

PILSEN: A Center of Mexican Life



6 COMMUNITY

The Pilsen Planning Committee
Preserving Our Mexican Culture

15 VISION

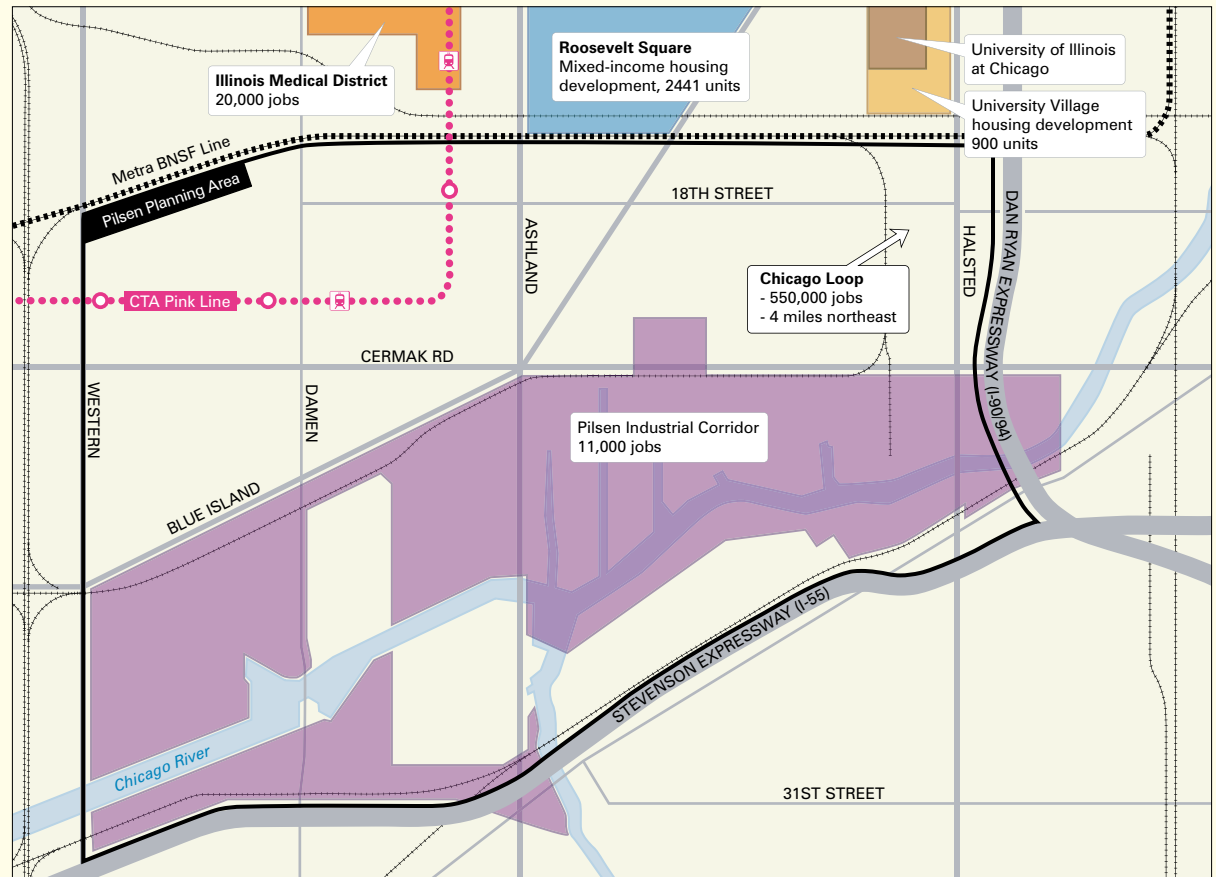
A Strong Mexican Community and Culture

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Five Approaches to a Strong and Stable
Pilsen Neighborhood

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Close to jobs, transportation

Just four miles from downtown, Pilsen has excellent access to transportation and major job centers.

COMMUNITY

The Pilsen Planning Process

The Pilsen Planning Committee (PPC) was convened in 2005 by the leaders of four long-standing organizations in Pilsen: The Resurrection Project (the LISC/Chicago lead agency for Pilsen), Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, Eighteenth Street Development Corporation and Alivio Medical Center.

The PPC began meeting monthly on November 22, 2005 and continued through August 2006. Throughout the planning process, members invited participation from other leaders, which resulted in broad representation from Pilsen organizations and an open and vigorous discussion of the neighborhood's future. This plan is endorsed by the following organizations:

Alivio Medical Center
Eighteenth Street Development Corporation
El Valor
Gads Hill Center
Instituto del Progreso Latino
Mujeres Latinas en Acción
Pilsen Neighbors Community Council
Pilsen Little Village Community Mental Health Center
Pilsen Together Chamber of Commerce
Pros Arts Studio
Rauner Family YMCA
Office of Ald. Daniel S. Solis (25th Ward)
Spanish Coalition for Housing
The Resurrection Project
West Side Technical Institute

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Jane Garza, *Executive Director, El Hogar Del Niño*
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Giles Morris, *Pilsen Neighbors Community Council*
Álvaro R. Obregón, *The Resurrection Project*
Henry Perez, *Chicago Police Department*
Maria Pesqueira, *Executive Director, Mujeres Latinas en Acción*
Sylvia Ramos, *President, West Side Technical Institute*
Raul Raymundo, *CEO, The Resurrection Project **
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Ald. Daniel S. Solis, *25th Ward*
Luz Maria Solis, *Office of Early Education, Chicago Public Schools*
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Pilar Villanueva, *Spanish Coalition for Housing*
Emma Villarreal, *Parent, Benito Juarez Community Academy High School*

* Pilsen Planning Committee co-chairs

Preserving Our Mexican Culture



Dancing on El Zócalo has become an annual tradition.

Since the 1950s, our neighborhood has been a center of Mexican life. With its old brick houses and two-flats, its flower gardens and playing children, the community called Pilsen has been home to generations of Mexican families and businesses. 18th Street is lined with shops where Spanish is the first language spoken, and on every street there are signs of our culture, from murals and music to churches and community organizations whose mission is to make life better for local families.

Pilsen today is under pressure. Just three miles from Chicago's booming downtown and well-served by rail transit and highways, our community of 44,000 residents is experiencing the strongest wave of new investment since it was built in the late 19th Century. Thanks to decades of effort by our residents and more than a dozen strong community organizations, our neighborhood is no longer a place of vacant lots and empty factories. Instead, it is a thriving urban community with a growing job base and a strong housing market. This is good news. But change can also mean that our cultural heritage could be at risk.

We have a great deal of *orgullo*, or pride, in what we have built in Pilsen, and we believe that the best future for this community is one that incorporates and celebrates our Mexican culture. Many of our older residents came here in the 1960s and 1970s to raise their families. Today they hope their grown children and other Mexicans will start the cycle again on these same streets.

Though our community has many strengths, it has weaknesses, too, areas that must be addressed to ensure the healthy future that we envision. As others discover the beauty of our housing stock and the vitality of our local economy, it is up to us to protect and nurture the culture that has made Pilsen what it is.

