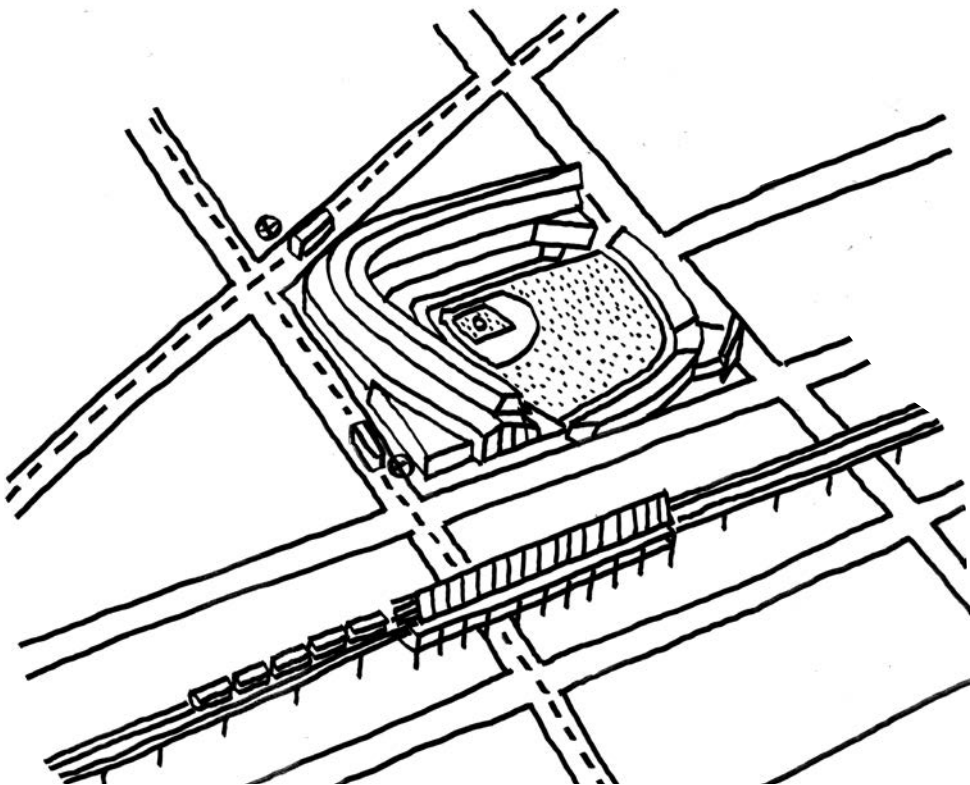
Stadium neighborhoods must connect seamlessly to adjacent areas. Can someone walk to the stadium from a neighborhood a mile away and have a pleasant journey? Are there clear routes to the stadium from transit stops? Do sidewalks continue in all directions, or do they dead-end at parking lots and highways? The goal is integration into the larger city, not creating a walkable island surrounded by car infrastructure.

Chicago's weather demands realistic design. People walk year-round to work, school, and transit despite cold winters and hot summers. Design for that reality with weather protection, cleared paths in winter, and warming spaces. Make walking pleasant enough that people choose it over driving even when conditions aren't ideal.

Walkable neighborhoods create the spontaneous encounters that define urban life: the chance meetings, impromptu gatherings, and sense of belonging that make people choose city living.

Principle 4

Connection not Isolation



Successful stadium neighborhoods integrate into the existing city rather than stand apart from it. This sounds simple but requires overcoming significant challenges. Many of Chicago's potential stadium sites are former industrial areas that were intentionally separated from residential neighborhoods. Another is part of a lakefront park, boxed in by water and one of the city's busiest streets. Highways, rail lines, and superblocks created barriers that still exist. Negotiating over, under, and through these barriers so the new development sites can unite with the city beyond them requires deliberate effort and substantial financial investment.

Start by restoring the street grid wherever possible. While Chicago's traditional grid may not be glamorous, it's very useful and durable. It provides locations for bus stops and bike racks and street trees. It leaves room for front stoops and building entrances. Space for running utilities underground. Logical service routes for deliveries and trash collection. The grid creates the framework for everything else to function.

Connection means thinking in all directions simultaneously. How do neighbors to the north access new amenities? Can businesses to the south lure extra customers from the game day foot traffic? Do communities to the east and west have pathways through the site, or does the stadium create a new barrier? These questions matter because effective connection spreads benefits throughout surrounding areas rather than concentrating them in one location. A well-connected stadium neighborhood becomes a hub that nearby areas can access and benefit from.

Stadium benefits—energy, visitors, economic activity—should flow naturally into surrounding neighborhoods rather than staying contained within the stadium area. When only ticket holders can access or enjoy these benefits, the public's investment doesn't serve the public. The goal is creating value that spreads outward to surrounding communities.

Principle 5

Keep Public Spaces for Everyone



The spaces between buildings are where city life happens. Around stadiums, crowds of people become part of the show. The gathering, the anticipation, the energy of thousands converging on one place, this is part of what makes stadium neighborhoods compelling. But spaces designed to welcome these crowds must remain genuinely public, accessible to everyone regardless of whether they're attending games.

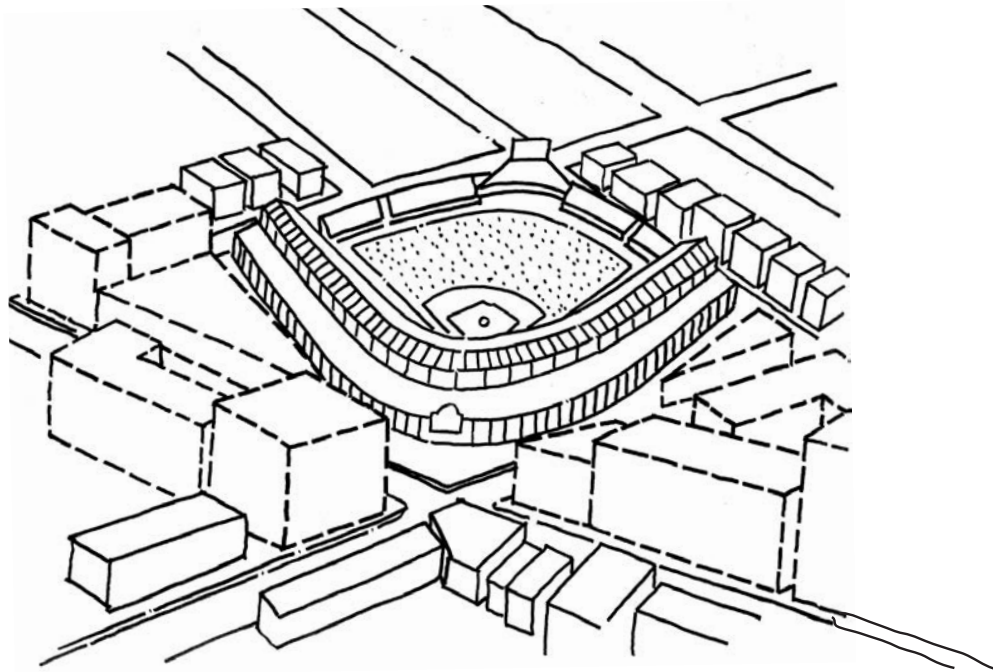
Real public spaces serve multiple users simultaneously without conflict. Office workers eat lunch on benches while kids play nearby and tourists stop to rest. Fans gather before games while residents walk through on their way home. All these uses coexist because the space is designed for people in general, not for a specific type of user on a special day. This requires thoughtful design, spaces that function for both large groups and individuals, features that accommodate both active play and contemplation.

The best public spaces also accept new uses. People invent their own activities in ways an urban planner cannot fully anticipate. Pick-up games appear. Pop-up markets emerge. Neighborhood gatherings arise spontaneously. These organic activities make spaces feel alive and owned by the community rather than managed by authorities. You can't plan for every use, but you can create conditions where new uses are more possible—flexible spaces, minimal restrictions, infrastructure that accommodates improvisation.

The test of a truly public space is simple: can you walk through it without spending money and feel welcome? If spaces only accommodate consumers, they're outdoor shopping malls with stadium views, not public space. The stadium area should invite everyone to be part of the energy, whether they can afford tickets or not.

Principle 6

Patience for Generational Development



Great stadium neighborhoods emerge slowly through accumulated memories, adaptations, and periods of growth. Wrigley Field and Lakeview's century-long evolution demonstrates this. The neighborhood didn't appear fully formed. Rather, it developed through thousands of decisions by property owners, business operators, and residents over decades. This timeline frustrates people accustomed to grand openings and ribbon cuttings, but real neighborhoods can't be rushed.

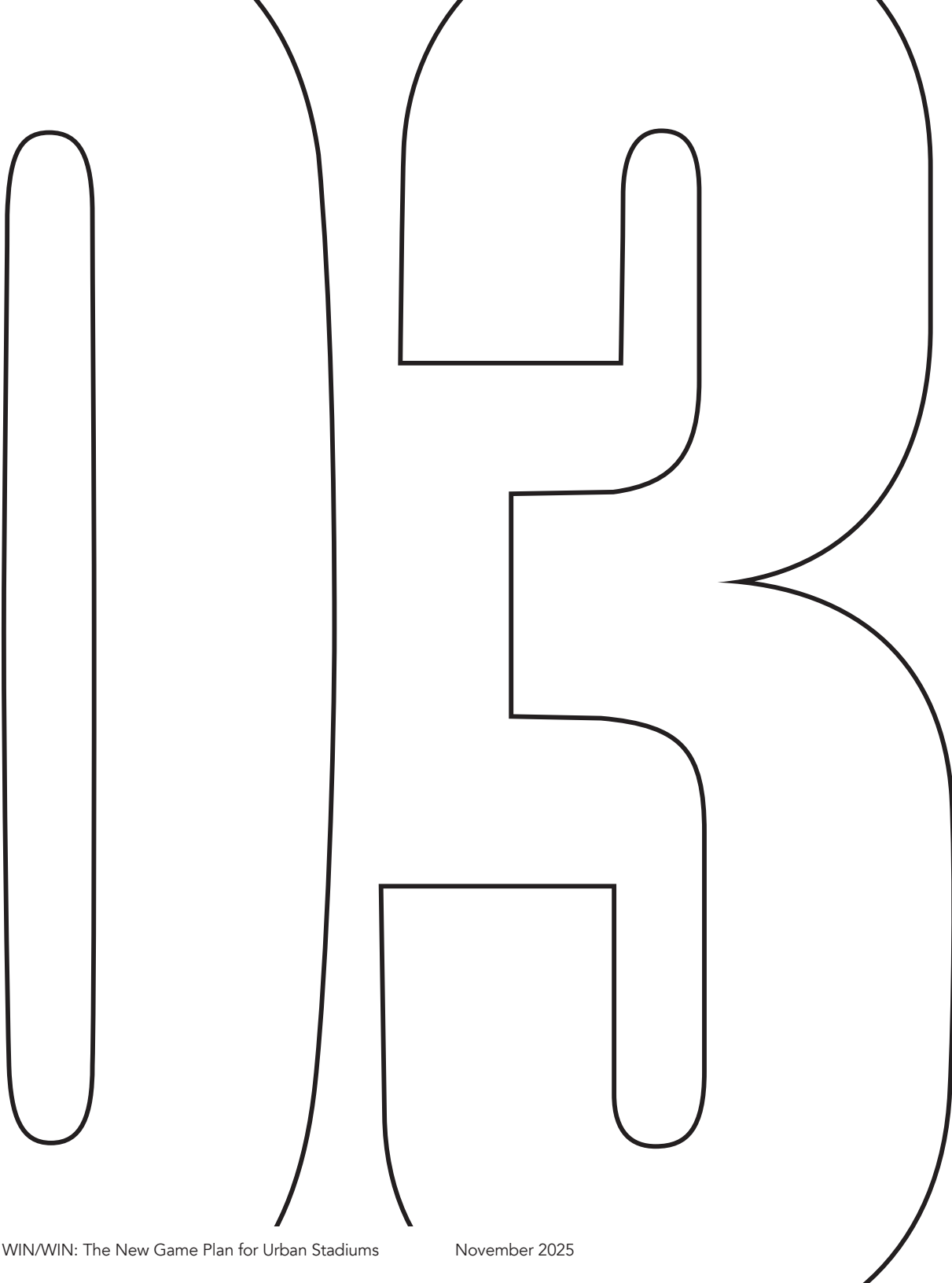
The implication is that stadium development must accommodate change from the start. Stadiums will need renovation, investment, expansion, and adaptation over their lifetimes. This must be acknowledged by owners and the public, and it must be planned for. The stadium that opens in 2030 won't look or function the same in 2080. Create flexibility rather than locking in today's solutions for tomorrow's problems. Environmental and accessibility standards should be foundational rather than expensive retrofits

