

Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, Department of Planning and Development

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2025-2029



COOK COUNTY
BUREAU OF
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025-2029 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Cook County outlines a 5-year strategic action plan to advance economic development initiatives across the county. It is informed by a synthesis of current County plans—including the Bureau of Economic Development (BED) 2024-2027 Strategic Plan and Cook County 2024-2027 Policy Roadmap—as well as detailed analysis, stakeholder engagement and discussions with County staff.

Two overarching principles—racial equity and resilience—guide the strategies and actions proposed in the CEDS. Despite recent commitments to center equity in policies and investments, disparities in economic, housing, social, environmental and health outcomes persist for Black, Latine and other historically excluded communities. Through this plan, Cook County is committed to addressing the structural barriers to racial equity that impact residents' access to economic opportunity. Resilience, the ability to withstand economic and environmental shifts and shocks, is also directly linked to equity, ensuring that all residents, communities and businesses have the tools they need to adapt to changing economic and climate conditions. The plan's strategies are designed to further climate and economic resilience for the county's diverse communities.

The CEDS is informed by feedback from a range of stakeholders, including regional planning bodies, community organizations and nonprofits, municipalities, business leaders, educational institutions, and other key practitioners and advocates from across the county. Two primary sources of external engagement were utilized: (1) a Steering Committee and (2) focus groups organized around specific topic areas. The Steering Committee contributed strategic direction and insight into key regional considerations, identified high-impact strategies and provided guidance on the prioritization of the strategy framework. Focus group participants provided additional insights into existing conditions, needs, challenges and opportunities. The feedback received from the Steering Committee and focus group participants directly informed the CEDS' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis and the Strategic Direction, Action Plan and Evaluation Framework.

The CEDS is organized into five topic areas: (1) economic development, (2) workforce development, (3) housing and homelessness, (4) infrastructure, and (5) community development. The plan is organized by goals centered around each of these five topic areas. The CEDS has been prepared as one component of a larger Cook County planning initiative—Uplift Cook. Uplift Cook encompasses both the CEDS and the 5-year Consolidated Plan required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Cook County.

The following section provides a brief overview of key trends, goals and objectives for each topic area.

1 | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Cook County has a large, diverse economy. There is strong coordination at the regional level, focused on growing six key industries: (1) manufacturing, (2) business and professional services, (3) finance and insurance, (4) transportation, distribution and logistics, (5) food manufacturing and innovation, and (6) life sciences. Supporting diverse and minority businesses is a top priority to build wealth and provide

opportunities for historically excluded communities while stimulating economic growth. Recent catalytic state commitments to renewable energy production create opportunities to further climate resilience and equitable economic growth while developing clean energy sectors within the county. Core challenges include addressing longstanding geographic gaps in investment and the impact of population loss on the County's tax base and revenues.

Economic Development Goal: Foster inclusive, resilient economic growth that creates opportunities for all residents and businesses.

- **Objective 1.1:** Champion a regional approach to grow the economy and advance racial and economic equity.
- **Objective 1.2:** Invest in economic sectors with good jobs and positive economic, environmental and social impact.
- **Objective 1.3:** Grow the small business ecosystem, support innovation and entrepreneurship, and reduce the racial wealth gap.
- **Objective 1.4:** Promote environmental sustainability in economic development initiatives
- **Objective 1.5:** Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth

2 | WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The six key industries offer more than 820,000 jobs in Cook County, or approximately one third of all employment in 2024. While the presence of top higher-education institutions and technical-education programs produce a strong supply of local talent, racial disparities in educational attainment and unemployment persist. Facilitating connections between educational institutions, workforce providers and job seekers and reducing barriers to employment that disproportionately impact historically excluded communities will help address these disparities. Other workforce priorities include growing the clean energy sector workforce, supporting industries with high-growth occupations that pay living wages, and addressing geographic mismatches between jobs and housing.

Workforce Development Goal: Promote pathways to good jobs that support economic mobility for residents and meet the needs of employers.

- **Objective 2.1:** Align investments and incentives to intentionally support access to high-quality jobs that promote economic mobility and equity.
- **Objective 2.2:** Foster partnerships between employers, workforce service providers and job seekers.
- **Objective 2.3:** Strengthen internal County processes and policies to support current workers, job seekers and workforce partners.

3 | HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing in Suburban Cook County predominantly comprises owner-occupied, single-family homes. Overall, slowing construction and strong market demand have driven increased housing competition and escalating prices for both for-sale and rental homes. Affordability challenges point to the need to develop more affordable housing and preserve existing, aging housing. Lower income households are particularly at risk: nearly two-thirds of households with incomes below \$75,000 are housing cost-burdened, and the shortage of affordable housing is greatest for households (both renters and owners) making less than 30% of area median income. Racial disparities in housing stemming from decades of historically discriminatory housing policies persist, including higher rates of housing cost burden and lower rates of homeownership for Black and Latine households. Ending homelessness within the county is also a key priority.

Housing & Homelessness Goal: Provide a continuum of quality, affordable housing for all.

- **Objective 3.1:** Develop and increase funding and its flexibility for affordable housing types, ensuring investments are community-driven and maximize impact.
- **Objective 3.2:** Transform the County's services for the unhoused to achieve housing security for our most vulnerable residents.
- **Objective 3.3:** Fund programs and provide capacity building support to improve housing outcomes and build economic opportunity.
- **Objective 3.4:** Advocate for fair housing policies and streamline communications around programs and data.
- **Objective 3.5:** Support environmental sustainability and positive health outcomes through housing investments and policies.

4 | INFRASTRUCTURE

Cook County has a diverse network of road, water, air and rail infrastructure. This transportation infrastructure is key to supporting the county's workforce and attracting industries that rely on strong freight networks. Leveraging robust statewide energy infrastructure and commitments to renewable energy production, the county is also poised to become a major clean energy producer, with implications for both industry growth and workforce preparedness. While the county faces fewer disaster-related climate threats than other similarly sized metros, strengthening climate resilience will require substantial investment in aging infrastructure, particularly as potential climate migration may increase service demand. To ensure communities that have been disproportionately impacted by climate events and environmental conditions are centered in climate-related investments and green economy participation, the County is committed to advancing environmental justice in all programs and activities. A County Environmental Justice Policy has recently been issued.

Infrastructure Goal: Leverage infrastructure investments to promote resiliency, accessibility and equitable economic growth.

- **Objective 4.1:** Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth.
- **Objective 4.2:** Promote environmental sustainability in infrastructure, reduce contribution to climate change, and invest in mitigation.
- **Objective 4.3:** Increase regional accessibility and connectivity by investing in sustainable infrastructure throughout Cook County.
- **Objective 4.4:** Leverage existing infrastructure assets and available financial resources to attract future investment and facilitate equitable implementation.

5 | COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The County's community development investments and programs focus on addressing gaps in healthcare, safety, social services, recreation, childcare, food access and other factors that are fundamental to healthy and successful communities. Racial and geographic disparities in healthcare and food access negatively impact quality of life and health outcomes, particularly for residents of the south and west suburbs. Health outcomes are also closely tied to pollution and climate-related heat and flooding impacts, which disproportionately burden environmental justice communities. The cost of childcare in the county exceeds national affordability benchmarks, straining households' financial security and challenging workforce participation. Investments that support accessibility are a key priority to support residents with a disability and the growing senior population.

Community Development Goal: Build healthy, connected, and sustainable communities where residents have equitable access to services and amenities.

- **Objective 5.1:** Foster a community-centered, equity-based approach to implement community development and economic revitalization.
- **Objective 5.2:** Advance environmental justice to address historical injustices and promote environmental equity.
- **Objective 5.3:** Promote residents' economic security and increase economic mobility.
- **Objective 5.4:** Promote health equity through policies and partnerships that support healthcare access and improved health outcomes.
- **Objective 5.5:** Facilitate and invest in comprehensive and coordinated approaches to proactively address violence and improve safety in highly impacted communities.

01 Introduction

Cook County is the second largest county in the United States, home to over 5 million residents. The county has a dynamic, established economy with a gross regional product (GRP) exceeding that of many states and nations. More than 650,000 businesses represent a diverse range of industries, including significant concentrations in finance & insurance, business & professional services, transportation, distribution & logistics (TD&L), manufacturing, food innovation & manufacturing, and life sciences. The county draws from a strong regional workforce, leveraging an ecosystem of over 500 accredited postsecondary programs. Robust transportation infrastructure—including two international airports, railways, ports, highways and public transit—connects residents, businesses and communities to economic opportunities across the region, nation and world.

The past decade has been a period of economic volatility. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated economic shifts toward e-commerce and workforce automation, global supply chain challenges pushed businesses to rethink distribution networks, and technology evolved to facilitate changes in how and where people work. Concurrently, changing climate patterns increased pressure on infrastructure and natural resources, and racial inequities in access to economic opportunity persisted. While progress has been made to center economic equity in policies and investments, the legacies of economic, housing, environmental and social inequities continue to disproportionately burden historically excluded communities. Addressing these injustices will require changes across interrelated systems, including business development, job access, housing affordability, educational attainment, infrastructure resilience and childcare accessibility. The interdisciplinary nature of economic development has never been more apparent.

Together, Cook County (the “County”) and State agencies, municipalities, nonprofit organizations, businesses and residents advance economic development throughout the county. The County and its partners have prepared numerous economic development plans and championed related initiatives in recent years. These plans detail the impacts of recent economic shifts and shocks, key opportunities, and strategic priorities for County departments and partner agencies, and were a starting point for development of 2025-2029 Cook County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a goal-oriented, 5-year strategic action plan that will guide economic development initiatives throughout the county. The plan is informed by a synthesis of prior plans, updated analysis, stakeholder engagement and discussions with County staff.

OVERVIEW OF UPLIFT COOK & CEDS

The CEDS has been prepared as one component of a larger Cook County planning initiative—Uplift Cook. Uplift Cook encompasses the CEDS and the Consolidated Plan required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Cook County. The organization of the CEDS follows the same framework as Uplift Cook:

- Two overarching principles—**racial equity and resilience**—inform Cook County’s priorities and strategies across Uplift Cook. These principles have been considered in each facet of the planning process and will be embedded in strategies to address historic inequities and plan for a resilient future.

- The County launched Uplift Cook to proactively plan for **economic development, workforce development, housing, infrastructure and community development** throughout the county. The plan is organized by goals centered around each of these five topic areas.
- Uplift Cook's strategies are focused on driving positive, equitable outcomes for the county's **residents, communities and businesses** as part of a broader **systems change** effort to transform implementation by enhancing internal County practices, creating programs that address root causes, and prioritizing transparency and partnerships. These four pillars align with the County Bureau of Economic Development's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan and intersect with Uplift Cook's objectives and strategies.

RACIAL EQUITY

Cook County faces particular challenges due to the legacy of discrimination and inequitable systems that have shaped the economic and social outcomes of generations of Black and Latine residents and members of other historically excluded communities. Housing segregation, enforced by policies such as redlining, severely limited homeownership opportunities for over a century in Cook County, particularly for Black residents. Limited access to homeownership opportunities, lack of access to conventional lending, discrimination and predatory lending practices have resulted in generational racial wealth disparities that persist today.

Though many discriminatory practices have been abolished and steps have been taken to dismantle systemic inequities, the legacy of these racist systems endures. Cook County residents remain distinctly geographically segregated by race. There continue to be persistent disparities in income, health, safety and access to economic opportunity between Cook County's White residents and members of historically excluded communities. These disparities must continue to be addressed through intentional planning and policy guided by this plan.

RESILIENCE

A community's resilience translates to its ability to withstand shifts and shocks. These disruptions may be local, regional or global in nature and driven by anything from climate change to technological advancements to economic shifts.

Globally and nationally, the impact of severe weather events has accelerated in recent years, leading to both opportunities and challenges in Cook County. Cook County is better positioned than many communities struggling with the impacts of the climate crisis due to its geographic location. However, persistent flooding following significant rain events continues to negatively impact homeowners and businesses, highlighting the challenges of aging infrastructure. Adverse climate impacts disproportionately burden historically excluded and environmental justice communities in Cook County. Strategies to adapt to or mitigate these climate impacts must center equitable provision of green infrastructure, clean energy and opportunities to participate in the growing green economy.

The pandemic also underscored the importance of economic resilience, as entire segments of the economy were abruptly impacted and, in some cases, transformed. To strengthen economic resilience, the County and its partners are focused on supporting workforce and business development across key and emerging

economic sectors that represent areas of regional competitive advantage. This plan documents potential opportunities to improve economic resilience to smaller shifts and major shocks.

TOPIC AREAS

The CEDS encompasses five topic areas, each with unique challenges and opportunities. These topic areas function as the plan's main goals. Objectives, strategies and action items identified within the CEDS are organized by these topic areas.

- **Economic Development:** Economic development is driven by targeted, equitable investments in businesses and residents, as well as regional collaboration to strengthen key industries and sectors. The County seeks to foster inclusive, resilient economic growth that lifts up small businesses, promotes innovation and entrepreneurship, and grows industries with jobs that lead to upward mobility.

Goal: Foster inclusive, resilient economic growth that creates opportunities for all residents and businesses to thrive.

- **Workforce Development:** Workforce development is integral to economic development. As the economy evolves, the workforce must be prepared to meet the needs of modern industries and access jobs that can support household needs. Workforce development initiatives are targeted toward emerging and growing industries, as well as the long-standing priority industries that are integral to the local economy. Workforce development efforts aim to provide pathways to “good jobs” with living wages and opportunities for career advancement.

Goal: Promote pathways to good jobs that support economic mobility for residents and meet the needs of employers.

- **Housing & Homelessness:** Access to stable, safe affordable housing is a core tenet of economic and community stability. Housing provides necessary shelter while also creating opportunities to build wealth, foster social connections, and promote positive health and educational outcomes. Providing a continuum of quality, affordable housing creates economic and community benefits that transcend beyond the housing units themselves. A robust housing ecosystem in Cook County is inclusive of everything from rapid rehousing programs that provide stability for at-risk residents to attainable homeownership housing that allows for wealth building for residents at all incomes.

Goal: Provide a continuum of quality, affordable housing for all.

- **Infrastructure:** Rail, water, road and digital connections are the foundation of economic success for nearly all businesses. Strong infrastructure networks connect supply chains, workers to jobs, learners to education and more. The lifespan of infrastructure necessitates ongoing investment, which may need to be accelerated due to the increased pace of severe weather events. Cook County seeks to

intentionally leverage infrastructure investments to promote resilience, accessibility and equitable economic growth.

***Goal:** Leverage infrastructure investments to promote resiliency, accessibility and equitable economic growth.*

- **Community Development:** Community development includes access to healthcare, food, childcare and other factors that impact the health, safety and economic opportunity of residents. Building healthy, connected and sustainable communities where residents have equitable access to services and amenities requires intentional investment. Cook County seeks to prioritize investments in areas with the greatest need, especially geographic areas with high concentrations of low-income residents or environmentally vulnerable communities.

***Goal:** Build healthy, connected and sustainable communities where residents have equitable access to services and amenities.*

BUREAU OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS

The mission of the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development (BED) is to enhance the quality of life for residents through transformative and equitable community and economic development. BED's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan reflects the County's core values of Equity, Engagement and Excellence, as well as BED's commitment to Leadership, Impact, Innovation and Collaboration. The BED plan is organized into four pillars, with the following goals:

- **Residents:** Improve economic mobility and well-being for all, by providing the resources and housing that residents need to thrive.
- **Businesses:** Support innovation and grow businesses by expanding access to talent, services and capital.
- **Communities:** Strengthen communities by investing in the foundations needed for thriving local organizations and governments.
- **Systems Change:** Transform implementation by enhancing internal practices and creating programs that address root causes while prioritizing transparency and partnerships.

Alignment between CEDS objectives and BED pillars is noted in the **Strategic Direction, Action Plan and Evaluation Framework** section.

RECENT PLANNING INITIATIVES

The CEDS aligns with and builds on recent planning work at the county, regional and state levels. The County's 2024-2027 Policy Roadmap (the "Policy Roadmap") functions as a north star, guiding all other County planning initiatives. County plans include bureau- and department-specific plans as well as overarching, cross-departmental policies including an equity framework, digital equity plan and environmental justice policy. Building on the framework of prior County plans, the CEDS also identifies how the County can leverage regional and statewide initiatives, particularly those concerning infrastructure, economic development and climate resilience.

Major planning initiatives that inform the CEDS are outlined below. Additional plans, reports and documents reviewed as part of the CEDS process are noted in **Appendix A**.

Key Plans, Policies, and Initiatives

Cook County Policy Roadmap (2024-2027). The Policy Roadmap sets the strategic direction across all Cook County Offices Under the President (OUP), including BED. The Policy Roadmap outlines aspirational strategies in six priority areas: health and wellness, economic and community development, safety and justice, climate resilience, public infrastructure and technology, and good government.

Cook County BED Strategic Plan (2024-2027). The Strategic Plan describes how BED will further the objectives set forth in the Policy Roadmap, with the overarching goal of enhancing quality of life for county residents through transformative and equitable community and economic development. Strategies are organized around Residents, Businesses, Communities and Systems Change.

Cook County Equity Fund Report (2021). The Cook County Equity Fund Report outlines the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's recommendations on strategies to address structural barriers that prevent meaningful advancement of equity across Cook County. The report also includes financial and legislative commitments for the Cook County Equity Fund, established in the fiscal year 2021 budget, and introduces a baseline definition and vision for equity across County departments, programs and systems.

Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP). Formed in 2023, GCEP is a joint initiative of the seven Chicagoland region counties, the City of Chicago and World Business Chicago (WBC) that aims to foster unified and inclusive regional economic development. GCEP contributes research, identifies priority industries, pursues regional business development, acts as a convener, and promotes the economic assets of the Chicagoland region. GCEP and WBC have produced several reports on economic trends including Chicagoland's Economic Landscape (2023), GCEP Year in Review (2023), and High-Growth Industries in Chicagoland (2023). Additionally, GCEP releases quarterly regional economic data for key metrics including gross regional product (GRP), jobs, spending, business counts, and unemployment across key and emerging regional industries.

Additional Plans, Policies and Initiatives

Cook County Digital Equity Plan (2023). The Digital Equity Plan reaffirms the County's commitment to advancing digital equity with the goal of ensuring all residents can benefit from and contribute to a growing digital economy, regardless of race, geography, ability or language. The plan outlines current challenges, opportunities and actions that can be taken to build digital accessibility, confidence, safety and infrastructure for all county residents.

Cook County Environmental Justice Policy Framework. The County's Environmental Justice Policy Framework aims to address historical injustices and promote environmental equity throughout the county. The framework will serve as a guide to inform program and policy design across County offices and departments.

Cook County Transit Plan (2023). The Transit Plan refines how the County's Department of Transportation and Highways (DOTH) can improve transit for people who live and work in the county. Strategies encompass

better bus service and stops, accessibility improvements, increased access to transit, additional transit service, and fare integration. Potential partnerships are identified to facilitate key regional transit investments.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA) 7 Local Plan (2024-2028). Prepared by the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, the LWIA Plan identifies workforce development challenges and opportunities across the county. The plan describes the current programs and services provided by the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and other workforce development organizations and identifies strategies to advance state, regional and local priorities.

Open for Business: Illinois' Economic Growth Plan (2024). Open for Business outlines a five-year roadmap to advance economic development statewide, including attracting targeted investments, creating jobs, and supporting equitable growth across underinvested and underrepresented communities. The plan has a distinct focus on building the clean energy economy, executing on elements of the state's landmark 2021 climate legislation, the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act. Six high-growth economic sectors are identified: (1) life sciences, (2) quantum computing, artificial intelligence and microelectronics, (3) clean energy production and manufacturing, (4) advanced manufacturing, (5) agriculture technology and food processing, and (6) transportation, distribution and logistics.

See **Appendix A** for a complete list of plans, reports, and other documents leveraged throughout the CEDS process.

ENGAGEMENT

Uplift Cook is championed by the Cook County Department of Planning and Development within the Bureau of Economic Development. In addition to engaging partners across BED, the Uplift Cook team led engagement and communications outreach with external partners throughout the planning process, engaging stakeholders in the five topic areas. The team also helped to build momentum around the planning process and foster meaningful partnerships to support the development, adoption and implementation of the CEDS.

The primary sources of external feedback and engagement were:

1. A **Steering Committee** comprising leaders in housing, economic development, public policy and community development that contributed strategic direction and insight into key regional considerations, identified high-impact strategies, and provided guidance on the prioritization of the strategy framework; and
2. Five **focus groups** (one for each topic area) with representatives of community organizations, municipalities, advocates and other stakeholders across the county, with participants providing insights into existing conditions, needs, challenges and opportunities.

Steering Committee members and focus group attendee organizations represent a diverse range of communities and residents. They include regional planning bodies, community organizations and nonprofits, business leadership, educational institutions and other key practitioners and advocates from across the county.

The feedback provided by Steering Committee and focus group participants directly informed the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis** and the **Strategic Direction, Action Plan and Evaluation Framework**. Primary methods of engagement included facilitated in-person and virtual meetings and an online survey.

*More detail on engagement activities, feedback and a full list of Steering Committee members is provided in **Appendix B**.*

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02 Summary Background – Data Snapshots

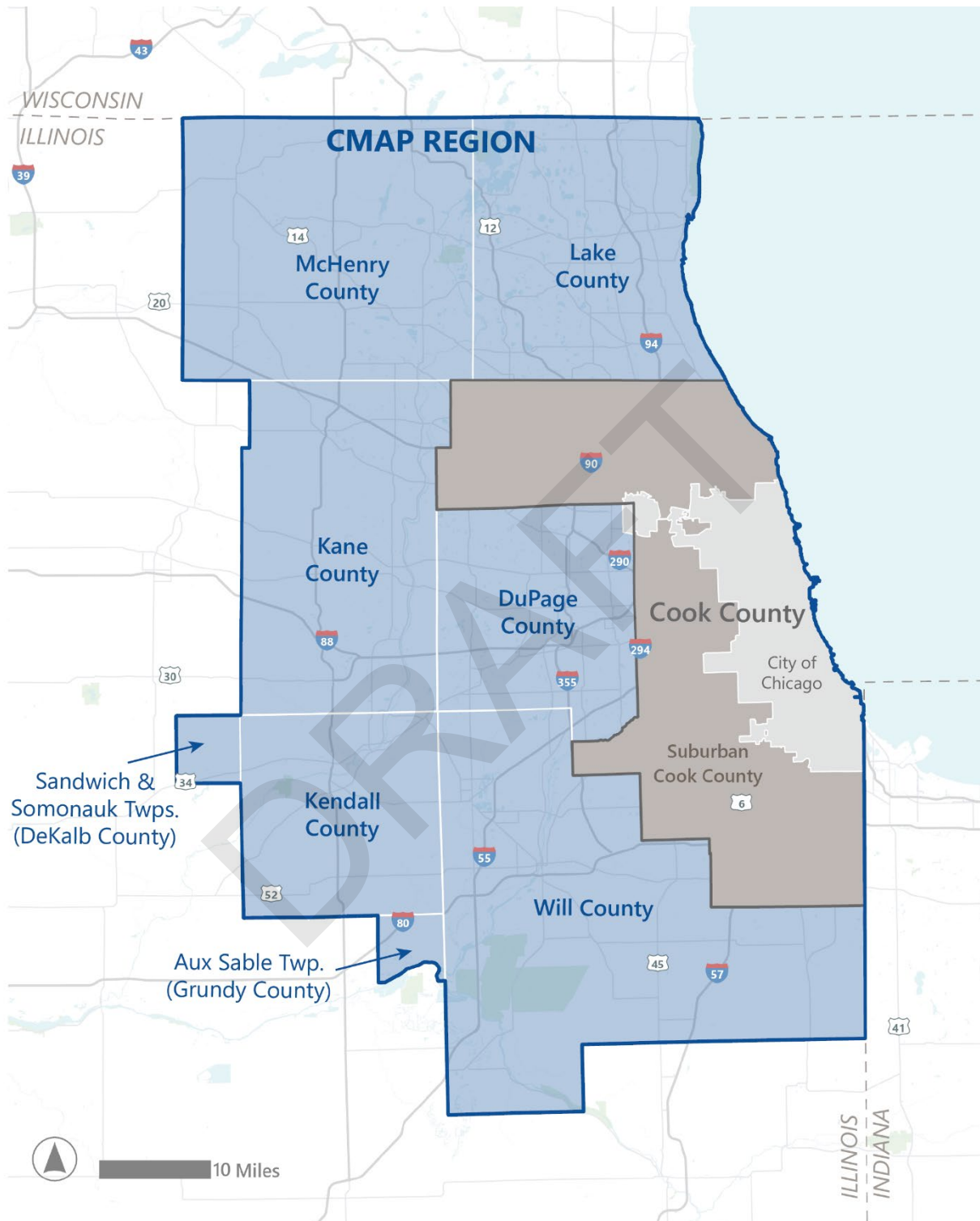
The Summary Background is an analysis of existing conditions and recent trends that intersect the five primary topic areas of the CEDS. It provides an overview of the county's demographic composition, economic drivers, workforce, housing market, community development, and infrastructure needs and priorities, and puts these conditions within the regional context where relevant. **The full Summary Background Analysis can be found in Appendix C, while key trends and data points are provided by topic area below.**

Most trends are analyzed over the past five years to demonstrate changes from the prior CEDS plan. Certain overarching trends are analyzed over a longer period, particularly those related to changing economic and housing conditions.

The analysis is provided for several geographic scales, shown in **Figure 1**. From largest to smallest, these geographies are:

- **Region:** The Chicagoland region is defined according to the planning area boundaries of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). CMAP encompasses seven counties—Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will—as well as portions of DeKalb and Grundy counties. The region is used as a point of comparison to understand the impact of broader trends within Cook County. Additionally, major economic development and infrastructure initiatives are coordinated on the regional level.
- **County:** The focus of the CEDS is Cook County. Cook County is a major economic driver within the region, accounting for over 60% of regional economic output, jobs and population.
- **Suburban Cook County:** Many of the County's housing and community development programs are administered across Cook County, excluding the city of Chicago. Additionally, HUD funding programmed under the County's Consolidated Plan is generally focused on the suburban portion of the county, excluding the cities of Chicago, Evanston and Skokie, each of which submit their own consolidated plans. For this reason, portions of the Housing & Homelessness and Community Development sections of the CEDS are tailored to Suburban Cook County rather than the county overall.

Figure 1. Overview of Analysis Geographies



Source: CMAP, Esri, SB Friedman

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Cook County is home to approximately 5.2 million residents, accounting for 61% of the region's population. Regionally, population growth has been slowing in recent years, and Cook County population declined slightly from 2017-2022 (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). Other major trends reflected in the county's changing demographics include growth in the number of households despite modest population decline, smaller household sizes, increasing racial diversity, and a growing cohort of residents aged 65 and above. These trends impact the county's housing needs, workforce considerations, infrastructure requirements, and provision of community and social services.

Despite increasing diversity, patterns of geographic racial segregation stemming from historic disinvestment and redlining are still prevalent in the county. South suburban communities with predominantly Black residents have experienced the greatest population losses, and Black and Latine household incomes continue to lag those of White and Asian households. Strategies to reverse these trends and support communities that have experienced intersecting challenges related to being historically excluded are a core component of the County's policy goals and the CEDS plan.

*All data presented below reflect 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for **Cook County**, unless otherwise noted.*

Population (Cook County): **5,225,400**

- Change, 2017-2022: **-13,200** (-0.3%)

Households: **2,066,200**

- Change, 2017-2022: **+110,000** (+5.6%)
- Average Household Size: **2.49**

Figure 2. Population by Race & Ethnicity

	2022 Population	2022 Share	Change, 2017-2022
White alone	2,148,200	41%	-87,400
Hispanic or Latine	1,352,500	26%	40,200
Black or African American alone	1,170,800	22%	-55,300
Asian alone	398,600	8%	35,500
Two or More Races	130,600	2%	45,000
Some Other Race alone	19,700	0%	10,200
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	3,900	0%	-1,300
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	1,200	0%	100

Figure 3. Population by Age

	2022 Population	2022 Share	Change, 2017-2022
Under 18	1,121,800	21%	-52,000
18-34	1,296,200	25%	-43,300
35-49	1,047,100	20%	4,900
50-64	966,300	18%	-8,200
65-74	463,400	9%	65,900
75 and over	330,500	6%	19,500

Median Household Income: **\$75,100**

- Asian alone: **\$107,600**
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latine: **\$81,400**
- Hispanic or Latine: **\$64,900**
- Black alone: **\$47,400**

Source: 2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Key Demographic Takeaways

- Recent increases in the number of households along with marginal population loss indicate the formation of new, smaller households
- Racial diversity is increasing, but patterns of historic segregation remain
- An aging population continues to dominate demographic shifts
- Incomes for Black and Latine households lag those of White and Asian households

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SNAPSHOT

Cook County's economic base is established, diverse and dynamic. As of December 2024, the county's economic output was \$504.7 billion as measured in GRP, greater than the GRPs of 34 states and the District of Columbia (Lightcast). Between 2010 and 2023, county GRP grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.1% (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), Lightcast). The county accounts for a significant portion of the regional economy in terms of both GRP and jobs, comprising 63% of regional GRP and 62% of regional jobs. No single sector accounts for more than 16% of GRP or 14% of jobs, indicating the diversity of the economic base.

