



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Looking back, when the Wicker Park Bucktown Master Plan was adopted in 2009, it was truly a groundbreaking plan. The plan not only had a very extensive input process, it presented the information in an engaging, captivating manner. The plan's vision called for a walkable, bikeable community, fiercely independent in artistic expression, business ownership, and resident activism; experimental and pioneering; eclectic yet collaborative and committed.

The plan set out to lay bold ideas that would reinvent the streets, sidewalks, and open spaces of Wicker Park Bucktown to meet the artistic creativity, hip business culture, and forward-thinking residents of the community.

Present day, just seven years later, a lot has changed. When the plan was released, the Great Recession was starting to set in and the days of rampant growth took a brief pause. Yet the projects recommended in the Plan moved forward quickly, spearheaded by SSA #33, its members, elected officials, and neighborhood associations.

As we look ahead, there are a number of noteworthy trends that will continue to impact the neighborhood; the projects included as part of this plan are a direct reflection of such. To name a few, these include:

- Increasing development pressure
- Escalation of retail and residential rents
- Rising median home value
- Heightened focus on multi-modal transportation and inter-relationships therein (CTA / Metra / Bikes / Car Sharing / Pedestrian Space)
- Increasing importance and need to protect and advance the preservation of arts and culture
- Heightened demand for public people spaces
- Need for maintenance, cleanliness, and green practices

Since 2009...



The 606, also known as the Bloomingdale Trail, was built and includes the 2.7 mile Bloomingdale Trail as well as four neighborhood parks;



The number of PINs (Parcel Identification Numbers) has nearly doubled;



New development has returned, but has been transformed, with some of the first TOD projects with little or no parking in the City;



