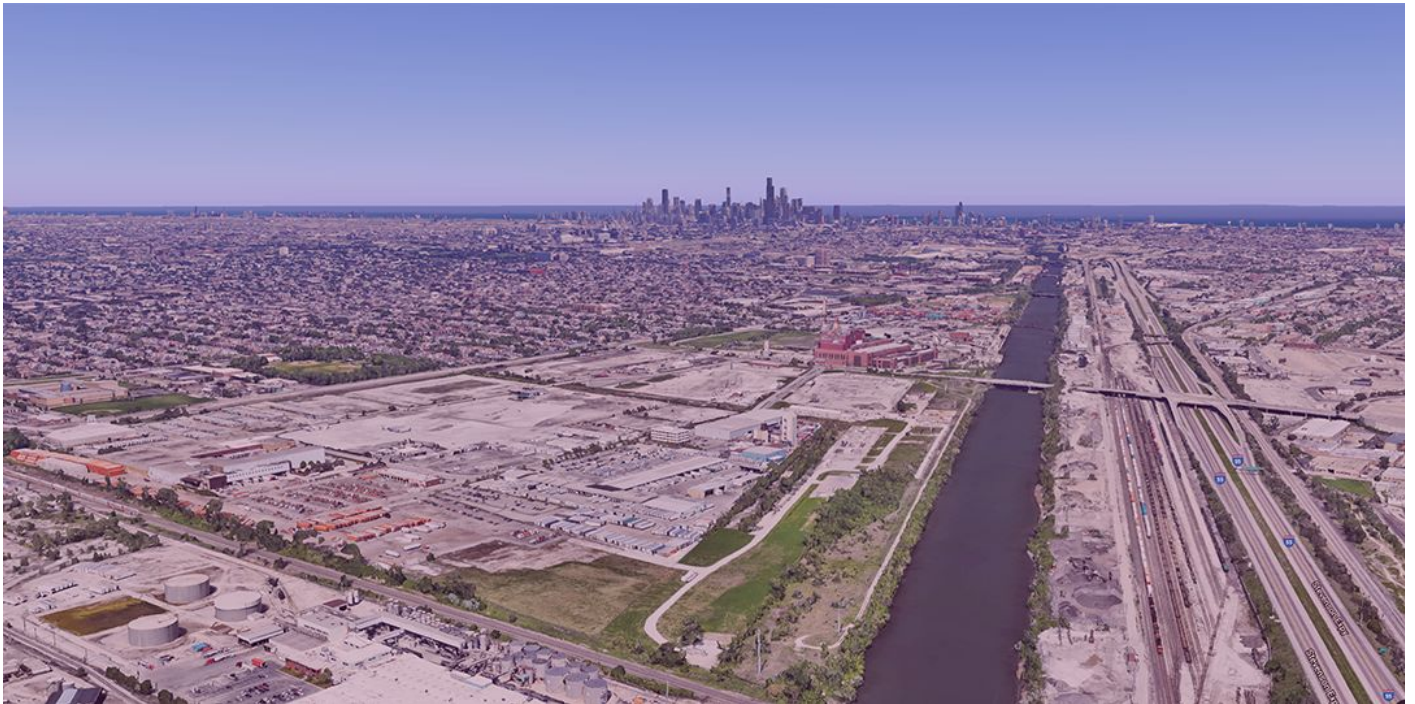


# Comprehensive Overview of the Industrial Modernization Initiative for the Little Village Industrial Corridor Framework

Urban Studies

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**Executive Summary:**

For generations, Little Village has hosted a plethora of intense developments and industrial activities. With a strong and well-connected working-class, comprised of diverse immigrant communities - the neighborhood continues to foster and attract manufacturing and trading outlets using local labor to meet global demand. However, these trends have consequently come at the cost of health and environmental sustainability, producing toxic waste and particulates that have received major backlash throughout the years. In return, community activists raised awareness on the environmental injustice occurring, helping mobilize stakeholders to take action and fight for change. As a response, the city of Chicago along with multiple private and nonprofit agencies have come together to create a framework for development in the Little Village industrial corridor, under the umbrella of the Industrial Corridor Modernization Initiative passed under Rahm Emanuel. While the plan promotes job creation and industry adaptation through the restructuring of the built physicality; is it enough to reimagine a space that works for all folks and establishes a viable, efficient, and equitable outlook into the future, or will it conversely disenfranchise the residents that cultivate the area. Which are all important questions we'll be exploring throughout this report.

