

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN SOUTH CHICAGO

The New Communities Initiative



Sponsored by:
The Southeast Chicago Development Commission
and LISC's New Communities Initiative

Summer 2000

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The Southeast Chicago Development Commission gratefully acknowledges the following people for the time, energy and resources given to create this Quality of Life Plan.

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On the Cover -
We All Come Together As One, the mural pictured on the cover of this document, was designed by Gamaliel Ramirez with inspiration and assistance from local students. The mural was funded by LISC through NCI and the South Chicago Housing Collaboration.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Quality of Life Plan is part of LISC/Chicago's New Communities Initiative (NCI). The New Communities Initiative is a large-scale, comprehensive community-building program that is presently assisting three Chicago Community Development Corporations (CDC) in developing and implementing multiple projects and programs aimed at strengthening their neighborhoods and the lives of those who live and work in them. The three organizations are: The Resurrection Project, The Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corporation, and the Southeast Chicago Development Commission (SCDCom). Components of the NCI program include: 1) comprehensive quality of life physical planning in each community; 2) flexible new program/project development support; 3) core support for NCI staff at the CDCs; and 4) program-wide and project-specific technical assistance.

This Plan, prepared by the Southeast Chicago Development Commission, seeks to improve the quality of life in South Chicago, once a thriving steeltown neighborhood which was devastated by the closure of the USX South Works Steel Mill in the 1970s and 1980s. Its vision supports the ongoing revitalization efforts

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2. Preserve, Expand and Improve Affordable Housing

Residents have a strong commitment to South Chicago. Interest in homeownership and upgrading housing in South Chicago is strong and the need is great. SCDCCom will work collaboratively with neighborhood housing development corporations so that quality, affordable rental and ownership options exist for residents and for those interested in relocating to our community. Key projects for this purpose include:

- Bush Housing Initiative
- Southeast Chicago Construction Contractors Association
- Government-Assisted Housing Programs
- Homeowner Education and Awareness
- Emphasis on Rehabilitation Instead of Demolition

3. Work to Achieve Safer Neighborhoods

In South Chicago, fear of violence impacts residents' freedom to move about the community. We propose to increase community safety through the following projects:

- Supporting Intervention Strategies Recommended by the Metropolitan Family Services Violence Prevention Planning Group
- Designating Specific Areas as Safe Zones
- Expanding the Housing Collaboration's "Building Safe Blocks" Small Grants Program
- Establishing a New Police Facility in Bush
- Supporting the Efforts of our Local CAPS Unit, Block Clubs and Other Organizations Working to Improve the Safety of our Community

4. Beautify Neighborhoods with Both New and Improved Open Space

South Chicago suffers from a lack of small and large open space for active recreation and passive relaxation. We propose to clean up and green up our community by supporting projects which:

- Convert Existing Vacant Lots into Neighborhood Tot Lots
- Support Groups that are Organizing to Clean and Permanently Maintain Open Space
- Develop a Nature Preserve or Park
- Construct a Senior Citizen Oasis
- Encourage the Involvement of Local Artists in Community Improvement and Design

5. Support and Advance Healthy Activities for Youth and Family

In order to improve the quality of life for existing residents and attract new families to South Chicago, quality social services must be accessible and available to all. SCDCCom has made a commitment to increasing healthy activities and services for families of South Chicago through the establishment of projects which support:

- Community Schools
- Expanded and Enhanced Health Care Options for Underserved Communities within South Chicago

This promises to be an exciting time for South Chicago. The City's plans for the former South Works Site will bring to bear public and private investment that will surely change the face of the community. There will be projects and programs initiated by local service providers and local investors. It is important to plan now for a mechanism to monitor and coordinate activities so as to maximize their benefit to one another. As a major, multipurpose organization deeply rooted in the community, SCDCOM will make itself available to assume the role of coordinator for the neigh-

I. THE NEW COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE AND QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN

This Quality of Life Plan is part of LISC/Chicago's New Communities Initiative (NCI). The New Communities Initiative is a nine million dollar comprehensive community building program which is presently assisting three mature Community Development Corporations (CDC) - The Southeast Chicago Development Commission, The Resurrection Project and The Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corporation - in developing and implementing projects and programs aimed at strengthening their neighborhoods and the lives of their residents.

NCI speaks to the evolution of community development during the past 20 years and the changing needs of neighborhoods. It is testing the premise that mature community development organizations can build the capacity to expand from a singular focus on housing or economic development to a more comprehensive community building agenda.

NCI has its roots in the findings of the Futures Committee, a LISC/Chicago led panel of community leaders that met in 1996 and 1997 to assess both the current and future state of community development in Chicago. The Committee found that, despite great achievements in housing and commercial development within low-income neighborhoods, it was clear that economic and social conditions remained stagnant. Affordable housing was still in demand, violent crime and drugs affected many neighborhoods, and unemployment rates often exceeded 25%.

The Committee reaffirmed the centrality of the community development industry in addressing these problems, emphasizing that CDCs and LISC/Chicago should be engaged in more comprehensive community building activities. NCI was created in 1998 in response to the Committee's recommendations. It links LISC's national resources and expertise with community development corporations that have strong neighborhood ties and proven capacities to develop and implement a Quality of Life Plan.

Components of the NCI program include: 1) comprehensive quality of life physical planning in each community; 2) flexible new program/project development support; 3) core support for NCI staff at participating CDCs; and 4) program-wide and project-specific technical assistance. It encourages the use of a community-based planning process which works through task forces composed of the CDC's constituents, as well as leadership from other neighborhood groups, and seeks to develop plans of action which are implemented by other local entities in addition to the host CDC. The plan presented in this document typifies this process and effort.

The goal of NCI is to gather a body of experience that will serve as a foundation for future community development in Chicago, and in other urban communities both within and beyond LISC's network, that are faced with comprehensive challenges to neighborhood health.

