



The State of ETOD in Chicago

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**equitable transit-oriented development*

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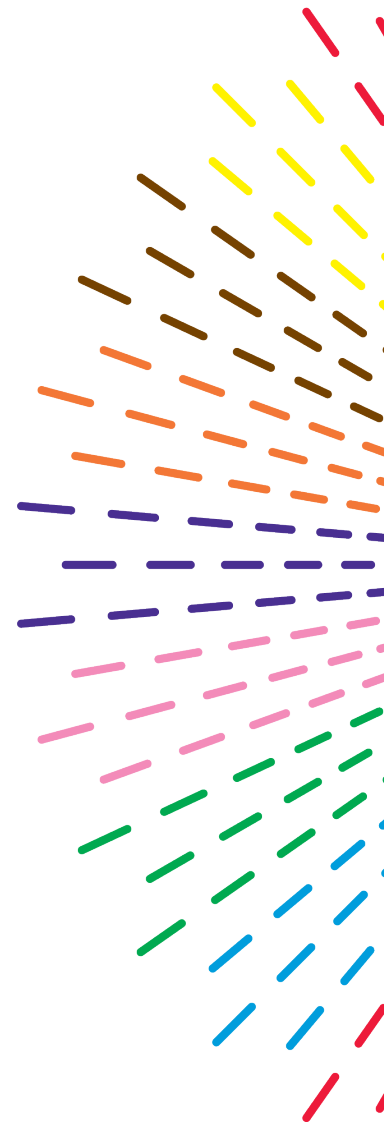
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INTRODUCTION

Equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) is a framework that prioritizes equity, accessibility, affordability and sustainability in neighborhood development near Chicago transit hubs. By confronting the city’s racially segregated patterns of investment and disinvestment, ETOD transforms transit access from a limited resource to a broadly shared asset that expands opportunity, fosters connection and combats scarcity-driven displacement.

Since the adoption of its first Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) ordinances in 2013 and 2015, the City of Chicago has promoted compact, mixed-used development near CTA and Metra stations. To intentionally embed equity into this approach, in 2017, a coalition of community builders, developers and funders formed Elevated Chicago, a collaborative that works across communities and sectors to advance ETOD as a tool to address disinvestment, gentrification and displacement while creating inclusive, vibrant, transit-centered communities by pushing for equitable investment, smarter policies and community-led development.

Together, the City of Chicago, Elevated Chicago and more than 70 stakeholders created the city’s first [ETOD Policy Plan](#). Unanimously adopted by the Chicago Plan Commission in 2021, the plan’s 42 recommendations focus on directing investment to historically disinvested communities, preventing displacement in areas with rising housing costs, expanding affordable housing near transit and creating more walkable, people-centered neighborhoods citywide. The past five years have brought meaningful gains, with ETOD increasingly integrated into housing, economic development and policy — progress has been made on 20 recommendations, and significant progress has been made on 22 recommendations. Yet persistent and emerging challenges still require attention, and many transit-rich neighborhoods need greater investment, improved amenities, and increased affordability. *See Appendix 1 for a complete list of ETOD Policy Plan recommendations and their progress.*

This report, **The State of ETOD in Chicago**, examines how the City of Chicago and its partners have implemented the ETOD Policy Plan since its adoption. It explores progress citywide and identifies priorities for continuing to advance equitable, transit-oriented development across Chicago neighborhoods. The report has four sections.

1. **Building Community Power** explores how organizing and advocacy have advanced ETOD while protecting against displacement.
2. **Progress Toward an Enabling Environment for ETOD** examines progress in the government policies and regulations, institutional practices, capital resources, technical assistance, relationships and research needed to make ETOD possible.¹
3. **Advancing a Pipeline of ETOD Projects** reviews patterns of ETOD investment, assessing how advocacy and policy have translated into development outcomes and whether implementation has led to more equitable growth.
4. **Recommendations for the Next Five Years of ETOD** offers policymakers and advocates insights for continuing to advance ETOD while navigating a shifting political and funding landscape.

BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER

Early efforts to incentivize development near transit (through the City of Chicago’s first Transit-Oriented Development ordinances in 2013 and 2015) ultimately resulted in inequitable patterns of investment. A City of Chicago analysis found that between 2016 and 2020, the overwhelming majority (90%) of developments that benefited from TOD incentives were concentrated in wealthier, predominantly white North Side neighborhoods.² During the same period, Logan Square, a largely Latine neighborhood that received TOD investment, lost 10,000 Latine residents, and its share of white residents increased from 42% to 51%.³

Recognizing that traditional TOD policies often contributed to displacement and deepened racial and economic inequities underscored the need for an explicit focus on equity. Elevated Chicago, and later, the Transportation Equity Network (TEN) were formed to embed equity in Chicago’s evolving development and transportation policies, building on Chicago’s deep history of community-oriented organizing.

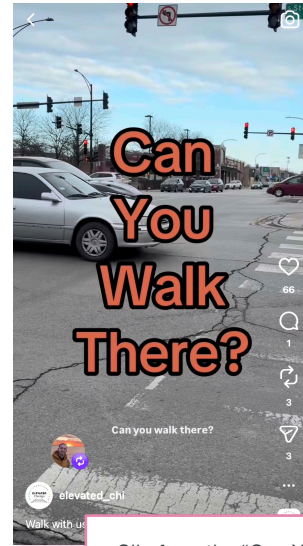
¹ Shaping the Enabling Environment: An Introduction. Center for Community Investment (2022)

² Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Policy Plan. The City of Chicago (2021). Accessed at: <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/sites/etod/Pdfs/ETOD-Full-Policy-Plan-with-Appendices-6-15-21.pdf>

³ Community Data Snapshots Historical Data (2015-2025). Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (2025). Accessed at: <https://datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/>



Logan Square residents participate in the 2018 March for Equity



Clip from the “Can You Walk There?” TikTok series

Elevated Chicago focuses on *people* (supporting neighborhood residents, especially long-time residents in communities facing displacement by disinvestment and gentrification), *place* (transforming the built environment in the ½-mile radius around public transit), and *process* (pushing public, private and civic organizations to create processes that are more accountable, transparent and inclusive). Its commitment to community has included supporting neighborhood priorities, such as joining Logan Square residents for the March for Equity in 2018, and developing community engagement principles to guide inclusive development processes. By highlighting inequities in the built environment (for example, through the “Can You Walk There?” TikTok series) and examining common development narratives in explainer videos on topics such as parking and density, Elevated Chicago leverages creativity to connect and amplify local power — these efforts have earned state and national recognition, including The Council on Foundations and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships and the American Planning Association Illinois Chapter’s Advancing Diversity and Social Change Award.



Roberto Requejo and Marisa Novara with the HUD Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships

Please visit elevatedchicago.org for more information and a full list of members and partners.

Transportation Equity Network (TEN) is a coalition of more than 30 community groups, equitable transportation advocates, civic organizations and other stakeholders in Chicago and Cook County who work to embed racial equity and mobility justice into transportation policies and investments. Its advising and feedback on the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) Strategic Plan, Cook County Transit Plan and ETOD Policy Plan has

focused on how unequal transportation access impacts the racial wealth gap, and for the past three years, TEN prioritized embedding a mobility justice lens in bus priority infrastructure, including bus stops, bus lanes and bus-friendly intersections, and positioning community-based organizations to advocate for anti-displacement, affordability and accessibility strategies in implementing the Better Streets for Buses plan.