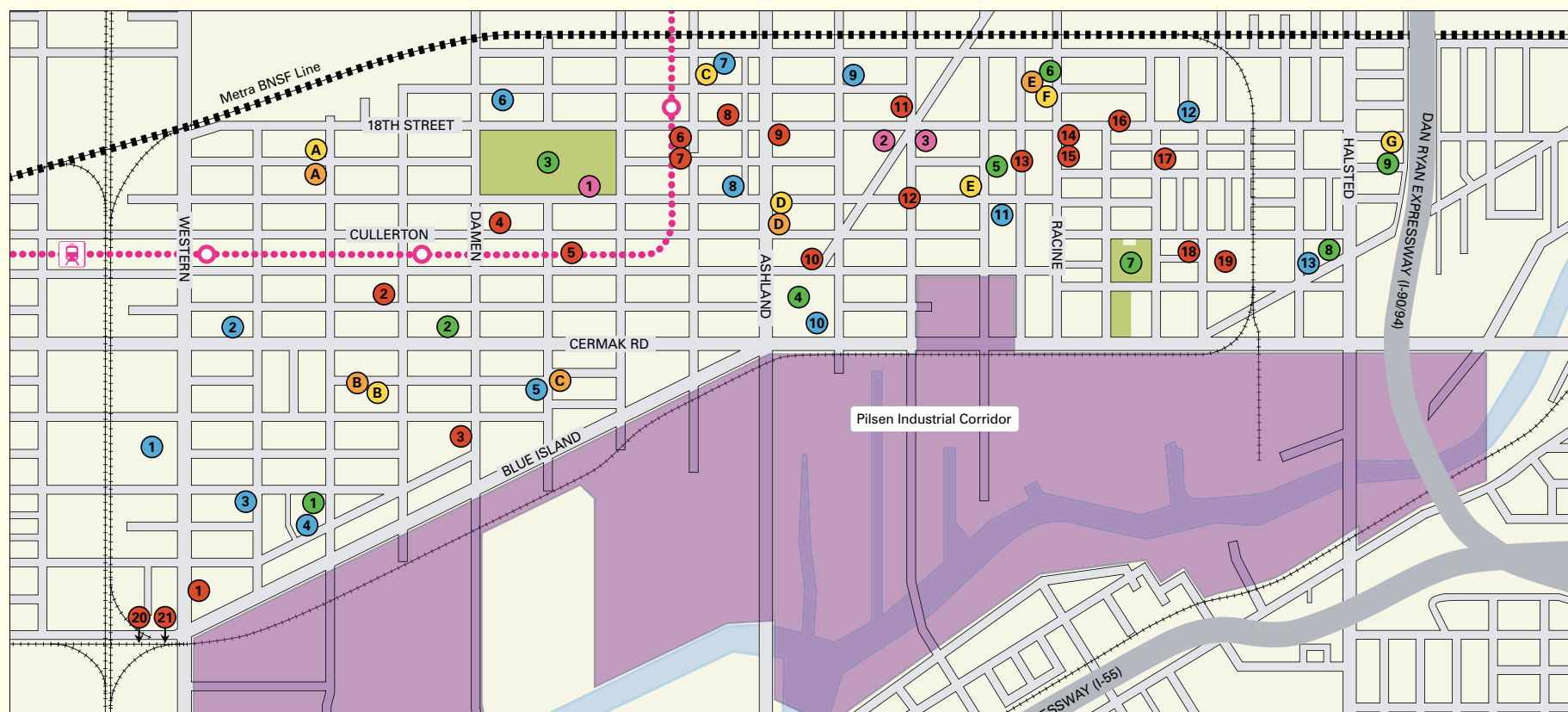


Figure 2 Community assets

Pilsen is a close-knit community with many strong community organizations. Its schools, churches and parks are heavily used by local residents.

Community Organizations

1. Instituto Del Progreso Latino
2. Mujeres Latinas En Accion
3. Pilsen Little Village Community Mental Health Center
4. Gads Hill
5. El Valor
6. Centro Familiar Guadalupeño
7. The Resurrection Project
8. Latinos Progresando
9. Pilsen "Together" Chamber of Commerce
10. Pilsen Neighbors Community Council
11. El Hogar del Niño
12. San Jose Obrero
13. United Merchants of Pilsen
14. Pilsen Alliance
15. Casa Atzlan
16. Spanish Coalition for Housing
17. Eighteenth Street Development Corporation
18. Pros Arts Studio
19. Alivio Medical Center
20. Rauner Family YMCA
21. West Side Technical Institute

Public Schools

1. Finkle E.S.
2. Pickard E.S.
3. De La Cruz M.S.
4. Ruiz E.S.
5. Whittier E.S.
6. Orozco M.S.
7. Bartolome de Las Casas Charter E.S.
8. Cooper E.S.
9. Pilsen Academy E.S.
10. Juarez H.S.
11. Perez E.S.
12. Jungman E.S.
13. Walsh E.S.

Catholic Schools

- A. St. Ann
- B. St. Paul
- C. Cristo Rey Jesuit H.S.
- D. St. Pius
- E. St. Procopius

Churches

- A. St. Ann
- B. St. Paul
- C. St. Adalbert
- D. St. Pius V
- E. Holy Trinity
- F. St. Procopius
- G. Providence of God Church

Parks & Recreation

1. Playlot at Ruiz E.S.
2. Barrett Park
3. Harrison Park
4. Fields at Juarez H.S.
5. Throop Playlot
6. Playlot at St. Procopius
7. Dvorak Park
8. Playlot at Walsh E.S.
9. Playlot at Providence of God

Cultural Facilities

1. Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum
2. Yolocalli Youth Museum/ Radio Arte
3. Rudy Lozano Public Library



Pilsen is a family-oriented community with strong churches and community institutions.

Opportunities and challenges

What are these strengths? First, a long and storied history. Pilsen is one of Chicago's oldest communities and in 2006 was designated an official historic district. Its first homes were built in the late 1850s near the lumber docks on the Chicago River. The neighborhood grew up fast alongside huge factories like the McCormick Reaper Works. Pilsen's houses, with their sunken front yards and ornamental stonework, date from the era before Chicago's streets and sidewalks were raised to reduce flooding.

Before the Mexicans came waves of other immigrants, first German and Irish, then the Czechs who named the community after the Bohemian city of Pilsen. Our community was home to labor activists since the 1877 Battle of the Viaduct at 16th and Halsted, and has continued this tradition of activism. Our organizations and leaders today—many of them participants on the Pilsen Planning Committee—are experts and innovators in community development, health care, education and the rights of women, immigrants and low-income workers.

The arts and culture are longstanding traditions.

Thalia Hall at 18th and Allport includes a 114-year-old theater; our churches hold annual *kermeses* (festivals); the 34-year-old Fiesta del Sol brings out thousands each summer; murals have decorated local walls for three decades or more; dancing and movies take place on our *Zócalo*; and arts programming serves children and adults alike.

Our culture is also reflected along 18th Street, one of the first areas in Chicago with a strong Mexican business cluster. Between Halsted and Damen are tortilla factories, supermercados, restaurants, craft shops, a book and record store and sidewalk vendors of corn, fresh fruit and ice cream. At the intersection with Blue Island, there's a branch library, a youth-run radio station and busy food markets. Farther west near Damen is Harrison Park, the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum and Orozco School with its wonderful mosaic façade.

The 1970s and 1980s were difficult times economically in Pilsen as thousands of local jobs disappeared, but our close-in location and transportation resources remain excellent and have helped bring a surge of new development. Since creation of a Tax Increment Financing district in 1998, more than 15 companies have invested \$208 million in the 900-acre Pilsen Industrial Corridor, creating produce distribution centers, a cold-storage warehouse, an industrial laundry and most recently a production center

for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois that will support 200 jobs. New and existing companies employ about 11,000 people. To the north are even bigger job centers: the Illinois Medical District, which supports tens of thousands of positions from clerks and technicians to doctors and scientists, and downtown Chicago, with more than half a million jobs.

Coming together to plan

Pilsen has the leadership, expertise and organizational base to take advantage of these strengths and to use them to build a stronger Mexican-oriented community.

Our neighborhood groups have not always been successful at working together, but since 2005 the Pilsen Planning Committee (PPC) has served as a central point of connection. Convened by The Resurrection Project, Alivio Medical Center, Pilsen Neighbors Community Council and the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation—and with the support and participation of Alderman Daniel Solis—the PPC has attracted participation of virtually all local organizations.

The PPC met monthly for eight months to develop the five strategies in this plan and the 32 projects that will help us achieve our goals. Our efforts focus in five areas:

- **Housing.** A strong housing market has led to tear-downs of historic buildings and sale prices beyond the reach of many residents. Our projects focus on creating more affordable housing for both renters and owners, and encouraging existing owners to take advantage of historic preservation tax credits.
- **Neighborhood economy.** Development of small businesses and well-paid jobs can help our residents gain the economic strength necessary to stay and invest in the neighborhood. We will expand our economic development efforts and emphasize job-training, placement and support to small businesses.
- **Family-oriented.** Pilsen is a good place to raise families, but we must improve programs for safety, health and social supports. Our efforts will build on Pilsen's strong foundation of organizations, churches and schools.



Much of the housing stock dates from the late 19th Century.