The New Communities Initiative is generously supported by The National Community Development Initia-

II. A VISION FOR SOUTH CHICAGO

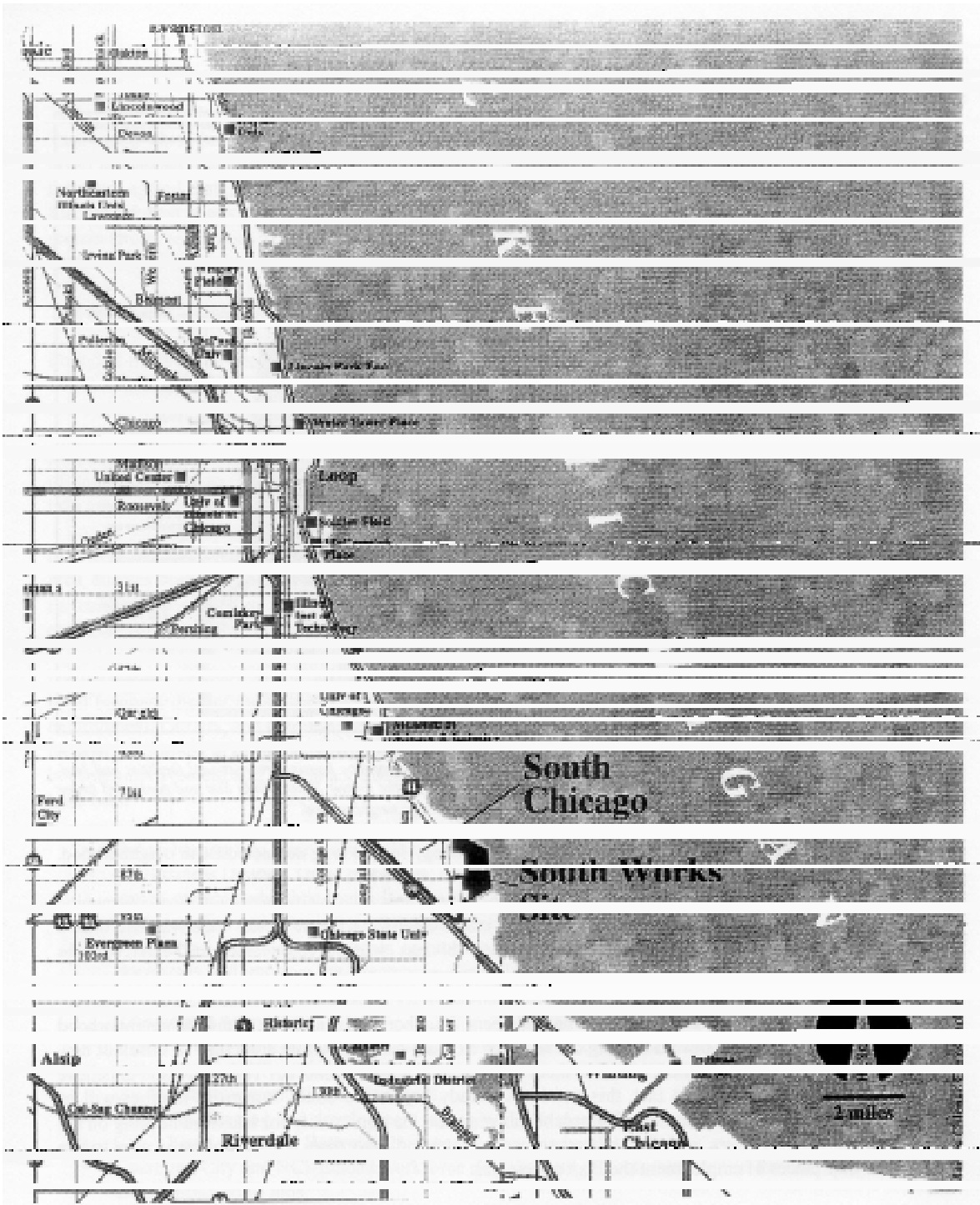


FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP

SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN

Prepared for : The Southeast Chicago Development Commission
and USC's New Communities Initiative.

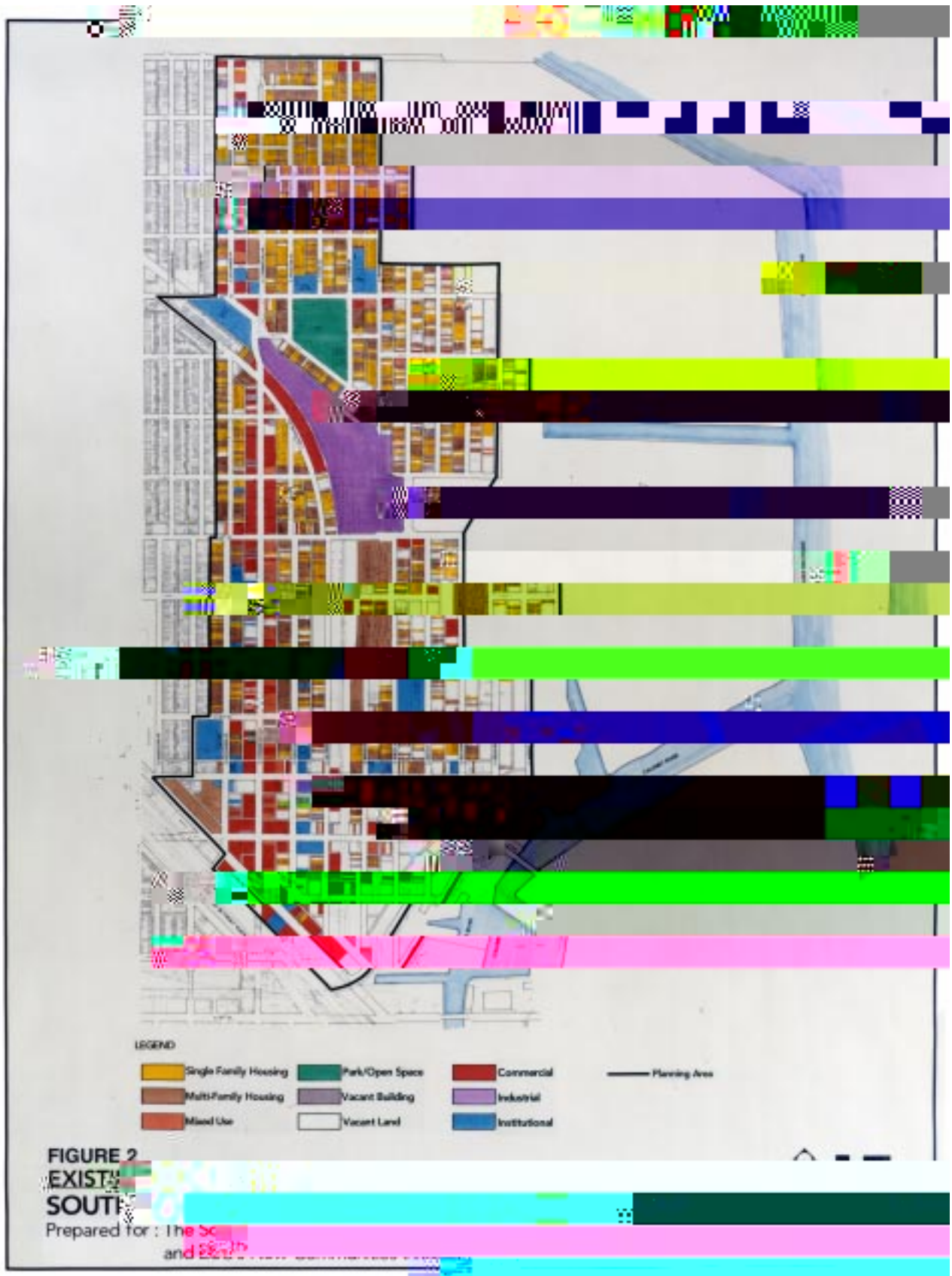
The vision of South Chicago presented in this Quality of Life Plan reflects the best thinking of our planning Task Force. This Plan will serve many, including representatives from business and industry and from nonprofit human service and community development agencies. During the course of their work, Task

