

# REALIZING THE PROMISE:

## Chicago 2016 Was a Beginning, Not an End



“Exposure to different sports opens up people’s eyes. There’s great potential for collaboration and just for talking to your neighbors. The programs are going well and growing – momentum continues to build.”

**Rob Castañeda, director of Beyond the Ball and co-founder of Project Play**

LISC/Chicago’s neighborhoods make no little plans. So when the dream of the 2016 Olympics in Chicago was over, they didn’t miss a beat, turning plans put forward to support the bid into sustainable strategies to accomplish community goals.

The plans developed as part of LISC’s **Neighborhood Partnership for Chicago 2016** were an outgrowth of the neighborhoods’ existing Quality-of-Life plans and provide direction for neighborhood development with or without the Olympics.

The long-term, proactive strategies suggested by the Neighborhood Partnership address key community issues that were relevant to the Olympics – youth and family programming, communications and technology, tourism and placemaking, housing and jobs, and transportation. While many of the ideas, such as job training and transit-oriented development, require the kind of major funding the Games would have brought to Chicago, the vision of the Neighborhood Partnership remains alive and is moving forward, building on support already in place.

### Starting with Sports

Sports are not about who’s watching – even if who’s watching includes the international Olympic community. Spring Into Sports, an eight-day run of sports activities and tournaments organized by LISC/Chicago’s **Neighborhood Sports Chicago (NSC)**, coincided with the visit of the

International Olympic Committee in March. But its lasting impact has much more to do with strengthening a robust neighborhood sports infrastructure as a way to build healthy communities, providing a positive response to challenges like youth violence.

“We were proud to showcase our neighborhoods and their sports-based youth programs during the IOC visit,” said Keri Blackwell, LISC program officer. “But Spring Into Sports was really about the kids – engaging them in healthy and safe activities over spring break, exposing them to Olympic sports like archery, badminton, and track and field, and building positive relationships within and among kids, adults and neighborhoods.”

Spring Into Sports was supported by the 2016 Fund for Chicago Neighborhoods, created by local foundations to support the city’s Olympic bid and ensure that it provided lasting benefits to Chicago neighborhoods. A whirlwind week for more than 1,500 youth, Spring Into Sports was only the first of a wide range of Neighborhood Sports Chicago programs. This past summer, NSC also launched **Chicago Co-MOTION** to back summer sports leagues, tournaments, outdoor family programs and neighborhood events.

While some were the traditional, well-loved programs like basketball leagues, others, such as Project Play in Little Village, were new and innovative. Project Play reclaimed outdoor space that had been dominated by gangs and invited kids and their parents to participate in traditional and non-traditional games and activities – in short, it asked families to play together.



“The Chicago 2016 plans helped us orient the tours to visitors from afar. The tours are adaptable to different audiences, and we’ve already had the chance to give tours to people from abroad and from all across this country. But it’s also important for local people to be able to see Auburn Gresham from a different perspective. We’ve built this great capacity in our organization and our neighborhood, and we’re proud to keep using it.”

**Carlos Nelson, executive director of Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation**

are moving forward, and Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation is working on a TOD to include housing and commercial space. On the Near West Side, discussions begun during the 2016 planning process for new CTA Green and Pink Line stations are continuing, and a focus on transit in Washington Park led to a recent Regional Transportation Authority grant to the WashingtonPark Consortium to do transit-oriented planning in line with their Quality-of-Life plan.

“Instead of just dropping their kids off, parents stay to play with them,” said Rob Castaneda, director of Beyond the Ball, which organized Project Play. “It promotes a sense of unity to use this space together.”

### **Neighborhoods Worth Visiting**

Chicago, the “city of neighborhoods,” has much more to offer tourists than downtown attractions. Even without the influx of international tourists the Olympics would have brought, **New Communities Program** neighborhoods have started to attract visitors to the rich cultural offerings in under-explored parts of the city.

The first of those efforts, launched as part of the City’s Great Chicago Places and Spaces festival this past spring, was a smashing success. Six neighborhoods led sold-out bus and walking tours in South Chicago, Bronzeville, Pilsen, Albany Park, Auburn Gresham and West Ridge. With support from the Boeing Company and with leadership from the Burnham Plan Centennial and Chicago Metropolitan2020, the tours showcased the neighborhoods’ cultural attractions and local shops and restaurants unique to each area.

And according to LISC/Chicago Director of Programs Joel Bookman, the tours went beyond showing off the neighborhoods.

“The tours communicate not only all the exciting features that these neighborhoods have to offer,” Bookman said, “but the collective neighborhood action that brought these changes to the neighborhoods.”

In addition to bringing visitors to neighborhoods, the Neighborhood Partnership identified ways to create new attractions and promote cultural and commercial districts to tourists – and to neighborhood residents. Lawndale Christian Development Corporation is developing the Martin Luther King, Jr. District, including an affordable housing museum, a library, apartments and a rehabbed community center to celebrate Dr. King’s 1966 fair-housing campaign in North Lawndale. In Quad Communities, LISC recently supported Connect 4, an event launching the revamped United Bronzeville Business association with tours of local businesses on Cottage Grove Avenue.

### **Moving Ahead**

While the plans of the Neighborhood Partnership for 2016 are already producing tangible results, they’ve also set in motion larger projects that are seeing early progress, particularly in the areas of transit and transit-oriented development (TOD). In Auburn Gresham, a new Metra station at 79th Street was suggested by the Neighborhood Partnership as a way to connect the city’s busiest east-west bus route with downtown. Plans for the station

Chicago is not a city to mull over its losses, and its neighborhoods know how to move forward in the face of both challenges and advantages. If anything, the International Olympic Committee’s rejection of Chicago’s bid for 2016 left NCP neighborhoods more committed to realizing their goals. These neighborhoods know that their long-term vision for their communities – sharpened by the dream of the Olympics – is larger, more important, and more enduring than a single aspiration for a single event.



Carlos Nelson leads the “Rebuilding a Classic Community” tour in Auburn Gresham.