

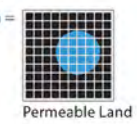
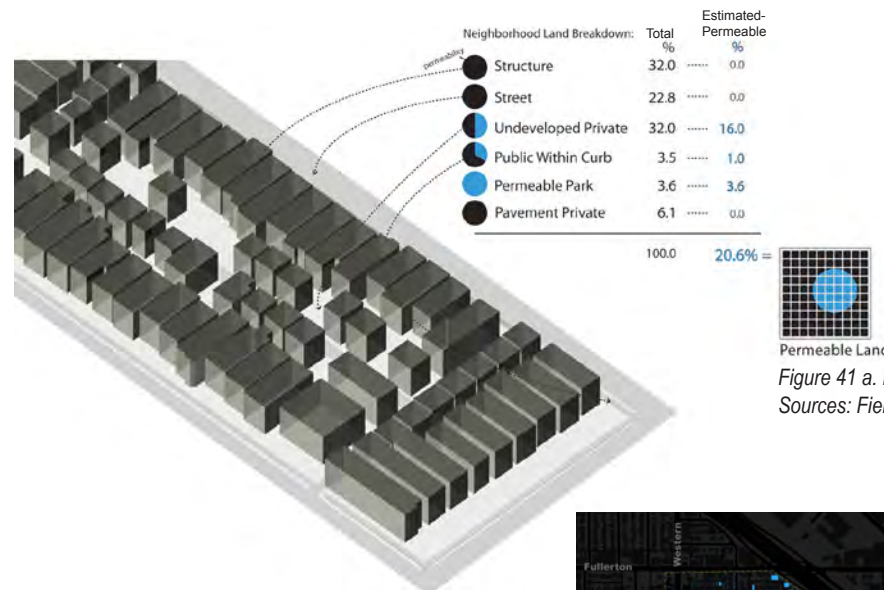
Environmental Conditions and Open Space

Topography and Impervious Surfaces

Issues related to stormwater runoff are usually a factor of topography and the ability of local ground area to absorb water. Like much of Chicago, WPB's topography is relatively flat with little to no variation in elevation. Given the flat landscape, the primary stormwater issues in WPB are associated with impervious surfaces including primarily rooftops, sidewalks, and streets. Impervious surfaces shed water extremely quickly to the sewer system that are already at capacity during heavy rains. Existing and new development that contains no pervious surfaces exacerbate these issues. Secondary stormwater run-off issues are associated with the highway and elevated rail lines, which shed a lot of water unevenly onto surrounding blocks during heavy rains.

Despite a dense tree canopy, the actual amount of pervious surfaces that infiltrates stormwater runoff and reduces flooding is quite low. Available data suggests that an estimated 79.4% of WPB's surface area is impervious. The remaining 20.6% includes unbuilt private lots like yards and driveways, parks, parkways, and rear yards, most of which, though classified as "pervious," is compacted soil or other material that absorbs little stormwater. Many of these surfaces present opportunities to increase infiltration through practices such as green roofs, pervious alleyways, and landscaping. Increasing the amount of green and pervious surfaces will:

- Green the streetscape;
- Reduce the demand on the City's stormwater management infrastructure; and
- Improve the quality of water runoff entering the Chicago River.



Permeable Land

Figure 41 a. Permeable Surfaces Diagram
Sources: Field Survey and Aerial Photography

