

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

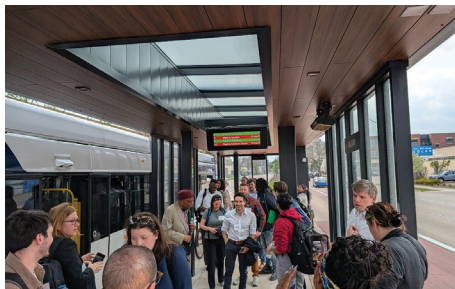
PEOPLE

About our people



Students at Aldridge Elementary School

APRIL: Altgeld Gardens Students Reimagine 130th Street Through ETOD. Elevated Chicago joined eighth-grade students at Aldridge Elementary School in Altgeld Gardens as they presented a large-scale diorama redesigning the 130th Street greenway using ETOD principles. The project, led by Collective Learning Lab, included an earlier classroom visit from Manager Marly Schott and Coordinator Audrey Rutter on ETOD and the importance of community input as the Red Line Extension moves forward.



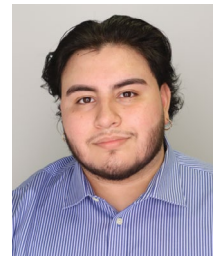
Bus Rapid Transit learning trip in Madison, Wisconsin

APRIL: Transportation Equity Network's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Learning Trip. In April, Elevated Chicago joined the Transportation Equity Network's BRT learning trip to Madison, Wisconsin, to explore how bus rapid transit can provide communities with equitable, accessible transportation options. We left inspired by the potential to bring BRT to Chicago, especially as a tool to improve service, reduce travel times, and promote ETOD in communities underserved by public transportation.



Watch the case for right-sizing parking on YouTube

MAY: The Case for Right-Sizing Parking Educational Video. Elevated Chicago released a new ETOD educational video on right-sizing parking. The video explains how reducing excess parking can lower housing costs, ease traffic, and support ETOD, serving as an accessible tool for partners and community members to learn about and advocate for ETOD in their own communities.



Alonso Bueno

and has since gone on to pursue a master's degree in geography at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. While at Elevated Chicago, Alonso gathered and analyzed data to support our forthcoming State of ETOD report. We're grateful to Alonso for his time with us!

JUNE: Elevated Chicago Welcomes Alonso Bueno as an Intern.

Alonso Bueno joined us as an intern from June to August 2025. Alonso graduated from the geography program at DePaul University



Panel on Community-Driven Planning in Action at the ETOD-for-All

SEPTEMBER: ETOD-for-All Reimagines Symposium as Community Celebration. Elevated Chicago hosted our first ETOD-for-All, reimagining our traditional symposium as a community festival at Experimental Station in Woodlawn. More than 100 participants engaged with ETOD through panels on Elevated Works technical assistance, transit funding and reform, and community-driven planning, alongside outdoor music, art, food, and family-friendly activities that invited new community members to learn about ETOD.

Continued

2025 was a transformative year for equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) in Chicago. We invite you to join us in revisiting the meaningful strides that Elevated Chicago took last year.



2025 HIGHLIGHTS

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Steering Committee celebrates our 8th anniversary

SEPTEMBER: Steering Committee Leadership Renewed as Elevated Chicago Marks Eighth Anniversary.

As we celebrated our eighth anniversary, Elevated Chicago also renewed our Steering Committee leadership, re-electing Kevin Sutton and Leslé Honoré as Co-Chairs and electing Juan Carlos Linares with Association House/LUCHA as a third Co-Chair. We also welcomed the Chicago Department of Planning & Development, represented by Dawveed Scully, and The Renaissance Collaborative, represented by Oji Eggleston. We also thanked the Chicago Department of Public Health and Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative for their contributions as they transitioned off the committee.

Transitions on Elevated Chicago's Steering Committee.

Elevated Chicago's Steering Committee saw several leadership transitions: Christen Wiggins replaced Marisa Novara as The Chicago Community Trust representative; Emily Bloom-Carlin succeeded Audrey Wennick at the Metropolitan Planning Council; Rev. Veronica Johnson became the representative for Endealeo Institute; Kevin Sutton retired from FHS and transitioned to an individual member; Ebony Scott-Anderson joined and later departed for FHS; and Juliet De Jesus Alejandre became the representative for Palenque LSNA.

