

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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 of the City of Chicago directed at the vacant 573 acre South Works Site and adjacent residential areas. It is designed to assure that private and public investors, working together with the community, revitalize South Chicago in a way that preserves local traditions and values while attracting newcomers who will add to the economic base and vitality of the community.

It does this by establishing six strategies for action and investment in both people and places.

1. Promote Economic Development and Opportunity

During the next several years, South Chicago stands to benefit from expanded economic opportunities resulting from the City's plans to redevelop the USX Site and adjacent neighborhoods. SCDCom plans to build upon this momentum through the following projects:

- South Chicago Job Resource Center
- Expanded Child Care Options
- Commercial Avenue Improvement Program
- Commercial Avenue/93rd Street Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Project
- 87th Street/US-41 Retail/Commercial Development
- Small Business Development Program

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. SCDCOM 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. SCDCOM 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

- Expanded Social Service Provisions in Bush
- Expanded Programs for Parents
- Substance Abuse Centers

6. Coordinate Public and Private Improvement Activities

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 neighborhood-based actions outlined in this Plan.



This Plan is a product of a number of citizen task forces which include representation from local residents, businesses, community development organizations, industry and SCDCOM staff.

These projects are further discussed in this Plan, which concludes with a Work Program that prioritizes the projects and identifies the lead organization responsible for its implementation.

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 Initiative, The Surdna Foundation, Avondale Bank, Bank of America, Bank One, The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation.

II. A VISION FOR SOUTH CHICAGO

The story of South Chicago is linked first to the growth, then to the demise, and now to the promised rebirth of the 573 acre South Works Steel Site that dominates the neighborhood's eastern edge (see [Figure 1: Location Map](#)). Established in 1880, this steel plant provided jobs, and the neighborhood provided workers to fill those jobs. At its peak, the South Works Site was the largest producer of structural steel in the world and employed over 20,000 workers. Still employing over 18,000 people in 1970, the mill was battered by foreign and domestic competition, closing in phases until 1992 when the entire facility was shuttered. Its closure, and its impact on service industries, devastated the neighborhood which is only now beginning to repair two decades of disinvestment.

During this period, South Chicago has struggled continuously to reposition the community as a place where businesses could thrive and those who live in our neighborhood could find opportunity. Now, thanks to a City plan for the renewal of the South Works Site, and adjacent portions of the neighborhood, our vision of a revitalized South Chicago promises to take shape. After more than a year of planning and discussion with the community, the City issued a framework for development that makes it possible to envision a bright future for South Chicago and the 40,000 people who live within its borders.

Entitled, *From Steeltown to Hometown*, this ambitious plan for the former steel mill site envisions new light manufacturing, housing, recreational facilities and businesses, and connects these new developments to long neglected neighborhoods nearby. The plan's main themes can best be summed up as: improving connections between South Chicago, the city and the region; extending the City's lakefront park system to include South Chicago; creating jobs; and developing new housing, while at the same time expanding existing residential areas.

From Steeltown to Hometown does indeed hold promise for the realization of our dreams for South Chicago. But we know that, as the plan unfolds, we will need to be deeply involved to ensure that the concerns of South Chicago's residents and the special expertise they bring to the effort are given the acknowledgment they deserve.

This Quality of Life Plan for South Chicago was developed with extensive community input. It sets forth our perspective on what must happen at the micro level to make sure that the City's commitment, and our community's hard work to revitalize South Chicago achieves a successful outcome - one that preserves local traditions and values. To that end, the plan focuses on how South Chicago can build upon City and local investments, and suggests programs and projects to resolve issues not addressed by City proposals. Its purpose is to serve as a blueprint for action and investment in both people and places.