This Quality of Life Plan is an example of the SCDCCom mission in action. It is the product of a SCDCCom-organized process that involved local residents, representatives of business, and development groups and industry, as well as members of our organization's staff and professional planners. The Plan gives direction to our mission of improving the quality of life for the people of South Chicago by encouraging a set of unified projects that further South Chicago's rebirth as a community of choice.

The South Chicago Community

South Chicago is a community where people have always valued individual dignity and respect for others. For more than a century, our neighborhoods have been home to waves of immigrants coming to Chicago from all over the world. Here, they found residential areas and retail businesses that met the growing needs of industrial workers at the South Works Site and nearby plants.

South Chicago continues to welcome newcomers - now, mostly African Americans and Mexican Americans who, together with a relatively small number of European Americans and Haitians, make up the vast majority of the current population. They are largely people of modest means who evidence strong pride in their community and even stronger ties to family. Among those who are joining us now are families returning here after having moved to other southeast side neighborhoods or the suburbs. Is this the precursor to the overall rebirth of our neighborhoods - the forerunner to what we will see when the City's redevelopment plans and this Quality of Life Plan become reality? We are confident that the answer is "yes."



only by short “bridges,” stairs down or other devices that link buildings to the street system. Here, too, one finds that the frontage of the South Works Site with its vacant, unkempt appearance further adds to the area’s visual blight.

These conditions not only adversely affect the people who live in this neighborhood, they also present an image to the world beyond that belies the strength and viability that exist here. For example, drivers who use US-41, a major arterial route that wends its way through a maze of streets in this very neighborhood, are provided with continuous vistas of deteriorated conditions. We have long advocated for the relocation and reconstruction of US-41 and action directed at solving the neighborhood’s housing and street conditions. We do so again in this document and trust that our sense of urgency relative to this entire project will be shared by the City as part of its plan to



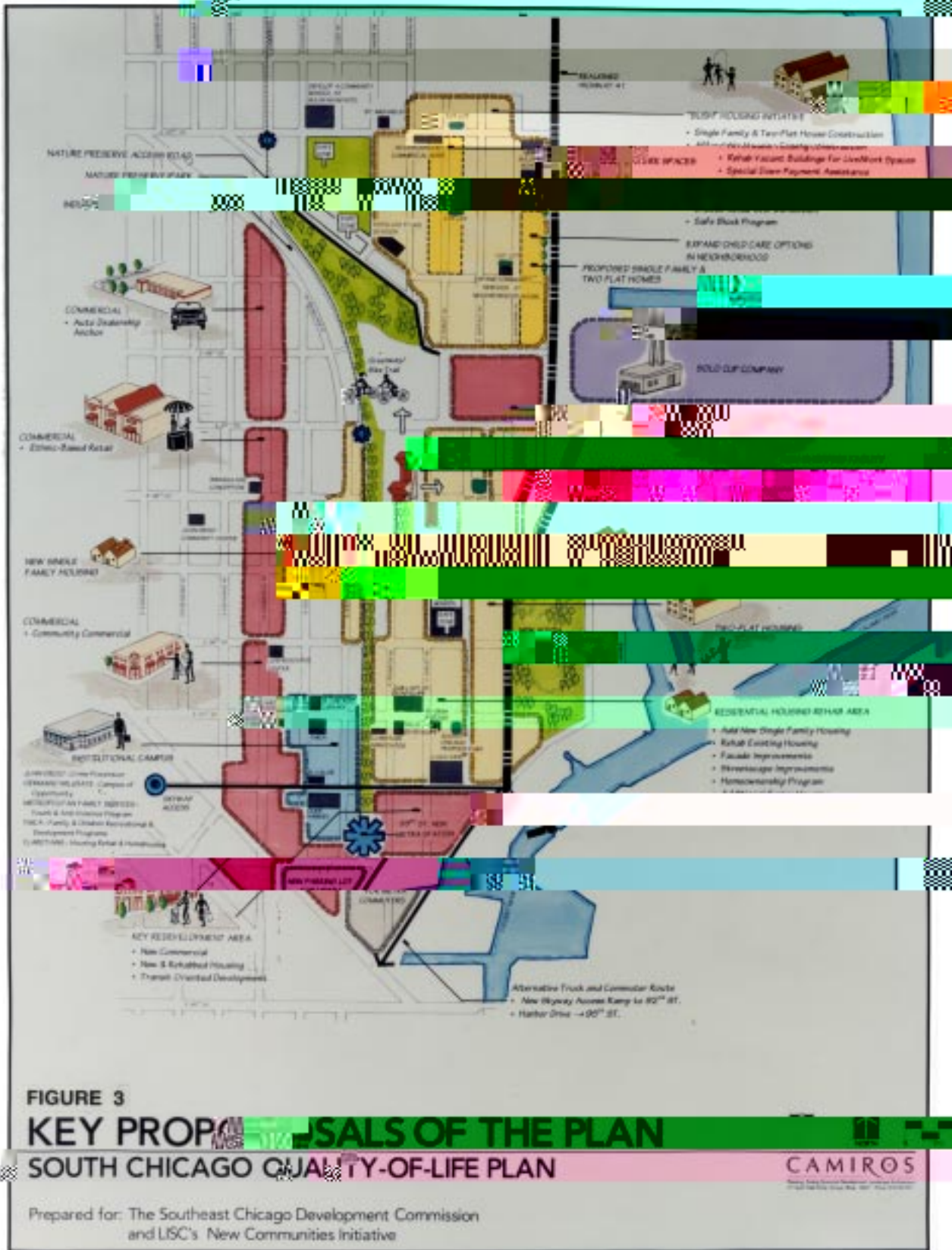
SCDCom has long advocated for the relocation and reconstruction of US-41 and actions directed at solving the area’s traffic and street conditions.

III. STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT OUR VISION

This Quality of Life Plan lays out the elements of a comprehensive initiative that, from the community's perspective, is essential to achieving South Chicago's rebirth. The City's plans are bold, major steps - the heavy lifting that is essential if South Chicago is to be rejuvenated. The opportunity is available for members of the community, through SCDCOM and other community organizations, to assure strong resident direction to any community revitalization. The City's plan and our Quality of Life Plan work together to present a unique opportunity to resolve a host of issues that have long needed attention. These can be seriously addressed now in the context of major changes that are to occur - changes that require both the will and financial capacity of the City of Chicago.

To this end, the SCDCOM-led planning process has produced a series of integrated projects that reach deep into our neighborhoods. These projects emerged through a process that involved many stakeholders from the community and built upon the City's plans and other community organizations' works in progress. They are organized within the framework of six key strategies. (See [Figure 3: Key Proposals of the Plan](#))

1. Promote Economic Development and Opportunity
2. Preserve, Expand and Improve Affordable Housing
3. Work to Achieve Safer Neighborhoods
4. Beautify Neighborhoods with Both New and Improved Open Space
5. Support and Advance Healthy Activities for Youth and Family
6. Coordinate Public and Private Improvement Activities



South Chicago Job Resource Center is one of three such Centers initiated as part of LISC's New Communities Initiative. In the case of South Chicago, a minimum of 120 participants will be served by the Center annually.

The South Chicago Job Resource Center builds upon strong relationships with local industry and other employers, built over 18 years of service to the economic community of the southeast side. The Center looks to the nationally recognized Project Match program for how to best assist those who find it difficult to find and keep a job. Project Match's 15 years of experience with such clients, together with our employer relationships and the resources provided by the LISC Initiative, the Polk Bros. Foundation, the City of Chicago and other funders, promise successful outcomes for South Chicago residents while, at the same

center management approach to Commercial Avenue's rehabilitation. We provide basic maintenance services and free parking for the Commercial Avenue Business District, financed in part by the SSA.

Ethnic and Specialty Goods District: The ethnic diversity of South Chicago has given rise to a number of small retailers who sell ingredients and prepared foods native to Mexico, the Caribbean and Africa. Located mainly along Commercial Avenue, between 87th and 90th Streets, this emerging ethnic restaurant and shopping district is an important component of our local business development effort. The wide range of shopping and dining choices has made this district attractive; it has become a place to visit and shop, creating a market which is larger than the immediate neighborhood. We can help to advance this district's growth by encouraging the coordination of advertising and marketing beyond the immediate neighborhood and by assisting merchants in the improvement of the appearance of their stores and enabling them to build greater management capacity. We will pursue all of these items in the context of the Main Street USA Initiative.

Convenience and Shoppers Goods District: This district is the retail mainstay of Commercial Avenue, providing a direct link between the Commercial Avenue Business District and the residents of the community. SCDCOM works with local businesses, the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Program to maintain established businesses, recruit new businesses and identify ways to better serve neighborhood commercial needs. Retailers located between 90th and 93rd Streets, who constitute the core of this District, range from well-known national chains to family-owned entrepreneurs.



The plan suggests three commercial areas for Commercial Avenue - automotive sales and service, ethnic foods, and community commercial.

We propose to enlarge this commercial core to accommodate new commercial uses which could extend south to South Chicago Avenue and east beyond the Metra tracks to, perhaps, Harbor Drive. A large, new retailer on Commercial Avenue would attract people to the Commercial Avenue Business District and generate additional development. Such development should be part of a larger residential-commercial mixed-use program designed to assure access and visibility for commercial uses from US-41, the Metra station and Commercial Avenue. This is discussed further below.

Commercial Avenue/93rd Street Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Project

Metra plans to extend their electric line to a new terminal at 93rd Street and to link this terminal to a new 600 space parking facility. Considered a linchpin - connecting transit to the area's commercial core and the adjacent cluster of institutions - this transit-oriented development will enhance the market base and development potential of the immediate area while increasing the mobility of community residents. Two key actions are needed to achieve its potential success - assuring proper access and linking the terminal to the shopping center.

Assuring Proper Access. The relocation of the Metra terminal to 93rd Street, and the provision of a 600 space parking lot, will make the use of transit more attractive and increase local ridership. These riders would be potential patrons for area businesses, especially near the terminal area. However, studies have shown that commuter transit ridership alone is not enough to support significant retail development. Additional patronage generated by shoppers who drive to the location is also required. Therefore, it is important to significantly improve auto access to any new commercial development and the METRA site.

The present Commercial Avenue Business District, and the proposed Metra site, suffer from limited automobile visibility and accessibility. The improvement of US-41 will create a major arterial which, under the present design, lacks a strong relationship to the existing commercial area and Metra terminal. The South Works Plan notes this problem and, for various reasons, suggests improvement of Harbor Drive as a link between 95th Street and US-41. We believe this is critical to the success of potential development linked to the Metra terminal. Thus, design of the Metra parking lot and additional commercial area parking must be linked to Harbor Road in a manner which makes the site both visible and accessible.