Arts and Culture Strategy and Creatives Table Launch.

Elevated Chicago launched our Arts and Culture Strategy in April, a bold approach to community development focused on preserving neighborhood cultural identities



Panel on the role of the arts in development at the Arts & Culture Strategy launch event

amid the ongoing displacement of long-time residents, especially in Black and Brown communities. As part of the strategy, Elevated Chicago launched our Creatives Table in June— a space for artists and creatives working in the built environment to learn and network.

PLACE

About places we're impacting

FEBRUARY: City Passes 95th Street Corridor Plan.

The Chicago Plan Commission adopted the 95th Street ETOD Corridor Plan in February, guiding redevelopment to support mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented development. City Council proactively upzoned more than 300 parcels in November to begin implementing the plan. The Endealeo Institute's 95th Street Community Table played a key role in leading community engagement and shaping the plan's vision for equitable corridor investment and continues to support advancement of the plan.

MARCH: Palenque LSNA and CDOT Host Panel on Intersectional Urbanism.

Elevated Chicago member Palenque LSNA partnered with CDOT to host a panel discussion on intersectional urbanism at the Chicago Mobility Collaborative Spring meeting. The panel featured several Elevated Chicago partners, including former 35th Ward Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, DOH Commissioner Lissette Castañeda, Urban Gateways CEO and Co-Chair Leslé Honoré, Association House CEO & President Juan Carlos Linares, and Elevated Executive Director Juan Sebastian Arias.



Rendering of the Ujima Hive community hub's Nia Square

APRIL: Elevated Chicago Invests \$250,000 in Community-Driven Development.

Elevated Chicago awarded \$250,000 in predevelopment grants: \$100,000 to MAAFA Redemption Project to restore a historic West Garfield Park church into an Art & Activism Center; \$75,000 to Ujima Hive to redevelop a vacant CPS building in Englewood as a community hub; and \$75,000 to Here to Stay Community Land Trust to preserve affordable single-family homes and two-flats on the Northwest Side—advancing equitable, community-driven development.



Emily Laflamme leading the APA-IL tour at Saint Leonard's Ministries

OCTOBER: Showcasing ETOD in Practice.

Elevated Chicago members, IFF and CNT, led a mobile workshop at the APA-IL Conference highlighting the Elevated Works Technical Assistance Program. Attendees rode the train between West Side project sites—Saint Leonard's Ministries Campus, Chicago Printworks, and Starling—learning how Elevated Works advanced ETOD. 95th Street Community Table Lead Hubert Morgan and manager Marly Schott also joined CTA and DPD for a panel on ETOD in practice, highlighting the Community Table's role in shaping the 95th Street Corridor Plan.



Elevated's Steering Committee touring the Fifth City Commons development

Milestones Reached: Community-Led ETOD Projects Open Citywide.

Elevated Chicago marked major milestones with ribbon cuttings and openings across the city, including Fifth City Commons, a 43-unit affordable housing development built to Passive House standards as part of the broader 5th Avenue redevelopment and global C40 Sustainable Cities initiative (supported by a \$342,000 grant in 2022), and Bandwith Chicago, which opened its new Performing Arts Center and Community Hub to expand youth and adult programming (supported by a \$100,000 grant in 2024). Additional community-led ETOD projects reaching ribbon-cutting or opening milestones include The Canvas at Leland Plaza and Elevated Works projects — Little Angels Learning Center, Avenue Apartments, and Comedy Clubhouse — underscoring continued momentum for equitable transit-oriented development across Chicago.

\$1.5 Million Creative Placekeeping Partnership with the MacArthur Foundation, First Eight Grantees Selected.

Elevated Chicago secured a three-year, \$1.5 million partnership with the MacArthur Foundation to fund creative placekeeping projects citywide as part of our Arts & Culture Strategy. The first eight Elevating Culture Near Transit grantees were announced in December 2025, with projects ranging from murals to cultural pop-ups and festivals funded in North and South Lawndale, Austin, Garfield Park, Washington Park, Grand Crossing, Avondale/Humboldt Park, Bridgeport, and Bronzeville.

