



STONY ISLAND

CHICAGO - IL

A Community-Anchored Economic Corridor



Chicago

JANUARY
2026

Technical Assistance Panel
REPORT



ULI

WHERE THE FUTURE IS BUILT

CONNECT. INSPIRE. LEAD.

The Urban Land Institute (ULI), is the oldest and largest network of cross-disciplinary real estate and land use experts in the world. ULI is its members. Through our members' dedication to the mission and their shared expertise, the Institute has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice.

Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region, with members in 80 countries. ULI Chicago, one of the largest District Councils of the Urban Land Institute, has over 1,300 members in the Chicago area. Learn more at chicago.uli.org. Follow ULI Chicago on Twitter and LinkedIn.

ULI MISSION

**Shape the future of
the built environment
for transformative impact
in communities worldwide.**

The Stony Island Avenue TAP took place on January 14-15, 2026 in Chicago, Illinois.

© 2026 URBAN LAND INSTITUTE CHICAGO
1700 W. Irving Park Road
Suite 208
Chicago, IL 60613

All rights reserved. Reproduction or use of the whole or any part of the contents of this publication without written permission of the copyright holder is prohibited.

Unless otherwise mentioned, all photo credits belong to ULI Chicago.

ON THE COVER: "CULTURE IS POWER" MURAL BY MAX SANSING

ULI Advisory Services: National and Global Programs

For more than 75 years, ULI members have delivered change in our cities through ULI's Advisory Services. Whether it be the devastation of disaster, food access and healthy design, or a shortage of housing choices, Advisory Services panels have offered unbiased and independent solutions to the most complex problems facing communities.

Through this program, ULI members integrate into communities dealing with a wide array of real estate and land use challenges to provide unbiased, expert advice and specific recommendations for improvement. Members link together with local leaders to draft a plan to revive, rethink, and restore communities around the globe to ultimately enact change and improve the lives of the people who live there.

Panels bring together the best and brightest from ULI's diverse membership — developers, planners, financiers, market analysts, economists, architects, designers, and public officials — to provide practical solutions and objective advice not available from any other source.

We thank all who volunteered their skills, time, and energy to create a more authentic blueprint for change, identified communities facing urban development and land use challenges, and supported panels through philanthropic giving. Your commitment and dedication have delivered the holistic, creative solutions cities need today. Thank you for being a part of this transformative journey. Together, we shape the future of our cities.

Learn more at americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/.

ULI Advisory Services: Chicago District Council Programs

ULI Chicago's technical assistance program draws from its local membership base to offer objective and responsible advice to local decision-makers. Our technical assistance program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to address a wide variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

The two-day Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) is the most popular format for employing ULI member expertise. An additional local offering is the Development Dialogue, which offers a shorter, half-day format suitable for more specific, targeted development problems.

ULI Chicago panelists are land use professionals, selected carefully for their knowledge and skills so that the panel is uniquely positioned to address the challenges at hand and provide in-depth, project-specific, and pragmatic recommendations. The intimate, focused, and collaborative format of ULI panels encourages creative thinking and problem solving.

Learn more at chicago.uli.org.

Distinct from an Advisory Services panel, a TAP leverages local expertise through a half-day to two-day process.

SUPPORTERS

ULI Chicago gratefully acknowledges its sponsors, whose support is critical to local ULI initiatives:

PLATINUM

Chicago Title Insurance Company
J.P. Morgan

GOLD

Associated Bank, N.A.
Bank of America
CBRE
CRG
Crown Community Development
DLA Piper LLP (US)
Gould & Ratner LLP
Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP
McShane Construction Company
Related Midwest
Riverside Investment & Development Company
Wintrust

SILVER

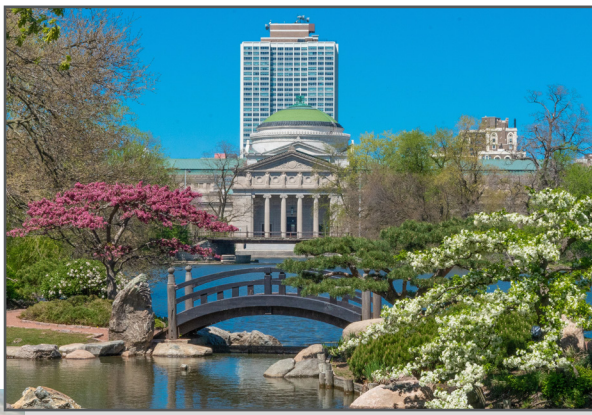
Avison Young
Byline Bank
CIBC
Colliers
East Lake Management & Development Corporation
Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.
Teska Associates, Inc.
Waterton

BRONZE

Baker Barrios Architects
Blue Vista Capital Management, LLC
Deloitte
Elrod Friedman LLC
FOCUS
Gensler
Golub & Company LLC
Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture
Heitman
Hines
JLL
KWILL Merchant Advisors
McLaurin Development Partners
Midland States Bank
OKW Architects, Inc.
Perform Properties
Quarles & Brady LLP
SB Friedman Development Advisors

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
The Technical Assistance Panel	8
Scope of Work	9
Study Area Context	10
Panel Recommendations	13
The Opportunity	13
Guiding Principles and Goals	14
Redevelopment Recommendations	14
Adopt a Hub and Spoke Approach	14
Create an Authentic Experience Rooted in Area's History	22
Strengthen Residential Neighborhoods	24
Redesign Stony Island Avenue	26
Enhance and Expand Access	29
Implementation Actions	30
The First Step: Shared Governance Structure	30
Near Term Actions (1-3 Years)	31
Longer Term Actions (3+ Years)	32
Participants	33



The Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, located at the northern end of the beautifully landscaped, historic Jackson Park, draws 1.4 million visitors annually.



CREDIT: THE OBAMA FOUNDATION

The Obama Presidential Center, at an estimated development cost of \$850 million, is the largest single investment in Chicago's Southside in decades.

56th Street

67th Street

71st Street

Stony Island Avenue

75th Street



The 217-acre campus of the globally renowned University of Chicago, with nearly 20,000 students, is located north of 61st Street on the west side of Stony Island Avenue.



CREDIT: KEITH C VIA ELICKR

Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit focused on neighborhood transformation through arts initiatives, restored a former bank building at the corner of 68th and Stony to open the Stony Island Arts Bank. The Arts Bank is a place for preserving and celebrating Black history, art, and culture.

Chicago Skyway

Figure 1. The TAP study area is centered on Stony Island Avenue from East 56th Street to East 79th Street in the City of Chicago.

INTRODUCTION



CREDIT: ERIC ALLIX ROGERS VIA [FLICKR](#)

South of 67th Street, Stony Island Avenue carries four lanes of fast-moving traffic in each direction with few amenities for pedestrians.



CREDIT: ERIC ALLIX ROGERS VIA [FLICKR](#)

Ramps to and from the Chicago Skyway tower over the 79th Street intersection making the roadway harder to navigate for both cars and pedestrians.

Street

79th Street

Base Map: Google Maps

Stony Island Avenue is a major north-south roadway running from East 56th Street along the western edge of Jackson Park to Chicago's South Side neighborhoods. Through most of the study area, which extends from 56th to 79th Street (Figure 1), Stony Island Avenue operates as a high-speed roadway carrying thousands of cars every day. But most drivers are simply passing through, rushing past neighborhoods and businesses to destinations beyond the study area. The street environment, especially south of Jackson Park, is frequently interrupted by vacant lots and boarded-up storefronts. Just south of 76th Street, Stony Island's center lanes serve as on and off ramps to the Chicago Skyway, an interstate highway connecting Chicago to Indiana. Stony Island's speed and width directly impact quality of life and remain an impediment to redevelopment in the study area, which, like many of Chicago's South and West side neighborhoods, is still recovering from the devastating impact of decades of disinvestment.

But there are also bright spots—tight-knit residential neighborhoods, active chambers of commerce supporting local businesses, arts initiatives honoring the area's rich Black cultural history, and world-class institutions, including the University of Chicago and the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry are part of the study area. Additionally, the Obama Presidential Center (OPC), slated to open in June 2026 at the north end of the study corridor, is expected to draw up to a million visitors every year. This could bring a long-awaited jolt to the local economy and create new opportunities for area businesses and residents.

THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL

To build on the momentum of redevelopment initiatives underway in the community and the opportunity created by the opening of the Obama Presidential Center, City of Chicago's Department of Planning & Development (DPD) invited ULI Chicago to conduct a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) for Stony Island Avenue.

On January 14-15, ULI Chicago convened a multi-disciplinary, volunteer panel with experience in different aspects of land-use and development including urban design, transportation, land economics, lending, and mixed-use and housing development. As part of the TAP, panelists reviewed past studies and plans, toured the study area, and met with nearly 100 area stakeholders including residents, business owners, civic and institutional leaders, and city representatives.

Using these key inputs and drawing on best practices and market realities, panelists worked collaboratively to prepare recommendations for the future of Stony Island Avenue, which are presented in this report.