Linking the Terminal to the Shopping Center. Commercial transit-oriented development does not come about merely by placing commercial uses in the vicinity of the transit stop. It requires the design of a linkage between the two that encourages interaction. At its heart, the METRA terminal is a “park-and-ride” stop. Patrons go from parked cars to the train. Studies have found that if adjacent development wants to take advantage of this potential market of transit users, it is necessary to intercept their movement between the train and parked car. Thus the commercial facility must be located along, rather than away from, this route. To be successful as a TOD then, the design of the new retail development, transit stop and parking lots must be undertaken in an integrated manner. SCDCOM will work to establish such coordination with Metra in the design of this facility.

87th Street/US-41 Retail/Commercial Development

The Commercial Avenue Business District, while linked to the new Metra terminal and several access roads, will always have limited automobile accessibility. It is not part of the major arterial system and it is not fully visible from nearby elements of this system. Thus, while the area is well positioned to serve the immediate neighborhood, transit users and others attracted by specialty retailing and destination uses, it may not successfully accommodate major



The vacant area at the intersection of 87th Street and US-41 represents a key opportunity for the development of “big box” commercial that can serve our community and nearby communities.

One site that meets these criteria in South Chicago is at the northwest corner of 87th Street and the proposed location for US-41. This 11 acre site is currently vacant, close to the Metra stop and well-buffered from existing residential areas. It could accommodate up to 110,000 square feet of uses oriented to serve all of South Chicago as well as the South Shore, Woodlawn and Hyde Park neighborhoods to the north, and the Roseland, Hegewisch and East Side neighborhoods to the south. This development opportunity was first

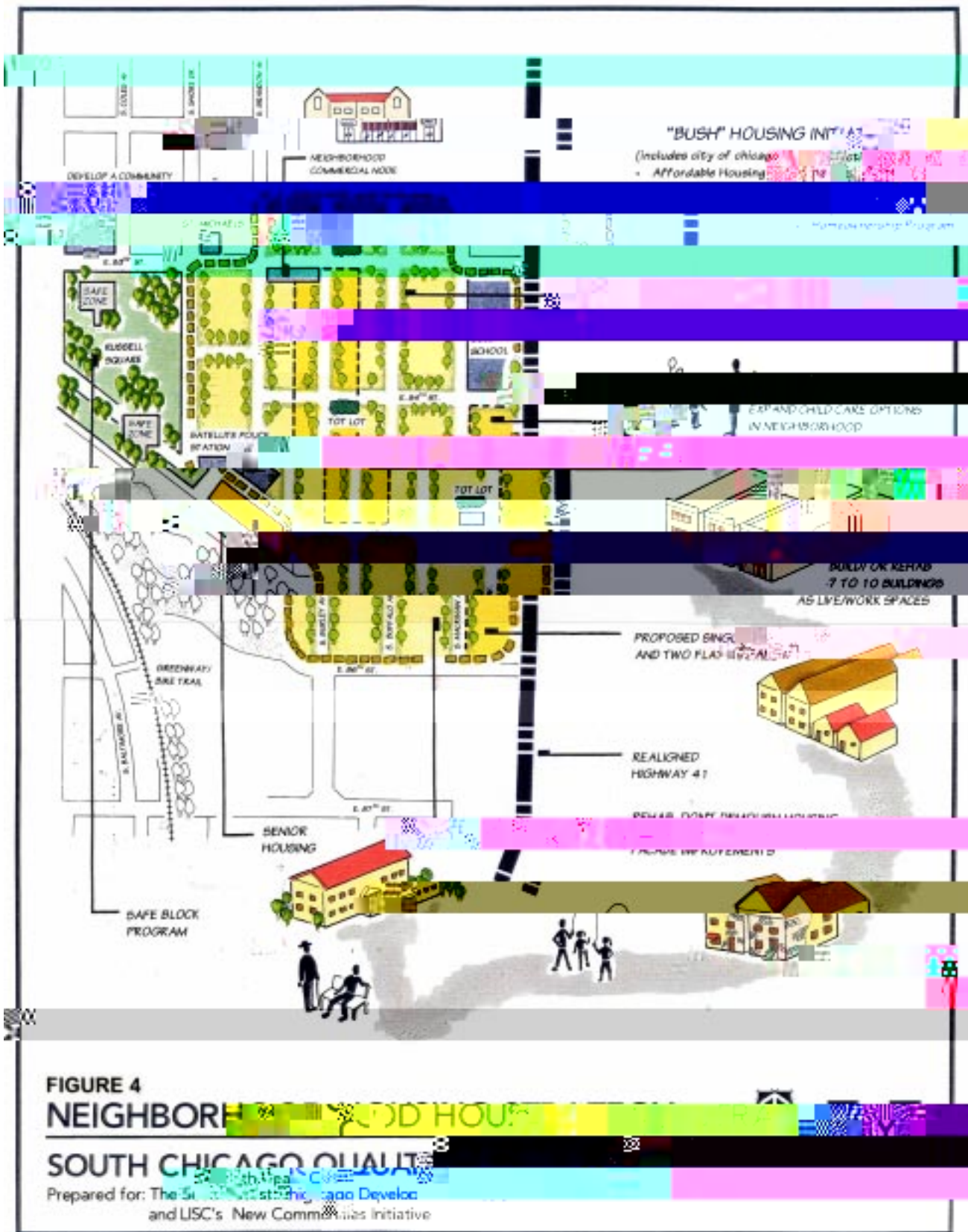


FIGURE 4
NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING

SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY
 Prepared for: The South Chicago Development Corporation
 and LISC's New Communities Initiative

These efforts will result in:

- The construction of 300 new single-family and two flat residences.
- Rehabilitation of more than 200 existing residences.
- Construction of senior housing and/or other special needs housing projects.
- The conveyance of vacant parcels to adjacent property owners for additional yard space or redevelopment with new single-family homes, two flats or other housing.
- The rehab of abandoned buildings whenever possible.
- The formation of a neighborhood-based housing task force.

Elements of this program are underway.