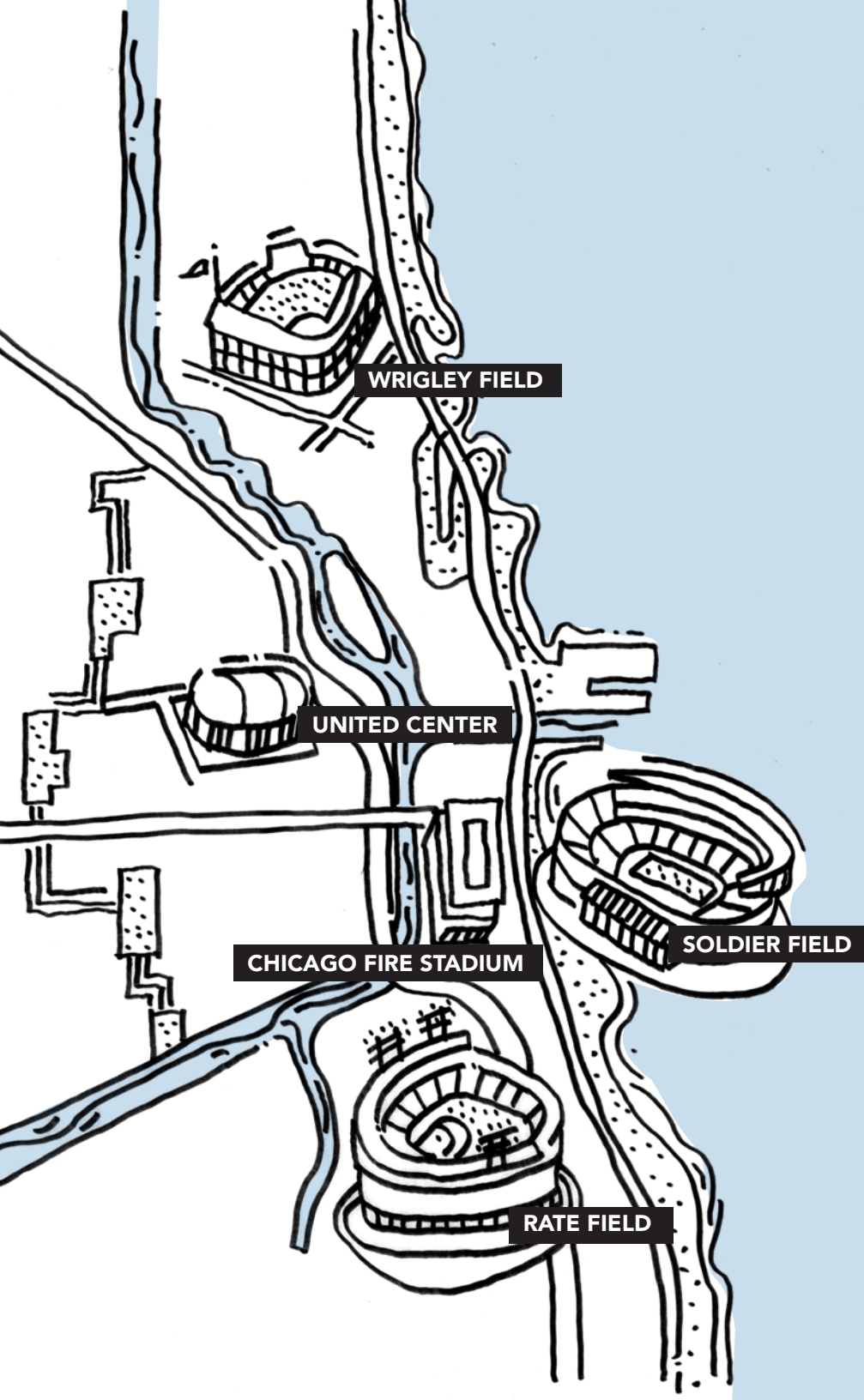
added later. The infrastructure should be overbuilt rather than sized precisely to current needs.

Communities and stadiums require different success metrics that operate on different timelines. Teams track revenue, attendance, and consumer behavior measured in seasons. These matter for team operations, but they don't tell you whether the neighborhood is succeeding. Another set of metrics should be used by local authorities: Are people choosing to live there? Are businesses thriving beyond game days? Are property values rising sustainably rather than through speculation? Are long-term residents staying and benefiting, or are they being displaced? These questions take years to answer honestly.

Patient development requires sustained commitment through political cycles and leadership changes. Each generation should leave these places better than they found them, building on rather than replacing what came before.

SECTION





Applying the Model to Chicago Sites

The Chicago Model moves from theory to practice when applied to specific locations. Each of Chicago's teams currently pursuing new stadiums or stadium-adjacent development opportunities presents distinct challenges and possibilities. Some involve transforming existing facilities surrounded by parking lots into mixed-use neighborhoods. Others require building new communities on vacant land or former industrial sites.

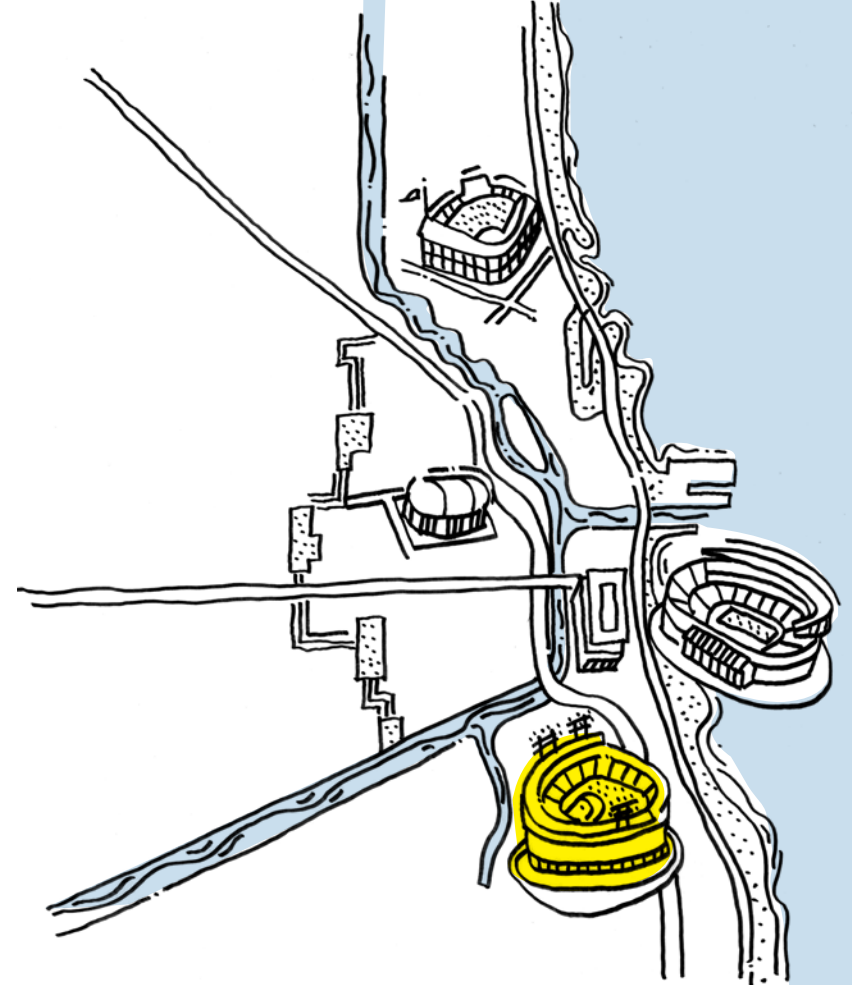
The following aren't prescriptive plans. They're demonstrations of how City-led development changes the questions we ask. Rather than starting with "how do we accommodate this stadium?," we begin with "what kind of neighborhood should exist here in 10, 25, even 50 years?" The stadium becomes one element in a comprehensive development strategy, not the organizing principle for everything around it.

Site 1

Bridgeport and Rate Field

THE CHALLENGE

Rate Field itself is generally considered a fine stadium. The surrounding surface lots offer little more than game day service and they do not foster economic development in the area. Although both the stadium and lots are owned by the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA), the White Sox have exclusive rights to the parking. At lease expiration in 2029, either through a negotiated agreement or through a re-imagined set of development authority powers for ISFA, there is an opportunity to rethink the land use around the stadium and transform this underperforming area into a bustling mixed-use neighborhood. Thoughtful design could build on the existing nearby vibrancy of Bridgeport and make it an even more desirable community.



THE SITE

70-plus acres in South Side Bridgeport, with Rate Field surrounded by surface parking lots. 35th Street is the primary roadway through the property. Roughly bounded by 33rd Street, Dan Ryan Expressway, 38th Street, and freight rail lines on raised embankments. Armour Square Park and the Wentworth Gardens Chicago Housing Authority complex abut the site. CTA Red Line and Metra Rock Island stations at 35th Street are immediately east of the site. This area is steeped in baseball history—original Comiskey Park and Armour Field previously occupied the site.



Applying the Principles

PLANNING RESOURCES

There is always a collection of related planning documents to consult. Most resources are publicly available at the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development's website or through a simple web search using the report's proper name.

Resources for this site include:

- Planned Development 464 (PD-464)
- Back of the Yards Quality of Life Plan
- Bridgeport and Canaryville Priorities Plan
- Chinatown Community Vision Plan
- CTA Transit Friendly Development Guide
- Metra Typologies Plan
- Quad Communities Quality of Life Plan

TRANSIT

Well served by transit with Red Line, Metra, and even Green Line stops near 35th Street but physical approach to the stadium grounds is not inviting. Upgrades at 75th Street corridor will bring even more south suburban ridership through Metra's 35th Street station. Celebrating the 35th Street arrival with pedestrian- and bike-friendly upgrades could set the stage for aspirational neighborhood development. Reserved garage parking could be fronted by residential and mixed-use buildings.

DENSITY

Opportunity to rescale surface lots into smaller blocks that line up with surrounding street grids could put the site on track for neighborhood development. Stadium-related entertainment is logical, but the lots also present an opportunity to bring missing services to the area, which community engagement can inform. Taller buildings at the east edge would be well sited for transit and buffer the development from the expressway. Mid-rise buildings would then step down to neighborhood scale.

WALKABILITY

The in-person experience outside the stadium is what's lacking and could be greatly enhanced with the construction of ground level uses that help connect this area to nearby communities.

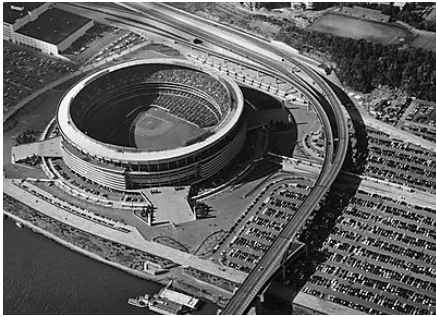
CONNECTION

Link the site to the nearby north and south grid and run new local streets close to the stadium. The big idea some pose: deck over the Dan Ryan Expressway, providing a grand public space that connects the site directly to the communities to the east. Strong precedents exist in other cities and produce tangible economic results and quality of life improvements.

PUBLIC SPACE

All of the aspects of the public space essay in the prior section apply here (see page 28): more intensive uses developed at the site should be connected by an improved public realm that serves multiple uses at different times, allows for new uses and adaptation and change over time, and ultimately fosters vitality on game days and all the other days of the year.

Case Study: Pittsburgh



Three Rivers Stadium (c. 1970)



PNC Park, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates (c. 2016)

BUILD OVER TIME

The rising of Three Rivers Stadium (completed: 1970) on a former junk and service yard in Pittsburgh's North Shore area brought with it a golden age of on-field success by the Steelers and Pirates—six Super Bowl appearances and two World Series appearances in just their first decade playing there. When the building eventually wore out by the turn of the century, the teams elected to rebuild on the hallowed ground.

