



LISC

Economic Inclusion Agenda





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Letter

February 27, 2025

Dear Community Friends,

The Back of the Yards exemplifies everything this nation stands for. The cornerstones of our Constitution; freedom and opportunity have been lived in this community for centuries. People from around the world came to our “land of opportunity” for a chance at a better life. Folks risked literally everything—their safety, freedom, and life to get to Chicago’s Back of the Yards. Oftentimes this meant people came across borders without permission or legal authority.

These people from every part of the globe (Ireland, Germany, Poland, Mexico, etc.) made this their home, raised families here, worked in our factories, owned businesses, and started churches. They were intertwined in the very fabric of what is the Back of the Yards community. This community has never been considered prosperous or affluent and thus times have never been easy, but it was undoubtedly a better life than the one they had left.

Throughout the history of the Back of the Yards, immigrants made up a large percentage of population. Immigration has therefore been an unfortunate concern for those not “documented” for some time. It has impacted the community on every level; safety, mental health and trauma, education and the economy. The level of concern of deportation has been mercurial to say the least, and definitely political. This ongoing situation needs to be addressed from the federal level down to local levels. The strength and foundation of communities like ours need resolution related to pathways to citizenship, asylum, and sensible deportation. It affects all of us.

As this economic inclusion agenda reflects on ways to improve our commercial corridor and thus the entire Back of the Yards, we must examine the impact of immigration policies and work toward a better solution. In 2020 the Census estimated that 11 million undocumented immigrants reside in the U.S. and that number is obviously higher in 2025. It is unrealistic to think of an immigration policy that could deport over 11 million people. The humanitarian concerns along with the negative impact such policies would have on the U.S. should preclude any administration from that path.

Our local economy has already seen much less foot traffic on the corridors which means less revenue, a lessened workforce, greater safety concerns, and lastly, a traumatized community.

Although this issue is most easily dealt with at a federal level, every tier of government and community must engage in a thoughtful, humanitarian, and economically sound solution. Implementation of this economic inclusion agenda should always be mindful of this major concern and proceed with immigration at the forefront of all decisions because it affects every aspect of our lives.

Craig Chico
President & CEO
Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council



Executive Summary

Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council partnered with LISC to create the first Economic Inclusion Agenda in Chicago focused on the Southwest side neighborhood of Back of the Yards. Rooted in the community's vision for itself and input from nearly 50 community stakeholders, the Economic Inclusion Agenda represents a new way for Chicagoans to drive, and benefit from, economic development in their own backyards.

Back of the Yards is a neighborhood on the cusp. Several large-scale, mixed-use developments, in addition to new streetscaping, are transforming the neighborhood's economic potential and bringing in nearly \$200M in public and private investment. At the same time, the neighborhood already has a strong foundation of small business activity along its bustling commercial corridors.

By embarking on an Economic Inclusion Agenda, we can both capitalize on the new momentum and attention coming to the community, and to also ensure that residents equitably share in the benefits of these new developments.

The Economic Inclusion Agenda includes a roadmap of seventeen concrete, actionable strategies across five priority areas. Together, these strategies will advance the neighborhood's economic, workforce, and community development goals over the next three years (2025 – 2027). This community-centered approach to economic inclusion will:

- 1. Strengthen Local Small Businesses**
- 2. Create Destination Commercial Corridors**
- 3. Advocate for Community-Driven Development**
- 4. Connect Residents to Job Opportunities**
- 5. Address Neighborhood Safety Concerns**

Introduction

Led by the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) and with support from LISC, the Economic Inclusion Agenda is a roadmap for implementing a new approach to place-based economic and community development – an approach that is focused on concrete, actionable strategies that can truly move the needle on the neighborhood’s growth trajectory.

BYNC and LISC have been partners for many years on a variety of community development initiatives, including Quality of Life Plans in 2005 and 2014. **This latest collaboration leverages a national model for local gain and highlights how Chicago neighborhoods can benefit from coordinated, strategic action.** Our community-centered planning period between June 2024 through January 2025 engaged nearly 50 community stakeholders in the plan’s development.

Our vision is to create economic growth for the neighborhood, by the neighborhood – building on the community’s strong history of entrepreneurship, skilled working population, proximity to transportation and industry, and neighborhood pride. Too often, economic development plans are made without meaningful community input, and the benefits are reaped by those who live outside the neighborhood.