PROCESS

About our systems-change work



Read our 2025-2027 work plan at elevatedchicago.org

JANUARY: Elevated Chicago Launches 2025-2027 Work Plan.

Elevated Chicago released our 2025-2027 Work Plan, outlining a vision for how we will build vibrant, inclusive communities connected to frequent, safe, and accessible transit, together. Our strategic plan centers community leadership, equitable policies and investments, arts and culture, and cross-sector collaboration to transform the built environment around transit hubs while strengthening internal processes and collective power to advance equitable transit-oriented development citywide.

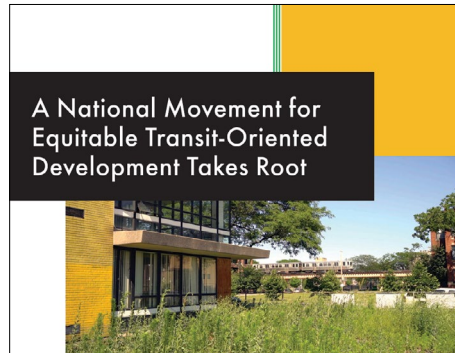


The In.Field Kit in use at a training workshop

FEBRUARY: In.Field Kit Expands Tools for Delightful Community Engagement.

After a two-year visioning and engagement process, Elevated Chicago launched the In.Field Kit, a community engagement toolkit

developed with Duo Development. Designed as a practical and dynamic guide to applying Elevated's Community Engagement Principles, the kit helps teams plan with communities, not for them. In our first year, we produced 500 kits, shared more than 150 in the field, delivered 15 trainings and workshops, and reached over 11,850 online views, with 111 planning map downloads—supporting deeper, more meaningful engagement across projects.



Read the report at cnt.org

APRIL: Report Examines the National Evolution of ETOD.

Published in April in partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Technology, *A National Movement for ETOD Takes Root* examines the evolution of transit-oriented development across various cities, tracing how equity became central to the model through case studies in Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Medellín, Colombia—redirecting investment toward communities near transit facing displacement, disinvestment and gentrification challenges.

MAY: City Council Passes Green Social Housing Bill.

The Chicago City Council passed a green social housing ordinance to create a city-run nonprofit that partners with developers to build sustainably designed mixed-income housing. Elevated Chicago joined partners to advocate for the bill and testify at City Council. Palenque LSNA's Traoloch O'Sullivan and Elevated's Executive Director Juan Sebastian Arias also penned an op-ed in support of the bill in *Crain's Chicago Business*.

JUNE: Elevated Chicago Joins Chicago Reparations Task Force.

Mayor Johnson announced the Chicago Reparations Task Force, with Juan Sebastian Arias as a member. The task force will support a historic effort to build Chicago's first Reparations Study, and members will help shape how the City acknowledges, addresses, and repairs generations of harm experienced by Black communities and residents in Chicago, including the impact of 20th century federal highway construction and exclusionary zoning practices.

JULY: Elevated Chicago Selected for Smart Growth America ZEST Program.

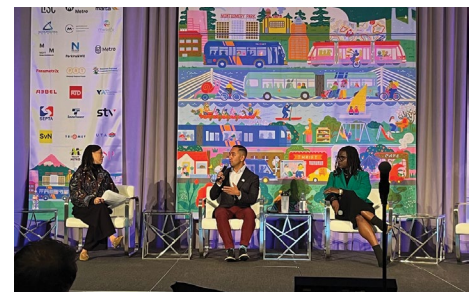
Elevated Chicago was selected as one of seven organizations in Smart Growth America's inaugural ZEST (Zoning for Equitable Solutions and Thriving Communities) program, receiving tailored technical assistance and an invitation to a November convening in Baltimore to advance zoning reform through a health equity lens. We also participated in Smart Growth America's Equity Summit in March, where Juan Sebastian Arias shared insights on community leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and joyful advocacy while connecting with partners working to build equitable, walkable communities nationwide.

JULY: Elevated Chicago Joins RTA Joint Development Study Steering Committee.