To kick-off the 2-day TAP, City of Chicago elected officials and staff provided an overview of the study corridor and their vision for its future potential to the ULI Chicago Panel.

SCOPE OF WORK

City of Chicago Department of Planning & Development (DPD) posed the following questions to ULI Chicago with the goal of strengthening Stony Island Avenue, from East 56th to 79th Street, as a gateway corridor.

1. What are the opportunities to enhance the corridor's identity as a welcoming gateway to key destinations (Jackson Park, Obama Presidential Center, University of Chicago), and foster it as a hub for retail, entertainment, tourism, and higher education?
2. What retail, non-retail, and land use strategies, including zoning recommendations, would best serve residents of the area and the greater Chicago region?
3. What public realm improvements can make Stony Island more inviting, safe, and dynamic while connecting existing communities and anchor uses?
4. What potential marketing and branding strategies can help strengthen the corridor's connection and recognition to the greater Chicago region?
5. Which funding mechanisms, such as a Business Improvement District (BID), would be beneficial to the corridor, and how can they be secured?



Community stakeholders gathered for a roundtable discussion with ULI Chicago panelists to share their concerns and aspirations for the future of the Stony Island Avenue study corridor.

STUDY AREA CONTEXT

Multiple Jurisdictions & Neighborhoods

Through the nearly 3-mile-long study corridor, Stony Island Avenue passes through three Chicago neighborhoods—Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore—each with its own distinctive character and history. The corridor also overlaps with three Chicago wards, 5th, 7th, and 8th, each led by a locally elected alderperson. This presents an opportunity for curating unique, varied experiences along the corridor while necessitating collaboration across different entities, including elected officials, to create a unified identity.

Past Plans & Studies

The Panel's recommendations build-on existing plans and studies to enhance the quality of life in the neighborhoods surrounding the study corridor. Selected recent plans include:

The South Shore Corridor Study. Completed in 2020, this study focuses on re-establishing 75th and 79th Streets as vibrant, commercial corridors. Proposed revitalization strategies include strengthening local organizations, enhancing the public realm, improving connectivity, and targeted infill development.

Woodlawn Plan Consolidation Report. Adopted in 2020, this report analyzes nearly dozen plans completed for the Woodlawn community since

2005 by the City and other organizations including neighborhood groups and non-profits. The report consolidates information in one place and identifies common goals across different plans to make it easier to move forward in a coordinated, unified way.

The South Shore Quality of Life Plan. Key goals of this community-led plan, adopted in 2022, include supporting a sustainable economy with opportunities for community wealth-building, increasing home-ownership, preserving and promoting natural resources, celebrating culture, and enhancing public safety.

CorridorLive! South Shore. In 2026, South Shore Community Development Corporation (CDC), the development arm of the South Shore Chamber, released a comprehensive development strategy to uplift 71st Street as a vibrant economic and cultural district. A market study completed in 2025 found a leakage of \$845 million dollars annually from South Shore. CorridorLive! seeks to capture a greater share of that retail spending locally by creating a thriving commercial corridor with rehabilitated buildings, vibrant public places, and space for local entrepreneurs.

Economic Development Tools

Key existing economic development tools that can help finance infrastructure improvements and support redevelopment activities within the study area include:

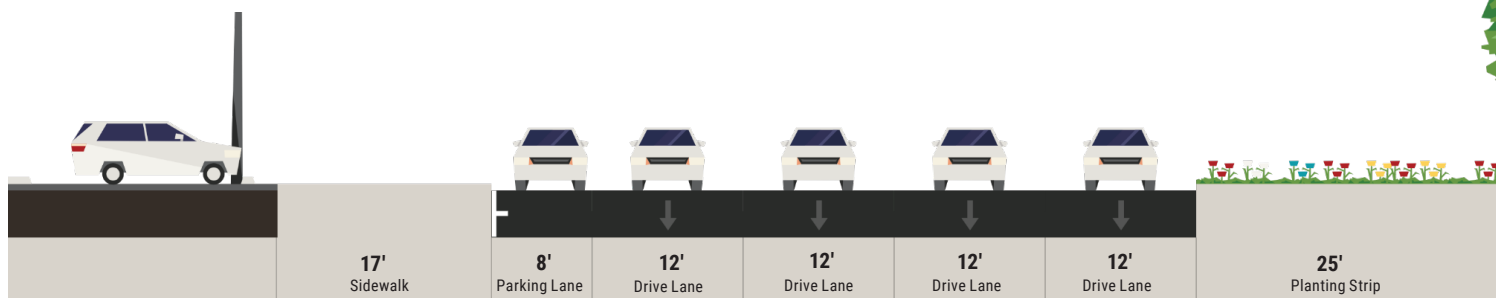


Figure 2. Existing conditions along Stony Island Avenue from 67th to 79th Street

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts. South of 67th Street, Stony Island is served by the 71st and Stony Island TIF which is set to expire in 2034. The Woodlawn TIF, expiring in 2035, covers a short, 2-block segment of Stony Island between 65th Street and Marquette Road.

Special Service Areas (SSAs). The study corridor has two SSAs that provide enhanced services to local businesses, funded by an additional tax levy. SSA #42 or the 71st and Stony Island SSA, managed by the South Shore Chamber, covers Stony Island from 67th to 79th Street and 71st Street. SSA #50, managed by the Southeast Chamber of Commerce, serves 79th Street and business corridors farther south and west.

Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF). NOF provides capital development grants of up to \$250,000 for small business and cultural projects. Stony Island Avenue south of 60th Street and key east-west corridors – 71st, 75th, and 79th Streets, are eligible for NOF grants.

Incentives for Historic Buildings. Buildings designated as Chicago Landmarks, such as the Avalon Regal Theater on 79th Street, can avail of financial incentives such as property tax reduction and permit fee waivers to help offset rehabilitation costs. Buildings within federally designated historic districts can also access federal income tax credits equal to 20% of the rehabilitation cost.

Roadway Character

Wide Roadway. Stony Island Avenue changes significantly in physical character from 56th to 79th Street. At the northern end, it is narrower, carries

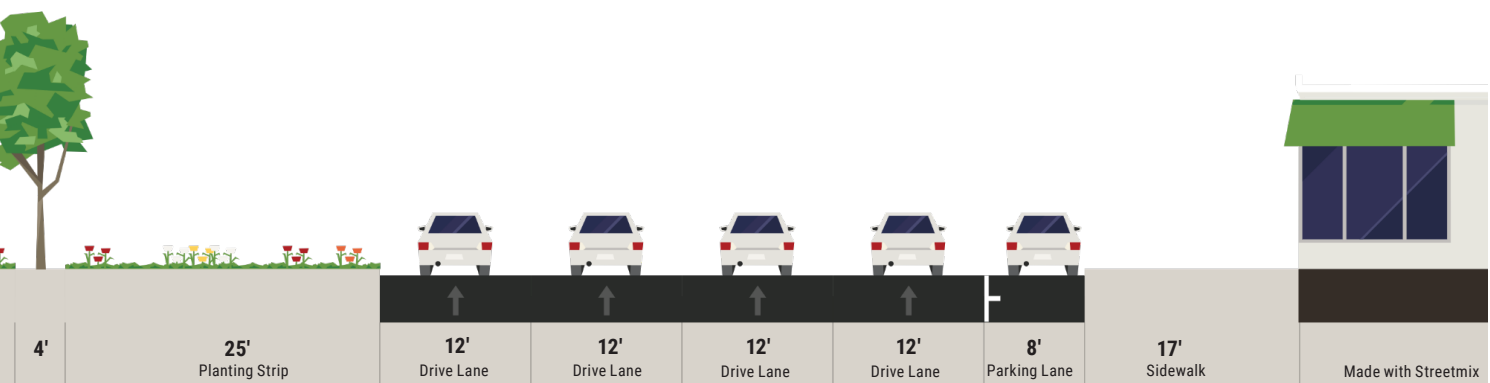
less vehicular traffic and is more pedestrian and bike friendly. South of 67th Street, however, Stony Island widens to four traffic lanes and one parking lane in each direction with a 50 feet wide grassy median (Figure 2).

High Traffic Volume and Speeds. The wide roadway configuration encourages high traffic speeds creating a challenging environment for pedestrians. Just south of 76th Street, the center lanes of Stony Island become entrance and exit ramps to the Chicago Skyway, further contributing to higher speeds. Beneath the Skyway, Stony Island’s lanes split between the towering support columns, making the avenue harder to navigate for pedestrians and cars alike. The south end of the study corridor from 71st to 79th Street has the heaviest traffic volume, carrying more than 33,000 cars every day¹, but most of them are passing through.

Large Number of Crashes. High traffic volume and speeds, combined with excessive roadway width have led to significant number of roadway crashes. The 79th Street intersection is considered amongst the highest risk for crashes in the entire city. According to Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) data, between January 2020 and December 2024, there were 1,632 crashes on Stony Island. 642 people sustained injuries, 51 of whom were pedestrians or bicyclists, indicating that they likely live or work in the neighborhood. 56 people suffered an incapacitating injury or were killed².