About the Economic Inclusion Agenda

Developed by LISC and the Brookings Institution’s Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking, community-centered economic inclusion (CCEI) seeks to build wealth within underinvested communities while simultaneously reducing economic inequities. To date, more than 20 communities across the country have developed a community-centered Economic Inclusion Agenda.

Economic inclusion is focused on expanding economic opportunity for communities that have not benefited from traditional and top-down economic development strategies. Overcoming structural forces and decades of inequities requires a different, more community-focused approach that prioritizes the needs of existing residents.

The approach has three priorities:

- 1. Equitable resource alignment:** Focused on achieving greater economic inclusion for historically disadvantaged people, places, and small businesses.
- 2. Community voice and power:** Designed to center community voice and shift power imbalances between disinvested communities and public and private sector powerbrokers.
- 3. Holistic, cross-disciplinary focus:** Aimed at addressing the economic, built environment, social, and civic infrastructure that influences community well-being.

The Economic Inclusion Agenda planning process includes the following components in order to be successful:

- **An advisory group of community stakeholders** that represent the diverse economic aspirations, priorities, and interests of local residents and small businesses and have access to resources and power.

- **An understanding of the neighborhood economy**, including employment patterns, challenges, and opportunities for place-based investments to meet strategic goals.

- **A focus on the community’s strengths** and how they can support the shared goals of local businesses and residents around equitable economic development and mobility.

- **A plan for implementation of agenda items**, including timelines and key stakeholders.

By prioritizing the goals of community-based organizations and local leaders, community-centered economic inclusion can help address a fundamental challenge in traditional approaches to economic development: namely, a lack of alignment between those closest to place-based inequities and those with the institutionalized power to alleviate them.

“Everyone that is engaged in our Economic Inclusion Agenda is someone that can actually impact something. They are as dedicated to this community as we are. We all want people to stay here and to earn a good living here.”

– Craig Chico, CEO, Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council

CCEI prioritizes action strategies that are implementable and achievable; it engages key decision-makers and influencers from the beginning; and it catalyzes new collaborations and investments.

You can learn more about community-centered economic inclusion at www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/economic-development/our-work/community-centered-economic-inclusion/



Neighborhood Overview

About Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council

In 1939, when the father of community organizing, Saul Alinsky, and Joseph Meegan founded the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC), their mission was to build on the rich civic infrastructure (schools, churches, and social clubs) developed by generations of stockyards employees before them. For over 80 years, BYNC has continued that tradition by remaining committed to community-driven development.

Over the past eight decades, BYNC has successfully organized and united the community to advocate for more equitable labor practices, economic development, and increased employment opportunities. Today, BYNC delivers a holistic approach of social services and economic development programs to uplift the community. Programs include a Mexican Folklore Dance Troupe, Computer Technology Center, Industrial Retention activities, Special Service Area (SSA) management, senior support services, retail development, and employment placement assistance.

Learn more and get involved at www.bync.org.

About LISC

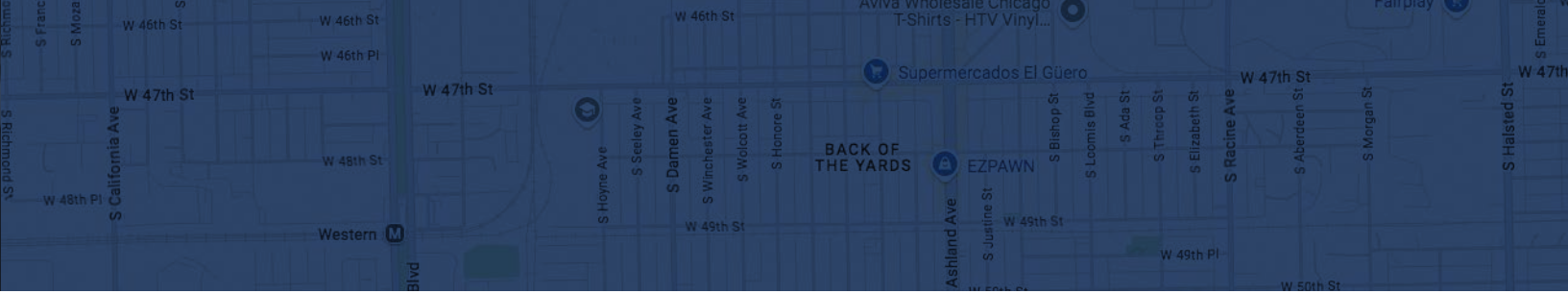
With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America – great places to live, work, visit, do business, and raise families. Since 1980, LISC has invested \$970 million to build or rehab 506,300 affordable homes and apartments and develop 82.5 million square feet of retail, community, and educational space in the Chicago region. For more information, please visit lisc.org/chicago.