A new hotel is under construction at Milwaukee/North/Damen; and

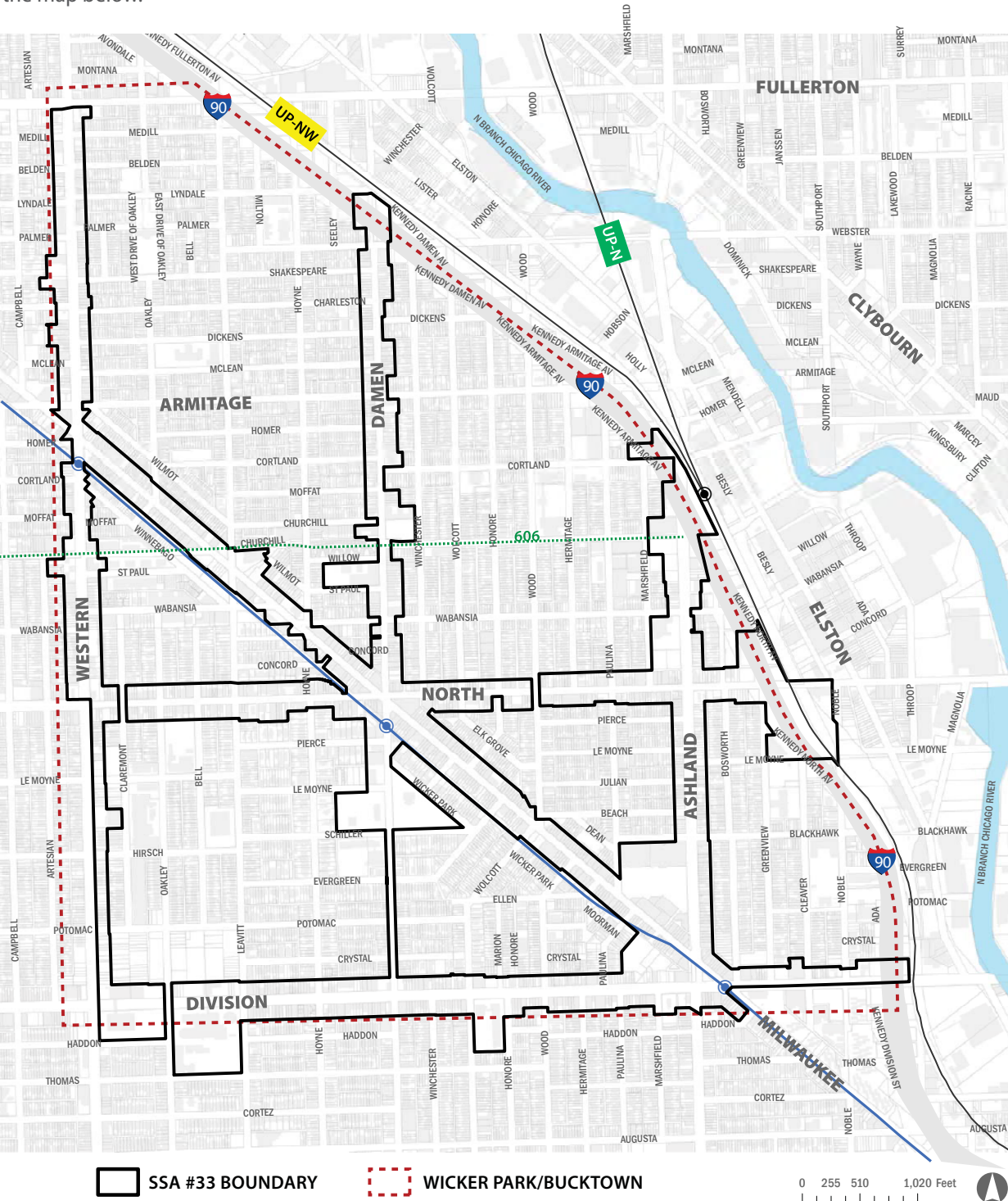


The SSA has been reconstituted and extended.

In early 2016, SSA #33 selected a team of consultants led by Teska Associates, Inc. to lead an update of the 2009 Plan. Streamlined throughout the planning process were the additive knowledge, support and local insights from residents, businesses, and organizations in Wicker Park Bucktown. The update builds on the success of the 2009 Master Plan and sets out objectives and projects that will live up to the vision of the community.