Resident commitment to the community, strong interest in homeownership and the South Chicago Housing Collaboration's proven capacity to work with residents to improve homeownership has led to the development of the following housing strategy. It builds upon existing leadership, the work of NHS and the Claretians, and supports the City's redevelopment plans. We suggest, however, that there are additional activities that should be undertaken to augment this program and make it comprehensive. They are:

- Bush Housing Initiative
- Southeast Chicago Construction Contractors Association
- Government-Assisted Housing Programs
- Homeowner Education and Awareness
- Emphasis on Rehabilitation Instead of Demolition

Bush Housing Initiative

Bush, the South Chicago neighborhood located between 83rd and 86th Streets directly west of USX, was home to hundreds of South Works employees. Bush was hard hit when the steel mill closed. Former employees moved elsewhere in search of jobs. Stores and service industries on the neighborhood's once thriving commercial strip, Burley Avenue, shut their doors, while decreases in ridership led to devastating cuts in bus transportation. The neighborhood has never recovered from these blows.

Residents of Bush, the South Chicago Housing Collaboration and SCDCOM are developing a new housing strategy for the neighborhood. The New Communities Initiative is assisting this effort by funding a housing consultant who has special expertise in designing programs that emphasize revitalization without displacement. Together, they are evolving a multifaceted housing program tailored to concerns and interests voiced

by Bush homeowners and renters alike. This strategy is consistent with the City's Housing Initiative outlined above. Members of the Bush Homeowners Association were particularly helpful in designing the following strategies:

- Building single-family homes and/or two-flats on Green Bay Avenue. These would be aimed at households earning \$40,000 to \$60,000.
- Developing more affordable homes for purchase on assembled vacant parcels for households earning \$30,000 to \$40,000.
- Acquiring seven to ten vacant buildings to market, or rehabilitate, for use as combined live/work spaces.
- Creating a special down payment assistance program for members of resident families.
- Combining loans from Neighborhood Housing Services with grants to make the expense of doing exterior repairs affordable for existing owners.
- Forming a neighborhood advisory group for ongoing input and feedback.

This strategy intends to create a community where it makes economic sense for people to spend time, energy and money on the upkeep of their homes and the neighborhood. This is especially important as redevelopment of the USX Site occurs next to the Bush neighborhood. If nothing is done, the neighborhood will decline, the home ownership fabric will weaken and the neighborhood will, over time, lose its core of committed residents. Development will happen, but it will more likely replace the neighborhood than build upon the neighborhood.



Bush neighborhood housing needs special attention which combines the resources of SCDCOM and the South Chicago Housing Collaboration.

In addition to the strategy outlined above, the City must invest in capital improvements such as new sidewalks, street resurfacing, sewer repair and tree trimming - all visible signs to the neighborhood that things are going to be different. As the residential TIF for the neighborhood is put in place, it is probable that funds for these capital improvements, as well as the housing strategies above, will become available.

Southeast Chicago Construction Contractors Association

The City of Chicago is calling for the construction of 300 new single-family and two-flat residences, including both affordable and market rate housing over the next decade. These will be developed in the neighborhood adjacent to the USX Site. Several multi-family structures and senior housing and/or other special needs facilities are already planned, while over 205 residential structures within the area are targeted for rehabilitation.

Significant numbers of local residents are skilled in carpentry and home maintenance. In order to help these residents gain access to construction opportunities in the community, SCDCOM, in partnership with the

South Chicago Housing Collaboration, will create the Southeast Chicago Construction Contractor's Association modeled after the Construction Cooperative established by our fellow NCI participant, The Resurrection Project. Through the Southeast Chicago Construction Contractor's Association, we will help small contractors obtain appropriate licensing, develop administrative procedures needed to run a successful business, provide job referrals and gain assistance in securing working capital. Our plan is to help local contractors develop their businesses to a level that will enable them to participate in the growth and development of the South Chicago community. Ideally, this effort will result in expanded job opportunities for additional residents as well.

Government-Assisted Housing Programs

Recognizing that changes in the City's programs may result in an increased number of families seeking housing through government-assisted housing programs, such as Section 8 and scattered site, we believe that South Chicago should work to assure that all new residents are integrated into the neighborhood. Several actions are proposed.

We will work to ensure that families moving into government-assisted housing are moving into quality housing and that they are able to maintain that quality. We support the maintenance education programs and training for Section 8 landlords offered by the South Chicago Housing Collaboration and will support their efforts to secure additional funding to continue and expand their services if needed.

Renters of apartments and homes in the neighborhood should also have the opportunity to participate in a maintenance education program. This program would provide renters with information about their obligation regarding the maintenance of their units and identify local resources that can provide financial and technical assistance for that purpose.

We support community participation in government-assisted housing programs and will work to assure that

housing opportunities in South Chicago to potential homebuyers from elsewhere, particularly single professionals, young families and children of existing residents.

Emphasis on Rehabilitation Instead of Demolition

There are buildings in South Chicago that have not been properly maintained. In many instances, the community would benefit from buildings being rehabbed rather than demolished. According to the Neighborhood Housing Collaboration, it would be economically feasible to rehabilitate these buildings if actions were taken quickly by responsible new owners. People from the neighborhood who are interested in homeownership are often interested in buying and fixing up such homes but are unable to identify the owner. Often, vacant buildings are owned by mortgage companies or HUD. In some cases, NHS has been

Supporting Intervention Strategies Recommended by the Metropolitan Family Services Violence Prevention Planning Group

Recommendations from the Metropolitan Family Services' Violence Prevention Planning Group would make South Chicago a safer place to live. We support and will assist in implementing their recommendations which include:

- *Designing and implementing a public education campaign promoting non-violence.* A consistent message that promotes non-violence will be communicated through a variety of media, which may include community safety signs distributed to households in the target area for display in the windows of their homes, and posters and flyers displayed via local businesses and directories of community resources.
- *Creating positive supports and programming for youth.* Program options that would serve as positive evening alternatives for youth to participate in recreation and non-violence education include school-based community centers to provide comprehensive programming to the community during non-school hours (the Community Schools model is described in greater detail below) and "Safe Night" activities.
- *Developing the South Chicago United Against Non-Violence Institute (SUN) as a community resource center for non-violence, as well as connecting resources and services with those neighborhoods where they are needed.* Possible resources to be offered to families by the institute will include workshops on stress and anger management, classes on parenting skills, and training to learn to deal with neighborhood safety issues.