Embedded in LISC's founding, and strengthened over the last two decades, we are committed to equitable economic development. Community-centered economic inclusion is a multidisciplinary and systems-level approach to building community wealth within underinvested places, while driving city and regional economic growth and development that centers equity. LISC has supported the creation of more than 20 economic inclusion agendas across the country since 2019, resulting in millions of dollars in targeted investment.

Back of the Yards is a melting pot of working-class immigrants who, for a century, have raised families, built businesses, and created vibrant communities on the outskirts of the Union Stockyards. Today, Back of the Yards is densely populated by a community of close-knit families, individuals, and businesses eager for economic opportunity and a bright future.

“We are a tight-knit community. People look out for each other here. We have deep roots in Back of the Yards, and we are passionate about making the neighborhood better.”





History

Thanks to its proximity to the railroads and the establishment of the Union Stockyards, Back of the Yards became the epicenter of the nation's meat-packing industry in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the time Chicago annexed the neighborhood in 1889, Lithuanian, Czech, Polish, Irish, and German immigrants had all settled in the community in search of nearby jobs.

During World War I, additional ethnic groups – including Mexican immigrants – began residing in the largely Slavic community, and the neighborhood's many ethnic enclaves had their own distinct civic infrastructure with schools, churches, and social clubs. However, the dangerous and unsanitary working conditions of the stockyards ultimately catalyzed coalition building and neighborhood activism. Fueled by the Great Depression, residents created the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee in 1937 which helped propel the union movement for better wages and safer working conditions.

By the time the stockyards closed in 1971, Back of the Yards was the predominantly Latino community it remains today. Despite disinvestment and population loss, residents are eager to tell a new story about Back of the Yards. Many of the neighborhood's elementary schools consistently score among the best in the Chicago Public Schools system. Its Mexican ballet dance troupe has won six national championships, its restaurants are a destination for the Southwest side, and a network of civically engaged residents are actively organizing to create a safer, more connected community. The result is a neighborhood rich with history, community, and potential.

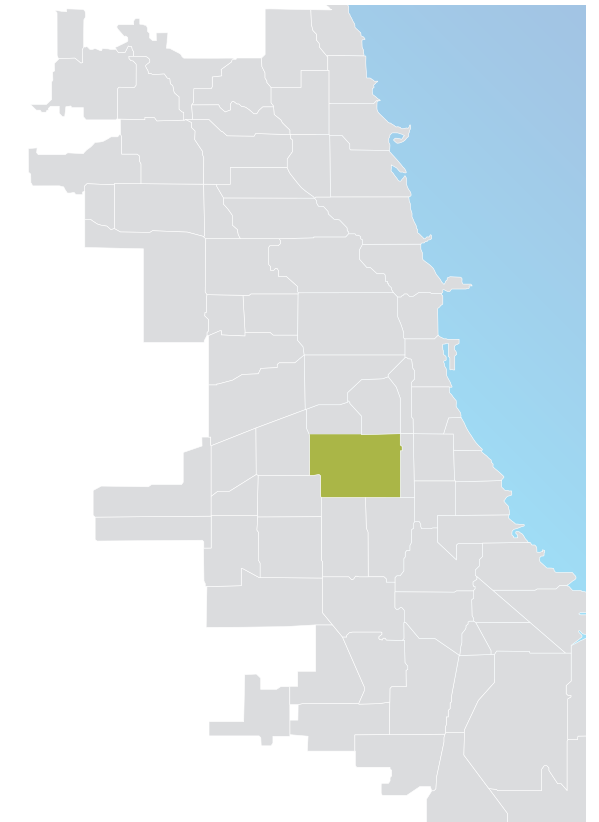


Geography

Back of the Yards is part of the New City community area in Chicago. Located on the city's Southwest side, the neighborhood borders Bridgeport to the north, Englewood to the south, and Brighton Park to the west. It remains a highly accessible location for transit and railroads – just south of the Stevenson Expressway and west of the Dan Ryan Expressway.