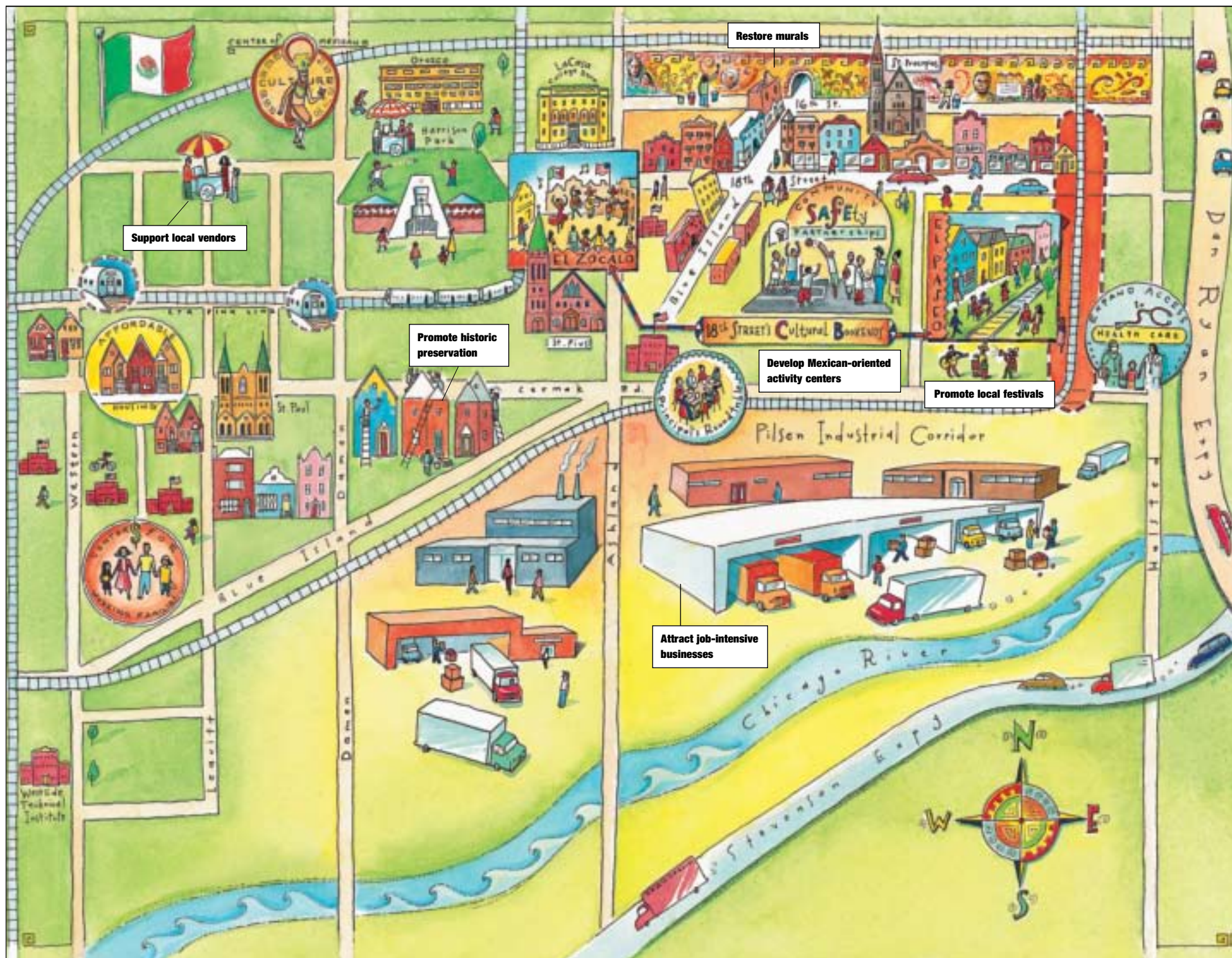


Residents participate in church kermeses (festivals) and other regular events.

- **Image.** Pilsen is the premier center of Mexican culture in metropolitan Chicago and we must maintain and expand this valuable neighborhood image. Projects will focus on enhancing 18th Street as a Mexican shopping district, building new gathering places, supporting Mexican artists and street vendors and improving neighborhood amenities.
- **Educational opportunity.** We have succeeded in construction of new schools—including the expansion of Benito Juarez Community Academy now underway—and we have created college-bound programs for our youth. But we must raise achievement levels and address declining enrollment due to gentrification and smaller family sizes. Projects focus on building up our schools networks, increasing parent involvement and developing multiple paths to higher education.

This quality-of-life plan is more than simply our dreams for Pilsen. It is a blueprint for the future that we, as the Pilsen Planning Committee and individual organizations, are already implementing. The Principals Table envisioned in Project 5.1 is meeting regularly and laying out aggressive programs to improve our schools. Local groups are laying the groundwork for new-business development, expanded job linkages, restoration of historic murals and improved access to social services. And some members of the Pilsen Planning Committee have formed the Pilsen Land Use Committee, which is working with Ald. Solis to incorporate affordable housing into new developments.

By working together through a coordinated plan, we will preserve our Mexican culture and extend Pilsen's long-time role as a center of Mexican life in Chicago.



A Strong Mexican Community and Culture



Street vendors contribute to the neighborhood's economy and its image as a Mexican neighborhood.

Members of the Pilsen neighborhood will work together to build and preserve a strong, safe, healthy, mixed-income Mexican community for families, while enhancing the character and history of Pilsen.

Our strategies:

1. **Expand** housing options for Pilsen residents.
2. **Build** a stronger neighborhood economy.
3. **Make** Pilsen a self-reliant, family-oriented community.
4. **Create** a stronger image for Pilsen as a historic Mexican neighborhood.
5. **Develop** educational opportunities for residents of all ages.

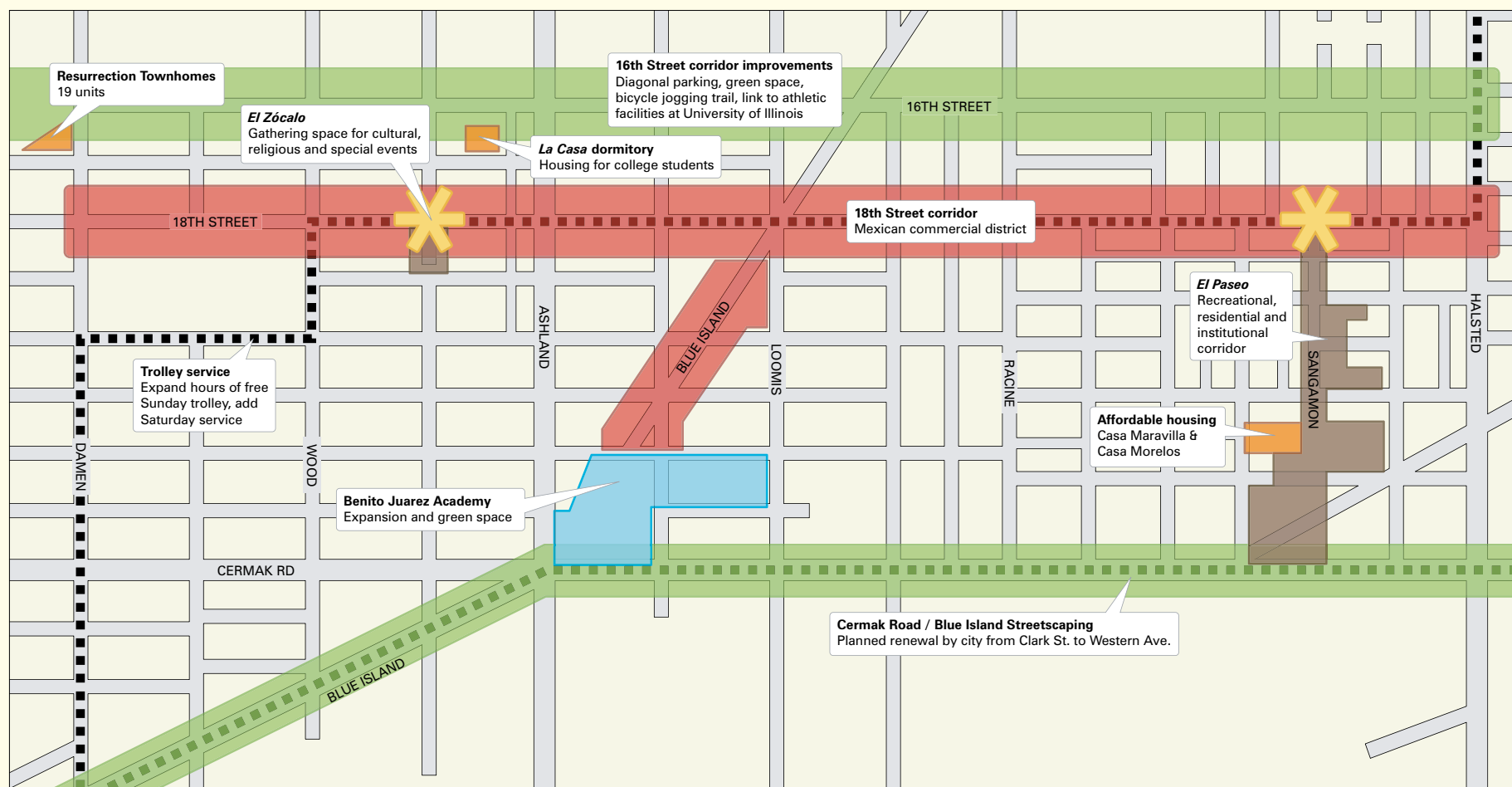


Figure 3 Community Vision

New projects will enhance the major corridors in the community, including 18th Street and Blue Island Avenue, and will transform the Sangamon railroad corridor into a pedestrian-friendly gathering place.