Designating Specific Areas as Safe Zones

We are calling for the designation of specific areas of the community as safe zones, particularly those where our youth tend to congregate. Likely safe zones would include Russell Square Park, Bessemer Park, Thorp School and along Baker Street across from Russell Square. These areas should be demarcated with signage and transformed into neutral places where youth and adults alike would feel safe. This activity, to be successful, will need Police Department and Park District support, and will need to be backed up by other organizations and local bloc and training to

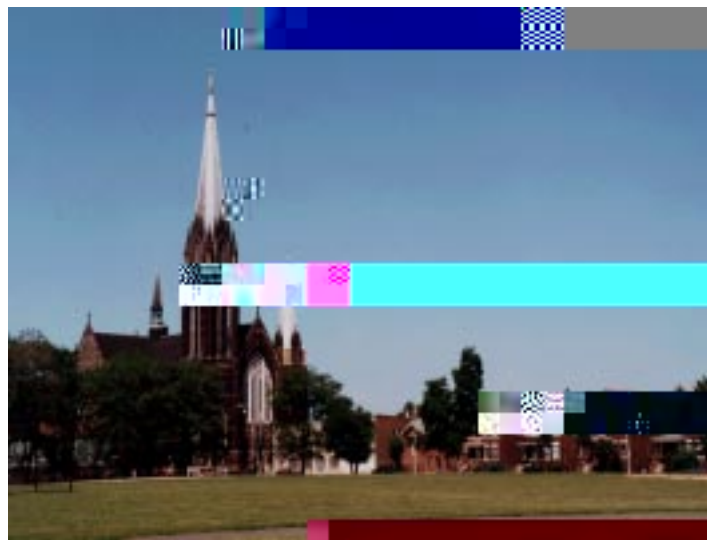
Neighborhood House become a Chicago's Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) Site so that active residents and block clubs do not have to attend CAPS meetings in a site located in the southern half of South Chicago. Finally, there has been some discussion about building a new police facility in Bush. To this end we will work closely with the Police Department and residents to identify a location for a new police facility and urge City support for its operation.

Supporting Efforts of Our Local CAPS Unit, Block Clubs and other Organizations Working to Improve the Safety of Our Community

There are organizations in South Chicago that have successfully organized to reduce neighborhood crime - the Juan Diego Community Center, the Save Our Neighborhood Community Organization, Metropolitan Family Services and the South Chicago Neighborhood Housing Collaboration serve as examples. We will continue to support their efforts to obtain funding to increase the number of effective prevention programs available to our community. We will also encourage community organizations and block clubs to work together with CAPS to monitor and report crime. At the same time, we will further support efforts to ensure that local police keep residents safe from harm when they report suspicious activity and make suggestions at CAPS meeting.

4. BEAUTIFY NEIGHBORHOODS WITH BOTH NEW AND IMPROVED OPEN SPACE

South Chicago's eastern edge is dotted with hundreds of vacant lots, all contributing to the unfavorable image of the residential community adjacent to the South Works Site. Nonetheless, the community suffers from a lack of both small and large open spaces for active recreation and passive relaxation. In fact, vacant land makes up approximately 30% of the land use in our study area, while recreational use is only 5% community-wide. East of Commercial Avenue there is only one park, Russell Square, that is run by the Chicago Park District. A second outdoor facility, People's Park, was built by local residents, organized by Claretian Associates. In this instance, four vacant lots have been converted into a park.



The Plan provides for additional passive and active open space.

Major open space improvements are part of the City's plan for South Chicago. It suggests that a minimum of 123 acres of the South Works Site be devoted to open space with an extension of the City's parks and green space along the entire South Works lakefront. This would mean nearly continuous open space from the northern border of the neighborhood south to the Calumet River. The plan also includes a new 20 acre park to be developed in 2000-2001 along with several community parks to be scheduled for future development. We believe that a subcommittee of the Claretian Associates' South Chicago Clean and Green Task Force should be appointed to serve in an advisory capacity to the City and the Park District as they go about the work of designing all of South Chicago's new parks.

Much will change as the City and the Park District actually begin construction of the proposed parks. What will not change, however, is the availability of parks in existing neighborhoods where there is a real need for active and passive recreation. Tot lots, play spaces and sitting areas remain in short supply. Furthermore, we must clean up and green up our neighborhood. The following are proposed strategies:

- Convert Existing Vacant Lots into Neighborhood Tot Lots
- Support Groups that are Organizing to Clean and Permanently Maintain Open Space
- Develop a Nature Preserve or Park
- Construct a Senior Citizen Oasis
- Encourage the Involvement of Local Artists in Community Improvement and Design

Convert Existing Vacant Lots into Neighborhood Tot Lots

We propose to work closely with the City Department of Planning and Development and the Park District to identify and develop a number of vacant lots as “tot lots” or additional neighborhood open spaces that could be created and maintained through a community-based “adopt-a-lot” effort. This project will identify lots which are currently owned by the City. We would seek control of the property and secure a local sponsor who would provide funds for park fixtures (swings, benches, etc.), while we use local volunteers to develop and maintain the facility. We have called for a minimum of three new tot lots near the Neighborhood House, Thorp School, and the new Sullivan School, but our ultimate goal is to have such community open spaces within a three block radius of all residences. Selection shall be premised on land availability, neighborhood interest and the degree to which such improvements will reduce, or remove, neighborhood “hot spots.”

Support Groups that are Organizing to Clean and Permanently Maintain Open Space

Organized by the Claretian Associates in 1993, the South Chicago Clean and Green Task Force is a volunteer coalition of local residents. Focused on improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods, the Task Force sponsors clean-ups, beautification projects and the transformation of unused lots into park space. One such park is the South Chicago People’s Park. This site of vacant lots has been transformed by community volunteers into a park with a stage, benches designed by young local artists and a community garden. Over 2,500 volunteer hours have been contributed to the development of People’s Park.

Further efforts to clean up and green up open space in the community should build off the experiences and successes of this volunteer coalition. Claretian Associates has been working to position local residents as advocates and decision-makers on land use issues. These efforts have given local residents the experience and credibility needed to voice their interest in green space development as South Chicago undergoes revitalization.

While encouraging individual commitment to cleaning and greening our community, SCDCOM will also encourage our local businesses and service organizations to “adopt a block,” or a specific area, where they will maintain responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of green space.