The community has two primary thoroughfares: Ashland Avenue from Pershing to Garfield Boulevard and 47th Street from Halsted Street to Western Avenue. These streets, along with Damen Avenue to the west, are the neighborhood's busiest for car and foot traffic. **On Ashland Avenue alone, an estimated 25,000 cars drive through the neighborhood daily** – which is a huge advantage to the community's commercial prospects.

The Back of the Yards Economic Inclusion Agenda is focused on concrete, actionable steps to benefit the primary commercial corridors of the neighborhood, defined as Ashland Avenue from 43rd Street to 49th Street and 47th Street from Loomis Boulevard to Damen Avenue.



Map of the City of Chicago
(Back of the Yards highlighted)



Back of the Yards Commercial Corridors,
47th Street and Ashland Avenue



Demographics

In the fifty years since the closing of the stockyards, Back of the Yards has retained its spirit of camaraderie, connection, and community. Over 41,000 people call the neighborhood home. The community is one of only a few Chicago neighborhoods where racial integration is a point of pride: while the neighborhood primarily identifies as Latino (and 65% of residents are Hispanic), 20% of residents are Black and 10% are white. Similarly, the neighborhood’s heritage as a vibrant community of immigrants remains to this day; over a quarter of residents were born outside the United States, and over half speak Spanish.

Back of the Yards today is predominantly young, with a median resident age of 28. Education, training, and credentialing remain a priority for the workforce because one third of the neighborhood’s residents have less than a high school degree or equivalent education.

Race and Ethnicity	
White Non-Hispanic	10.4%
Black Non-Hispanic	20.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.6%
Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	64.9%

Source: American Community Survey, 2019-2023 5-year estimates

Educational Attainment (for Adults 25 Years and Older)	
Less than High School	27.9%
High School or Equivalent	34.2%
Some College, No Degree	16.7%
Associates Degree	6.2%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	15.0%

Source: American Community Survey, 2019-2023 5-year estimates

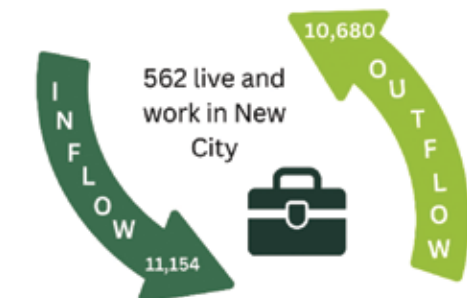


Income and Employment

When the stockyards closed, Back of the Yards’ main employment engine left and suddenly residents had significantly fewer opportunities for upward economic mobility. While the number of jobs within the neighborhood increased by 9% from 2011 to 2021, financial and employment challenges remain. Today, according to the U.S. Census, two-thirds of the 14,000 neighborhood households are surviving on \$50,000 in annual income or less, and the neighborhood’s median income (\$37,274) is almost half of the city as a whole (\$70,386). At 13%, the neighborhood’s unemployment rate is higher than that of the city’s (8.2%), and employment obstacles involving certifications, language, and digital skills persist.

“The local workforce is amazing – I want to hire them. We have quality workers and tradespeople here with a strong work ethic. But they have more skills than education or formal training.”

Sales, administration, health care, and food production are among the top industries employing Back of the Yards residents today, though the majority of roles located within the neighborhood are industrial jobs in production and transportation. Many residents travel outside the city of Chicago to lower-paying jobs in the near suburbs. What is striking here is that so many residents leave the city to work, and an almost equal number of workers come from outside the neighborhood to work in the community.



Despite these challenges, there are significant employment opportunities in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Local companies like the Stockyards Industrial Park, located at the center of the community, employ up to 10,000 people annually and are frequently looking for qualified, local candidates to fill vacancies.



Commercial Corridors

47th Street is characterized by its density of small and locally owned businesses. Ashland Avenue is a busier street with more vacancies—but new developments are on the horizon.

However, there are also significant infrastructure needs along the commercial corridors and plenty of storefront vacancies as well. Investments in new business facades and filling vacant storefronts would go a long way in improving the neighborhood’s reputation as a welcoming retail destination.

“Back of the Yards needs a facelift. Driving down Ashland Avenue between 47th and 49th feels like an open tunnel. Our storefronts need to be upgraded to the 21st century.”