1. Annual Average Daily Traffic, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), <https://www.gettingaroundillinois.com/Traffic%20Counts/index.html>

2. TYLin analysis of 2020-2024 IDOT Crash Data





Uprising of the Sun by Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu is an 83-foot-high painted glass installation on the OPC Museum's north side. The artist's hope for the installation is to serve as both a reflection on historical context and an inspiration for future possibilities.

CREDIT: THE OBAMA FOUNDATION



PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Stony Island Avenue has the potential to be transformed from a high-speed thoroughfare that bisects the community into a thriving corridor of economic opportunity and unique cultural experiences for area residents, workers, and visitors. The ULI Chicago Panel's assessment of the opportunity to create a strong future for Stony Island Avenue, and key recommendations to help achieve that future, are presented in this section.

The Opportunity

Stony Island can evolve into a welcoming gateway of national significance while remaining a community-anchored economic corridor.

The opportunity lies not in isolated projects, but in integrated identity, hub and spoke based development, and institutional alignment that positions education, arts, culture, entertainment, retail, and tourism as mutually reinforcing engines of inclusive growth.

Guiding Principles and Goals

A redeveloped Stony Island, with enhanced dining, entertainment, and cultural destinations, can be more effective in drawing visitors southward to extend their experience at the Obama Presidential Center. To create recommendations for balanced redevelopment, the Panel grounded its work in the following guiding principles and development goals:

Guiding Principles

- Prioritize area residents while also creating a welcoming experience for visitors.
- Leverage existing assets and community initiatives to support future growth with clarity, equity, and positive neighborhood impact.
- Create authentic experiences grounded in area's rich history of Black culture.

Development Goals

- Enhance economic opportunity for existing and new local businesses by establishing Stony Island as a connector to 71st Street, 79th Street, and other existing and emerging neighborhood destinations.
- Enhance safety and connectivity along Stony Island by improving multimodal access, increasing pedestrian presence, and creating active public spaces.
- Encourage increased investment, that benefits surrounding communities, from public, philanthropic, non-profit, as well as private developers.

Redevelopment Recommendations

1. Adopt a Hub and Spoke Approach

From globally renowned institutions to favorite local bakeries, the Stony Island study corridor and intersecting east-west streets have many destinations that serve as gathering places or “hubs” for residents and visitors. One of the largest hubs, the Obama Presidential Center, scheduled to open in June 2026 at the north end of the corridor, is projected to draw up to a million visitors annually, creating new economic opportunity for surrounding neighborhoods.

However, the enduring opportunity for Stony Island Avenue and the larger community lies not in individual new developments, but in coordinated efforts to enhance existing hubs and build stronger connections between them. Hubs, both large and small, existing and emerging, should be connected via safe and accessible pathways or “spokes” to create an integrated yet distinctive, and easily navigable community. Strategies for fostering a hub and spoke redevelopment approach in the study area, with Stony Island as a unifying, central spine is outlined in this section.

Hubs are places where people naturally gather, and can include cultural attractions, business districts, schools, parks, places of worship, transit stations, and entertainment venues.

Spokes are connections such as roadways, trails, and bus or rail transit, that allow people to travel between hubs.

1a. Create Distinct Zones with Unique Experiences

Stony Island Avenue changes in character through the nearly 3-mile-long study area; the panel identified three distinct zones with unique development opportunities and challenges (Figure 3). Each zone has multiple existing and/or emerging hubs with different levels of multi-modal access and streetscaping. Redevelopment efforts within each zone should be synergistic with existing assets and initiatives to maximize impact and foster unique experiences.

1b. Serve Resident and Visitor Needs

Hubs, both existing and new, along Stony Island should serve both neighborhood residents and visitors. To help achieve that, the panel recommends:

- In addition to hospitality uses like hotels, restaurants & bars, encourage daily necessities such as grocery, pharmacy, and hardware stores.
- Encourage facilities and programming that appeals to diverse groups including families, teens, adults, and seniors. For example, music and dance lessons, cooking classes, author or artist events, open sports sessions, docent-led or self-guided tours exploring the area's history could create an enriching experience for a wide range of residents and visitors.
- Improve access and safety for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists, along Stony Island and key east-west streets making it easier for children, seniors, or others without access to cars, navigate the study area with ease.

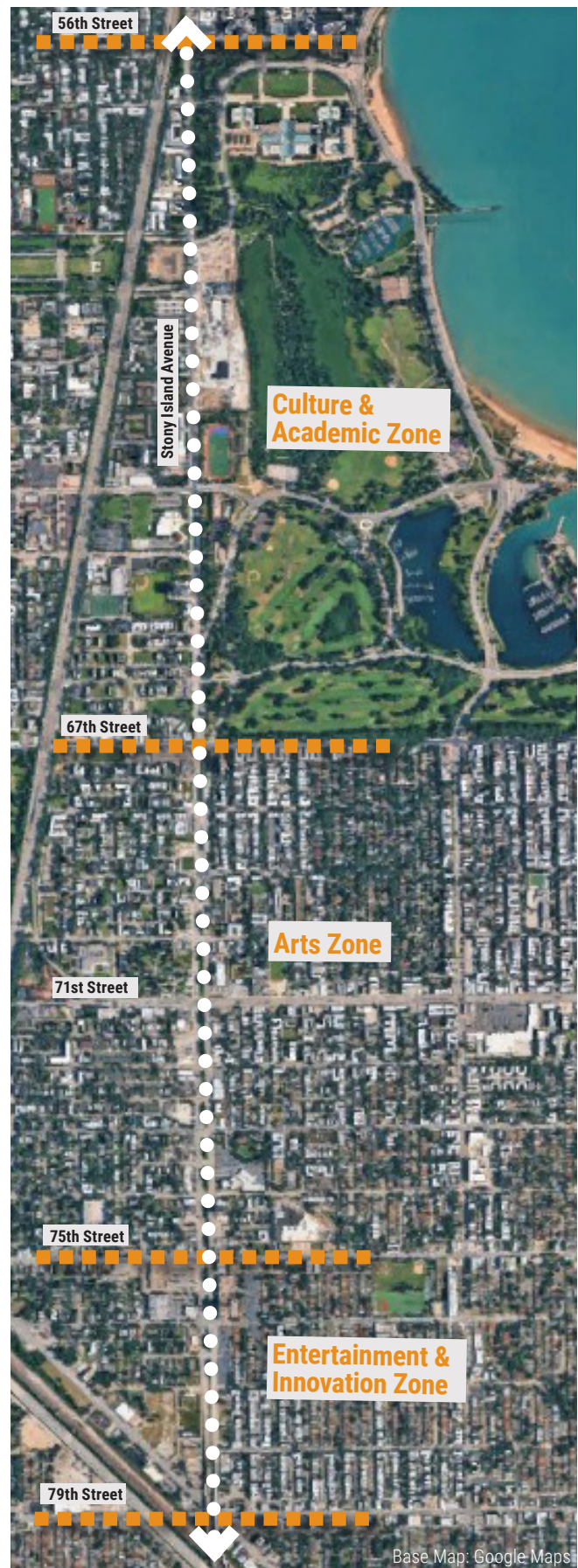


Figure 3. The nearly 3-mile-long study corridor has three distinctive zones with unique characteristics; redevelopment efforts should build upon them.

Culture & Academic Zone

56th to 67th Street

This section of Stony Island is home to the largest destinations in the study corridor, including the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (MSI), the historic Jackson Park and the nearly finished Obama Presidential Center. Across Stony Island from the Obama center, the Midway Plaisance leads west to the 217-acre University of Chicago campus.

Current and Proposed Projects. Projects to enhance existing hubs within this zone are currently underway and new hubs are planned. These include:

- MSI is renovating its south portico to reopen the original entrance from Jackson Park and add an outdoor café and terrace overlooking the park’s lagoon and the Obama Center. Supported by a \$10 million grant from the Driehaus Foundation, the project is expected to be completed by 2027.
- The Chicago Park District, with the help of a \$1.2 million federal grant, will soon begin work on repairing and upgrading the Jackson Park trail connecting the museum’s south entrance to OPC and the Japanese garden.

- Metra is planning to start a \$78 million reconstruction project in early 2027 to modernize and improve access to the 59th-60th/University of Chicago Station on the Metra Electric Main Line. The project includes reconstructing station buildings and platform and street level enhancements, including opening the 60th Street entrance that has been shuttered for 45 years.
- A proposal for a 250-room hotel at the southwest corner of 64th and Stony was approved by the Chicago Plan Commission in Fall 2025.
- Woodlawn Central, an 8.5-acre mixed-use, transit-oriented development is proposed near the 63rd Street Metra station just west of Stony Island Avenue.

Key Recommendations. To enhance this zone and better connect it to destinations farther south, the panel recommends the following:

- Publicize existing and increase programming at existing and emerging institutions to appeal to a wide range of interests and age-groups. This could include lecture series and cultural performances at area institutions, workshops, drop-in classes at dance/music schools, and open-play sessions at local athletic facilities.