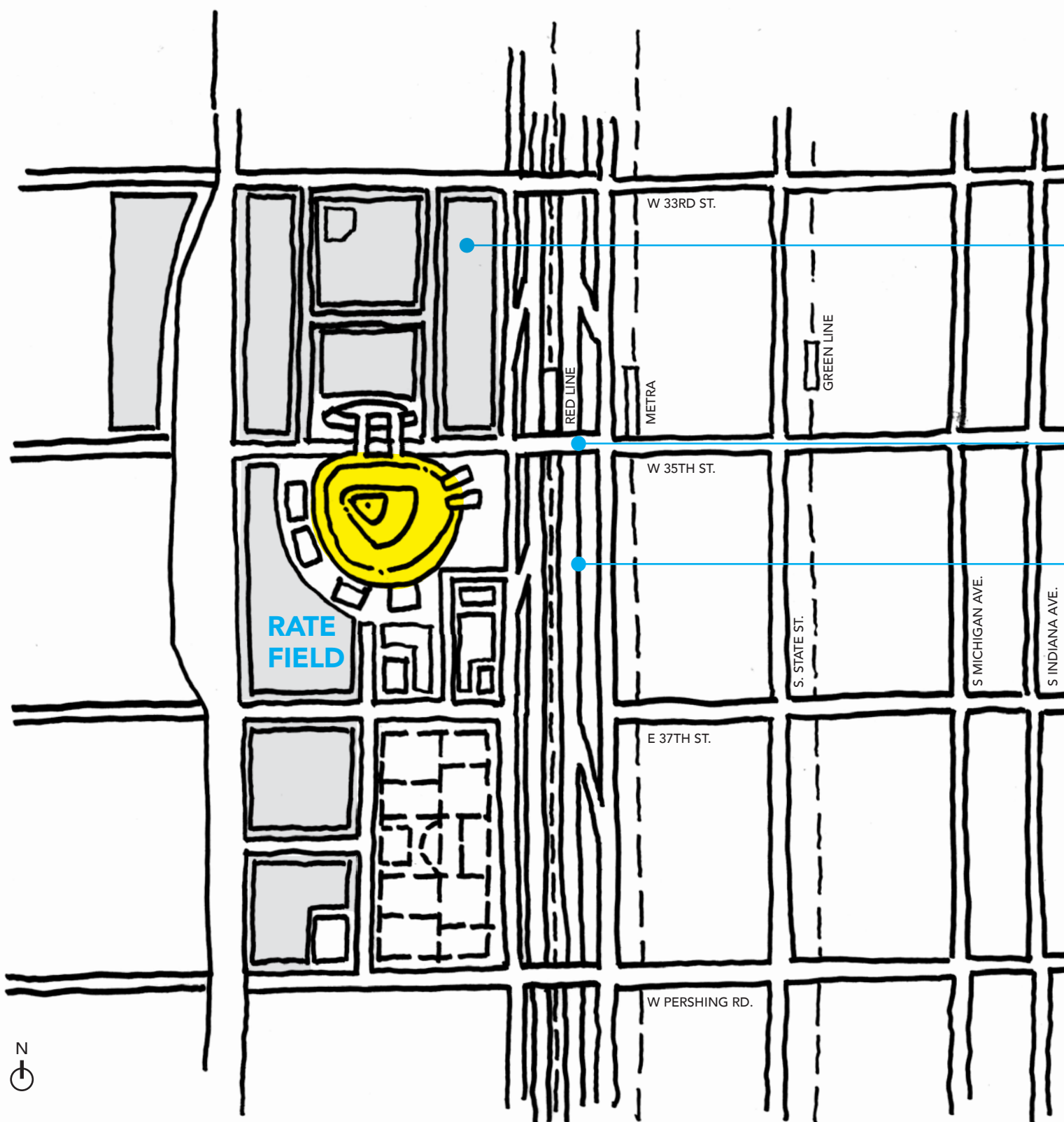
Separate state-of-the-art municipal stadiums were delivered for the Steelers and Pirates in 2001, along with a riverfront park running the length of the site. Two years later, a public-private partnership was inked by the City of Pittsburgh, its Stadium Authority, North Shore Developers, and the two sports teams to establish a long-range infill development plan for the parking lots between the

two stadiums. The first years of redevelopment introduced a parking garage and two office buildings with ground-floor restaurants and retail, all strategically sited to serve the master plan. Decade two brought in a hotel, an outdoor live entertainment venue, more retail and office space, and a mass transit rail connection.

Redevelopment efforts are still ongoing but have already catalyzed other notable building efforts nearby. All the while, the stadiums have received at least half a dozen significant upgrades in the same time span. The success is a testament to the partners' diligent work and clear vision to build back better.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SITE 1: BRIDGEPORT AND RATE FIELD

Ideas are limitless for this publicly owned parcel and a long-range vision essential. With so many transit lines converging nearby, Rate Field could enjoy a remarkable second act. The surface lots are the ideal place to re-imagine how we could surround the stadium with a mix of dense, vibrant uses appropriate for the surrounding scale and community, including some parking. Don't underestimate what a huge opportunity exists here to reconnect and reinvigorate communities in a way that signals important progress to all Chicagoans.



DENSITY

Re-scale surface parking into smaller sized lots that line up with surrounding street grid; Place high-rises along expressway, with mid-rises stepping down into the site.

TRANSIT

Redesign 35th Street Bridge to prioritize arrival on foot or bike and calm vehicular traffic.

CONNECTION

Deck over expressway to make a large public space that serves the stadium and connects site with communities to the east.



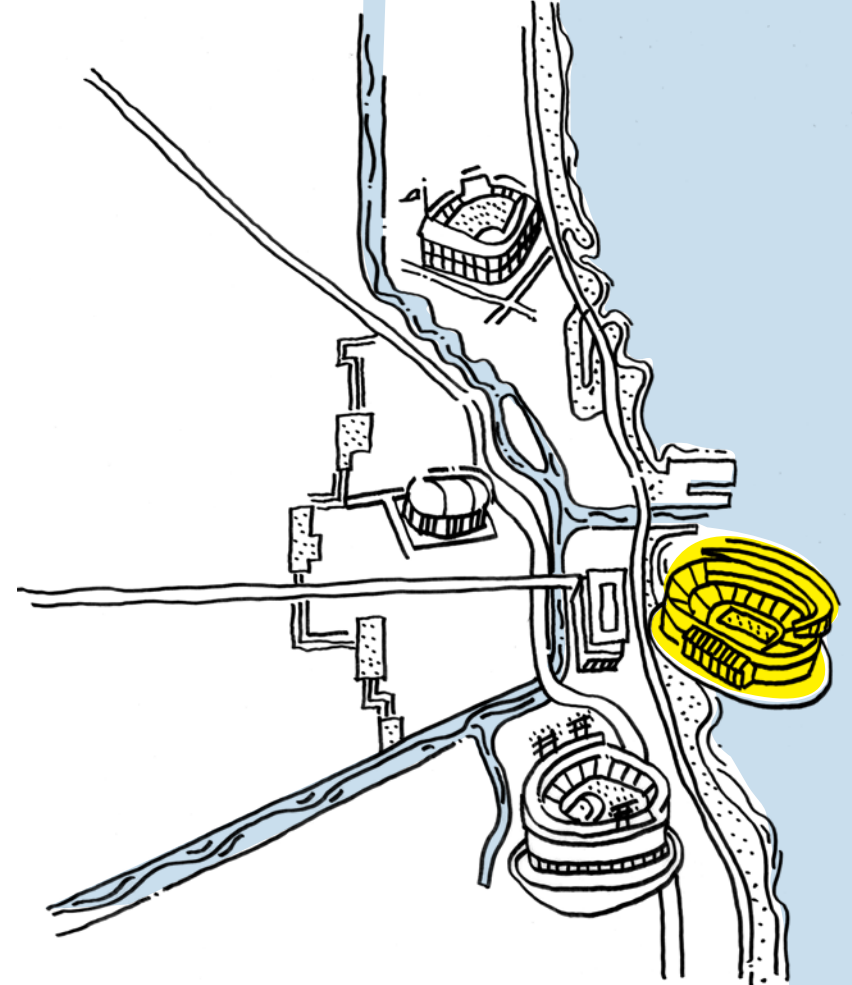
Site 2

Museum Campus and Soldier Field

THE CHALLENGE

If we were starting from scratch, would we put a large stadium inside a public park isolated from its nearest community? Most likely not. It is an awkward fit for The Chicago Model; nonetheless it is the situation we face with the Museum Campus and Soldier Field, and everyone wants to make the best of what many stipulate is an imperfect existing situation.

The Bears have asserted that the updated Soldier Field no longer meets their needs. Reusing or further renovating the stadium is undoubtedly the most environmentally and fiscally responsible solution. Some designs show that a roof and additional seats could be added to the existing structure to meet current expectations for an NFL venue. However, on game days and during big events the site experiences severe constraints for pedestrians, transit, and vehicular access. If Soldier Field were to lose its primary tenant, the public access issues remain and must be addressed through coordinated infrastructure improvements.



THE SITE

57 acres bounded by Roosevelt Road, Lake Michigan, I-55, and DuSable Lake Shore Drive. Contains Soldier Field, three major museums, an outdoor music venue, exhibition hall, public park with nature sanctuaries, and a seasonal harbor. Soldier Field underwent a major renovation in 2003.



Applying the Principles

PLANNING RESOURCES

There is always a collection of related planning documents to consult. Most resources are publicly available at the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development's website or through a simple web search using the report's proper name.

Resources for this site include:

- Planned Developments 778 and 618 (PD-778 and PD-618)
- Central Area Plan 2045
- CTA Transit Friendly Development Guide
- Metra Typologies Plan
- Near South Community Plan
- Where Worlds Connect: A Vision for a Reimagined Museum Campus

TRANSIT

Pedestrian bridges over DuSable Lake Shore Drive could usher Metra users directly to the venue. Extension of the McCormick Place underground busway north to Grant Park/Millennium Park and south to 31st Street could service visitors further away from the site. Accepting water taxi arrivals from Navy Pier, 31st Street Harbor, and other points could further leverage the waterfront setting.

DENSITY

The Obama Presidential Center and Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park will increase Metra Electric ridership. Building on that momentum, intensified development near the 18th Street station deserves fresh consideration, as permanent new construction within the park itself is prohibited.

WALKABILITY

The walk from the campus back to the Loop is a far distance with few comfort stations. Enhancing this pedestrian route so as to de-emphasize car trips to the park should be the goal.

CONNECTION

The City's Central Area Plan 2045 already calls for north-south lakefront path enhancements to better knit together the Museum Campus with Grant Park to the north and Burnham Park to the south. Further development near the 18th Street Metra station could also encourage connection to the neighborhood immediately west of the site.

PUBLIC SPACE

This could be the setting for an incredible celebration of the natural world meeting the city's edge, building on Northerly Island's rewilding and the McCormick Place Bird Sanctuary. Even the stadium itself could allow public tours and use. The campus needs a jolt of Millennium Park's very public inviting ethos.

Case Study: Miami



Then and Now: Joe Robbie Stadium (c. 1987), renovated into Hard Rock Stadium (c. 2016)



KEEP WHAT WORKS, FIX WHAT DOESN'T

The arrival of Joe Robbie Stadium in 1987 not only provided the NFL's Miami Dolphins with a new home but it was also designed to support professional baseball in anticipation of potential MLB expansion to South Florida. The strategy was successful, as the Florida Marlins were established and started playing at the stadium in 1993.

The multi-sport utility required design compromises, with sideline seats far from the football playing field and outfield bleacher seats far from the baseball diamond. The searing summer heat proved too much, so the Marlins elected to play most home games at night. Still, the stadium hosted more than its fair share of high-profile events, including soccer, tennis, and auto racing contests, music concerts, the annual Orange Bowl, as well as home games for the University of Miami football team.

By 2012, though, the (now named) Miami Marlins had decamped to its own purpose-built facility.