In 2023, the seven Chicagoland region counties and the City of Chicago formed the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) with the goal of driving inclusive economic development on a coordinated regional level. Recommendations outlined in GCEP's reports and analysis focus on the ways that each county and jurisdiction can best position itself take advantage of and build key industries that leverage the region's strengths and are poised for growth. These GCEP-identified key regional industries are: (1) manufacturing, (2)

business and professional services, (3) finance and insurance, (4) transportation, distribution and logistics (TD&L), (5) food manufacturing and innovation, and (6) life sciences. Focus group and steering committee stakeholders pointed to the formation of GCEP and its success in building partnerships across organizations and jurisdictions as one of the region's key strengths.

Total GRP (Cook County): **\$504.7 billion**

- CAGR, 2010-2023: **4.1%**
- Share of Regional GRP: **63%^x**

Figure 4. Key GCEP Industries

	Number of Jobs (2024)	Change in Jobs (2010-2024)
Business and Professional Services	248,600	+59,300
Manufacturing	173,900	-20,100
Finance and Insurance	171,100	+16,400
TD&L	157,000	+43,200
Food Manufacturing & Innovation	42,400	+7,900
Life Sciences	28,600	-2,000

Source: BEA, Lightcast (2024)

Total Businesses: **651,000**

- Nonemployer firms: **516,000** (79%)
- Firms with 1,000+ employees: **180** (0.02%)

Source: U.S. Census County Business Patterns and Nonemployer Statistics (2021)

Certified Minority or Diverse Business Enterprises: **1,925**

- Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs): **917**
- Women Business Enterprises (WBEs): **489**
- Veteran Owned Small Businesses: **48**

Source: Illinois Certified Firms Directory (as of December 2024)

Business Funding (2023): **\$22 billion**

Source: Crunchbase

Number of Postsecondary Programs (Region): **500+**

Source: GCEP

Statewide Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) Commitments:

- **50%** clean energy by 2040
- **100%** clean energy by 2050
- Contracting requirements - Minimum percentage of equity-eligible persons¹: **10-30%**

Source: Illinois Public Act 102-0662

Key Economic Development Takeaways

- The region is coordinated and focused on growing key industries (listed above).
- Diverse and minority businesses are a critical component of the business ecosystem, stimulating economic growth while also building wealth and providing opportunities for upward mobility across traditionally underrepresented communities. These include small, sole proprietor and local firms, as well as minority-, woman- and veteran-owned businesses.
- Education systems, innovation and increased business funding support growth in emerging industries like gene therapeutics, carbon capture, hydrogen energy, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.
- The statewide focus on clean energy creates opportunities to further climate resilience and equitable economic growth.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SNAPSHOT

An active and prepared workforce is integral to economic development. Employers require a skilled workforce that meets their needs, while workers and job seekers need access to education and training to help them grow within their fields or transition to new sectors or roles.

The BED Strategic Plan identifies the need to invest in economic sectors with good jobs and positive economic, environmental and social impact. Generally, “good” jobs provide living wages and opportunities for career advancement.

Cook County’s growing economy presents opportunities to further equitable, inclusive employment in key regional industries and emerging sectors through fostering connections between employers, workers and providers of education and training. Growing industries, such as clean energy, will have unique demands on the workforce, which may have gaps in training and access. Filling these gaps can expand job opportunities while also supporting economic and climate-related goals.

While the county has a strong economy, economic success has not been achieved equally. Investing in education and training opportunities, attracting jobs in high-growth industries, and addressing barriers to

¹ As defined by IL Public Act 102-0662. Equity-eligible persons include (1) graduates or participants in the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, Illinois Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program, Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program, or the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program, and the solar training pipeline and multicultural jobs program created by CEJA, (2) who are graduates of or currently enrolled in the foster care system, (3) persons who were formerly incarcerated, or (4) persons whose primary residence is in an equity eligible investment community (defined by the Illinois Power Authority).

employment can help address historic inequities and promote inclusive economic growth. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership operates one of the largest public workforce systems in the country, overseeing dozens of programs that address barriers to employment and connect residents to job opportunities.

Total Jobs (Cook County): **2,558,000**

Source: BEA (2023)

Fastest-Growing Industries by Employment (2010-2024):

- Information technology: **+84%**
- Food processing & manufacturing: **+35%**
- Transportation & logistics: **+33%**

Source: Lightcast (2024). Includes industries with at least 25,000 employees.

Percent of Population with Associate's Degree or Higher:

- Cook County overall: **62%**
- Asian alone: **79%**
- White alone: **77%**
- Black alone: **61%**
- Hispanic or Latine: **41%**

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Unemployment: **4.4%**

- State average: **4.5%**
- Black residents (Cook County): **14.2%**
- Latine residents (Cook County): **6.8%**
- Residents returning from incarceration (statewide): **46%**

Sources: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates, BLS, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

Key Workforce Development Takeaways

- Cook County employment continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, with 2023 employment at 98% of 2019 levels.
- While most high-growth occupations have wages greater than Cook County minimum living wage (per the MIT Living Wage calculator), wages tend to be lower for those that require only a high school diploma or Associate's degree.
- Unemployment, limited access to higher education, and other barriers to employment disproportionately affect Black and Latine communities.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS SNAPSHOT

Stable and affordable housing is fundamental to well-being and economic opportunity; the ability to access such housing varies by race and ethnicity. For almost one-third of Suburban Cook County households, housing costs comprise over 30% of their monthly income, indicating that they are housing cost-burdened. Housing cost burden is higher and homeownership rates are lower particularly for Black and Latine households. A Black person is more than five times as likely to experience homelessness than a White person in Cook County (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) Racial Analysis Tool 4.0.).

To address these housing challenges, the County uses a comprehensive approach to increase housing stability and prevent and end homelessness, grounded in the principle of racial equity. Focusing on the housing needs not addressed by the private market, the County prioritizes development of housing to increase the supply of affordable units and the provision of programs and services that keep residents safely and securely housed.

*Housing data is shown for **Suburban Cook County**, unless otherwise noted.*

Total Households: **936,340**

- Owners: **673,700** (72%)
- Renters: **262,630** (28%)

Homeownership Rate by Race/Ethnicity:

- White alone: **80%**
- Asian: **70%**
- Hispanic or Latine: **62%**
- Black alone: **55%**

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Median Sale Prices (2024):

- Single-family, detached homes: **\$373,000**
 - Change, 2015-2024: **+\$154,000** (+70%)
- Single-family, attached homes: **\$250,000**
 - Change, 2015-2024: **+\$112,000** (+81%)

Source: MLS

Median Rent Price (2024): **\$1,700/month**

- Change, 2015-2024: **+\$430/month** (+34%)

Source: CoStar

Cost-Burdened Households: **297,620** (32%)

- Owners: **27%**
- Renters: **45%**
- With income under \$75,000/year: **64%**
- With income \$75,000/year or greater: **9%**

Affordable Housing Gap:

- Owners
 - At 30% area median income (AMI): **27,100** fewer affordable homes than households
 - At 60% AMI: **18,700** fewer affordable homes than households
- Renters
 - At 30% AMI: **43,800** fewer affordable homes than households

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates, CoStar, SB Friedman

Residents Experiencing Homelessness (2024): **1,188**

- Chronically homeless: **18%**
- Members of households with children: **53%**
- Sheltered: **90%**
- Unsheltered: **10%**
 - Increase, 2023-2024: **+58%**

Source: Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, as of January 31, 2024 point in time count.

Key Housing and Homelessness Takeaways

- Most Suburban Cook County households are homeowners and live in detached single-family homes, though homeownership rates are lower for Black and Latine households.
- Slowing overall construction and strong market demand have driven increases in housing competition and prices.
- Almost a third of residents are housing cost-burdened, though nearly half of renters and two thirds of those with income less than \$75,000 are cost-burdened.
- There is a shortage of affordable owner- and renter-occupied homes, particularly at the lowest income levels.
- The number of unsheltered residents experiencing homelessness is increasing.

INFRASTRUCTURE SNAPSHOT

Cook County's vast infrastructure network is a foundational asset that supports businesses, organizations and residents. Passenger and freight rail, road, water and air connections are extensive and facilitate inter-county, national, and international movements of goods and people. A robust statewide energy infrastructure and focus on clean energy supports economic growth while furthering critical climate goals. County and state

commitments to environmental justice will help ensure the benefits of the clean energy economy serve populations that have faced the brunt of past and current environmental harms.

While these assets position the county for growth, gaps in transportation access, aging infrastructure, rising costs for capital projects and ongoing operations and maintenance, and the immediate and future threats posed by a changing climate pose challenges to the county today.

Commuting Patterns

- **69%** of Cook County workers also live in Cook County
- **31%** of Cook County workers live outside Cook County
- **22%** of Cook County residents work outside Cook County

Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (2022)

Public Transit

- **3** major commuter rail and bus systems (Metra, Chicago Transportation Authority and Pace)
- **90%** of regional transit trips begin or end in Cook County
- **17%** of residents commute via public transit

Highways & Roadways

- **5** major interstates
- **561 miles** of roadway under County jurisdiction

Source: Cook County Transit Plan (2023)

Other Transportation Assets

- O'Hare International Airport and Midway International Airport generate more than **\$45 billion** in annual economic activity and support **540,000** regional jobs
- Illinois International Port District generates **\$1.4 billion** in wages and contributes **\$2.4 billion** to state GRP
- **76.1 miles** of canals and altered portions of natural rivers

Sources: Chicago Department of Aviation, IDOT, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Energy Infrastructure

- Illinois ranks **5th** in the nation for energy production
- **67%** of electricity statewide comes from nuclear, wind and solar generation
- Illinois **doubled** its production of renewable energy from 2021-2023

Sources: GCEP, IL DCEO

Climate Resilience

- Core challenges include **flooding** and **increased heat**
- Illinois had the **6th** lowest number of major environmental disasters in the nation from 2018-2022

Sources: CMAP, GCEP, Greenprint

Environmental Justice

- **28%** of census tracts in Suburban Cook County are federally designated disadvantaged communities

Source: Council on Environmental Quality's Economic Justice Screening Tool

Key Infrastructure Takeaways

- Cook County has a diverse network of road, water, air and rail infrastructure.
- Strong public transit is key to supporting the county's workforce.
- Infrastructure age, project backlog and ongoing maintenance costs present significant challenges.
- Cook County is poised to become a major green energy producer.
- Cook County faces fewer disaster-related climate threats than other similarly sized metros.
- Climate resilience will require substantial infrastructure investment.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SNAPSHOT

Successful community development addresses the gaps in healthcare access, safety, social services, recreation, childcare and other factors that are fundamental to healthy and successful communities. Disparities in access to services and amenities disproportionately impact historically excluded communities and limit their economic opportunities. Individuals experiencing housing instability and other economic hardships often have compounding challenges which may include exposure to negative health and environmental conditions, difficult access to reliable transportation, or limited access to social services.

The County's community development investments and programs seek to address disparities and ensure equitable health, safety and economic outcomes for its diverse residents and communities. Dozens of nonprofits are working to reduce extraordinary costs, improve health outcomes and connect residents to economic opportunities. Numerous County programs also provide resources and assistance to improve residents' health and well-being. However, gaps in economic opportunity and health outcomes persist, and there are opportunities to better coordinate limited resources to improve residents' quality of life.

*Community development data is shown for **Suburban Cook County**, unless otherwise noted.*

Percentage of residents with a disability: **10%**

- Population 65 and over: **32%**

Percentage of residents without health insurance: **8%**

- Hispanic and Latine residents: **12%**
- Black residents: **8%**
- White residents: **5%**

Percentage of residents receiving food stamps or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP): **11%**

- See **Appendix C** for detailed information on the geographic distribution of households receiving SNAP.

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Childcare Costs

- Average annual, full-time cost at a licensed center in Cook County (one infant): **\$16,500**
- Average annual, full-time cost at a licensed center in Cook County (one preschooler): **\$11,500**
- Federal childcare affordability benchmark: no more than **7%** of family income
- Average Cook County family income spent on childcare
 - **18%** for one infant
 - **15%** for one 2-year-old

Source: 2023 Report on Childcare in Cook County

Life Expectancy

- Higher in north suburbs (around **80 years**)
- Lower in the south and west suburbs (**68-70 years**)

See **Appendix C** for detailed census tract level information on life expectancy.

Source: CDC USALEEP

Key Community Development Takeaways

- Racial and geographic disparities in healthcare and food access negatively impact quality of life and health outcomes, particularly for residents of the south and west suburbs
- Better connections to the county's vast system of parks and forest preserves can increase health benefits
- Health outcomes are closely tied to pollution and climate-related heat and flooding impacts which disproportionately burden environmental justice communities
- Accessibility improvements are needed to assist residents with disabilities and an aging population
- High childcare costs challenge workforce participation for some residents

03 SWOT Analysis

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis represents a synthesis of research, analysis, current and recent County planning initiatives, and input from critical stakeholders from a wide range of organizations across the county. Feedback was aggregated from two Steering Committee meetings, five topic-area focus groups, existing conditions research, and information provided by County staff. The following section highlights major SWOT themes that span multiple topic areas. More specific themes related to economic development, workforce development, and infrastructure are also noted, as these have the most alignment with projects and initiatives programmed through the CEDS.

A full summary of SWOT feedback from Steering Committee and focus group engagement by topic area is included in **Appendix B**.

STRENGTHS

Major Themes

- County, regional and state focus on addressing geographic gaps in investment
- Real estate and cost of living are more affordable in Cook County than similarly sized, globally connected metropolitan areas
- Numerous transportation assets, including airports, railways, interstate connections and public transit systems
- Relative climate resilience compared to other major metropolitan areas
- Strong and improved regional partnerships, engaged advocates and political will
- County interest in pilot programs and innovative solutions
- Community involvement and traction for change

Economic Development, Workforce Development and Infrastructure Themes

- Large, diverse workforce
- Diverse economic base
- Presence of top higher-education institutions and technical-education programs that produce a strong supply of local talent
- Employer commitments to equitable workplaces
- Access to broad federal, state and local funding sources
- Untapped economic potential and availability of land in south suburbs
- Strong energy infrastructure and energy price stability
- County and municipal focus on supporting green infrastructure projects to combat flooding and heat-related challenges

WEAKNESSES

Major Themes

- Racial and economic segregation
- Inequitable outcomes for residents and communities stemming from gaps in investment across the south and west suburbs
- Lack of affordable housing, particularly at the lowest income levels
- Mismatch between jobs and housing, with many workers commuting over an hour between home and work
- Lack of municipal awareness of available programs and funding
- Insufficient funding relative to increasing service needs
- Complicated jurisdictional boundaries, which can make project implementation challenging
- Geographic gaps in public transportation access

Economic Development, Workforce Development and Infrastructure Themes

- Barriers to employment that disproportionately impact underserved populations, including youth, older workers, public housing residents, disabled residents and individuals returning to their communities from incarceration
- Challenges in collaboration and data-sharing between different workforce service providers
- Insufficient engagement with the business community preventing timely development of workforce training programs
- Limited capacity for infrastructure planning and implementation within many municipalities
- Reimbursement funding structure for many programs rather than upfront funding

OPPORTUNITIES

Major Themes

- Continue coordinated, countywide focus on historically excluded communities
- Increase communication around positive progress and project successes
- Incentivize local investments in affordable housing
- Identify ways to support climate resiliency, positioning Cook County for future growth
- Leverage statewide commitments to renewable energy production
- Identify changing housing, service and infrastructure needs relevant to the aging population

Economic Development, Workforce Development and Infrastructure Themes

- Promote economic growth in priority industry clusters
- Support small and diverse businesses to build wealth and economic opportunity
- Implement better messaging around community college and technical education options for all ages
- Break down friction points to stimulate collaboration between job seekers, service providers and businesses
- Expand and/or re-tool online resources to better support job seekers
- Support childcare access
- Proactively further climate goals and equitable participation in the clean energy economy
- Continue to leverage the work of GCEP in growing the regional economy
- Build on CEJA, including growing clean energy jobs
- Leverage freshwater resources strategically to guard against overuse

THREATS

Major Themes

- Impacts of population loss on tax base and county revenues
- Rising cost of housing and limited new construction
- Vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding, with disproportionate impacts on low-income and historically excluded communities
- Capacity challenges for service providers
- Local competition for scarce resources
- Crime deters investment and community cohesiveness
- Aging infrastructure and project backlog
- Projects motivated by grant dollars rather than sustainable funding sources
- Impact of climate migration on infrastructure and service demand
- Lack of public support for projects and general mistrust of government

Economic Development, Workforce Development and Infrastructure Themes

- Employment has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels
- Geographic, racial and income disparities in unemployment
- Employer bias towards employees with a Bachelor's degree or higher
- Lack of clarity and consistency around existing workforce program administration and funding requirements
- Stagnant wages for many residents relative to increasing cost of living
- Commercial and retail obsolescence

04 STRATEGIC DIRECTION, ACTION PLAN AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The strategic direction for Uplift Cook reflects the mission and vision outlined by BED.

MISSION: Enhance quality of life for Cook County residents through transformative and equitable community and economic development.

VISION: Achieve equitable economic vitality by increasing resiliency, investing in community-driven solutions, and catalyzing investment.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Findings from analyses, SWOT feedback, focus groups, and past plan reviews were utilized to create draft goals, objectives and strategies, which were then updated following review and feedback from the Steering Committee and County staff. These goals, objectives and strategies constitute Uplift Cook's strategic framework. They align with the goals and strategies outlined in the BED Strategic Plan, the Policy Roadmap and other County plans, and expand on those where applicable.

Alignment with the BED Strategic Plan

Demonstrating this alignment with other County plans, **the intersection between Uplift Cook's strategies and the BED Strategic Plan pillars of residents, communities, businesses and systems change is noted.** Additionally, all BED strategies under the residents, communities and business pillars are included within Uplift Cook's strategic framework as they are written in the BED Strategic Plan.

The strategies that fall under the BED **systems change pillar** are essential to advance all the County's work across each of Uplift Cook's five topic areas. For this reason, they have not been included as standalone strategies within the Uplift Cook strategic framework. However, many of Uplift Cook's strategies align closely with BED's work to advance systems change across County economic and community development programs, policies and internal processes. These intersections are noted in the strategic framework.

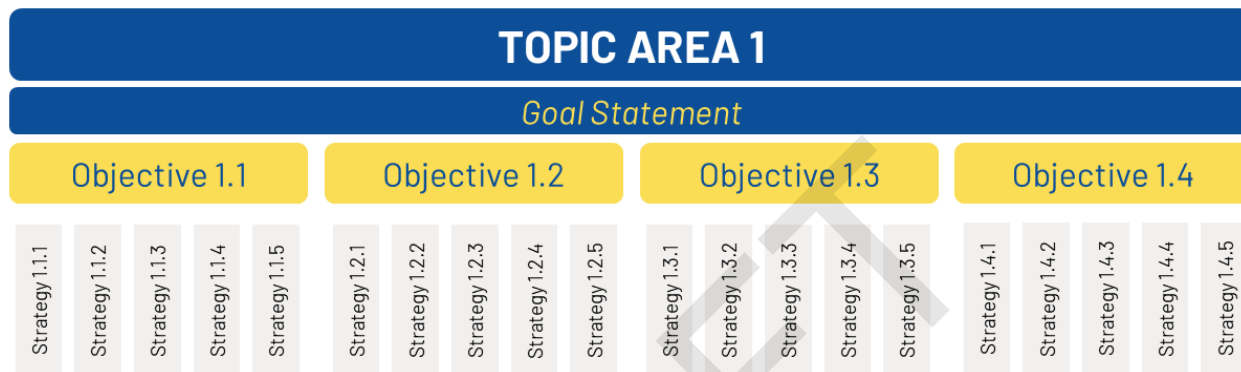
The critical, cross-cutting strategies that fall under the BED systems change pillar are:

- Support economic and community development in unincorporated Cook County;
- Employ equitable and inclusive policies and practices for strategic decision making, implementation and resource allocation;
- Implement effective, transparent and innovative programs; and
- Support and expand partnerships at all levels.

Overview of Strategic Framework Organization

Each of Uplift Cook's five topic areas—economic development, workforce development, housing and homelessness, infrastructure, and community development—have individual goal statements that outline the County's overarching vision for each area. Each topic area goal then contains several objectives, each of which addresses a different avenue for advancing the goal. Finally, strategies represent prioritized steps that can be undertaken to progress the objectives and goals. Goals, objectives and strategies are organized under the format shown in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5. Strategic Framework Organization



ACTION PLAN & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

BED has a wide array of existing and forthcoming programs aimed at tackling the goals outlined in Uplift Cook's strategic framework. Descriptions of current and future priority programs—constituting concrete, measurable actions—are provided within the strategic framework. Relevant County performance measures, partners and funding sources are also identified for these programs. **All programs are assumed to be implemented in the near term.** While the priority programs do not represent the entirety of potential actions the County could take to advance the goals of Uplift Cook, they constitute priority focus areas. The County will continue to collaborate with community stakeholders and partner organizations to identify mechanisms to advance the plan's goals.

GOAL 1 | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal Statement: Foster inclusive, resilient economic growth that creates opportunities for all residents and businesses to thrive.

Objective 1.1 Champion a regional approach to grow the economy and advance racial and economic equity.

Strategies:

- 1.1.1 Facilitate collaboration across public, private and nonprofit sectors to advance regional economic vitality, with particular emphasis on uplifting disinvested communities. [\[Businesses\]](#)
- 1.1.2 Attract, retain and expand businesses by facilitating redevelopment and reactivating markets. [\[Businesses\]](#)
- 1.1.3 Increase communication around positive progress, project successes and regional cross-sector collaboration. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 1.1.4 Collaborate with regional and community partners to establish a framework to evaluate policies and resource allocation from an equity lens and build community trust. [\[Systems\]](#)

Objective 1.2 Invest in economic sectors with good jobs and positive economic, environmental and social impact.

Strategies:

- 1.2.1 Grow the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) to further strengthen competitiveness, resilience and alignment around key sectors and facilitate growth in emerging industries. [\[Businesses\]](#)
- 1.2.2 Invest in infrastructure that boosts equitable economic growth, supports businesses in priority industries, and facilitates better connections between jobs and residents. [\[Businesses / Residents\]](#)
- 1.2.3 Align workforce programs and investments to priority industries and growing green economy sectors. [\[Businesses\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Manufacturing Reinvented

Working with expert technical advisors, this program helps manufacturers develop custom solutions to improve their operational efficiency and capacity. Upon completion of the project, the County reimburses the business for up to \$25,000 of approved expenses. Eligible projects include services like a cybersecurity risk assessment, search engine optimization or support for talent solutions. This program received national recognition from multiple organizations including the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Foundation of Manufacturing Excellence.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Projects completed and underway
- Projects by type
- \$ amount in reimbursements to manufacturers
- Manufacturers engaging in program

PARTNERS:

- Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC)

Objective 1.3 Grow the small business ecosystem, support innovation and entrepreneurship, and reduce the racial wealth gap.

Strategies:

1.3.1 Provide resources to grow a pipeline of small, diverse and/or minority-owned businesses with the capacity to procure private-sector and government contracts. [\[Businesses\]](#)

1.3.2 Build and maintain a network of organizations and partners that can support small businesses in Cook County. [\[Businesses\]](#)

1.3.3 Improve access to capital for small, diverse and minority-owned businesses to reduce barriers to business formation and market entry. [\[Businesses\]](#)

1.3.4 Provide services related to succession planning, shared-ownership models and/or other business operation models that build and sustain wealth. [\[Businesses\]](#)

1.3.5 Invest in business development initiatives that create meaningful job opportunities in areas of high unemployment. [\[Businesses / Residents\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Cook County Small Business Source

The Small Business Source strives to support, grow and elevate small businesses by providing no-cost business advising, resources, events and grants. Its network of business-support organizations includes over 50 community partners, with funding from the State of Illinois Community Navigator Program and We Rise Together, who provide expert advising, marketing and outreach and grant-application support services for small businesses.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of businesses receiving one-on-one, no-cost business advising services
- Number of small businesses attending events
- Number of businesses served that are owned by people of color
- Number of businesses served that are owned by women

PARTNERS:

- Women's Business Development Center

FUNDING SOURCES:

- US EDA, IL DCEO, State of Illinois Community Navigator Program, We Rise Together, private investment, philanthropy

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Supplier Finance Fund

Establish a supplier finance program, creating a loan loss reserve fund that incentivizes nonprofit community lenders to lend to supplier businesses and to offer innovative financial products tailored to supplier businesses. The program aims to alleviate supplier-specific challenges, such as shortages in working capital needed to deliver on a contract and cash flow enhancement given challenging payment time frames.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of contracts secured through program lending
- Total dollars of investment secured through program lending

PARTNERS:

- IL DCEO, Chicago Community Loan Fund, The Chicago Community Trust, Allies for Community Business, WBDC, Somercor, commercial banks, local banks

FUNDING SOURCES:

- US EDA, IL DCEO, CDFIs

Objective 1.4 Promote environmental sustainability in economic development initiatives

Strategies:

1.4.1 Incorporate environmental impact as a key criterion when making policy and economic development decisions and a metric for success. [\[Systems\]](#)

1.4.2 Reduce barriers to participating in the green energy economy, particularly for small and minority businesses. [\[Businesses\]](#)

1.4.3 Increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in businesses, residences and governments through direct funding and technical assistance. [\[Systems\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Solar Synergy Initiative

Establish the Chicagoland Solar Collaborative, an industry sector partnership to improve on-ramps for business and individuals seeking access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Fill a recognized void in the solar ecosystem to convene align, and leverage diverse stakeholders. Provide business-advising services to entrepreneurs interested in accessing the solar installation marketplace. Address the need for trained solar panel installers in Cook County.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of workers trained, hired and retained
- Percentage of workers who are Black, Latine or women
- Percentage of workers hired to union jobs
- Number of businesses connected to contractor accelerators

PARTNERS:

- Hire360, OAI, WBC, Network of Employer-Led Workforce Solutions (NEWS)

FUNDING SOURCES:

- US Department of Energy (won)

Objective 1.5 Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth in historically marginalized communities.

Strategies:

- 1.5.1 Provide resources and support to local governments in historically disinvested areas to facilitate equitable economic growth and mitigate historic inequities. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 1.5.2 Attract businesses and focus economic development investments in areas with target workforce. [\[Businesses / Residents\]](#)
- 1.5.3 Invest in the improvement of undeveloped or under-developed land to promote community and economic vitality. [\[Communities\]](#)

GOAL 2 | WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Goal Statement: Promote pathways to good jobs that support economic mobility for residents and meet the needs of employers.

Objective 2.1 Align investments and incentives to intentionally support access to high-quality jobs that promote economic mobility and equity.

Strategies:

- 2.1.1 Meet the talent needs of employers in key sectors to increase opportunity for and access to good jobs. [\[Businesses / Residents\]](#)
- 2.1.2 Increase workforce development funding available to local businesses that provide jobs to historically excluded communities. [\[Businesses\]](#)
- 2.1.3 Support investments in affordable, high-quality transit, particularly in high-unemployment areas across southern and western Cook County. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 2.1.4 Incentivize affordable housing development in areas well-served by public transit and/or near job concentrations. [\[Systems\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Good Jobs Chicagoland

Implements customized, employer-led training programs to upskill current workers and onboard new hires. BED formed an innovative partnership with NIMS, a 501(c)3 focused on developing and maintaining a globally competitive workforce, to offer manufacturers credentials and On-the-Job Training (OJT) through Smart Training Solutions. The program offers career advancement, financial coaching, wage increases and supportive services.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of employers engaged by sector
- Total funding provided
- Number of employees trained
- Number of employees retained and promoted/upskilled

PARTNERS:

- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, NIMS, OAI

FUNDING SOURCES:

- US EDA Good Jobs Challenge Grant (won)

Objective 2.2 Foster partnerships between employers, workforce service providers and job seekers.

Strategies:

2.2.1 Facilitate connections between workforce development providers and underserved populations or those facing barriers to employment, including youth, older workers, public housing residents, disabled residents and individuals returning to their communities from incarceration.

[\[Residents\]](#)

2.2.2 Expand service integration across agencies and educational institutions, including the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Chicago Jobs Council, City Colleges of Chicago, and others to increase program access for underserved populations and communities. [\[Residents\]](#)

2.2.3 Work with service providers to reduce friction points that challenge collaboration between organizations, job seekers and businesses. [\[Businesses / Residents\]](#)

2.2.4 Expand outreach to employers to proactively establish workforce pipelines in advance of projects. [\[Businesses\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Road Home

This program offers justice-involved individuals living in suburban Cook County a suite of services to facilitate re-entry into the community as well as stable employment. Resources provided include career coaching, job training and legal support, networking opportunities, and introductions to employers.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Percent of participants advancing to paid work experience
- Percent of participants completing paid work experience

PARTNERS:

- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Phalanx Family Services, Safer Foundation, Cook County Justice Advisory Council (JAC)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Cook County Manufacturing Accelerator

The Manufacturing Apprenticeship Accelerator was established to address the biggest hurdle manufacturers face—hiring and retaining talent. Cook County partnered with Skills for Chicagoland's Future to provide manufacturers with a "concierge service" to identify and screen candidates for employment. Apprentices are also provided with supportive services for 90 days after being hired. To be eligible, manufacturers must have a facility in Cook County and offer:

- an "earn and learn" model;
- an industry-focused on-the-job training plan or curriculum;
- the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials; and
- a salary increase upon completion.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of workers trained, hired and retained

PARTNERS:

- Skills for Chicagoland's Future

FUNDING SOURCES:

- US EDA, IL DCEO

Objective 2.3 Strengthen internal County processes and policies to support current workers, job seekers and workforce partners.