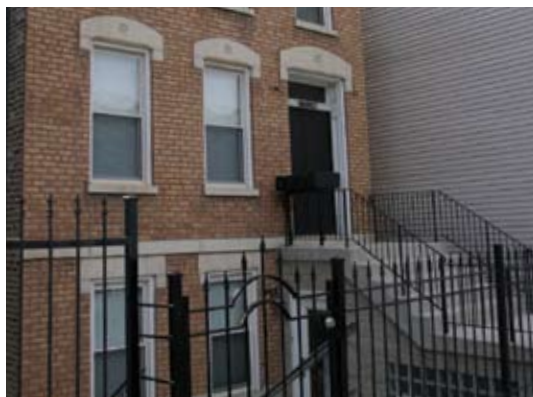


STRATEGY 1

Expand housing options for Pilsen residents

A working-class community for more than 120 years, Pilsen today faces a serious threat of gentrification and the resulting displacement of our low- and moderate-income residents. Condominium and loft construction have gained momentum in the last five years, forcing up housing prices and property taxes throughout the neighborhood.

The following projects are designed to slow down this process and to provide continued housing options for residents of moderate incomes. They will also provide housing options for people who grew up in Pilsen and would like to move back to the neighborhood.



Investments in housing can qualify for tax breaks because of Pilsen's historic designation.

1.1 Increase the volume of affordable housing within the neighborhood's boundaries.

The neighborhood has very little vacant land for new housing construction, but it does have some underutilized industrial buildings and vacant tracts, particularly on the east end of the neighborhood. These properties should be targeted for rental or homeownership housing that is affordable to households with moderate incomes. To provide financial support, we will explore the feasibility of using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for affordable housing developments.

1.2 Support inclusion of affordable housing units in all new developments in Pilsen.

Alderman Daniel Solis and neighborhood organizations have worked together through the Pilsen Land Use Committee to persuade housing developers to set aside 21 percent of all units for families earning 60 to 85 percent of the Chicago-area median income. The Pilsen Planning Committee supports this policy and will develop the outreach and training resources necessary to bring these housing opportunities to local residents and their families (see #1.3).

1.3 Improve access to housing and homeownership opportunities.

Organizations that offer housing-related services will work together to expand programs that help residents and other interested households find affordable housing in Pilsen. Led by the Spanish Coalition for Housing and The Resurrection Project (TRP), this effort will include:

- Expanded outreach, counseling and support programs to help households become economically prepared for homeownership. Services will include pre-screening, credit-counseling, household budgeting and debt reduction.
- Post-purchase training to educate new homeowners on maintenance needs and to help condominium owners become active in their associations.

- Promotion of employer-assisted housing, in which employers provide financial assistance to their employees to purchase a home nearby. Such programs have helped reduce commuting time and employee turnover, and could become an important tool for Pilsen residents and employers.
- New rental opportunities such as the planned Casa Maravilla (66 senior units) and Casa Morelos (44 rental units) developments planned by The Resurrection Project next to the Alivio Medical Center.

1.4 Encourage residents in the new Pilsen Historic District to invest in their housing.

The 2006 designation of the Pilsen Historic District brings significant property-tax benefits to owners of 4,200 local buildings. Covering the Pilsen and Heart of Chicago residential neighborhoods from the Dan Ryan Expressway to Western Avenue, 16th Street to Cermak/Blue Island, the district allows for an eight-year freeze on property taxes to any owner who invests 25 percent of the assessor's estimated market value into rehabilitation of the building. Rehabilitation of local structures, rather than demolition to build modern housing, is an essential step in preserving the character and beauty of Pilsen's streets.

1.5 Maintain affordability by introducing and passing a continuation of the former 7 percent cap on property assessment increases.

Legislation that capped property tax increases at 7 percent expired in 2006, leaving property owners vulnerable to large tax hikes. Pilsen organizations will support renewal of this legislation to help maintain affordability for property owners.

STRATEGY 2

Build a stronger neighborhood economy



The 18th Street retail district includes a wide variety of businesses.

Unlike some neighborhoods that have seen economic opportunities decrease as employers moved away, the Pilsen neighborhood has an excellent location near major transportation resources and large-scale job centers, including the Pilsen Industrial Corridor, Illinois Medical District and University of Illinois at Chicago. It is also a 1.5-minute train ride from downtown Chicago's enormous job base.

But to take full advantage of these economic opportunities, our neighborhood must build stronger and more coordinated systems for business development, job training and placement, and local networking. The six projects below will help build a stronger local economy while increasing the earning power of local households.

2.1 Develop 18th Street as a premier Mexican shopping district for local residents and visitors.

One of Pilsen's greatest assets is the 18th Street retail district between Halsted and Damen, known throughout Chicago as the center of the Pilsen Mexican community. To help it reach its potential as a resource for local residents and a magnet for visitors, we will pursue these interlocking tasks:

- **Business support.** Encourage reinvestment and business growth through supportive business training programs, technical assistance, joint advertising and access to city business-development programs. This work will be led by the Pilsen Together Chamber of Commerce.
- **Parking.** Work with business owners, the chamber of commerce, business associations, city officials and property owners to develop additional parking areas for the 18th Street corridor. One approach would be to create two new lots, one on each end of the street, to encourage pedestrian traffic.

- **Pilsen Summer Trolley.** This free Sunday afternoon shuttle links 18th Street and other Pilsen attractions to the Jane Addams Hull House Museum at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The service brings visitors to the neighborhood and serves local residents as well. We will work with the shuttle sponsors, including Pilsen Together Chamber of Commerce and Ald. Daniel Solis, to ensure continued service, develop additional ridership and expand hours to include Saturday service.

2.2 Create and market well-defined retail districts.

Marketing programs described in Strategy 4 will be targeted to support businesses in Pilsen's commercial districts along Blue Island Avenue and 18th Street.

2.3 Attract job-intensive businesses to the Pilsen Industrial Corridor.

The 900-acre industrial corridor just south of the Pilsen residential neighborhood supports 11,000 jobs and has seen \$208 million in new investment since creation of a Tax Increment Financing district in 1998. New facilities include American Linen, DHL, Chicago International Produce Market and Preferred Freezer Services, but there are underutilized facilities and vacant tracts available for further development. The Eighteenth Street Development Corporation will continue its successful business attraction and retention efforts in the corridor, working with the City of Chicago and local elected officials. A joint effort with the Digital Workforce Education Society and West Side Technical Institute will improve high-speed internet access for local businesses, including possible activation of an unused fiber-optic cable under Western Avenue.



Wholesale produce markets have built new facilities in the Pilsen Industrial Corridor.

2.4 Expand employment training and placement partnerships to help families increase their earning power.

Pilsen is well served with employment training and placement services by the Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL), West Side Technical Institute (WSTI) and other agencies that offer training in health care, precision metalworking, office technology, graphics, maintenance and other skills. A coordinated effort led by IPL, WSTI and Eighteenth Street Development Corp. will:

- Improve household financial strength through integrated programming at IPL's Center for Working Families, which offers job placement, financial counseling and access to financial services.
- Promote training opportunities to local residents regardless of their age, gender, immigration status and skill levels.
- Create new training in job skills needed by local employers.