CREDIT: THE OBAMA FOUNDATION



Home Court, a 60,000-square-foot athletic and events space at the OPC, will include sports based programming for youth.



Outdoor seating create a welcoming street environment encouraging people to slow down and explore the neighborhood.

- Visitor-serving hospitality and retail uses, which also add to the overall corridor vibrancy such as restaurants and storefront art galleries featuring local artists.
- Public gathering spaces that invite people to pause and experience the corridor instead of simply passing through.
- Pedestrian-friendly streetscaping along Stony Island and east-west streets to create safe, accessible connections between hubs.

There are opportunities to build on the momentum and further enhance this zone as an interconnected, accessible center of learning, culture, and civic life for residents as well as visitors.



Figure 3a. Redevelopment efforts between 56th and 67th Streets should be synergistic with existing academic and cultural hubs.

Arts Zone

67th to 75th Street

Just south of Jackson Park, Stony Island has an emerging arts district centered around 71st Street. This area is also home to Rebuild Foundation, founded by the internationally renowned artist Theaster Gates, to rejuvenate historically Black neighborhoods through arts and culture. Rebuild Foundation has restored multiple vacant sites and buildings on Chicago's Southside, including within the study area.

Existing Hubs. Key community hubs in this zone include:

- A neo-classical building at 68th Street and Stony Island Avenue, once slated for demolition, was restored and opened as the Stony Island Arts Bank by the Rebuild Foundation in 2015. The Arts Bank is a space for exhibitions, archival research, film screenings, and artist residencies.
- In Fall 2025, Rebuild Foundation restored another shuttered building just west of the corridor, at the corner of 72nd Street and Dorchester Avenue. Known as The Land School, the former St. Laurence elementary school building, is now a place for creative experimentation through artist residencies and arts-centered community programming.

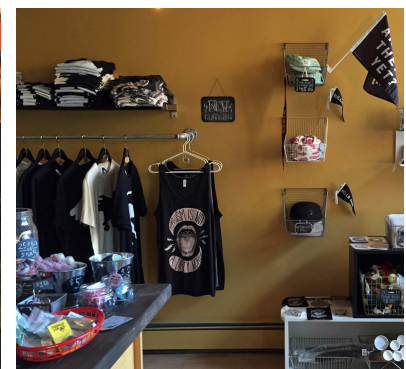
Build on existing hubs to encourage redevelopment of vacant and under-utilized spaces to foster an arts and artisan centered community and economy.

- The 71st Street business district has a unique character with beautiful older buildings and street-level commuter rail tracks running through the center. The South Shore Chamber of Commerce is leading initiatives to reinvigorate the corridor—the Artisan's Collective, transformed vacant storefronts into studio and vendor spaces for emerging local artisans. By providing affordable space and training in critical business skills, this program has helped build the local creative and entrepreneurial ecosystem and infuse new energy into the corridor.
- Another significant existing hub is the gold-domed Mosque Maryam, headquarters of the Nation of Islam, located at 74th Street and Stony Island Avenue. During the TAP, representatives from Mosque Maryam shared their vision of establishing a learning and workforce development center for digital creative arts in the corridor.

CREDIT: ERIC ALLIX ROGERS VIA FLICKR



CREDIT: PROJECT STOREFRONTS



Art galleries and pop-up shops featuring local artists and entrepreneurs create a unique experience while boosting the local economy (top).

Books and periodicals by the Johnson Publishing Company, publisher of Ebony and Jet magazines, archived at the Stony Island Arts Bank (left).

Key Recommendations. To strengthen the emerging arts community and economy in this zone, the panel recommends the following strategies:

- Rehabilitate vacant buildings to create affordable space for new uses such as arts education, maker spaces, art galleries, neighborhood serving-retail, and live-work spaces.
- Redevelop City-owned vacant lots west of Stony Island to create new transit-oriented housing, including housing attainable for artists and entrepreneurs.

- Redesign Stony Island Avenue to make it safer and easier to travel between hubs within the Arts Zone and beyond. Currently, south of 67th Street, Stony Island is extremely wide with few pedestrian amenities. Left turns are prohibited from Stony Island on to 71st Street, making it harder for 71st Street businesses to attract potential customers. Strategies to transform Stony Island Avenue from a thruway into a connector, for pedestrians as well as cars, are included later in the recommendations section.



Figure 3b. Arts-centered programming and uses should be encouraged to strengthen existing and foster new hubs between 67th and 75th Streets.

Entertainment & Innovation Zone

75th to 79th Street

At the southern end of the study corridor, from 75th to 79th Street, there is an opportunity to create a vibrant zone that blends entertainment and entrepreneurship.

Existing and Emerging Hubs. Key community hubs in this zone include:

- The Avalon Regal Theater, located on 79th Street just east of Stony Island Avenue, is a Chicago Landmark with magnificent architecture and historic significance as a center of Black arts and culture. Icons such as Ray Charles and B.B. King performed here in its heyday. Since its opening in the 1920s, the Avalon Regal Theater underwent many changes to adapt to the times, but in 2003, it closed doors in the face of mounting costs and challenges. The current owner is pursuing plans



Joined as One mural by Kayla Mahaffey livens up an empty lot on 79th Street. The mural features a central hero joined by others to represent the strength of a community coming together.

Build on the legacy of the 79th Street corridor, encourage arts and entertainment focused initiatives and businesses.

- to restore the Avalon Theater as a hub for arts and culture, a place where future generations can imagine and train for a career in the arts. However, the building has fallen into disrepair since its closure and significant investment will be required to rehabilitate it.
- On the other side of Stony Island Avenue, across from the historic Regal Theater, Regal Mile Studios is a proposal to develop a large film and television production campus. The project was originally envisioned as a roughly 380,000-square-foot media campus with multiple sound stages, supporting offices, production facilities, and educational training components intended to position the South Side as a hub for screen production and creative economy.
- As these larger projects take shape over time, community organizations, including local chambers of commerce are continuing to invest in the 75th and 79th Street corridors through place-making initiatives, supporting small businesses, and helping repurpose vacant buildings/spaces. For example, the Southeast Chicago Chamber of Commerce has collaborated with local artists to install murals along 79th Street, activating blank walls and building community pride.

Key Recommendations.

- Support existing and encourage new music and performance venues, and dining and nightlife destinations.
- Redesign Stony Island to make it safer and welcoming. This is especially important in this zone as the 79th Street intersection was repeatedly highlighted as very difficult to navigate by area residents and users. The ramps to and from the Chicago Skyway rising from the center lanes of Stony Island create physical and visual barriers between the two sides of the roadway, further limiting access. The panel's recommendations to help overcome these barriers and improve access and connectivity are presented later in this section.



CREDIT: WARREN LEMAY VIA ELICKR

The architecturally and culturally significant Avalon Regal Theater is a Chicago Landmark on 79th Street just east of Stony Island Avenue. Restoring and repurposing this long-vacant theater building with new community-serving uses would bring a jolt of new energy to the neighborhood.

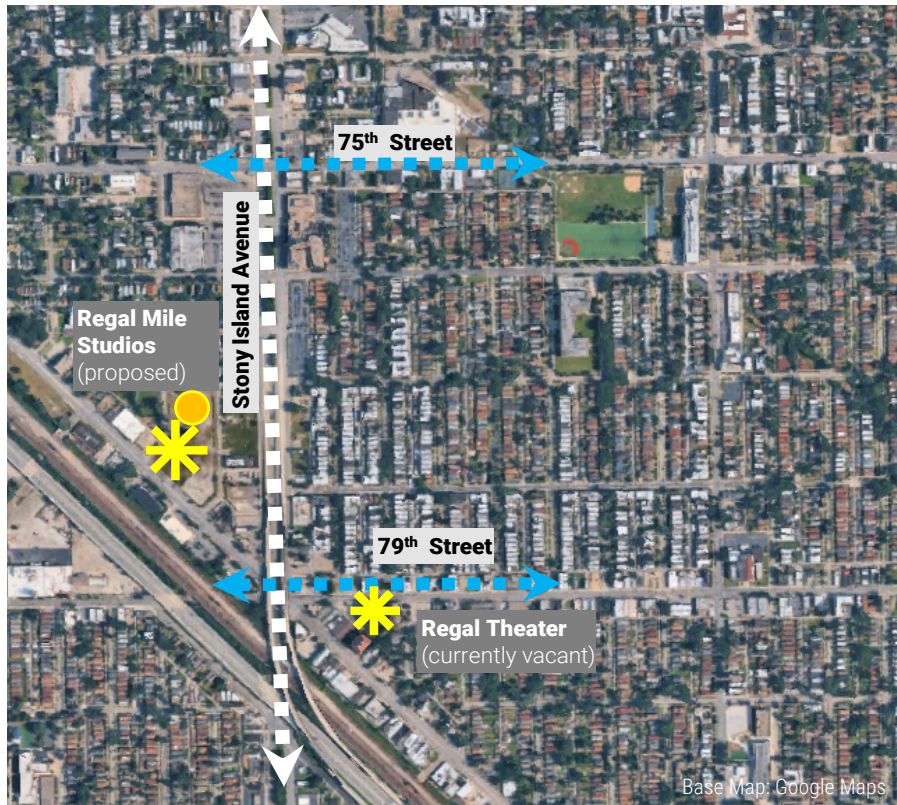


Figure 3c. Entertainment uses such as music venues should be encouraged within this zone and roadway improvements completed to enhance access and connectivity.