Equity, the defining feature distinguishing ETOD from TOD, is both a process and an outcome. It requires authentic community involvement in decision-making and a commitment to ensuring all residents and communities can benefit from mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development—and the thriving neighborhoods that it creates—near transit. The following case studies are examples of organizing and advocacy that have advanced ETOD while protecting against displacement.

Northwest Side Preservation Ordinance

As property values rose in Chicago’s Northwest Side neighborhoods, it became common for developers to buy and demolish a multiunit 2- or 4-flat building and then build a single-family home on that lot. In response, Logan Square-based Palenque LSNA worked with local alderpeople to disincentivize demolitions and deconversions and give tenants policy tools to stay in their homes.

The Northwest Side Preservation Ordinance aimed to address rising housing prices, displacement and gentrification in neighborhoods including Logan Square, Avondale, Hermosa, Humboldt Park and West Town by providing tenants the right of first refusal for sale of residential rental properties and increasing demolition surcharges. Chicago City Council approved the ordinance in September 2024.

95th Street Corridor Plan

The 95th Street Corridor Plan resulted from a community-driven process focused on ETOD around the 95th Street CTA Red Line Station and the 95th/Chicago State University Metra Electric Station. The community engagement process centered around the creation of a Community Table in 2023, led by the Endeleo Institute. This long-term coalition of 28 trusted civic leaders and residents from the surrounding neighborhoods served as a sounding board for entities to present and address community priorities for the 95th Street projects and future corridor developments. The Community Table formed a subcommittee of respected community leaders to serve as its Community Advisory Group who collaborated with 95th Street Corridor project staff to refine materials and strategies for public meetings, facilitate small-group discussions with residents and discuss plan drafts.

In February 2025, the Chicago Plan Commission adopted the 95th Street Corridor Plan.

This demonstrated, deep commitment to community collaboration has led to growing momentum for the 95th Street renaissance and improved responsiveness to resident needs and desires.

- The Plan reflects strong community preference for a more walkable streetscape with sit-down restaurants, which resulted in aldermanic opposition to a proposed drive-through blocks from the 95th Street station.
- The Community Table is actively participating in Chicago State University corridor and campus redevelopment efforts. In November 2025, the City Council Zoning Committee approved proactive zoning for more than 300 parcels along 95th Street between Halsted Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, a change that will consolidate district designations (from eight to two) and create opportunities for more pedestrian-oriented development along this transit-rich corridor.
- In early 2026, the Department of Planning and Development approved a \$3 million grant to further storefront activation and workforce development along the corridor.

PROGRESS TOWARDS AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ETOD

The Center for Community Investment defines the enabling environment as “the setting in which community investment takes place... inclusive of the policies, institutional practices, funding sources, resources and relationships.”⁴ In Chicago, the ETOD enabling environment is shaped by the shared priority of investing in and expanding equitable transit-oriented development via a pipeline of projects that support this shared priority and the policies, practices and resources that shape investment.

Over the last 5 years, there’s been significant progress in shaping policies, establishing partnerships and directing funding to strengthen the enabling environment for ETOD in Chicago. Efforts that demonstrate Chicago’s commitment to facilitating ETOD are captured below, organized by seven focus areas:

- Capital and Technical Assistance
- City Ordinances
- Engagement, Outreach, Education and Media Relations
- ETOD Research Agenda
- ETOD Working Group
- Institutionalizing ETOD in Local Government
- Protecting and Amplifying Community Culture

⁴ Shaping the Enabling Environment: An Introduction. Center for Community Investment (2022). Accessed at: <https://centerforcommunityinvestment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Shaping-the-Enabling-Environment-INTRO.pdf>

ETOD WORKING GROUP

Co-chaired by Elevated Chicago and the City of Chicago Mayor’s Office, the ETOD Working Group has convened regularly since 2019. Its membership includes staff from City of Chicago departments and local and regional transit agencies, developers, artists, civic organizations and community-based organizations (see full membership list at chicago.gov/etod).

The group’s scope and priorities have shifted over time, beginning as a collaborative space to develop and review the ETOD Policy Plan and evolving into a space to discuss and workshop proposed policies and legislation. The ETOD Working Group has been a stable space for sustained relationship- and trust-building across sectors —

various City of Chicago departments have been able to embrace and integrate ETOD policies and principles, and policy-focused Working Group members have been able to dialogue and receive feedback from advocates representing the lived experience of those impacted by policy decisions and initiatives.

In June 2024, the ETOD Working Group held a daylong, in-person retreat for its 75 members and additional City of Chicago staff, with two primary goals: to align the City of Chicago’s Cut the Tape initiative to recommendations in the ETOD Policy Plan and discuss strategies to incorporate ETOD into the Chicago Transit Authority Better Streets for Buses Plan. Further progress on right-sizing parking minimum requirements and ensuring that bus priority infrastructure efforts include an ETOD and anti-displacement lens were the shared priorities that emerged from the gathering, and another retreat is planned for June 2026.



ETOD Working Group members at the working group retreat

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 1.1 Continue convening ETOD Work Group and formalize cross-sector, cross-agency coordination around ETOD.

CITY ORDINANCES

Though Chicago had passed a series of ordinances supporting transit-oriented development (the first in 2013), January 2019 was the first time the City Council adopted a transit-oriented development ordinance with an explicit focus on equity; Ordinance O2018-9304 required the City to develop the ETOD Policy Plan, which laid the groundwork for the Connected Communities Ordinance (CCO).

Passed in July 2022, the Connected Communities Ordinance is a landmark reform to Chicago's zoning code. It implements many of the recommendations of the ETOD Policy Plan through provisions aimed at creating more affordable housing, speeding up affordable housing approvals and preventing displacement near public transit; these provisions specifically include an expanded and standardized definition of transit-served locations (TSL), increased flexibility in required off-street parking and ground floor uses, new density incentives, accessibility zoning bonuses, guidelines for pedestrian-friendly design and transportation demand management, rules addressing deconversions, and a streamlined process to approve zoning applications for affordable housing.

Transit-Served Location Definition

The CCO expanded the transit-served location definition to include a 1,320-foot (or ¼-mile) buffer around 77 high-frequency bus corridors, and a standard 2,640-foot (or ½-mile) radius around CTA rail and Metra station entrances and exits.

Minimum Parking Requirements And Parking Caps

The CCO expanded zoning districts eligible for parking relief to include residential multiunit districts (RM-5, RM-5.5, RM-6, RM-6.5) in addition to the already eligible business or mixed-use (B), commercial (C), downtown (D), manufacturing (M) and planned manufacturing districts (PMD). The CCO also simplified the process for accessing parking relief. In transit-served location zones, minimum off-street parking ratios could be reduced by up to 100 percent (if the reduction is more than 50 percent, it may be approved via an administrative adjustment.) In addition, residential developments that would like to build more parking need an administrative adjustment to allow the additional spaces. See a map of ETOD projects that were approved to build less than 50% parking in the *Advancing a Pipeline of ETOD Projects* section.