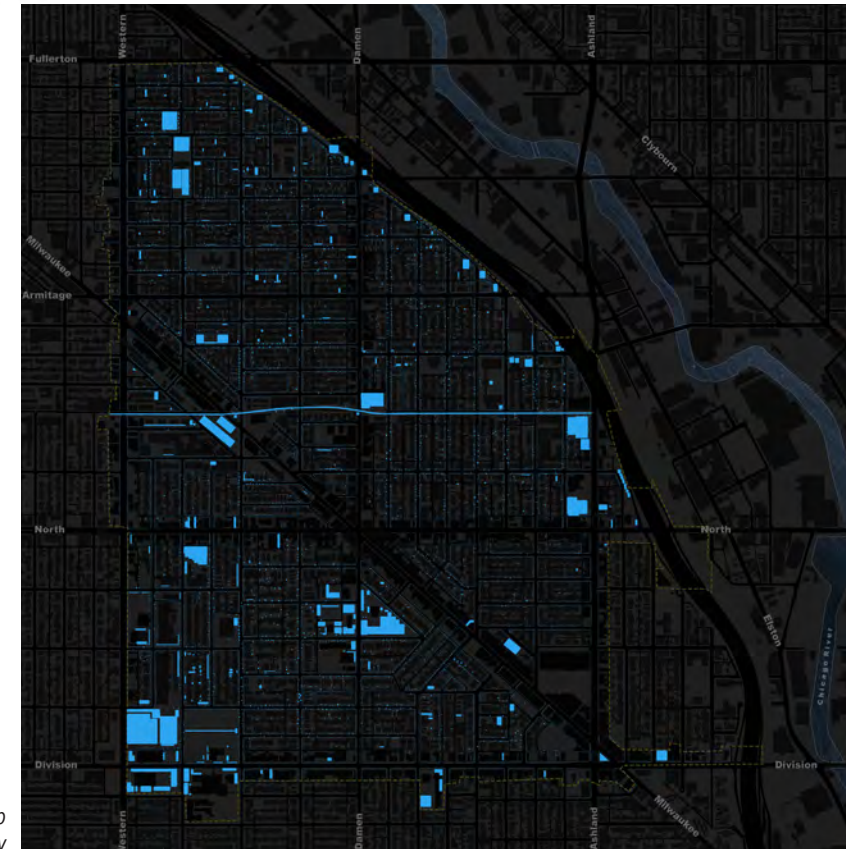


Figure 41 b. Estimated Pervious Surfaces Map
Sources: Field Survey and Aerial Photography

Parks & Plazas

The WPB neighborhoods provide residents with a mixture of small parks, flower patches, dog runs, and public squares. The majority of residents live within reasonable walking distance from a public park. The formal parks and plazas within WPB include Wicker Park, Holstein Park, Walsh Park, Roberto Clemente Park, Churchill Park and the small but widely recognized Polish Triangle at Ashland Avenue and Division Street. Most of the park space here is primarily designed as baseball fields, and with the exception of Wicker Park and the Polish Triangle, the parks and plazas are primarily used for that purpose.

The intersection of Division Street, Ashland Avenue, and Milwaukee Avenue forms a triangular open space called the Polish Triangle. Historically significant, the plaza was the centerpiece for both Chicago's "Polish Downtown" and the headquarters for many Polish organizations across the Country, as well as a feature in the work of Nelson Algren, who there found inspiration for his novels. Controversy surrounding the name of the Polish Triangle emerged when the plaza's name was changed to honor Algren; this controversy continues today, marked by significant public debate about the small park's future design and use.



L-R: Two images of the gardens at Wicker Park, Source: Wicker Park Garden Club; the Bloomingdale Trail meets Walsh Park at the dog park; Clemente playing fields; and the Polish Triangle.

Wicker Park, located just south of the Damen Stop along Damen Avenue, is a center for neighborhood activity and fairs, and attracts a variety of people from all over Chicago who come to the park to garden, sit by the fountain, or simply to watch that day's line up of league softball games. Wicker Park is fortunate to have a strong volunteer base for the support and care for its extensive gardens, which line Damen Avenue and encircle the fountain at the park's core. While the volunteer leadership is local, much of the man- and woman-power for these volunteer efforts is rooted elsewhere in the City. Individuals who have an interest in urban parks and gardening are drawn to the range of gardening and landscaping classes offered by the Wicker Park Advisory Committee. The Committee is hoping to further encourage use of the park and community center by people of all ages particularly given the Park's proximity to four elementary schools within a six block radius. A major step was taken in this regard when, a few years ago, the City rebuilt the kids' playground, transforming a deteriorated space into a neighborhood- and kid- friendly usable place.

Unfortunately, making the plaza a more prominent and exciting gateway to WPB as well as a centerpiece to local arts is a significant challenge. Lined with trees, a central fountain, and a taxi cab stop, the Polish Triangle is often strewn with refuse and plays home to many pigeons and homeless individuals. 80,000 cars a day encircle the Triangle making seamless pedestrian connections to adjacent communities difficult. Furthermore, surrounding uses are often not the type that actively promote pedestrian activity, catering instead to the automobile. Despite these challenges, the Polish Triangle is the front door to the successful Chopin Theater, affords stunning views to the City's downtown and is infused with activity at the heavily-used CTA bus stops and underground "L" station. Addressing the plaza's issues is a broad design challenge that must move beyond the Triangle itself. Traffic calming and supportive uses, as well as new activity in the plaza are needed to transform the highly visible and contested plaza into a renewed centerpiece for WPB.

In addition to the existing parks, two new parks are currently proposed in WPB.