Strategies:

2.3.1 Create educational materials for partner organizations to increase clarity around existing workforce program administration and funding requirements. [\[Businesses\]](#)

2.3.2 Advance data infrastructure and technologies to increase awareness of job availabilities, prioritizing jobs in target industries. [\[Businesses\]](#)

2.3.3 Evaluate job retention and career growth as key metrics for workforce program success in addition to job placement. [\[Businesses\]](#)

2.3.4 Strengthen and enforce Cook County's worker protection laws to ensure all workers receive fair compensation and protection from violations. [\[Businesses\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Innovation Nexus

The Nexus is a collaborative project made up of many different stakeholders in the workforce development, education and business communities within Cook County. The Nexus's goal is to create innovative, tech-driven solutions for shared workforce challenges. The two main projects hosted and maintained by the Nexus in collaboration with Nexus members include Chicagoland CareerPathways and Talent Solutions Connector. Developing new sector partnerships is a current priority.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Member organizations by sector
- Number of referrals from project platforms

PARTNERS:

- Forefront, Chicago Workforce Funder Alliance (CWFA), Origami Works Foundation

GOAL 3 | HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Goal Statement: Provide a continuum of quality, affordable housing for all.

Objective 3.1 Develop and increase funding and its flexibility for affordable housing types, ensuring investments are community-driven and maximize impact.

Strategies:

- 3.1.1** Increase Cook County resources to create new units of affordable housing across Cook County to promote housing stability and affordability. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.1.2** Support and incentivize local investments in affordable housing in areas with strong access to jobs, transit, community amenities and other assets, with a particular focus on housing for residents with incomes under 60% AMI. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.1.3** Increase affordable homeownership programs to help increase family stability and address the racial wealth gap. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.1.4** Improve the condition and preserve affordability of the unsubsidized affordable housing stock in disinvested areas of Cook County. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 3.1.5** Identify opportunities for hotel- and office-to-residential conversions to increase the supply of affordable housing. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.1.6** Explore new financing and ownership models such as public banks and social housing. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 3.1.7** Incentivize local zoning reform that allows more housing to be built as-of-right. [\[Residents\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: The HOME Investment Partnerships Program

The HOME Investment Partnerships Program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and supports creation or preservation of affordable housing units. The County typically fills a funding gap to support the construction of new or renovation of existing affordable rental housing that serves priority groups like seniors, veterans, low-income residents and those with disabilities. The County partners with the State, developers, local governments and others to leverage the County's investment and increase the supply of affordable housing.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of units developed

PARTNERS:

- Developers, local governments

FUNDING SOURCES:

- HUD HOME

Objective 3.2 Transform the County's services for the unhoused to achieve housing security for our most vulnerable residents.

Strategies:

- 3.2.1** Identify opportunities for temporary and permanent hotel conversions to increase shelter capacity for people experiencing homelessness. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.2.2** Build a more resilient housing and shelter system to provide dignified and reliable support to people experiencing homelessness. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.2.3** Collaborate with housing and homelessness service providers to continue to streamline and improve comprehensive referral systems. [\[Residents\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Fixed-Site Emergency Shelter for People Experiencing Homelessness

Building on the success of the emergency hotel-based shelter program, the County is funding the acquisition and renovation of existing hotels into fixed-site shelters, dedicated to serving homeless residents. These facilities offer a stable place to stay as well as wrap-around services such as mental and physical health supports, employment services, and pro-bono legal consultation.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Percent of residents exiting to stable housing

PARTNERS:

- Connections for the Homeless, Housing Forward, South Suburban PADS, BEDS Plus

FUNDING SOURCES:

- IL DHS, HUD ESG, CDBG-DR

Objective 3.3 Fund programs and provide capacity building support to improve housing outcomes and build economic opportunity.

Strategies:

- 3.3.1** Develop innovative policies and programs to assist communities and residents that have been impacted by predatory lending, investor acquisitions of previously owner-occupied housing, and/or landlord housing discrimination. [\[Residents / Communities\]](#)
- 3.3.2** Provide support and technical assistance for small and minority-led housing developers. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 3.3.3** Provide more funding to programs that support financial education, credit counseling and homebuyer education. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.3.4** Implement property tax reforms to limit the degree to which reduced assessments as a result of high vacancy disincentivize investment. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 3.3.5** Support collaborative efforts to reform Cook County's property assessment and taxation system to promote equity and fairness and reduce the racial wealth gap. [\[Systems\]](#)

Objective 3.4 Advocate for fair housing policies and streamline communications around programs and data.

Strategies:

- 3.4.1** Coordinate with providers to develop efficient data management systems to track the inventory of publicly assisted housing and client needs. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.4.2** Increase education and communication to tenants and property managers around current housing programs and resources and build an open dialogue that can spur mutually beneficial solutions to housing challenges. [\[Residents / Communities\]](#)
- 3.4.3** Advocate for state-level policy changes to increase availability of affordable units and protect the most vulnerable residents. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.4.4** Increase education, publicity and coordination around state and federal funding sources. [\[Residents\]](#)

Objective 3.5 Support environmental sustainability and positive health outcomes through housing investments and policies.

Strategies:

- 3.5.1** Continue energy efficiency programs that reduce housing-related costs and reliance on non-renewable energy sources. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 3.5.2** Fund code enforcement programs that proactively identify and address key issues in older homes that lead to negative health impacts. [\[Residents\]](#)

GOAL 4 | INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal Statement: Leverage infrastructure investments to promote resiliency, accessibility and equitable economic growth.

Objective 4.1 Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth.

Strategies:

- 4.1.1 Prioritize transportation and infrastructure investments that increase residents' access to economic opportunities and jobs. *[Residents]*
- 4.1.2 Facilitate efficient multimodal transportation of goods and people within and beyond Cook County to encourage economic growth and community vitality. *[Residents / Businesses]*
- 4.1.3 Encourage equitable transit-oriented development, including through regulatory support and economic development incentives. *[Systems]*
- 4.1.4 Connect infrastructure maintenance and land use development efforts to employment and job training opportunities for residents, especially those from historically disinvested communities. *[Residents / Businesses]*
- 4.1.5 Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure to address decades of disinvestment in historically excluded communities. *[Communities]*

Objective 4.2 Promote environmental sustainability in infrastructure, reduce contribution to climate change, and invest in mitigation.

Strategies:

- 4.2.1 Increase availability of and access to open spaces, greenways and trails, prioritizing areas where open space is currently limited. *[Communities]*
- 4.2.2 Invest in transportation systems that decrease emissions. *[Communities]*
- 4.2.3 Integrate sustainability metrics into Cook County purchasing and operations. *[Systems]*
- 4.2.4 Protect freshwater resources to proactively guard against overuse and potential climate impacts. *[Communities]*
- 4.2.5 Coordinate the development of water infrastructure projects to improve drinking water and stormwater management. *[Communities]*
- 4.2.6 Partner with municipalities and community-based organizations to build regional capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change. *[Communities]*

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE)

Launched in 2021, the Cook County C-PACE program offers long-term, fixed-rate financing for investments in energy efficiency, water conservation, electric-vehicle charging and more. Funding comes from private capital providers—with over \$13 million provided through 2023 to complete three projects.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Amount of funding disbursed by project type
- Private investment leveraged

PARTNERS:

- Illinois Energy Conservation Authority

FUNDING SOURCES:

- Private investment

Objective 4.3 Increase regional accessibility and connectivity by investing in sustainable infrastructure throughout Cook County.

Strategies:

- 4.3.1** Increase access, availability and affordability of public transit, bicycle, electric vehicles and pedestrian infrastructure to connect communities and ensure transit equity. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 4.3.2** Provide technical assistance and funding to municipalities to promote seamless transportation throughout the region. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 4.3.3** Fund projects through partnership with jurisdictions that include improvements to street lighting, sidewalk installation, pedestrian crossings and bus stop infrastructure on transit corridors. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 4.3.4** Coordinate with public entities and transit agencies to improve ADA accessibility in public buildings and transit. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 4.3.5** Increase access to broadband infrastructure and digital devices for residents, particularly communities of color, through infrastructure projects and strategic partnerships. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 4.3.6** Continue to engage with regional partners to establish a coordinated approach for infrastructure investments. [\[Systems\]](#)

Objective 4.4 Leverage existing infrastructure assets and available financial resources to attract future investment and facilitate equitable implementation.

Strategies:

- 4.4.1** Identify, publicize and pursue all relevant federal and state funding programs, supporting historically excluded communities in accessing resources. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 4.4.2** Strengthen regional partnerships to align on key infrastructure projects and increase funding competitiveness. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 4.4.3** Continue subrecipient and partner capacity building efforts related to compliance and reporting for major federal grants. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 4.4.3** Support greater utilization and investment in existing infrastructure. [\[Systems\]](#)

GOAL 5 | COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Goal Statement: Build healthy, connected, and sustainable communities where residents have equitable access to services and amenities.

Objective 5.1 Foster a community-centered, equity-based approach to implement community development and economic revitalization.

Strategies:

5.1.1 Build up capacity of and support local non-profits to grow self-sustaining, community-based institutions. [\[Communities\]](#)

5.1.2 Build capacity of and support local governments to achieve locally desired economic and community development goals. [\[Communities\]](#)

5.1.3 Promote better access to and coordinate social services for residents. [\[Residents\]](#)

5.1.4 Improve communications with residents, paying special attention to those with unique needs related to disability, language and other barriers. [\[Residents\]](#)

5.1.5 Improve community engagement by involving community members and stakeholders in an authentic way that centers them in processes and informs planning. [\[Communities\]](#)

5.1.6 Utilize innovative practices to streamline the procurement process to make it more efficient and accessible. [\[Businesses\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Community Information Exchange (CIE)

Cook County is in the process of building out a Community Information Exchange (CIE). The CIE will serve as a care management hub, allowing case workers and service providers from different organizations to securely and safely share information. This helps them deliver more responsive and effective care for people who face multiple, often related, challenges (for example, food insecurity, unstable housing and access to health care). Next steps include building out technology platform and launch pilot, evaluating and refining pilot, and expanding with new partners and use cases.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of clients served

PARTNERS:

- Illinois Public Health Institute, Chicago Department of Public Health

FUNDING SOURCES:

- Cook County Equity Fund

Objective 5.2 Advance environmental justice to address historical injustices and promote environmental equity.

Strategies:

- 5.2.1 Identify community environmental assets and vulnerabilities and address priority needs, including developing programs that reduce exposure to pollution, with priority given to environmental justice areas. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.2.2 Continue to convene the County's environmental justice working group and establish a long-term external working group to provide community-driven feedback and evaluate progress. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 5.2.3 Perform a thorough assessment of County programs and policies through the lens of the County's environmental justice policy to ensure that all internal practices align with environmental justice goals. [\[Systems\]](#)
- 5.2.4 Minimize environmental impacts of facilities by adopting technology that reduces energy and water consumption, minimizes toxics use and output and diverts waste. [\[Communities\]](#)

Objective 5.3 Promote residents' economic security and increase economic mobility.

Strategies:

- 5.3.1 Continue advocacy and identify dedicated funding streams for guaranteed income program. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 5.3.2 Expand access to legal aid for Cook County residents. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 5.3.3 Continue to provide utility assistance to low-income households. [\[Residents\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt (CCLAHD)

Launched in November 2020, CCLAHD provides free legal aid, mediation services and case management for tenants facing evictions, landlords in disputes, property owners behind in mortgage or tax payments, and individuals struggling with consumer debt issues. The County partners with the City of Chicago's right to counsel program to seamlessly and fully serve residents.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of residents assisted with legal aid
- Rate of court-ordered evictions

PARTNERS:

- Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Housing Development Authority, Circuit Court of Cook County

FUNDING SOURCES:

- Cook County Equity Fund, Circuit Court of Cook County, state funding

Objective 5.4 Promote health equity through policies and partnerships that support healthcare access and improved health outcomes.

Strategies:

- 5.4.1** Reduce barriers to accessing health services for all residents, particularly members of historically excluded communities. [\[Residents\]](#)
- 5.4.2** Deepen relationships and foster authentic dialogue with community-based organizations, advocacy groups, healthcare providers, government agencies, residents and other partners for increased collaboration and capacity to advance health equity. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.4.3** Coordinate a continuum of services and programs and work across jurisdictions to reduce behavioral health inequities. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.4.4** Ensure that access to emergency response resources and capabilities are equitably distributed throughout the County. [\[Residents / Communities\]](#)
- 5.4.5** Develop equitable, healthy and sustainable local food systems that reduce food insecurity, encourage resident health, and create economic opportunity within historically excluded communities. [\[Residents / Communities\]](#)

PRIORITY PROGRAM: LeadCare Cook County

Cook County has one of the highest counts of lead service lines (LSLs) in the country. These lines connect water mains to a home's water supply. LSLs leach lead into water and pose a particular danger to children's development. The cost to replace all LSLs in Cook County is estimated to be \$8 billion, with need vastly outstripping resources. LeadCare Cook County was launched in June 2023 and prioritized providing free LSL replacements for licensed home-based daycares in suburban Cook County to maximize the reduction of harm to children. The program covers all costs, including restoration and clean-up expenses.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- Number of childcare providers served
- Number of children served by providers receiving new lines

PARTNERS:

- Elevate Energy

Objective 5.5 Facilitate and invest in comprehensive and coordinated approaches to proactively address violence and improve safety in highly impacted communities.

Strategies:

- 5.5.1** Support community-based partners with planning, resources and response capabilities to address root causes of violence and reduce reliance on the legal system. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.5.2** Invest in a public health approach to reduce gun violence, and coordinate and integrate efforts across the county. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.5.3** Expand investment in community-based organizations focused on re-entry support and survivor services. [\[Communities\]](#)
- 5.5.4** Better meet the needs of residents involved in the legal system by coordinating efforts across governmental entities, impacted communities, and people with lived experience. [\[Residents / Communities\]](#)

APPENDIX A | Plans, Reports, and Data Reviewed

KEY REPORTS AND PLANS

- Cook County Policy Roadmap (2024-2027)
- Cook County BED Strategic Plan (2024-2027)
- Cook County BED Impact Report (2023)
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act LWIA 7 Local Plan (2024-2028)
- Cook County Equity Fund Report (2022)
- Cook County Transit Plan (2023)
- Cook County Draft Environmental Justice Policy Framework (2024)
- Cook County Digital Equity Plan (2023)
- Open for Business: Illinois' 2024 Economic Growth Plan
- GCEP Asset Map (2023)
- GCEP Economic Dashboard reports (2023-2024)
- GCEP Chicagoland's Economic Landscape (2023)
- WBC High-Growth Industries in Chicagoland (2023)
- CMAP ON TO 2050
- Illinois Homelessness Mortality and Morbidity Report (2017-2022)

OTHER REPORTS AND PARTNER DATA

- CMAP Job Quality and Access dashboard (2023)
- CMAP Inclusive Growth Analysis Summary of Findings (2022)
- Cook County BED Strategic Plan - stakeholder focus group comments (2024)
- Cook County Business Diversity Report (2022)
- Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (DOT) Transportation Improvement Plan (2024-2028)
- Cook County Economic Development Advisory Committee Update on Access to Capital initiative (2024)
- Cook County Housing Policy Brief (2024)
- Cook County Policy Roadmap crosswalk to BED Strategic Plan (2024)
- GCEP economic and workforce data (2024)
- GCEP Sector Analysis (August 2024)
- IDOT Illinois International Port District Profile (2021)
- Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority "Employment of Individuals After Release from Illinois Prisons: Employee Characteristics, Occupations, and Wages" (2023)
- Illinois workforce tax credits, subsidized wages, and training programs compilation, provided by BED (2024)
- Moving to Implementation (Cook County 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan and CEDS)
- Planning for Progress (Cook County 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan and CEDS)
- Report on Childcare in Cook County (2023)

APPENDIX B | Engagement Summary

DRAFT



Uplift Cook

2025-29 Consolidated Plan & Comprehensive
Economic Development Strategy | Cook County, IL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

September - December 2024 | Round #1

Introduction

Cook County and its partners are working together on the **2025-29 Consolidated Plan & Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy** of Cook County, Illinois, collectively referred to as “Uplift Cook.” This initiative aims to proactively plan for economic development, housing, infrastructure improvements, and social services throughout the county.

Between September and December 2024, the Uplift Cook team led engagement and communications outreach, utilizing diverse methods to engage stakeholders in the topic areas of economic development, workforce development, housing and homelessness, infrastructure, and community development. The team also helped to build momentum around the planning process and foster meaningful partnerships to support the development, adoption, and implementation of Uplift Cook. This summary presents an account of the team’s engagement activities, including insights gleaned from stakeholder feedback.

Round #1 Engagement	October 2024	November 2024	December 2024
Steering Committee Meetings			
Focus Groups (Topic-based)			

Methodology

To effectively engage the community, the Uplift Cook project team developed an Engagement & Communications Strategy that leveraged a mix of in-person and digital methods to amplify diverse voices across the county.

Phase 1 & 2

- **Steering Committee Meetings:** Regular interactive workshops with key stakeholders to provide strategic direction, promote collaboration, and align efforts with community priorities.
- **Focus Groups (Topic-based Stakeholders):** Facilitated discussions with stakeholders from various topic areas to explore key issues in-depth, gather feedback, and identify actionable insights.

Phase 2

- **Focus Groups (Specific Populations):** Focused sessions with historically excluded community groups and other specific population groups to ensure that their unique experiences and perspectives were captured.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** One-on-one interviews with community leaders, service providers, and other relevant stakeholders to deepen understanding of local needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Public Hearings:** Public-facing meeting where the community can share their opinions, ask questions, and provide feedback on the Uplift Cook initiative.

The project team also ensured that engagement activities included clear instructions and actionable asks for participants, with regular feedback loops that connected participants’ input to decision-making processes. This approach helped ensure that engagement efforts were not only inclusive but also transparent and impactful.

Throughout all the engagement methods mentioned above, the following goals were prioritized:

- ***Build momentum and excitement around the countywide initiative to support the adoption/implementation of the Five-year Plan.***
- ***Emphasize the initiative's significance and its potential to positively impact current and future residents and visitors of Cook County.***
- ***Leverage community partners to connect with a diverse range of organizations that represent the county's demographics.***
- ***Cultivate trust and establish strong partnerships within the Steering Committee and beyond to ensure meaningful and enduring collaboration.***
- ***Promote focus group participation through effective communication and inclusive engagement opportunities.***
- ***Ensure transparency throughout the planning process.***

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee serves as Uplift Cook's primary advisory source. As leaders in housing, economic development, and community development in Cook County, the committee members meet at key milestones throughout the planning process to lend their expertise and provide strategic direction. The Steering Committee is composed of representatives from regional planning bodies, community organizations and nonprofits, business leadership, and other key practitioners and advocates across the county.

- 100 Black Men of Chicago, Inc.
- Blue Eddy Community Advisors LLC
- Cabanban, Rubin, & Mayberry Commercial Realty
- CEDA (Community & Economic Development Authority of Cook County)
- Chicago Community Loan Fund
- Chicago Community Trust (CCT)
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
- City of Chicago Planning & Development (DPD)
- Community Investment Corporation (CIC)
- Cook County Health Department
- Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA)
- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership
- Economic Development Advisory Committee/ Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP
- Housing Action Illinois
- Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC)
- John and Katherine T MacArthur Foundation
- Karry L. Young Development, LLC
- Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC)
- Somercor
- South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
- The Chicago Cook Workforce (The Partnership)
- University of Chicago (UC)
- University of Illinois Chicago (UIC)
- Women's Business Development Center
- World Business Chicago

SWOT Analysis

The Uplift Cook team collaborated with the Steering Committee and focus group participants to conduct a SWOT analysis to develop insights into Cook County’s current context and inform the plan’s strategic direction. The analysis identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats across the plan’s five topic areas. The emerging themes were then categorized based on their topic areas and respective sources.

Steering Committee Meeting #1

Date: Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Location: George W Dunne Cook County Office Building, Chicago, IL

Attendance: 33 (19 committee members & 14 County staffers)

During the first Steering Committee meeting, the Uplift Cook team introduced the project, highlighted the regional successes of the last five years, and guided members through a SWOT analysis across the topic areas. The following pages include a summary of this collaborative exercise.





Housing & Homelessness

- **Affordable Housing Shortage & Inequities:** There is a critical shortage of affordable housing, especially for low- and moderate-income individuals. Many units are not ADA accessible, and rising rents and high property taxes exacerbate housing insecurity, particularly across the south and west suburbs. There is also a need for more housing options for moderate-income families.
- **Coordination & Collaboration for Housing Solutions:** Effective coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, developers, and community organizations, is essential for addressing housing challenges. This includes ensuring that funding initiatives are better aligned across sectors and promoting intergovernmental and inter-organizational collaboration to create sustainable housing solutions.
- **Barriers to Housing Development:** High construction costs, limited access to financing, and local opposition (NIMBYism) are key barriers to the development of affordable housing. There is a strong interest in exploring new financing models, such as public banks or social housing, and more support and technical assistance for small and emerging developers is needed to overcome these obstacles.
- **Homelessness Prevention & Support for Unhoused Residents:** There was a strong focus on addressing homelessness through prevention and a better understanding of root causes. Recommendations were made for more targeted solutions to reduce homelessness, including donations and assistance based on immediate needs and enhancing legal support for residents facing discrimination from landlords.



Community Development

- **Coordination & Integration of Services:** A key theme was the need for better coordination of services, particularly in low- and moderate-income areas. Creating a “one-stop shop” for resources would improve accessibility and reduce duplication, making it easier for residents to access the support they need.
- **Efficient Resource Allocation:** There was a strong emphasis on allocating financial resources and human capital more efficiently and equitably. This included targeting funding to specific initiatives that will have the most significant impact and avoiding wasteful or duplicative efforts, especially in areas with limited resources.
- **Community Connectivity & Green Infrastructure:** Integrating green infrastructure into community development projects may strengthen community connections and improve quality of life. It was seen as a way to foster environmental sustainability while uniting communities through shared projects.



Workforce Development

- **Access to Affordable Housing & Living Wage Jobs:** There is a significant need for affordable housing, especially for young adults and families. At the same time, wages must be aligned with the cost of living. Many entry-level jobs do not pay enough to support families, highlighting the need for living wages to ensure economic stability. Employment has also not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Workforce Mobility & Job Accessibility:** Participants noted that residents in the south suburbs face challenges accessing major job centers. Many must travel long distances to find quality employment, especially in areas with limited public transit options.
- **Educational & Training Opportunities:** Steering Committee members expressed a desire to see traditional and non-traditional educational pathways expanded to help upskill the workforce. Partnerships between educational institutions and workforce development organizations were viewed as essential for providing relevant training and career advancement opportunities, especially for young adults with caregiving responsibilities.
- **Partnerships & Specialized Funding for Workforce Development:** There were calls for stronger partnerships between workforce development organizations, businesses, and public agencies. Specialized funding for these organizations is critical to expand their capacity and support sustainable workforce growth that balances economic and social needs.



Infrastructure

- **Aging Infrastructure & Maintenance Challenges:** Key infrastructure, including water, sewer, and transportation systems, is deteriorating, and maintaining these assets is becoming increasingly difficult due to limited funding and shrinking local tax bases.
- **Transit & Transportation Strengths:** Cook County benefits from a robust infrastructure system, including a well-developed rail network with six Class 1 railroads and two major airports, making it a key national and international transportation hub. However, the challenge lies in maintaining and upgrading these systems to keep pace with demand.
- **Equitable Access to Resources & Infrastructure:** Disparities in infrastructure across regions should be addressed, particularly in flood-prone areas in the south suburbs and in expanding high-speed broadband to underserved areas. Additionally, communities need better access to federal funding and tools like CDBG to revitalize underutilized parcels.
- **Environmental & Environmental Justice Issues:** Concerns over brownfields, environmental hazards, and flood risks were prominent, particularly in underinvested areas. Replacing lead service lines and addressing environmental justice issues are critical to improving infrastructure and public health, particularly for historically excluded communities.



Economic Development

- **Manufacturing Growth & Challenges:** Focus on balancing the maintenance of existing manufacturing infrastructure while expanding activities, particularly in the south suburbs. Support is needed to access low-cost financing for manufacturers and address land use conflicts between manufacturing and residential areas.
- **Small Business Succession Planning:** Many small businesses in Cook County lack a succession plan, highlighting the need for support and resources to help ensure their continued success and sustainability.
- **Labor Force Participation & Workforce Development:** Low labor force participation among young adults, compounded by a history of offshoring, has led to an untapped but underutilized workforce. There is a need to bridge this gap and ensure that the workforce is willing and able to fill available manufacturing jobs.
- **Transportation & Access to Manufacturing Corridors:** There were reports of challenges with last-mile access to manufacturing corridors, particularly regarding transportation infrastructure, which needs to be addressed to improve accessibility for manufacturers and workers alike.

Meeting Icebreaker



Focus Groups | Topic-based Stakeholders

The Uplift Cook team facilitated the first round of focus group discussions in October and November 2024. The focus groups were conducted virtually over Zoom and designed to obtain broader feedback from County departments, practitioners, and stakeholders. The discussions were organized around five (5) topic areas.

Focus Group 1: [Housing & Homelessness](#) (Tuesday, October 29, 2024)

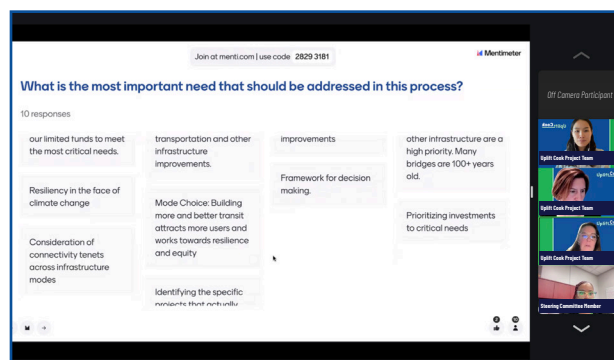
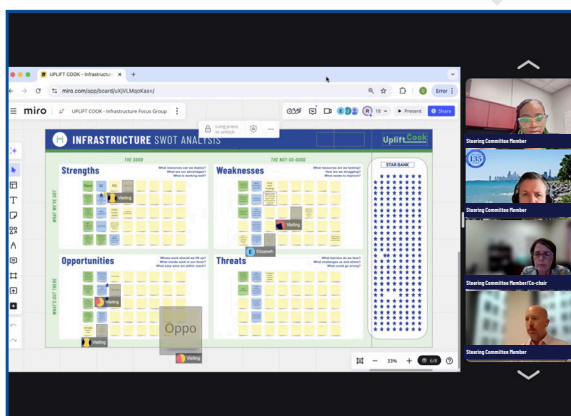
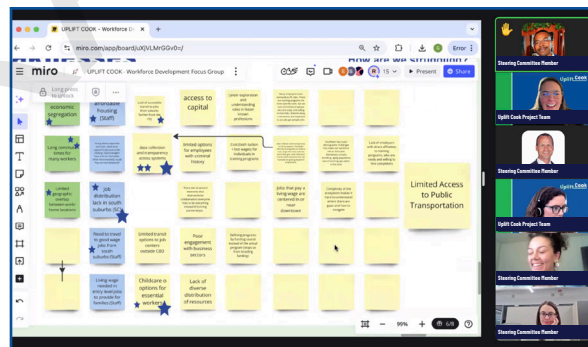
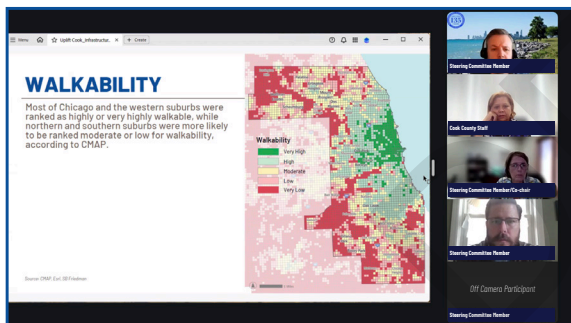
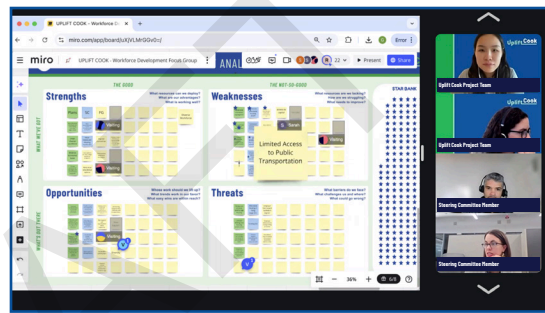
Focus Group 2: [Community Development](#) (Tuesday, October 29, 2024)

Focus Group 3: [Workforce Development](#) (Wednesday, October 30, 2024)

Focus Group 4: [Infrastructure](#) (Wednesday, October 30, 2024)

Focus Group 5: [Economic Development](#) (Tuesday, November 19, 2024)

Each focus group session began with an introduction to the Uplift Cook planning process, followed by a SWOT analysis within each topic area. The goal was to understand gaps in other planning efforts and brainstorm ideas to address identified needs. Key themes from the focus group discussion are detailed in the following section.