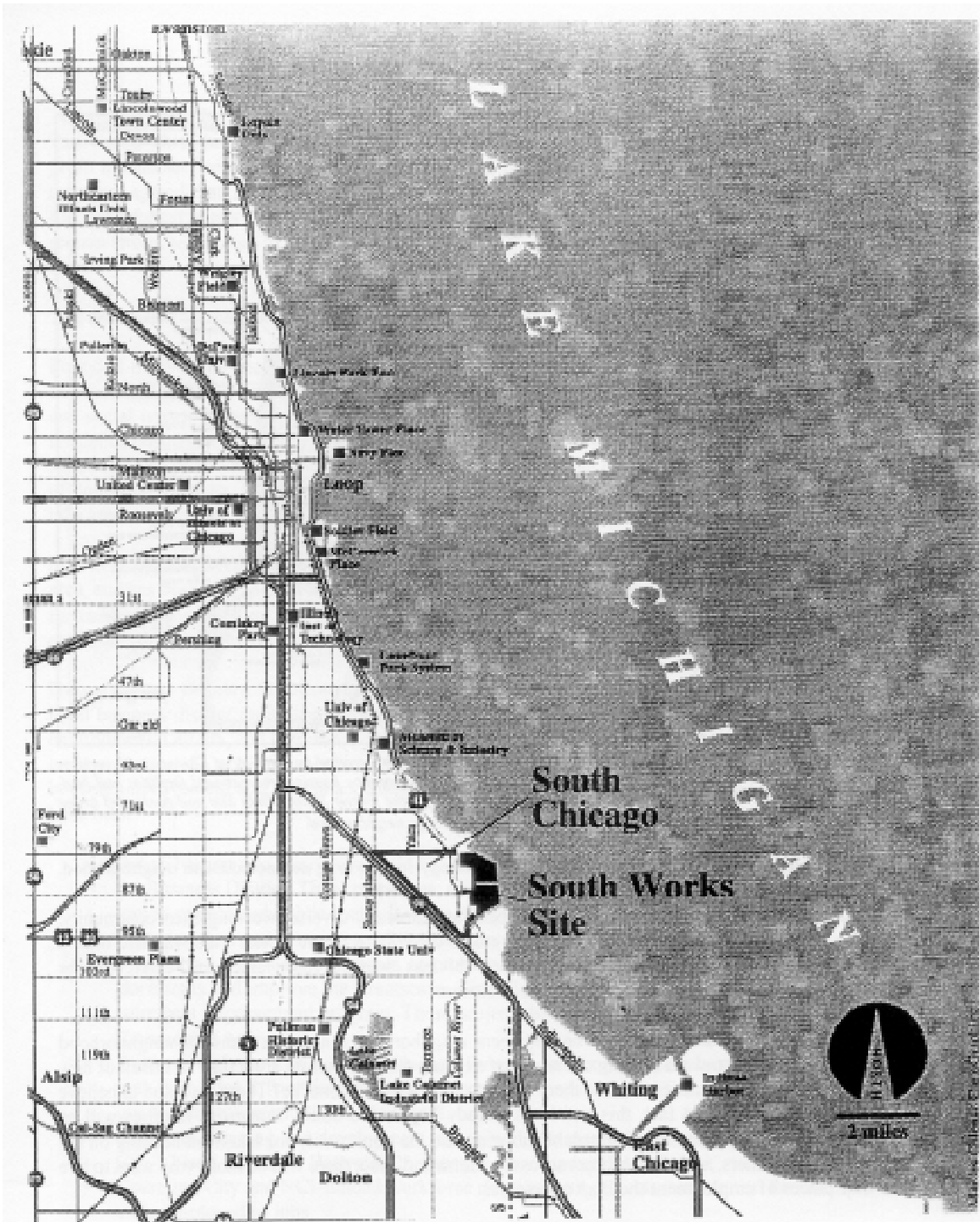


FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP

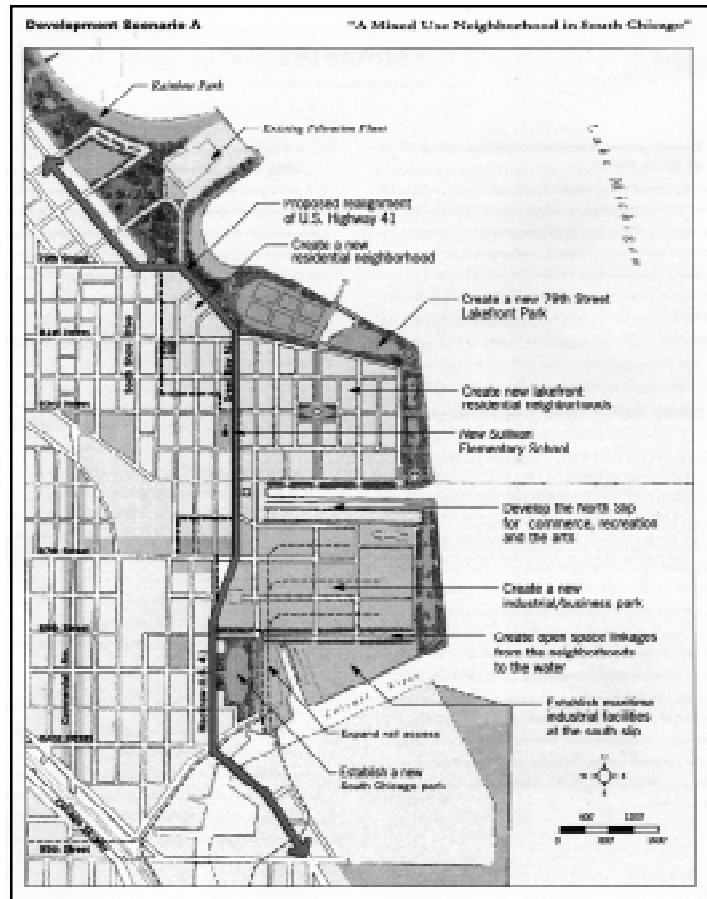
SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY-OF-LIFE PLAN

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

The South Chicago Development Commission (SCDCOM) was chosen to participate in LISC's New Communities Initiative (NCI) at the very point in time when the City was planning for the renewal of the South Works Site. With NCI support, we were able to bring community residents and representatives together with planning professionals in a process that made it possible to produce this comprehensive plan. It focuses on turning concepts into actual projects and programs that build on City and local thinking, while suggesting new initiatives and issues not addressed by City proposals.

In fact, several new NCI-supported comprehensive initiatives are already underway - as a result of adopting the NCI commitment to "doing and planning together." Among these new initiatives are:

- Our well received local newspaper, *The Observer*.
- The busy South Chicago Job Resource Center.
- The widely supported Community Schools for South Chicago, ready for launching during the 2000/2001 school year.
- The development of a resident-driven housing strategy for the long neglected Bush neighborhood.



The development scenario crafted by the City of Chicago with resident input, creates a vision of new housing, recreational facilities and businesses to be built on the former South Works Site and connected to our larger South Chicago neighborhood.