Develop a Nature Preserve or Park

The area located between the Metra tracks and the housing fronting Baker Avenue has long been vacant and unused. Originally part of railroad right-of-way, this area is difficult to develop. However, it is a major open

space resource located within the middle of the developed eastern part of the neighborhood. Early elements of the City's plan called for this area to be developed as a formal park. But the amount of formal park presented as part of the City's current plans leads us to see this area being used differently. Our notion is to turn it into a nature preserve to serve local educational and passive open space functions. With visual connections to Russell Square and a bike path along the Metra tracks south to the new terminal, this space could become a central open space east of Commercial Avenue. While issues of safety, security, and connections through the industrial areas immediately south need to be refined, this nature preserve or park would, no doubt, be important in tying together the north and south neighborhoods of the existing eastern edge of South Chicago.

Construct a Senior Citizen Oasis

An open space facility, located in a readily accessible site near a high concentration of senior residences, would be geared specifically for senior usage. It should be designed with senior, as well as youth, input and emphasize outdoor activities and events that bring seniors together. Control, development and maintenance of the site would follow an approach similar to that outlined above for tot lots.

In an effort to reach out to South Chicago youth, NCI and the Housing Collaboration hosted a youth council meeting at which students were encouraged to identify projects that they could implement in the community in order to improve the quality of life. One of the projects students identified was the need for a senior citizen oasis.

This initiative would be connected to Bowen High School's service-learning program so that youth could continue to be involved in the community.

5. SUPPORT AND ADVANCE HEALTHY ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH AND FAMILY

South Chicago residents care about the youth of their community. The youth and young adult population makes up the largest demographic portion of our community. According to 1998 estimates, approximately 49% percent of South Chicago is 24 years of age and under, with roughly 37% percent under 18 years of age. Having programs in place to assist with the academic, social and psychological growth of our young population is critical to their future. But in order for our youth to prosper, the whole family and community must have access to these programs as well. We propose to augment current youth and family programs with the following:



Children and young adults make up the largest portion of our community. We must act to help ensure positive futures.

- Community Schools
- Expanded and Enhanced Health Care Options for Underserved Communities within South Chicago
- Expanded Social Service Provisions in Bush
- Expanded Programs for Parents
- Substance Abuse Centers

Community Schools

Families in South Chicago have long expressed the need for increased recreational services for themselves and their children. In response to this need, SCDCOM, with NCI support, has initiated a Community Schools Partnership. Community Schools are collaborative efforts established between schools and community organizations to improve community access to educational, recreational and social service programs. Services are provided in school buildings during non-school hours. Programming could include activities such as tutoring, sports clubs, English as a Second Language, arts and crafts, music, dance, computer classes, Internet access, career planning, parenting workshops and other activities as recommended by community members. Other Community Schools efforts include Chicago's Full Service Schools (supported by the Polk Bros. Foundation), New York City's Beacon Schools and the federally funded 21st Century Schools.

As SCDCOM started researching the Community Schools model, we found an ally in Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) who have been in South Chicago since 1985 providing much needed individual and family services to the people of the community. Under a federal grant to Metropolitan Family Services, residents and local organizations are identifying programs to reduce violence in the community. One of their program recommendations is for positive support and programming for youth, both in-school and afterschool, so as to offer alternatives to violent activities, especially during the critical afternoon hours when youth crime surges. Together, SCDCOM and MFS have been working with three local schools - Coles Elementary,

We have eDingred opportunities to eDtend services to Bush residents through the development of satellite offices of South Chicago service organizations. Current services here include activities and meals for seniors and afterschool and recreational programs for youth. A coalition of local service providers is eDingring the feasibility of reserving space in the Bush's Neighborhood House or another facility on a rotating basis in order to provide the additional services the Bush neighborhood seeks.

Expanded Programs for Parents

To help young parents develop parenting skills while continuing to pursue personal goals, the Department of Children and Family Services Local Area Network #87, Metropolitan Family Services and Chicago Family Health Center jointly sponsor parenting classes for teen mothers. The MoMs program (Mentors of Mothers) assigns teen mothers to mentors who provide support and information to enable participants to become healthy, nurturing mothers. The program also helps new moms to find a GED program or an apartment, or to re-enter school. Metropolitan Family Services also collaborates with Chicago Family Health Center on their Teen Dads program. Dads learn parenting skills as well as valuable construction skills through the South Chicago Workforce. While in the pre-apprenticeship program, dads earn their GED.

While these programs help our youth to develop positive parenting skills and pursue personal goals, there is

Timing for several other city-sponsored infrastructure projects is also critical. One example is the construction of Harbor Road which should be coordinated with the opening of Metra's new terminal at 93rd Street. This is to ensure the success of the proposed transit-oriented development at the head of the Commercial Avenue Business District.

IV. IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

SCDCom recognizes that one organization cannot carry out these strategies and related projects alone. Implementation of this ambitious Quality of Life Plan will require the involvement of the City, other local S.03547entatigroups,oneivs a businesssed proj0.0 ofstitu ambs. Ter nizes thole, of addi ambito takingoneime inspmbsh

SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN WORK PROGRAM

STRATEGY/PROJECT	VISION PRIORITY			LEAD ORGANIZATION
	SHORT TERM Year 1	INTERMEDIATE TERM Years 2-3	LONG TERM Years 3-5	
I. PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & OPPORTUNITY				
A. South Chicago Job Resource Center	x	x	x	SCDCom

SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN WORK PROGRAM

STRATEGY/PROJECT	VISION PRIORITY			LEAD ORGANIZATION
	SHORT TERM Year 1	INTERMEDIATE TERM Years 2-3	LONG TERM Years 3-5	
V. SUPPORT & ADVANCE HEALTHY ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH & FAMILY				
A. Community Schools	x	x		SCDCom, Metropolitan Family Services
B. Expanded and Enhanced Health Care Options for Underserved Communities within South Chicago	x	x	x	SCDCom with Local Health Care Providers (Short-Term) Existing Health Care Providers in the Region (Long-Term)
C. Expanded Social Service Provisions in Bush	x	x	x	SCDCom & Existing social service providers in area/Neighborhood House
D. Enhanced Programs for Parents	x			Metropolitan Family Services Chicago Family Health
E. Substance Abuse Centers		x	x	SEADAC

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