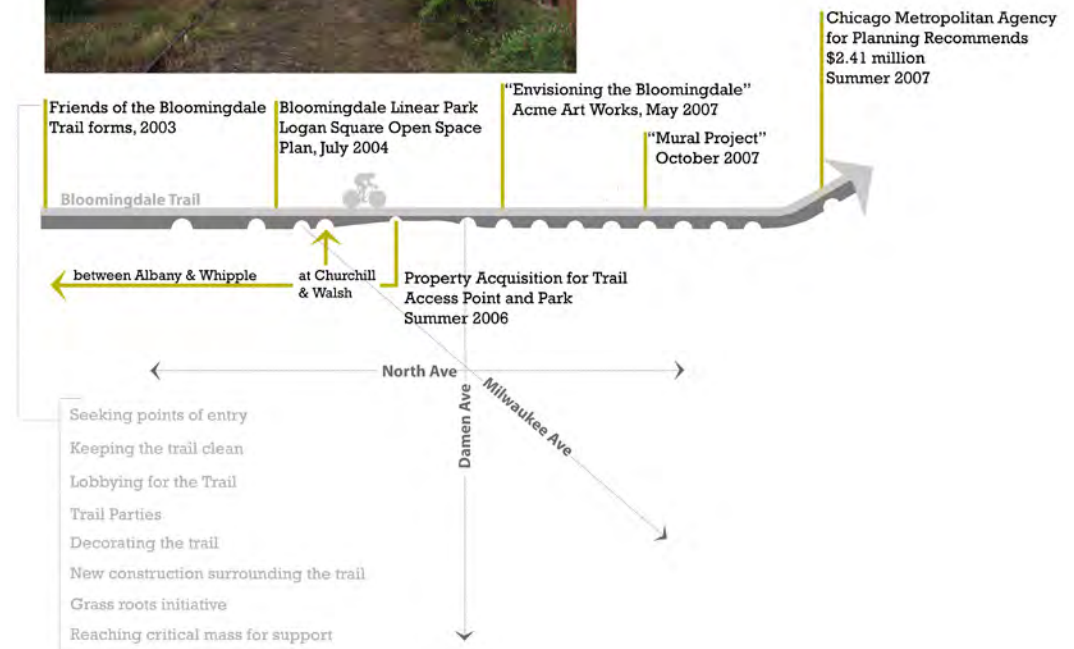
- Mautene Court is a small, currently vacant piece of land along Milwaukee Avenue that was at one time a through street. The space was formerly occupied by a scattering of concrete benches and planters next to an active McDonalds which fueled the perception that Mautene Court was a part of McDonald's property. McDonalds is now gone, new development surrounding the lot is in the planning stages, and the Mautene Court is intended to become an innovative and attractive centerpiece to lower Milwaukee Avenue. The SSA's Open Space Committee is currently coordinating with the City of Chicago on design objectives.
- The Bloomingdale Trail is a proposed linear park spanning the entirety of WPB from east to west. The idea of the Bloomingdale Trail was first mentioned in the City's Plan in 1997 and is envisioned as a unique green space and alternative transit connection for bicyclists. The former rail line has 38 bridges (many of which are in need of repair) and is currently used by a mixture of fence hoppers / urban explorers and homeless. The Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail started as a community outreach initiative focused on working with the City to convert the rail line into a multi-use trail with access ramps. Their recent work has resulted in a trail cleanup, new public art on the bridge overpasses, and a completed design charrette to generate ideas for the trail's future. The estimated cost for the trail is \$50 million, with some federal funds committed by the City, \$2 million from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), and \$1 million from the City. To ensure that the trail is integrated into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhoods, the ultimate design will require nearby land for access ramps. Opportunities for these access points include Churchill Field, Walsh Park, and land along Milwaukee Avenue.



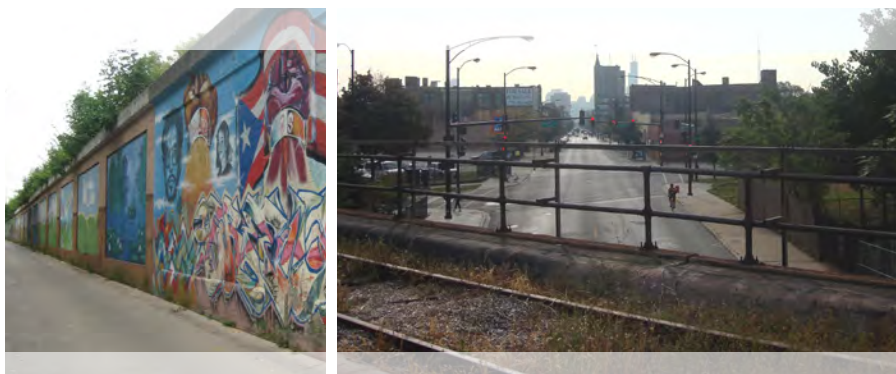
Mautene Court.



Figure 42. Bloomingdale Trail Timeline
Source: Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail



Bloomingdale rail line, ground level and above.