STRENGTHS

- **Strong Collaboration & Partnerships:** There is coordination among agencies, nonprofits, local governments, and service providers, especially in efforts to address homelessness. The increased collaboration following the pandemic and the engagement of elected officials are significant strengths.
- **Political Will & Leadership:** Strong political commitment at the County and State levels is driving progress on housing issues. Engaged leadership, particularly at the county level, brings fresh energy and enables quicker policy action.
- **Service Capacity & Resources:** The region has a growing range of services, including the Illinois Court-based Rental Assistance Program (CBRAP) and creative housing solutions like hotel acquisitions for shelters. Improved access to services through platforms like 211 further strengthens the support network.
- **Infrastructure & Economic Assets:** Cook County benefits from a diverse economy, more affordable housing than other major metros, strong transportation networks, and available land for development, particularly in the South and West Suburbs, where land prices are more affordable.

WEAKNESSES

- **Access Barriers & System Fragmentation:** Significant barriers include long waits for shelter, fragmented systems across the region, and unreliable coordinated entry. Property owner resistance to vouchers is also a barrier.
- **Shortage of Affordable & Supportive Housing:** There is a critical shortage of affordable housing, especially for low-income, fixed-income, and family households. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and rental assistance programs are insufficient, and few affordable small or larger family units are available.
- **Funding & Political Challenges:** Funding is inconsistent and highly reliant on federal dollars. There is a gap between available funding and the need for shelter, prevention, and housing development. Political will is often lacking, especially in holding municipalities accountable for providing affordable housing.
- **Systemic Inequities & Housing Discrimination:** Challenges related to restrictive zoning laws, high property taxes, illegal housing discrimination, and rising rents hinder access to affordable housing. Additionally, aging housing leads to negative health outcomes that disproportionately impact lower income residents and other historically excluded groups with limited means to invest in necessary updates.



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Repurposing Existing Properties:** There are opportunities to convert unused spaces such as office buildings, hotels, churches, and malls into affordable housing. Coordination with land banks and more flexible zoning can facilitate these projects.
- **Improved Coordination & Collaboration:** Increased coordination between municipalities, the County, and the State could better align funding, services, and resources. Collaborating with employers, tenant unions, and school districts can strengthen responsiveness to housing challenges.
- **Increased Funding & Innovative Housing Models:** Opportunities include expanding rental assistance, exploring social housing, leveraging federal funds (ARPA, CDBG-CV, HOME-ARP), and engaging private developers and employers to help meet housing needs.
- **Raising Public Awareness & Political Will:** Growing public awareness of the housing crisis and national policy conversations provide a chance to break stigmas and build political will for policy changes. Expanding partnerships and advocating for programs like guaranteed income can drive momentum for solutions.

THREATS

- **Systemic Barriers & Fragmentation:** Duplication of services, lack of transparency, and complex referral networks make it hard for clients and advocates to navigate available resources. Clearer coordination and a centralized database could improve access to housing solutions.
- **NIMBYism & Local Resistance:** Strong opposition to affordable housing and shelter development, driven by concerns over taxes and neighborhood impact, creates barriers. Zoning challenges and NIMBY sentiments hinder progress.
- **Economic Pressures:** Rising construction costs, property insurance, and taxes threaten housing affordability. Limited funding for shelter beds and long-term solutions prioritizes short-term assistance over systemic change.
- **Access and Affordability Issues:** Increased competition in the housing market, driven by entities like hedge funds and vacation home rental companies, is driving up rents and reducing availability. Strict credit requirements and eviction histories further limit access to housing for those in need.



STRENGTHS

- **Innovative Models & Resource Access:** The success of converting hotels into shelters in Evanston and Oak Park is a strong model that could be expanded to the south and southeast suburbs, which face higher homelessness rates. Cook County's ability to distribute funds like Home-ARP and CDBG-CV is also significant in addressing homelessness.
- **Strong Community Support & Engagement:** South suburban residents are committed to spending within their communities, and local governments, shelter services, and homeless service providers are strongly engaged. Organized efforts by the CoC (Continuum of Care) and service providers help facilitate solutions.
- **Geographic & Logistic Assets:** The south suburbs benefit from strategic geographic advantages such as extensive rail, highway, port, and airport infrastructure, which can be leveraged for economic development and service delivery. Additionally, the Southern Triad has open land for potential development.
- **Institutional & Policy Support:** South suburban communities have untapped economic potential, with opportunities for local development. Supportive local policies, grants, and incentives are in place to encourage business development and expansion.

WEAKNESSES

- **Limited Financial Resources:** Insufficient federal, state, and local funding (CDBG, ESG, HOME) creates gaps in addressing homelessness and community needs. Resource allocation is challenging, with tough choices between agencies, and there is a \$4-5M shortfall annually to meet shelter bed targets.
- **Healthcare & Infrastructure Access:** Healthcare access is limited in the southern suburbs, with key hospitals lacking public transit access and trauma centers. Aging housing stock and minimal support for repairs further impact health and safety.
- **Regional & Social Inequality:** Disparities in homelessness, poverty, and life expectancy are more severe in southern Cook County. Fragmented governance and lack of coordination between local, county, and state entities complicate efforts to address these challenges.
- **Youth & Community Services Gaps:** There is inadequate investment in youth services like after-school programs and career centers, particularly in the south and west suburbs. Weak community engagement and fragmented connections between local governments and chambers hinder development.



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Community Empowerment & Positive Messaging:** There is a strong focus on highlighting community assets and promoting positive projects and change happening across communities. Stakeholders aim to shift community narratives through beautification campaigns, programming in vacant spaces, and youth involvement.
- **Housing & Land Use:** There is a significant opportunity to address housing needs by leveraging vacant land and buildings for affordable housing targeted at low-income individuals, particularly 30% AMI or lower. Strengthening the housing continuum—looking at affordable housing and transitional solutions—is critical.
- **Green Energy & Workforce Development:** There is potential to expand green energy initiatives, particularly in clean energy jobs and green technology. The state's investment in solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources provides a foundation for future projects. Workforce training programs, especially in collaboration with community colleges, are viewed as a way to build sustainable, long-term job opportunities.
- **Collaboration & Advocacy:** Strong opportunities exist for enhanced cooperation across sectors, including workforce development, landlord partnerships, and advocacy efforts at state and federal levels. There is also an opportunity to advocate for more resources to bridge annual operating expense gaps.

THREATS

- **NIMBYism & Zoning Barriers:** There is local resistance to affordable housing, including zoning restrictions and opposition to shelter conversions (e.g., hotels to fixed-site shelters).
- **Funding & Resource Scarcity:** Competition for limited funding and reliance on insufficient federal and local resources (CDBG, ESG, HOME) exacerbate funding challenges. High dependence on property taxes exacerbates these challenges by rewarding aggressive communities that attract development.
- **Economic & Demographic Shifts:** Issues like an aging population lacking affordable housing options, young people delaying milestones due to financial insecurity, and competition from larger cities for talent and investment all threaten economic prosperity.
- **Municipal Challenges & Bureaucratic Barriers:** Small, under-resourced municipalities face difficulties in staffing, governance, and addressing systemic issues like racial segregation. Bureaucratic barriers and stigmas around certain areas create additional hurdles in implementing effective development policies.



STRENGTHS

- **Collaborative Workforce Ecosystem:** Strong partnerships like Chicagoland CareerPathways and Talent Solutions Connector help connect residents with training programs and employers with workforce solutions, fostering a more equitable ecosystem.
- **Diverse & Available Workforce:** The region has a diverse workforce eager to work, and there is a growing focus on connecting local talent to opportunities and eliminating barriers to employment.
- **Education & Training Opportunities:** Many education and training programs, including free college workforce programs and trade group training, are available to meet a wide range of worker needs.
- **Employer Engagement & Incentives:** Employers are increasingly committed to creating equitable workplaces, offering incentives for hiring underrepresented workers, and forming partnerships to address talent recruitment and retention challenges.

WEAKNESSES

- **Access to Jobs & Transportation:** Limited or inadequate public transportation options, particularly in suburban areas, hinder workers' ability to access job opportunities, especially in locations outside of downtown or business districts.
- **Employer Engagement & Job Matching:** A gap exists between the skills workers acquire through training and the needs of employers ready to hire them. A lack of commitment to hiring program graduates exists, and effective matchmaking between training programs and employers is needed.
- **System Complexity & Data Gaps:** The workforce development ecosystem is fragmented and hard to navigate. There is a lack of data transparency and challenges tracking candidate referrals, program outcomes, and long-term employment success, hindering informed decision-making.
- **Financial Barriers & Support:** High training costs (e.g., tuition and lost wages) and limited support for essential workers (e.g., childcare) present significant barriers to workforce participation and successful program completion. The rising cost of living also outstrips wages for many residents.



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Collaboration & Partnership Building:** This involves strengthening relationships between workforce development organizations, employers, educational institutions, and community groups to integrate efforts, improve referral systems, develop online resources for job seekers, and ensure that training programs align with the needs of local businesses.
- **Access & Support for Workers:** Expanding access to job training programs is crucial to addressing barriers while including support for childcare and transportation. This necessitates offering flexible, non-traditional education options that cater to the workforce's diverse needs, including seniors and individuals with justice involvement. Enhanced communication strategies are needed to effectively promote community college and technical education pathways to individuals of all ages.
- **Emerging Sectors & Green Jobs:** Workforce policies and training programs must be aligned with growing sectors, such as green technology, and partnerships must be created in these emerging fields to support sustainable and long-term job creation.
- **Capacity Building & Investment in Organizations:** Building the capacity of workforce development organizations is critical for enabling them to engage in effective partnerships, build strong networks, and invest in the necessary infrastructure to meet workforce demands and deliver positive results.

THREATS

- **Employer Bias & Reluctance to Change:** Employers often have a bias toward hiring individuals with bachelor's degrees and are hesitant to change their hiring practices, which limits opportunities for workers with alternative qualifications or experience.
- **Bureaucratic & Administrative Challenges:** Workforce development programs face significant bureaucratic red tape in funding requirements and program administration, making it difficult to implement and manage initiatives effectively. Employer partners also experience challenges with this red tape.
- **Educational & Experience Gaps:** There is a disconnect between educational programs and workforce needs, with higher education programs lacking nimbleness in adapting to evolving demands. Additionally, gaps in employment history and biases that undervalue experience further hinder job seekers' success.
- **Financial Challenges & Organizational Capacity:** Wages are not keeping up with the cost of living, creating financial barriers for workers. At the same time, workforce development organizations face capacity issues that prevent them from effectively meeting growing demands and advancing initiatives. Partnership turnover further exacerbates these challenges.



STRENGTHS

- **Collaboration & Partnerships:** Cook County successfully coordinates with regional agencies and forms new partnerships based on shared goals and a common vision.
- **Strong Infrastructure Foundation:** The region boasts a strong infrastructure, including energy, public transit, and broadband. Long-term plans are in place, backed by reliable, fundable projects.
- **Capacity for Large-Scale Projects:** The region has a proven track record of successfully managing major projects, such as CREATE and the Deep Tunnel, backed by dedicated professionals. The availability of land in the southern suburbs also boosts this capacity.

WEAKNESSES

- **Funding & Financial Barriers:** Communities face challenges in securing long-term financing, meeting grant requirements, and accessing upfront capital for large projects, particularly in areas with limited resources. Insufficient funding relative to service needs exacerbates the issues.
- **Capacity & Resource Constraints:** Many municipalities lack sufficient staff, local engineers, and other resources needed to develop, implement, and manage infrastructure plans, and they often have limited capacity to apply for or manage large-scale projects.
- **Planning & Coordination Gaps:** There is a lack of comprehensive long-range infrastructure plans, inadequate community engagement in the planning process, and difficulties coordinating efforts, especially regarding green infrastructure and project execution.
- **Infrastructure Stability & Reliability:** Maintaining reliable infrastructure and addressing the project backlog are key challenges facing the County.



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Climate Resilience & Migration:** There is an increasing recognition of the impact of climate change on infrastructure and resiliency. This includes opportunities for lead service line replacements and building the capacity to support people from climate-impacted regions.
- **Infrastructure Investment & Federal Support:** Recent federal funding opportunities like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provide significant resources to address longstanding infrastructure needs. This includes investments in multi-jurisdictional projects, technical assistance for environmental justice efforts, and funding for workforce training and infrastructure improvements.
- **Land Use & Development:** There is potential for infill development near existing infrastructure and opportunities to leverage available, developable land without expanding into undeveloped areas. The need to shrink overbuilt infrastructure also presents an opportunity for more efficient land use.
- **Demographic Shifts & Housing Needs:** The aging population presents opportunities for more public transportation and car-free lifestyles while driving the demand for multi-family or denser housing. These demographic changes can inform the development of long-term infrastructure planning and housing strategies.

THREATS

- **Vulnerability to Climate Change & Environmental Risks:** Extreme heat, flooding, and the broader impacts of climate change, particularly on infrastructure like roads, bridges, and stormwater systems, disproportionately affect low-income and historically excluded communities. Aging infrastructure compounds the challenges. Climate migration is also anticipated to strain existing infrastructure.
- **Funding & Financial Uncertainty:** Significant challenges relate to insufficient or unstable funding, including unfunded mandates, lack of sustainable funding, and difficulty securing long-term financial commitments. Projects may be driven by short-term grant cycles rather than long-term sustainability, and there is a risk of future financial obligations from ongoing infrastructure expansion.
- **Public Support & Trust Issues:** A general lack of public understanding of infrastructure needs, benefits, and funding complexities exists. This, combined with mistrust of government (regarding managing funds and making decisions), leads to low public buy-in and potential resistance to infrastructure projects or referenda.
- **Political & Decision-Making Challenges:** Political factors sometimes influence project prioritization, leading to decisions that may not align with long-term needs or sustainability goals. Additionally, there is a risk of hasty decision-making to allocate funds quickly, often without considering long-term impacts, sustainability, or resilience goals.



STRENGTHS

- **Economic & Industry Diversity:** The region benefits from a diverse economic base, with multiple industries (including tech, logistics, manufacturing, and finance), a strong industrial base, and a diverse workforce across various skill levels. A strong small business ecosystem and startup funding community support innovation and growth.
- **Transportation & Infrastructure:** A well-developed transportation network (roads, rail, waterways), global airport, and smart electrified logistics enhance regional connectivity and support economic growth.
- **Educational & Research Institutions:** Key strengths include higher learning institutions, technical education programs, and research assets like Argonne National Laboratory and the Chicago Quantum Exchange. The region also benefits from an attractive environment for college graduates, offering a strong connection between universities and businesses for talent development and innovation.
- **Government & Community Support:** Government support for economic development is provided through programs like tax increment financing (TIF), Cook County Small Business Source, and property tax incentives like Class 6/7B. Collaboration among business support organizations is also strong.

WEAKNESSES

- **Inequality & Disinvestment:** Historically excluded communities, especially in the south and west suburbs, may face increased burdens from new developments due to negative externalities, with limited opportunities for public engagement in decision-making.
- **Workforce Mismatch:** The workforce ecosystem lacks alignment with employer needs, and there are limited funds available for workforce training, which limits the region's ability to address skill gaps and meet the demands of emerging industries.
- **Lack of Regional Collaboration & Leadership:** There is a lack of collaboration between the City of Chicago and suburban communities, particularly on the South Side. Stronger regional economic development leadership and better alignment between jurisdictions are needed to create more cohesive and effective strategies.
- **Regulatory & Infrastructure Barriers:** Aging infrastructure raises development costs, while issues like permitting delays, little incentive to lease vacant property with appealed property taxes, and public transportation gaps slow economic progress. New businesses also face challenges in energy infrastructure.



OPPORTUNITIES

- **Regional Collaboration & Land Utilization:** A regional approach to development, with stronger partnerships between counties and organizations, can leverage available land for infill development. The region has abundant land and access to fresh water, providing a competitive advantage for growth and innovation.
- **Workforce Development & Training:** Opportunities exist to enhance workforce training targeted to key industries, including sustainable jobs, apprenticeships, and training for quantum computing and clean energy sectors. There's potential to build a strong, competitive workforce that can attract global employers and investors.
- **Incentive & Tax Reform:** Revising outdated tax incentives (e.g., Class 6B) and addressing property tax issues can drive more effective economic development. Advocacy for property tax reform can improve conditions for growth, particularly in suburban areas.
- **Industry Growth & Innovation:** Expanding foreign direct investment, attracting employers to locate in Illinois, and focusing on priority industry clusters like clean energy, quantum computing, and life sciences offer significant opportunities for long-term economic growth and technological innovation. Building on provisions through the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, including growing clean energy jobs, can further efforts.

THREATS

- **Economic & Financial Uncertainty:** Rising construction costs, interest rate uncertainty, and inflation are significant threats to economic development. Reduced state funding for municipalities, potential labor cost increases, and competition from regions with lower taxes and better incentives also pose challenges.
- **Infrastructure & Property Issues:** Abandoned buildings, office space obsolescence, and commercial property decline complicates development, while energy generation gaps and increasing infrastructure costs from climate change add further burdens.
- **Political & Public Trust Challenges:** Political divisiveness, distrust of government, and NIMBYism hinder development, alongside concerns about status quo marketing and lack of regional collaboration.
- **Climate Change & Resiliency:** Climate change impacts threaten vulnerable areas, while climate migration and gentrification further complicate development in disinvested communities.

Key Takeaways

Outlined below are the SWOT themes gathered from Steering Committee Meeting #1 and the initial round of topic-based stakeholder focus groups.

STRENGTHS

- County, region, and state focus on addressing geographic gaps in investment
- More affordable real estate and cost of living than other similarly-sized, globally-connected metropolitan areas
- Numerous transportation assets, including airports, rail, interstate connections, and public transit system
- Relative climate resilience compared to other major metropolitan areas
- Strong and improved regional partnerships, engaged advocates, and political will
- Interest in pilot programs and innovative solutions
- Community energy and traction for change

WEAKNESSES

- Racial and economic segregation
- Inequitable outcomes for residents and communities stemming from gaps in investment across the south and west suburbs
- Lack of affordable housing, particularly at the lowest income levels
- The mismatch between jobs and housing, with many workers commuting over an hour between home and work
- Lack of municipal awareness of available programs and funding
- Insufficient funding relative to increasing service needs
- Complicated jurisdictional boundaries, which can make project implementation challenging
- Geographic gaps in public transportation access

OPPORTUNITIES

- Continue coordinated, countywide focus on historically excluded communities
- Increase communication around positive progress and project successes
- Incentivize local investments in affordable housing
- Identify ways to support climate resiliency, positioning Cook County for future growth
- Continue development of County environmental justice policy
- Leverage statewide commitments to renewable energy production
- Identify changing housing/service needs and infrastructure demands relevant to the aging population

THREATS

- Impacts of population loss on tax base and County revenues
- The rising cost of housing and limited new construction
- Vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding, with disproportionate impacts on low-income and historically excluded communities
- Capacity challenges for service providers
- Local competition for scarce resources
- Crime deters investment and community cohesiveness
- Aging infrastructure and project backlog
- Projects motivated by grant dollars rather than sustainable funding sources
- Impact of climate migration on infrastructure and service demand
- Lack of public support for projects & general mistrust of government

Strategy Prioritization

The Uplift Cook team presented draft strategies to the Steering Committee. These strategies were developed by combining the findings of the SWOT analysis with the results of the housing needs, market study, and industry cluster analyses. Committee members were then tasked with prioritizing the draft strategies and identifying missing priorities and strategies for each Plan objective.

Steering Committee Meeting #2

Date: Tuesday, December 10, 2024

Location: The Old Post Office, Chicago, IL

Attendance: 24 (16 committee members & 8 County staffers)

Follow-up Online Survey Completion: 12

In the second Steering Committee meeting, the Uplift Cook team provided project updates and a report-back from the SWOT exercise. Members identified potential strategies for the Economic Development, Workforce Development, and Infrastructure topic areas through a strategy prioritization activity. Members who could not attend the in-person meeting or wanted to provide additional feedback were given the option to complete the same exercise through an online survey.

For the exercise, participants ranked strategies in priority order. The highest score within each objective below represents the highest priority for either Steering Committee or Cook County staff respondents. Scores are a weighted average of responses for each survey response group. Responses to the activity were aggregated and outlined on the following pages.





Economic Development Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 1.1: *Champion a regional approach to grow the economy and combat racial and economic inequities.*



Facilitate collaboration across public and private sectors to advance regional economic vitality, with particular emphasis on uplifting disinvested communities.



Attract, retain and expand businesses by facilitating redevelopment and reactivating markets.



Establish an evaluation framework to evaluate policies and resource allocation from equity lens.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: *Attract businesses in economic sectors with good jobs and positive economic, environmental and social impact.*



Invest in infrastructure that boosts equitable economic growth and supports businesses in priority industries.



Align workforce programs and investments to priority industries and growing green economy sectors.



Grow the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) to further strengthen competitiveness and resilience of key sectors and facilitate growth in emerging industries.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: *Grow the small business ecosystem, support innovation and entrepreneurship, and build wealth for historically excluded communities.*



Improve access to capital for small, diverse, and minority businesses to reduce barriers to business formation and market entry.



Provide resources to grow a pipeline of small, diverse, and/or minority owned businesses with the capacity to procure private sector and government contracts.



Build and maintain a network of organizations and partners that can support small businesses in Cook County.



Invest in business development initiatives that create meaningful job opportunities in areas of high unemployment.

OBJECTIVE 1.4: *Promote environmental sustainability in economic development initiatives.*



Incorporate environmental impact as a key criterion when making policy and economic development decisions.



Increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in businesses, residences and governments through direct funding and technical assistance.



Economic Development Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 1.5: Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth in historically marginalized communities.



Invest in infrastructure that boosts equitable economic growth and supports businesses in priority industries.



Provide resources and support to local governments in historically disinvested areas to facilitate equitable economic growth and mitigate historic inequities.



Workforce Development Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 2.1: Increase pathways to economic prosperity by investing in workforce development.



Facilitate collaboration across public and private sectors to advance regional economic vitality, with particular emphasis on uplifting disinvested communities.



Attract, retain and expand businesses by facilitating redevelopment and reactivating markets.



Establish an evaluation framework to evaluate policies and resource allocation from equity lens.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Expand access to employment, training, education and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment.



Facilitate connections between workforce development providers and underserved populations or those facing barriers to employment.



Incentivize affordable housing development in areas well served by public transit and/or near job concentrations.



Support investments in affordable, high quality transit, particularly in high unemployment areas across southern and western Cook County.



Strengthen and enforce Cook County's worker protection laws to ensure all workers receive fair compensation and protection from violations.



Workforce Development Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Foster partnerships between employers, workforce service providers, and job seekers.



Coordinate with stakeholders in the workforce development ecosystem to intentionally and strategically support high quality jobs that promote residents' economic mobility and equity.



Expand service integration across agencies including the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Chicago Jobs Council, City Colleges of Chicago, and others to increase program access for underserved populations and communities.



Work with service providers to reduce friction points that challenge collaboration between organizations, job seekers, and businesses.



Create educational materials to increase clarity around existing workforce program administration and funding requirements.



Infrastructure Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 5.1: Base investments on their capacity to promote equitable economic growth in historically marginalized communities.



Prioritize transportation and infrastructure investments that increase residents' access to economic opportunities and jobs.



Connect infrastructure maintenance and land use development efforts to employment and job training opportunities for residents, especially those from historically disinvested communities.



Facilitate multimodal transportation of goods and people within and beyond Cook County to encourage economic growth and community vitality.



Encourage equitable transit-oriented development, including through regulatory support and economic development incentives.



Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure to address decades of disinvestment in historically disinvested communities.



Infrastructure Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 5.2: *Promote environmental sustainability in infrastructure, reduce contribution to climate change, and invest in mitigation.*



OBJECTIVE 5.3: *Increase regional accessibility and connectivity by investing in sustainable transportation throughout Cook County.*





Infrastructure Strategy Prioritization Exercise

OBJECTIVE 5.4: Leverage existing infrastructure assets and available financial resources to attract future investment and facilitate equitable implementation.



Pursue all relevant funding programs and applications from federal and state sources.



Support greater utilization and investment in existing infrastructure.



Identify and publicize available and underutilized funding sources to help marginalized communities access resources.



Continue subrecipient / partner capacity building efforts related to compliance and reporting for major federal grants.



Increase awareness of the long term benefits of infrastructure investments via increased funding.

Meeting Icebreaker

What's your favorite winter activity in Cook County?

BOTANICAL GARDENS LIGHT SHOW
CHRISTKINDLMARKET HOLIDAY MARKET
DINNER & A PLAY AT THE WALNUT ROOM
MILLENNIUM PARK ICE SKATING
DINNER PARTIES WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY
ICE SKATING WITH MY KIDS
CITYWIDE HOLIDAY LIGHT VIEWING
SNOW TUBING

UpliftCook

Additional Ideas

Steering Committee members were encouraged to share additional strategies that they felt were important to consider during the planning process. The following lists summarize the suggested strategies.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Economic Development & Capacity Building:** Pursue federal and philanthropic funding to support growth, build the capacity of small business support organizations, and develop infrastructure to address multiple priorities.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Ensure economic growth benefits historically excluded communities, promote cross-jurisdictional collaboration, and embed equity in environmental justice efforts.
- **Sustainability & Green Economy:** Invest in clean energy, support ecological restoration, and promote sustainable agriculture and green development practices.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- **Job Readiness:** Focus on programs that prepare job seekers for employment and ensure clear connections between workforce programs and job opportunities. Enhance training for youth, justice-involved individuals, and those with mental health challenges.
- **Access & Mobility:** Address employment barriers, such as transportation issues, and remove obstacles for justice-involved individuals while promoting alternative career pathways and supporting low-income seniors.
- **Collaboration & Ecosystem Integration:** Strengthen collaboration within the workforce ecosystem, setting performance goals for economic mobility, investing in disinvested areas, and engaging non-traditional stakeholders like the court system.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Infrastructure and Systems:** There is a need for clarification between physical infrastructure (roads, bridges) and systems (like programs or services). There was also a call to accelerate investments in delayed infrastructure projects.
- **Environmental & Community Investments:** Invest in green spaces, such as street trees, to improve property values and environmental outcomes, particularly in suburban areas with insufficient funding.
- **Capacity Building:** Expand capacity through training, staffing, and increased funding to ensure effective program delivery and sustainability.

APPENDIX C | Summary Background Detailed Analysis

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Recent household increases combined with marginal population loss indicate the formation of new, smaller households

Cook County is home to approximately 5.2 million residents, accounting for 61% of the region's population (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). Population held nearly constant between 2017 and 2022, with a marginal loss of approximately 13,200 residents (-0.3%). Suburban Cook County accounted for most of the population loss (-12,500 residents), with the city of Chicago generally stable (-700 residents). Generally, population losses were concentrated in south suburban communities while many north and west suburban communities gained population, as shown in **Figure 1**.

Regionally, population increased by about 3% between 2005 and 2014 (CMAP). However, slowing regional population growth noted in the prior CEDS has continued, with a 0.05% increase in regional population (+4,100 residents) from 2017 to 2022.

Despite population loss, the county gained approximately 110,000 households from 2017 to 2022. Household growth was driven primarily by an 83,000-household increase within the city of Chicago, accounting for 75% of countywide growth, as shown in **Figure 2**. Combined, these population and household trends indicate the formation of new, smaller households.