2. Create an Authentic Experience Rooted in Area's History

Chicago's Southside has a rich history of Black excellence and resilience, these neighborhoods have been home to changemakers—from poets and artists to entrepreneurs and civic leaders. The homes of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks and the celebrated playwright Lorraine Hansberry are Chicago Landmarks, located not far from the study corridor. This neighborhood was also home to the civil rights icon, Jessie Jackson, Sr. and the country's first Black First Lady, Michelle Obama. Other important sites include the headquarters of Alpha Kappa Alpha International, a historically Black sorority with more than 365,000 members worldwide, the site of the first Black-owned McDonald's franchise, and the original location of Moo & Oink, a popular meat store.

Local organizations could help create a robust narrative of the area's history by crowd-sourcing information from neighbors, many of whom have lived and worked here for generations. University of Chicago's history and archives departments could help curate information and develop physical and digital storytelling components.

2a. Interpretive Wayfinding

To create an accessible district, the panel recommends installing visible markers or plaques at each site. Interpretive wayfinding along Stony Island Avenue and major east-west streets will help people navigate and learn about the historical and cultural significance of different sites. Some wayfinding elements should be easily visible from cars to encourage drivers along Stony Island to stop and experience the neighborhood.

2b. Digital Access

Digital storytelling should be an integral part of the experience—QR codes on markers and maps can link

Stony Island Avenue can be the common thread that ties different stories and sites together, allowing visitors as well as locals to experience and celebrate the area's rich Black culture and history of excellence.

visitors to photos, audio clips related to the sites and a digital map of the area that includes dining and retail destinations.

2c. Branding & Marketing

Coordinated wayfinding elements, such as banners, monument signs, and markers, can help create a cohesive identity for the entire area, while highlighting features that make different parts unique. A coordinated marketing strategy can further enhance visibility and appeal, enticing visitors to stay longer and explore places beyond their original destination. For instance, specialized menu offerings at local restaurants or workshops at art/dance studios could be synchronized with current exhibits or programming at the museums or OPC and publicized through flyers.



Interpretive signage and digital storytelling through a dedicated app help create an engaging experience for visitors to the Memphis Heritage Trail.

MEMPHIS HERITAGE TRAIL MEMPHIS, TN

The Memphis Heritage Trail (MHT) is a cultural district encompassing a 20-block, 8.2-mile area in South Memphis. MHT was designed in partnership with residents and neighborhood organizations to celebrate the significant cultural and business contributions of the city's African American residents, and to boost cultural tourism as a driver of local economic development.

Officially launched in 2018, the trail consists of more than 60 historical and cultural sites organized into four loops: civil rights, entertainment, commerce, and residential. Interactive experiences, including interpretive wayfinding signage, public art, and a digital app help visitors navigate and learn about each site.



Informative signage at the MLK Reflection Park, a key site along the Memphis Heritage Trail.

DESTINATION CRENSHAW LOS ANGELES, CA

Destination Crenshaw is an initiative to transform a 1.3 mile long stretch of Crenshaw Boulevard in south Los Angeles into an open-air museum celebrating Black art, culture, and history. New streetscaping, gathering spaces, and a series of permanent and rotating art installations by local Black artists are planned for the district, bringing new jobs and economic opportunities, while inspiring generations of residents.

Driven by neighborhood activists and residents, Destination Crenshaw is supported by major public investment from Los Angeles County, LA Metro, and the City of Los Angeles.



Sankofa Park is nearing completion at the northern end of the District near 46th Street and Crenshaw Boulevard. Its unique design is inspired by the Ghanaian "Sankofa" bird, which signifies looking to the past to build a better future.

3. Strengthen Residential Neighborhoods

Most successful commercial corridors and districts are sustained primarily not by visitors but by neighbors who live and work in the area. Strengthening surrounding residential neighborhoods is therefore key to the future success of Stony Island Avenue.

As the corridor redevelops and vacant sites are returned to productive use, it will be important to attract new housing development while maintaining affordability for current and new residents.

3a. Provide Maintenance and Repair Loans for Owner-Occupied Property

Neighborhoods around Stony Island are lined with beautiful homes, but many of them are suffering from deferred maintenance. Reinvesting in their maintenance will make it easier for residents to stay in their homes and create a stronger foundation for inclusive economic growth. In addition to improving health and safety conditions for residents, well-maintained properties help create a safe and welcoming street environment, which is beneficial for area businesses. Several financial assistance

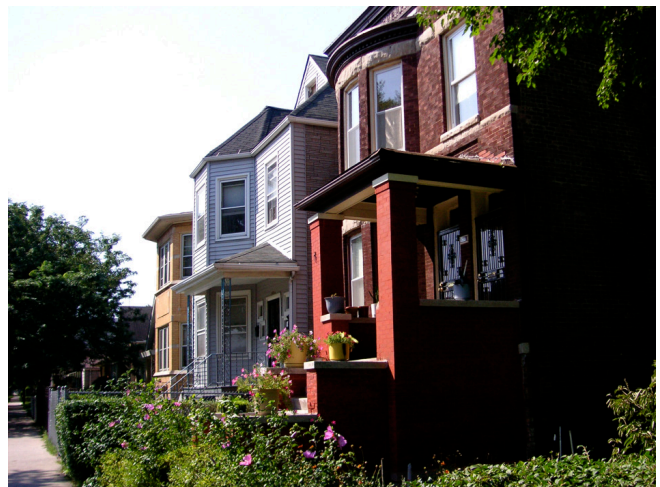
programs are available to help eligible homeowners make necessary home repairs; the panel recommends public information campaigns and targeted outreach, especially to senior homeowners, to make it easier for them to access these resources.

3b. Support CDCs and Local Entities in Acquiring and Rehabbing Mixed-use Buildings

East-west commercial corridors in the study area, especially 71st Street, have many older, smaller-scale mixed-use buildings with ground-level storefronts and residential apartments on upper levels. These beautiful buildings are not designated landmarks but provide a unique charm to the local business districts. Unfortunately, with decades of disinvestment and vacancy, many of these buildings have fallen into dis-repair. Rehabilitating them can serve a dual purpose—provide affordable apartments and space for small businesses and infuse the corridor with new energy. Local Community Development Corporations (CDCs), such as the South Shore CDC, are actively pursuing such rehabilitation efforts. The City should support CDCs and other local entities by streamlining approvals and aligning financial incentives.



CREDIT: ERIC ALLIX ROGERS VIA ELICKR



CREDIT: ERIC ALLIX ROGERS VIA ELICKR

Neighborhoods on either side of Stony Island Avenue have a mix of residential buildings, from 2-4 flats (left) and single-family homes (right) to larger multi-family buildings. Home repair grants can help homeowners, especially those on fixed incomes, with maintenance and upkeep leading to healthier, safer homes and streets.

3c. Encourage Private Market Investment

The City has identified the area between 64th and 71st Streets as a focus area for selling City-owned vacant land to encourage private, market-rate development. The panel recommends encouraging a development pipeline of private developers and other local entities by continuing to streamline City processes from land-sales to development approvals, and, if needed, providing financial assistance. For example, the City's Missing Middle Housing Initiative provides developer financial assistance, including lots priced at \$1 and up to \$150,000 in construction subsidies per unit, to encourage 2-6 unit market-rate buildings in select South and West side neighborhoods.

3d. Encourage Broader Participation in Development Opportunities

Small-scale residential development in the study area,

both new construction and rehabilitation, presents an opportunity for greater participation from local, emerging developers, contractors, and other vendors. To encourage this broader participation, the panel recommends:

- Consider making available more flexible funding sources with fewer requirements that increase development costs, such as the TIF Purchase Rehab program or small grants through the City's Neighborhood Opportunity Fund.
- When requirements such as prevailing wage are in place, provide robust technical assistance to make compliance easier for smaller, emerging vendors. This could include training for commonly used software for construction-site compliance and workforce reporting through the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP).

Financial Assistance Programs for Homeowners

Although frequently over-subscribed, City of Chicago offers programs to help income-eligible homeowners make needed home repairs so they can continue to stay comfortably in their homes. These include:

Home Repair Program (HRP) provides grants to owner-occupants of 1-to-2-unit residential properties for roof or porch repairs and small repairs to improve accessibility. Households earning 50% or less than the Area Median Income (AMI) are eligible.

Emergency Heating Repair Program (EHRP) provides service grants to assist owner-occupants of 1-to-4-unit properties with emergency heating system replacements or repairs during winter. To be eligible, households must earn 80% or less of AMI.