Our plan recognizes that South Chicago has always been an ethnically diverse, working class community, evidenced by its mix of religious institutions and the stores catering to ethnic tastes. Ours was also once a neighborhood where people often walked to work. Now this has changed. Many assets still exist, but jobs are no longer a primary reason for coming to South Chicago.

The City's plan for the South Works Site and adjacent neighborhoods, and our plans for neighborhood improvements, are geared toward serving the needs of existing residents while attracting an influx of new people and new stores and facilities to serve them. Who will the new residents be? There is reason to believe that some will be returnees; in fact, this trend has already begun. No doubt, numerous families will be attracted to South Chicago because of affordable housing and the opportunity for lakefront housing on the USX Site. They, and others, may desire direct access to Metra and, also, there will be those who want to live near the new places of employment the Plan anticipates.

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 Force members agreed that, in the years ahead, South Chicago must reinvent itself. We also unanimously agreed that our greatest assets - our institutions and values, and our stakeholders and their ethnic diversity - must remain strong as we seek to attract newcomers who will add to the economic base and vitality of our community.

The Southeast Chicago Development Commission

Founded in 1981 by local businesses and community leaders, SCDCCom's initial work addressed the community's needs as the steel mill shut down operations. Today, SCDCCom continues to address economic and social issues that affect the quality of life on Chicago's southeast side. Our mission is to work with residents, business and industry, government and other community partners to provide leadership, planning, advocacy, and programs that increase economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for the people of Southeast Chicago. This translates into providing both leadership, and/or active support, for efforts that take aim at achieving these goals.

SCDCCom has long seen the reuse of the former mill site as the key to the revival of the entire South Chicago area, and has been a strong advocate for City action to reclaim it. Further, SCDCCom is prepared to maintain its traditional coordinating function in the community and to work with the City collaboratively to pursue our vision of a renewed South Chicago.

During the past 19 years, SCDCCom has developed programs that address real estate development, neighborhood business district revitalization, industrial corridor planning and development, community building, environmental affairs, and workforce development. We eagerly collaborate with other community development organizations to bring new investment to the commercial center of South Chicago, and we support housing improvement and the enhancement of vital community services. Among our recent achievements have been:

- Rehabilitating two mixed-use buildings on Commercial Avenue in order to catalyze investment in the Business District. These properties, owned and managed by SCDCCom, represent over \$3.5 million in private and public sector investment.
- Fostering the continuing rejuvenation of Commercial Avenue, the neighborhood's business district, by working with local businesses or property owners and encouraging them to rehabilitate their storefronts and improve the streetscape. Since 1996, 24 property owners have participated in the storefront improvement program. These projects have added over \$800,000 in new investment on Commercial Avenue.
- Working with the City's Retail Chicago Program and coordinating local improvement activities with the National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street USA Initiative to facilitate the upgrading and improvement of our businesses.
- Industrial planning and development, along with the management of the planning process for the City's Local Industrial Retention Initiative, in three industrial corridors.
- Operating City and NCI-funded workforce development projects that connect the unemployed and underemployed to jobs.
- Publication of *The Southeast Chicago Observer*, a new community newspaper with a circulation of 28,000.

This Quality of Life Plan is an example of the SCDCOM mission in action. It is the product of a SCDCOM-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.

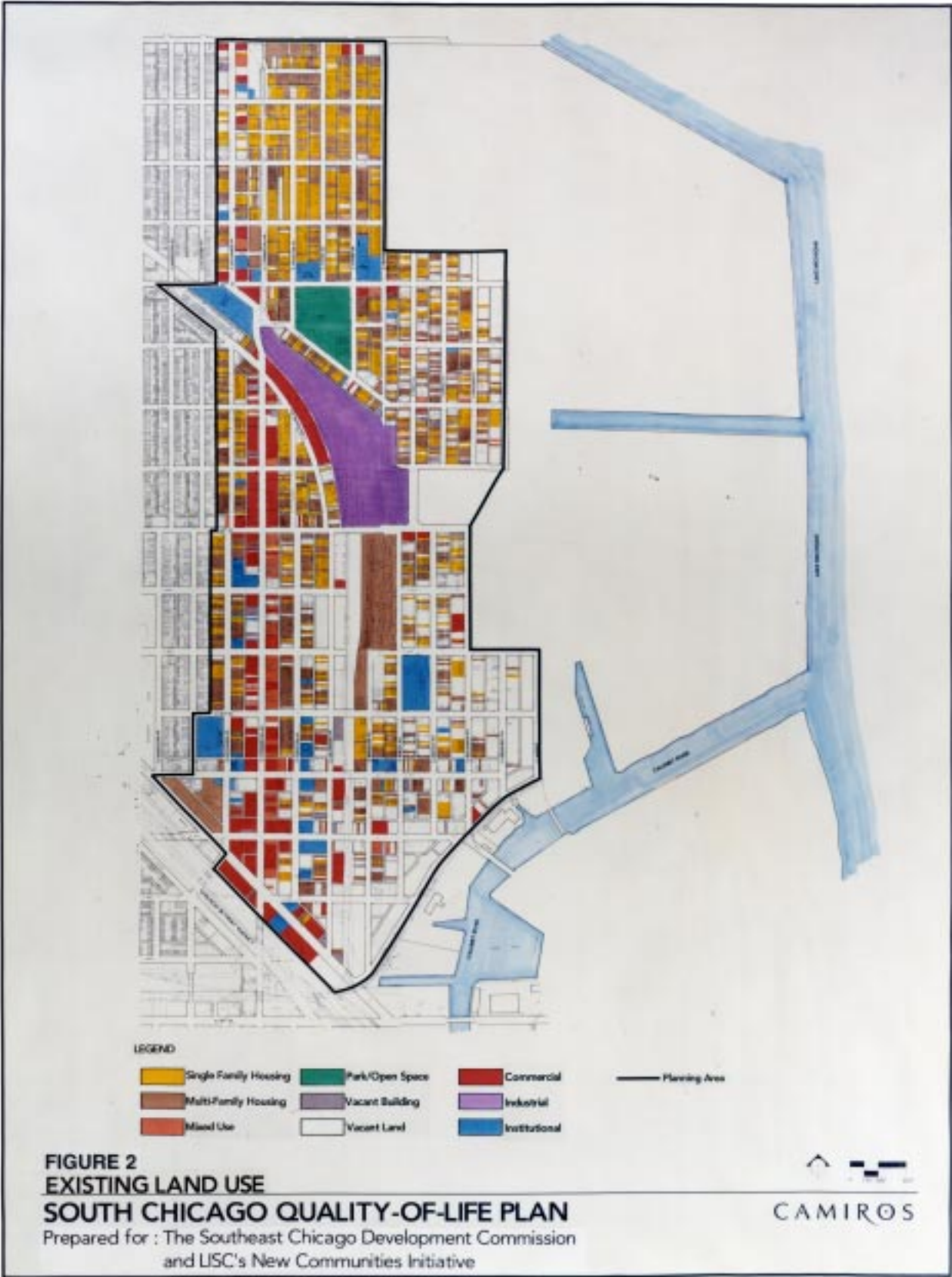
South Chicago continues to welcome newcomers - now, mostly African Americans and Mexican Americans who, together with a relatively small number of European Americans and Haitians, make up the vast majority of the current population. They are largely people of modest means who evidence strong pride in 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."