Parking requirements were further amended in July 2025 with the passage of SO2025-001557 which built on progress made in the CCO and expanded parking relief by removing parking minimums for new residential and commercial developments in all transit-served locations except downtown (D) districts or near Metra stations, such that an administrative adjustment is no longer required.

Similar parking reform has advanced at the state level. In October 2025, the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA) Act eliminated parking minimums statewide near transit stations and along high-frequency bus corridors. As a result, the City will once again amend parking requirements to comply with NITA, thereby eliminating parking requirements almost entirely within Chicago.

Density, Affordability And Accessibility Bonuses

In certain zoning districts in transit-served locations, the CCO allows reduced minimum lot areas (MLAs) and increased floor area ratios (FARs) for developments with higher proportions of affordable dwelling units. It also allows developments that reduce parking by more than 50 percent of the otherwise standard amount to add bonus residential dwelling units without counting against FAR or MLA. Lastly, in certain zoning districts, developers would not have to count ground floor units that are accessible to individuals with mobility-related disabilities (Type A accessible) against FAR or MLA.

People-Friendly Design

The CCO extended many aspects of existing Pedestrian Street rules to all transit-served rail locations; a specific example is limiting new curb cuts. Expanded guidelines make new developments near rail stations more pedestrian-friendly and promote safe public space for people using wheelchairs, bikes, scooters or other mobility devices. See a map of ETOD projects that applied these CCO people-friendly design guidelines in the *Advancing a Pipeline of ETOD Projects* section.

Deconversion Protections

In communities facing displacement pressures (defined in the ordinance as “Community Preservation Areas” as designated by the Affordable Requirements Ordinance), the CCO restricts low-density development in areas zoned for multifamily buildings. To prevent existing multiunit housing from being deconverted to single family homes, detached houses are no longer permitted in high-density zoning districts (RT, RM, B and C) within transit-served locations.

Zoning Application Process

The CCO created a mechanism whereby the City Council Committee on Zoning, Landmarks and Building Standards must vote on developments with affordable units within a designated time period. This applies to developments in transit-served locations that designate at least 20% of its dwelling units as legally restricted affordable and are located in communities that are designated as “Inclusionary Areas” in the City’s Affordable Requirements Ordinance.

Transportation Demand Management

The CCO introduced Transportation Demand Management (TDM) requirements, to be created by CDOT, for certain new developments in business (B), commercial (C), and

downtown (D) zoning districts located within a half-mile of CTA and Metra rail stations. CDOT established interim TDM guidelines in 2023 as a step towards developing rules. See a map of ETOD projects that complied with the TDM guidelines in the *Advancing a Pipeline of ETOD Projects* section.

Flexibility In Ground Floor Uses

In February 2025, Chicago City Council passed O2024-0008277, allowing ground floor commercial space of multistory buildings to be converted into residential units in residential (R), business (B), commercial (C) and downtown (D) zoning districts (except C-3 and D-3).

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 2.2 Improve design and use guidelines to promote walkability and transit-orientation
- 2.3 Expand eligibility and strengthen density and parking incentives
- 2.4 Allow more flexibility in permitted building uses, such as by permitting residential on the ground floor in more business and commercial districts
- 2.6 Strengthen the minimum internal and external bike parking requirements for projects in transit-served locations
- 2.7 Establish a cap on off-street parking spaces allowable in transit-served locations, identifying provisions to minimize burden on low-income drivers
- 2.8 Require parking to be paid or leased separately from housing in transit-served locations
- 2.9 Include sustainable transportation options and incentives in zoning code
- 2.10 Allow shared parking arrangements to meet parking requirements
- 2.15 Improve pedestrian infrastructure in transit-served locations
- 2.17 Increase access to shared micro-mobility options, including bike-share, e-bikes, e-scooters and car share
- 2.21 Preserve existing unsubsidized affordable housing in transit-served locations, such as by disincentivizing the demolition and deconversion of 2-4 unit buildings
- 2.22 Streamline and incentivize the production of multi-family affordable housing near transit
- 2.23 Strengthen affordability and accessibility requirements for city-supported housing developments in transit-served locations

INSTITUTIONALIZING ETOD IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Ensuring that government and transit agencies have the capacity and authority to advance ETOD policies, programs and reforms is critical to shaping and building more healthy, equitable and vibrant neighborhoods near transit. Through advocacy and coalition-building among city departments, transit authorities, community-based organizations and research institutions, significant progress has been made to ensure equity, affordability and

accessibility are prioritized in the policies, projects, programs and planning efforts advanced by the City of Chicago and our regional transit systems.

Leadership In ETOD

Elevated Chicago partnered with City officials to develop the ETOD Policy Plan, educating and mobilizing public officials about the policy barriers that cause inequities in current development practices and advocating for reforms that would result in systems level change over time. The Elevated Chicago Leadership Council was created to bring community-identified barriers and opportunities to senior leaders from public agencies and civic institutions for their support. Members of the Leadership Council have included senior executives of The Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), Chicago Department of Housing (DOH), Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD), Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), the Mayor’s Office, the Treasurer’s Office, and more. Through the Leadership Council, the culture and norms for built environment actors in Chicago has changed to embrace equity and ETOD.

Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act

After years of organizing by transit advocates, in October 2025, Illinois passed the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA) Act (SB2111), securing \$1.2 billion in annual operations funding for CTA, Metra and Pace. The newly created NITA will address service improvements such as increased transit frequency, fare integration and fare capping, a regionally integrated service plan, safety improvements such as a transit ambassador program, and \$180 million in new annual capital funding in addition to the annual operating funding.



Governor J.B. Pritzker and advocates after signing the NITA Act

The NITA Act also includes ETOD provisions and reforms that enable transit agencies to pursue joint development projects on land adjacent to transit hubs by acquiring land and coordinating, funding, or constructing projects jointly with private developers. Communities that want ETOD can collaborate with NITA, using its expertise to increase transit ridership and economic activity, and the income generated from real estate investments can help NITA fund transit operations or subsidize future developments. (Additionally, while the NITA Act authorized a transit-supportive development incentive fund to promote ETOD through financial mechanisms such as grants or loans, it is not funded in the legislation.)

Joint Development

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 and supporting community development near transit. In 2025, the Regional Transportation Authority launched its [Joint Development Study](#), a feasibility study to assess how a future regional joint development program in the Chicago area can advance ETOD goals. The Study is slated to be complete by Fall 2026, and with the NITA Act establishing clear authority to engage in joint development efforts, the Chicago region is poised to gain significant new institutional capacity and a regional agency partner to advance ETOD projects and goals. Lessons that NITA can learn from Chicago's experience implementing its ETOD Policy Plan are discussed explicitly at the end of this report.

Dedicated ETOD Staff

Upon the passing of the NITA Act and its secured funding, the Chicago Transit Board approved a 2026 operating budget that created two full-time CTA staff positions that will focus on advancing ETOD through policy strategy, project coordination and community partnerships. These staffings are a major milestone and demonstrate how ETOD capacity can be embedded in institutions and agencies; the CTA positions can lay the groundwork for future efforts to institutionalize ETOD policies and principles within NITA and other units of government.

