

2020
2021
2022
2023

3 YEARS OF IMPACT



2022-2024

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Elevated Chicago began in 2017 as part of the national **Strong, Prosperous, And Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC)**, which identified six regions across the country to reimagine the built environment through an equity lens. From humble beginnings as a small group of community builders, developers and funders, by 2021, we hired three staff members; formalized a multi-sector Steering Committee; launched five Community Tables to advance ETOD in their respective neighborhoods; awarded hundreds of thousands in grants; convened our first policy symposium; and partnered with City leadership to create Chicago's first **ETOD Policy Plan** and launch an **ETOD pilot program**. We also deepened relationships within government and across communities that paved the way for future systems-change wins.

Between 2022 and 2024, we expanded our reach and impact across our three core pillars: People, Place and Process. We engaged new partners and activated more Chicagoans around ETOD, bringing together more than 1,000 leaders from across sectors through the ongoing efforts of our Working Groups and Community Tables and at events such as our **Symposiums**, the **ETODay Party** that celebrated pipeline projects, and our **ETOD Walking Tour**. And our strategic communications, advocacy and deep partnerships with the City helped secure critical policy wins, most notably the **Connected Communities Ordinance**, still the nation's strongest local ETOD policy.

In our work we've served as a convener, facilitator, bridge-builder, translator, advocate and funder, positioning Chicago at the forefront of equitable transit-oriented development nationwide. Our team has changed, and we've welcomed new staff including a Coordinator and **Executive Director**. Our **project pipeline** now includes more than 60 community-led ETOD efforts citywide, from affordable housing and grocery stores to daycare centers and community theaters. **Elevated Works**, our technical assistance program for emerging community developers, has helped dozens of projects reach major milestones, including site acquisitions, groundbreakings and ribbon-cuttings.

This report celebrates our achievements between 2022 and 2024, and invites you to reflect on how far we've come, together, in our mission to establish equitable, vibrant communities near public transit.

GROWING OUR MOVEMENT FOR ETOD IN CHICAGO

Bringing new people into the movement for ETOD is central to our advocacy.

Through education and conversation we have engaged and mobilized more than 1,000 community members.

Convening to Celebrate, Explore and Advance ETOD Together

Elevated Chicago continues to bring people together around a shared vision for thriving, connected communities. Our [2022 Symposium](#) explored the links between ETOD and public health, celebrating milestones such as new community centers, affordable housing and land trust homes that represent inclusive growth. In 2024, our [ETODay Party](#) gathered more than 135 guests to celebrate 28 ETOD projects and strengthen collaboration among community, policy and development partners. That same year, our [ETOD Walking Tour](#) convened more than 20 partners in Bronzeville and Washington Park to experience ETOD in action and discuss its impact on the ground.



Equitable Development Ambassadors Program Puts Power in Residents Hands

Launched in 2021, the Equitable Development Ambassadors (EDA) program gave everyday Chicagoans the tools and know-how to shape their neighborhoods, focusing on how real estate and city processes work and then imagining projects that reflect community needs. Our second EDA cohort (March 2022) featured twelve Ambassadors from neighborhoods including South Shore, Auburn Gresham and North Lawndale — guided by Duo Development, Palenque LSNA and Rudd Resources, participants pitched ideas for affordable housing, retail and cultural spaces, demonstrating what can happen when residents hold the power to decide what gets built where.

Community Tables Power Equitable Development Citywide

Our Community Tables unite residents and empower them to shape development near transit in ways that prevent displacement, foster equity and center community pride. In Logan Square, neighbors helped create [La Placita Plaza](#) and advanced new housing protections. In North Lawndale, residents celebrated the [Home Sweet Homan](#) supportive housing opening while transforming vacant lots with art. In East Garfield Park, [Fifth City Commons](#) represents an affordable housing accomplishment. On the South Side, sunflowers now bloom where vacant structures stood in Bronzeville; neighbors are shaping the vision for [Imani Village](#) in Roseland; and there's a corridor-wide [95th Street ETOD plan](#). These efforts prove that community-led development can create lasting change.

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT AMBASSADORS



TRANSFORMING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, BUILDING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Elevated Chicago transforms areas within a half-mile of public transit into vibrant, equitable communities, with a keen interest in areas affected by disinvestment, segregation and gentrification. Through direct grantmaking, technical assistance for emerging developers and public engagement, we help create places where Chicagoans can live, work and thrive together.

Elevated Works Powers Community-Led Development Across Chicago

Launched in 2023 with a \$1 million investment from the City of Chicago, [Elevated Works](#) is our technical assistance program for small and emerging developers. Anchored by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), Elevated Chicago, IFF, Metropolitan Planning Council and Rudd Resources, Elevated Works has become a national model for equitable development, pairing free coaching and zoning, design and marketing services with City grants of up to \$250,000. Since 2023, Elevated Works delivered 2,000 hours of assistance and 850 hours of coaching, unlocking more than \$300 million in investment. The program has supported 29 community-led projects, including affordable housing, grocery stores, early learning centers and comedy clubs, encompassing 23 site acquisitions, seven groundbreakings and five openings.