Small Accessible Repairs for Seniors (SARFS) provides minor safety and accessibility improvements, such as installation of grab bars, lever faucets, and door repairs, to help seniors remain in their homes. This program is open to homeowners over the age of 60 and earning 80% or less of AMI.

Green Homes Chicago provides free energy efficiency retrofits including new insulation and heat pump heating and cooling systems for owner-occupied single-family homes and duplexes. Eligible homeowners must earn no more than 80% of AMI.

Tax Increment Financing-Neighborhood Improvement (TIF-NIP) provides home repair grants for 1-4 unit residences in certain TIF districts. Grants are primarily for exterior repairs, however, up to 30% of the grant may be used for health and safety related interior repairs. Homeowners earning up to 100% of the AMI are eligible; households between 100 to 140% of AMI must match the grant dollar for dollar.

The South Shore Condo/Co-Op Preservation Fund Pilot was launched in 2022 by the City in partnership with the Chicago Community Loan Fund (CCLF). This pilot established a loan/grant product to assist owner-occupants of condos and co-ops in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood with repairs, and provide loans to Homeowner Associations (HOAs) for needed maintenance.

4. Redesign Stony Island Avenue

Compared to other similar roadways in Chicago, Stony Island Avenue, south of 67th Street, has too many traffic lanes (Table 1). North Avenue and 87th Street, which carry similar traffic volumes, have four and six travel lanes respectively, compared to Stony Island's eight lanes. DuSable Lake Shore Drive carries three times the traffic on Stony Island with one less lane in each direction.

Roadway	Average Daily Traffic Volume (Year)*	No. of Travel Lanes**
Stony Island Avenue between 71st and 79th Streets	33,100 (2022)	8
North Avenue west of Clybourn Avenue	33,200 (2021)	4
87th Street between Western and Ashland Avenues	32,800 (2023)	6
DuSable Lake Shore Drive north of 57th Drive	103,300 (2024) 96,300 (2022)	6

* As per IDOT website

** Combines lanes in both directions, excludes turn lanes

Table 1. Traffic volume and no. of lanes on Stony Island Avenue and other similar Chicago roadways

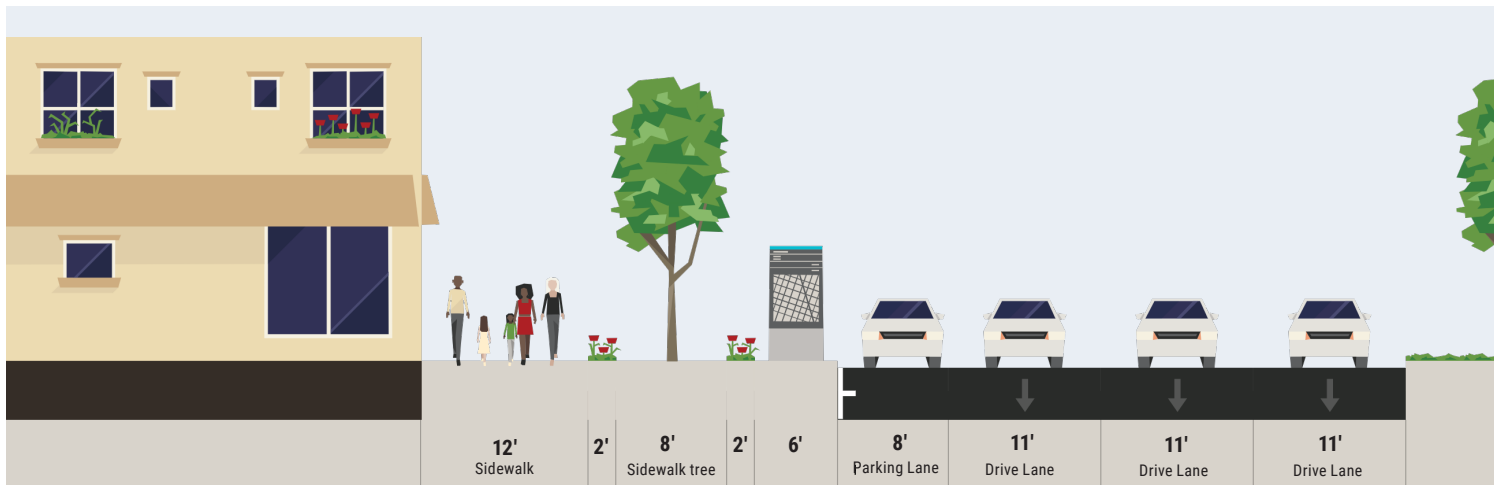
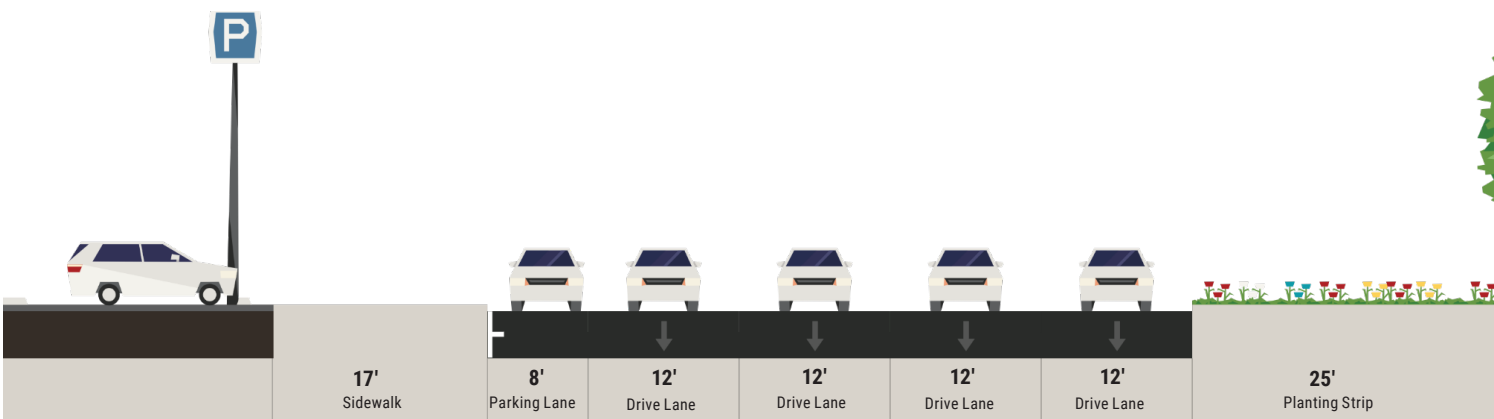


Figure 4. Alternative Design for Stony Island Avenue from 67th to 79th Street



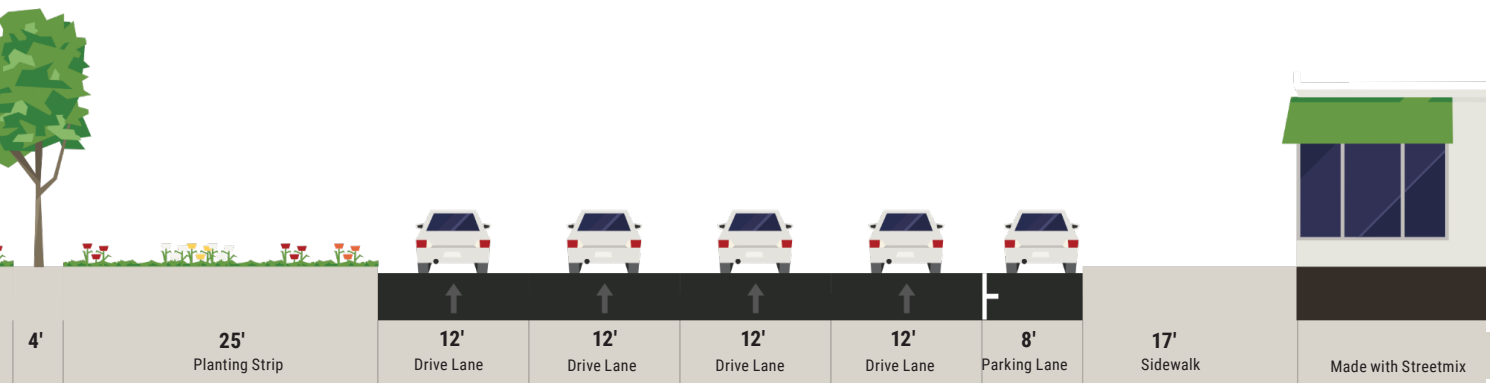
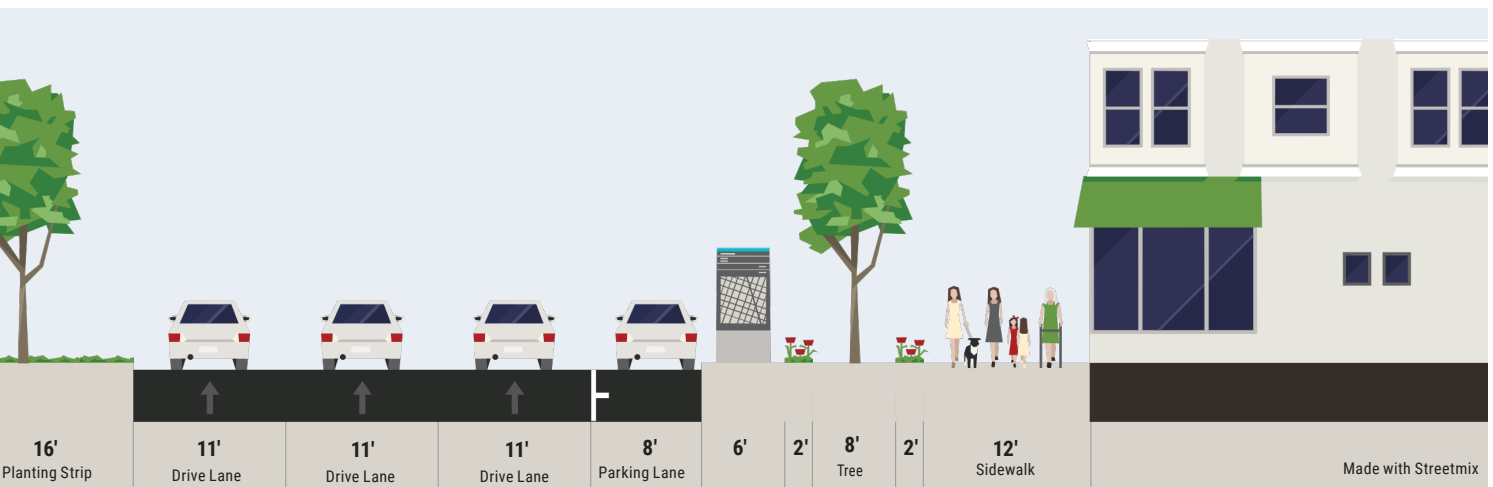
Existing conditions along Stony Island Avenue from 67th to 79th Street