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 1.2 Dedicate full time City staff to serve as ETOD Manager in advancing policy recommendations and coordinating ETOD projects and programs

CAPITAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ETOD projects have proven successful when capital from philanthropic and government partners is coupled with tailored technical assistance and peer-to-peer learning around development processes, barriers and resources. In addition, impact data has demonstrated that real estate coaching and technical assistance can help developers overcome system barriers, achieve development milestones and avoid delays and added costs.

ETOD Development And Pre-Development Grants

Launched as an early implementation of the ETOD Policy Plan, in 2021, the City of Chicago and Elevated Chicago awarded \$160,000 in microgrants to 11 ETOD pilot

projects across the city, prioritizing dense, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented developments near transit hubs. The following year, the City of Chicago increased its commitment to ETOD and, over 2023 and 2024, allocated \$10 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support ETOD as an economic recovery strategy; \$1 million was used to create an ETOD technical assistance program that ultimately became Elevated Works, and \$9 million went toward pre-development grants (up to \$150,000) and development grants (up to \$250,000) for 29 projects. This was the first time the City provided funding for pre-development and the first time it administered a dedicated ETOD grant program.

Elevated Works Technical Assistance

Elevated Works⁵ managed a pipeline of ETOD projects and provided customized technical assistance (TA), one-on-one coaching, system navigation support and community-building through peer learning engagements. A partnership of five core planning partners (Elevated Chicago, Center for Neighborhood Technology, IFF, Metropolitan Planning Council and Rudd Resources) along with 12 additional TA providers, Elevated Works provided expertise spanning capital and real estate readiness, market analysis, zoning, legal and compliance, architecture, urban design, community development, public art, transportation planning, green infrastructure, community engagement and communications. Many of the 29 ETOD developments in the Elevated Works cohort were being led by first-time or emerging Black, Latine and women developers working in communities that are experiencing displacement due to disinvestment or gentrification.

In 2025, the [Elevated Works Impact Report](#), found that over two-and-a-half years 24 projects reached site acquisition, seven projects reached groundbreaking and five projects were completed (two more after the publishing of the report); all together, \$300 million was invested in Chicago neighborhoods.⁶ ETOD grantees received 39 individual TA scopes, attended five peer learning events and six developer education events and received more than 2,800 hours of dedicated technical assistance.

As of December 2025, the ARPA funding to support Elevated Works has been spent in full (though several projects are slated to break ground in 2026). While there is no public funding for continuing Elevated Works, the innovative approach of pairing dedicated TA support with development grant funding is already informing local philanthropic efforts and serves as a model for what an equitable approach to supporting community-led ETOD projects can look like.

⁵ Elevated Works was funded by the City of Chicago, The Chicago Community Trust, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

⁶ Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Technical Assistance Impact Report. Center for Neighborhood Technology (2025). Accessed at: https://cnt.org/sites/default/files/publications/Bridging%20Visions%2C%20Accelerating%20Impact_0.pdf

Qualified Allocation Plan

The Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) sets forth the rules under which federal affordable housing funds in the form of Low Income Housing Tax Credits (commonly referred to as LIHTC) are allocated to developments. The City of Chicago Department of Housing updates its QAP every 2 years and since 2021, in alignment with the City's ETOD Policy Plan, has included selection preferences and priorities for ETOD projects.

In 2023, a transit subsidy preference was added to the QAP to encourage developers to give tenants of ETOD developments a choice of low- or no-cost transit or bikeshare passes. In 2025, the transit subsidy preference was removed, but the QAP still prefers development sites located within a transit-served location (TSL).

Missing Middle Housing Initiative

The City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development Missing Middle Housing Initiative is a neighborhood repopulation strategy that leverages City land and financing to build two- to six-flat buildings and make them available to owner-occupants at market rates. To facilitate development, awarded developers can purchase lots in clusters for \$1 per parcel, with up to \$150,000 in construction assistance per unit to maintain a maximum per-unit sale price that's commensurate with a household income of 140% of the area median income (AMI). The first three rounds of the Missing Middle RFPs have included ETOD principles as a development objective; as of February 2026, the program has advanced 307 buildings on vacant lots on the South and West Sides, in McKinley Park, East and West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Chatham, South Chicago and Morgan Park.

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 2.11 Strengthen equity in procurement and supplier diversity policies to ensure small and minority owned firms and Black, Brown and Indigenous, Asian and people with disabilities benefit from new development
- 2.12 Create quality jobs through ETOD projects with priority given to local residents and firms
- 2.22 Streamline and incentivize the production of multi-family affordable housing near transit
- 2.23 Strengthen affordability and accessibility requirements for city-supported housing developments in transit-served locations
- 2.25 Develop incentives to preserve and retain community organizations, small businesses and other neighborhood assets
- 2.27 Prioritize ETOD in applications for City funding that supports housing and economic development
- 2.29 Develop incentives for services that would benefit young children, families and pregnant people near transit hubs or in ETOD projects

PROTECTING AND AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY CULTURE

Chicago's diverse cultural identities are a foundational element of our vibrant neighborhoods. When the built environment near transit reflects people and communities, residents and businesses benefit from the increased connectivity, foot traffic and sense of belonging. ETOD projects are strengthened when investments in arts and culture are intentionally integrated with capital from philanthropic and public partners to anchor development in community identity. Arts- and culture-led strategies, supported by targeted technical assistance and cross-sector learning, can help mitigate cultural displacement and build community power by elevating local creatives, preserving neighborhood narratives and embedding long-standing cultural assets into ETOD.



Culture Near Transit

Elevated Chicago launched its Arts & Culture strategy, Culture Near Transit, in 2025. Designed to protect, preserve and amplify culture as an essential component of thriving communities and a pillar of ETOD, Culture Near Transit provides a framework for centering community culture in shaping the built environment through supporting community-driven and resident-led priorities, increasing the capacity of artists and creatives to participate in and influence community development processes and community engagement, investing in creative placekeeping near transit and shifting perspectives on the role and impact of arts and culture related to economic outcomes and opportunities and improved social cohesion and well-being of communities.

Creatives Table and Curriculum

As part of Culture Near Transit, the Creatives Table brings together artists and creatives who are interested in community development for relationship-building, problem-solving, thought partnership and resource-sharing. It also provides a forum for bidirectional learning that allows artists and creatives to build skills such as arts administration and community co-design while also providing critical insights and expertise to shape the policies and practices that dictate how the city and its communities are developed. In 2026, Elevated Chicago is partnering with the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events to host half-day expos focused on skill- and capacity-building for artists to be leaders in community engagement and development and increase access to economic opportunity.

Elevating Culture Near Transit Program

In 2025, the Elevating Culture Near Transit grant program made eight grants totalling \$340,000, and two more rounds of \$350,000 in grants are slated for each of the next two years (2026 and 2027). These grants support creative placekeeping efforts across the city, engaging residents, community organizations and small businesses in designing and implementing cultural activations and art installations to beautify and invigorate public spaces near transit, lifting community culture and history, strengthening community cohesion and increasing economic activity along the city's commercial corridors. In spring 2026, CTA partnered with Elevated Chicago to support three more projects, totaling \$150,000, for creative placekeeping efforts near transit.