South Chicago is an amalgam of land use districts devoted primarily to residential purposes. As shown in Figure 2: Existing Land Use, the eastern edge of the neighborhood is dominated by the South Works Site. Immediately west, between South Works and the Commercial Avenue Business District, lies historic South Chicago - the area of working class housing and related institutions built as a mill worker neighborhood. Development west of Commercial Avenue is mainly residential. Housing in this area was constructed from the 1920's to the 1960's and reflects the style of each decade as unused land was filled in, first with more worker housing and later with residences for the middle class.

Conditions in our neighborhoods largely reflect the age of the housing stock. For this reason, housing west of Commercial Avenue is generally sound. Most distressed is the housing east of Commercial Avenue, where the original workers' neighborhoods were developed. Compounding the housing problems of age, construction quality and lack of maintenance are the street conditions. A portion of South Chicago is served by a street system elevated from the original construction grade. This has created blocks where streets are above building lots and buildings can be reached



Reinvestment in our community will bring about significant improvement of our housing stock.



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



SCDCCom 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

1. PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

The South Chicago economy is beginning to show signs of improvement after years of suffering from the loss of USX - a major employer and the area's economic engine. The unemployment rate has decreased from a high of 50% in the 1970s and 1980s to its present rate of 9%.¹ However, this number is still too high - more than twice the national average. About 65% of residents have no more than a high school education. And while drop-out rates at Bowen High School have been reduced in recent years, they remain at an alarming 22% - seven points above the city average. Further, many of our residents are underemployed, working in service-oriented jobs with low wages and few benefits.

Nonetheless, we are encouraged by the increase in local employment opportunities as well as by the business growth that is occurring. An example is the recent Solo Cup commitment to redevelop approximately

¹ Illinois Department of Employment Security



FIGURE 3
KEY PROPOSALS OF THE PLAN
SOUTH CHICAGO QUALITY-OF-LIFE PLAN



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

103 acres of the industrial portion of the South Works Site for a new manufacturing plant. This facility will consolidate existing plants and add approximately 200 new jobs over the next ten years. Further, the entire southeastern area of Chicago is under scrutiny from developers and investors. The area's key location along a number of major interstate highways and rail lines, along with an availability of large tracts of vacant land, make it an attractive location for expanding industry.

Commercial Avenue, the shopping hub of South Chicago, is undergoing a positive change. Our goal here is twofold - to grow local employment opportunities and to ensure that our retail district is viable so that it can serve the needs of our community while increasing shopping traffic from elsewhere. SCDCOM's work with the local business community to revitalize the Commercial Avenue Business District has City support for several programs including Main Street USA, an initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Here, the effort is to secure storefront improvements, streetscape treatments and business expansion at the same time that we work to recruit new businesses. Recent commitments to make investments on Commercial Avenue by local and national retailers reflect the program's early impact.

There is reason for optimism in regard to improved and increased commercial development. For example, according to the South Works/South Chicago Market Analysis prepared by the Goodman Williams Group for the City of Chicago, South Chicago is "under-stored." As such, the Goodman Williams Group suggests that the local trade area has an adequate number of households and sufficient aggregate income to attract middle-market and discount retailers such as Kmart, Target or Sears. Opportunities for the siting of such "big box" facilities are addressed in some of the following projects.