Trees

The majority of residential streets are shaded during the summertime by large street trees; the best coverage is found in the historic residential areas surrounding Wicker Park (the park) and stretching into Bucktown. Residential areas closer to Western Avenue and Ashland Avenue, however, exhibit the least coverage with, in some cases, only a few small trees per block. Portions of North Avenue, Western Avenue and Armitage Avenue (not in the SSA boundary) currently have the fewest street trees in the study area. Overall, with a tree canopy coverage of roughly 8.6%, WPB's canopy coverage is below Chicago's city wide average of 11% overall.⁹

In 2007, the SSA commissioned a landscape and tree survey that identified the location and condition of all existing trees along the commercial corridors. The study found 1,196 trees, with 98 (8%) in unhealthy or unmaintained condition. As indicated by the survey, almost all of the trees are significantly smaller than those found on nearby residential blocks owing to the relatively young age of the trees within the SSA.

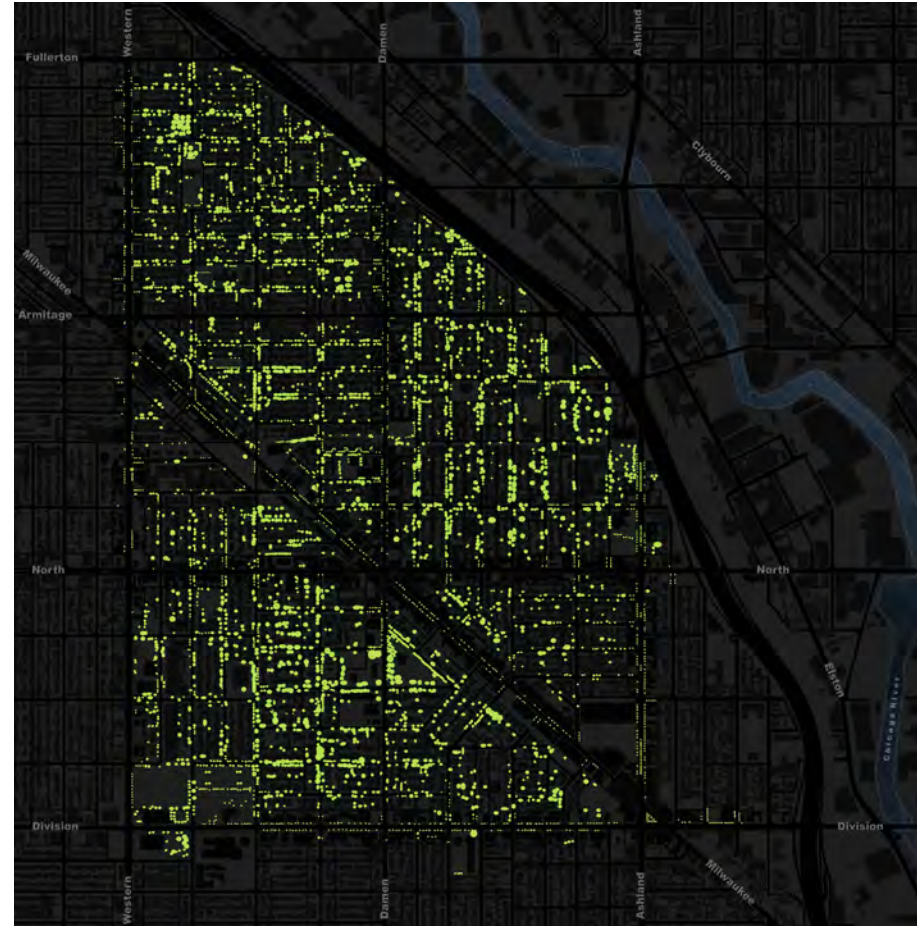
Trees in Wicker Park face many challenges and have been a source of conflict. Space is often limited for plantings along commercial corridors, and it is often unclear as to who is responsible for their maintenance. Along Division Street in particular, the street trees are competing for space with outdoor restaurant seating despite the wide sidewalks that can easily accommodate both. In addition, local residents have stated that trees are "lost" every year due to new development. Participants in this study repeatedly stated that maintenance and enforcement of the rules are necessary to protect the existing tree canopy.

Despite the conflicts, a quality tree canopy is important for WPB to improve air quality, promote carbon absorption (sequestration) and provide shading which reduces the urban heat island effect. Efforts should be made to improve and expand the tree canopy while recognizing that other options may need to be explored to shade commercial corridors.

Brownfields

There are nine identified brownfield properties in the study area. They are scattered, relatively small parcels, especially when compared with the dense clustering of large brownfield sites lining the north branch of the Chicago River where former industrial mills have become big-box retail destinations. City data locates three contaminated or potentially contaminated sites on Milwaukee, three on Division to the east and west of the Polish Triangle, two on the west side of Damen north of North, and one on the north side of North east of Damen.

⁹ 1. Nowak, D.J. and E.G. McPherson. Quantifying the impact of trees: The Chicago Urban Forest Climate Project. Urban and Peri-urban Forestry. Unasylva. Issue 173. 1993.



Figures 43 a. and b. Tree Canopy Map and Diagram
Sources: SSA tree survey, Summer 2007, and Aerial Photography.