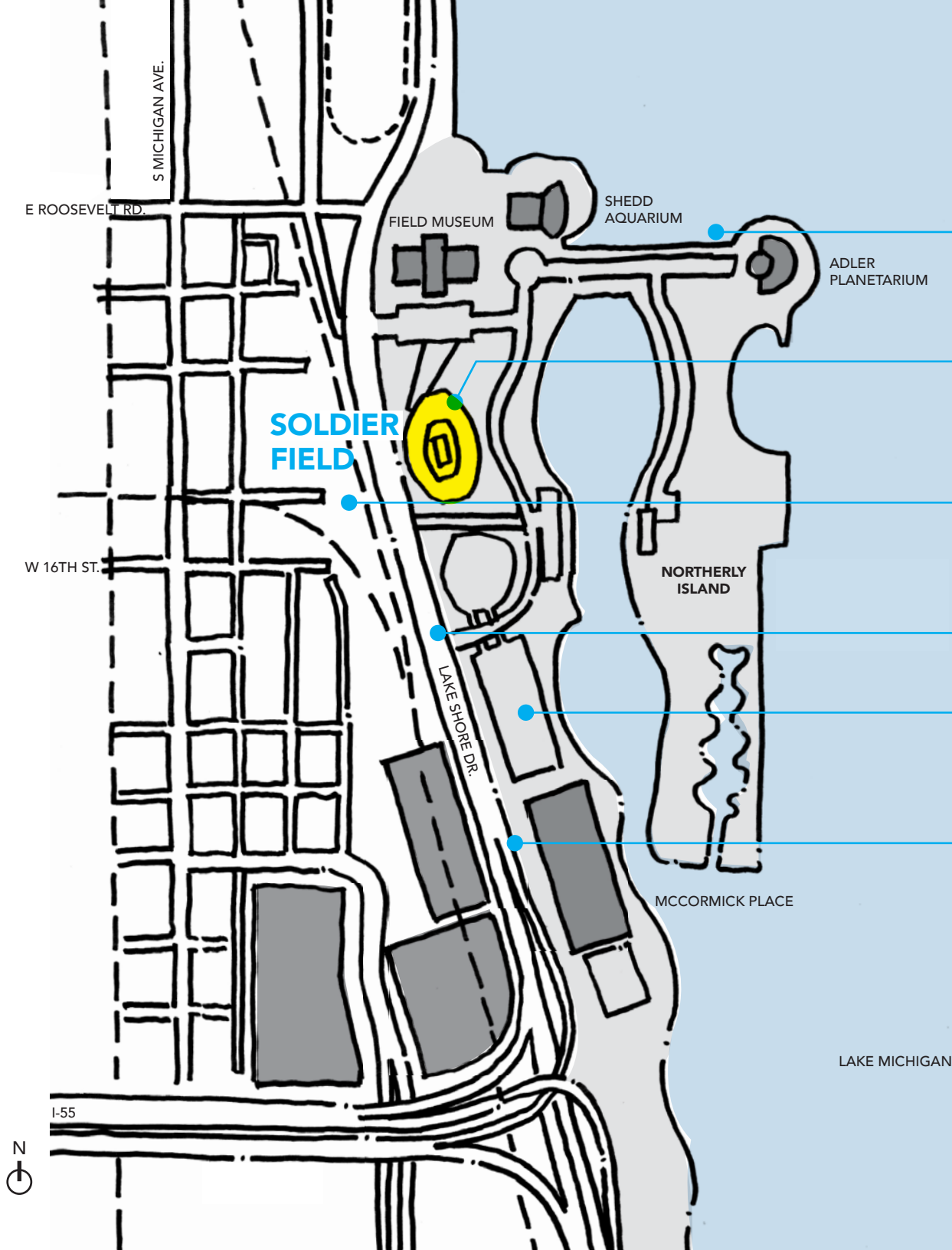
A \$350 million renovation of Joe Robbie began in winter 2015, paused for the Dolphins' 2015-16 season, and then resumed work, completing in time for the next football season. Concourses were widened, luxury amenities and jumbo video screens introduced, and entire sections of the stands rebuilt to bring fans closer to the sidelines but still reconfigurable to meet international soccer standards. A large open-air canopy was also added to provide weather protection for fans in the upper decks. Seating was reduced from 75,000 to 65,000 and the facility successfully relaunched as Hard Rock Stadium.

The reborn stadium played host to the Super Bowl LIV in winter 2020 and soon will be the site of seven FIFA World Cup '26 matches this summer.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SITE 2: MUSEUM CAMPUS AND SOLDIER FIELD

If executed with ingenuity, a modern stadium or festival grounds in a well-functioning park would be a one-of-a-kind experience few cities could rival.

One must ask: has every option really been exhausted?



TRANSIT

Improve multi-modal site access with water taxi service.

PATIENCE

Consider ways to enhance stadium with a retrofitted roof or with a partial demolition and reconfiguration project.

DENSITY

Consider the merits of more intense development along the west edge of the site.

TRANSIT

Improve site access with an expanded bridge or deck over DuSable Lake Shore Drive.

PUBLIC SPACE

The quality of the park's open space is also critical infrastructure. Capital upgrades here are smart investments.

TRANSIT

Improve multi-modal site access with expanded service via McCormick Place underground busway.

Site 3

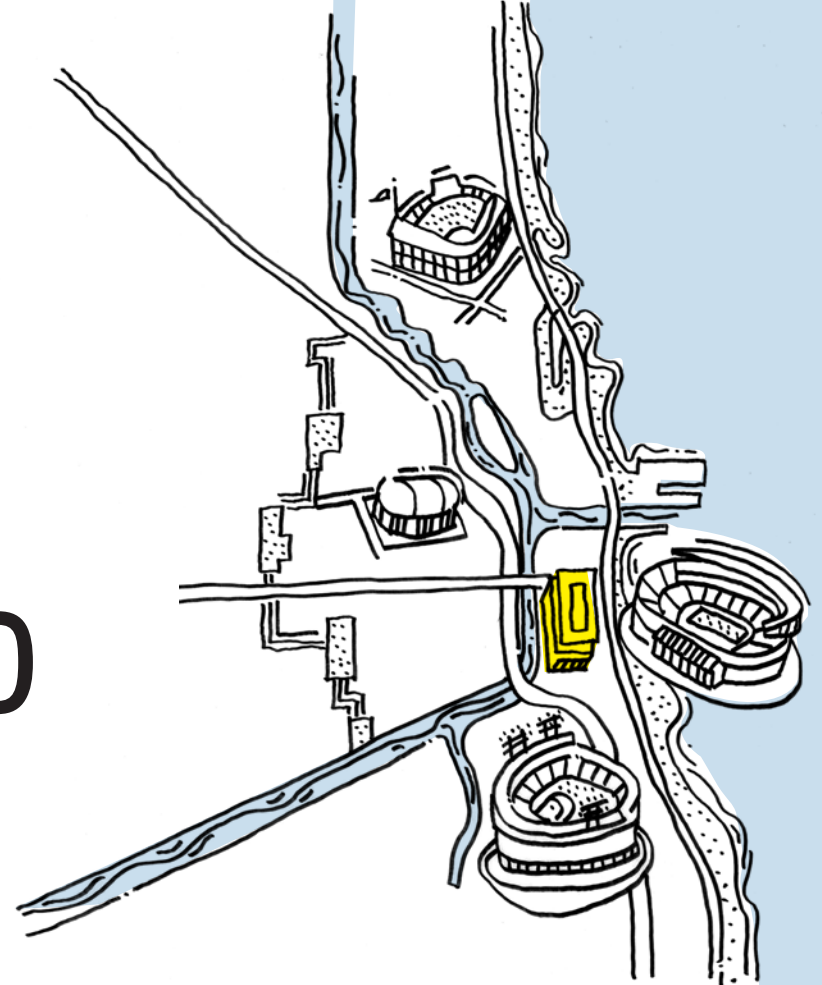
The 78 and Chicago Fire Stadium

THE CHALLENGE

This fallow parcel resulted from a straightening of the Chicago River in the 1920s. Many schemes have been proposed since, including Mayor Jane Byrne's plan for a 1992 World's Fair. The site holds promise given its prime location, but physical barriers must be solved. Adjacencies to Ping Tom Park, Chinatown, the South Loop, and the Chicago River all represent real strengths. The upside is huge but requires big swings and long-term vision.

THE SITE

62-acre former industrial parcel in the Near South Side, bounded by Roosevelt Road, Clark Street, 16th Street, and the Chicago River. Mixed-use neighborhood anchored by a 22,000-seat Fire-owned soccer stadium is what's planned. Largely cut off from surrounding areas—Metra's Rock Island Line runs atop an elevated embankment hemming in the eastern edge of the site, while the Chicago River complicates access at the western edge. Ping Tom Park and Chinatown are the immediate neighbors to the south, residential areas lie to the east, and the planned Riverline high-rise community to the north.





Applying the Principles

PLANNING RESOURCES

There is always a collection of related planning documents to consult. Most resources are publicly available at the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development's website or through a simple web search using the report's proper name.

Resources for this site include:

- Planned Development 1434 (PD-1434)
- Central Area Plan 2045
- Chinatown Community Vision Plan
- CTA Transit Friendly Development Guide
- Metra Typologies Plan
- Near South Community Plan
- Near West Side Plan
- Pilsen (Lower West Side) Quality of Life Plan

TRANSIT

The City and State should commit to a combined Metra/CTA Red Line station at 15th Street, even if it takes time to study and finance. No more convenient option exists for getting to the heart of the site, and the station can be designed to absorb game day flows much better than the already cramped Roosevelt Road CTA station. Existing and new residents will benefit from added service. Water taxi service can also lend a helping hand. As more time passes and density builds, the CTA Green and Orange lines offer possibilities for yet another infill station. The St. Charles Air Line Bridge west of the site might also someday gain relevance for bikers and pedestrians.

DENSITY

Reliable game day foot traffic gives this site the chance to balance institutional anchors and dense urban living in a way Chicago hasn't seen before. Careful, varied designs should consider nearby residents' needs to ensure locals and visitors both frequent the place.

WALKABILITY

This is a very large site—a half-mile north-south, a quarter-mile east-west. A contiguous river walk at the west edge should be of a generous width and treated as a major public benefit. A network of local streets, paths, and modestly scaled green spaces would break down the interior of this expansive site into manageable pieces and create a livelier pedestrian experience. Temporary surface parking should follow the same small block scheme to encourage urban forms when demand for future uses does arrive.

CONNECTION

The most formidable challenges involve inventing new connections to nearby areas, as limited traditional street grid exists. We cannot expect people to traverse the full length of the site just to enter or exit. Multiple pedestrian entry and exit points would improve game day flows, and provide access to green spaces for nearby residents.

PUBLIC SPACE

Big ideas are already shaping up with the stadium fronting plaza and river walk. If these spaces are privately managed, the design and operational hours should encourage strong public access. As development is phased, vacant parcels should be landscaped or filled with temporary public/recreational uses until build-out.

Case Study: Minneapolis



U.S. Bank Stadium

PUTTING TRANSIT FIRST

The Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome (completed: 1982) was the first major indoor stadium in Minneapolis. A spartan building on a formerly industrial patch of East Minneapolis, it was nonetheless a very busy multi-sport facility that still holds its place in Twin Cities' collective memory. In fact, it is the only U.S. arena to have hosted a Super Bowl, a World Series, and an NCAA Final Four. The stadium (demolished: 2014) spent the great majority of its days at a challenging remove from the city's downtown—reachable only by car, city bus, or by schlepping in on foot.

When the replacement U.S. Bank Stadium rose at the very same site in 2016, the city had since grown up around the site. The most important change, however, involved public transit. The city's first Metro line, the north-south Blue Line, went into

service in 2004 and included a stop at the stadium location. In 2014, the east-west Green Line, linking to St. Paul, went into service and it also included a stop at the stadium location. Add to this a skyway (elevated indoor walkway) link to the stadium, generous on-site bike storage facilities, and several city bus lines operating and the new U.S. Bank Stadium is by far the best transit-connected, next-generation facility in the country. What's more, Metro often throws in free transit days during a Vikings homestand.