The neighborhood’s projected economic outlook also shows growth in key retail areas like apparel, food, and entertainment. **Residents are spending over \$30M annually on these services outside the neighborhood** – and are clamoring for more options close to home. Moreover, over the next five years, retail spending from residents is likely to grow by \$11M, providing ample opportunities for a diverse array of businesses like coffee shops, grocery stores, and healthy restaurants to find their market nearby.

“People are making money, but they have to leave the neighborhood to spend it. I’d love more diverse shops and places to walk to so I can spend my money locally.”



Back of the Yards Business Licenses, 2024
(Source: City of Chicago)



Why Now?

Like many neighborhoods on Chicago's South and West sides, Back of the Yards has suffered from decades of underinvestment. This lack of both private and public economic development has taken a significant toll on the community's potential and the ability for residents to succeed in place.

But the tide has been turning since 2022 with renewed interest in the neighborhood's commercial corridors and large, mixed-use developments in the works. Therefore, this is the perfect time to embark on an Economic Inclusion Agenda to both capitalize on the new momentum and attention coming to Back of the Yards, and to also ensure that residents equitably share in the benefits of these new developments.

"There is a feeling that things are changing here. I grew up here, my parents owned a business in the community. Now I'm excited to come back and open my business here too."

Here are the significant projects being developed in Back of the Yards, as of early 2025 representing a combined, nearly \$200M in public and private investment:

1. 4630 S. Ashland Avenue: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council is getting ready to break ground on a new 7-story, mixed use building that will include affordable rental housing, a new Chicago Public Library branch, and office space for multiple community-based service providers. The project will demolish an unsightly abandoned storefront and breathe new life and activity into this block directly north of the key intersection of Ashland Avenue and 47th Street.

2. United Yards: The winning project of the city's INVEST South/West initiative, United Yards is redeveloping multiple vacant properties at and near the intersection of Ashland Avenue and 47th Street. Projects include revitalizing the 4-story commercial building at 4701 S. Ashland with a coffee shop, ground-floor retail, and affordable rental apartments, as well as housing, medical offices, and community service spaces at 1515 W. 47th Street, 1641 W. 47th Street, and 4704 S. Marshfield Avenue.

3. Third Coast Music Recording Complex: Third Coast Music has been selected by Chicago's Department of Planning and Development to redevelop the landmark Stockyards Bank and adjacent land into a global destination for state-of-the-art, large-scale music recording, post-production, special events, education, and a Chicago music museum. The 76,000-square-foot-project will bolster Chicago's top five national ranking as a recording center and provide new employment and cultural opportunities in the neighborhood.

4. Streetscape Improvements and Public Plazas: The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) recently completed a series of streetscape improvements on 47th Street (Loomis to Hoyne) and on Ashland Avenue (43rd Street to 49th Street). The improvements include resurfacing; new sidewalks, curbs, and gutters; pavement markings and signage; site furniture; gateway identifiers; tree planting and landscaping; and more.



Addressing the Current Political Climate

As a primarily Latino neighborhood and with a quarter of our population born outside the United States, Back of the Yards is deeply impacted by the new presidential administration. Their mass deportation strategy and virulent anti-immigrant rhetoric is sowing a culture of fear throughout the neighborhood that will have major repercussions for the community economy. Foot traffic is already down along the main commercial corridors of Ashland Avenue and 47th Street; community events are more sparsely attended; and local businesses are reporting a drop in clients.

Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council and LISC are already working with partner organizations, including Advisory Committee member The Resurrection Project, to distribute information about their rights to residents and business owners and to connect to citywide rapid response networks in case of immigration raids. However, the specter of this anti-immigration activity will weigh heavily on the implementation of the Economic Inclusion Agenda, representing significant challenges that were not present in 2024, but are now very real in 2025.



Community Engagement

A primary component of the Economic Inclusion Agenda is centering community voice to ensure the priorities of residents, local businesses, and community leaders are represented. Community input was an integral part of the Back of the Yards CCEI process and shaped the action strategies outlined below. We are grateful to all of the community members who engaged in this planning process for their time, creativity, and commitment.

We used two primary strategies for community engagement:

- **Advisory Committee:** The Advisory Committee includes sixteen stakeholders, representing a cross-section of government representatives, private developers, residents, and social service providers. The role of the Advisory Committee is to provide sustained, expert guidance on the creation of the Economic Inclusion Agenda and to leverage their access to or influence on resources to support implementation efforts. The Advisory Committee met four times between June and November 2024 and put their stamp of approval on the action strategies outlined below. Through the process, committee members developed new and exciting collaborations that will be instrumental to the success of the Economic Inclusion Agenda.

