

Environmental Priorities for Chicago's Next Mayor

Chicago is known around the US and internationally as an environmental and sustainability leader. The City has a track record of innovation in solving environmental problems both to improve the quality of life for residents and to boost the City's economic competitiveness. The next mayor has the opportunity to build on that success and address unresolved environmental challenges.

The Illinois Environmental Council recently released a report with [recommendations for the next mayor](#) reflecting input from more than 20 local organizations. The Joyce Foundation urges careful consideration of those recommendations, which cover water, energy, transportation and other issues. Effective public policy is the result of transparent, inclusive, and responsive processes, so the Joyce Foundation echoes that report's call for the next mayor to prioritize "...environmental and environmental justice issues as brought forward by organizations and individuals who are invested in making Chicago a cleaner, healthier and more livable city."

The Joyce Foundation supports work on the environmental issues outlined below. We hope these issues will be high on the next mayor's list of priorities. We would be glad to provide more information on any of them, as well as referrals to organizations in Chicago already working to address them.

- 1. Update the Chicago Climate Action Plan.** Chicago was one of the first large cities with a comprehensive climate plan. The [Chicago Climate Action Plan](#) established ambitious goals for how much the City should reduce global warming pollution by 2020, and the plan's detailed strategies have helped drive numerous meaningful changes by City departments, affiliated agencies, and private sector partners. The next mayor will have the opportunity in her first term to celebrate what has been accomplished by 2020 and to set the stage for even more aggressive action over the next decade. This action should include:
 - Commissioning a detailed global warming pollution inventory covering emissions within the City and reporting on progress made toward the 2020 goals of the Chicago Climate Action Plan.
 - Celebrating the many successful climate action strategies that have helped the City reduce emissions while honestly pointing out which strategies did not work or were not pursued.
 - Launching an inclusive process to develop an updated climate action plan with specific, ambitious strategies for her first term, as well as long-term goals running at least through 2030.

- 2. Accelerate the City's transition to clean energy sources.** Chicago has joined many other leading US cities as part of the [Ready for 100](#) campaign, committing to transition all buildings in Chicago to 100% renewable energy by 2035.
 - More than 90% of building energy use in Chicago is in the private sector. The next mayor should support efforts to change state policies so all of those buildings are supplied with renewable energy as soon as possible, and no later than 2035.
 - City departments should seek opportunities to install cost-effective, on-site renewable power generation, including solar power plus storage systems that can provide resilient power for critical facilities during emergencies.

- 3. Lead transportation electrification in Illinois and beyond.** Electric vehicle technology is rapidly advancing, with more classes of electric vehicles available every year. These vehicles are clean, quiet, require minimal maintenance, and emit no air pollution in the neighborhoods where they operate. Chicago has long been a pivotal part of North American transportation systems, with the greater Chicago region now a key multi-modal freight logistics hub. Actions to accelerate adoption of electric vehicles in Chicago will not only reduce air pollution locally, but also help accelerate adoption of electric vehicles across the state and the Midwest and Great Lakes regions. There is no reason America’s heartland should cede leadership of transportation electrification—and the many jobs associated with that transition—to cities and states on the East and West coasts. To achieve this, Chicago should:
- Develop a detailed plan to electrify all City and affiliated agency vehicle fleets as soon as possible, including supporting CTA management to establish a transition plan so that it will purchase only electric buses no later than 2025.
 - Ensure that sufficient electric vehicle charging infrastructure is installed to facilitate rapid expansion of both private electric vehicle fleets and personal electric vehicles in Chicago.
 - The next mayor should drive dramatic improvements in local air quality by having the City at the forefront of efforts to electrify goods movement and delivery, including phasing in required use of zero emissions delivery vehicles within the city.
- 4. Ensure every Chicagoan has clean, safe and affordable water.** Chicago has undertaken engineering marvels to provide its citizens with clean water, most famously by reversing the flow of the Chicago River a century ago. The infrastructure feats required today are more mundane, but no less essential. The City must continue to invest in new pipes for both water and sewer service. To ensure that Chicago is a healthy and vital city, that investment needs to address the threat posed by lead service lines. Moreover, while the City has raised water rates to pay for new infrastructure, it has an obligation to ensure that rising costs do not jeopardize access to water services for low income people. To achieve this, Chicago should:
- Oversee creation of an inventory of lead service lines in Chicago and a plan for replacing them by 2040. The plan should prioritize neighborhoods at high risk of lead exposure and include funding mechanisms that do not jeopardize water affordability for low-income residents.
 - Assess whether additional changes are needed in the Department of Water Management to ensure its capacity to serve all Chicago residents.
 - Direct the Department of Water Management to undertake an affordability analysis and develop a plan to ensure all Chicagoans can afford water services. The plan should evaluate the adoption of a tiered rate structure and disclose the number of residents whose water service have been terminated.
 - Ensure that water infrastructure planning processes include public health agencies, labor, nonprofit organizations, community groups and the residents who will be most directly affected.
- 5. Improve Chicago’s systems for managing and protecting our water.** Chicago is defined by its waterways. Lake Michigan, the Chicago River, and the Calumet River have supported the City’s economic growth and quality of life. To continue to make gains, the City needs to manage water in a holistic way, across departments, and through the systems we have built to capture, carry, and protect it. In some parts of the City, Chicago has made landmark improvements—transforming the riverfront and upgrading the pipes and