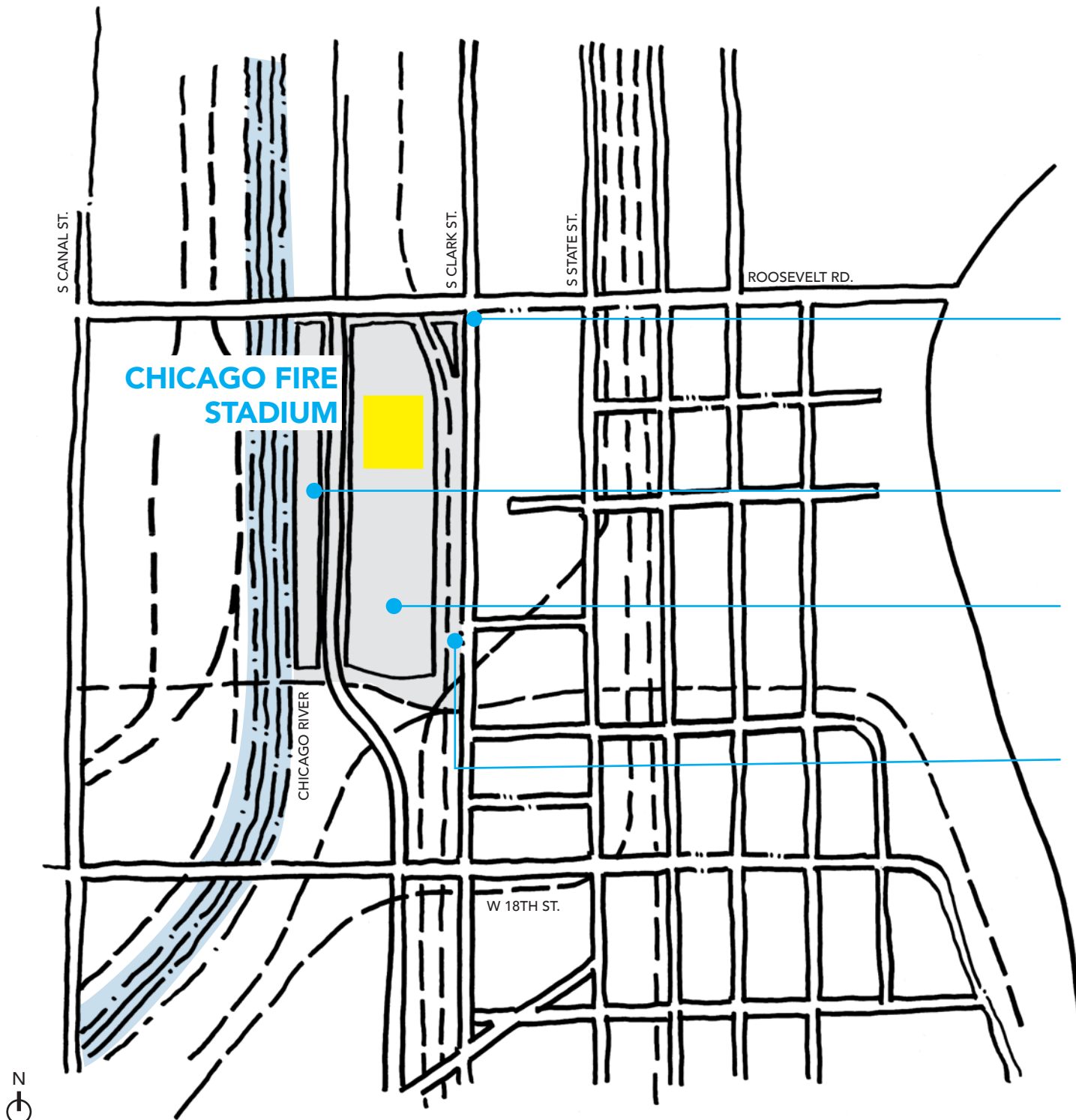
The stadium, not even a decade old, has already hosted a Super Bowl and an NCAA Final Four, and is consistently rated a top venue nationally, especially in the coveted categories of fan experience and value for dollar. Transit is a big reason for the instant success.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SITE 3: THE 78 AND CHICAGO FIRE STADIUM

The 78 has always been billed as the city's next neighborhood. Set the cornerstones of this development deliberately and with a future-leaning orientation so coming generations of Chicagoans can build on what we start.

NEAR-TERM NOTE

Since Chicago City Council recently approved this project, building trust early is important. The City, developer, and soccer team should socialize phased plans with the public and surrounding communities, so everyone understands what will be built and when, including temporary uses. If infrastructure investment is needed to augment phases, that should be noted and added to City budgets in corresponding years.



CONNECTION

Push through existing infrastructure barriers at critical places to connect the site to surrounding areas.

PUBLIC SPACE

Celebrate the water's edge with a generously scaled river walk. This half-mile stretch can set the tone for the next generation of river improvements.

DENSITY

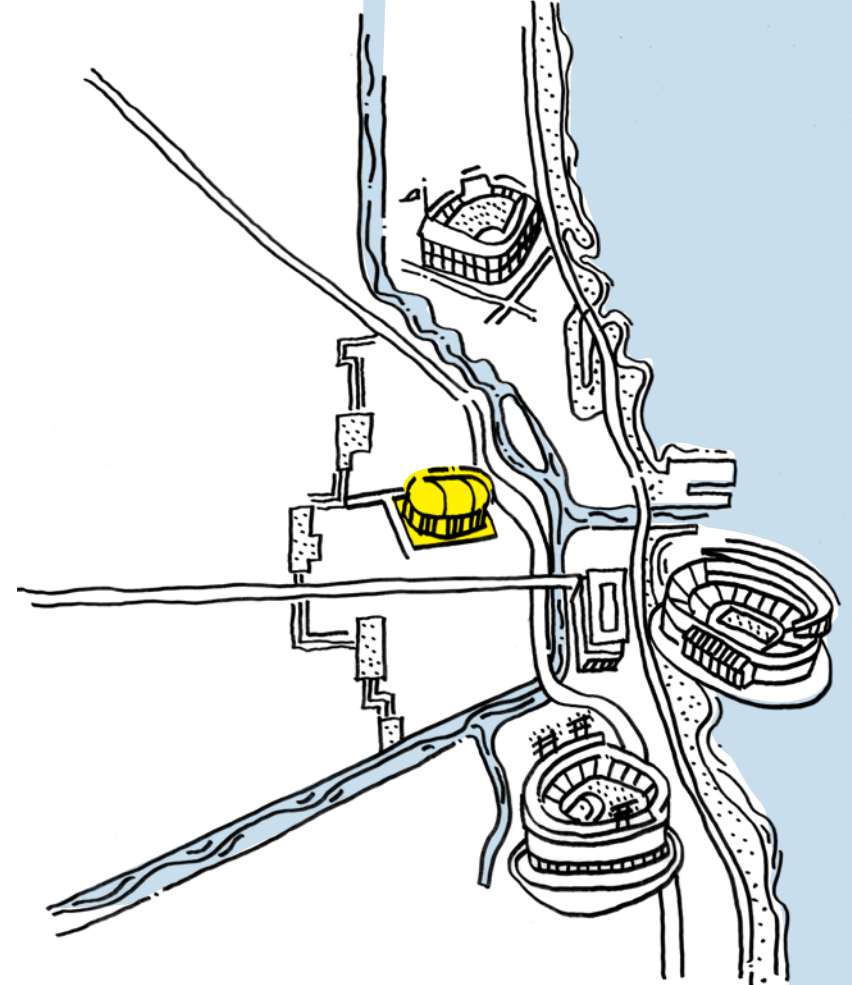
Break down interior into block sizes that prioritize travel by foot and bike.

TRANSIT

Keep a future 15th Street CTA/Metra station in the plans.

Site 4

Near West Side and United Center



THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Project 1901, as it is being branded, will build on the site's existing surface parking lots. The plan may unfold in six phases over 15 years, resulting in a mixed-use neighborhood with up to 9,500 housing units and 1,300 hotel keys. This fall, phase one will enter construction with a 6,000-seat music venue, hotel, and parking structure. Details for later phases aren't fully public but are believed to contain the bulk of housing deliveries.

THE CHALLENGE

An early master plan is the time to set forth large ideas and values. Over time—and projects like these do take time—market conditions will change, user preferences might change, ownership groups can evolve. Staying true to a master plan will take discipline. At the same time, encouraging public dialogue to help refine the developer's plans is a must. Perhaps temporary uses can even be piloted along the way, so the public gets to test and inform ideas before future phases are implemented. Developing such a rapport can go a long way toward building the neighborhood locals and teams need and that the owners better understand how to deliver.

THE SITE

55 acres on the Near West Side, with the United Center surrounded by surface parking lots. Madison Avenue is the lone street running through the property. Roughly bounded by Warren Boulevard, Wood Street, Adams Street, and Damen Avenue. CTA bus routes and recently opened Green Line station at Damen and Lake Street. I-290 and CTA Blue Line station two blocks south. Just west of the highly successful Fulton Market area. As the arena to two hometown teams plus a robust concert schedule, this is the city's busiest stadium with 200+ events per year.



Applying the Principles

PLANNING RESOURCES

There is always a collection of related planning documents to consult. Most resources are publicly available at the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development's website or through a simple web search using the report's proper name.

Resources for this site include:

- Planned Development 522 (PD-522)
- Central Area Plan 2045
- CTA Transit Friendly Development Guide
- East Garfield Park Quality of Life Plan
- Fulton Market Innovation District
- Near Northwest Side Plan
- Near West Side Plan
- Reconnecting Neighborhoods Plan
- West Loop Design Guidelines

TRANSIT

The recent opening of the CTA Green Line Damen Avenue station is a welcome addition. The CTA Pink Line runs just a block east; a new station there would significantly enhance site access for Lower West Side and West Side neighborhoods on game days and put the United Center neighborhood on the map for all riders on non-game days. By transforming the parking lots to more varied uses, there should be many opportunities to better welcome bikes/bike storage at the stadium and throughout the campus.

DENSITY

The 9,500 housing units being proposed represent significant density—roughly equivalent to adding a neighborhood the size of Bucktown. If realized, this would dramatically transform the current parking-dominated landscape. The specifics of where this density is distributed, who it serves, what building types and materials are

used, and how it transitions to adjacent neighborhoods will be important once more details are available.

WALKABILITY

A rooftop green space above a parking garage in phase one is attention grabbing, but the bigger needs are more generic: Can this new neighborhood create walkable streets with active ground floors? It should be noted that retail demand might take time to arrive, so get creative in exploring different ground-floor uses. As for the 9,500 housing units, they will require public space beyond rooftop amenities—distributed across multiple smaller yards, playgrounds, and plaza-like spaces, accessible to everyone not just the people who live in the buildings.

CONNECTION

The Near West Side has seen tremendous change in the past decade. An added challenge here is that no matter how successful the United Center expansion is,

there is the extra opportunity to create seamless connections leading to surrounding neighborhoods. These should be a priority for the City. A deck over I-290, for example, could change the sunken expressway from barrier to pedestrian-friendly gateway and aid bold neighborhood-building actions at the Illinois Medical District.

PUBLIC SPACE

Private financing of the campus transformation is exactly what The Chicago Model advocates. The question is how to ensure city infrastructure investments (transit, streets, public spaces) are coordinated with private development phases. A phased development agreement should specify what infrastructure the City commits to in each phase, what community benefits the development delivers, and ongoing community engagement mechanisms throughout the 15-year build-out.

Case Study: San Francisco



Oracle Park with Mission Rock Phase 1 in the background

A NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE MAKING

Things were looking up for the San Francisco Giants when they moved from Candlestick Park into Pacific Bell Park (completed: 2000) in the city's China Basin neighborhood. Fans and press heaped praise on the new ball field (now called Oracle Park) and a design that celebrated its waterfront location. By 2010, the Giants found themselves World Series champs and operators of a wily front office other teams wanted to copy.