Advisory Committee Members

- Jaime Arteaga, *LISC*
- Karina Ayala-Bermejo, *Instituto del Progreso Latino*
- Torrey Barrett, *KLEO*
- Craig Chico, *Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council*
- Erica Esquivel, *The Resurrection Project*
- Maricruz Gaytan, *Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council*
- Vanessa Irizarry, *Chicago Department of Transportation*
- David Kelly, *Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation*
- Ethan Lassiter, *Mayor's Office*
- James Matanky, *Matanky Realty Group*
- Patrick Molloy, *Chicago Public Libraries*
- Maryrose Pavkovic, *Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events*
- Edgar Ramirez, *Chicago Commons*
- Michelle Ramirez, *Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council*
- Caroline Rendon, *LISC*
- Aron Weisner, *Celadon Partners/United Yards*



- **Focus Groups and Interviews:** We also sought input from an additional thirty-three community stakeholders either via one-on-one interviews or small focus groups. The interviews and focus groups took place between July and September 2024. A broad cross-section of the community was engaged, including community leaders, elected officials, local businesses, residents, and service providers. A full report on the results of the focus groups and interviews is available by request from Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council. Anonymous quotes taken from the interviews and focus groups are sprinkled throughout the Economic Inclusion Agenda.



Community Stakeholders

- Carlos Aldana, *Chicago Police Department*
- Maria Arellano, *Resident*
- Caitlin Barrett, *SSA #13 Program Manager*
- Salvador Benitez, *SSA #10 Commissioner*
- Patricia Brekke, *Principal at Back of the Yards College Preparatory High School*
- Emilio Carrasquillo, *Spanish Coalition for Housing, SSA #10 Chairperson*
- Oscar Contreras, *Light in the Night Program Manager*
- Terri Cox, *Matanky Realty, SSA #10 Commissioner*
- Barton Dassinger, *Principal at Cesar Chavez Multicultural Academic Center*
- Erendira De La Luz, *Resident*
- Maria Ester Fernandez, *Resident*
- Maricruz Gaytan, *SSA #10 Program Manager and resident*
- Elizabeth Gonzalez, *Case Manager at James Hedges Elementary*
- Ignacio Gonzales, *Dreamcatcher Café*
- Michael Harrell, *Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation*
- Brooke Hernandez, *Chi-Town Mecca Fitness*
- Brian Hernandez, *Mad Science Print Lab*
- Vivi Hurtado, *Effortless Look HQ*
- Lucas Kristen, *Great Lakes Realty, SSA #10 Commissioner*
- Alderman Raymond Lopez, *15th Ward*
- Joseph Mapp, *Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation*
- Carmen Medina, *Principal at James Hedges Elementary*
- Natasha Ortega, *Principal at John Hamline Elementary*
- Alderwoman Julia Ramirez, *12th Ward*
- Paulina Roman, *Resident*
- Rolando Santoyo, *La Selva Shop*
- Paul Schissler, *Principal at Lara Academy*
- Gloria Talamantes, *BYNC Manager of Youth Workforce Development*
- Alma Valdez, *Resident*
- Bruce Wellems, *Peace and Education Coalition of Back of the Yards*



Action Plan

The goal of the Back of the Yards Economic Inclusion Agenda is to identify concrete, actionable projects that will advance the neighborhood's economic, workforce, and community development goals, and to assemble stakeholders who can move these projects forward. The following action strategies will become the roadmap for Back of the Yards stakeholders to implement a new approach to place-based economic and community development over the next three years (2025 – 2027).

These strategies build on the neighborhood's strengths and envision a more prosperous and equitable future. The seventeen action strategies outlined are categorized into five pillars of activity.

Strengthen Local Small Businesses

One of Back of the Yards' most significant economic strengths is the high amount of commercial activity already happening in the neighborhood. This primarily Latino neighborhood has a strong entrepreneurial spirit that you can feel in the character, culture, and businesses lining Ashland Avenue and 47th Street. However, these family-owned small businesses need significant resources to succeed including bilingual coaching, access to capital, and updated infrastructure. There is an opportunity here to create a thriving, connected, and powerful small business community that is able to grow alongside and benefit from the new traffic and attention brought in by the incoming mega-developments.

