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ULI Chicago | The Front Stoop Series
"Resilience Series: Building a Chicago that Works for All"

A Conversation with:
Ciere Boatright, *Vice President, Real Estate and Inclusion,* Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives
Claude Robinson Jr., *Executive Vice President, External Affairs and Diversity,* UCAN
Juan Sebastian Arias, *Deputy Director of Policy,* Office of the Mayor, City of Chicago

On August 26, 2021 ULI Chicago peers engaged in a virtual discussion on strengthening social infrastructure—spaces, programs, experiences, and relationships—that build community and support growth and well-being of all Chicagoans. This Front Stoop is part of our series of four conversations focused on four pillars of resilience presented in ULI Chicago's Report on Resilient Chicago Neighborhoods. The following is a summary of the discussion.

How is social infrastructure influenced?
Historic challenges, specifically racial discrimination, is a big part of what influences social infrastructure today through institutional, interpersonal, systemic, and intrapersonal racism. This tends to create an implicit bias and notions of inferiority in some communities that needs to be unwound if progress is going to be made in breaking the cycles in place. UCAN focuses on education in its initiatives and the City of Chicago is creating multi-generational projects to work towards this goal.

Authentic Community Engagement
The biggest recurring theme was a need for authentic community engagement as critical for projects and initiatives to adequately support the work to be done. Supporting members, both public and private, need to work with (not for) the community and take the time to listen to what the people need. This builds trust, which is the only productive way to move forward. Members from UCAN, City of Chicago, and CNI all feel this is paramount and stories were shared of lack of trust being a barrier in the past. UCAN is intentional in the way they support clients throughout the entire community, including those that can potentially harm the community and victims.

How to accomplish authentic community engagement?
A great question was posed to the group about what counts as authentic community engagement, as developers are often seen to be "checking a box" by holding a certain number of community meetings simply to get through the approval process. This leaves communities feeling unheard. Many gems were provided to the group, including:
  o There are many paths for real community engagement and many examples of paths were shared, including the MPC CDI Process and the Elevated Chicago Community Engagement Principles & Recommendations.
  o Realize you're helping the fabric of the community beyond what can be quantified. Simply having a meeting may not accomplish all of the goals of engagement.
  o Engagement isn't a one-time process and needs to be constant. Checking back in along the way is important to confirm the execution is in line with the original vision.
  o Need to be able to provide feedback to community in a respectful way.
  o Private development shouldn't look at the individual project just in its immediate timeline and should have a more meaningful and sustainable plan beyond the completion of the project.
  o UCAN suggests private developers follow the goals and actions of the non-profits as a framework to be authentic.

Written by Vic Howell, Development Manager, Focus Development