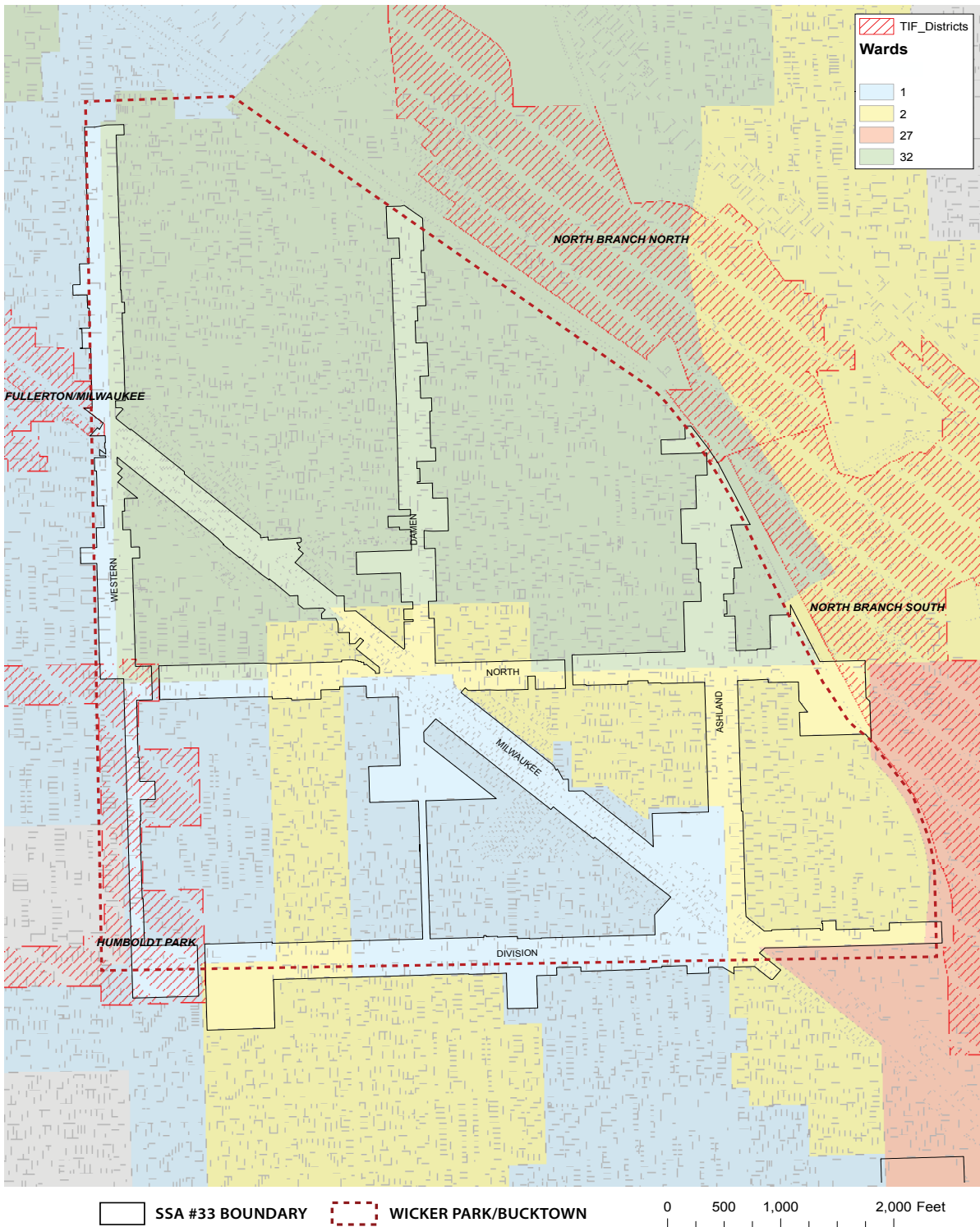
Study Area Map

Wicker Park and Bucktown are located between Western Avenue to the west, Fullerton to the north, Kennedy Expressway to the north and east, and Division Street to the South. The Wicker Park Bucktown SSA #33 Master Plan will focus primarily on the commercial corridors in Wicker Park Bucktown that correspond to the boundaries of SSA #33 along Western, Damen, Ashland, Milwaukee and North Avenues, and along Division Street as shown in the map below.



Ward Map

Wicker Park Bucktown is located in the 1st, 2nd and 32nd Wards, and is immediately adjacent to the 27th Ward toward the southeast. Currently, there is one TIF District, the Humboldt Park TIF, which overlaps the SSA along Western Avenue between North Avenue and Division Street. The North-Branch, North and South TIFs lie just east of the SSA #33 boundaries.



ene on Milwaukee Ave.
Near Ashland Ave.,
Chicago.

120.

RECORD-
HERALD



THINK
OF
IT

History

The word “diversity” gets widely cited as a desirable social goal, but in most places, including much of Chicago, it has been difficult to achieve. Wicker Park Bucktown has been a notable exception for more than 150 years, with many ethnic groups and people of various incomes living together. In 1857 the area’s first industry, the Rolling Mill Steel Works near Ashland and Armitage, opened and attracted a predominantly Irish work force, who soon lived and worked with Germans and Scandinavians. Later came many Poles, as did central and eastern European Jews.

As the population grew, so did the neighborhood, especially following the Great Fire of 1871 and the advent of the streetcar. The Fire inspired masonry construction, especially in Wicker Park, as an alternative to wood, but for three years after the Fire, WPB was outside the boundaries where masonry was required. This attracted working class residents to the more affordable wood-frame houses, especially in Bucktown. With the advent



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in 1895 of the Metropolitan “L’s” Northwest branch service, later to become the CTA, home construction quickly grew, as well as larger buildings along the commercial corridors.

After World War II, millions of Americans moved to the suburbs, enticed by favorable financing and new expressways. Much of the northwest side, including Wicker Park and Bucktown, welcomed new waves of immigrants, predominantly Hispanic, including many from Puerto Rico. Starting in the 1970s, WPB became a haven for artists, attracted by cheap rent and quick access to downtown Chicago via Milwaukee Avenue, the CTA or Metra. This in turn has attracted young professionals, many in creative fields, which paved the way for restaurants, bars, and artist colonies that sprouted throughout the neighborhood.