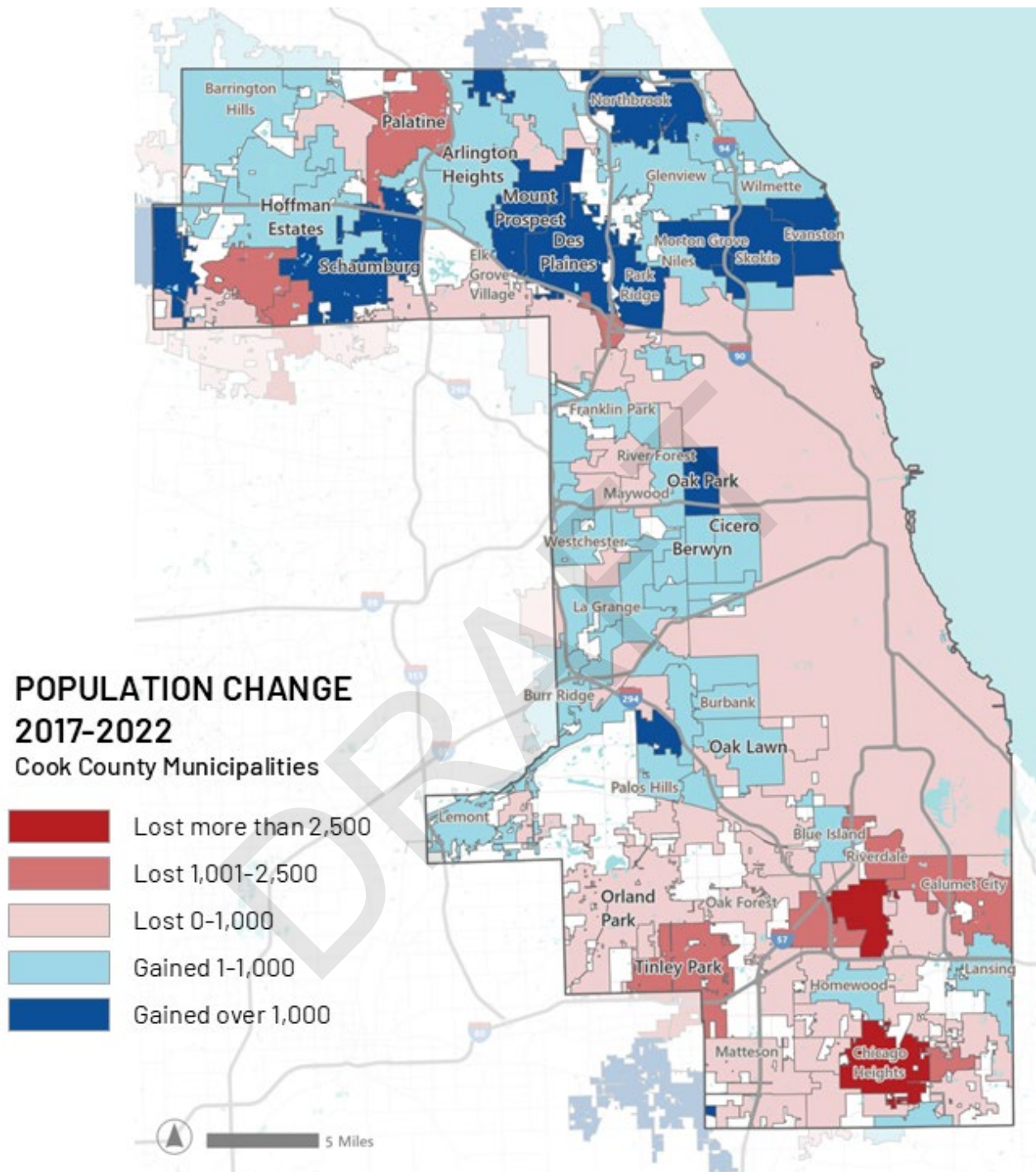
Racial diversity is increasing, but patterns of historic segregation remain

Cook County continues to become more racially diverse, driven by increases in residents who identify as two or more races, Latine or Asian. Between 2017 and 2022, the population of residents identifying as two or more races increased by 45,000, the Latine population increased by 40,200, and the Asian population increased by 35,500. Over the same period, the White population decreased by 87,400, while the Black population decreased by 55,300 (2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).²

Despite increasing diversity, patterns of geographic racial segregation stemming from historic disinvestment and redlining are still prevalent in Cook County. South suburban communities with predominantly Black residents have experienced the greatest population losses, as shown in **Figures 1 and 3**. Strategies to reverse these trends and support communities that have experienced intersecting challenges related to being historically excluded are a core component of the County's policy goals and the Uplift Cook planning process.

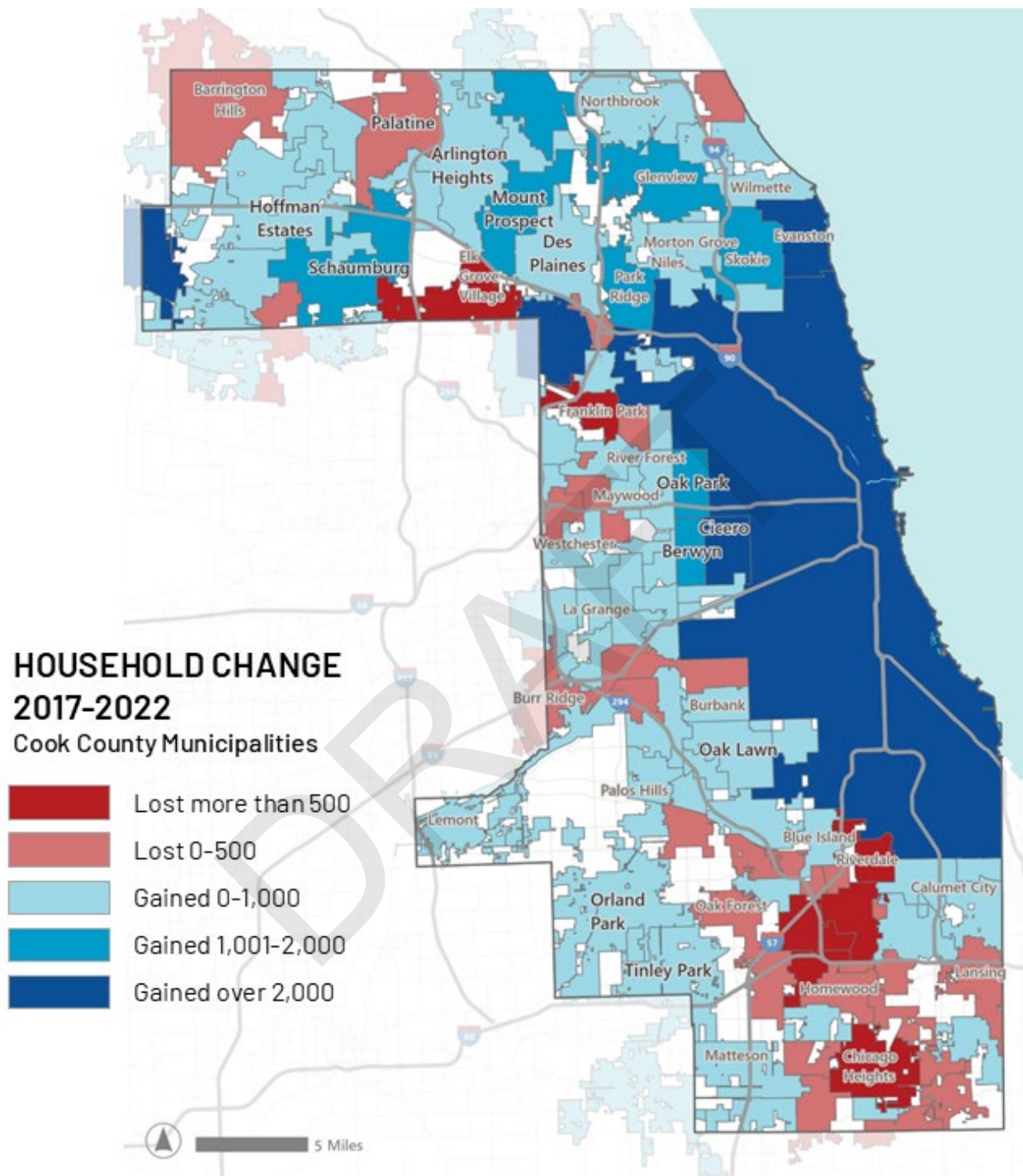
² Some of the decrease in White alone population and increase in population identifying as two or more races may be attributable to a 2020 change in Census race and ethnicity questions. Nationally, the population identifying as two or more races increased by 276% between the 2010 and 2020 Censuses, while the White alone population declined by 8.6%.

Figure 1. Cook County Population Change by Municipality, 2017-2022



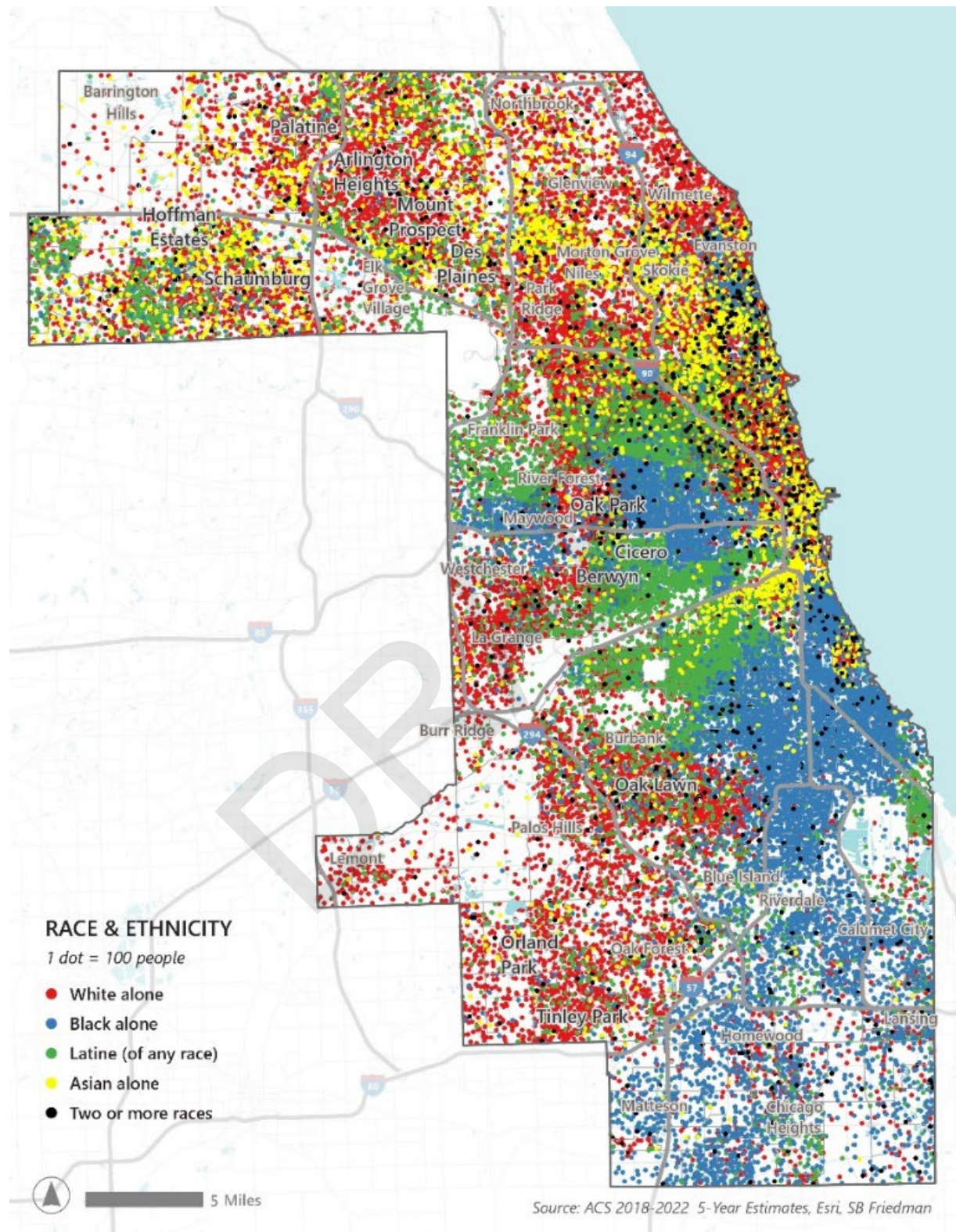
Source: 2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 2. Cook County Household Change by Municipality, 2017-2022



Source: 2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 3. Population by Race & Ethnicity

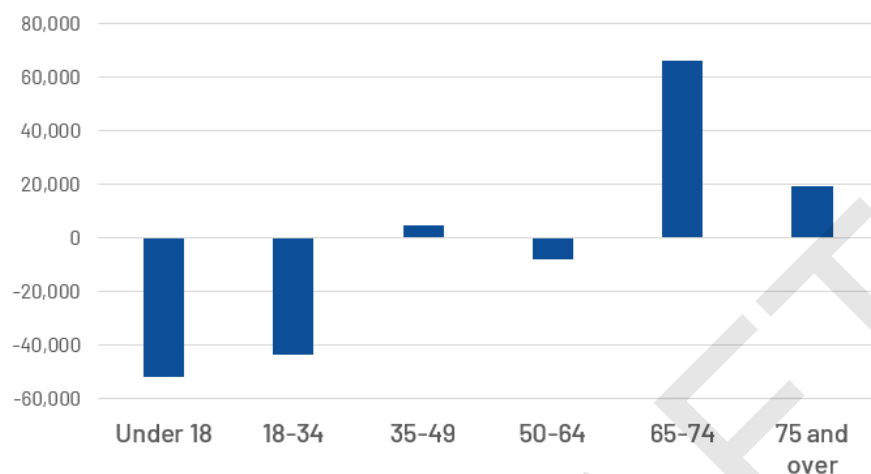


Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

An aging population will impact community needs

Overall, Cook County's population is aging, continuing a trend highlighted in the prior CEDS. Compared to 2017, there were 52,000 fewer residents under the age of 18 (-4%) and 43,300 fewer residents aged 18-34 (-3%) in 2022. However, the population aged 65 and over increased by 85,400 (+12%) over the same period, with most of this increase in residents aged 65-74 (2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

Figure 4. Population Change by Age, 2017-2022



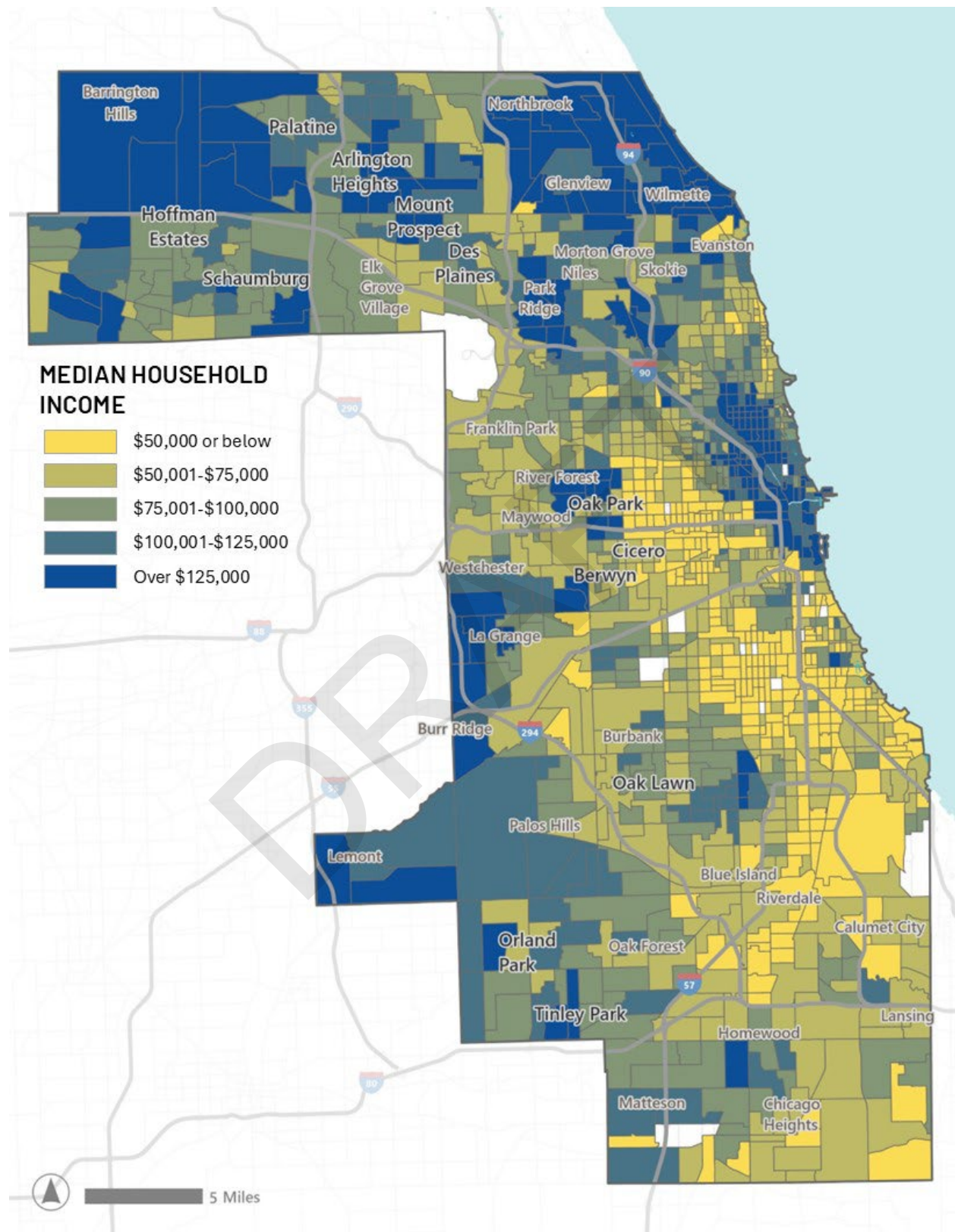
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022

Incomes for Black and Latine households continue to lag those of White and Asian households

Geographic and racial disparities are also present when considering household income, with Black and Latine household incomes lagging those of White and Asian households. In 2022, the median household income for Black householders was \$47,400, 63% of the overall median (\$75,100) and only 58% of the median household income for White householders (\$81,400). Median income for Latine households was \$64,900 (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). Lower-income areas generally align geographically with areas that are predominantly Black or Latine, as shown in **Figures 3 and 5**.

Cook County is actively investing in measures to combat the racial income and wealth gaps and increase economic mobility through initiatives including housing and property tax reform and direct financial assistance programs. In 2022, the County introduced the Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot Program with the goal of alleviating poverty by centering racial equity and economic justice in public assistance. The program provided unconditional \$500 monthly cash payments to 3,250 low-to-moderate income families in Cook County for a period of two years. Additional strategies that center economic mobility are built into the Uplift Cook plan.

Figure 5. Median Household Income by Census Tract



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Defined Terms

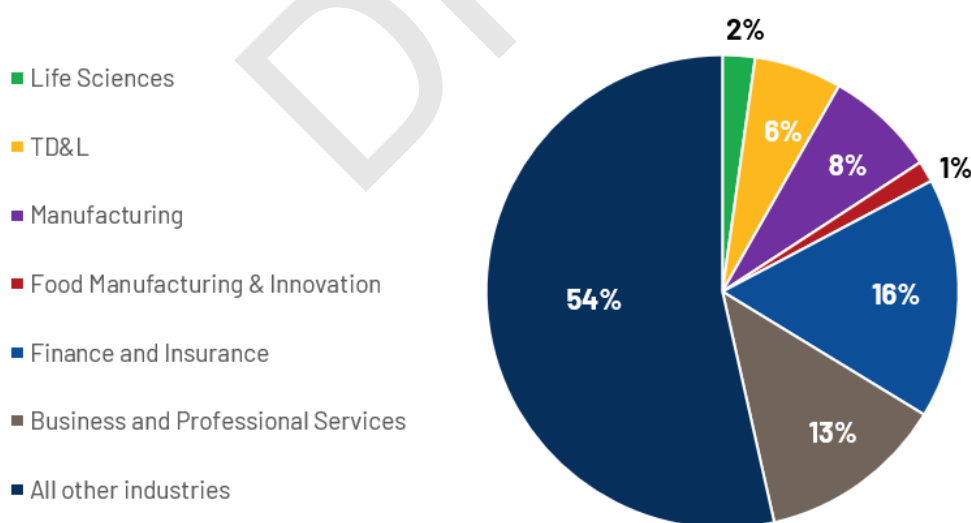
Gross Regional Product (GRP): The market value of all goods and services produced within a regional economy. The CEDS uses Lightcast as the primary data source for GRP, which is calculated as the sum of earnings, taxes and profits, less subsidies. GRP for key industries is shown for 2023, the most recent full calendar year available at the time of this analysis.

Location Quotient: A numerical value that quantifies an industry's concentration within a particular region. A location quotient of 1 means that the industry's regional concentration is equal to its concentration nationally. A location quotient greater than 1 represents an industry that is specialized within the region and may have a competitive advantage, while industries with a location quotient below 1 are less specialized.

A coordinated, regional focus on growing key industries

Formed in 2023 as a joint initiative of the seven Chicagoland region counties, the City of Chicago and World Business Chicago (WBC), the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) aims to foster unified and inclusive regional economic development. A significant portion of GCEP's activities focus on supporting key regional industries that leverage the region's strengths and are poised for growth. These industries are (1) manufacturing, (2) business and professional services, (3) finance and insurance, (4) transportation, distribution and logistics (TD&L), (5) food manufacturing and innovation, and (6) life sciences. Overall, these key industries account for almost 50% of Cook County's overall GRP as shown in **Figure 6**. The industries vary in size, history and geographic prevalence across the region.

Figure 6. Cook County GRP by Industry (2023)



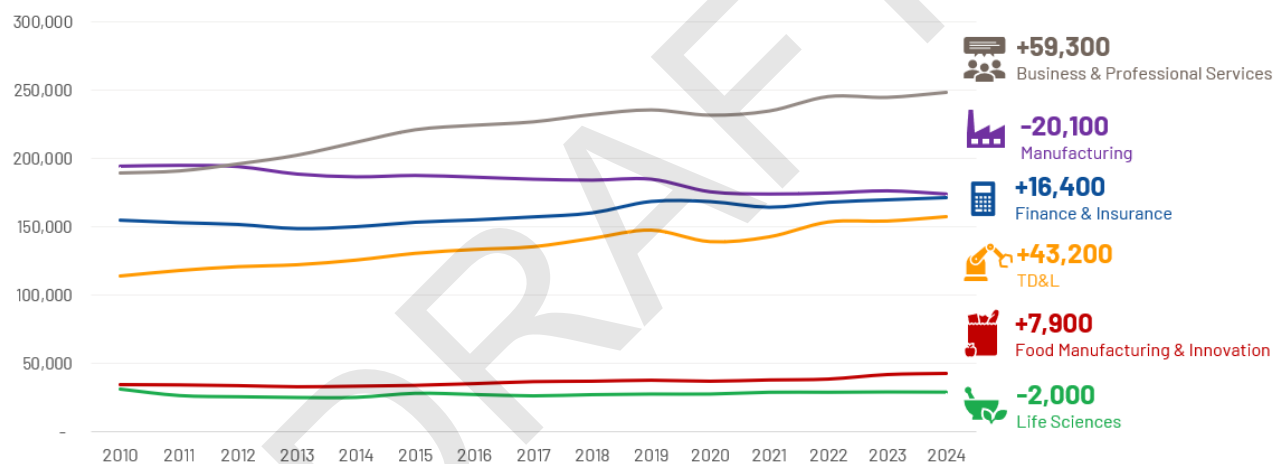
Source: Lightcast, WBC

- **Finance & Insurance.** Of the GCEP key industries, finance & insurance accounts for the greatest portion of countywide GRP at \$76.6 billion (Lightcast, 2023). There were 171,100 finance & insurance jobs in Cook County as of 2024, a 16,400 increase since 2010. Overall, the finance & insurance industry accounts for 6% of countywide jobs (Lightcast, 2024). Financial services industries comprise 62% (59,000) of finance & insurance jobs and are highly specialized within Cook County, with a location quotient of 1.8. While insurance services account for fewer jobs (36,100 or 38%), job growth since 2010 has been stronger for these industries (+7,400 jobs) compared to financial services (+1,700 jobs).
- **Business & Professional Services.** Business & professional services industries in Cook County have the second highest GRP across key industries (\$59.6 billion as of 2023) and account for the greatest number of jobs. As of 2024, there were approximately 248,600 business & professional services jobs, or 9% of total countywide jobs, reflecting growth of 59,300 jobs from 2010 to 2024. Business services industries, such as consulting, account for 38% of all business & professional services jobs (79,100) and experienced the strongest job growth between 2010 and 2024 (+34,300 jobs, a 76% increase). Information technology industries employed approximately 36,000 workers in 2024 and also experienced strong job growth (12,900, +56%). Other top industries for employment include marketing, design and publishing industries (41,700 jobs) and legal services (37,000). Many business & professional services industries are highly specialized within Cook County, with location quotients ranging from 2.0 to 2.3.
- **Manufacturing.** Overall, the manufacturing sector accounts for 8% of countywide GRP (\$35.4 billion) and 7% of jobs (Lightcast). Manufacturing industries benefit from strong regional supply chains, with over half of inputs sourced locally (GCEP). While manufacturing is an area of regional focus, particularly in industries related to advanced manufacturing and clean energy, overall manufacturing jobs in Cook County declined by 10% between 2010 and 2024, from 194,000 to 173,900. Despite a national trend of declines in manufacturing employment, Chicago has experienced growth in niche subsectors such as food, pharmaceutical and plastics manufacturing (GCEP). Subsectors with the greatest job declines since 2010 include production technology & heavy machinery industries (-6,100 jobs, - 38%), printing services (-5,700 jobs, -41%), and downstream chemical products (-3,300 jobs, - 39%). Contrary to overall manufacturing job loss trends, automotive-related manufacturing industries saw an increase of 3,200 jobs since 2010 (+37%). As of 2024, automotive industries also account for the greatest number of manufacturing jobs, at 12,700 (other large clusters include metalworking technology, with 10,600 jobs, and upstream metal manufacturing, with 10,200 jobs). Other manufacturing industries experienced job growth at a smaller scale, including wood products (+550 jobs), aerospace vehicle and defense (+450 jobs), and trailers, motor homes and appliances (+250 jobs).
- **Transportation, Distribution, & Logistics (TD&L):** TD&L industries account for 6% of countywide GRP (\$28.0 billion) and 6% of jobs (157,000). TD&L industries have experienced strong job growth since 2010 (+43,200, 38%), leveraging regional and county transportation and freight infrastructure and benefiting from the proliferation of e-commerce. Transportation and logistics industries account for the majority (80%) of TD&L jobs, spanning industries such as passenger air transportation (36,200 jobs), freight trucking (11,800 jobs), and freight transportation arrangement (11,400 jobs). They are

also highly specialized within the county, with a location quotient of 2.2. Warehousing and storage industries account for an additional 17% of TD&L jobs.

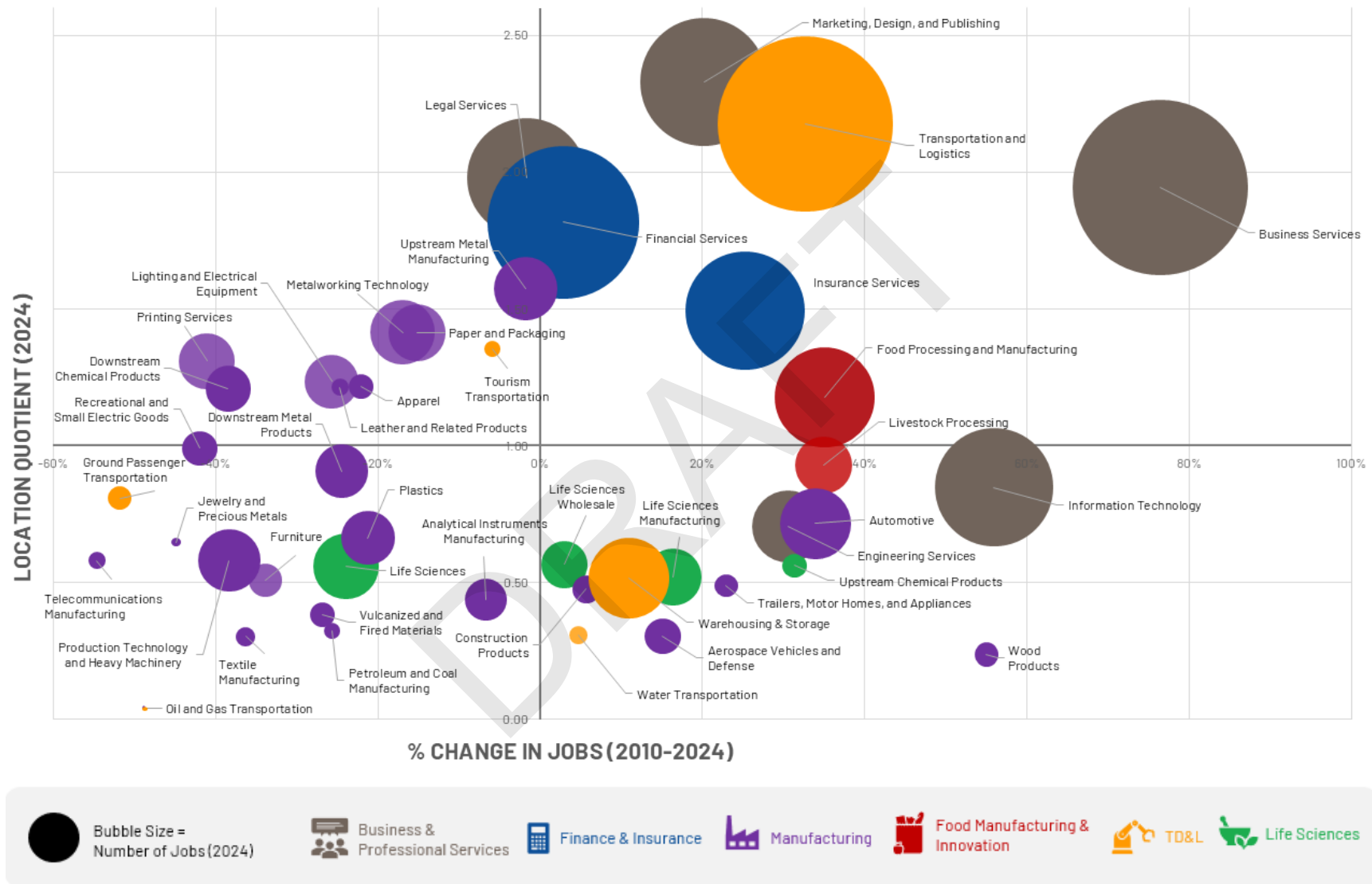
- **Life Sciences.** Regionally, life sciences industries are concentrated in Lake County and thus, represent a relatively small portion of Cook County's total GRP (2%) and jobs (1%). In 2024, there were 28,600 life sciences jobs in Cook County, representing a decline of around 2,000 since 2010 (Lightcast). Most life sciences jobs in Cook County are concentrated in research and development (46%) and manufacturing (41%), including analytical instruments, medical supplies, upstream chemical products and pharmaceuticals.
- **Food Manufacturing & Innovation.** Food manufacturing and innovation industries produce \$6.8 billion in GRP (1% of countywide GRP) and account for 42,400 jobs (2% of county). Compared to the manufacturing sector overall, food manufacturing and innovation industries have experienced strong job growth since 2010, increasing by 23% (+7,900 jobs). Top industries by employment include meat processing (8,200 jobs), nonchocolate confectionery manufacturing (4,400 jobs), and perishable prepared food manufacturing (2,400 jobs).