While these efforts are encouraging, they are only a starting point for action that must be taken to cure the weak economy and joblessness that South Chicago and its residents are experiencing. Listed below are projects and programs that bring us closer to achieving our common goals. Some are now in existence and need to be brought to scale, others would be new initiatives. They are:

- South Chicago Job Resource Center
- Expanded Child Care Options
- Commercial Avenue Improvement Program
- Commercial Avenue/93rd Street Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Project
- 87th Street/US-41 Retail/Commercial Development
- Small Business Development Program

South Chicago Job Resource Center

The need for jobs and access to training are the greatest concerns of South Chicago residents. The South Chicago Jobs Task Force was formed to respond to this concern. The Task Force, which is convened by SCDCOM, has the mission of designing strategies to help local residents take advantage of employment opportunities in, and beyond, South Chicago. Its first successful project is the South Chicago Job Resource Center.

The South Chicago Job Resource Center serves both welfare recipients and the working poor for whom underemployment is as severe an issue as unemployment and who may be slipping through the cracks of other programs. The Center provides long-term pre- and post-employment services to all residents regardless of income, gender, age, educational background or work history. It focuses on the needs of individuals by helping to determine if they require further education or training to improve their earnings potential. The

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 time, developing a model program for other communities similar to our own.

The South Chicago Job Resource Center is also designed to improve community access to technology. Like many economically disadvantaged communities in Chicago, South Chicago's limited access to technology has restricted residents' ability to access and exchange information and to qualify for jobs. We propose to establish a community technology center for residents' use within the South Chicago Job Resource Center. The Center would allow residents without computers in their homes the opportunity to access and share information available on the Internet as well as learn the computer applications necessary for employment in today's world.

Expanded Child Care Options

South Chicago is a community very much in need of adequate child care services for the children of working parents and growing families. Last year, with financial assistance from NCI, Claretian Associates and the Interfaith Housing Development Corporation of Chicago contracted the Consulting Partnerships and Alliances Group (CPA Group) to conduct a study of the child care delivery system in South Chicago. The CPA Group found that we have licensed day care available for only 18% of our infants and toddlers, and 54% of our preschoolers. Access to afterschool programs is afforded to only 74% of the school age population. The study also pointed to the Bush neighborhood as being especially lacking in child care options. Although we already have daycare and other agencies providing child care and afterschool programs in the community, waiting lists confirm that infant daycare is a critical need and that we need to expand these programs in order to serve more working families. To that end our plan proposes the following:

Support the development of additional child care facilities. Among such facilities is the anticipated development of integrated child care resources at Casa Kirk, a supportive housing complex scheduled for construction in 2000-2001 by Claretian Associates and Interfaith Housing. Additional services could be provided through the development and/or expansion of the Neighborhood House, a community service provider located in Bush. These centers can work with current, larger providers, like the YMCA and Our Lady of Guadalupe, that have the resources and staffing to provide extended hours, culture specific education and child development services. An extended hours format is essential if we are to accommodate the various lifestyles and schedules of parents who do not work the typical 9 to 5 hours.

Increased home day care opportunities via the creation of new home provider networks by an existing child care agency that would hire and train local residents in order to expand into underserved areas. Specifically, we look to local home daycare network providers, such as El Valor and Catholic Charities, to carry out this expansion. Increasing capacity by enlarging network programs would be the fastest and most cost effective way to close the gap between the number of available slots and the number of children in need of care.

Commercial Avenue Improvement Program

Commercial Avenue has served as the heart of South Chicago's retail district for more than a century. While smaller in size and sales volume than in previous years, it still retains substantial public and private investment and continues to serve as the center of the neighborhood, attracting customers from within, and beyond, the community. For these reasons the future of Commercial Avenue is critical to the long-term future of South Chicago. SCDCOM has worked hard during the past two decades to increase the vitality of Commercial Avenue and the streets around it.

- In 1983, we successfully organized commercial property owners to form a Special Service Area (SSA) taxing district that generated \$1 million of the \$4 million needed to rebuild vaulted sidewalks along the street.
- Upon completion of the sidewalk project in 1987, SCDCOM developed a shopping 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.
- To encourage private sector investment, we purchased and rehabilitated the two largest mixed-use buildings on Commercial Avenue. The investment was \$3.5 million.
- In addition, some 24 property owners have invested, or intend to invest, in upgrading their commercial real estate holdings using the City's Facade Rebate Program which SCDCOM facilitates.
- SCDCOM serves as the focal point for the City-funded National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street USA Initiative in South Chicago. This program is working with our local Chamber of Commerce and business owners to improve the area and to provide assistance to those seeking to enhance their business skills.



Commercial Avenue, shown here in the 1950s, has always been the business heart of the neighborhood.

The Main Street USA Initiative has helped us to create a new vision of Commercial Avenue; we now see it as three distinct districts and will treat their development accordingly. The three are: 1) automotive sales and services; 2) ethnic and specialty goods; and 3) convenience and shoppers goods.

Automotive Sales and Service District: Auto sales and service businesses continue to locate along the northern reaches of Commercial Avenue between 85th and 87th Streets. As a result, this part of Commercial Avenue is developing an auto market image that attracts large numbers of non-resident shoppers to the area. SCDCOM supports this concept and will work with the auto merchants and service facilities located here on such matters as proper zoning and access to nearby properties for the safe storage of their vehicles.

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 “big box” type development which needs access to much larger market areas, big open sites and a location that is likely to be at the intersection of arterial streets.