Chicago’s big decline in population occurred between the late 1950’s and 1990 (decreasing from 3.7 million in 1950 to 2.7 million in 1990), and has since stabilized and grown a little.

Retail Follows Residential

An axiom of the real estate industry is that retail follows residential, while jobs follow major transportation facilities, including rivers and roads. This has certainly been true in WPB, where the Chicago River and diagonal Milwaukee Avenue, running northwest from downtown Chicago, helped attract wave after wave of immigrants and jobs.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a rebirth of WPB which has once again attracted new waves of homebuyers and renters, but this time it has been fueled by urban pioneers, and later singles and families who appreciate the diversity of people, experiences, and central location. With expressway, road, CTA trains and buses (which include 8 major bus routes that crisscross WPB), and Metra the area is now attracting a wide range of households who call Wicker Park Bucktown home.



Photo Courtesy of Forgotten Chicago

Great Moments + Facts in WPB History:

❑ **Native Americans** established a foot path that later became Milwaukee Avenue, aka “the path to prosperity,” aka the “Polish Downtown,” aka the “Hipster Highway.”

❑ Milwaukee Avenue was once a **toll road**. However, “Anti-toll sentiments boiled over in 1881, when a mob burned the toll gate at Fullerton and Milwaukee, thus freeing the street for commercial traffic,” according to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. (page 8, Milwaukee Avenue Landmark Designation Report, 2007)

❑ According to the City of Chicago, Wicker Park is mapped as part of West Town and Bucktown is the southeastern part of Logan Square, but residents like to debate the **dividing line** between Wicker Park and Bucktown at North Avenue, Bloomindale or Armitage.

❑ Wicker Park is named after **Charles Wicker**, who developed land west of Milwaukee Avenue and donated some of it for the park that now bears his name. He got top dollar developing lots for the large, high style homes built by well-off German and Scandinavian immigrants near the park.

❑ **Bucktown**, where most houses were more modest, gets its name because, according to urban legend, some residents, mostly Poles, kept goats in their front yards. Male goats, of course, are called bucks.

❑ In 1993 **Liz Phair**, who had moved to Wicker Park from the North Shore, released *Exile in Guyville*, a musical commentary on life as a young woman in the neighborhood, which had become both an artist’s colony and focal point for Chicago’s indie rock scene.

Accomplishments of 2009 Master Plan

Many master plans do not spawn identifiable community improvements. For a variety of reasons, they often end up simply collecting dust on shelves or—in the digital age—soaking up hard drive space. Happily, such is not the case with the 2009 Wicker Park Bucktown Master Plan, which SSA #33 has used as a guide post for numerous improvements that today help make the neighborhood an exciting place to live, work and play. Let us count the ways...

Arts + Culture

As the 2009 plan emphasizes, Wicker Park Bucktown is a community where people come to express themselves. The long-time emphasis on a wide variety of arts (from visual arts to poetry to music) helps improve the public spaces, which the SSA enhances with programs like the Orange Walls mural project, the Chicago Sculpture Exhibit, and the You Are Beautiful art installation on Division Street near Clemente High School.

Artistic self-expression is further encouraged by the watercolor wonder art program for senior citizens, community grants, and the arts tab on the Chamber of Commerce website.

These efforts reflect one of the 2009 Plan's major goals—Promote Local Arts—and specific recommendations, such as:

- Improve “artspace”
- Support arts programs in local schools and celebrate new spaces for arts instruction and incubator studios
- Enhance the Flat Iron as WPB’s arts hub

As the examples illustrate, WPB SSA#33 has led a systematic effort to implement the ambitious 2009 Master Plan. Throughout, the key has been to collaborate and coordinate. Given that the SSA includes parts of three city wards, and that numerous public agencies and private groups are involved, this has proven to be an eminently sensible approach. This is the same path the SSA is following now that it is time to update the master plan.