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 2.13 Require health, arts and culture and equity considerations in TOD-project level design
- 2.25 Develop incentives to preserve and retain community organizations, small businesses and other neighborhood assets
- 2.28 Develop incentives for the creation, activation and programming, and long-term stewardship and maintenance of public and open space in ETOD projects

ENGAGEMENT, OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Community-driven development is an essential component of ETOD, but resident perceptions and resistance are a common challenge for ETOD projects. Deep, delightful community engagement equips residents with tools and resources and helps them understand development processes and the benefits that ETOD projects can bring to their neighborhoods. Education makes complex policy concepts more accessible, strengthening public understanding and support and enabling a broader range of stakeholders to participate meaningfully in decision-making around development citywide. Outreach and education efforts related to ETOD and connected topics have increased significantly over the past 5 years, promoting greater awareness about ETOD and sparking further curiosity for deeper understanding among residents and other community stakeholders.

Engagement And Outreach

Direct engagement has been a core strategy for building shared understanding of ETOD and fostering relationships across community, government and development sectors.

ETOD Walking Tours: Elevated Chicago hosted ETOD walking tours that brought elected officials, policymakers, political staff, funders and developers to ETOD project sites across the city. These tours provided participants with an on-the-ground understanding of how ETOD functions in real-world contexts, illustrating the relationship between transit access, housing, commercial space and community amenities and allowing developers to speak about the processes and community benefits of ETOD projects. Beyond building knowledge, the tours created opportunities for cross-sector relationship-building that supported collaboration beyond the tours; for example, the Elevated Works American Planning Association Illinois State Conference walking tour, led by Center for Neighborhood Technology and IFF, used a similar approach to expand awareness of ETOD among planning professionals.



Aldermanic Outreach: Elevated Chicago conducted targeted outreach to alderpeople by sharing educational materials about ETOD projects in their wards. These materials highlighted project goals and community benefits and established how projects were relevant to local priorities. To increase familiarity with ETOD at the ward level, Elevated Chicago also mailed display posters celebrating ETOD projects to aldermanic offices, creating visible, place-based education opportunities for elected officials, their staff and residents visiting those offices.

School and University Class Visits: Elevated Chicago engaged students through presentations and discussions in K-12 schools and university classrooms, such as Aldridge Elementary, Lindblom Math and Science Academy and DePaul University. These visits introduced students to ETOD as a framework for advancing equity, affordability and sustainability through land use and transportation policy, helping build long-term awareness among future planners, advocates and policymakers.

Education

Educational tools have played a critical role in making ETOD more understandable, accessible and actionable for audiences with varying levels of familiarity with planning and development processes.

making processes. The City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development released a set of related [educational videos and engagement resources](#) in March 2026.

City of Chicago ETOD Webpage: In partnership with Elevated Chicago and other stakeholders, the City of Chicago developed an [ETOD webpage](#) that defines ETOD, outlines the City’s priorities and provides overviews of the ETOD Policy Plan and Connected Communities Ordinance. The webpage serves as a centralized, publicly accessible resource for understanding ETOD and the City’s approach to implementation.

Media Relations

Media engagement has been an important strategy for shaping public narratives about development, transit and equity and for elevating ETOD as a citywide priority.

Op-Eds and Media Interviews: Elevated Chicago and partners advanced ETOD through strategic op-eds and media interviews that articulated the case for equitable transit-oriented development and highlighted the need for policies that support inclusive development near transit. These efforts helped frame ETOD as both a development and racial equity strategy that elevates specific projects and policy priorities and contributes to broader public conversations about displacement, affordability and access to opportunity.

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 1.8 Standardize community engagement requirements and practices related to development and planning projects across City departments.
- 1.9 Develop public education and messaging tools to communicate the vision and case for ETOD

ETOD RESEARCH AGENDA

Elevated Chicago members and partners have advanced research to better understand and shape equitable transit-oriented development. This body of work provides a data-driven foundation for more inclusive, community-centered planning and investment.

ETOD Calculator

The [ETOD Social Impact Calculator](#), published by Center for Neighborhood Technology in partnership with the Metropolitan Planning Council, provides a broad swath of data to help developers, households, neighbors and communities recognize the value of developing housing in and around transit-rich areas. Users enter the address of a prospective development and if the location is within Chicago, the generated map provides property details, neighborhood attributes, displacement pressure and demographic trends over time, transit benefits and guidance regarding where a developer can take advantage of CCO benefits. The tool also can calculate how a planned development will affect residents and the surrounding community through data points such as residents’ purchasing power,

tax revenue generated, job opportunities and access, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, residential parking use and annual transit trips.

Vacant Lot Research

The DePaul Institute for Housing Studies in collaboration with Elevated Chicago, Rudd Resources, the Endeleo Institute and the Garfield Park Community Council, developed a project to examine Chicago’s vast inventory of [vacant land near CTA train stations](#). The project combines data analysis with community input to understand how residents want this land repurposed and to identify barriers to returning vacant lots to productive use.

The analysis quantifies both City-owned and privately held vacant lots and finds that a substantial share of these sites lie within a half-mile of CTA train stations. Significant concentrations of vacant land are a legacy of long-term disinvestment and racial inequity; predominantly Black South and West Side neighborhoods have been left with high concentrations of underutilized parcels that can depress property values and development opportunities, pose safety and environmental concerns and weaken transit access and neighborhood vitality. The findings highlight a key ETOD challenge: South and West Side communities often have land near transit available for development but have not attracted dense, mixed-use investment aligned with community needs and vision; this is partly because existing TOD incentives have been more effective in higher-income areas.

Supported by community case studies in East Garfield Park and Roseland/Washington Heights, the project pairs data with resident perspectives to show how these vacant lots pose both challenges, such as environmental hazards and limited amenities, but also opportunities for community-driven redevelopment. Resident-identified priorities include affordable housing, neighborhood-serving retail, green space and community spaces. Overall, the project underscores the importance of intentional, community-led ETOD strategies to transform vacant land into productive spaces that support equitable access to transit and strengthen neighborhood economic and social well-being. From a policy perspective, the findings point to the need for proactive incentives, targeted redevelopment support, sustained community engagement and technical assistance for small-scale developers to ensure vacant land near transit becomes a resource for inclusive growth and displacement mitigation.



Community members at the Washington Heights engagement event

ETOD Health and Racial Equity Impact Assessment

In 2021 and 2022, the City of Chicago Mayor’s Office, Chicago Department of Public Health, Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) and Elevated Chicago partnered to conduct a [Health and Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#) (HREIA) on a set of zoning reform policy proposals that became the Connected Communities Ordinance. The HREIA process included targeted engagement with youth, people with disabilities, low-wage workers, older adults and community representatives in Black, Latine, Asian and Indigenous communities to assess how proposed policy changes may benefit or burden different communities and identify complementary strategies to maximize impact for more equitable outcomes.

ETOD Scorecard

The [ETOD Scorecard](#), created by Metropolitan Planning Council, presents the range of benefits that can be realized through ETOD, to help community-based organizations evaluate development proposals and developers demonstrate that their proposals meet ETOD criteria; government agencies can use the scorecard to assess funding proposals and potential planned developments. To develop the Scorecard, Metropolitan Planning Council worked with community groups to gain their perspectives on how ETOD benefits communities and incorporated those insights into an evaluation rubric.