4a. Right-size Stony Island

As illustrated in Figure 4, the panel recommends right-sizing Stony Island Avenue by reducing at least one traffic lane in each direction, reducing the median, and adding the "unlocked" space to the outer edges of the roadway. The new roadway configuration will reduce traffic speeds, improve safety and accessibility for all users, and allow Stony Island Avenue to function as a neighborhood connector rather than a thruway.

The new space added to outer edges of Stony Island Avenue can be repurposed with pedestrian-friendly amenities. It can also be used to create stronger linkages with the business districts along east-west

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has jurisdiction over Stony Island Avenue south of 67th Street. Redesign recommendations for Stony Island Avenue (Figure 4) will be most effective with a jurisdictional transfer from IDOT to the City of Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT). With Stony Island's designation as a Strategic Regional Arterial, this transfer will require significant political will.



corridors, boosting their visibility and customer base. Opportunities for repurposing the unlocked space include:

- Public gathering spaces to encourage pedestrian activity on the street, thereby enhancing public safety
- Interpretive wayfinding including monument signs with maps and QR codes
- Enhanced landscaping and public art installations, especially at key east-west intersections to draw people into the business districts
- Adding developable land to adjacent sites enhancing development feasibility

4b. Add Left-Turn Lanes at 71st Street Intersection

Currently, left turns are prohibited on 71st Street from Stony Island Avenue, limiting the ability of 71st Street businesses to attract potential customers traveling on Stony Island. Through the panel's recommendation for narrowing the median, there is an opportunity to redesign the intersection and add left-turn lanes on Stony Island that allow access onto 71st Street.

As illustrated in Figure 5, median reduction will free-up adequate space for left-turning cars to queue at a safe distance from the railroad tracks running through the center of 71st Street, significantly improving vehicular access to the business district.



Right-sizing Stony Island Avenue will add "new" space at the edges of the roadway that can be repurposed for enhanced wayfinding (top left), expanded space for area businesses and public plazas (top right and bottom left), and street art at strategic locations (bottom right).

5. Enhance and Expand Access

The panel recommends pursuing additional improvements to enhance connectivity and multi-modal access within the study area. These include:

- Addressing cul-de-sacs and one-way streets within residential neighborhoods that can limit access to business corridors and unduly concentrate traffic impact on other residential streets.
- Exploring transit enhancements such as improved bus service, increased service frequency on the Metra Electric line, and (re)extension of the Green Line to 63rd Street and Stony Island Avenue.
- Exploring opportunities to improve connection with the Chicago Skyway while minimizing impact on neighborhood properties. CDOT is currently undertaking a study of Chicago Skyway access from Stony Island Avenue. As part of the study, the panel recommends evaluating the use of a more traditional interchange junction and/or indirect access via side streets like Anthony to reduce speeds on Stony Island Avenue and allow access to/from the south, while minimizing impact on adjacent properties.

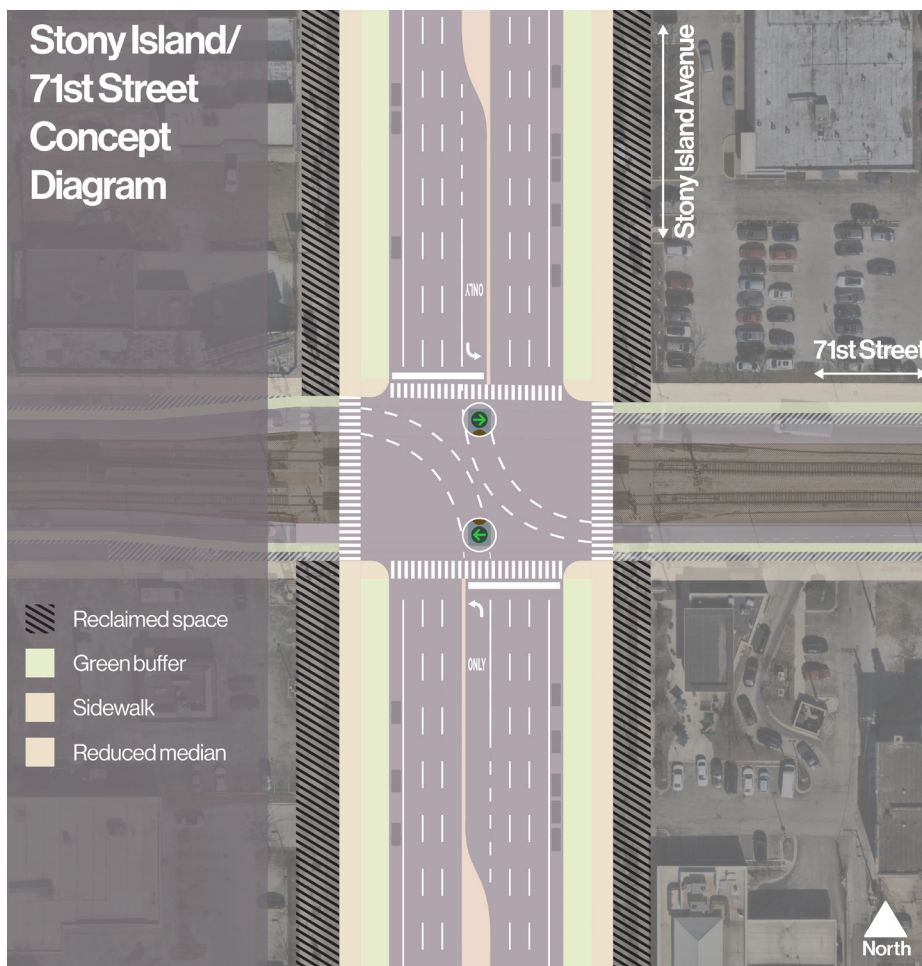


Figure 5. Concept diagram illustrating addition of left-turn lanes from Stony Island Avenue to 71st Street
Source: TYLin

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The panel recommends a long-term approach supported by near-term actions to implement the redevelopment strategies presented in this report for a vibrant, community-centric Stony Island Avenue.

The First Step: Shared Governance Structure

As an immediate first step, the Panel recommends forming a new, shared governance structure to bring together various entities that are actively engaged in the study area to coordinate various projects and initiatives to maximize their synergistic impact.

From CDCs and local foundations to larger private institutions, many organizations are working and investing in the larger study area, but they are focused on specific locations, such as a business district or an institutional campus. There is an opportunity to synchronize these efforts and bridge any gaps by creating an umbrella organization that can be a champion for the entire length of the Stony Island study corridor, from 56th to 79th Street. To be successful, this organization should be:

- Focused on the entire Stony Island Avenue study area that transcends multiple Chicago neighborhoods and wards and be committed to fostering increased collaboration across area organizations and groups.
- Rooted in the community and have the trust of neighborhoods resident, workers, and community organizations.
- Possess expertise in real estate development.
- Supported with financial and other resources by the City and area institutions, including OPC and University of Chicago.