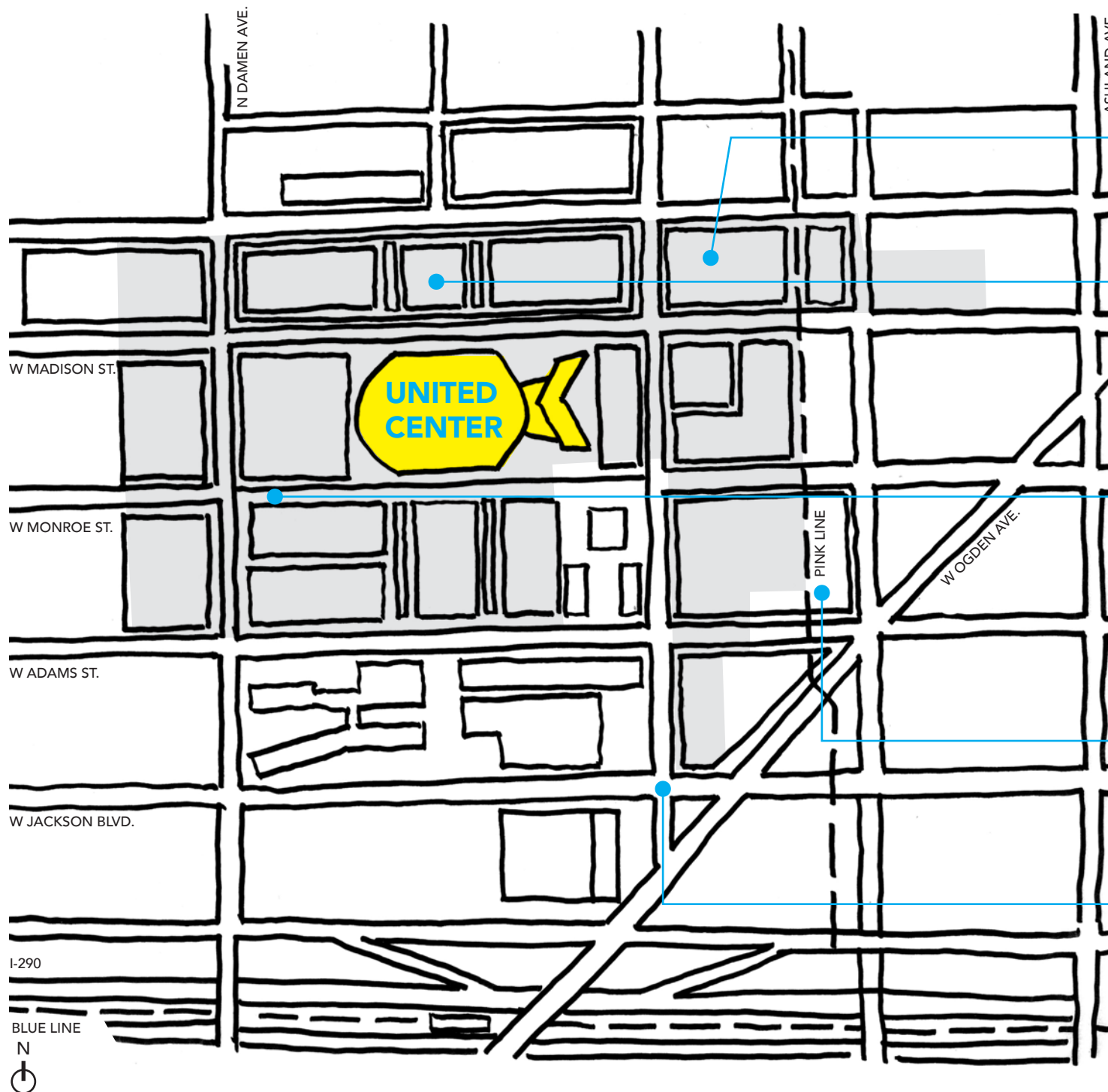
It was from this position of strength that the Giants were announced by the City of San Francisco, also in 2010, to have won the rights to develop a 28-acre industrial site/parking lot adjacent the stadium dubbed Mission Rock. Eight years into planning, and in partnership with Tishman Speyer, the Port of San Francisco, and the City and County of San Francisco,

the Giants unveiled detailed plans for the new ground-up neighborhood: 1,200 housing units (40% on-site affordable), eight acres of open space, two new streets, and 1.7 million square feet of retail and offices, including a global headquarters for Visa. What's more, they were engaging top design firms like Henning Larsen and Studio Gang, and pursuing thermal district energy and greywater recycling to reduce environmental impacts.

Construction started in 2020 with phase one completed by 2024, and so far the partnership group is making good on its promises. There is a long way to go for this neighborhood to grow into its own. In terms of a high-achieving sports franchise pursuing stadium-anchored development, the Giants are raising the bar.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SITE 4: NEAR WEST SIDE AND UNITED CENTER

This is a massive private investment that, if executed well, could create a model for stadium-anchored neighborhood development. The challenge is ensuring that 15 years of phasing results in genuine neighborhood integration rather than an isolated development. Patient build-out requires sustained coordination between private developers, the City, transit agencies, and the community.



DENSITY

With 9,500 units of planned housing (to come in later phases), much care and community input is needed to ensure the right product mix that supports a vibrant neighborhood.

PUBLIC SPACE

There is minimal public park space in the immediate vicinity of the stadium. Adding a featured public green space would be a major amenity for the greater neighborhood.

WALKABILITY

Invest extra time and attention to break down surface parking into new local streets with active ground-floor uses and connections to the surrounding street grid.

TRANSIT

Improve site access with the addition of a new Pink Line station east of the stadium.

CONNECTION

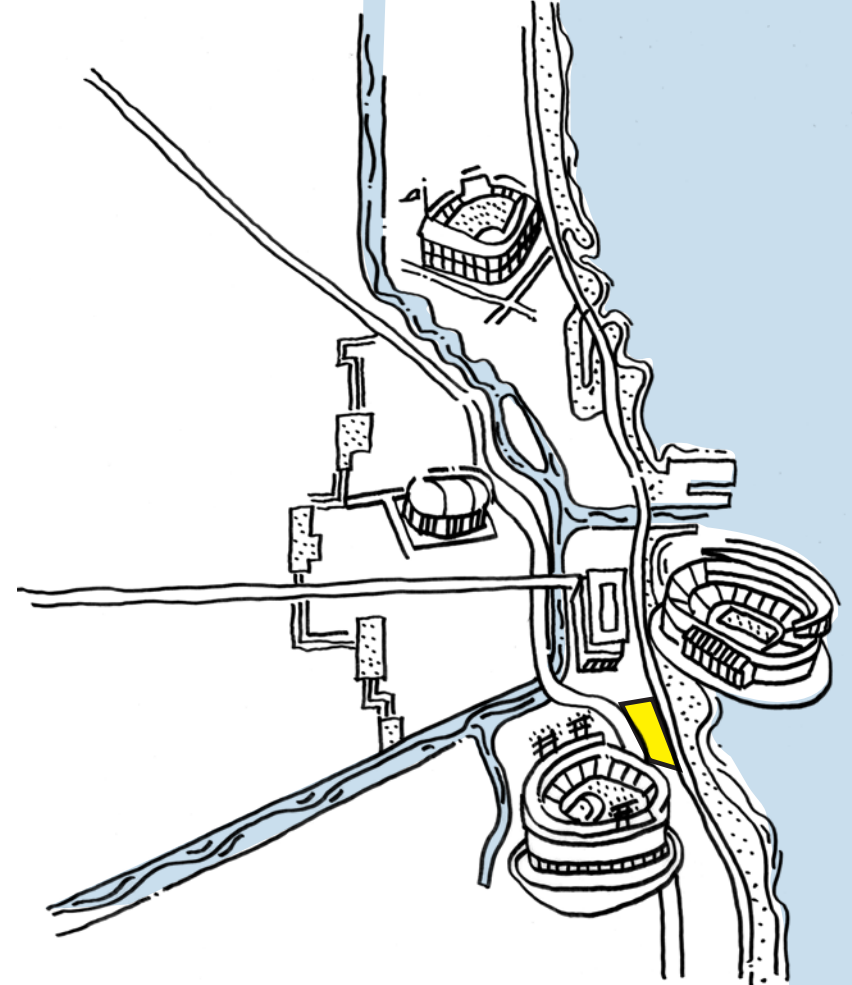
City government should leverage this private investment and design new gateway connections to the existing neighborhoods surrounding the United Center.

Site 5

Bronzeville Lakefront

THE CHALLENGE

The site is a sleeping giant spanning vibrant Bronzeville, McCormick Place, and the adjacent lakefront. The parcel requires an adventurous move in order to unlock the full potential here, and that may well start by selecting a type of anchor institution that can grow with the neighborhood.



THE SITE

48 acres formerly containing the Michael Reese Hospital and Medical Center, bounded by 26th Street, the Metra Electric Line, 31st Street, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. Cleared in 2009 for the city's unsuccessful 2016 Olympics bid, Singer Pavilion is the lone building that remains (and must stay for preservation reasons). The five Prairie Shores residential towers remain in good use immediately west of the cleared land. Burnham Park and the lakefront lie close by to the east but are difficult to access due to Metra tracks and McCormick Place marshalling yards.



PLANNING RESOURCES

There is always a collection of related planning documents to consult. Most resources are publicly available at the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development's website or through a simple web search using the report's proper name.

Resources for this site include:

- Planned Development 1509 (PD-1509)
- Central Area Plan 2045
- Metra Typologies Plan
- Near South Community Plan
- Quad Communities Quality of Life Plan
- Reconnecting Neighborhoods Plan
- Where Worlds Connect: A Vision for a Reimagined Museum Campus

Applying the Principles

TRANSIT

Improvements to the Metra Electric Line and a modernized 27th Street station would provide easy access north to downtown and to points farther south. The MLK corridor is well served by CTA bus routes and this site could benefit from a sheltered bus depot. Links to the lakefront bike trail plus a dedicated bike lane west to CTA Green and Red lines would be smart additions.

DENSITY

Prime location should support a mixed-use neighborhood with office and residential. Demand for the biomedical sciences and lab space as originally envisioned has been elusive. A modestly scaled stadium or other entertainment venue could act as an anchor that reliably increases activity, jumpstarts development, and supports local businesses. Taller residential buildings could benefit from lake views and Metra upgrades.

WALKABILITY

As a large site—a half-mile north-south, a half-mile east-west—the current planned development wisely employs a local street network that could result in comfortably sized blocks and a walkable neighborhood.

CONNECTION

Link new local streets to existing city grid south, west, and north. The big upgrade involves bridging over Metra tracks and DuSable Lake Shore Drive, providing direct lakefront access. Bringing the lakefront so broadly into play would be a game changer for the Bronzeville Lakefront and benefit nearby neighborhoods.

PUBLIC SPACE

The principles for the public realm outlined earlier in this report (see page 28) are applicable on this site. It will be critical to create continuity between existing high-rise residential uses in adjacent areas, any new development on the site, and the lakefront.

Case Study: New York City



Etihad Park



The Willets Point development

BUILD IT AND THE STADIUM WILL COME

After a nearly decade-long search for a suitable site, New York City's first purpose-built professional soccer stadium is getting constructed in Queens where it is paired with a large affordable housing development. The 25,000-seat Etihad Park (est. completion: 2027) will be home to the New York City Football Club. The team is self-financing the stadium construction on land it will lease from the city; in exchange, the city is waiving real estate taxes throughout the life of the 50-year term. The area is already well served by mass transit, local roads, and expressways, as Citi Field, home to the New York Mets baseball team, is close by.