Figure 7. Cook County Employment Change for Key Industries (2010-2024)



Source: Lightcast, WBC

Figure 8. Cook County Key Industry Traded Clusters



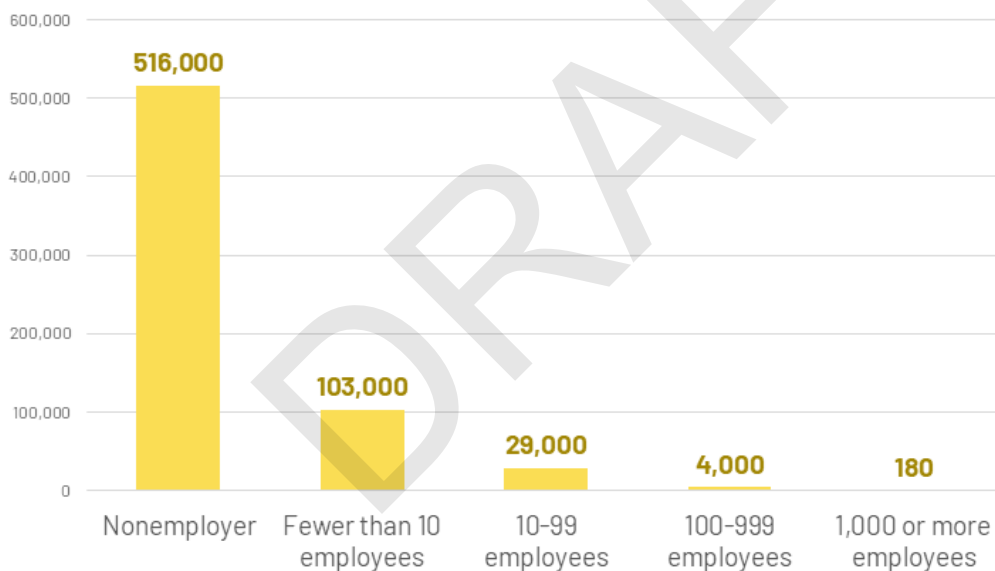
Source: GCEP, Lightcast, SB Friedman. Data shown only reflects GCEP's key industries. See **Appendix D** for a full crosswalk of key industries and clusters.

A robust business landscape ranging from large, international firms to small, diverse business enterprises

There are approximately 651,000 businesses in Cook County, ranging from large multinational companies to small, sole-proprietor businesses (U.S. Census County Business Patterns and Nonemployer Statistics 2021), shown in **Figure 9**. Most (79%) of these businesses are nonemployer firms with no paid employees (U.S. Census Nonemployer Statistics 2021). These businesses are typically self-employed individuals operating unincorporated businesses, otherwise known as sole proprietorships. An additional 16% of businesses (103,000) are small employer firms which have fewer than 10 employees (U.S. Census County Business Patterns 2021).

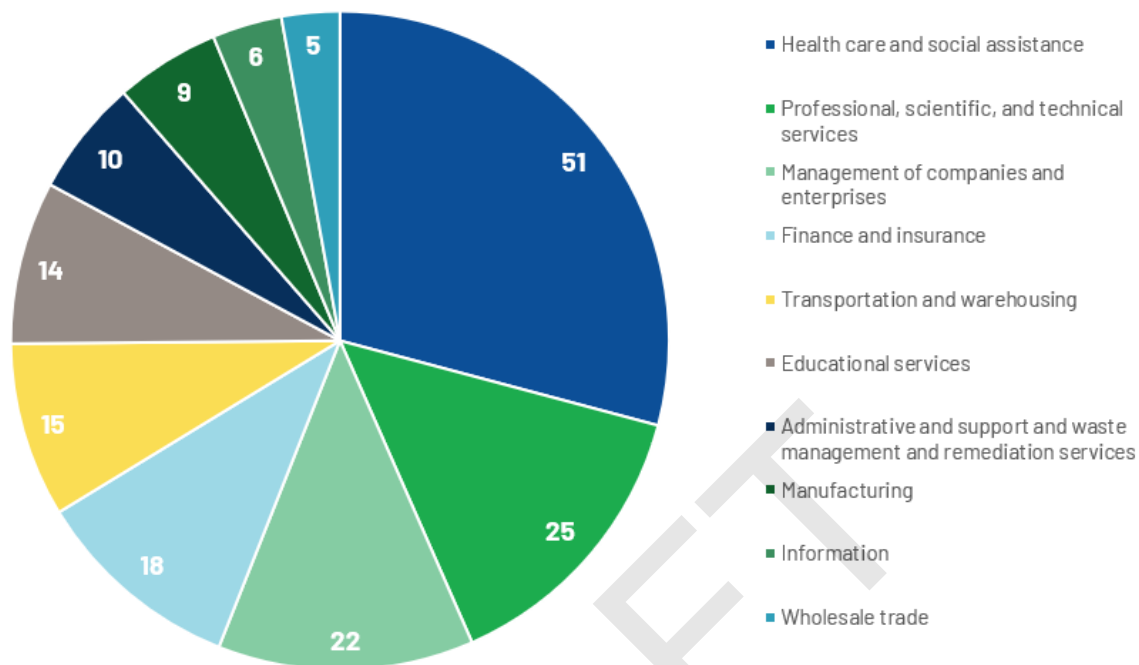
On the opposite end of the spectrum, approximately 180 firms in the county have over 1,000 employees. Most of these largest firms are in the healthcare sector, followed by professional services, management and finance, as shown in **Figure 10**. Major healthcare employers include Advocate Aurora Health with 26,300 employees, Northwestern Memorial Healthcare with 22,000 employees, and Amita Health with 14,300 employees (Crains Business 2021).

Figure 9. Cook County Businesses by Number of Employees (2021)



Source: U.S. Census County Business Patterns and Nonemployer Statistics 2021

Figure 10. Number of Businesses with 1,000 or More Employees by Sector



Source: U.S. Census County Business Patterns 2021

Diverse and minority businesses are a critical component of the business ecosystem, stimulating economic growth while also building wealth and providing opportunities for upward mobility across historically excluded communities. There is more diverse representation across smaller firms: 47% of nonemployer firms are minority-owned, compared to 23% of firms with employees. Similarly, 41% of nonemployer firms are woman-owned, compared to 24% of employer firms (U.S. Census Nonemployer Statistics 2021).

Cook County is committed to the inclusion and expansion of government contract procurement opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses (M/WBEs). In fiscal year 2022, 32% of contract commitments were made to M/WBEs (Cook County Annual Diversity Report Fiscal Year 2022). As of December 2024, there are approximately 1,925 businesses registered as minority or diverse businesses enterprises within Cook County, the majority of which are minority business enterprises (shown in **Figure 11**). The County remains focused on increasing M/WBE procurement participation through efforts including extensive outreach and developing and offering solicitations that limit the competitive pool to only minority- and women-owned businesses.

Figure 11. Cook County Certified Businesses by Type (2024)

Certification	Number of Businesses
Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)	971
Women Business Enterprise (WBE)	489
Women/Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE)	433
Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB)	48
Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)	34
Persons with Disability Business Enterprise (PBE)	12

Source: Illinois Certified Firms Directory (as of December 2024)

Education systems, innovation and increased business funding support growth in emerging and key industries

The county economy benefits from the strong presence of higher education and research institutions, technical training programs, and accelerators/incubators that spur innovation and build strong workforce pipelines to core and emerging industries. There are over 500 post-secondary programs approved by the Illinois Board of Education within the region, including programs at several of the world’s top research institutions like the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois system (GCEP).

Regionally, over 200 companies are active in emerging industries such as gene therapeutics, carbon capture, hydrogen energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum computing (GCEP). The Chicago region is already a leader in quantum computing, with advanced degree programs, strong regional partnerships between academia, government and industry, and over \$1 billion in recent government investment for quantum technologies (University of Chicago). A new quantum computing campus on Chicago’s south side—the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park—was announced in summer 2024 and is expected to include the nation’s first utility-scale, fault-tolerant quantum computer.

In addition to investments in emerging industries, funding for companies within the region’s key industries has accelerated over the past several years. For businesses in Cook County municipalities with populations over 50,000, funding in key industries increased from around \$4 billion in 2018 to \$22 billion in 2023 (Crunchbase). This increase spans industries in all key sectors and was driven primarily by an increase in debt financing, commitments after initial public offerings, and private equity.

Statewide focus on clean energy creates opportunities to further climate resilience and equitable economic growth

With the passage of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) in 2021, Illinois made a historic commitment to clean energy, mandating a transition to 50% clean energy by 2040 and 100% by 2050. CEJA uplifts the clean energy sector as a vehicle for expanding access to jobs and economic opportunity, particularly for historically excluded and environmental justice communities. Programs funded under CEJA include the development of workforce hubs, pre-apprenticeship programs, retraining programs for workers impacted by

the energy transition, business incubators, and grants to fund renewable energy projects that support businesses, community organizations and residents. For competitive procurements and certain grant opportunities, CEJA requires a minimum percentage of the workforce to be from communities that have been historically excluded from economic opportunities, increasing from 10% in 2023 to 30% by 2030.

Cook County recognizes the importance of the clean energy economy in both building climate resilience and promoting racial equity in economic development. Within Cook County, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Safer Foundation and 548 Foundation have been awarded grants designating them as workforce hubs (IL DCEO). As part of this program, the organizations will offer training, certification preparation and skill development for entry-level jobs in a range of clean energy sectors.

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Cook County employment continues to recover from the pandemic

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Cook County had 2,558,000 jobs as of 2023. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the county had more than 2.6 million jobs. About three quarters of the approximately 220,000 jobs lost during the pandemic have been recovered. According to Lightcast, the three largest industries by employment in the county in 2024 were hospitality & tourism, healthcare, and education & knowledge creation, as noted in **Figure 12**. The three fastest growing major industries by employment since 2010 were information technology, food processing & manufacturing, and transportation & logistics, as noted in **Figure 13**.

Figure 12. Largest Industries by Employment (2024)

Industry	Employment
Hospitality & Tourism	280,000
Healthcare	136,000
Education & Knowledge Creation	128,000

Source: Lightcast

Figure 13. Fastest Growing Major Industries by Employment (2010-2024)

Industry	Growth	Jobs Added
Information Technology	84%	24,000
Food Processing & Manufacturing	35%	7,000
Transportation & Logistics	33%	19,000

Source: Lightcast. Data only reflects industries with at least 25,000 employees.

Key industries as identified by GCEP represent more than 820,000 jobs in Cook County as of 2024, or approximately a third of all employment. Cook County is part of one of the most diverse manufacturing ecosystems in the U.S., with the county consistently ranked as one of the top 10 destinations for manufacturing across 16 of 21 manufacturing subsectors (GCEP). Among key industries, business & professional services, finance & insurance, TD&L, and food manufacturing & innovation have grown since 2010, despite a brief period of decline or stagnation during the pandemic. Over the same period, employment in manufacturing and life sciences gradually declined. Preparing workers for jobs of the future should focus on high-growth industries.

Educational attainment varies significantly by race and ethnicity

Educational attainment is a key indicator of access to opportunity, as many jobs require a minimum educational level. Higher educational attainment is typically correlated with higher income and a lower poverty rate. As of 2022, 62% of Cook County residents had at least an Associate’s degree or some college education. However, educational attainment varies widely between racial and ethnic groups. As presented in **Figure 14**, Asian, White, and Black or African American residents had rates of attainment for at least an Associate’s degree or attended some college near or above the county average. However, residents who

identified as two or more races (55%), Hispanic or Latine (41%), or Other race (35%) had rates below the county average.

At the same time, 38% of county residents had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Bachelor's degree attainment by race and ethnicity followed a similar trend as Associate's degree attainment, with Asian and White alone residents having the highest rates of attainment and Hispanic or Latine and Other race residents having the lowest rates of attainment. Improving access to educational opportunities in Cook County is one tool to assist in ameliorating the racial wealth gap.

Figure 14. Educational Attainment by Race and Ethnicity (2022)

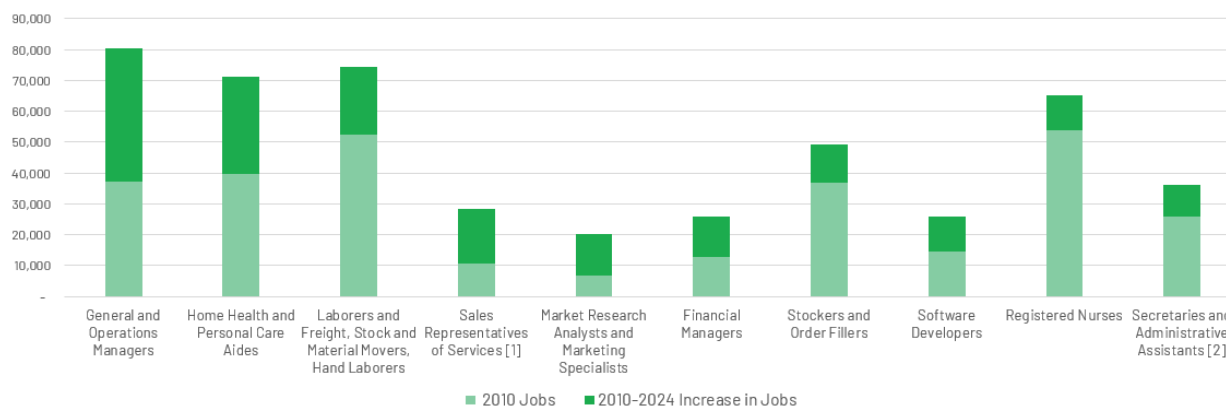
Race	Percent with an Associate's degree, some college, or higher	Percent with a Bachelor's degree or higher
Asian	79%	65%
White alone	77%	56%
Black or African American	61%	25%
Two or more races	55%	30%
Hispanic or Latine	41%	18%
Other race	35%	15%
Cook County Overall	62%	38%

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Occupational growth has been distributed across many job types

Between 2010 and 2024, the fastest growing occupations requiring a bachelor's degree included financial managers, software developers, general & operations managers, registered nurses and market research analysts. Other high growing occupations which required only a high school diploma or equivalent included sales representatives, secretary and administrative assistants, stockers and order fillers, as well as laborers and material movers, which have no formal education requirements. The top ten high-growth occupations alone accounted for about 80% of net job growth in the county since 2010. The growth in these high-growth occupations is shown in **Figure 15**.

Figure 15. Number of Jobs for Top Occupations by 2010-2024 Job Growth



[1] Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services and Travel

[2] Except Legal, Medical and Executive

Source: Lightcast, 5-digit SOC occupations

Wages in high-growth occupations vary, with jobs with fewer formal education requirements typically offering lower wages. Median annual earnings ranged from \$79,000-164,000 for high growth occupations requiring a Bachelor's degree, and \$34,000-65,000 for those requiring less than a bachelor's degree or without formal education requirements. The median annual earnings and typical entry-level education of high growth occupations is outlined in **Figure 16**.

Figure 16. High-Growth Occupations by Wage and Education

Top Occupations by 2010-2024 Job Growth	Median Annual Earnings	Typical Entry-Level Education
Financial Managers	\$164,300	Bachelor's degree
Software Developers	\$133,500	Bachelor's degree
General and Operations Managers	\$113,100	Bachelor's degree
Registered Nurses	\$84,200	Bachelor's degree
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	\$79,100	Bachelor's degree
Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services and Travel	\$65,400	High school diploma or equivalent
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical and Executive	\$49,300	High school diploma or equivalent
Stocker and Order Fillers	\$40,800	High school diploma or equivalent
Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers, Hand Laborers	\$40,400	No formal educational credential

Source: Lightcast, 5-digit SOC occupations

Unemployment disproportionately affects historically excluded communities

Cook County's unemployment rate in 2023 was 4.4%, similar to the state average of 4.5% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). While unemployment has continued to decline since 2020, it remains above the 3.9% pre-pandemic rate. Unemployment disproportionately impacts Black residents specifically in Cook County. White and Asian populations had unemployment similar to the county average, while Black/African American residents had a 14.2% unemployment rate, which is more than triple the county average (2022 American Community Survey). Hispanic/Latine, American Indian/Alaska Native and people who identify as having two or more races or some other race had unemployment rates of 6-7%.

There are also significant disparities in unemployment by educational attainment. People with a Bachelor's degree or higher have an unemployment rate below the county average, while those with less than a college degree had an unemployment rate about double the county average. **Figure 17** and **Figure 18** show unemployment by race/ethnicity and educational attainment.

Figure 17. Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity (2022)

Race or Ethnicity	Unemployment Rate
Black/African American	14.2%
Two or more races	7.4%
Hispanic/Latine	6.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	6.6%
Some other race	6.4%
White	4.5%
Asian	4.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4.2%
Cook County Overall	7.1%

Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 18. Unemployment by Educational Attainment (2022)

Educational Attainment	Unemployment Rate
Less than high school graduate	8.9%
High school graduate or equivalent	9.7%
Associate's degree or some college	7.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	3.3%

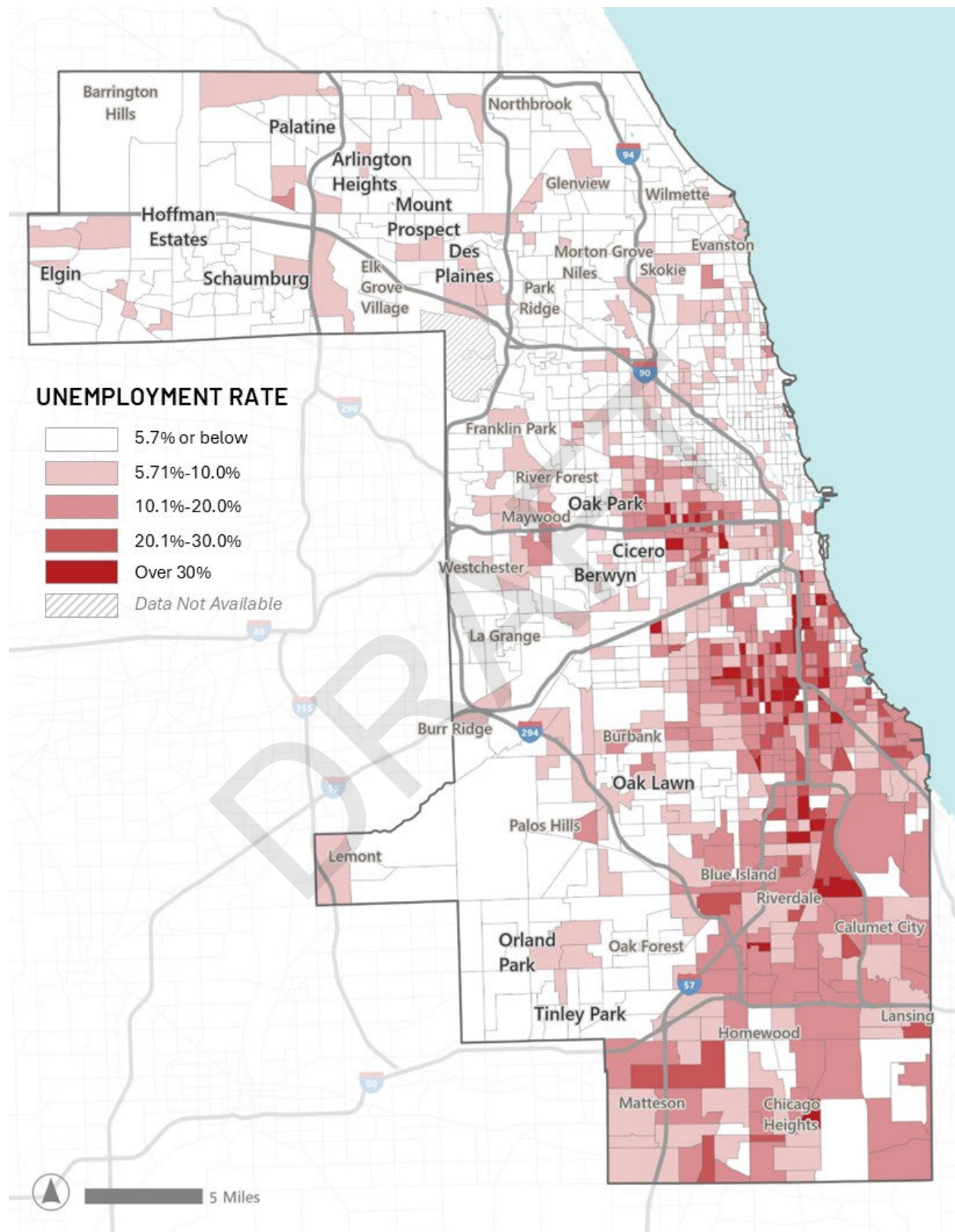
Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

South and west suburban communities and the South Side of Chicago in particular experience unemployment at significantly higher rates than other parts of the county, as shown in **Figure 19**. Employment in these areas may be impacted by educational attainment, transit accessibility, housing instability, discrimination and justice involvement.

Residents returning from incarceration face substantial challenges in reentering the workforce, including gaps in work experience, barriers related to incarceration status, and social stigma. As a result, returning residents experience unemployment at higher rates. In a 2022 study by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, a sample of more than 4,400 returning residents experienced unemployment of 46%.

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Figure 19. Unemployment Rate by Census Tract (2024)



Source: Esri 2024 estimates of U.S. Census data

Those who were employed had average wages less than \$9,000 annually. Black returning residents experienced higher unemployment and lower wages than returning residents of other races/ethnicities, while returning residents who were women were more likely to be working, but earning lower wages.

Educational opportunities and training programs can help to overcome barriers to employment

Cultivating a strong workforce necessitates continued investments in career pathways for jobs at all levels. Expanding pathways to employment at all education and training levels requires addressing the barriers to opportunity which prevent potential employees from accessing job opportunities. While Cook County's labor force participation rate is comparable to Illinois overall (67% and 66%, respectively), there are areas of concentrated unemployment in the county. Barriers to employment may include justice involvement, training and educational cost/accessibility, discrimination, child or dependent care, housing instability, transportation access, and low job quality.

Addressing gaps in the educational attainment of the workforce to meet the requirements of available jobs will require long-term investments. Over 100 public and private universities, community colleges and trade schools in Cook County already provide a diverse range of programs and hands-on training to prepare and elevate residents for the jobs they seek. Major universities with programs that support key industries include the Illinois Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. New or modified programs may be required to meet the needs of the workforce and key industries. Continuing to find ways to connect those entering the workforce or making a career change to educational opportunities is important to the success of the county's businesses and residents alike.

Thousands of jobs in Cook County do not require a college education, particularly in trade careers. These jobs, including welding, masonry, electrical and plumbing work, are accessible through apprenticeships and hands on training. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (the "Partnership") is a significant force in Cook County to facilitate access to trade and other accessible jobs, with particular focus on key industries. In the 2022-2023 program year, the Partnership placed 600 individuals into registered apprenticeships and created 2,100 individual training accounts, investing more than \$16 million in training. The Partnership's programs also target key industries, such as the 600 positions recruited in TD&L and 300 positions filled in the manufacturing sector. As noted in the 2024-2028 LWIA Plan, the Partnership is working to refine its performance metrics to assess how well its programs serve historically excluded communities with particular focus on their connection to high-growth sectors.

A diversified workforce is prepared for job opportunities in key established and emerging industries. With the passage of CEJA, additional funding and programming for workforce development in green jobs will be available. Improved training and workforce preparation for clean jobs, such as solar, wind, energy efficiency and electric vehicle production and maintenance will allow these industries to expand and grow in the county. Additionally, CEJA programs focus on historically excluded areas and populations that have been disconnected from the workforce, such as returning residents, providing a foundation for economic growth while meeting the challenges presented by a changing climate.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Housing & homelessness section data is presented for Suburban Cook County.

Most Suburban Cook County households own their homes and live in detached single-family homes, though homeownership rates are lower for Black and Latine households

There are approximately 1 million housing units in Suburban Cook County, 93% of which are occupied. Of these occupied units, 72% (673,700) are owner-occupied, while the remaining 28% (262,630) are renter-occupied. Most of the recent growth in Suburban Cook County households was attributable to an increase in homeowner households, which grew from 645,800 in 2017 to 673,700 in 2022 (+27,900 households). Over the same period, the number of renter households decreased by 1,300.

While most Suburban Cook County households are homeowners, disparities in homeownership along racial lines persist. Only 55% of Black households and 62% of Latine households are homeowners, compared to 80% of White, non-Latine households. However, the number of owner-occupied households increased for both Black (+6,400) and Latine (+19,400) households between 2017 and 2022, demonstrating increased access to homeownership opportunities.

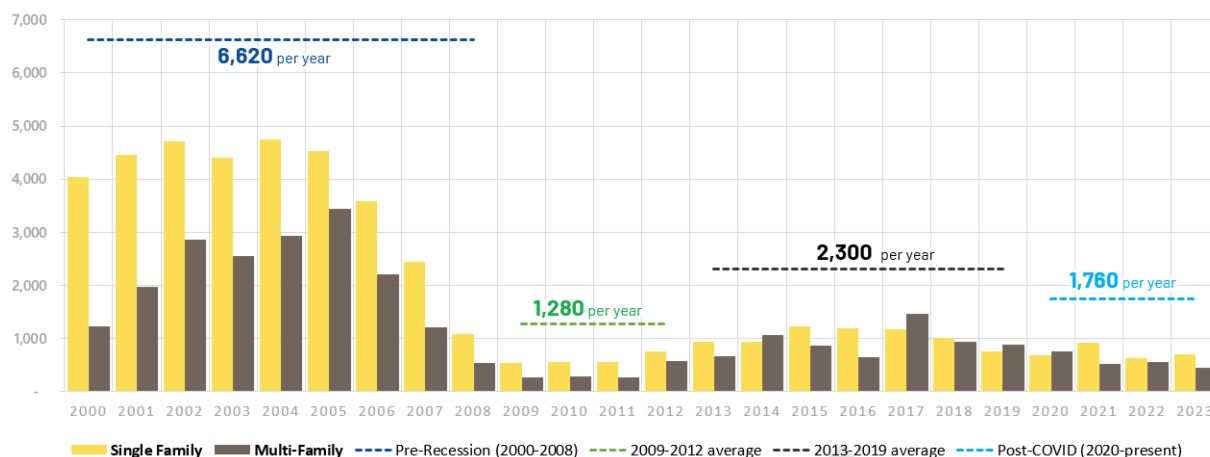
Approximately 83% of owner households live in single-family homes, while renters are more likely to live in multifamily housing (74%). From 2017 to 2022, this distribution of household tenure across housing types largely held constant. Relatively minor shifts in household tenure by unit type include an increase in owner-occupied, single-family homes (+18,500) and renter-occupied multifamily housing in buildings with 10 or more units (+5,600). There was a small decrease in renter households living in traditional single-family, detached homes (-5,000) and a minor increase (+800) in those living in single-family attached homes like townhomes and duplexes (2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

Slowing overall construction and strong market demand have driven competition and price increases

Historically, new housing construction in Suburban Cook County was mostly single-family housing. In recent years, construction overall has slowed, though has been more balanced between single-family and multifamily housing, as shown in **Figure 20**. Between 2020 and 2023, an average of 1,760 homes were permitted annually in Suburban Cook County (U.S. Census Building Permits). This is significantly lower than the average 6,620 units permitted annually before the Great Recession, and the 2,300 units annually from 2013 to 2019.

Limited new construction combined with macroeconomic housing trends during the COVID-19 pandemic—the low-interest rate environment and changing housing preferences—has led to a tight, competitive housing market for both for-sale and rental homes. These trends manifest in increasing sale prices and rents, decreasing time on the market, and lower vacancy. The overall vacancy rate for Suburban Cook County decreased from 8.1% in 2017 to 7.1% in 2022 (2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). Higher interest rates in recent years have also challenged affordability for homeowners and impacted the feasibility of development.