**Context:**

The Little Village Industrial Corridor Framework Project will take place in Little Village. Little Village is one of Chicago's largest neighborhoods, and home to a large percentage of Latinx and Hispanic populations. Based on population data from the 2015 Census tract, Little Village was made up of 3.07% white, 11.05% Black, 85.24% Hispanic, and 0.25% Asian. The

neighborhood's median household income is \$30,701. Little Village is also one of Chicago's high-poverty neighborhoods. Despite the highly concentrated poverty issues, "Little Village's 26th street is the second highest grossing shopping district in the city" In 2015, the 2-mile street created \$900 million dollars in sales. In addition to Little Village being a staple for financial and capital investment, it is also home to several annual concerts, festivals, and parades which bring together people from all backgrounds for opportunities of social engagement and cultural/heritage celebration.

There are not many sustainable aspects that surround the plan and that is why The Framework project is pushing for more sustainable projects in this area. The land consists of damaged grass and openly abandoned fields. The plan is also near a frequently used expressway of I-55 which produces pollution and go against the anti-sustainability The Framework project is ultimately working to reduce. The land has lacked sustainable implementations way before the project. The Framework project is aware of unsustainable land use and is taking greater sustainable approaches for future projects including The Framework. These approaches include solar plants and green top buildings and "the implementation of on-site renewable energy, increased landscaping, and encouraging the use of alternative fuel vehicles for industrial operations."

The stakeholders that are onboard with the project are multiple city departments and agencies such as the Chicago Transit Authority, the Department of Planning and Development, and the Department of Public Health. Additionally, there are several community organizations and other public and private stakeholders. Some community organizations include Enlace Chicago, Lawndale Business Renaissance Association, Little Village Chamber of Commerce,

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization and Open lands. Moreover, the project is being funded by a number of sources. According to the text, “The Framework will be implemented through new and existing financial tools, including the industrial corridor fee, Tax Increment Financing (TIF), state and federal sources, developer contributions and other sources.” It is difficult to track where all funding is coming from, but the project will have many financial sources that will help with its implementation.

**Problem:**

The Little Village Industrial Corridor Framework seeks to address three major problems including land-use and vacant development, transportation congestion and carbon emissions, as well as greenspace and riverfront sustainability. First, the project seeks to make use of open land and space (often characterized as blighted areas) through the creation of new developments and projects. In addition to making use of open land, the Little Village Corridor Framework aims to promote employment and improve economic development and opportunities in the neighborhood. Little Village. Secondly, a second problem The Framework seeks to address is transportation. One prime study listed in the Framework, suggested that while most of the 26 industrial corridors experienced a shift of energy into hospitality and office-space, the Little Village corridor in fact saw an increase in employment for sectors relating to transportation, and hard labor. The Framework mentions several challenges posed by large volumes of trucks using the local streets, inducing traffic congestion and increasing the stress on public infrastructure. According to the community members we spoke to from LVEJO, one of their studies they did with local high school students found that approximately 500 diesel trucks pass by in a span of 5 hours” (LVEJO, 2019).

Lastly, another problem the Framework plans to address is sustainability pertaining to air and water quality. The Framework outlined major disparities in the air quality for residents in Little Village, noting that while air measures meet Illinois standards, there was still a large number of cases in which residents were being affected by respiratory illnesses. This includes a higher number of children diagnosed with asthma, and a relatively high number of adults with lung cancer. mission is to bring more sustainable planning and developments through these types of projects. The Framework plans to adopt sustainable solutions to protect public health and the environment. As stated in the text, “The Framework attempts to provide strategies that reflect this intersection and address health and environmental impacts of development through the lens of sustainability” (Little Village Framework, 2019). The Framework is planning to commit to sustainable developments that will not impact communities and the environment. The Framework has focused its attention on these three major problems and intends to address these problems with the solutions discussed below.

### **Solutions:**

In relation to the outlined problems, the Framework for the industrial corridor in Little Village aims to overcome the barriers by using three conceptual directions that branch out and become more specific. The first direction is explained as - “Maintaining the industrial corridor in Little Village as an employment center” This means that the city of Chicago and the entities representing it, want Little Village to continue its role being an economic hub that connects downtown consumers with service-delivery providers, by expanding the corridor’s territory, incentivizing public-private partnerships, and creating modern jobs. It points out the assets of Little Village, emphasizing the importance of the I-55 interstate, as well as its proximity to the

Sanitary and Ship canal. There's also research suggesting that 82% of the jobs in Little Village entail sectors in manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, and wholesale trade. While further studies have shown that employment in the transportation sector have increased 22% from 2005 to 2017 (Little Village Framework, 2019). Additionally, it found that Little Village has three main peripheries in which 800 residents are directly employed by the firms located inside the corridor boundaries. By using the employment magnet as the framework for development, Little Village embarked on two main projects that oriented around this concept including - a \$100 million development of a distribution center lead by the Hilco group that will replace the vacant Crawford plant. Which has also recently received a \$19 million tax break from the city of Chicago over the span of 12 years (Peña & Cherone, 2019).