2.5 Create employment connections with adjacent job centers and downtown.

The Illinois Medical District and University of Illinois at Chicago, both directly north of Pilsen, support tens of thousands of jobs with a wide range of skill levels from entry-level clerical work to medical technicians and professional work. Chicago's Loop is an even more powerful resource with an estimated 650,000 jobs just 15 minutes from Pilsen. We will develop the relationships, communication tools and referral networks necessary to take full advantage of these nearby employment resources.

2.6 Market Pilsen as a center for manufacturing and distribution of Mexican-oriented goods and services.

Our neighborhood is well positioned to take advantage of national and global business opportunities, with excellent transportation, distribution and manufacturing resources nearby. One thrust of our business-development efforts will be to help existing Mexican-oriented companies grow and to attract new ones. A promising sector is food products because several Mexican-owned companies are already located in Pilsen.

STRATEGY 3

Make Pilsen a self-reliant, family-oriented community



Health-awareness efforts include Alivio Medical Center's annual Run for Health.

Our neighborhood is fortunate to have a long history of activism and community involvement through settlement houses, churches, non-profit agencies, arts organizations and others that provide services and run programs for local residents.

Today our community has a strong network of organizations and agencies—most of them participants on the Pilsen Planning Committee—that work with families, children, teenagers, abused women, day laborers, undocumented immigrants, artists, business owners, people needing health care and other community residents. We are a strong neighborhood already, but by coordinating and expanding our efforts, we can make Pilsen a strong, self-reliant and family-oriented community.

3.1 Enhance the role of schools and churches as centers of community life, social programs and family services.

Schools and churches have always had a central role in the life of our community. We will enhance this role through expanded services, coordinated programming and improved outreach. Preliminary efforts will:

- Coordinate and publicize the church-based *kermeses* (festivals) that bring families together nearly every weekend throughout the summer. The Resurrection Project is working with churches to create a common calendar that will reduce overlap of events and more widely publicize these important social gatherings.
- Develop additional school-based programs to bring adults and families into schools on evenings and weekends. This programming could include English as a Second Language classes, health services, immigrant-support programs and arts instruction.

3.2 Catalog, coordinate and improve local programs.

One of the most effective and efficient ways to strengthen our community is to coordinate existing programs, identify areas not being served and create new programs to serve those needs. The Pilsen Planning Committee began this process by creating preliminary lists of programs; the lists will be used to assess and improve community-wide programming in the following areas:

- Health services.
- Programming for youth.
- Family programs.
- Support to abused spouses and their children.
- Immigrant support.
- Leadership development.
- Safety and gang involvement.

3.3 Expand access to quality, affordable health care.

Alivio Medical Center is a major resource for Pilsen families including those who are uninsured or undocumented, serving 16,000 patients a year at three centers including a satellite facility at Gladstone School. Chicago Department of Health statistics show strong decreases in the rate of heart disease, diabetes and births to teenage girls between 1990 and 2000. But the neighborhood continues to have high rates of liver disease and tuberculosis, and many families lack adequate health care. To improve access and reach more residents with effective services, we will:

- Establish additional health-care partnerships with schools and organizations, such as the planned Alivio health services for residents of The Resurrection Project's new Casa Maravilla senior housing.
- Promote health-awareness and prevention programs such as health fairs and Alivio's annual Alivio y Salud Run for Health.



The Friday-night basketball league provides a safe environment for youth.

3.4 Make Pilsen a safer community.

The level of “index” crimes in the Lower West Side (Pilsen) community fell more than 30 percent between 1999 and 2004, but with more than 1,800 index crimes per year, more work is needed to create a safe and comfortable environment for all residents at all times of day and night. Though 18th Street is a safe and well-used artery during the day, it is perceived as less safe in the evenings, and other streets in the neighborhood are known as “hot-spots” for criminal or gang activity. To make Pilsen a safer community, organizations and individuals will:

- Expand involvement in CAPS, Chicago’s community policing program. Some Pilsen residents and organizations are active participants in beat meetings and the District Advisory Committee, but ongoing involvement is needed and more participation will be recruited among business owners and others.
- Create positive activities such as TRP’s Friday night Resurrection Basketball League, which moves from block to block each week and brings out people of all ages to play, watch and socialize. The program is co-sponsored by the Chicago Police Department’s 12th District and in 2006 completed its eighth year of programming.
- Develop neighborhood activity centers that bring people onto the streets. The Zócalo and Paseo concepts described in Strategy 4 will create lively centers of street life, and the retail programs for 18th Street and Cermak will increase pedestrian traffic on those business strips. A larger presence of people using the streets for positive activities helps reduce crime and the perception of danger.

- Participate in development of CLEARpath, the Chicago Police Department’s new public-safety information system. TRP and other local groups and residents are advising the police department on the design and implementation of the web-accessible information system.

3.5 Expand support to immigrants through coordinated programming and a local resources booklet.

To help documented and undocumented immigrants connect with local services and other resources, we will develop an information booklet in Spanish and English covering employment training and placement, health care, safety, school involvement, domestic violence, youth programming and leadership activities, and housing assistance. The booklet will emphasize services available to undocumented residents and explain that there is no reason to fear using such services, and it will help local organizations coordinate their services.

3.6 Expand programs at Dvorak Park.

This park on the east side of the neighborhood is well used, with active baseball, soccer, basketball, swimming, crafts and senior programs. Pilsen Neighbors Community Council will work with the Chicago Park District on a study of primary needs, which may include program expansions or infrastructure improvements such as enclosure of the outdoor pool for year-round use.

STRATEGY 4

Create a stronger image of Pilsen as a vibrant, attractive community



Pilsen's many murals are an invaluable cultural resource.

Pilsen is a vibrant, colorful and historic neighborhood with a great deal to offer its own residents as well as visitors. But many of its assets are underappreciated, and some need further development to preserve and enhance their value.

This strategy focuses on identifying and building up the qualities that make Pilsen an interesting neighborhood. It recognizes the 18th Street business district, with its Mexican handicraft shops, groceries, coffee houses and bookstore, as a cultural and economic asset that must be protected. It sees the value of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum and the adjacent Harrison Park and Orozco School, with its colorful mosaic façade. It values the murals along the 16th Street viaduct, on St. Pius School and elsewhere, as integral elements of the neighborhood's culture, just as its historic buildings are the architectural fabric of the neighborhood.

This strategy also sees potential to create new attractions such as the Zócalo and Paseo projects outlined below, which will not only enhance the neighborhood's image but reinforce other strategies from economic development to housing and safety.

4.1 Create and promote "identity" streets.

Three street corridors in Pilsen have distinct characters that will be enhanced and promoted through unified street design and landscaping, banners and/or maps. They are Cermak Rd., which requires streetscaping to soften its hard industrial edge and rail corridor; Blue Island, which includes the Juarez High School expansion at Cermak and a busy shopping district; and 18th Street, the neighborhood's Mexican retail district.

4.2 Expand the 18th Street business district to create a continuous Mexican-oriented strip from Halsted to Damen.

Eighteenth Street Development Corp. and others will encourage reinvestment by business owners to upgrade storefronts through the use of public and private programs. Support current and potential business owners through workshops and mentoring opportunities.

4.3 Beautify Pilsen with banners, kiosks, benches, landscaping and attractive signage.

To attract customers and visitors, Pilsen's business development groups will develop a beautification plan and develop more parking to encourage people to park and then walk the strip. Rather than a single gateway, kiosks at various locations could:

- Welcome people to Pilsen or to a particular location in Pilsen ("El Zócalo" or "El Paseo").
- Attract and inform visitors.
- Encourage pedestrian activity around Pilsen.

4.4 Restore murals throughout Pilsen, especially 16th Street.

The Community Image Task Force and Pros Arts Studios will convene community artists and residents to catalog, evaluate and make recommendations for restoration and upkeep of current murals and suggestions for future murals. Murals play a strong role in the community's history and culture and may be lost if they are not restored soon.

Figure 5 *El Paseo* concept plan

The railroad corridor along Sangamon Street can become a major amenity by adding pedestrian paths, greenery and safety improvements.



