



**ULI Chicago's "Front Stoop Series"
Finding Space in Uncertain Times
September 10, 2020**

A Conversation With:
Ben Helphand, *Executive Director*, NeighborSpace
Olga Bautista, *Community Planning Manager*, Alliance for the Great Lakes

On September 10th, ULI Chicago members convened virtually for the Front Stoop Series to discuss "Finding Space in Uncertain Times". The discussion was led by Ben Helphand, Executive Director, Neighbor Space and Olga Bautista, Community Planning Manager, Alliance for the Great Lakes. Highlights from the conversation are presented below:

The Role of Gardens in the Local Community

Community gardens have long provided a place of connection for the local community. These spaces provide, on the surface, a place for recreation. Deeper, they provide a connection to the land and the community. Ben shared that, often, community gardens lead to greater social change, such as: local pantries and advocacy for municipal issues.

Pandemic and Public Spaces

The current pandemic has only increased the role of gardens in the community. What was once a place of recreation transformed into a space for neighbors to feel in control, even in such uncertain times. Throughout the pandemic, these spaces have served as a gathering place for performances, in various forms, and group exercise, like yoga and Zumba. Additionally, the density of crops planted per square foot have increased.

The Future of Open Spaces

Land use controls throughout the city of Chicago, and the greater US, have made the acquisitions process difficult and time consuming for nonprofits, like NeighborSpace. Ben and Olga agreed that municipalities should offer less stringent controls over projects that offer positive communal and environmental change.

Summary written by Michael Stengl, *Property Manager*, Steve Brown Apartments