

The Future of Work and Health: Environmental Justice & Climate Change

On May 14, 2019, 60 Chicagoans of the public health community came together at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health for “On The Table” conversations around the Future of Work in Chicago. Participants composed memos on the Future of Work to Mayor Lightfoot to let her know what issues we want her to prioritize for action.

Describe the Topic: Environmental Justice & Climate Change

Specific Groups Discussed: All city employees

Neighborhoods/Communities of Focus: All neighborhoods

Who was at the table: Olga Bautista, Our City Our Voice; Susan Buchanan, UIC School of Public Health; Caitlin Donato, UIC School of Public Health; Amanda Abramson, UIC School of Public Health; Elena Grossman, UIC School of Public Health; Marsha Love, UIC School of Public Health; Megan Piotrowski, UIC School of Public Health.

Views and opinions represented in this document are those of individuals not the organizations.

What are the suggestions from the conversation for Chicago’s new mayor to consider?

1. Industrial Corridor Modernization Initiative

- a. Communities that have long suffered from polluting industries in their communities should be prioritized for sustainable development not continue to be burdened with new, heavy polluting industries coming into their neighborhoods.
 - i. We recommend that the Mayor prioritize the Green Economic Industrial Corridor model in all communities that are affected by established and encroaching industries causing pollution. The Southeast Environmental Taskforce created a model to revitalize the Calumet Region, serving as a showcase for sustainable development. This model calls for job creation and business opportunities while improving the environmental health and safety of the region. Jobs should be in green industries such as renewable energy, pay decent wages, and hire local residents.
 - ii. It is vital that all residents who live near or within an industrial corridor have the opportunity to voice their concerns about modernization plans. Therefore, there should be an equal and sufficient number of community engagement sessions for all communities impacted by industrial corridors/areas. Those sessions should not be last minute and should limit all barriers for the community by providing childcare, ensuring language translation is available, and taking the time of day into consideration, among others.
 - iii. Toxic businesses should have stricter environmental controls including: noise suppression, capturing particulate matter, substituting safer chemicals. These protections should not only protect the workers, but also the residents in the community.
 - iv. We recommend the city set stricter regulations for trucks transporting materials in and out of these areas and come up with a plan that would reduce truck traffic.
 - v. Guide for Equitable Development: <https://greatcities.uic.edu/uic-neighborhoods-initiative/calumet-river-communities-planning-framework/>

2. Housing

- a. The existing Affordable Requirements Ordinance requires developers to pay an in lieu fee if they do not develop 10% of affordable units on site.
 - i. We recommend that the in lieu fee be increased in order to provide housing subsidies for affordable, sustainable, and green housing developments. By increasing the in lieu fee funds could also be made available for residents to request free heavy metal testing in bio-samples, soil or air, etc.
 - ii. We also recommend the use of these fees to repair the existing harm done to communities faced with environmental injustices.
 - iii. Residents should be able to afford to live in their communities after they fight to clean it up. Ex: Pilsen and Little Village residents struggled to close two coal-fired power plants only to be priced out of their neighborhood when their air-quality improved.

3. Planning and Development Division

- a. The [Chicago Sustainable Development Policy](#) allows too many loopholes for developers and industries.
 - i. We recommend that this checklist is reviewed and improved so that it includes a list of mandatory actions that all developers and industries must follow, and then includes additional options for them to incorporate in order to receive a higher score.
- b. The Plan Commission is an appointed board and does not represent the community for which it is making decisions.
 - i. We recommend that the Plan Commission be revamped in order to allow the community to have a voice and shape decisions. The health of the community must be taken into account for every planning decision. The Plan Commission should include representation of residents from environmental justice communities.
- c. Zoning Board of Approvals are often done quickly without letting community members know about them.
 - i. We recommend that evaluation process for special use permits and variances allow for transparency and opportunity for community members to respond to the proposals.
- d. Community members who are impacted by land use decision are not always given the opportunity to be heard.
 - i. We recommend a special vote for land use decision which would allow for a lower age limit and allow people who are undocumented to be part of the vote
- e. Community Benefit Agreements
 - i. All new developments should be required to include Community Benefit Agreements. <https://www.forworkingfamilies.org/page/community-benefits-101>

4. Chicago Department of Transportation

- a. Green infrastructure, such as permeable pavement, has been a part of Chicago's plan to manage storm water, but existing projects have not been maintained.
 - i. We recommend that CDOT review the Green Alley Program and assess how many more alleys can be converted to permeable alleys. In addition CDOT should be re-trained on how to maintain green infrastructure projects and given the proper resources to do so.
- b. Chicago's Commitment to 100% Clean Energy includes completely electrifying its fleet of over 1,850 buses by 2040.
 - i. We recommend that the electric fleet be deployed to Southeast Side, Altgeld Gardens, Little Village and other Environmental Justice communities that have very poor air quality issues before other neighborhoods.
 - ii. We also recommend that the city works to electrify all school buses and enforces no idling policies for buses parked outside schools.

5. Impact of Climate Change on Labor

- a. We would like to better understand how industries and workers will be impacted by climate change in Chicago. For example, how do extreme rain events impact industries along the river or how extreme heat or cold impacts workers? If we can better understand this, we can align the interests of environmental justice groups and labor groups and create communities that protect our health and environment.
 - i. We recommend that the City of Chicago develop a taskforce to further explore these issues.