Existing Ground Floor Uses

Commercial and Related Uses

	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Land Area</i>
Service	255	1,056,221
Retail Goods	213	898,298
Restaurant/Bar	207	715,866
Parking Lot	105	594,990
Offices	18	84,985
Multiple Uses	47	441,129
Gym	20	85,059
Food Store	18	190,425
Commercial	91	354,540
Auto/Gas	47	232,277

Residential

Multi Family	108	681,641
Single Family	32	92,702

Institutional

School	13	494,675
Healthcare	6	458,978
Park	28	456,591
Institutional	18	105,496
Library	1	23,061

Vacant & Other

Vacant Buildings	45	172,039
Vacant Land	47	150,428
Other	27	100,684

Transportation

Many people love to travel, but few like traffic congestion. Wicker Park Bucktown has become more popular, so helping people get from one place to another was a major focus of the 2009 Master Plan, which called for making the area less dependent on cars and more reliant on bikes, walking and public transportation.

The 2009 Plan’s goals included:

- **Make WPB the center of Chicago’s bike culture**
- **Engineer and implement additional bicycle infrastructure to help cyclists feel safe**
- **Re-work congested intersections and make safety improvements**

Implementing the Plan has led to important improvements. WPB became home to Chicago’s first bike corral—on Milwaukee Ave, just south of North and Damen. In addition, over 60 bike racks have been installed in the neighborhood. Bike to Work days also encourage the two-wheeled alternative to driving, as do bike lanes on Milwaukee Ave. And the 606, in addition to being a recreational amenity, also serves as an important new way to help people, especially commuters, travel east-west. In addition, the City has improved the formerly awkward Milwaukee-Wood-Wolcott intersection, while a parking study drilled down on a perennial complaint: parking, or the perceived lack thereof.

Guide Development

Protecting and enhancing the neighborhood’s quality-of-life by guiding development is a key goal of the SSA and reason for ongoing long-range planning. The 2009 Plan acknowledged strong development pressure and opportunities.

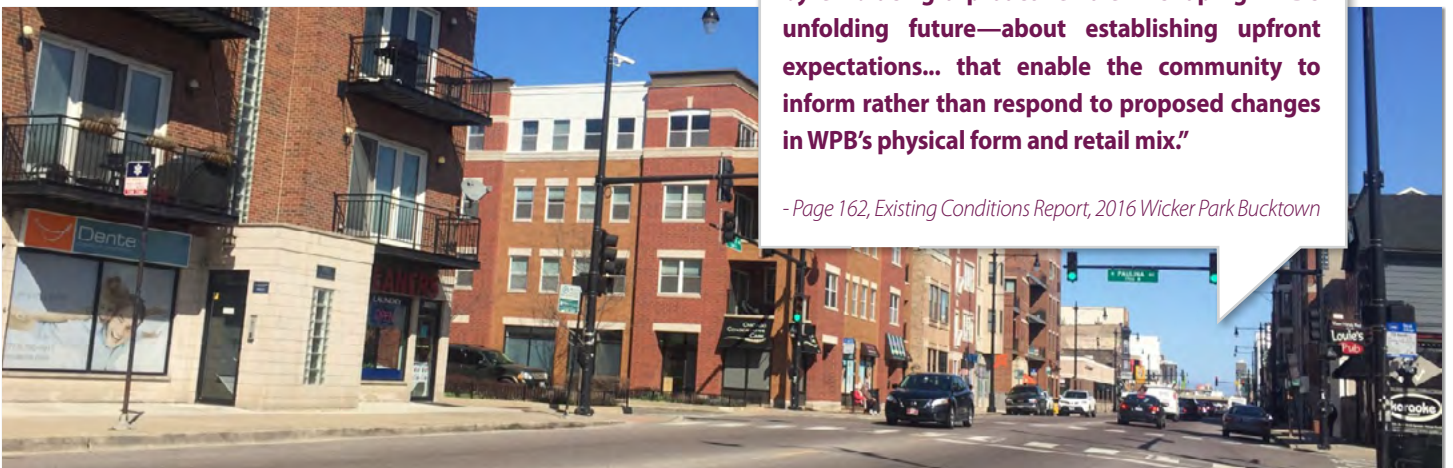
The 2009 plan explicitly promoted Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) which is happening in a big way, especially in the wake of the city ordinance that promoted TOD by relaxing parking requirements in developments built near public transportation. This policy provides long-term benefits to residents and businesses alike by attracting more people, not cars. Already, TOD developments are being developed along Division and Milwaukee near the Division Street CTA station as well as on Milwaukee near the 606. Specific goals from the 2009 plan that have been addressed include:

