

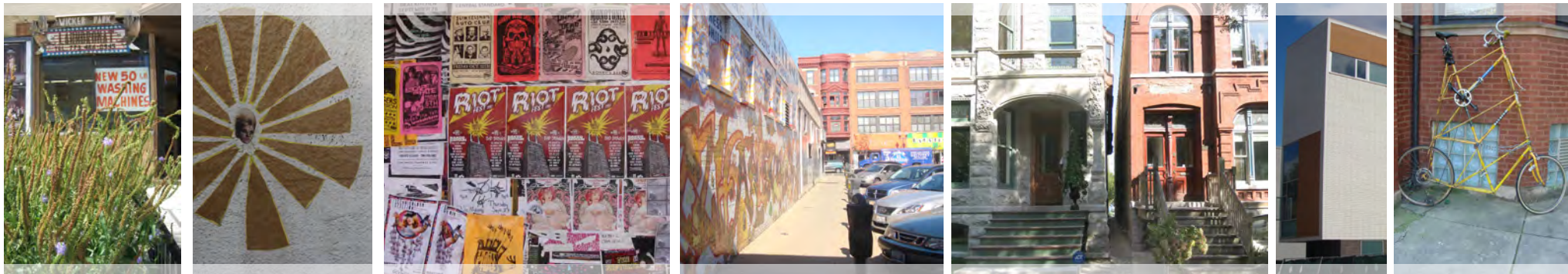
I Introduction & Methodology

Purpose of Plan

Wicker Park and Bucktown are two neighborhoods in a City of neighborhoods, two neighborhoods long home to an eclectic mix of Eastern European and Latino immigrants and a thriving underground culture fueled by local artists, musicians, writers, and other creators. Located northwest of Chicago's Loop and on the left shoulder of Goose Island, Wicker Park and Bucktown now find themselves in the midst of rapid change and the center of much attention. The area's independent spirit, bohemian vibe, artistic self-expression, and collection of fiercely local restaurants and boutiques, coupled with its proximity to downtown and three Blue Line "L" stations, have piqued mainstream interests, drawing hordes of investors and developers, an influx of new 20-something residents, new commercial competition from national retailers, and waves of suburbanites and tourists who come to shop and dine.

With soaring real estate prices and shifting demographics, the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods are becoming more transient, less diverse, and far more affluent. Wicker Park and Bucktown's commercial corridors – the social spaces and opportunities for unparalleled "street ballet" along Milwaukee, Division, North, Western, Damen, and Ashland – are at risk of losing their beloved "grittiness" and their "edge." Sensing an inevitable and irreversible slip away from the varied urban collage and intersection of sub-cultures that defines the area today, members of the Wicker Park and Bucktown communities proclaim,

["we are unique, or at least we perceive ourselves as unique. We want to keep it that way."]



Local textures and character.

Unique among Chicago's Special Service Areas (SSA) for its size and eclecticism, the Wicker Park Bucktown SSA's district **[13 miles of sidewalk, 1,399 parcels, 734 businesses, about 30 institutions, and roughly 2,750 dwelling units]** encompasses a vibrant yet varied, mixed use urban area home to a diverse mix of people and a rare combination of nightlife, culture, family, and art. The SSA's challenges are to:

1. Preserve, encourage, and enhance the qualities of Wicker Park and Bucktown that make the neighborhoods and their corridors distinctly *Wicker Park* and *Bucktown*; and to
2. Balance the needs and desires of all residents, visitors, and businesses in the allocation and expenditure of their tax dollars.