ETOD Policy Plan Recommendations Progressed:

- 1.4 Create an ETOD scorecard that community and government partners can use to assess future projects and programs
- 1.5 Develop strategy to leverage publicly owned land and vacant lots near transit for public benefit
- 1.6 Address root causes of vacant land, including environmental contamination and remediation needs
- 1.7 Develop a comprehensive ETOD calculator to help community members and developers identify qualifying ETOD sites and potential impacts
- 2.1 Apply health and equity impact assessments to the development of ETOD-related policy

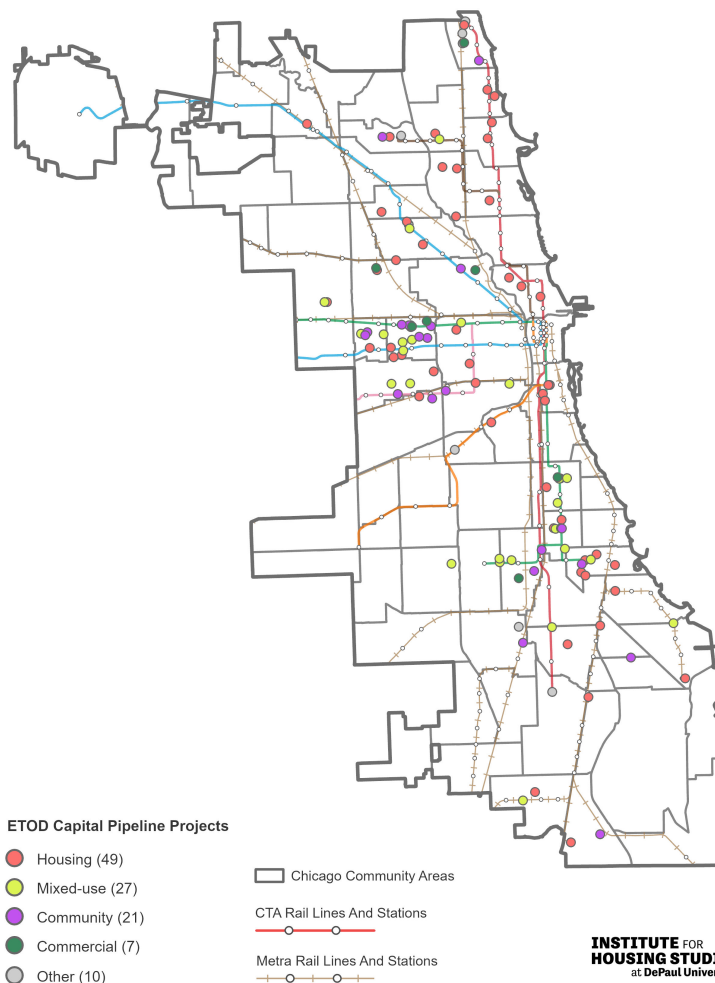
ADVANCING A PIPELINE OF ETOD PROJECTS

Given the improved enabling environment for ETOD (i.e. the policy changes, dedicated grants, technical assistance, etc. noted in the previous section), over the past 5 years, the number of completed and in-progress ETOD projects has grown substantially, with ETOD becoming more norm than exception.

For this report, we document and visualize the growing pipeline of ETOD projects in two ways: (1) the ETOD project pipeline collaboratively maintained by Elevated Chicago, IFF and partners and (2) the number of projects that have leveraged the Connected Communities Ordinance to build more walkable, affordable and mixed-use developments across Chicago.

ETOD Project Pipeline

[The Elevated Chicago project pipeline](#) aggregates ETOD capital projects that are a shared priority for Elevated Chicago, government and philanthropy. The pipeline serves to identify specific capital opportunities and support developers in identifying capital needs, capture real estate progress, and document completed projects as case studies for storytelling and lessons learned. The pipeline offers a snapshot of the projects at specific points in time and tracks project progress, including key metrics such as site control, architecture, transit access, community engagement, zoning, project team (architect, general contractor, etc.), capital stack and upcoming project milestones. Through the pipeline, Elevated Chicago has been able to take an ecosystem approach by working with diverse projects across Chicago, identifying real estate opportunities, and understanding common road blocks to support systems-level change and identify unique and shared technical assistance needs.



“Mixed-use” projects have multiple uses that can be housing, commercial and community space. “Other” projects include ETOD corridor plans, traffic safety and walkability improvements, beautification projects, and outdoor public spaces.

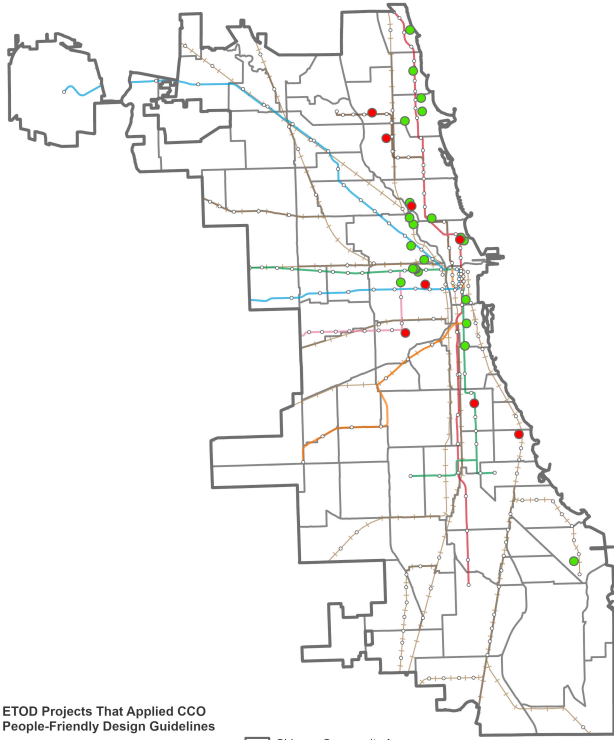
Connected Communities Ordinance Projects

The Connected Communities Ordinance was passed by City Council in July 2022, changing many processes, rules, and incentives related to development near transit (as detailed in the previous section). While data are not available on the implementation of every aspect of the CCO, the following 3 maps visualize development projects that have accessed different aspects of the ordinance from 2022 through 2025, including:

- Projects that decreased the number of parking spots beyond the by right 50% reduction
- Projects that incorporated Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies to support transit usage and other active modes of transportation
- Projects that relocated curb cut access points through the alley instead of from the main street

These visuals illustrate patterns of recent ETOD investment and activity across Chicago. For example, 40% of projects that accessed additional CCO parking relief were located in upper income census tracts, with just 15% in low-income census tracts. While these data show a broader and more equitable pattern of investment than a similar analysis conducted in 2020, there are still many transit-rich communities with little to no ETOD development activity, such as the Far South Side along the future Red Line Extension.

Elevated Chicago members and partners will continue to assess these data to deepen our understanding of how the CCO has advanced ETOD goals and to inform ETOD policy change and investment goals.