- **Promote transit-oriented development**
- **Encourage greater density at the 606 / Bloomingdale Trail main gateway**
- **Work to redevelop strategic sites, such as Mautene Court.**

This site has been renamed to Jan Metzger Court, and includes a very tasteful and impressive plaque at the entry. It currently hosts Chicago’s first Temporary Vendor Structure (Boombbox) under CDOT’s People Place Activation Program. This prefabricated micro retail kiosk provides short-term pop-up retail opportunities for local entrepreneurs in WPB.

“Guiding development is about managing change by embracing a proactive role in shaping WPB’s unfolding future—about establishing upfront expectations... that enable the community to inform rather than respond to proposed changes in WPB’s physical form and retail mix.”

- Page 162, Existing Conditions Report, 2016 Wicker Park Bucktown



Clean, Green + Safe

A big part of Wicker Park Bucktown's appeal is its many ways to have fun. Well known for art and live music, the neighborhood now has a wonderful outdoor place to hang: The Bloomingdale Trail, aka The 606. This linear, elevated park was a dream when mentioned in the 2009 Master Plan. Today, due to the hard work of many groups and people, it is a reality, and recently received a top national award from the American Planning Association.

The 606, however, is not the only improvement to the public realm. More trees grace the streets, and landscaped planters improve the looks of North Avenue and Metzger Court. Banners help provide identity and cohesiveness to the area, as do holiday decorations. The concept of play is also enhanced by major festivals and smaller initiatives, such as performance art on neighborhood streets.

Finally, it must be noted that many of these services would have disappeared if property owners in 2014 had not voted to reconstitute the SSA for another 15 years.

These services correspond to these goals and recommendations from the 2009 plan.

All these efforts—the big things, like the 606, to the little things, like the banners and new trees—reflect recommendations from the 2009 plan, specifically:

- **Develop a directory and annual calendar for arts, small businesses and services**
- **Make gateways to the 606 / Bloomingdale Trail focal points of WPB**
- **Provide bicycle parking at festivals**





Demographic Trends

Wicker Park Bucktown has been in the midst of change for the past two decades. Over this time, there has been a greatly increased interest in the area, first from waves of immigrants, later by artists and urban pioneers. By the 2000s, the area was home to a wide range of households, from singles to families with children to seniors who had long called the area home.

The 2009 plan was largely prepared just as the Great Recession was starting to hit and was not yet captured in available data. The 2000-2010 decade turned out to be one in which the City of Chicago as a whole lost 7% of its population, but Wicker Park Bucktown stayed even, as shown in Figure 1.4.

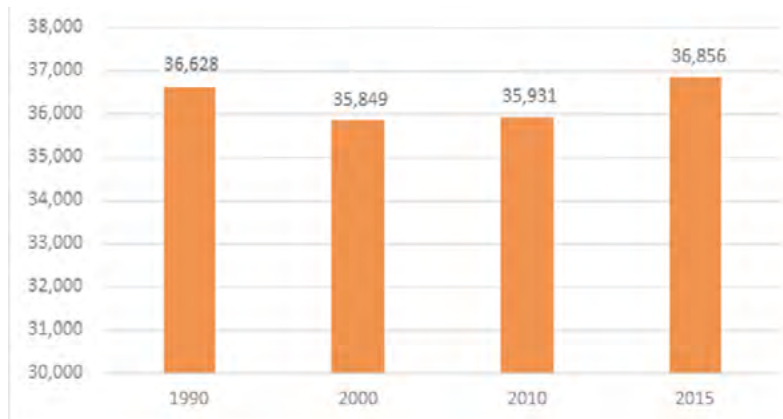


Teens hanging out in Wicker Park circa 1959
Photo Credit: Pinterest

Population

The population of WPB decreased from 1990 to 2000, stayed stable in the 2000s and is beginning to show a steady return since 2010, growing by 925 residents since 2000. While the data does not explain the reasons for the recent population growth, this could be due to a number of factors:

WPB Change in Population 1990-2015



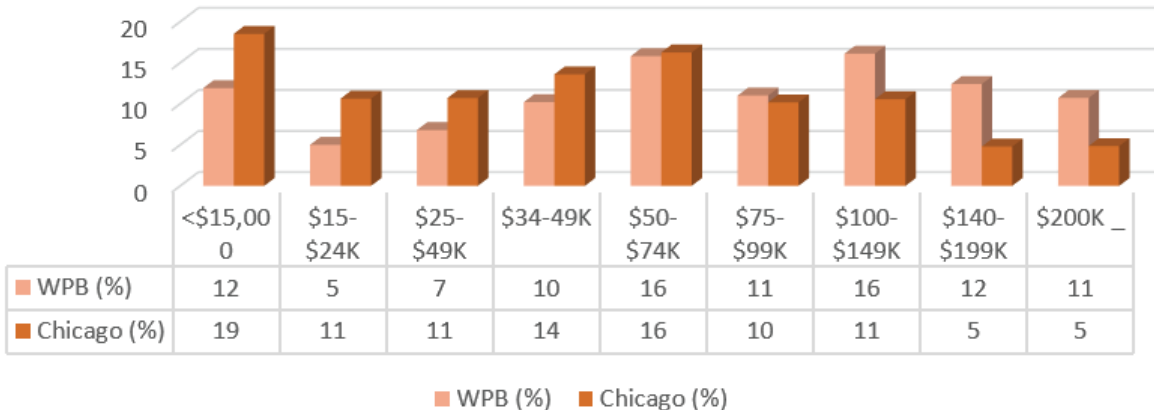
Source: Esri 2015, US Census 2010

- Stemming the tide of households leaving the City during the Recession due to loss of jobs, income;
- Increased number of people moving to the area due to its proximity to jobs and other amenities;
- Development of multi-family housing near CTA stations and along key corridors.

Income

The median income for WPB is \$75,381 (in comparison to the Chicago median income of \$45,319) but as shown below, there is a wide range of income levels. This range is one of the strengths of the community and was addressed in many of the interviews, in which the community would like to see continued opportunities for seniors, students, and artists continue to have opportunities to live in the area. For example, while 39% of households earn over \$100,000 per year, 24% earn under \$35,000, producing a wide range in household incomes.

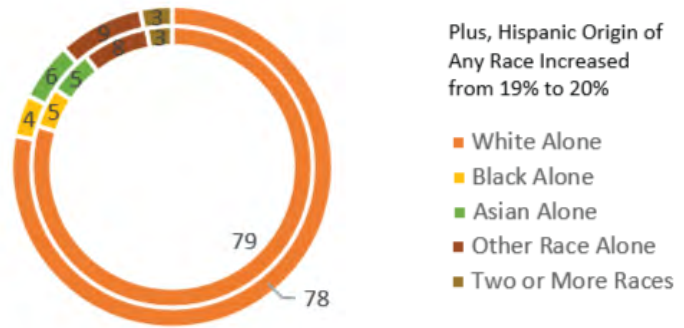
Household Income Levels



Race

In terms of race and ethnicity, WPB has become slightly more diverse since 2010, with a modest increase in Hispanics, Blacks, Asian, and Other or Two or More Races.

Racial and Ethnic Composition



Note: Inner circle represents 2010 and outer circle represents 2015

Source: Esri 2015, US Census 2010, American Community Survey, 2014

Key Takeaways

- 1** The area weathered the Recession better than the rest of the City, holding its own in population
- 2** There has been a fast rebound since 2010, with an increase of 925 residents
- 3** The median income is \$30,000 higher (or 66% higher) than the median City of Chicago income, yet there remains a wide range of household income levels
- 4** The area may be seeing a slight increase in racial and ethnic diversity, even as its median income has risen