Secondly, the Framework proposes to remove the industrial zoning boundary surrounding the Richard Daley Park and the boat launch on the eastern division of the corridor (Figure 1). This direction for the Framework explains "Providing better access for all modes within and around the Little Village Industrial Corridor." This approach is valuing development and land-use practices that increase the resident's mobility through alternative methods of transportation, including - improved walkways and bike paths, updated traffic signals, and additional passageways for trucks to easily move in-and-out of Stevenson highway. Thus, reducing the congestion on 31st street. Specific developments that reiterate this direction include the planned process to expand the corridor's boundary into Unilever's development and the vacant sites located North of 31st Street and Kostner Ave. This will enhance the connectivity between the Little Village Industrial Corridor and the Roosevelt/Cicero Industrial Corridor.

The last goal of the Framework is to “Incorporate best practices for new development within the industrial corridor to improve economic, environmental, and social conditions.” This all-encompassing goal provides the tools to address the poor air-quality of the area, while reforming industries to focus on green space and eliminating long-term impacts with carbon emissions and water pollution. This goal pushes for a variety of development projects in Little Village such as - remediating El Paseo’s landscape so it becomes a channel of movement to 300+ workers, guiding existing businesses to invest in solar roofs and on-site renewable energy, as well as opening the Collateral Channel to the public so that the riverfront becomes accessible to residents. Ongoing developments that have implemented this direction include the Focal Point community campus on 31st Street and Kedzie Avenue which will house an athletic facility, an emergency care unit, and educational programs. The other development includes the Paul Simon Job Corps training center.

### **Analysis**

Upon examining the issues in Little Village and the challenges the city faces as it navigates a sensitive space of economic and workforce development, the Framework attempts to uplift certain goals that emphasize growth while addressing the need of having sustainable mechanisms of economy. By dividing the goals into three main directions, that then branch off to become more specific, it ensures that the Framework is widely applicable and is shaped by the long-term needs of the community. However, for a comprehensive plan that outlines the future for the industrial corridor, it seems the plan is relatively normal and doesn’t really explore the possibilities of what a modern post-industrial land-use could look or function like. While the plan supports the development of a new distribution center, a new community campus, and

several revisions to the streetscape of 31st street, it doesn't utilize or manifest the full capacity of a green energy engine in one of Chicago's most diverse immigrant and working-class communities.

Additionally, while the plan guides efforts to utilize solar roofs and alternative methods of transportation that are not gas-run, it dismisses and leaves out any codifications that would allow existing corporations to adopt new methods of energy production such as - using urban wind turbines, setting up community farms and local agriculture, as well as incorporating industries that focus on technology and data. The main values guiding the Little Village industrial corridor Framework emphasize keeping Little Village as an economic center for labor and transportation, and making the environment surrounding it support greener initiatives. Which is a flawed concept theoretically, and structurally, because the Framework should support innovative and groundbreaking development that shifts away from harmful and intensive economic activity. Although CMAP research illustrates that warehousing and truck transit will increase onto 2040, it doesn't tell us how viable these sectors are when it pertains to the workers' health conditions, the amount of physical labor involved, and the wages correlated with this type of work. So that's one component that Little Village misses in the Framework as it continues the legacy and status quo of intensive labor in the area, and ignores programs or developments that elevate the standards or types of labor it's residents could partake in.

Overall, the Framework for the modernization of the Little Village industrial corridor allows for further development to occur, that later sets off a chain reaction of changes for the surrounding entities. These changes continue to reinforce the redevelopment of warehouse and transportation jobs which is problematic because one, it doesn't set up the community to compete



on a global scale for more technical and skill-based fields. Two, it doesn't resolve or remediate the negative air quality or contaminated water sources that encompass the neighborhood. As Harvard Public Health research indicated the effects of carbon related incidents - "41 premature deaths, 550 emergency room visits, 2,800 asthma attacks and 36,000 minor restricted activity days" (Peña, 2018). Hence why the Framework falls short of sustainability plans because even though it promotes walkability and the coexistence of trucking industry with local living, it doesn't treat the built space as an ecology of social, environmental, and economic fabrics. Instead, it concentrates on having the neighborhood continue as a system of profit production and lacks the human aspect that makes up the essence of a place. Endangering the revitalization of the neighborhood, and all the lives of the folks that call it home.

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Figure 1