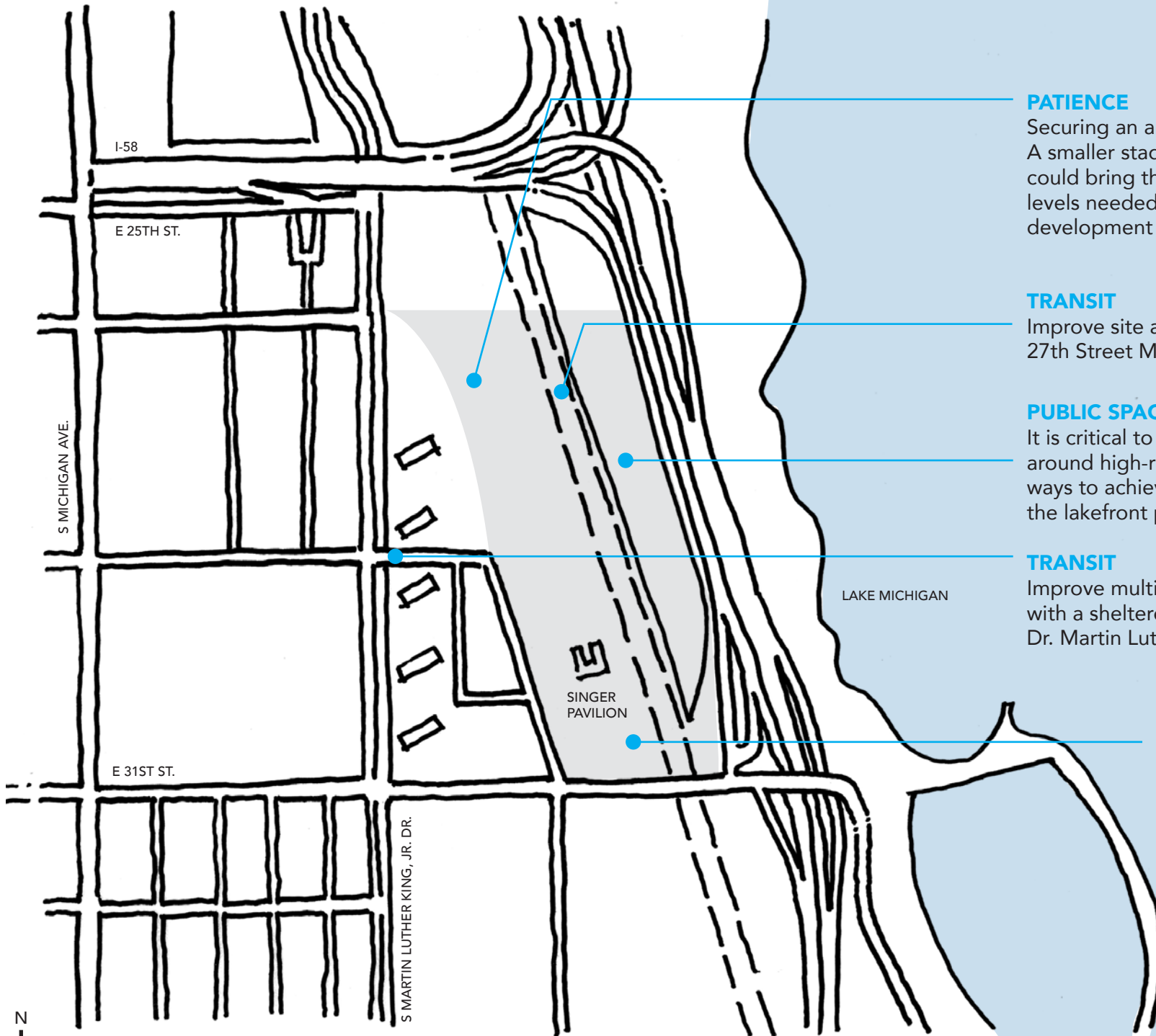
The 23-acre parcel includes the usual complements to a new stadium: a hotel, retail, and dedicated public space.

But the real anchor to the plan is 2,500 units of 100% affordable housing split over seven properties. The housing, to be completed in two phases, represents the city's largest all-affordable development in more than 40 years. The sizable development also calls for delivery of a 650-seat public school.

The Willets Point Project (as it is called) is attempting to flip the script and put housing construction and neighborhood-building in the lead position from day one. For its part, Etihad Park is pursuing an ambitious sustainability path that might inspire the whole neighborhood, including comprehensive rainwater capture, composting and zero waste commitments, and a solar roof that will power the first all-electric stadium in Major League Soccer.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SITE 5: BRONZEVILLE LAKEFRONT

This is a place with every ability to support desirable neighborhood living. The site boasts a fantastic lakefront location and quick access to many parts of the city's South Side and the downtown. The train and highway infrastructure is considerable, and co-location of a smaller stadium or practice facility plus a corporate tenant could very well attract the catalytic investment to get things going.



PATIENCE

Securing an anchor tenant is job one. A smaller stadium or practice facility could bring the density and activity levels needed to get this development moving.

TRANSIT

Improve site access with an updated 27th Street Metra station.

PUBLIC SPACE

It is critical to manage open space flow around high-rises on the site, as well as ways to achieve expanded access to the lakefront park.

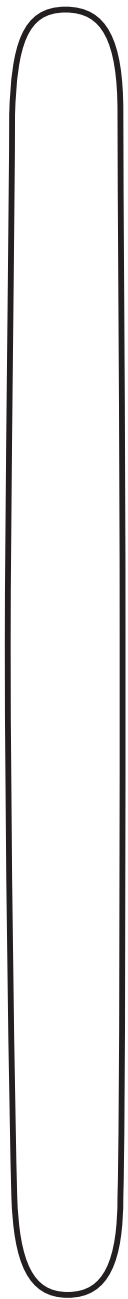
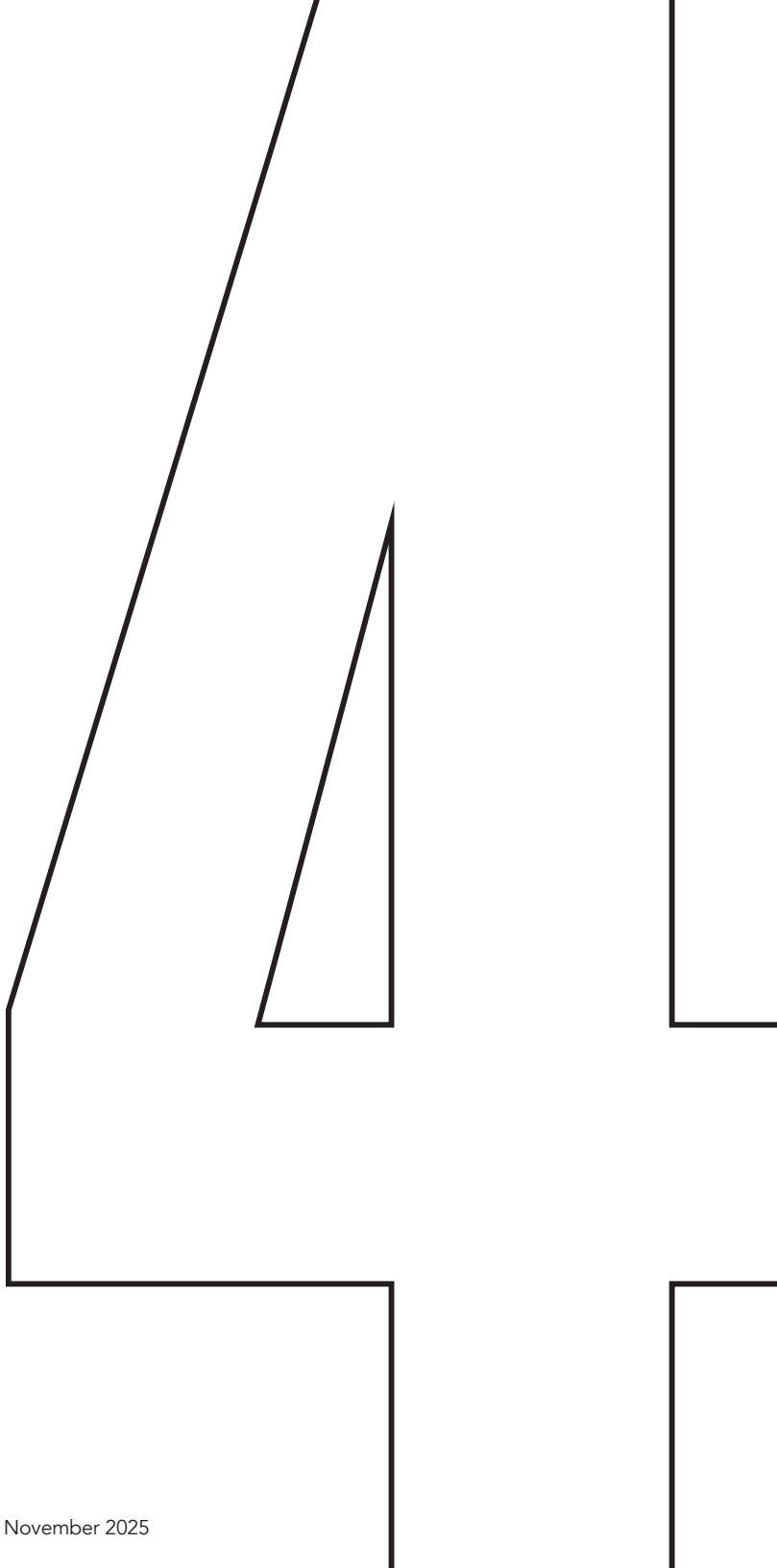
TRANSIT

Improve multi-modal site access with a sheltered bus depot along Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.

DENSITY

Break down interior into block sizes that prioritize travel by foot and bike.

SECTION



Making it Happen

The Chicago Model demands a fundamental shift in how stadium deals get done. Instead of teams driving negotiations while government reacts, the City must build frameworks for development, coordinate resources, and ensure stadiums anchor thriving communities. This isn't just a philosophical change. It requires building specific capabilities that most cities, including Chicago, haven't yet developed.

The following sections detail what City-led stadium development means in practice: from establishing neighborhood visions before teams arrive, to treating infrastructure as permanent legacy rather than game day necessity; from coordinating billions of dollars in existing government resources, to reimagining relationships between teams and communities; from expanding financial tools beyond traditional subsidies, to creating structures that align interests over decades. Each represents a concrete shift in how government approaches stadium development—not just approving projects but shaping them from the start.

Coordination not Competition

The Chicago Model requires coordinated development rather than team-led, piecemeal negotiations. That coordination can be achieved by an entity that can bring all the pieces together: a redevelopment authority, perhaps in the form of a re-imagined Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA).

Stadium deals traditionally start with teams. They develop plans, choose sites, design venues, then approach the City with proposals and requests for public support. The City evaluates and negotiates. Communities provide input after major decisions are made. This sequence puts everyone except the team in reactive positions.

Coordinated development reverses this. The City establishes frameworks for potential stadium areas before any specific proposal exists. When teams come forward with facility needs, they work within established parameters rather than creating their own. Communities inform the framework from the beginning. Developers compete to deliver comprehensive neighborhood development, not just venues.

This shift matters because stadiums have citywide impacts lasting generations. They determine transit patterns, housing development, and neighborhood character far beyond their own physical footprints. The City is the only party charged with representing the public interest across all these dimensions.

Each party's role becomes clearer in coordinated development:

1. Teams focus on venue design, fan experience, and operational efficiency. They provide technical requirements rather than neighborhood plans.
2. The City handles broader integration: stadium orientation for transit connections, urban design and zoning mixed-use development, infrastructure investments serving both stadium and neighborhood.
3. Communities inform framework parameters from the start: density, business mix, and public space needs
4. Developers participate in comprehensive neighborhood development, not just the construction of sports venues. The economics shift toward optimizing the total development rather than minimizing non-stadium uses.

Coordinated development uses existing tools more effectively. All parties involved in planned development negotiations start from a more informed position. Intergovernmental agreements align supporting resources proactively rather than under deadline pressure.

Success metrics also shift. Rather than focusing on subsidy amounts and lease terms, the City first settles what neighborhood outcomes to track: residential growth as well as displacement, business formation, transit ridership, property values. These take longer to measure but better reflect whether public investment achieved any public benefits.

Making this shift requires government to develop specific capabilities: establishing visions for potential stadium neighborhoods, treating infrastructure as catalyst, coordinating resources across agencies, re-imagining community benefits, and expanding financial tools. The following section details what each of these capabilities requires in practice.

Neighborhoods Ready for Investment

Coordinated development starts with framework planning for areas that could accommodate stadiums. Ideally, this planning should occur before teams express facility needs, establishing parameters that guide rather than react to proposals.

Chicago maintains extensive planning documents: community-led quality of life plans, studies and framework plans for specific areas, long-term land use strategies. Potential stadium sites include both existing facilities needing transformation and new development opportunities. The task is consolidating this existing work and adding stadium-specific considerations. Our previous section showed a starting point for this type of work and analysis.

Stadium locations fall into two categories:

1. Existing stadium sites where facilities need replacement or major renovation, surrounded by underutilized land.
2. Large vacant undeveloped parcels with potential for stadium-anchored transformation. This could also include assembly of many small parcels into a large redevelopment site in the future.

Both require framework planning that addresses development criteria in keeping with already adopted area plans and any stadium-specific concerns for transportation, infrastructure requirements, and public spaces.

When teams approach the City with facility needs, this preparation changes the dynamic. The City presents viable locations with clear specifications. Teams evaluate requirements upfront. Communities see their priorities already embedded. Developers understand what constitutes a complete proposal. And, importantly, the City outlines upfront what financial incentives or investments could be considered when a proposal meets a given location's needs.

The framework adds the benefit of eliminating non-starters before they consume time and political capital. Proposals requiring massive parking, ignoring transit access, or creating fortress-like facilities get screened out based on established parameter rather than political opposition.

This approach serves neighborhoods regardless of stadium outcomes. The framework planning identifies infrastructure needs, development opportunities, and community priorities that advance with or without sports facilities. Stadium development becomes one possible catalyst for changes the neighborhood already seeks.