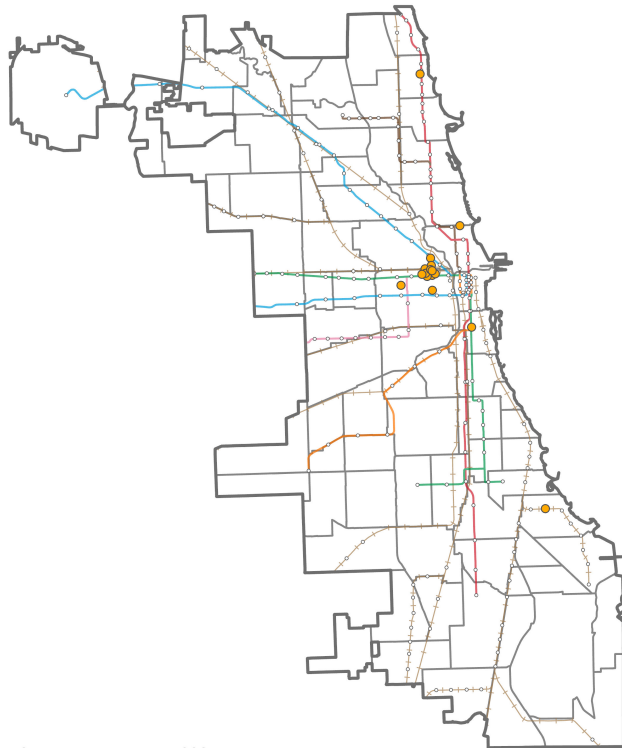
ETOD Projects That Applied CCO People-Friendly Design Guidelines

Public Alley Access for Parking/Loading:

- Yes (23)
- No (8)

- Chicago Community Areas
- CTA Rail Lines And Stations
- Metra Rail Lines And Stations

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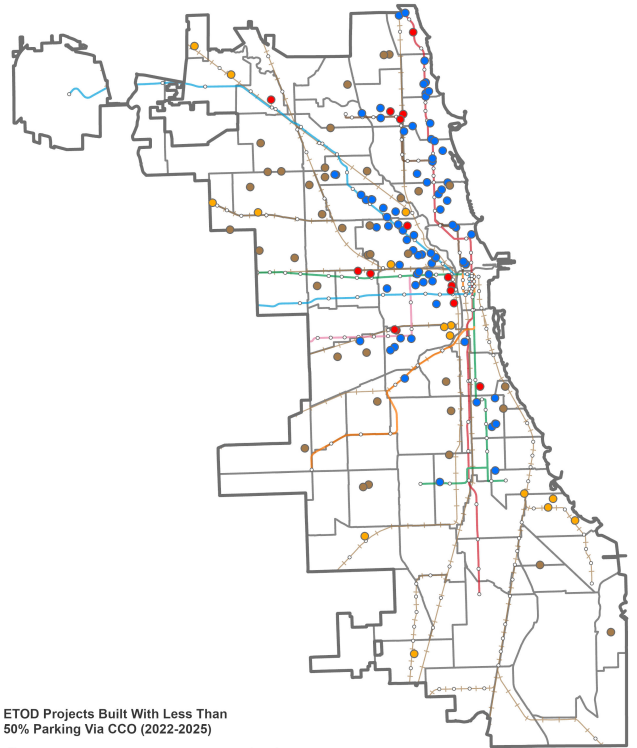


ETOD Projects That Applied CCO People-Friendly Design Guidelines

- ETOD Projects (17)

- Chicago Community Areas
- CTA Rail Lines And Stations
- Metra Rail Lines And Stations

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ETOD Projects Built With Less Than 50% Parking Via CCO (2022-2025)

- Near CTA Station (82)
- Near Metra Station (15)
- Near Bus Route (39)
- Near Multiple Transit Hubs (17)

- Chicago Community Areas
- CTA Rail Lines And Stations
- Metra Rail Lines And Stations

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ETOD Case Studies

These case studies showcase a mix of affordable housing, commercial and community amenity ETOD projects that have come to fruition in recent years.

- ETOD development grant recipient Micah Taylor wanted to renovate a building at 2811 W. Fulton into a commercial space for his small business. Proximity to the Green Line was a big factor in choosing the location (considering the commutes of his employees and customers) but he did not have development experience. Through Elevated Works technical assistance, he was matched with TA provider Chicago Cityscape for a zoning and parking needs assessment. Chicago Cityscape identified that the project was eligible for a reduction in parking requirements due to the CCO and helped Micah submit paperwork for an administrative adjustment, successfully eliminating parking requirements and unnecessary costs from the development. Now 2811 W. Fulton is home to several small businesses: Chicago Printworks, a print shop that serves the arts community; Direction Tour Marketing, an arts marketing agency; Studio inHaus, an architectural rendering firm; and FlightFX, an aircraft simulator design firm.



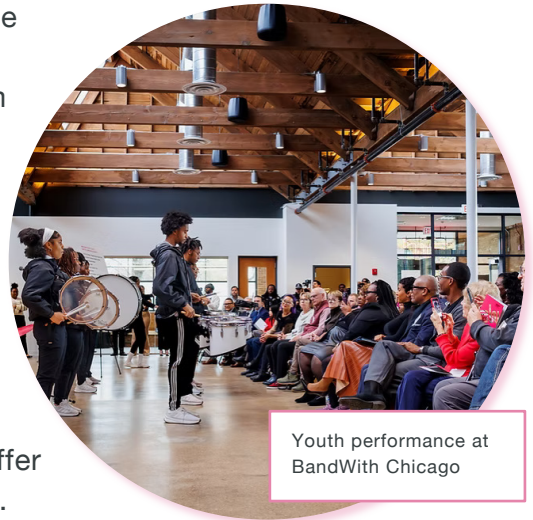
Micah Taylor at the ribbon cutting for 2811 W. Fulton



Lucy Gonzalez Parsons Apartments

- Largely considered one of the City's first ETOD projects, Lucy Gonzalez Parsons Apartments, a 100-unit affordable housing development by Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, was once a city-owned parking lot next to the Logan Square Blue Line station. A robust community engagement process, supported through the Metropolitan Planning Council Corridor Development Initiative, let neighborhood residents determine the best use of the space. Building on the robust engagement, community education and canvassing efforts by neighborhood leaders, including Palenque LSNA, helped push back against an opposition group who filed a nuisance lawsuit against the development. The apartments are now home to low-income, working class and long-time residents, a safeguard against displacement in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood.

- BandWith Chicago is a nonprofit that provides free performing arts education to youth on the West Side. It began as a youth performing arts program providing free instruction to LEARN Charter School students, operating out of a local community space in Garfield Park. Outgrowing that space is what prompted the search for its new headquarters at 148 S. California Ave, an adaptive reuse of a former casket company near the California Green Line stop, just a block away from their previous location. The new location allowed them to expand programming, offer community space, and open a public coffee shop. Through Elevated Works, BandWith Chicago received capital alignment and real estate readiness TA from IFF Real Estate Solutions which unlocked much needed capital funding from the City of Chicago and through a federal New Markets Tax Credits award. The \$15.5 million dollar capital project was also supported by Elevated Chicago via a \$100,000 pre-development grant, demonstrating the collective power of TA and pre-development to facilitate equitable transit-oriented development.