Funding Local Visions for Equitable, Transit-Connected Neighborhoods

Elevated Chicago awarded three [\\$100,000 grants](#) (covering critical pre-development costs) to ETOD projects that reflect the power of community-driven change.

- [The K](#), a business incubator in West Garfield Park, supports local entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- [Starling](#), a new community center in North Lawndale, offers space for learning and connection.
- [BandWith Chicago](#), based in East Garfield Park, provides free performing arts programming that nurtures youth creativity.

Nature Near Transit Connects Climate Resilience and Community Power

[Nature Near Transit](#) is a partnership between Elevated Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) and We Build Agency to bring resilient green infrastructure and public art to transit-adjacent neighborhoods experiencing disinvestment. The initiative supported five community-designed projects: a rain garden at Trinity United Church in Washington Heights; a green roof at Palenque LSNA in Logan Square; a rain garden at the Overton Center in Bronzeville; a redesigned bioswale at Chicago FarmWorks in East Garfield Park; and with North River Commission, bus stop seating and planters in Albany Park. Together, they improve stormwater management, support biodiversity and climate resilience, and boost neighborhood pride.



Can You Walk There? Video Series Brings ETOD Education to Social Media

Our [TikTok series "Can You Walk There?"](#) highlights stark disparities in walkability and transit access across Chicago neighborhoods. Created by former Elevated Chicago coordinator Jannice Newson, sparked by her real-life struggle navigating her neighborhood, the series documents how investment and urban design choices shape residents' daily experiences. In March 2023, the series was featured on [CBS News Chicago](#) for raising awareness of mobility inequities.

process

TRANSFORMING HOW CHICAGO PLANS AND BUILDS WITH COMMUNITIES

Elevated Chicago strengthens development processes and policies by centering community voices, promoting collaboration across sectors and ensuring inclusive engagement. By creating tools, convening stakeholders and advancing equity-focused frameworks, we ensure that decision-making fosters trust, reflects resident priorities and leads to more just, transparent and sustainable outcomes in development citywide.

Elevated Chicago Leads on Historic Connected Communities Ordinance

In July 2022, Chicago made history by passing the [Connected Communities Ordinance](#) (CCO), the nation's most comprehensive equitable transit-oriented development policy. Elevated Chicago co-created the [ETOD Policy Plan](#) that inspired the ordinance and led advocacy efforts for its passage — across two years we collaborated with more than 80 community, civic and government partners to reimagine the laws that shape how development near transit happens. The result? New rules that expand affordable housing, protect multiunit homes, make streets safer for walking and more. We continue to guide and support CCO implementation citywide.



Keeping ETOD Strong Through Change and Collaboration

We work with government leaders, elected officials and national partners to shape policy and planning that is rooted in equity. Our team developed tools and resources, e.g. video explainers, blogs and posters, to help residents, developers and policymakers understand the value and impact of ETOD. Locally, we ensured that ETOD remained a priority as City Hall administrations and City Council leadership changed. Regionally, we contributed to the [Plan of Action for Regional Transit](#) and [Regional Transit Authority Transit-Friendly Communities Guide](#) initiatives. Nationally we joined peer coalitions in Los Angeles and Atlanta to grow a shared ETOD movement.

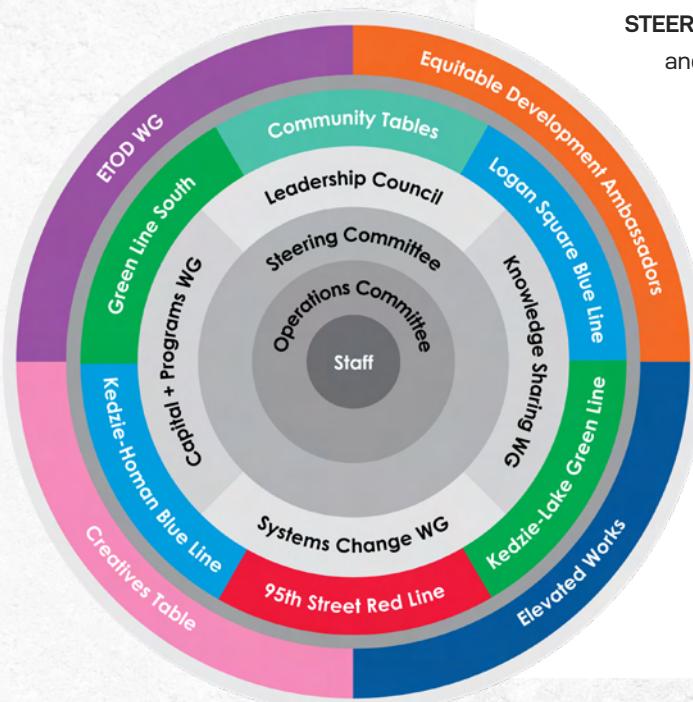
In.Field Kit Translates Resident Insights into Action