Infrastructure as Permanent Legacy

Stadium projects trigger infrastructure investments that might outlast the sports facilities themselves. Transit lines, utilities, and street grids built today will shape neighborhoods for decades to come. These investments should serve broader city building goals rather than just stadium operations.

Traditional stadium infrastructure focuses on game day needs: highway ramps, massive parking structures, utilities sized for peak crowds. Coordinated development reverses this thinking. Infrastructure investments become the permanent legacy, designed to catalyze neighborhood transformation. Every infrastructure decision faces a test: Will this serve the neighborhood when there's no game? Will this make sense in 50 years?

The stadium is for some. The infrastructure is for everyone.

Transit infrastructure represents the highest-impact investment. Stadium development can justify transit extensions that might otherwise wait decades. But station locations should optimize neighborhood access not just stadium convenience. Service patterns need to work for residents and workers, with event service as supplementary.

Street and utility grids determine development potential for generations. Extending the city grid through former industrial sites creates developable blocks. New streets should follow Chicago's traditional specifications, enabling dense settlement patterns. Utilities must be sized for full neighborhood build-out, not just stadium needs.

Green infrastructure addresses multiple challenges simultaneously. Stormwater parks provide flood management while creating public space. Green streets handle runoff while improving walkability. Urban forests reduce heat island effects while defining neighborhood character.

Parking infrastructure requires fundamental rethinking. Surface lots represent failed land use around urban stadiums. Structured parking should include retail or other ground-floor activations and be designed for future conversion to other uses or partial conversions should parking demands lessen. Better yet, robust transit reduces parking needs overall.

Coordination challenges multiply with infrastructure. City departments control local streets and sewers. State and County agencies manage highways and arterial roads. Multiple agencies handle mass transit. Federal programs provide funding but impose compliance and matching funds requirements. Utilities operate as regulated monopolies with their own planning cycles. Stadium infrastructure touches all these systems.

Effective coordination requires unified planning authority, integrated funding strategies, phased implementation, and performance standards.

The current stadium proposals demonstrate both challenge and opportunity. Multiple projects could fragment infrastructure investments across disconnected sites. Or coordinated planning could leverage investments that serve multiple stadiums and neighborhoods—transit lines reaching several venues, utility upgrades supporting adjacent development, street connections linking isolated areas.

Infrastructure built for single purposes serves single purposes. Infrastructure designed as catalyst enables transformation far beyond stadium walls. The difference lies in planning infrastructure for the city we're building, not just the stadium we're negotiating.

Coordinating Redevelopment

Effective resource coordination requires structural changes at both City and regional levels. Our government agencies collectively control billions in annual spending that could support stadium-anchored development and unlock the economic development potential of large vacant sites. These resources typically operate in silos, missing opportunities for larger impact. Coordinated support for infrastructure for stadium development requires aligning these resources toward shared objectives.

At the City level

Chicago needs dedicated stadium development leadership within the mayor's office or planning department. This role would track emerging opportunities, build relationships with teams and leagues, study best practices, coordinate City agencies, and ensure institutional knowledge survives political transitions.

At the State and regional levels

The Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA) could be transformed from a financing entity into a comprehensive development authority. The current model isolates sports facility decisions from broader development. This makes every stadium negotiation look like a subsidy request. An expanded ISFA changes the frame. Stadium decisions become neighborhood development decisions. Multiple projects get coordinated instead of planned separately, causing possible inefficiencies. Infrastructure commitments—transit, housing, public space—get tracked and delivered across political leadership changes.

This isn't new bureaucracy—it's upgrading an existing entity to match the moment. ISFA already has bonding capacity and stadium expertise. Expanding the mandate and adding development expertise to the board creates the coordination mechanism simultaneous stadium projects require.

Most importantly, a redevelopment authority makes long-term commitments credible and reliable to outside parties. When they commit to transit delivery, housing targets, or infrastructure standards, those commitments outlast any single elected official. Rather than just managing stadium debt, the agency could oversee the decades-long project of building communities around stadiums.

An expanded ISFA could coordinate planning across City, County, State, and Federal agencies; align infrastructure investments from multiple sources; ensure transit, housing, and development commitments get delivered; maintain institutional knowledge; and track long-term neighborhood outcomes beyond stadium operations.

Together, dedicated City leadership and a reimagined ISFA provide the structure needed for City-led development—one managing day-to-day coordination, the other handling multi-jurisdictional development across decades.

The multiple current stadium opportunities demonstrate the stakes. Pursued separately, each might receive modest support. Coordinated through an expanded ISFA, they could trigger transformational investments: new rapid transit lines or stations serving multiple venues and neighborhoods, thousands of housing units including affordable options, employment centers connected to neighborhoods, infrastructure supporting decades of growth.

Resource coordination requires using existing resources more strategically. Every agency already invests in these neighborhoods. The difference lies in whether those investments work together or at cross purposes. ISFA, reimagined as a redevelopment authority rather than just a financing vehicle, could provide the structure to ensure coordination happens.

The Benefit of The Chicago Model to Teams

The stadium development paradigm is shifting:

Political reality has changed.

Traditional subsidies face increasing resistance nationwide. Decades of research showing stadiums don't grow local economies make large direct subsidies politically difficult to defend. Teams need approaches that can survive public scrutiny and editorial board criticism.

Team financing is becoming standard.

The Fire is privately financing its stadium at The 78. The Bulls and Blackhawks are privately financing the United Center campus transformation. Across the country, leagues increasingly expect teams to finance their own facilities. Where teams request public stadium financing (Bears, White Sox), that becomes one element in comprehensive neighborhood development deals, not standalone subsidies.

Infrastructure creates more value than cash.

Teams increasingly recognize that transit access, street connections, and surrounding development create more long-term value than direct payments. Isolation kills stadium districts. Integration makes them thrive. When the City commits to building a transit system that serves a robust daily ridership as well as affordances for more increased traffic when fans are visiting a stadium, as The Chicago Model encourages, that's infrastructure creating value for everyone—including the team.

Coordination unlocks what isolation can't.

Five teams competing separately for limited resources means smaller individual outcomes. Coordination unlocks investments—particularly transit—that wouldn't happen otherwise. A new rail connection or line upgrades serving multiple venues benefits all teams and provides justification that single-project advocacy can't achieve.

This approach reduces risk.

Traditional stadium deals bet everything on attendance, naming rights, and team success. The Chicago Model diversifies success metrics. If the team struggles, the neighborhood still functions. If attendance softens, transit still moves commuters. If the franchise relocates, the city inherits valuable infrastructure serving a thriving neighborhood—not an empty building and debt. This is actually the lower-risk path for everyone involved.

Long-term value exceeds short-term extraction.

Teams increasingly think like real estate developer/owners, not just sports franchises. Surrounding neighborhood quality directly impacts franchise value. Wrigleyville makes the Cubs more valuable than any subsidy could. The United Center expansion recognizes that thriving neighborhoods create engaged fan bases and authentic atmosphere.

League pressure matters.

Major leagues increasingly push teams toward comprehensive development rather than isolated facilities. Our research found that the NBA and NHL particularly favor mixed-use districts. Teams proposing old-model stadiums face league skepticism.

Other cities will follow.

Chicago isn't the only city rethinking stadium development. Denver, New York City (Brooklyn and Queens), San Diego, San Francisco, Washington, DC and others are experimenting with similar integration. The successful examples will set the template for the next generation of stadium deals. Chicago has the opportunity to lead that evolution.

Teams and Communities as Partners

We are proposing a model where stadium-anchored communities, teams, and neighborhoods function as long-term partners whose fortunes rise or fall together, building mutual success along the way. When neighborhoods thrive, they provide the customer base, workforce, and authentic character that make venues successful. When teams succeed, they generate the activity, investment, and energy that strengthen neighborhoods. Neither can reach their full potential without the other.

This interdependence demands mechanisms that align interests rather than separate them: revenue-sharing structures where community investment grows with stadium success; co-investment models where both parties have a stake in neighborhood assets; governance structures with genuine shared decision-making; performance metrics focused on neighborhood outcomes rather than prescribed programs; and the evolution of mechanisms that allow agreements to adapt over decades as conditions change.

Government plays essential roles in forging these partnerships:

Convening authority

An expanded Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA) brings parties together before positions harden. Framework planning incorporates community priorities before team proposals emerge. Early engagement prevents adversarial dynamics.

Negotiation expertise

Many communities lack the expertise to understand complex development proposals. The City provides technical assistance in the form of financial analysis, legal review, and precedent research. This levels the playing field without government dictating terms.

Implementation capacity

Government ensures that visions and plans become reality. Monitoring compliance, tracking outcomes, and enforcing commitments require institutional capacity communities can't maintain alone.

Resource alignment

ISFA coordinates infrastructure investments that multiply community benefits. Transit improvements, housing programs, and infrastructure upgrades amplify what agreements alone could not achieve.

Long-term accountability

Political leadership changes but partnerships last decades. Government provides continuity, ensuring new administrations honor previous commitments while adapting to new conditions.

Creative Financing Paths

Traditional stadium financing relies on narrow tools: direct subsidies, tax exemptions, and bond issuances. These instruments treat stadium development as a cost rather than investment.

We need financial mechanisms that better match The Chicago Model's ambitions—structures that share both risk and reward. Several directions warrant investigation:

Value capture mechanisms

that allow infrastructure investment to be recouped from increased property values or parking revenues. Special assessment districts, land value capture, and tax increment alternatives ensure infrastructure investment generates returns. These tools work best when planned prior to development

and as part of the framework presented to teams rather than imposed afterward.

Patient capital structures

that match the long-term nature of community development. Social impact bonds, community development financial institutions, and revolving loan funds operate on timelines aligned with neighborhood transformation rather than political cycles.

Hybrid ownership models

that blur public-private boundaries. Community land trusts could own land while teams own facilities. Public entities could retain air rights or future development rights. Joint ventures could share ownership of mixed-use components.

Revenue participation

agreements where infrastructure investment is repaid through shares of future revenues rather than fixed payments. As stadiums and surrounding developments succeed, public returns increase. If projects underperform, public exposure is limited.

Regional funding approaches

that recognize stadiums serve metropolitan areas, not just host cities. Sales tax districts, regional authorities, and multi-jurisdictional agreements could spread costs and benefits more equitably.

The scale of several simultaneous stadium projects creates opportunities for financial structures that wouldn't work for single facilities. Coordinated financing across multiple projects could reduce costs and risks.

Portfolio approaches could balance different risk profiles and return timelines.

This report identifies directions, not final solutions.

These financial approaches warrant detailed feasibility analysis by specialists in infrastructure finance, municipal bonds, and public-private partnerships. The universe of infrastructure finance continues evolving and encompasses State legislation, and private capital markets increasingly interested in investments with social returns alongside financial ones.

We invite engagement from financial professionals who can refine these mechanisms into implementable structures. The goal is finding tools that match the time horizons, risk profiles, and benefit streams of stadium-anchored communities.

Conclusion: The Road Ahead

Chicago is in a unique position to change the dynamic of stadium-anchored community development to be collaborative and coordinated with impacts that could last a generation.

Business as usual with multiple uncoordinated deals produces familiar outcomes.

Each team negotiates independently. Each project gets modest support. Neighborhoods see game day activity but limited transformation. We'll spend comparable money on infrastructure whether we coordinate for meaningful neighborhood outcomes or not.

Coordinated development produces different results.

Framework planning happens before specific proposals arrive; or in the case of just approved new facilities like The 78 and United Center projects, coordinated planning can happen simultaneously. Transit investments serve venues and surrounding communities. Infrastructure gets sized for neighborhoods, not just stadiums.

A re-imagined Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA) as a development authority helps to maximize transit and economic development while infrastructure commitments get delivered across political transitions. These revitalized neighborhoods become places people choose to live and work year-round.

Making coordination work requires immediate action:

1. The City establishes dedicated stadium development leadership
2. Community engagement begins in affected neighborhoods, and existing plans for stadium-anchored development sites are re-enforced
3. The State legislature considers an expanded coordination role for ISFA to become a development authority
4. Cross-agency teams form to align resources

The infrastructure we choose to build could serve Chicago through 2100. The neighborhoods we create will shape how hundreds of thousands of people live and work. Other cities will study how Chicago chose to meet this moment—that time when the potential for stadium-anchored development became the driver for redevelopment at multiple sites at nearly the same time and transformed our city for a generation.

This is city building. The stadiums are the catalyst. The opportunity is unprecedented.

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