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 identified by the City. SCDCOM will now follow up. We will seek the cooperation of the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce and the City of Chicago in an effort to market the site to “big box” users.

Small Business Development Program

A key aspect of our vision for Commercial Avenue is that local, ethnic businesses will continue to emerge and prosper. Experience indicates that business start-ups don’t fail because of a bad idea. Rather, they tend to fail as a result of poor management. Our small business development program will be designed to help emerging entrepreneurs gain the skills and resources to manage and grow such businesses. SCDCOM will work in coordination with a committee of local business people and the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce to identify various technical training options in the setting of a small business incubator. This will include linking local entrepreneurs to additional training sources such as the Olive Harvey College Entrepreneurship Program, the Chicago State Small Business Development Center, the Main Street USA Program and other services that can work one-on-one with individuals to address specific operation and technical needs.

2. PRESERVE, EXPAND AND IMPROVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

South Chicago residents have a strong commitment to this community. For many families, this commitment can be traced back three or more generations. While many residents from today’s generation are interested in homeownership, this may not be feasible for them due to the prohibitive cost of rehabbing an older home or constructing a new one.

Nonetheless, interest in homeownership and in upgrading housing in South Chicago remains strong and the need is great. Residential areas make up approximately 50% of land use. About 39% of us own homes. Of our owner-occupied units, approximately 29% are single-family homes and have a median value of \$59,800. These statistics, coupled with an average of 3.4 persons per room, higher than the 2.9 persons per room average of the City, amply demonstrate the need for more affordable housing. The extent of this demand, coupled with strong resident commitment to the community, led to a unique partnership between Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago (NHS), a national leader in neighborhood revitalization which offers a range of low cost loans and expert technical assistance, and Claretian Associates, a leading housing development CDC active in South Chicago. In 1996, NHS and the Claretians formed the South Chicago Housing Collaboration to accelerate revitalization efforts in South Chicago. The mission of the Collaboration is to promote investment in residential areas of the community by making available home improvement loans, home buyer education and rehab technical assistance. Their success is evidenced by the fact that the South Chicago office of Neighborhood Housing Services has the highest volume of loans for NHS citywide (approximately \$1,000,000 from January to October of 1999).

As a result of their track record, the Housing Collaboration was selected by the City to spearhead additional homeownership and rehab opportunities identified in the course of the City’s planning process for the redevelopment of the USX site. The City’s redevelopment plan proposes a South Chicago Housing Initiative and targets many of the blocks east of Commercial Avenue for rehabilitation during the next 10 years (see [Figure 4: Neighborhood Housing Strategy](#)).

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.



The strategies of this Plan are designed to build upon past new housing construction and housing rehabilitation successes.

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 local residents, landlords and community organizations work with HUD to improve housing, maintenance and follow-up.

Finally, we support the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS). FSS is designed to help Section 8 families become self-supporting so that they will no longer need public assistance. Through this program, participants develop an action plan that identifies employment goals and outlines the activities and services necessary to achieve those goals. When rent goes up due to an increase in earnings, the amount of the increase is placed in a savings account for the participant and their family. At the end of the five-year program, the participant can access that money to start a business, put a down payment on a home or return to school. A key element of this Quality of Life Plan is to help residents of Section 8 housing move toward greater self-sufficiency through the FSS program. We will also work to increase Family Self-Sufficiency by connecting Section 8 residents to South Chicago's Job Resource Center.

Homeowner Education and Awareness

The abundant interest in homeownership housing in our community calls for new resources to support the South Chicago Housing Collaboration's Homeowner Education Program. This initiative provides information about the benefits and responsibilities that go with owning a home. Participants receive counseling on financing, budgeting and other related issues, and follow-up services and referrals for maintenance and repair work. Further, we see the Collaboration as important to broadcasting a positive message about

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 able to acquire a building, then sell it, and provide technical assistance and loans for rehabilitation. Another option for encouraging rehab rather than demolition would be the Chicago Abandoned Properties Program (CAPP), a city program which enables buyers to purchase abandoned properties at discounted prices.

3. WORK TO ACHIEVE SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS

As in most Chicago neighborhoods, an increase in crime over the years plays a significant part in resident perception of their quality of life. In 1999, Metropolitan Family Services, with funding from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, conducted a community planning process through which they discovered that many residents see violence as a normal part of everyday life. At the same time, residents feel that violence significantly impacts their freedom of movement and they often feel threatened and powerless against violent offenders.



Cooperation between local block clubs, other community organizations and our CAPS unit is part of our key crime reduction strategies.

South Chicago consistently ranks among Chicago's most violent neighborhoods.

In 1998, it ranked 7th of 77 community areas in homicides and 27th for overall violent crime. At least 12 street gangs are active on the Southeast Side, creating "turf" issues that discourage young adults and families from using certain streets or parks. Community policing has had some positive effects, but there is still far to go. Residents have identified certain locations in the neighborhood, such as vacant lots, and Bessemer and Russell Square Parks, as hot spots where questionable activity occurs. We must take action to make these places safer. Our strategies include:

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

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 block clubs in each area.

Expanding the Housing Collaboration's "Building Safe Blocks" Small Grants Program

The South Chicago Neighborhood Housing Collaboration offers small grants to support neighbors who work together to make their blocks safe, clean, green and a good place for families. Projects must help solve a block concern, make the block a better place to live, and be organized and carried out by residents of the block. SCDCOM is committed to helping the South Chicago Housing Collaboration expand this program by using the small grants program as an incentive to encourage the formation of block clubs.