4.5 Develop two Mexican-oriented activity centers.

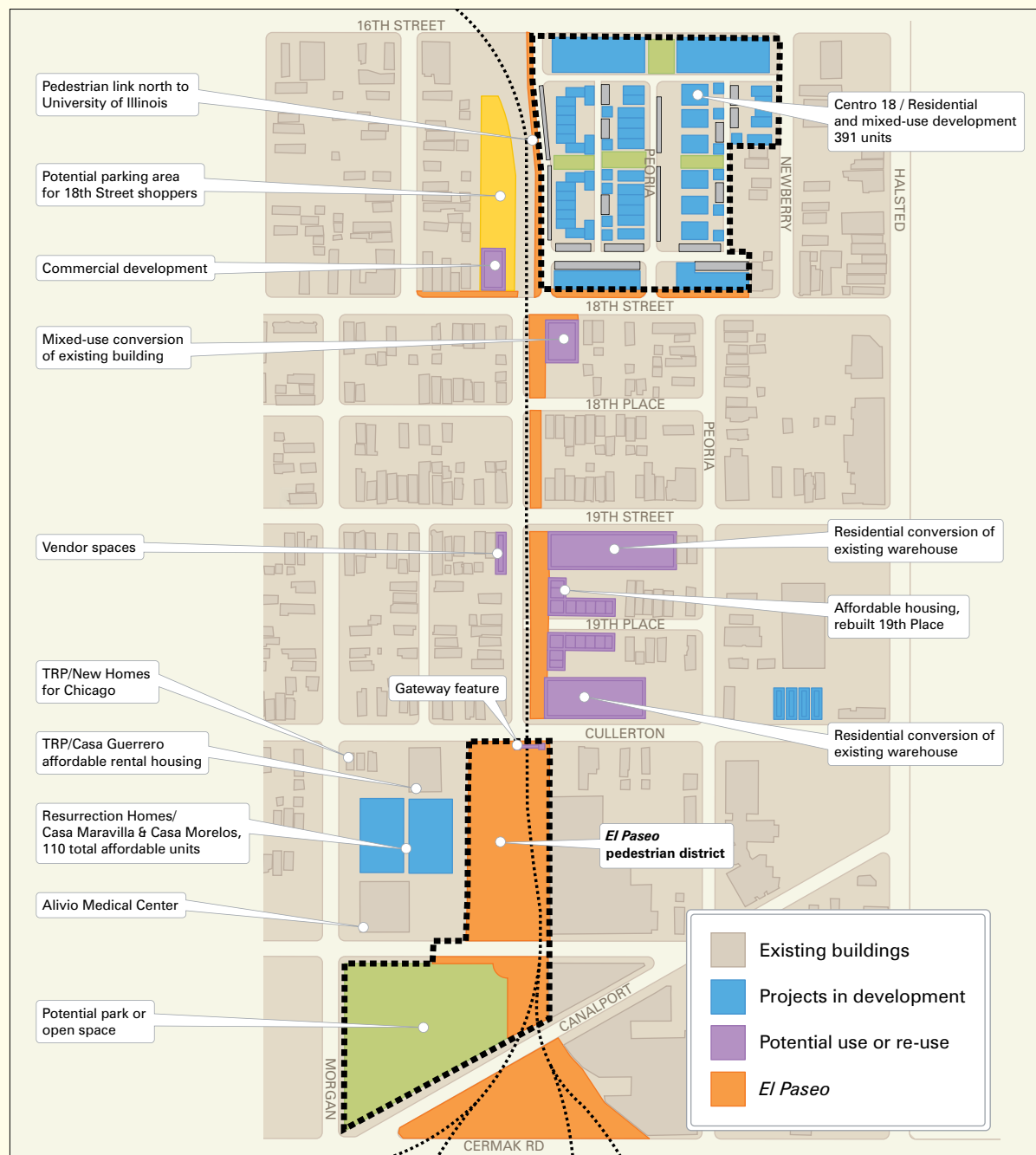
Two locations for Mexican-style gathering places have long been discussed and will be pursued aggressively. These projects can serve as “bookends” for the 18th Street business district and become major community amenities that support reinvestment in nearby housing and retail buildings.

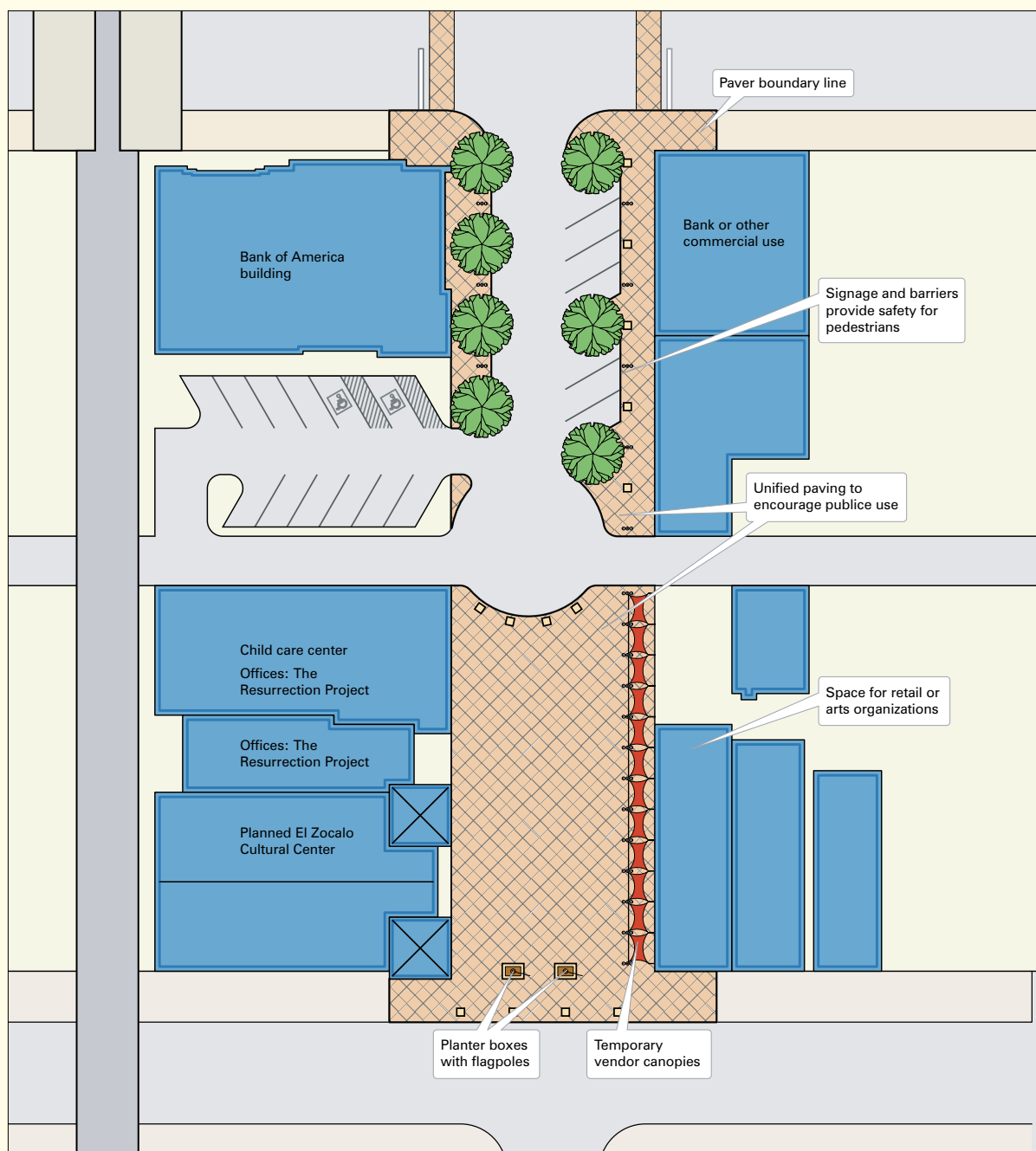
El Paseo, along the underutilized railroad right-of-way and Sangamon Street, will become an attractive north-south pedestrian link on the east end of the community. Buildings and vacant lots along the *Paseo* could be redeveloped for affordable housing and other uses, and a pedestrian passage could connect from Cermak Road on the south to the University of Illinois campus on the north. This project will be led by Pilsen Neighbors Community Council with support from Alivio Medical Center, The Resurrection Project.

El Zócalo, at 18th Street and Paulina, will serve as a Mexican-style town plaza, a site for community events and opportunities for vendors. Next to the CTA's 18th Street rapid transit station, the site is already used for the annual *Tardes en El Zócalo* event, which features movies, dancing and information booths. The Resurrection Project owns buildings adjacent to the proposed plaza and is working with Bank of America, which has built a branch bank on the corner, to create an attractive site with unified paving and safe access for both pedestrians and automobiles, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 El Paseo site plan

Turning Sangamon Street into an attractive pedestrian passage could lead to other new development.