Ensuring development is responsive to community needs and desires is core to ETOD. In 2024, we partnered with [Duo Development](#) to develop the [In.Field Kit](#), a hands-on tool for organizing delightful community engagement to support inclusive, engaging participation as a standard, not an aspiration. Grounded in Elevated Chicago's updated [2023 Community Engagement Principles](#), the kit guides users to plan, co-create with residents, capture insights and translate learnings into design or policy decisions.



our structure

Since 2017, Elevated Chicago has grown from the small team that conceived our work to a diverse group of more than 300 people who comprise our steering committee, leadership council, working groups and community tables. We have expanded the definition, stakes and contributing voices around equitable transit-oriented development by creating new systems of decision-making and reenvisioning leadership. Our bodies of governance are constructed to facilitate authentic and inclusive community engagement, build bridges between government, community and other sectors, and ensure collective ownership in decisions that affect the built environment.



STEERING COMMITTEE members function as Elevated Chicago's governance and decision-making body. Comprised of multi-sector leaders in the public, private and civic sectors, including regional and citywide institutions and community-based organizations, the Steering Committee reflects the different lenses of Elevated Chicago: arts and culture, climate resilience, equity and public health.

COMMUNITY TABLES are made up of neighborhood residents, leaders and business owners, particularly those who live and work within the half-mile radius of select transit stations or have a close relationship to the area (ex. community program participants or daily commuters). Our five community tables inform our strategies and determine our priorities for capital projects, programs, policies, narratives, data and technical assistance.

WORKING GROUPS bring together community-based, advocacy and institutional partners to shepherd the implementation of Elevated Chicago's workplan. Co-chaired by institutional partners who provide oversight and support to advance Elevated Chicago priorities, our three working groups — Capital & Programs, Systems Change and Knowledge Sharing — focus on projects and initiatives, policy and advocacy, and narrative change and education efforts, respectively. We also co-convene an ETOD Working Group with the Mayor's Office to advance policy priorities and engage a broader cross section of 50-plus organizations.

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL members are government and civic leaders committed to promoting ETOD, removing barriers to ETOD and changing the culture, policies and practices that impact equitable development in Chicago. The Leadership Council advises and supports Elevated Chicago in advancing our systems change efforts and priorities.

Acknowledging Our Partners and Funders

Elevated Chicago appreciates the support and guidance of our collaborators and funders across the past three years.

Current Steering Committee Members

Leslé Honoré (co-chair)
Juan Carlos Linares, (co-chair), Association House of Chicago & LUCHA
Kevin Sutton (co-chair)
Vickie Battle, IFF
Emily Bloom-Carlin, Metropolitan Planning Council
Trenton Blythe, Sunshine Enterprises
Juliet De Jesus Alejandre, Palenque LSNA
Foundation for Homan Square
Jacky Grimshaw, Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT)
Rev. Veronica Johnson, The Endeleo Institute
Alfredo Nieves, UChicago Arts and Public Life
Traci Sanders, Enterprise Community Partners
Dawveed Scully, Chicago Department of Planning and Development
Mike Tomas, Garfield Park Community Council
Christen Wiggins, The Chicago Community Trust

Past Steering Committee Members

Nootan Bharani, UChicago Arts and Public Life
Lissette Castañeda, LUCHA*
Chandra Christmas-Rouse, Metropolitan Planning Council*
Megan Cunningham, Chicago Department of Public Health*
Michael Davidson, The Chicago Community Trust*
Christian Diaz, Palenque LSNA*
Ghian Foreman, Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative
Kendra Freeman, Metropolitan Planning Council*
Kate McMahon, Chicago Department of Public Health
Marisa Novara, The Chicago Community Trust
Jannice Ortiz, LUCHA*
Jair Pinedo, Sunshine Enterprises*
Melvin Thompson, The Endeleo Institute*
Audrey Wennink, Metropolitan Planning Council

**noted affiliation reflects association during member's Steering Committee service*

Leadership Council

The Chicago Community Trust
Chicago Department of Housing
Chicago Department of Planning and Development
Chicago Department of Public Health
Chicago Department of Transportation
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Chicago Office of Equity and Racial Justice
Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA)
Chicago Treasurer's Office
City of Chicago, Office of Mayor Brandon Johnson
Rush University Medical Center

Other Partners

Aaron Rose
Agape Collective
Duo Development
Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University
Jannice Newson
JNJ Creative
NHP Foundation
Rudd Resources
We Build Agency

2022-2024 Funders

Builders Initiative
The Chicago Community Trust
Convergence Partnership
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
MetLife Foundation
JPMorgan Chase Foundation
Polk Bros. Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Square One Foundation
Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC)
Walder Foundation

Special thanks to Roberto Requejo, our founding Executive Director, for his passion, vision and leadership. His work to establish inclusive collaboration practices and fight for policy and systems change cemented Elevated Chicago as a regional and national leader in advancing ETOD.