Establishing a New Police Facility in Bush

Increased police presence is needed east of South Shore Drive and north of 86th Street in the high crime and underserved Bush neighborhood. We suggest multiple strategies. First, we will work with the South Chicago Housing Collaboration to establish additional block clubs in Bush. Second, we suggest that the Bush

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

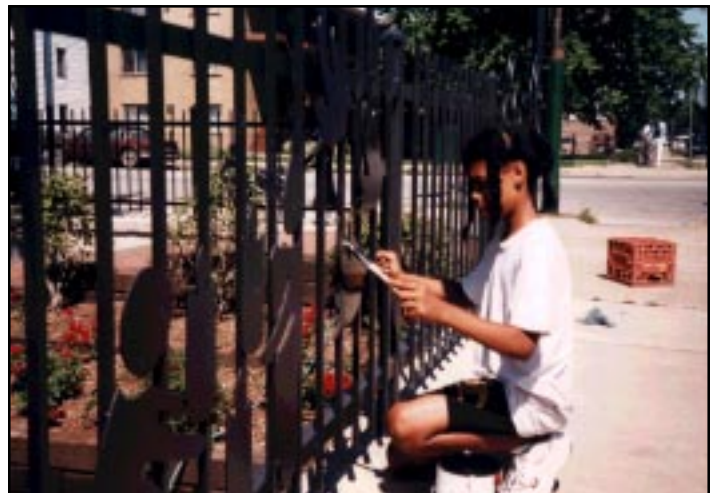
An open space facility, located in a readily accessible site near a high concentration of senior residences, would be geared specifically for senior usage. It should be designed with senior, as well as youth, input and emphasize outdoor activities and events that bring seniors together. Control, development 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 design and development of the oasis.

Encourage the Involvement of Local Artists in Community Improvement and Design

Mural art is a tradition of Hispanic and African American communities. We will promote our local artists by advocating the inclusion of public art in newly developed parks and public spaces. We have as an example *We All Come Together As One*, a mural designed by Gamaliel Ramirez (featured on the cover of this document), a local artist who had inspiration and assistance from local students. This mural, supported by NCI, transformed a corner of the commercial district where prostitution, loitering and graffiti had been rampant. Mr. Ramirez and students also designed and painted park benches for the People's Park.



Parks, open space and green space are in short supply in our community. People's Park is one response to that shortage. This Plan offers additional suggestions.

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, SCDCCom, 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 SCDCCom 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, SCDCCom and MFS have been working with three local schools - Coles Elementary,

Sullivan Elementary and Bowen High School - and three local service providers - the Chicago Park District, Olive Harvey College and the South Chicago YMCA - to develop and establish a model program that works for our unique community. This program is called the South Chicago Community Schools (SUCCESS).

SUCCESS will keep each of the three schools open until 8 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, add weekend and summer programming, expand the educational staff to help more students meet or exceed standards in core subjects, and bring new resources into the schools including family counseling, English as a Second Language, GED instruction, recreation, technology and employment services.

The program is intended to not only boost academic achievement but build stronger families, create a safer environment on the street, and provide positive alternatives to gang affiliation and drug and alcohol use among local children and young adults. About 775 students and adults are now served in the community by extended-day programs. The SUCCESS project plans to serve at least 1,100 additional people: 320 at the high school level, 600 in elementary school and 205 adults.

A long-time goal for our neighborhood - spearheaded by the South Chicago Fine Arts Committee - is to have a Cultural/Performing Arts Center that reflects the diversity of our community. Activities would include cultural education, performance and visual arts exhibitions. We believe that, through SUCCESS, children and families will have access to arts programming and will gain an appreciation for the arts that will eventually lend broad-based support to the Fine Arts Committee's efforts to bring a Cultural/Performing Arts Center to South Chicago.



There is great support within the community for fine arts programming.

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

During the Quality of Life Plan planning process, a lack of access to appropriate medical care services emerged as a concern, voiced by residents of Bush especially. As a consequence, with NCI support, we are conducting a medical service needs assessment to review existing services, identify service gaps and barriers to care, and recommend strategies to improve access to health care for residents. Both short-term and long-term strategies will be identified through this assessment. We will look to local health care providers for leadership in implementing both short- and long-term health care strategies.

Expanded Social Service Provisions in Bush

Our NCI Quality of Life Plan planning outreach involved meetings with residents of the Bush neighborhood where we repeatedly heard of the lack of many services which were accessible to other South Chicago residents, such as health care and drug abuse prevention programs. In fact, South Chicago is designated a Medically Under-Served Area (MUA) in the federal register. In addition, recent cuts in public transportation have hit South Chicago making access to many services even more difficult for people of Bush.

We have explored opportunities to extend 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 exploring 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 need for additional services. Both the MoMs and the Teen Dads programs should be expanded so as to be able to reach more youth in the community. In addition, our Community Schools (SUCCESS) proposal calls for implementation of the Families and Schools Together Program (FAST) as well as additional parent workshops at participating schools. FAST is a nationally recognized program which empowers parents as partners in their child's education and increases family affiliation with their child's school.