Elevated Chicago joined the Steering Committee for the RTA's Joint Development Feasibility Study. Joint development allows transit agencies to partner with developers to sell or lease agency-owned land near stations, capture increased land value, reinvest in transit operations, and advance ETOD goals such as building affordable housing near transit. The two-phase study will assess how a future regional joint development program in the Chicago area can advance ETOD goals.

JULY: City Passes Parking Reform.

Chicago City Council unanimously passed zoning reforms building on the Connected Communities Ordinance to fully eliminate parking mandates for most development near transit, including CTA bus corridors and rail stations. Elevated Chicago and members advocated for the reform, which removes a major cost and regulatory barrier, supports small-scale and affordable development, and advances equitable, transit-oriented growth across the city.



Juan Sebastian Arias speaking about equitable development at the Mpace conference

OCTOBER: Elevated Chicago at the Mpace Transit and Community Conference in Portland.

At the Mpace national conference, Marly spoke on a panel about Creating Authentic Places, highlighting community engagement and

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2025 HIGHLIGHTS

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creative place-keeping; Juan Sebastian joined a conversation on how equitable and reparative development brings meaningful community benefit; and Duo Development showcased the In.Field Kit.



Advocates and lawmakers celebrate the signing of the NITA Act

OCTOBER: State Passes Historic Transit Funding and ETOD Reform Act.

After years of organizing by transit advocates, Illinois passed the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA) Act, securing \$1.5 billion for public transit and creating NITA to oversee CTA, Metra, and Pace and advance ETOD reforms. Elevated Chicago joined the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition and several members including CNT, MPC, and Garfield Park Community Council to support passage through coalition advocacy, rallies, town halls, public education, social media videos, podcast conversations, an op-ed in the Chicago Tribune, and public speaking engagements—highlighting the critical link between transit investment, equitable development, and thriving communities.



CTA Acting President Nora Leerhsen (left) and Jacky Grimshaw (CNT/right) on a panel at the ETOD-for-All

NOVEMBER: CTA Budget Includes Funding for Dedicated ETOD Staff.

The Chicago Transit Board approved a \$2.23 billion 2026 operating budget that, for the first time, creates two dedicated staff positions focused on advancing equitable transit-oriented development. Elevated Chicago advocated for these roles, which will support policy coordination and community partnerships, marking a major milestone in institutionalizing ETOD capacity within CTA's core operations, and which can support future ETOD efforts under NITA.

DECEMBER: RTA and Metra Join Our Leadership Council.

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and Metra joined our Leadership Council in recognition of greater collaboration needed following historic state transit funding and ETOD reforms passed via the NITA Act.



Elevated Works partners IFF, CNT, and Duo Development with Elevated Chicago staff outside Starling

DECEMBER: Elevated Works Program Sunsets, Leaving a National Blueprint.

In 2025, the Elevated Works Technical Assistance Program concluded after two and a half years of advancing equitable development across Chicago by supporting small-scale and first-time developers. Twenty-six projects reached key milestones, including 22 securing site control, seven groundbreaking, and six grand openings, leveraging over \$300 million in community investment. Elevated Works delivered more than 2,000 hours of technical assistance and nearly 850 hours of real estate coaching at no cost to developers, setting a powerful national blueprint for supporting ETOD. The program's impact was captured in our impact report.



Juan Sebastian Arias' op-ed on the NITA Act

Elevated Chicago Elevates ETOD in Local and National Media.

Elevated Chicago and our members expanded our media presence in 2025, sharing ETOD perspectives through podcasts, op-eds, and news coverage. Highlights included coverage of Elevated Works on Streetsblog's *Talking Headways*; an op-ed on the NITA Act in the *Chicago Tribune*; an op-ed on an inclusionary housing project in Lincoln Park with Marisa Novara (CCT) in the *Chicago Tribune*; an op-ed on Green Social Housing with Traoloch O'Sullivan (Palenque LSNA) in *Crain's Chicago Business*; and a *Crain's* feature on the 95th Street ETOD Plan. We also joined the *dovewhether* podcast twice to discuss transit and walkability, and our "Can You Walk There?" series was featured in Convergence Partnership's report and podcast on narrative change.



CONNECTING PEOPLE,
BUILDING EQUITY

elevatedchicago.org

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