drainage systems that capture storm water and reduce flooding and pollution. As a world-class city, Chicago needs to ensure those improvements reach all residents. To achieve this, Chicago should:

- Continue improving storm water infrastructure, supporting initiatives like [Space to Grow](#), which empower leaders across City departments to partner with each other and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District to reduce flooding and sewer overflows. An emphasis should be placed on infrastructure improvements that create a variety of benefits (jobs, green space, reclaiming abandoned properties.), prioritizing those neighborhoods that flood the most.
- Oversee the update of Chicago's Green Infrastructure Strategy and Storm water Ordinance to continue to reduce flooding, prioritizing those neighborhoods that flood the most.
- Ensure that the City is an active partner in the implementation of the [Great Rivers Chicago](#) vision.
- Advocate for federal Great Lakes programs and policies that support the cleanup of Chicago's waters.

6. **Protect Chicago's residents and visitors from Asian Carp.** Chicago's efforts to improve the health of its waterways and keep pollution out of Lake Michigan have allowed residents and visitors to relax, swim, play, and boat more safely in more places. Lake Michigan is the backbone of a tourism industry that brings 20 million people to the Illinois shoreline each year. Chicago also has invested significantly in waterfront amenities like trails, parks, and the downtown Riverwalk. The Riverwalk draws 1.5 million users each year. Many of these benefits, and the economic gains they have generated, would be compromised if Asian Carp entered our waterways. To achieve this, Chicago should:

- Support construction of protections at Brandon Road Lock and Dam to prevent Asian Carp from reaching Chicago's waterways and Lake Michigan. The City should continue to work with the State of Illinois and other Great Lakes states to support funding of these protections.

7. **Revise Chicago's planning processes to protect public health.** Chicago has uneven and inequitable exposure to pollution and toxins across its neighborhoods. The City's planning processes continue to concentrate industry in low-income communities of color with high populations of young people. To be economically successful over the long term, Chicago must reform its zoning and development processes to take into account the health of the surrounding communities. Planning and zoning decisions should reflect and respect community input. To achieve this, Chicago should:

- Develop cross-department planning processes that include the Department of Health, the Department of Transportation, the Water Department, and the Department of Planning to prevent the further concentration of hazardous and polluting land uses in certain neighborhoods.
- Request a review of the City's Zoning Code, with an evaluation of adopting "green zone" overlay districts and a Cumulative Impacts Ordinance, which have been used in other cities to improve public health and economic development in communities with high levels of pollution.
- Ensure that infrastructure, economic development, and other planning processes include public health agencies, labor, nonprofit organizations, community groups and the residents who will be most directly affected. This should begin by ensuring inclusive community input in decisions about the redevelopment of the Fisk and Crawford coal power plant sites, as well as the Industrial Corridor Modernization process as a whole.

8. **Leverage infrastructure upgrades to create job opportunities.** Addressing Chicago’s pressing public and private sector energy, water, and other environmental infrastructure needs will require many workers, from engineers to laborers. Those jobs can benefit historically disadvantaged groups in Chicago, including returning citizens, foster care alumni, and residents of neighborhoods experiencing the most severe environmental impacts. To achieve this, Chicago should:
- Build upon and expand proven environmental workforce development efforts, including the targeted job training and job creation elements of the [Illinois Solar for All](#) program created by the Future Energy Jobs Act.