Figure 20. Housing Units Permitted by Type and Year, Suburban Cook County



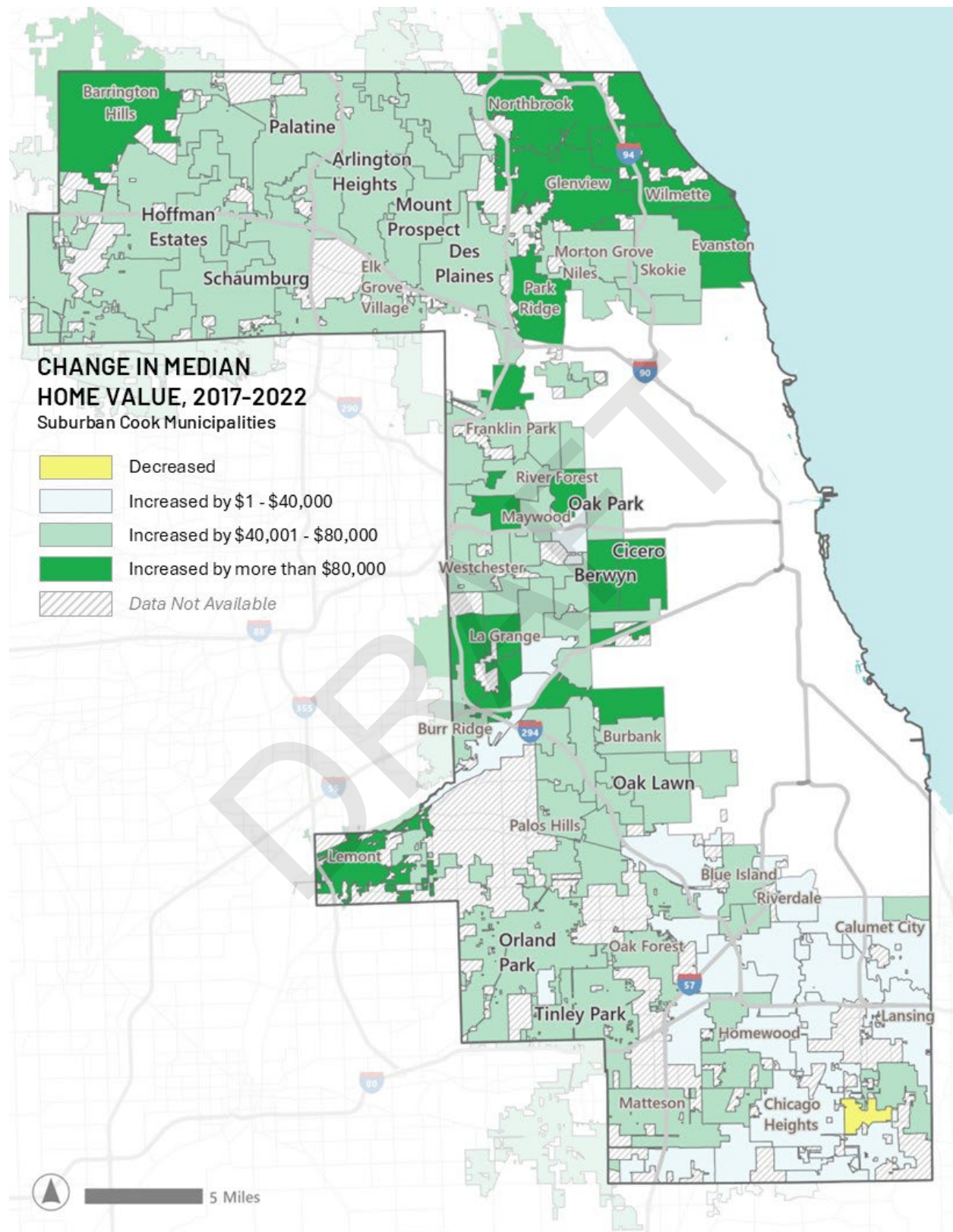
Source: U.S. Census Building Permits

As of August 2024, the median single-family detached home sold for \$373,000, and the median single-family attached home sold for \$250,000 (MLS; as of August 23, 2024). Between 2015 and 2024, the median home sale price increased by an average of 51% or \$110,000 across Suburban Cook County (MLS; Single-family detached, single-family attached, and 2-4-unit building condominiums; as of October 15, 2024). Increases were greatest for single-family detached homes, with a \$154,000 (+70%) increase over 2015 sale prices. Average days on market also declined, from 94 days in 2015 to 39 days in 2024 (MLS. Single-family detached and attached; as of August 23, 2024).

Increases in home values in Suburban Cook County were greatest in several municipalities with low initial home values, indicating potential housing affordability challenges for existing residents. Between 2017 and 2022, median home values increased by \$93,100 (52%) in Berwyn and \$85,200 (61%) in Cicero, two predominantly Latine suburbs with 2017 home values below the Cook County median. While home values also increased across many northern suburbs, these increases as a share of the initial home value were typically less. Generally, home value increases were the lowest in south suburban communities, as shown in **Figure 21** (2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). These communities may struggle with alternative challenges related to valuation, including limited equity to leverage for home improvements and a challenging market for new development.

Trends for rental housing are similar. Overall, average rents for new construction and existing multifamily units increased by 34% or \$430/month between 2015 and 2024 across Suburban Cook County (CoStar). Typically, new market-rate construction has a significant price premium over existing rental units. While the 2024 average rent across all market-rate rental units is \$1,700, the average asking rent per unit in a building constructed since 2020 in Suburban Cook County is \$2,400 (CoStar).

Figure 21. Change in Median Home Value by Municipality, 2017-2022



Source: 2013-2017 and 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

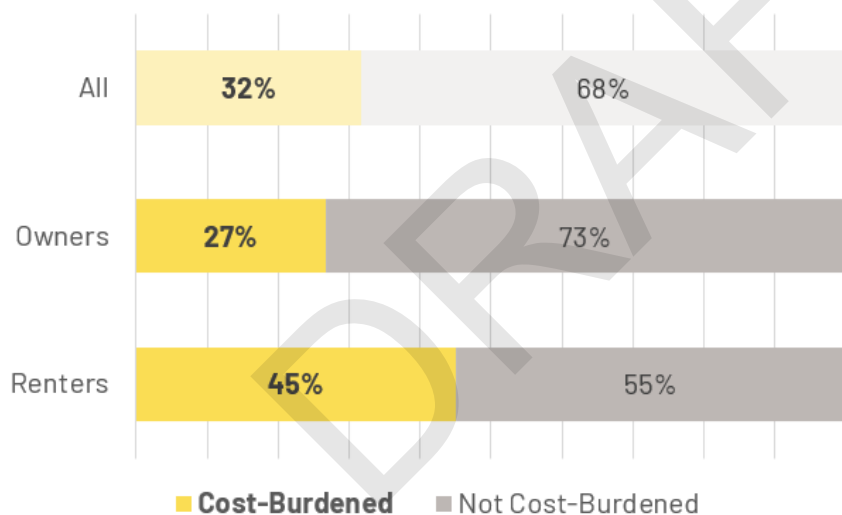
According to the BED 2023 Impact Report, the Bureau approved funding to support development of approximately 530 new housing units across 11 suburban projects. County affordable housing development includes multifamily rental and permanent supportive housing (Cook County Housing Policy Brief).

Almost a third of residents are housing cost-burdened, with a higher share of renters and residents with lower incomes

Housing is considered affordable if a household spends no more than 30% of their income on housing-related costs. Households spending more than 30% of their income on housing are considered housing cost-burdened. As housing costs rise, more households may experience housing cost-burden, particularly if incomes remain stagnant or increase at a slower pace.

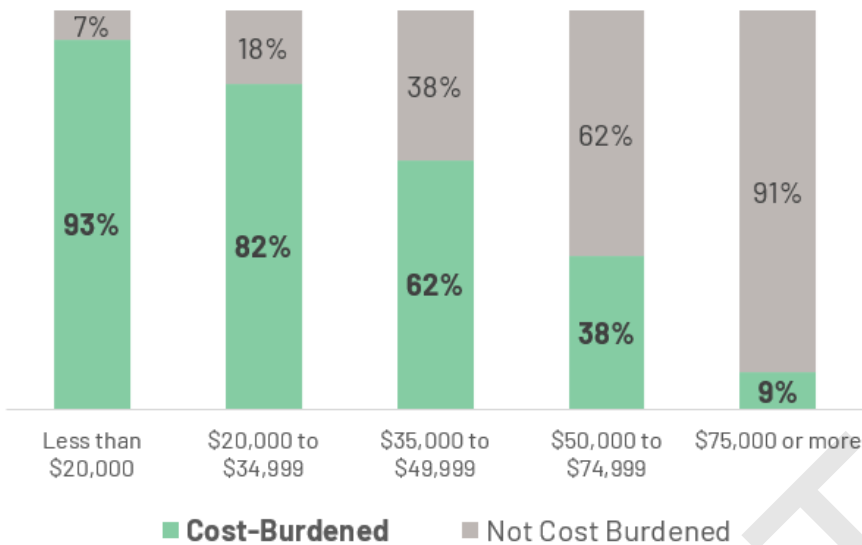
In total, 32% of Suburban Cook County households are considered housing cost-burdened, on par with the national rate (31%). However, distribution varies greatly across the population. Renters and lower-income households are more likely to be housing cost-burdened, as shown in **Figure 22** and **Figure 23** (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates). Additionally, housing cost-burden is higher for Latine and Black residents compared to Cook County overall (National Equity Atlas).

Figure 22. Percentage of Housing Cost-Burdened Households by Tenure



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 23. Percentage of Housing Cost-Burdened Households by Income



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

There is a shortage of affordable owner- and renter-occupied homes, particularly at the lowest income levels

Area median income (AMI) is often used to evaluate the availability of affordable housing units in a region. A household's income is considered in relation to AMI, with half of all households making above 100% AMI and half of all households making below that amount. AMI thresholds vary by household size: for instance, the 100% AMI threshold is greater for a 3-person household than a 1-person household. Typically, affordable housing programs and funding sources target units that are affordable to households earning up to 120% AMI for homeowners and 60% AMI for renters, with targeted programs focused on households earning less than 30% AMI. These AMI levels for households of various sizes are shown in **Figure 24** below.

Figure 24. FY 2022 Income Limits for the Chicago-Joliet-Naperville IL HUD Metro FMR Area

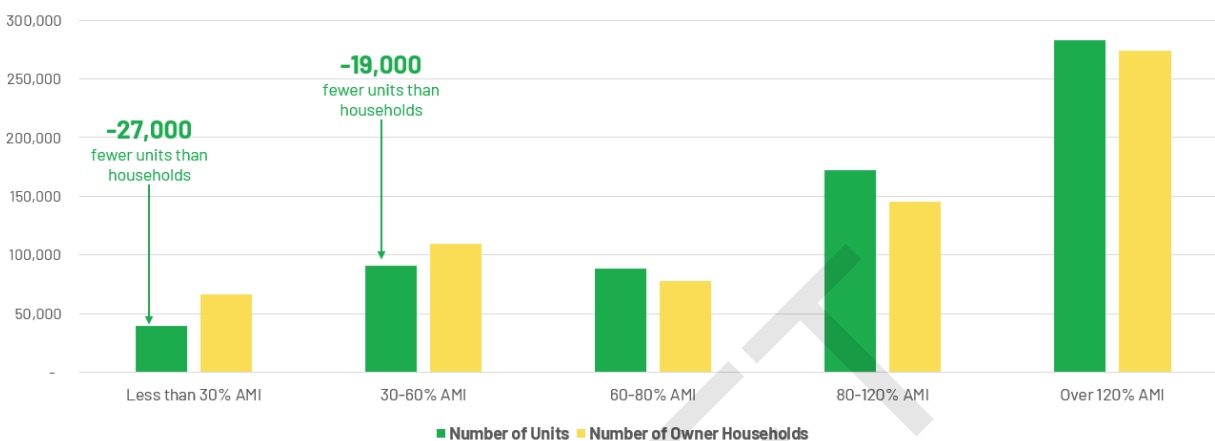
AMI Level	1-Person Household	2-Person Household	3-Person Household	4-Person Household
30% AMI	\$21,900	\$25,020	\$28,140	\$31,260
60% AMI	\$43,800	\$50,040	\$56,280	\$62,520
80% AMI	\$58,400	\$66,720	\$75,040	\$83,360
100% AMI	\$73,000	\$83,400	\$93,800	\$104,200
120% AMI	\$87,600	\$100,080	\$112,560	\$125,040

Source: HUD

In most housing markets, the largest housing shortage or "gap" is for housing units affordable to households earning less than 30% AMI. This is the case in Suburban Cook County, where there are gaps in affordable, owner-occupied units available to households under 30% AMI (27,000 fewer affordable units than households at that income level) and between 30-60% AMI (19,000 fewer units than households), as shown in **Figure 25**. For renters, the greatest affordability gap also exists for the lowest-income households earning

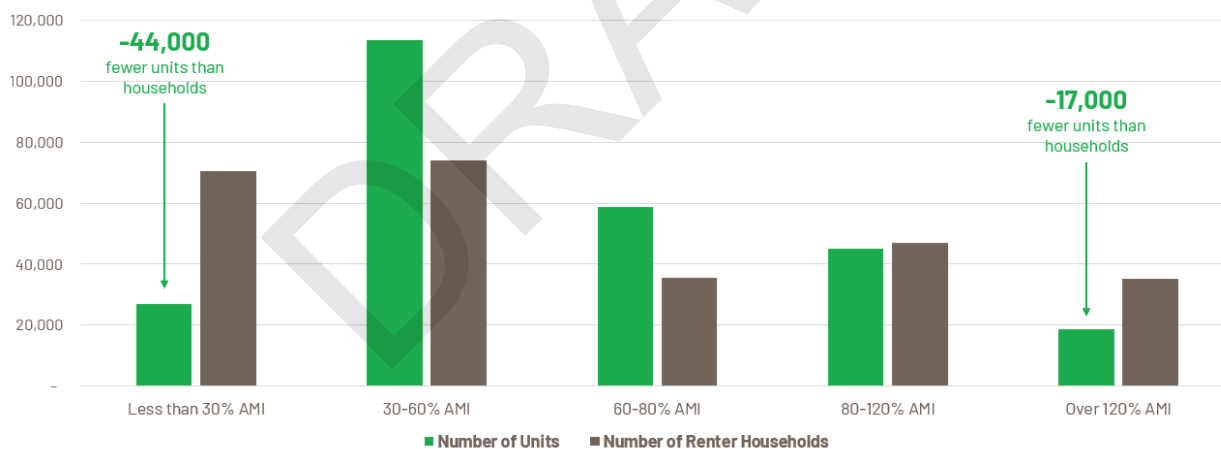
less than 30% AMI, with 44,000 fewer affordable units than households (**Figure 26**). There are more higher-income renter households earning over 120% AMI than units affordable at that income level. Households in excess of the housing unit count are renting units affordable to lower income cohorts, increasing the competition for housing units affordable at those income levels (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

Figure 25. Gap/Surplus of Affordable For-Sale Housing by Percent AMI



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 26. Gap/Surplus of Affordable Rental Housing by Percent AMI



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

The number of unsheltered residents experiencing homelessness is increasing

The Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County (the “Alliance”) estimates that there were 1,188 people experiencing homelessness within Suburban Cook County in 2024 (point in time (PIT) count as of January 31, 2024). Eighteen percent (18%) of these individuals were chronically homeless, and 53% were members of households with children. While most people experiencing homelessness were sheltered (90% of total), there were 114 unsheltered residents in 2024, a 58% increase in the unsheltered population.

The Alliance implements several programs aimed at ending homelessness and providing resources for long-term stability to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability. As the lead agency for the HUD Continuum of Care, the Alliance coordinates funding for approximately 45 different housing programs across the region to support people experiencing homelessness. The Alliance also operates the Coordinated Entry System, a network of nonprofit homeless service providers that supports individual communities in effectively targeting available resources and making client referrals. The Alliance oversees the Homeless Management Information System, collecting client-level data on characteristics and needs of people experiencing homelessness to design data-driven strategies that support the needs of individuals across the region. Beyond these programs, the Alliance conducts street outreach, landlord engagement, and diversion and rapid resolution programs. They also have specific programs targeted at ending youth and young adult homelessness.

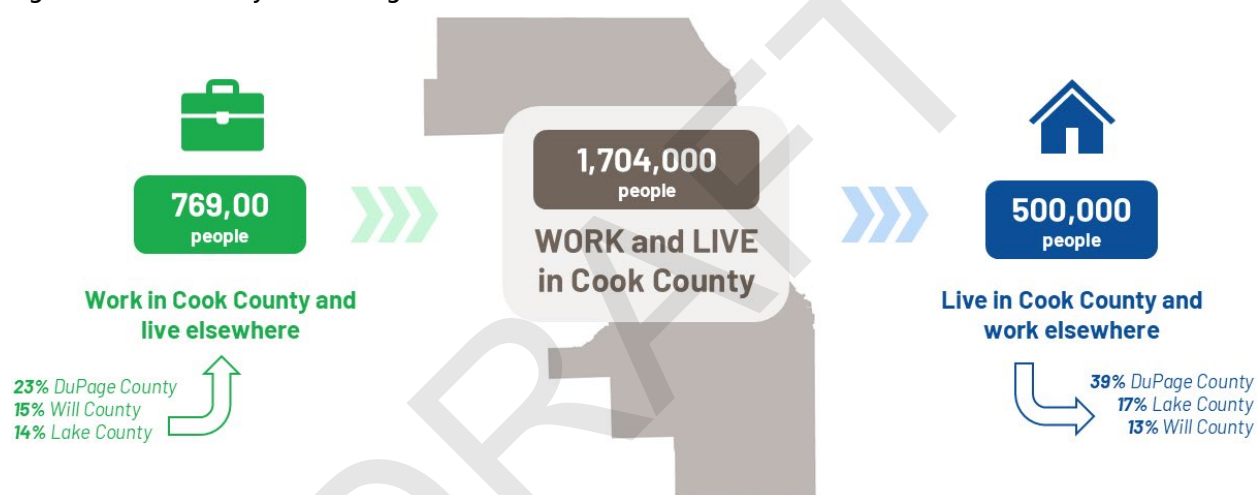
DRAFT

INFRASTRUCTURE

Cook County has a diverse network of road, water, air and rail infrastructure

Strong regional transportation infrastructure is essential to support Cook County's millions of workers and businesses. Cook County is one of the largest counties in Illinois, covering 946 square miles. While approximately 69% of Cook County jobs are filled by county residents, the county's sheer size means that many residents—even those that live and work in the county—may travel long distances between home and work. Infrastructure connections within the region are also critical, as 22% of Cook County residents commute to jobs in other counties (U.S. Census LEHD 2022). The Chicago region has long been a major freight hub. The availability of freight and distribution infrastructure facilitates the flow of goods throughout the region and country for manufacturing and TD&L businesses. The county's two international airports, ports and intermodal hubs supports participation in the global economy.

Figure 27. Cook County Commuting Patterns



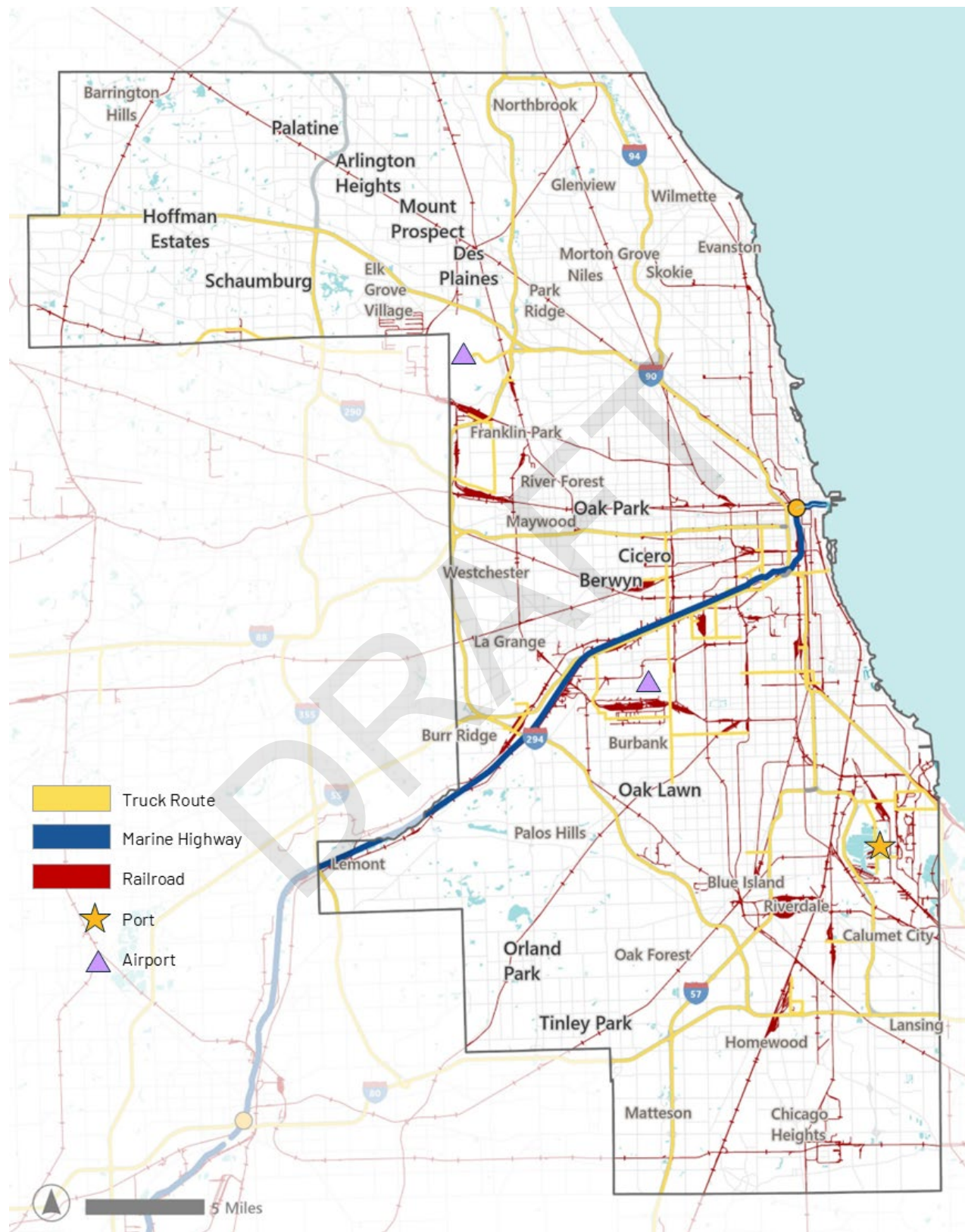
Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) 2022

- **Public Transit.** Three major commuter rail and bus systems run through the county: 11 Metra commuter rail lines, eight Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) rail lines and 127 bus routes, and 91 regional Pace bus routes. In addition, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) South Shore Lines and a network of water taxis serve the county. This transit network is one of the county's key assets, with roughly 90% of regional transit trips beginning or ending in Cook County. Approximately 17% of Cook County residents use public transportation to commute to work, compared to 8% statewide and just 4% nationally (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).
- **Highways and Roadways.** Approximately 76% of Cook County residents drive to their jobs; major highways also support freight connections. Major interstate highways that traverse the county include Interstate 80 (I-80), I-90, I-94, I-57, and I-55, as well as various circumferential interstates that connect the suburbs. These interstates facilitate the movement of people and goods within the county, region and nation, with Cook County functioning as a critical node along east-west national trucking routes. Cook County's Department of Transportation and Highways (DOT) has jurisdiction

over 561 miles of roadway as well as a maintenance responsibility for 1,620 lane-miles of pavement and other infrastructure (Cook County DOTH FY2024-2028 Proposed Transportation Improvement Program). In 2023, major maintenance priorities included bridge cleaning and sealing, pavement patching, and drainage improvements.

- **Waterways.** The Chicago Area Waterway System consists of 76.1 miles of canals and altered portions of natural rivers (Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago). This infrastructure creates critical connections between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River that support commerce and trade, provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and supports drainage for most of the region.
- **Ports & Intermodal Facilities.** The Illinois International Port District in southeast Cook County is a longstanding manufacturing and freight center with strong marine, rail and trucking capabilities. The port offers access to international ship traffic through the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway, multiple nationwide rail freight networks including CSX, Union Pacific, Norfolk Southern, and Canadian National, and interstates. As of 2021, the economic impacts of the port included over 22,800 direct and indirect jobs, \$1.4 billion in wages statewide, and approximately \$2.4 billion in state GRP (IDOT Illinois International Port District Profile).
- **Airports.** Cook County is served by two international airports: Chicago O'Hare International Airport and Chicago Midway International Airport. Combined, these airports generate more than \$45 billion in annual economic activity and support 540,000 regional jobs ([Chicago Department of Aviation](#), accessed January 15, 2025). In 2023, O'Hare and Midway accommodated nearly 96 million passengers and handled approximately 1.9 million metric tons of freight. At over \$300 billion in imports and exports, O'Hare was the top airport in all the Americas by cargo value (2023-2024 Chicago Department of Aviation Legislative Guide Annual Update).
- **Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure.** Designated bicycle infrastructure (primarily bike lanes) in the City of Chicago is mostly concentrated on the city's North and West Sides. Outside the city of Chicago, there is a lower density of bike infrastructure in many suburban communities. Many portions of the county are highly walkable, according to data from CMAP indicating that the majority of the city of Chicago and portions of many northern and western suburbs rank as high or very highly walkable. However, areas to the northwest, southwest and south are mostly moderate or lower in terms of walkability.

Figure 28. Cook County Freight Infrastructure



Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Esri, SB Friedman

Infrastructure age and ongoing maintenance costs present significant challenges

Much of the county's infrastructure has aged significantly and may be in need of maintenance or replacement. Roads and bridges are in need of investment, transit agencies have backlogs of maintenance, and portions of expressways may need to be rebuilt soon (CMAP ON TO 2050). Federal and state funding sources can assist with the costs of improvement or replacement of some types of infrastructure but are highly competitive and unlikely to be sufficient to address Cook County's infrastructure investment needs. Furthermore, external sources of funding often require lengthy application and award processes, challenging planning for needed improvements. Leveraging local resources also comes with challenges, as the patchwork of public entities controlling Cook County infrastructure requires concerted coordination for major infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure dedicated to bike and pedestrian movement is limited or unavailable in parts of the county, with a lack of bike lanes, sidewalks and safe road crossings. Bicyclists and pedestrians in those areas may be discouraged from riding or walking, or be forced to onto streets that are not built to ensure their safety.

Public transportation may be an alternative in areas served by Metra, Pace and the CTA. However, these agencies continue to be challenged by issues of reliability, sustainable funding and lower ridership since the pandemic. As of summer 2024, CTA's bus system led ridership recovery, with 77% ridership compared to 2019 levels. The Pace bus system's recovery stood at 62%, with rail lines slightly further behind at 59% for CTA and 58% for Metra (Mass Transit Magazine using CTA data).

While transit serves many Cook County residents, some parts of the county are not adequately served by transit. With great distances to transit lines or routes that do not directly connect residents to home or work, transit trips may be entirely lacking or become practically infeasible based on the time required to make multiple connections. To access job opportunities, many residents, particularly from historically excluded communities, have transit commutes in excess of 60 minutes. Long commute times may be compounded by long distances or service cutbacks, further exacerbating job accessibility in these areas. Disparities in transit access and utilization, especially for people with disabilities and residents of areas that are underserved by existing transit lines may significantly impact access to jobs, educational opportunities and services.

Finally, inadequate digital infrastructure via high-speed internet, or broadband, is a limitation for many residents, businesses and communities of Cook County, particularly for historically excluded communities. As noted in the 2023 Cook County Digital Equity Plan, half of survey respondents noted that their internet connectivity—characterized by slow speeds, unreliable connections or lack of bandwidth to support multiple users in a household—keeps them from doing what they want online, which may include working, attending school, accessing social services or socializing. Additionally, 27% of households do not have home wireline internet service, 11% rely on a cellular data plan to connect to the internet and 21% of households do not have a computer at all. Areas with the lowest rates of subscription to home internet services were on the South and West Sides of Chicago, as well as the south and west suburbs of Cook County. Lack of reliable internet access may compound challenges like unemployment and educational attainment. Additional investment in digital infrastructure will be required to ensure that access to the internet does not impede connections to work, play and livelihood of Cook County's residents, businesses and communities.

Cook County is poised to become a major green energy producer

Illinois is one of the top states in the nation for energy infrastructure: 1st in the Midwest and 5th nationally in gross production of electricity, and 4th in the nation for price stability over the past two decades. This performance is attributable to a diverse and reliable network of energy sources and extensive transmission and distribution infrastructure network (GCEP). The state is a leader in clean energy production, with over 67% of electricity coming from nuclear, wind and solar generation.

Illinois has prioritized investments in clean energy and reducing carbon emissions via passage of CEJA and the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles (REV) program. These initiatives encourage investment in manufacturing, research, workforce development and small businesses within the clean energy sector. Recent investments in green energy have resulted in the state doubling its production of renewable energy from 2021 to 2023 (IL DCEO). Greater investment in clean energy production and reducing carbon emissions will continue to make Illinois and Cook County leaders in energy production, while also creating new jobs, supporting businesses and reducing reliance on unsustainable forms of energy production.

Furthermore, these investments allow the state to be competitive nationally for cutting edge industries, including quantum computing and advanced manufacturing. Close proximity to robust, reliable energy production is important for high energy users to reduce transmission costs and ensure a stable source of power. Energy availability played a key role in spurring the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park planned for a former steel mill site along Lake Michigan on the South Side of Chicago. Energy reliability is also a key factor for manufacturers, as energy brownouts can add delays and disruptions to production lines. Having reliable energy sources supported by redundancies is critical to manufacturers feeling confident in investments for highly technical plants that consume energy.