“The small businesses that are already here need to be represented in economic development efforts. Let's invest in these businesses and help them become sustainable.”

Create Destination Commercial Districts

Historically, the busy intersection of Ashland Avenue and 47th Street was a destination for retail, entertainment, and community. Stakeholders reminisced about the movie theater, shops, and farmers' market that used to draw thousands of neighborhood residents and those who lived outside the neighborhood as well. By effectively marketing, promoting, and investing in the Back of the Yards' commercial corridors, we can once again become a destination district. New entrepreneurs are already popping up in the neighborhood, including Grano Panaderia y Cafe, ChiTown Mecca, and La Selva Shop to name a few. This upswing in traffic not only benefits existing small businesses but also attracts new commercial activity. It is the right time to reclaim Back of the Yards' narrative and tell a new story about our potential.

Advocate for Community-Driven Development

There were three problem sites that loomed large in our community feedback and research: Yards Plaza (4636 S. Damen Ave.), the Ashland Hotel (1537 W. 47th Street), and Rainbow Shop (4701 S. Ashland Ave.). Yards Plaza, now in receivership, lost its primary tenant (Food4Less) in 2023 and faces significant structural issues. Losing Food4Less was not only a setback for the Plaza, but also reduced the local, healthy food options for residents. The Ashland Hotel and Rainbow Shop are home to considerable conduct that bring down the image of the neighborhood and prevent residents from visiting the Ashland and 47th intersection. While these are privately held properties, the community has a substantial stake in their revitalization and needs to organize itself to advocate for positive solutions, including a new grocery store.

“Food4Less was a huge loss for the community. Our top priority should be getting a new grocery store, and helping the Damen Plaza become a thriving neighbor again.”



Connect Residents to Job Opportunities

Creating workforce pathways and access to local, good-paying jobs are also priorities for this Economic Inclusion Agenda. Through the CCEI implementation process, partners will come together to design and launch a new bilingual job placement and workforce development initiative that meets the needs of Back of the Yards’ residents and leverages new resources and partnerships. We also have the added benefit of significant employment opportunities right in our backyard at the stockyards industrial companies. By creating internships, upskilling training opportunities, and direct employment pathways, more residents – whatever their background – can find living-wage jobs.

“Safety is always a concern, but the best way to combat crime and violence is to provide job training and well-paying jobs. We need viable alternatives.”

Address Neighborhood Safety Concerns

More than anything else, the CCEI process surfaced widespread and urgent concerns about safety throughout Back of the Yards and particularly along 47th Street and Ashland Avenue. Whether it was perception of crime or the reality of increased property theft and gang activity, community stakeholders were unanimously anxious that safety concerns would hamstring any efforts to advance the neighborhood’s economic, workforce, and community development goals. Public safety and economic inclusion go hand-in-hand, and this agenda aims to tackle both challenges in tandem. The strategies outlined to address these issues are designed for broad and multi-pronged impact. We are recommending a new Community Safety Task Force that brings the Chicago Police Department and local businesses together to collaborate on solutions, as well as placemaking strategies that repurpose vacant and disorderly places to discourage crime. We also aim to invest in infrastructure improvements, such as security cameras and streetlights, that improve safety and security.

Pillar	Action Strategy and Key Stakeholders	Short Term (first 6 months)	Mid Term (6 – 18 months)	Long Term (18 months – 3 yrs)
Strengthen Local Small Business	1. Host roundtables and networking opportunities for local small businesses to build community and learn from one another. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partners: Grano Café, Madd Science Print Lab, Peace and Education Coalition	●	●	●
	2. Expand neighborhood-based economic development programming for small businesses, including: ✓ One-on-one coaching to access working capital, such as city programs like the Small Business Improvement Fund and Neighborhood Opportunity Fund or private capital. ✓ Researching and advertising funding opportunities for façade and building infrastructure improvements and procurement opportunities and providing technical assistance to help small businesses compete. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council		●	●
	3. Identify small business owners looking to purchase their building and connect them to available acquisition supports. • Lead: LISC		●	●
	4. Develop and launch an entrepreneurship training program to support new small business development in the neighborhood. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council			●