4.6 Promote local festivals.

Pilsen hosts the Fiesta Del Sol, Tardes en El Zócalo, the Día de Los Niños Parade, Día de Los Muertos activities, 18th Street Open Studios, Pilsen Mexican Independence Day Parade and church-sponsored kermeses, among other events. This role as cultural center will be promoted as a destination for visitors and tourists, with a special emphasis on the 1.6 million Latinos who live in metropolitan Chicago.

4.7 Support street vendors with equipment programs, technical assistance and training.

Like towns and cities in Mexico, Pilsen has a strong contingent of vendors who sell paletas (ice cream), elotes (corn on the cob), fresh fruit, tamales, cotton candy and other treats for children and adults. As a valuable part of the local culture and an important source of income for local families, the vendors will be supported through the local business development groups, the vendors' union and other means. To enhance the business success and visual impact of the vendors, supportive programs might include:

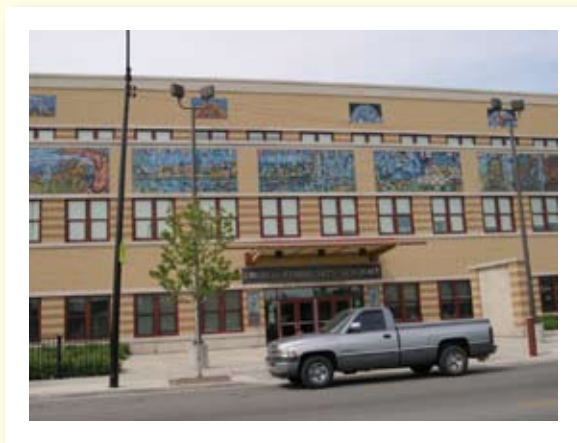
- Pilsen umbrellas available at cost or a discount to vendors. The umbrellas could be printed with phrases such as ¡Bienvenidos a Pilsen! and Welcome to Pilsen!
- Equipment programs that encourage high-quality carts, new food coolers and hand-washing equipment.
- Market locations with awnings and/or storage space for equipment, at the Zócalo, on the Paseo, at local parks or near the intersection of 18th and Blue Island.
- Business training to support reinvestment and expansion of these micro-enterprises.

Figure 7 El Zócalo shared plaza plan

Access to Pilsen's Mexican-style plaza, next to and behind the new Bank of America building, can be enhanced through pavement and traffic improvements that encourage pedestrian usage and improve safety.

STRATEGY 5

Develop educational opportunities for residents of all ages



Pilsen residents want to improve education opportunities for all ages. Above, Orozco School on 18th Street.

Pilsen's estimated 8,800 students from kindergarten through 12th grade attend 11 public elementary schools, four Catholic elementary schools and two high schools -- one public and one Catholic. A 2004 analysis by the Illinois Facilities Fund found that none of the 11 public elementary schools achieved the top level of student test performance (60 percent of the student body testing at or above standards) and the public high school, Juarez, was in the lowest ranking, with fewer than 15 percent of students testing at or above standards.

Another concern is a 23 percent drop in total enrollment at local schools from 1990 to 2003, which residents attribute to smaller families and moves out of the neighborhood caused by rising housing prices. The enrollment drop affects many of the public schools, where it can lead to staffing cuts, and has caused financial strains at the Catholic institutions.

The neighborhood does have assets to build on, including active parent and community involvement in schools; strong student performance at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, which uses business internships to help students earn money while gaining real-world skills; and several college-preparation programs that help students and their families with college admission. Also, the Chicago Public Schools has begun a \$25 million expansion of Benito Juarez Community Academy.

5.1 Convene a "Principals Table" to coordinate and improve programming in local schools and to attract new students.

After the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council brought together principals, parents and Local School Council members during the planning process, six principals agreed to formally create a Principals Table to work together on school improvement. This group will provide a central point of contact for education issues in Pilsen, including the projects listed below.

5.2 Improve transitions from pre-K to primary, middle school, high school, post-secondary institutions and college.

Principals and parents alike identified a lack of continuity among schools as a challenge that must be met to improve local education. Working through the Principals Table and among individual schools, we will develop communication, school visits, recruiting, orientation activities and other methods to make all residents aware of the educational paths available in Pilsen. One focus of the group will be to bring state pre-Kindergarten funding to Pilsen schools for full-day programs, which will free up discretionary funds now used to support full-day kindergarten.

5.3 Create a family literacy program to build adult skills and support student achievement.

To improve the academic performance of schoolchildren and to propel them into higher education, West Side Technical Institute will work with local schools and families to create a Family Literacy Program that boosts adult skills in reading, math and other subjects, so that the parents can more fully support their children's academic career. The program will include classes with- in Pilsen schools and at the WSTI facility, 2800 S. Western Ave.

5.4 Engage community organizations and education service providers in education improvement.

We will coordinate and expand the work of local organizations involved on education programs in and outside of the schools. Pilsen Neighbors Community Council will continue to provide leadership on parent involvement and improved academic performance. The Resurrection Project and its member churches will play a parallel role in the Catholic schools. Gads Hill Center, Pros Arts Studio and Mujeres Latinas en Acción will continue their outreach and programming that supports education.

5.5 Develop high levels of parent involvement and parent leadership at local schools.

The Parent Committee of the Principals Roundtable will promote parent involvement at three levels:

- Parent mentor programs will be started in at least one school, based on the successful model created by Logan Square Neighborhood Assn.
- Parent education will be supported through creation of a parent-child resource center in Pilsen that offers GED (high-school equivalency) training, English as a Second Language and computer training for parents, along with enrichment programs for their children. English-language training for parents at Orozco School, in partnership with National Louis University, improves the parents' ability to communicate in English with teachers and their children.
- Local School Council (LSC) participation will be enhanced, and current parent vacancies will be filled, through parent training, promotion and communication among LSCs in Pilsen.

5.6 Create neighborhood-wide school programs that build on Mexican culture.

To help preserve the neighborhood's Mexican culture and improve the quality of education, we will promote or develop programs within the schools that teach about Mexico, Mexican-Americans and current issues of importance to Latinos in Chicago and the United States. Neighborhood groups will seek an academic partner, such as a local college, to help implement this program.

5.7 Develop paths to higher education for youth and adults.

A recent study of Chicago high school students found that only six percent of entering freshmen citywide will attain a college degree by their mid-20s. The study by the Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research found that Latino students have even lower rates of college attainment. To reverse this serious problem, Pilsen groups will:

- Expand the college preparation program run by The Resurrection Project and implement the plan to develop the La Casa college dormitory at the former St. Adalbert's Convent, so that students attending Chicago universities can live close to home in a supportive environment. With leadership from Illinois Rep. Edward Acevedo, the State of Illinois has committed \$3.4 million toward this \$4.5 million project.

- Develop partnerships with City Colleges of Chicago, in particular the West Side Technical Institute (WSTI), to encourage higher education for graduating high school students and adults. WSTI will continue to work directly with all graduating seniors from Juarez High School to provide individual assessments for continuing education.
- Participate in recruitment, preparation and support programs offered by local universities, including those targeted at Latino students such as the University of Illinois at Chicago's LARES (Latin American Recruitment and Education Services) program, Northeastern Illinois University's El Centro program and a planned Spanish-language interdisciplinary program at National Louis University.

5.8 Develop industry-specific adult education, such as a health academy, that improves access to well-paid jobs.

Pilsen organizations will promote and coordinate their programs to help adults gain skills necessary to earn higher wages in the Chicago job market. These programs can include English as a Second Language, office and computer skills and the industry-specific training outlined in Project 2.4.

Proclamation of Support to Pilsen Community Planning Process

Whereas, the community of Pilsen is at a critical point in its history, one with great development opportunities but also potential threats to its Mexican culture; and

Whereas, a coalition of community-based organizations in Pilsen and I, Alderman Daniel Solis, have come together to work on a common vision for the community; and

Whereas, that Pilsen Planning Committee (PPC) includes a broad range of organizations that represent Pilsen's diverse and experienced leadership, including but not limited to the groups listed below; and

Whereas, the PPC has developed a draft vision to "build and preserve a stronger, safer, mixed-income, healthier Mexican community for families while enhancing the character and history of the neighborhood"; and

Whereas, the Committee has so far developed four preliminary strategies to achieve the vision, as follows:

- Build a Strong Neighborhood Economy;
- Provide a Range of Housing Options;
- Make Pilsen a Self-Reliant Family-Oriented Community; and
- Improve Pilsen's Image as a Strong Mexican Neighborhood.