Immediate action should be taken to amplify and harness the impact of new investments, such as the Obama Presidential Center, for community benefit and to help build momentum for future improvements along Stony Island Avenue.

With a shared governance structure, the new entity will be well-positioned to undertaking near-term actions to reinvigorate Stony Island Avenue and to build momentum needed for longer-term improvements.

Near Term Actions (1-3 Years)

Starting with actions that can be taken right away, the panel recommends working towards a visible and easily navigable hub and spoke development model with Stony Island as the central spine. Over the next 1-3 years, the panel recommends the following actions:

Enhance existing hubs. Encourage enhanced and coordinated programming within existing and emerging hubs that can appeal to people with different interests and age groups. Repurpose vacant/underutilized storefronts as affordable rental spaces to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs and bring new energy to existing hubs. Curate and market these unique, local experiences to entice people to visit multiple destinations within the Stony Island corridor.

Improve the public realm. To encourage people to travel between hubs, focus on making Stony Island Avenue and connecting streets, “clean, green, and safe.” Investing in regular cleaning and maintenance, plantings and shade trees, and wayfinding to create a comfortable, safe pedestrian environment should be a near-term priority. Additional investments to further improve the public realm, such as enhanced landscaping, public art installations, and interpretive signage, should be incorporated in conjunction with the full roadway redesign.

Initiate jurisdictional transfer of Stony Island.

Redesigning Stony Island south of 67th Street, as outlined earlier in the report, will be most effective by transferring roadway jurisdiction from IDOT to CDOT. The panel recommends initiating conversations and studies to explore potential pathways for jurisdictional transfer.

Coordinate branding and marketing. Create a brand identity rooted in the history of the Stony Island corridor and its unique neighborhoods and launch a strong marketing campaign to publicize it. The branding and marketing campaign should celebrate the three distinctive zones along Stony Island and the unique character of surrounding neighborhoods.

For example, special pavement colorings, markers, and rotating art installations could be used to create an “Art Walk” linking different hubs within the arts zone between 67th and 75th Streets. Community organizations should collaborate with citywide agencies like the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Choose Chicago, the city’s tourism bureau, to create a world-class campaign.

Align Regulatory Framework & Funding Sources.

The panel recommends reviewing current zoning designations in the study area and updating, when necessary, to attract desired development. For example, live-work units could be ideal for

Curate Unique Experiences

When friends or relatives from out-of-town visit, a tour of the Obama Center could be followed by a leisurely stroll through Jackson’s Park *Wooded Island* and a stop at *Give me some Sugah* to refuel with freshly baked cookies before heading to an author event at *da Book Joint*.

Or one might walk through quiet residential streets, admiring classic Chicago bungalows and 2-flats, including Evans Avenue, where the *home of Nobel Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks* is a designated Chicago landmark. And spend the evening enjoying live music at a local venue or browsing through the *record collection of Frankie Knuckles* at the Stony Island Arts Bank.



Near-term public realm improvements such as frequent street-cleaning, lower-maintenance plantings, and public art can help create an inviting street environment, attracting more people to area businesses and destinations.

supporting an entrepreneurial creative community, especially in the Arts Zone between 67th and 75th Streets. Ensuring that the zoning designation for development parcels allows for that use will streamline development approval, making it easier for smaller, local developers or community organizations to undertake these projects. Similarly, streamlining access to public funding sources and financial incentives could help boost broader participation.

Evaluate forming a Business Improvement District (BID). Currently SSA #42 and SSA #50 cover portions of the study area, providing an important source of funding for streetscape improvements and business support services within their boundaries. The panel recommends exploring the creation of a BID along Stony Island Avenue to supplement the existing SSAs. Like SSAs, BIDs are funded by a tax levy on property owners within the district but afford greater flexibility and local control. A new BID would need buy-in from property owners within the proposed BID boundary.

Longer Term Actions (3+ Years)

A sustained, focused, and coordinated effort that builds on the groundwork completed in the near-term, is essential for the continued future vibrancy of Stony Island Avenue. Over the long term, key actions to successfully implement the panel's recommendations and elevate Stony Island as a top Chicago attraction for Black art, culture, and history, include:

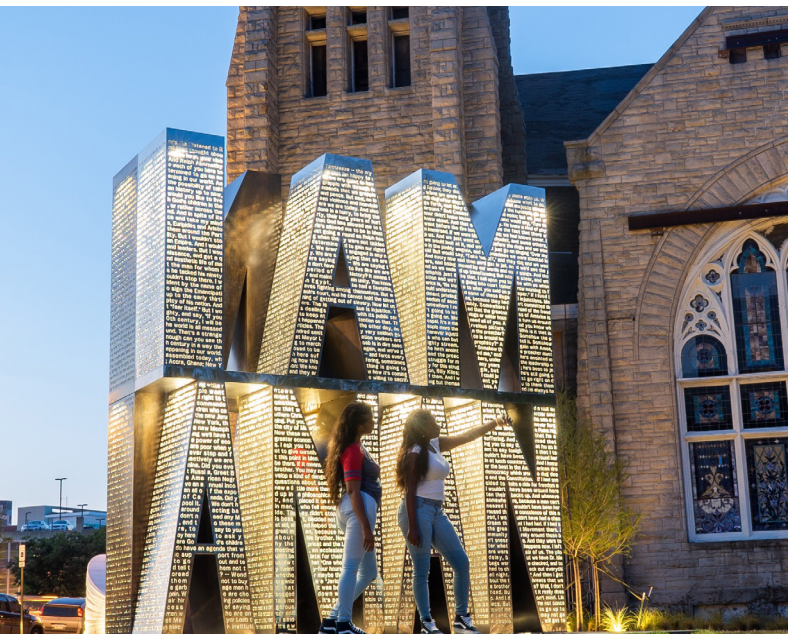
Foster development of new hubs. As the study area attracts more people and economic activity, opportunities for attracting new private investment will also strengthen. New investment should be leveraged to continue to enhance existing and foster the creation of new hubs by repurposing vacant and underutilized spaces.

Redesign Stony Island Avenue. Pursue redesign of Stony Island Avenue, to improve connectivity and enhance the public realm, through inter-agency coordination and potential jurisdictional transfer of the roadway south of 67th Street from IDOT to CDOT.

Strengthen Connectivity. Repurpose the space unlocked by roadway redesign to create discernible nodes at major east-west intersections to enhance visibility and access to neighborhood business districts. Nodes can be defined by public plazas, art installations, or unique/ popular businesses.

The panel also recommends continuing to explore opportunities to enhance transit service, including bus, service frequency for Metra commuter rail, and extending the Green Line to its original terminus at 63rd and Stony Island Avenue.

Continuing Coordinated Governance. As initiatives to reinvigorate Stony Island Avenue take root and flourish, continued coordination across various community organizations and institutions will remain key to maintaining the study area as a cohesive, vibrant, and welcoming district.



Public plazas and art installations at key intersections can draw people and strengthen access to business districts along east-west corridors.

PARTICIPANTS

PANEL MEMBERS

Ghian Foreman | *Panel Chair*

President & CEO | Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative

Ranadip Bose

Partner | SB Friedman Development Advisors, LLC

Andrew Buck

Principal | KOO LLC

Sara Disney Haufe

Vice President, City Solutions Practice Manager | TYLin

Bryan Esenberg

Director of Real Estate & Development | NHS Redevelopment Corporation (NHSRC)

Nick Legatos

Partner | Husch Blackwell

Chris Nash

Senior Vice President | Bank of America

Garrett Riou

Senior Program Officer, Lending | LISC Illinois

William W. Towns, PhD

Professor | Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

Jewell Walton

Vice President of Public Partnerships | Evergreen Real Estate Group

Brad White

Senior Program Director | Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

CITY OF CHICAGO REPRESENTATIVES

Aldersperson Michelle Harris

Ward 8, City of Chicago

Aldersperson Gregory Mitchell

Ward 7, City of Chicago

Aldersperson Desmon Yancy

Ward 5, City of Chicago

Ciere Boatright

Commissioner

Department of Planning and Development

Cindy Chan Roubik

Deputy Commissioner

Department of Planning and Development

Dawveed Scully

Managing Deputy Commissioner (former)

Department of Planning and Development

Justin Petersen

Supervising Planner | Southeast Region

Department of Planning and Development

London Walther

City Planner V | Southeast Region

Department of Planning and Development

ULI CHICAGO

Cindy McSherry

Executive Director

Swasti Shah

Director of Community Engagement

Elizabeth Duffrin

Staff Writer



Find this report and hundreds of others on Knowledge Finder,

the leading global resource of trends and best practices in real estate development and financing. Explore an ever-expanding library and find recommended content related to your interests, including reading lists, case studies, videos and webinars, books, and more.

knowledge.uli.org

ULI CHICAGO

1700 WEST IRVING PARK ROAD
SUITE 208
CHICAGO - IL 60613
773 | 549 | 4972
CHICAGO@ULI.ORG
WWW.CHICAGO.ULI.ORG



Chicago