Substance Abuse Centers

We propose that additional resources be provided to the Southeast Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center (SEADAC) to enable them to expand treatment and/or outreach programs to elementary and high schools throughout the community. These programs would offer confidential counseling and advice to youth and families who seek assistance and organize recreational activities to promote drug intervention.

6. COORDINATE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

This promises to be an exciting time for South Chicago. The South Works Project 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. With so much going on, it is important to plan now for a mechanism to monitor and coordinate activities so as to maximize their benefit to one another.

Management of this project, coordination with the private sector, and sensitivity to local issues will be critical to the successful execution of both our Plan and the City's Plan. We believe that the most significant redevelopment element of the City's plan, the reconstruction of US-41, will convey to potential investors an image of how the revitalization of South Chicago is likely to proceed. All concerned will want to assure that matters such as zoning, infrastructure improvements, landscaping, traffic, etc. are coordinated so that construction can go smoothly and quickly.

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.

Service levels, as well as timing, will influence just how much impact public investments have in South Chicago. For example, we currently have four bus routes serving our community as well as four Metra linestations. Most of these routes focus on linking South Chicago to the Loop and require multiple transfers to get to other locations. It will be necessary to work closely with both CTA and PACE to assure that area employees and employers alike find public transportation in South Chicago to be fully responsive to their needs.

As a major, multipurpose organization deeply rooted in the community, SCDCCom is well positioned to assume the role of coordinator for neighborhood-based actions such as these. In this role, SCDCCom would monitor timetables and identify when the action of one agency or developer might most easily and cost effectively be modified to assist another project within the community. SCDCCom would assume this role only after seeking the concurrence of both public and private agencies involved in implementation of this Plan and the City's Plan.



This plan is about the people of South Chicago who, working together, will help to realize the vision of a revitalized community of choice.

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 groups, private businesses and local institutions. The SCDCom role, in addition to taking prime responsibility for overall plan coordination and related projects, will be to encourage a community-wide effort by coordinating the efforts of interested parties, seeking investment from within, and beyond, our community, and acting as a rallying point for all in the community to get involved with the revitalization of South Chicago.

Establish a Community Public Relations Program

It is in the interests of all South Chicagoans to tell others about the pending changes in their community. The City's plans, while bold and newsworthy now, will disappear from center stage as time moves on, and the emphasis will change to implementation rather than visualization. It is important for our community to hold high the banner of the South Works redevelopment and link it to the redevelopment and improvement of the larger neighborhood, all the while making sure that residential developers, major businesses and employers are kept aware. It is also critical to assure that current South Chicago residents and businesses remain fully informed since change promotes worries and rumors which can best be eased and forestalled by consistent, factual information. Our new weekly newspaper, *The South Chicago Observer*, is one key tool for local public relations. However, we will need to devise other means of communication as well. To this end, SCDCom will increase its community marketing and public relations role in cooperation with the City.

Secure Commitment to Plan Implementation

A key component of this effort is to secure the commitment of outside funders and implementers for the host of activities called for in this Plan. The following matrix outlines the scope of the Plan, its strategies and its projects. Listed in this matrix are proposed timelines for each project and those groups or entities which have committed to, or are targeted for, leadership of each project.

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	SCDCCom
B. Expanded Child Care Options		x		Claretians and/or existing child care providers
C. Commercial Avenue Improvement Program		x		SCDCCom
D. Commercial Avenue/93 rd Street TOD Project		x		SCDCCom
E. 87 th Street/US-41 Retail/Commercial Development			x	SCDCCom
F. Small Business Development Program		x		SCDCCom with existing t.a. providers
II. PRESERVE, EXPAND & IMPROVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING				
A. Bush Housing Initiative	x	x	x	The Housing Collaboration and SCDCCom
B. Southeast Chicago Construction Contractors Association	x			SCDCCom
C. Government-Assisted Housing Programs	x	x	x	Housing Collaboration
D. Homeowner Education & Awareness	x	x	x	Housing Collaboration
E. Emphasis on Rehabilitation Instead of Demolition	x	x	x	Housing Collaboration

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	
III. WORK TO ACHIEVE SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS				
A. Supporting Intervention Strategies Recommended by Metropolitan Family Services Violence Prevention Planning Group	x	x	x	Metropolitan Family Services
B. Designating Specific Areas as Safe Zones		x		Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Schools
C. Expanding the Housing Collaboration's "Building Safe Blocks" Small Grants Program	x			Housing Collaboration
D. Establishing a New Police Facility in Bush			x	City of Chicago
E. Supporting the Efforts of Our Local CAPS Unit, Block Clubs & Other Organizations Working to Improve the Safety of Our Community	x	x	x	Juan Diego, SONCO, Housing Collaboration, Metropolitan Family Services
IV. BEAUTIFY NEIGHBORHOODS WITH BOTH NEW & IMPROVED OPEN SPACE				
A. Convert Existing Vacant Lots into Neighborhood Tot Lots		x	x	City of Chicago SCDCom
B. Support Groups that are Organizing to Clean & Permanently Maintain Open Space	x	x	x	Housing Collaboration
C. Develop a Nature Preserve or Park			x	Park District
D. Construct a Senior Citizen Oasis		x		SCDCom Housing Collaboration
E. Encourage the Involvement of Local Artists in Community Improvement and Design	x	x	x	South Chicago Fine Arts Committee

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
VI. COORDINATE PUBLIC & PRIVATE IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES	x	x	r	SCDCom