And Whereas, the Pilsen Planning Committee is charged with presenting a Pilsen Quality-of-Life Plan before me;

Now, therefore, I, Daniel Solis, Alderman of the 25th Ward and President Pro Tempore of the City Council of the City of Chicago, and active member of the Pilsen Planning Committee, do hereby proclaim my support to the Pilsen Planning Committee and I commit to bring necessary resources including municipal, financial, and human, to help implement the Pilsen Neighborhood Plan.

Alderman Daniel Solis, 25th Ward

JANUARY 24, 2006

Key to Participating Organizations

The following organizations have committed to participate in implementation of the plan. Some projects will be overseen by PPC task forces. More groups are expected to participate.

AMC Alivio Medical Center

CPD Chicago Police Department, 12th District

ESDC Eighteenth Street Development Corporation

EV El Valor

GHC Gads Hill Center

IPL Instituto del Progreso Latino

MLEA Mujeres Latinas en Acción

PNCC Pilsen Neighbors Community Council

PA Pilsen Alliance

PLUC Pilsen Land Use Committee

PLVCMHC Pilsen Little Village Community Mental Health Center

CITF Pilsen Planning Committee Community Image Task Force

ETF Pilsen Planning Committee Education Task Force

FTF Pilsen Planning Committee Family Task Force

HTF Pilsen Planning Committee Housing Task Force

PTCC Pilsen Together Chamber of Commerce

PAS Pros Arts Studio

YMCA Rauner Family YMCA

TRP The Resurrection Project

Ald. Solis Office of Alderman Daniel Solis (25th Ward)

SCH Spanish Coalition for Housing

TRP The Resurrection Project

WSTI West Side Technical Institute

Schedule and Priorities

STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME (YEARS)			ORGANIZATIONS	
	1	2-3	4-5	PRIMARY ORG(S).	SUPPORT ORG(S).
1. EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PILSEN RESIDENTS					
Community and School Connections Initiative					
1.1 Increase the volume of affordable housing within the neighborhood's boundaries	■	■	■	HTF, Ald. Solis	PTCC
1.2 Support inclusion of affordable housing units in all new developments in Pilsen	■	■	■	PLUC	HTF, PTCC
1.3 Improve access to housing and home ownership opportunities	■	■	■	SCH, TRP, Ald. Solis	ESDC
1.4 Encourage residents in the new Pilsen Historic District to invest in their housing	■	■	■	Ald. Solis, ESDC, PTCC	TRP
1.5 Maintain affordability by introducing and passing a continuation of the former 7 percent cap on property assessment increases.	■			HTF, Pilsen Alliance	PTCC
2. BUILD A STRONGER NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMY					
2.1 Develop 18th Street as a premier Mexican shopping district for local residents and visitors	■	■	■	PTCC, ESDC, Ald. Solis	TRP
2.2 Create and market well-defined commercial districts		■	■	ESDC, PTCC, Ald. Solis	
2.3 Attract job-intensive businesses to the Pilsen Industrial Corridor	■	■	■	ESDC, Ald. Solis	IPL, WSTI
2.4 Expand employment training and placement partnerships to help families increase their earning power		■	■	IPL, WSTI, Ald. Solis, AMC	ESDC
2.5 Create employment connections with adjacent job centers and downtown		■	■	ESDC, IPL, WSTI	Ald. Solis, AMC
2.6 Market Pilsen as a center for manufacturing and distribution of Mexican-oriented goods and services		■		ESDC	Ald. Solis, PTCC

STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME (YEARS)			ORGANIZATIONS	
	1	2-3	4-5	PRIMARY ORG(S).	SUPPORT ORG(S).
3. MAKE PILSEN A SELF-RELIANT, FAMILY-ORIENTED COMMUNITY					
3.1 Enhance the role of schools and churches as centers of community life, social programs and family services	■	■	■	TRP, PNCC, Schools	GHS, PAS, PTCC, Ald. Solis
3.2 Catalog, coordinate and improve local programs	■	■		FTF	AMC, PLVCMHC, YMCA, PAS, MLEA, Ald. Solis, PTCC, GHC
3.3 Expand access to quality, affordable health care	■	■	■	AMC, TRP	Ald. Solis
3.4 Make Pilsen a safer community	■	■	■	TRP, AMC, Ald. Solis, CPD	PTCC, PAS
3.5 Expand support to immigrants through coordinated programming and a local resources booklet		■		FTF	TRP, AMC, PTCC, IPL, PTCC, Ald. Solis
3.6 Expansion of programs at Dvorak Park		■	■	PNCC, AMC, PAS	Ald. Solis
4. CREATE AN IMAGE OF PILSEN AS A VIBRANT, ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITY					
4.1 Create and promote “identity” streets		■		ESDC, Ald. Solis	PTCC
4.2 Expand the 18th Street business district		■	■	ESDC, Ald. Solis	PTCC
4.3 Beautify Pilsen with banners, kiosks, benches, landscaping and attractive signage	■	■		Ald. Solis, PTCC, CITF	ESDC, PNCC, TRP
4.4 Restore murals throughout Pilsen, especially 16th Street		■		CITF	PTCC, PAS, Artists, Ald. Solis
4.5 Develop two Mexican-oriented activity centers: El Paseo and El Zócalo		■	■	AMC, TRP, PNCC	Ald. Solis
4.6 Promote local festivals and church-sponsored kermeses	■	■	■	PTCC, TRP	Ald. Solis
4.6 Support street vendors with equipment programs, technical assistance and training		■		CITF, PTCC	ESDC

STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME (YEARS)			ORGANIZATIONS	
	1	2-3	4-5		
				PRIMARY ORG(S).	SUPPORT ORG(S).
5. DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF ALL AGES					
5.1 Convene a "Principals Table" to coordinate and improve programming in local schools and to attract new students.	■			PNCC, TRP, Schools	ETF
5.2 Improve transitions from pre-K to primary, middle school, high school and college	■	■	■	PNCC, TRP	WSTI, GHC, EV, ETF
5.3 Create a family literacy program to build adult skills and support student achievement		■	■	WSTI	
5.4 Engage community organizations and education service providers in school improvement	■	■	■	PNCC, TRP	ETF, MLEA, GHC, PAS
5.5 Develop high levels of parent involvement and parent leadership at local schools	■	■	■	PNCC, TRP	ETF
5.6 Create neighborhood-wide school programs that build on Mexican culture		■	■	ETF	PAS
5.7 Develop multiple paths to higher education for youth and adults	■	■	■	TRP, WSTI, PNCC	ETF, GHC
5.8 Provide industry-specific adult education, such as a health academy, that improves access to well-paid jobs		■	■	WSTI, IPL	AMC

New Communities Program

NCP is a long-term initiative of Local Initiatives Support Corporation/Chicago to support comprehensive community development in Chicago neighborhoods. It seeks to rejuvenate challenged communities, bolster those in danger of losing ground and preserve the diversity of areas in the path of gentrification. Each effort is led by a neighborhood-based lead agency that coordinates programs among other local organizations and citywide support groups.

The program gives each of the lead agencies several resources: two full-time staff positions (an NCP director and organizer), technical support for planning and documenting the planning process, a pool of loan and grant funds distributed on a competitive basis for project seed money, and opportunities for learning from both peers and subject-area experts.

All NCP neighborhoods undertake a structured community planning process that leads to the quality-of-life plan, then move on to implementation. They are encouraged to be “doing while planning,” undertaking short-term “Early Action Projects” such as launching a youth program, opening an employment center, creating public art or sponsoring local health fairs.

NCP is designed to strengthen communities from within—through planning, organizing and human development. The comprehensive approach is designed to help broaden opportunities for local residents through better education, broader housing choices, safer streets, stronger personal finances and new economic opportunities. The strengthened community is better equipped to take advantage of larger market forces, attract new investment and enhance the overall quality of life.

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The New Communities ProgramSM (NCP) is supported by a major grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation with additional funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Chase Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Living Cities, Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, Partnership for New Communities, Polk Bros. Foundation, State Farm Insurance Companies and Steans Family Foundation.