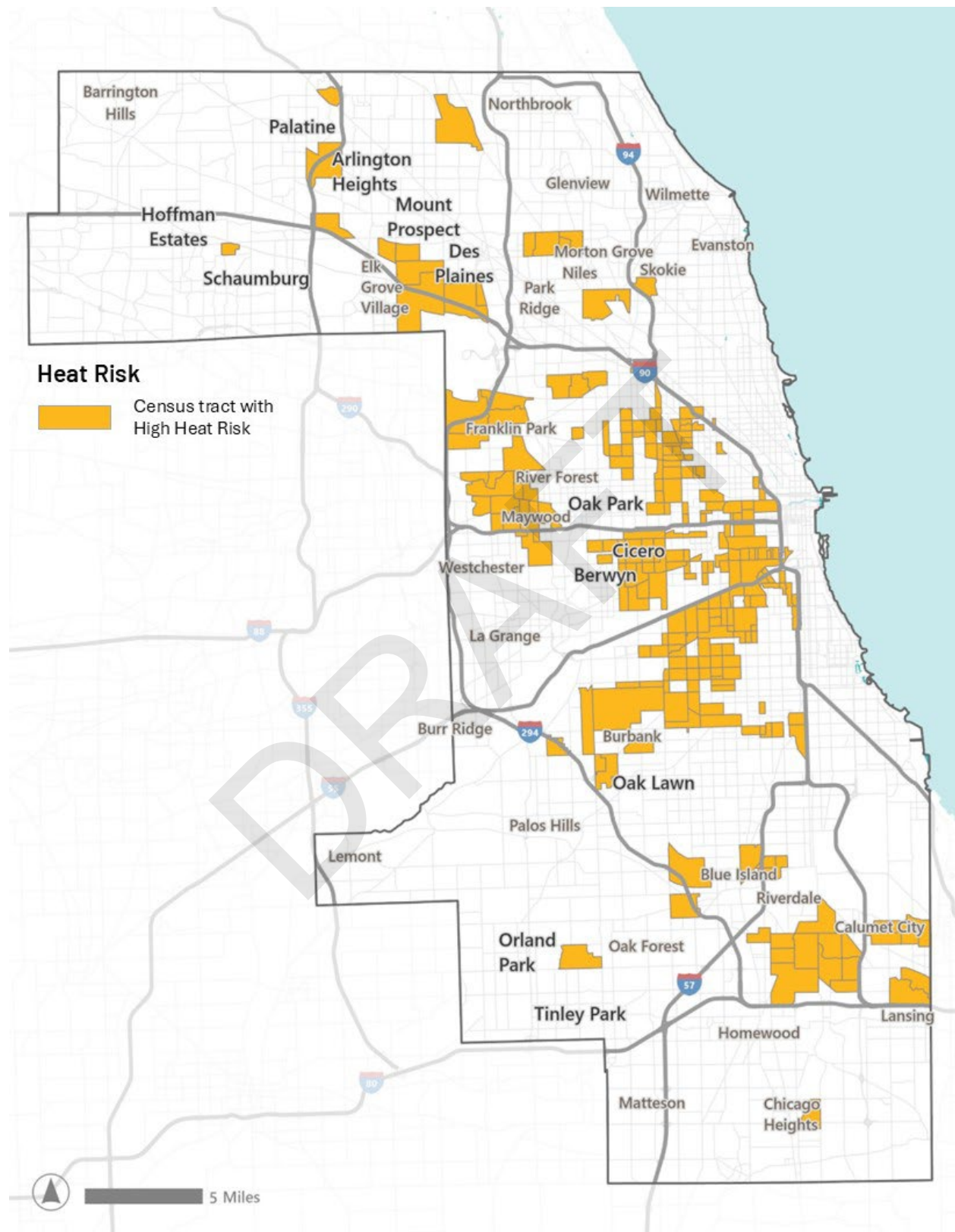
Climate resilience will require substantial infrastructure investment

Climate change is already impacting and will continue to impact Cook County, requiring infrastructure investments to address larger and more frequent rain events, increasing temperatures and possibly population change as residents of regions more prone to natural disasters seek relative stability.

Cook County is particularly susceptible to flooding and increased heat from a changing climate. Nearly the entire county has some level of flood risk, with most of the county ranked at least 8 out of 10 on CMAP's urban flood susceptibility index. These properties are defined as "extremely susceptible" to flooding. Factors that influence heat risk include a greater proportion of impervious surfaces, which tend to absorb and radiate heat, and less tree canopy, reducing the amount of cooling shade available. Areas of concentrated heat risk are located on the West and Southwest Sides of Chicago and the western and southern suburbs, with pockets in northwestern suburbs (Greenprint, 2022).

Despite these risks, compared to other regions of the country, Cook County and Illinois are relatively insulated from other major climate risks like wildfires, hurricanes and rising sea levels. Between 2018 and 2022, Illinois had the 6th lowest number of major environmental disasters. As recently as 2020, Illinois' homeowners insurance rates were below the national average (GCEP). The low relative risk may lead to an influx of climate refugees as other regions face increasing costs and challenges.

Figure 29. Census Tracts with High Heat Risk



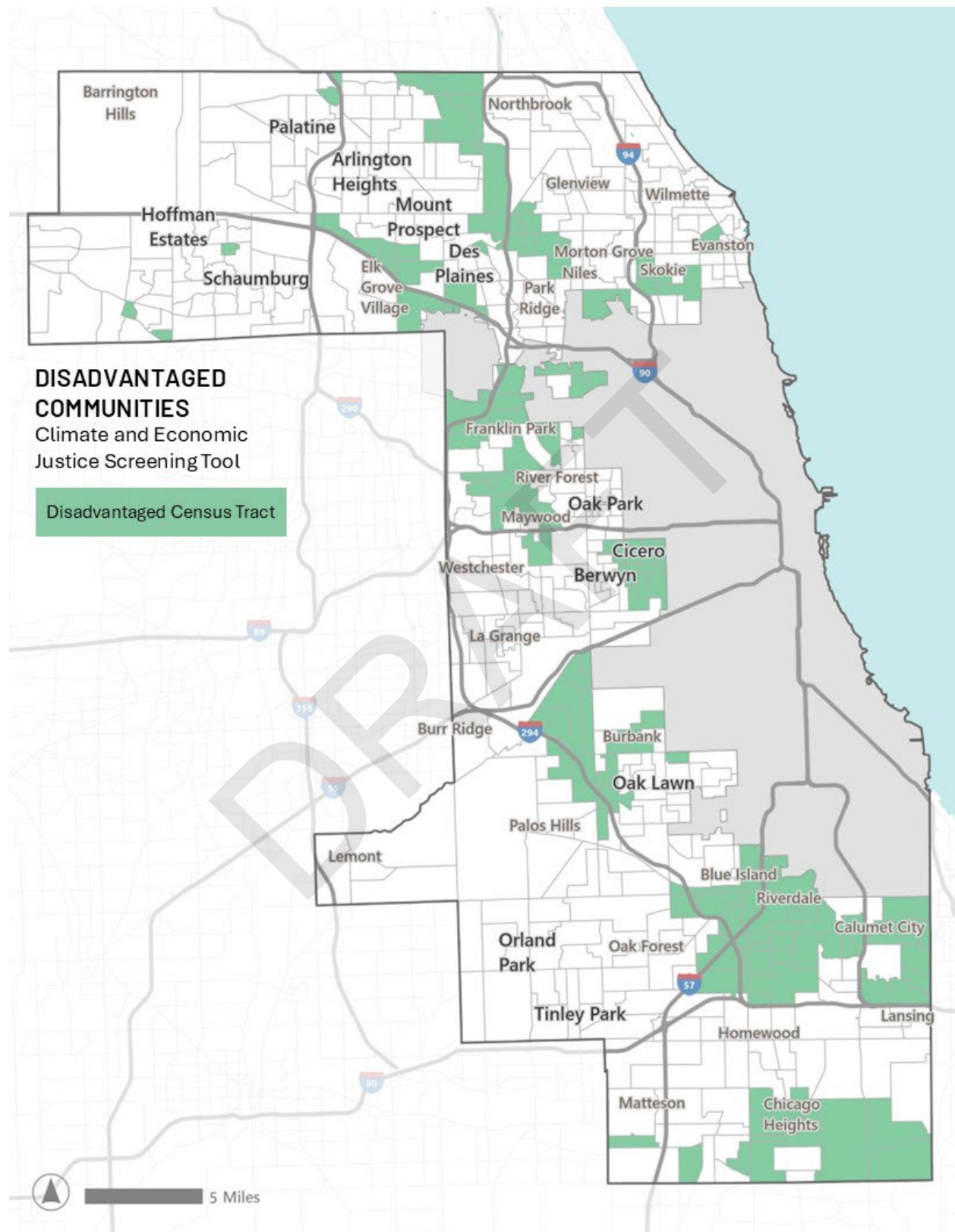
Source: Esri, Greenprint, SB Friedman

The County has recently refined environmental justice policies

The Council on Environmental Quality, a federal agency that reports to the EPA, identifies disadvantaged communities which experience burdens across eight categories: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development. These communities often face the intersection of multiple categories. 28% of census tracts in Suburban Cook County are federally designated disadvantaged communities per the Council on Environmental Quality's Economic Justice Screening Tool. These census tracts tend to overlap with historically excluded communities, lower-income tracts, and/or tracts that experience greater likelihood of heat risk and other impacts of climate change. Investing in infrastructure to mitigate these risks will be crucial to residents' health, safety and well-being.

The County recently issued a new Environmental Justice Policy, which more clearly identifies environmental challenges and articulates strategies to mitigate them. Strategies are related to pollution, clean water, flooding, climate resilience, access to healthy food, green space, and other topics. The Environmental Justice Policy is intended to guide actions and investments by the County and other public and private partners to create better outcomes for residents, businesses and communities within Cook County. Actions include the development of a local definition and mapping of environmental justice priority communities, regular meetings of an environmental justice working group, and additional staffing capacity and financial resources to address environmental justice challenges in the county.

Figure 30. Disadvantaged Communities



Source: Council on Environmental Quality Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development improves the lives of residents with a focus on inequities

Successful community development addresses the gaps in healthcare access, safety, social services, recreation, childcare and other factors that are fundamental to healthy and successful communities. Disparities in access to services and amenities disproportionately impact historically excluded communities and limit their economic opportunities. Individuals experiencing housing instability and other economic hardships often have compounding challenges which may include exposure to negative health and environmental conditions, difficult access to reliable transportation, or limited access to social services.

The County's community development investments and programs seek to address disparities and ensure equitable health, safety and economic outcomes for its diverse residents and communities. Dozens of nonprofits working to reduce extraordinary costs, improve health outcomes and connect residents to economic opportunities. Numerous County programs also provide resources and assistance to improve residents' health and well-being. However, gaps in economic opportunity and health outcome persist, and there are opportunities to better coordinate limited resources to improve residents' quality of life.

Disability status and access to insurance may create additional challenges to residents' health

Residents with a disability may face additional challenges to health, housing and employment than residents without a disability. As of 2022, 10% of Cook County residents reported having a disability. Certain populations are more likely to have a disability than others, particularly older residents. In Cook County, 32% of the population 65 years or older have a disability. Additionally, the senior population is growing, with an increase of 42,000 people aged 65 or older between 2017 and 2022. As this population grows, the need to address accessibility challenges will increase.

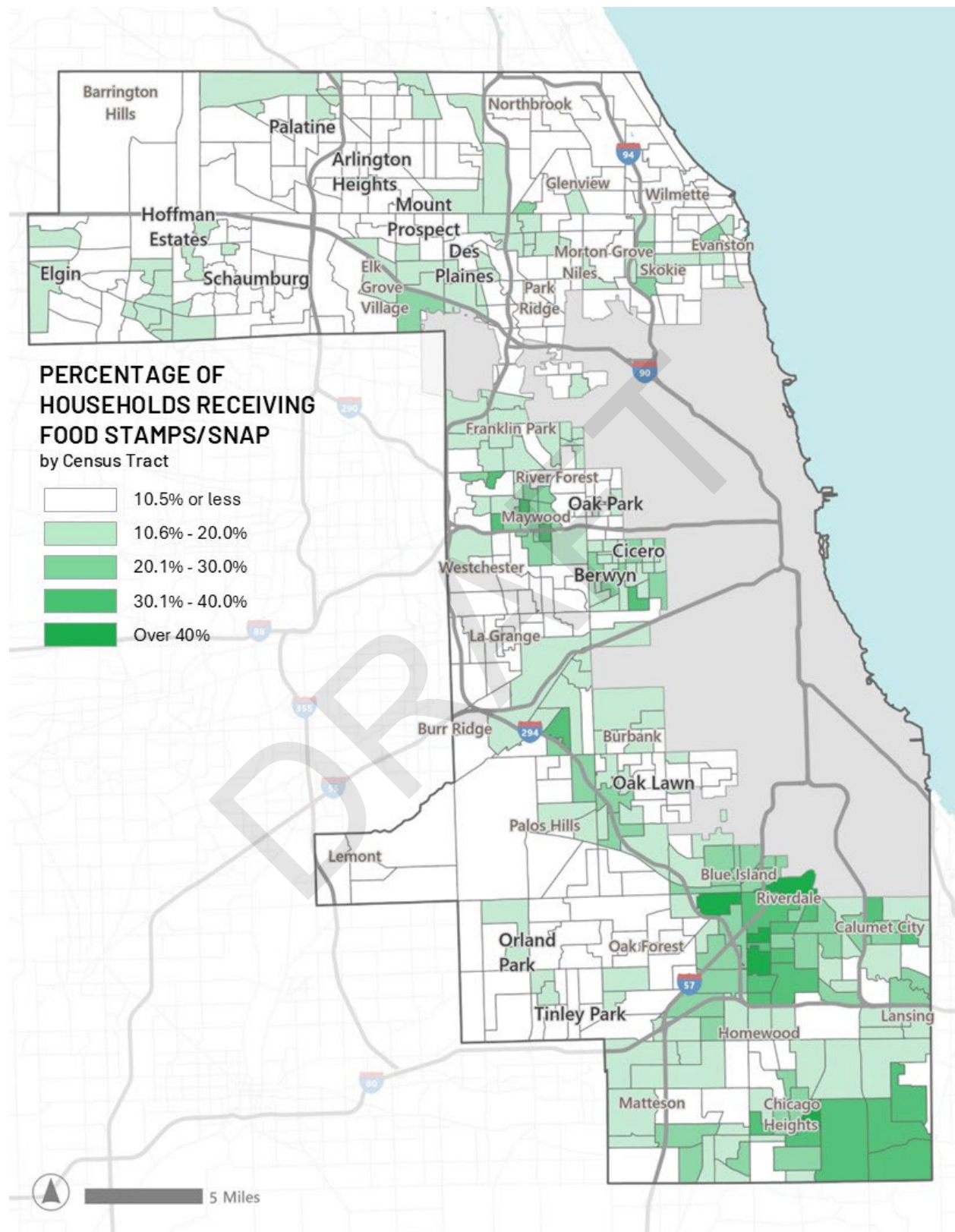
Access to health insurance is key to health and wellbeing. Those without insurance must pay significantly higher costs for healthcare, often leading to deferred care and worse healthcare outcomes. While 8% of all residents in Suburban Cook County lack health insurance, the ratio varies significantly by race and ethnicity. As of 2022, White residents had the lowest rate of uninsurance at 5%, while Hispanic or Latine residents and residents of two or more races were more than twice as likely to be uninsured, at 12% each. At that time, 7% of Asian residents and 8% of Black residents were uninsured (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

Food accessibility disproportionately affects residents of south and west suburban communities

Access to food has direct impacts on health and well-being for households. The U.S. Department of Agriculture maintains data on food deserts—geographic areas where residents' access to affordable healthy food options is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance (Food Empowerment Project). As of 2019, food deserts identified by the Food Access Research Atlas were largely clustered in southern Cook County, with a few smaller food deserts across the west and north.

Low-income households may be eligible for federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) to purchase food. In Suburban Cook County, 11% of households received SNAP benefits as of 2022, though in some parts of southern and western Cook County, more than 40% of households receive SNAP benefits (2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

Figure 31. Percentage of Households Receiving SNAP Benefits by Census Tract (2022)



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Additional factors threaten residents' opportunities for economic stability and healthy lives

Poor environmental quality, flood and heat risks, and inadequate infrastructure can negatively impact health and communities, especially for residents in environmental justice areas. Continuing to develop and implement a strong environmental justice policy at the County level may help to address the unequal burden of negative environmental impacts across the county.

Access to public parks and open space may result in higher physical activity and improved health and well-being for nearby residents. In Suburban Cook County alone, 46% of census block groups contain or are adjacent to a park or preserve of at least four acres, compared to 30% countywide (Cook County, SB Friedman). Access to parks and preserves may be further challenged by limited pedestrian, bike or transit infrastructure connecting residents with recreational open space. Parks and forest preserves are distributed across Suburban Cook County, with numerous public spaces in the north, south and western suburbs. Areas furthest from parks and forest preserves tend to be inner-ring western suburbs near Chicago and other small pockets around the county.

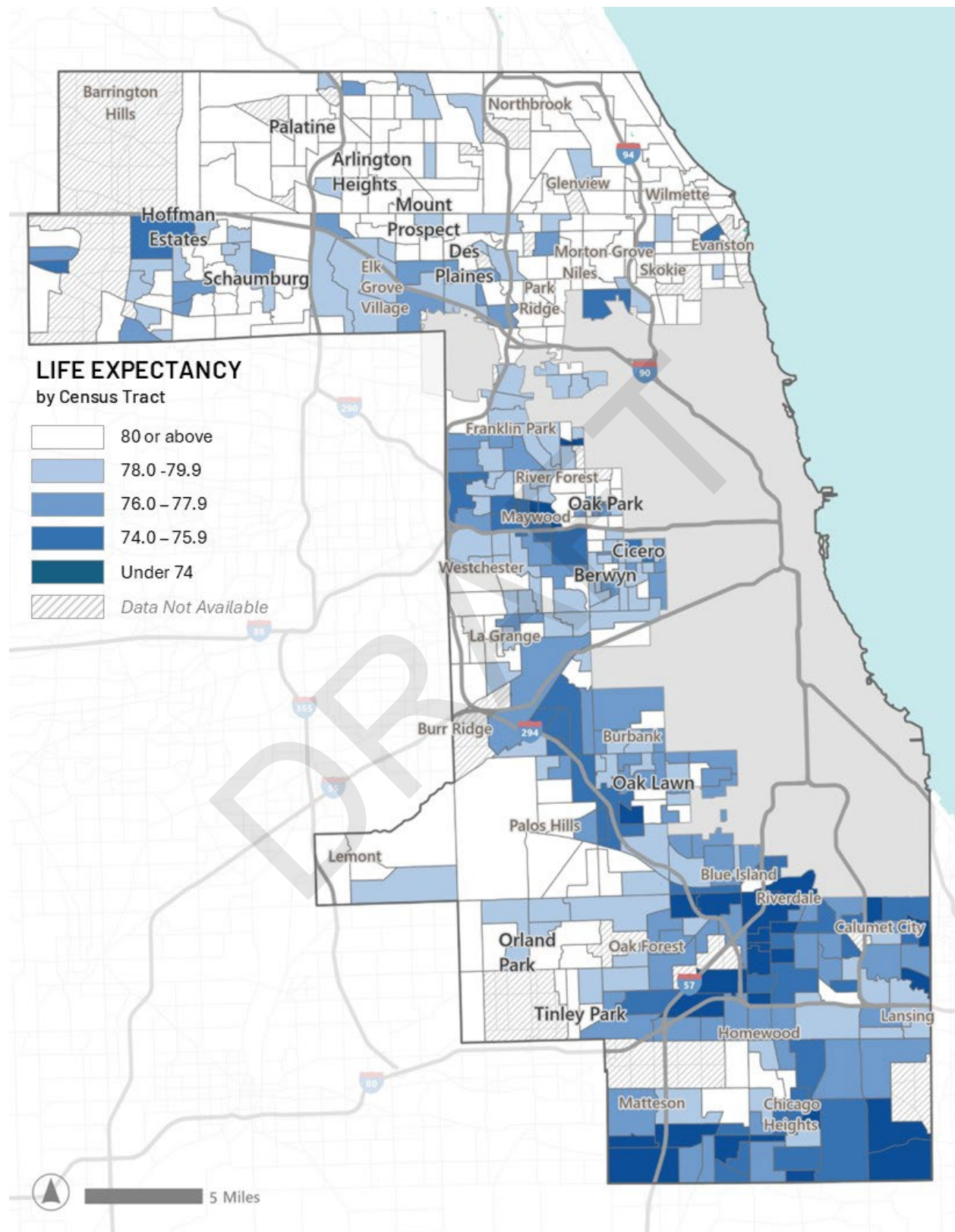
The cost of childcare can be a substantial burden on families, forcing tradeoffs with other critical household costs like housing, health care and food. Annual, full-time childcare costs in Cook County average \$10,000 to \$16,000 annually per child, depending on the child's age and whether they are enrolled in a licensed home or licensed center program (Report on Childcare in Cook County). The federal affordability benchmark for childcare was 7% of family income in 2023. Cook County families pay more than double the federal benchmark on average: 18% for an infant and 15% for a 2-year-old (Report on Childcare in Cook County). High childcare costs can lead to families sacrificing significant financial resources to afford childcare, deferring spending on necessities, limiting saving, or even foregoing one income stream to avoid paying for outside childcare.

Intersecting health and economic factors can impact quality of life

Community development challenges, such as those described above, tend to overlap and intersect vulnerable populations and increase impacts on historically excluded communities, reducing quality of life and life expectancy.

Though the countywide average life expectancy is age 79, it exceeds age 80 in many census tracts in northern suburbs, but is as low as age 68 in some southern and western suburbs. Average life expectancy by census tract is exhibited in **Figure 32**. The intersection of factors affecting health and well-being is often strongly correlated with communities that are lower income, have been historically excluded, and/or are most vulnerable to climate change. Addressing the factors which individually affect—and together compound—to limit health and safety could result in longer life expectancy and better quality of life for Suburban Cook County residents.

Figure 32. Life Expectancy by Census Tract (2015)



Source: CDC USALEEP

APPENDIX D | Crosswalk of NAICS Codes, Industry Clusters and GCEP Key Industries

Industry Cluster	Traded or Local	GCEP Key Industry	NAICS Codes
Business Services	Traded	Business & Professional Services	541214, 541310, 541320, 541340, 541611, 541612, 541614, 541618, 541690, 541930, 541990, 541380, 541360
Engineering Services	Traded	Business & Professional Services	541330
Information Technology	Traded	Business & Professional Services	541511, 541512, 541513, 541519
Marketing, Design and Publishing	Traded	Business & Professional Services	541410, 541420, 541430, 541490, 541613, 541810, 541820, 541830, 541840, 541850, 541860, 541870, 541890, 541910
Legal Services	Local	Business & Professional Services	541110, 541199
Local Commercial Services	Local	Business & Professional Services	541211, 541219, 541350, 541620, 541922
Other Local Business and Professional Services	Local	Business & Professional Services	541213, 541921, 541191, 541370
Veterinary Services	Local	Business & Professional Services	541940
Financial Services	Traded	Finance & Insurance	521110, 522210, 522220, 522291, 522292, 522299, 522310, 522320, 522390, 523150, 523160, 523210, 523910, 523940, 523991, 523999, 525110, 525120, 525190, 525910, 525920, 525990
Insurance Services	Traded	Finance & Insurance	524113, 524114, 524126, 524127, 524128, 524130, 524291, 524298
Local Financial Services	Local	Finance & Insurance	522110, 522130, 522180, 524210, 524292

Industry Cluster	Traded or Local	GCEP Key Industry	NAICS Codes
Food Processing and Manufacturing	Traded	Food Manufacturing	311512, 311340, 311991, 311942, 311999, 311221, 311830, 311412, 312120, 311421, 311352, 311351, 311824, 311821, 311520, 327213, 311813, 311920, 311919, 311941, 311230, 311513, 311411, 311511, 311930, 311710, 311119, 311514, 312140, 312112, 312111, 312113, 311111, 312130, 311911, 311422, 311423, 311211, 311225, 311314, 311212, 311213, 311224, 311313
Livestock Processing	Traded	Food Manufacturing	311612, 311611, 311615, 311613
Tobacco	Traded	Food Manufacturing	312230
Bakeries	Local	Food Manufacturing	311812, 311811
Life Sciences	Traded	Life Sciences	541713, 541714, 541715, 621511, 621512
Life Sciences Manufacturing	Traded	Life Sciences	325311, 325314, 325315, 334512, 334513, 334514, 334515, 334519, 325130, 325411, 325412, 325413, 325414, 334510, 334516, 334517, 339112, 339113, 339114, 339115
Life Sciences Wholesale	Traded	Life Sciences	424210
Upstream Chemical Products	Traded	Life Sciences	325110, 325120, 325180, 325193, 325194, 325199, 325312, 325320
Aerospace Vehicles and Defense	Traded	Manufacturing	334511, 336411, 336412, 336413, 336414, 336415, 336419
Analytical Instruments Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	333242, 334111, 334112, 334118, 334310, 334412, 334413, 334416, 334417, 334418, 334419, 334610
Apparel	Traded	Manufacturing	315210, 315250, 315990
Automotive	Traded	Manufacturing	331511, 331512, 331513, 331523, 331524, 331529, 332114, 336110, 336120, 336211, 336310, 336320, 336330, 336340, 336350, 336360, 336370, 336390, 336992, 336999

Industry Cluster	Traded or Local	GCEP Key Industry	NAICS Codes
Construction Products	Traded	Manufacturing	324121, 324122, 327310, 327331, 327332, 327410, 327420, 327991, 327993, 327999, 332410, 332420, 332913, 332996
Downstream Chemical Products	Traded	Manufacturing	324191, 325510, 325520, 325611, 325612, 325613, 325620, 325920, 325991, 325992, 325998
Downstream Metal Products	Traded	Manufacturing	332215, 332216, 332311, 332312, 332321, 332323, 332431, 332439, 332510, 332992, 332993, 332994, 332999
Footwear	Traded	Manufacturing	316210
Furniture	Traded	Manufacturing	321991, 337110, 337121, 337122, 337126, 337127, 337211, 337214, 337215, 337910
Jewelry and Precious Metals	Traded	Manufacturing	339910
Leather and Related Products	Traded	Manufacturing	314910, 316110, 316990
Lighting and Electrical Equipment	Traded	Manufacturing	335131, 335132, 335139, 335311, 335312, 335313, 335314, 335910, 335921, 335929, 335931, 335932, 335991, 335999
Metalworking Technology	Traded	Manufacturing	327910, 332313, 332721, 332722, 332811, 332812, 332813, 333511, 333514, 333515, 333517, 333519, 333991, 333992
Other Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	325212, 336611, 336612
Paper and Packaging	Traded	Manufacturing	322110, 322120, 322130, 322211, 322212, 322219, 322220, 322230, 322291, 322299
Petroleum and Coal Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	324110, 324199, 333132
Plastics	Traded	Manufacturing	325211, 326111, 326112, 326113, 326121, 326122, 326130, 326140, 326150, 326160, 326191, 326199, 339994
Printing Services	Traded	Manufacturing	323111, 323113, 323117, 323120, 325910

Industry Cluster	Traded or Local	GCEP Key Industry	NAICS Codes
Production Technology and Heavy Machinery	Traded	Manufacturing	332911, 332912, 332919, 332991, 333111, 333112, 333120, 333131, 333241, 333243, 333248, 333310, 333413, 333414, 333415, 333611, 333612, 333613, 333618, 333912, 333914, 333921, 333922, 333923, 333924, 333993, 333994, 333995, 333996, 333998, 336510, 339991
Recreational and Small Electric Goods	Traded	Manufacturing	335210, 336991, 337920, 339920, 339930, 339940, 339992, 339993, 339999
Telecommunications Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	334210, 334220, 334290
Textile Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	313110, 313210, 313220, 313230, 313240, 313310, 313320, 314110, 314120, 314994, 314999, 315120, 325220
Trailers, Motor Homes and Appliances	Traded	Manufacturing	335220, 336212, 336213, 336214, 339995
Upstream Metal Manufacturing	Traded	Manufacturing	331110, 331210, 331221, 331222, 331313, 331314, 331315, 331318, 331410, 331420, 331491, 331492, 332111, 332112, 332117, 332119, 332613, 332618
Vulcanized and Fired Materials	Traded	Manufacturing	326211, 326212, 326220, 326291, 326299, 327110, 327120, 327211, 327212, 327215, 327992
Wood Products	Traded	Manufacturing	321113, 321114, 321211, 321212, 321215, 321219, 321911, 321912, 321918, 321920, 321992, 321999
Construction Manufacturing	Local	Manufacturing	327320, 327390, 332322, 337212
Local Sign Manufacturing	Local	Manufacturing	339950
Machine Shops	Local	Manufacturing	332710
Ground Passenger Transportation	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	485310, 485320, 485999

Industry Cluster	Traded or Local	GCEP Key Industry	NAICS Codes
Oil and Gas Transportation	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	486110, 486210, 486910, 486990
Tourism Transportation	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	487110, 487210, 487990
Transportation and Logistics	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	481111, 481112, 481211, 481212, 481219, 482110, 484121, 484230, 485210, 485510, 488111, 488119, 488190, 488210, 488490, 488510, 488991, 488999
Warehousing and Storage	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	493110, 493120, 493130, 493190
Water Transportation	Traded	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	483111, 483112, 483113, 483114, 483211, 483212, 488310, 488320, 488330, 488390
Local Logistical Services	Local	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	484110, 484122, 484210, 484220, 485111, 485112, 485113, 485119, 485410, 485991, 491110, 492110, 492210
Motor Vehicle Towing	Local	Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	488410