Youth performance at BandWith Chicago

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS OF ETOD

The state of ETOD in Chicago is strong and growing with transformational opportunities on the horizon. Community leaders, policymakers, developers and communities increasingly recognize the benefits of building walkable, vibrant and transit-connected communities while protecting against displacement due to disinvestment and gentrification.

Since adopting its first-ever ETOD Policy Plan in 2021, Chicago has seen significant progress via changing policies, growing institutional capacity, promoting public education and awareness and directly investing in and supporting community-led projects near transit. The results can be seen in improvements to communities and the built environment near transit across Chicago.

However, from neighborhoods along the Orange Line to those near the future Red Line Extension stations, many transit-rich communities in Chicago are still missing the needed investment and policies to truly bring ETOD to every neighborhood and transit hub in the city.

The momentum from the past five years sets us up for continued success, but only if we are intentional about building on and institutionalizing progress. To continue advancing ETOD and building a region where all residents can live and work in a vibrant, walkable community connected to public transit, we still have work ahead of us. Thankfully, we also have historic

opportunities to advance ETOD city- and region-wide with the Red Line Extension now under construction and the forthcoming establishment of an empowered regional transit agency in NITA.

In the next five years and beyond, Elevated Chicago members are committed to advancing the following recommendations.

- **Advance a bold policy agenda that includes:**
 - strengthening anti-displacement protections
 - preserving the existing stock of naturally occurring affordable housing
 - removing barriers to new multifamily housing near transit
 - improving accessibility, walkability and connectivity to public transit
 - amplifying community culture in the built environment
 - facilitating community investment and economic development

The City of Chicago and the State of Illinois have enacted landmark ETOD reforms and investments over the past several years. To continue progress on changing systems for more equitable development, local leaders must advance a comprehensive ETOD policy platform that is rooted in the lived experience of residents, grounded in data and research and sustained by a broad, cross-sector coalition of support. This platform should, at the very least, promote community reinvestment, expand affordable housing options, prevent displacement and build more people-friendly and accessible streets, with a focus on disinvested and gentrified communities. Key policy changes include legalizing two- to four-flats with strong anti-displacement safeguards, preserving existing naturally occurring affordable housing and prioritizing people-friendly development near transit.

- **Maximize the potential of existing legislation, funding and planning efforts to implement ETOD**

The city and region can also leverage existing legislation, funding sources and planning efforts to create a supportive ecosystem for mission-driven and small-scale developers, especially those rooted in local communities. ETOD developers can range from small businesses to nonprofit service providers to affordable housing developers working on a range of project types from residential to commercial to community amenities. To create an enabling environment for ETOD developers, a range of needs and supports are necessary, including expanded access to pre-development and development funding, ensuring that ETOD criteria are prioritized in existing funding programs and technical assistance and systems navigation support to first-time or emerging developers. Implementation of corridor-focused ETOD plans, including efforts along the Red Line Extension, 95th Street, and Archer Avenue, can also serve as models for aligning land use, transportation and community investment in ways that reflect local needs and priorities.

- **Continue cross-sector and interdepartmental coordination through the ETOD Working Group**

Ongoing cross-sector and interdepartmental coordination is critical to sustaining momentum, problem-solving implementation challenges, identifying policy opportunities and ensuring

accountability. Chicago’s ETOD Working Group, co-convened by Elevated Chicago and the Mayor’s Office, is a model for building and sustaining collaboration and trusted relationships across mayoral administrations and shifting political priorities, and this model should be continued.

- **Support ETOD in Chicago Bus Priority Infrastructure efforts**

The City, led by CTA and CDOT, is currently exploring bus priority infrastructure improvements, and potentially Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along key corridors. Recognizing the importance of high-quality bus service in improving access and equity across Chicago, ETOD principles and anti-displacement considerations should be embedded through the planning and implementation of bus priority infrastructure to truly maximize the potential for improved bus service to expand access to transit and catalyze community investment.

- **Explore opportunities to support ETOD across the Chicagoland region**

The establishment of a new regional transit agency presents an opportunity to scale ETOD strategies across Chicago suburbs, ensuring that communities throughout the region can leverage transit investments to support inclusive growth, housing affordability and long-term economic opportunity for all Chicagoland residents.

- **Leverage opportunities under the Northeastern Illinois Transit Authority to advance ETOD**

The Northeastern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA) Act creates historic opportunities to increase access, connection and opportunity across the region through ETOD. In addition to the transformational investment in transit service, safety, frequency and accessibility, full implementation of NITA can further advance ETOD by increasing institutional capacity, launching new programs and directly investing in community projects. Recommendations specific to NITA follow.

What NITA Can Learn from Chicago’s ETOD Policy Plan

Chicago’s experience implementing the ETOD Policy Plan offers a guide for how NITA can advance ETOD regionally and in partnership with community leaders, including through supporting development of ETOD projects on publicly owned land throughout northern Illinois. Elevated Chicago and its partners stand ready to collaborate with NITA to guide policy, planning and development efforts while fundamentally recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ETOD, and municipal and community needs and considerations will often differ.

Still, as the transition from the Regional Transit Authority to NITA begins on June 1, 2026, we offer five key recommendations we believe will position NITA to exercise its development authority and advance ETOD most impactfully.

- 1. Adopt equity as a guiding framework:** Without an intentional equity lens, any joint development or transit-oriented development program will only exacerbate existing inequities across the region. NITA can learn from Chicago’s ETOD journey and set *equitable* TOD as a clear policy goal and framework.
- 2. Hire dedicated ETOD staff:** Successful ETOD efforts require consistent collaboration and dedicated capacity. Hiring dedicated staff will increase NITA’s institutional capacity to convene partners on NITA-supported development projects, advance policy and planning initiatives and coordinate with community leaders and developers.
- 3. Partner with communities and collaborate across sectors:** Establishing cross-sector collaborative tables to collectively advance ETOD policies and projects ensures broad support, builds political will and supports transformational change. Proactively partnering with community leaders and organizations, such as by growing the current RTA planning program, ensures collective ownership of local ETOD plans and visions.
- 4. Invest in ETOD projects now:** Capital and pre-development funding is critical to support community development and affordable housing projects, especially in disinvested communities. NITA is authorized to create a Transit Supportive Development Incentive Fund which has the potential to unlock new housing, commercial and community amenities near transit, yet with no funding actually allocated as of May 2026. Allocating seed funding into the fund now will allow for investments in ETOD projects that can further support transit ridership and earn growing returns for NITA.
- 5. Employ an “ecosystem approach” to joint development ETOD projects:** The Elevated Works technical assistance program offers a model for how NITA can support an enabling environment for community developers. Elevated Works managed a pipeline of ETOD projects and provided customized technical assistance (TA), one-on-one coaching, system navigation support and community-building through peer learning engagements. ETOD developers can range from small businesses to nonprofit service providers to affordable housing developers working on a range of project types from residential to commercial to community amenities. An “ecosystem approach” combines tailored resources and tracking common barriers across a pipeline of projects to inform systems change opportunities. NITA has an opportunity to innovate and employ this approach to advance ETOD projects regionwide at scale.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Policy Progress

[State of ETOD Report Appendix 1 Policy Progress](#)



CONNECTING PEOPLE,
BUILDING EQUITY