Pillar	Action Strategy and Key Stakeholders	Short Term (first 6 months)	Mid Term (6 – 18 months)	Long Term (18 months – 3 yrs)
Create Destination Commercial Districts	5. Conduct a market study to identify business needs on the commercial corridors of Ashland Avenue and 47th Street. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council	●		
	6. Design and launch a coordinated marketing campaign to make the Back of the Yards neighborhood a commercial destination and to create a unified and welcoming visual experience of the neighborhood. Creatively engage local artists and students in the campaign. • Lead: United Yards • Partners: Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Grano Café, La Selva Shop	●	●	
	7. Develop a neighborhood app to promote local businesses, events, jobs, and housing. • Lead: SSA 10 • Partners: Everyone Can Code		●	

Pillar	Action Strategy and Key Stakeholders	Short Term (first 6 months)	Mid Term (6 – 18 months)	Long Term (18 months – 3 yrs)
Advocate for Community Driven Development	8. Create a Community Advisory Committee to advocate for resident-led neighborhood planning and land use decisions. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partners: Chicago Commons, The Resurrection Project, 20th Ward, 15th Ward	●	●	●
	9. Advocate for the redevelopment of the mostly vacant Yards Plaza, with a grocery store as an anchor tenant. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partner: Matanky Group	●	●	
	10. Advocate for the redevelopment of the Ashland Hotel and Rainbow Shop into neighborhood assets. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partners: Matanky Group, United Yards		●	●

Pillar	Action Strategy and Key Stakeholders	Short Term (first 6 months)	Mid Term (6 – 18 months)	Long Term (18 months – 3 yrs)
Connect Residents to Job Opportunities	11. Engage an established workforce development organization to create a neighborhood-specific employment strategy for Back of the Yards. • Lead: Instituto del Progreso Latino • Partner: Chicago Commons	●		
	12. Design and launch a bilingual job placement and workforce development program in Back of the Yards. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partners: Chicago Commons, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Peace and Education Coalition, United Yards		●	
	13. Deepen partnerships with stockyards employers by identifying vacancies, coordinating job placements, and piloting an internship program. • Lead: SSA #13		●	●

Pillar	Action Strategy and Key Stakeholders	Short Term (first 6 months)	Mid Term (6 – 18 months)	Long Term (18 months – 3 yrs)
Address Neighborhood Safety Concerns	14. Create a Community Safety Task Force to increase cooperation, communication, and responsiveness between local businesses and the Chicago Police Department. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partners: Chicago Police Department, Chicago Community Safety Coordination Center, 20th Ward, 15th Ward, LISC, Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation	●	●	●
	15. Develop and execute a regular schedule of community programming on commercial corridors and Plazas to create neighborhood safe spaces. • Lead: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council • Partner: Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Department of Transportation	●	●	●
	16. Conduct a pedestrian experience study to identify street and sidewalk needs to improve walkability. • Lead: SSA #10 • Partner: Chicago Department of Transportation	●		
	17. Invest in infrastructure that improves safety and security, such as security cameras, public safety signage (bilingual), streetlights, and trash cans. • Lead: SSA #10 • Partners: Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago Police Department, Office of Public Safety Administration, 20th Ward, 15th Ward	●	●	

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Economic Inclusion Agenda will be published and launched in February 2025, kicking off a three-year period of implementation and progress. The time horizon for the Agenda is purposefully short (in contrast to other five- or ten-year plans) because it is meant to fuel deliberate action and quick wins.

Each action strategy above has an identified lead organization that will take responsibility for implementing the strategy across the timeline indicated. Actions have been divided into three time horizons (short term: within the first 6 months of launch; mid-term: 6 – 18 months post-launch; and long-term: 18 months – 3 years out). Where available, additional partners that have agreed to support the lead organization have been included. As additional partners raise their hands, they will be added to the team.

Progress on the action strategies will be provided to the Economic Inclusion Agenda leads (Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council and LISC) on a quarterly basis, so that regular reports can be made to the broader community – ensuring our collective accountability to the goals of the Agenda.

We encourage potential partners and any interested parties to contact either Michelle Ramirez at BYNC or Caroline Rendon at LISC to get involved in the implementation of the Economic Inclusion Agenda. We welcome additional partners and appreciate those who have already stepped up to support these ambitious efforts.

Together, we can create a neighborhood economy that grows local wealth and drives new, more equitable investments into Back of the Yards.

In memory of Alexander R. Nunes
November 2, 1995 – July 26, 2024