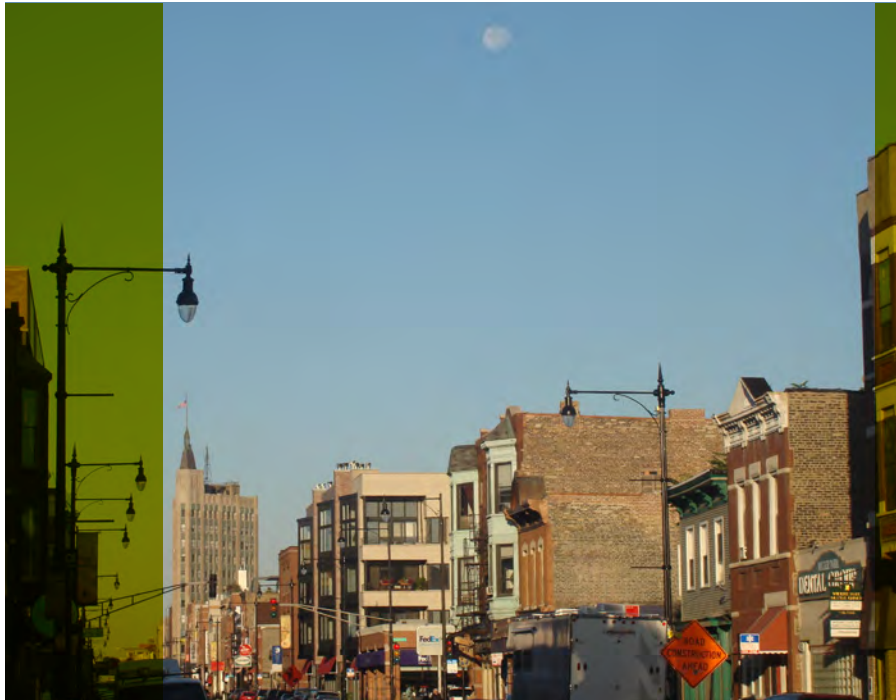
The decision to undertake this plan for Wicker Park and Bucktown's commercial corridors is part of an effort to address the community's growing identity head-on. It is a plan intended to balance the good that comes from increased prosperity along the corridors and within the neighborhoods with the strong desire to preserve local attitude and diversity and reinforce local arts, ecology, heritage, affordability, and values:

[drive less, bike more, buy local, go green, inhabit the sidewalks, indulge in urban eye candy, honor the past, welcome a progressive future, and do so as a unified community.]



The planning process is an opportunity to develop a collective vision for the future of Wicker Park and Bucktown's commercial corridors, a chance to bring together the active, but often uninvolved constituency of neighbors, business owners, artists, institutions, investors, and visitors who enjoy and identify with the culture and social life along Western, Damen, Ashland, North, Division, and Milwaukee to think about the effects of change, and how best to integrate old with new. The plan itself is a tool that at once recognizes the value of organic, unguided growth and the importance of community priorities and preferences, which, once clearly established, will steer the area's commercial corridors down a path of development that is in the best interest of Wicker Park, Bucktown, and their diverse stakeholder groups.

[The plan should be “as funky as we like,” a “dreamscape” for the area.]



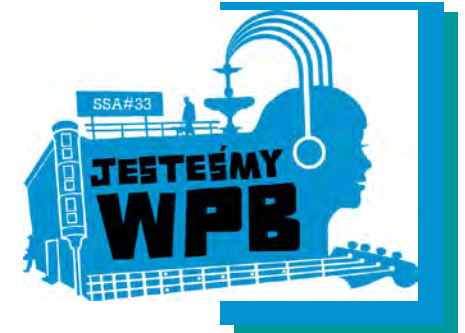
Looking west along North Avenue.

Project Partners

[we are WPB]

SSA #33 is the Special Service Area for the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods of Chicago. The mission of SSA #33 is “to sustain and promote the prosperity and unique qualities of life in the Wicker Park-Bucktown neighborhood and commercial district, whilst preserving its diverse character for the benefit of its residents, visitors, and businesses through the wise and discerning investment of resources to enhance our public ways.” The SSA was established by the Chicago City Council in November 2005 as a taxing district, and thus exists as a public body funded by property tax dollars paid by the residents, businesses, and other land owners along Wicker Park and Bucktown's commercial corridors.

The SSA commissioned the Wicker Park and Bucktown Neighborhoods Master Plan (WPB Master Plan) as an investment to guide its spending, advocacy, and outreach over the next three to five years.



Translations: blue, Polish, “We are WPB”
green, Spanish, “WPB works.”

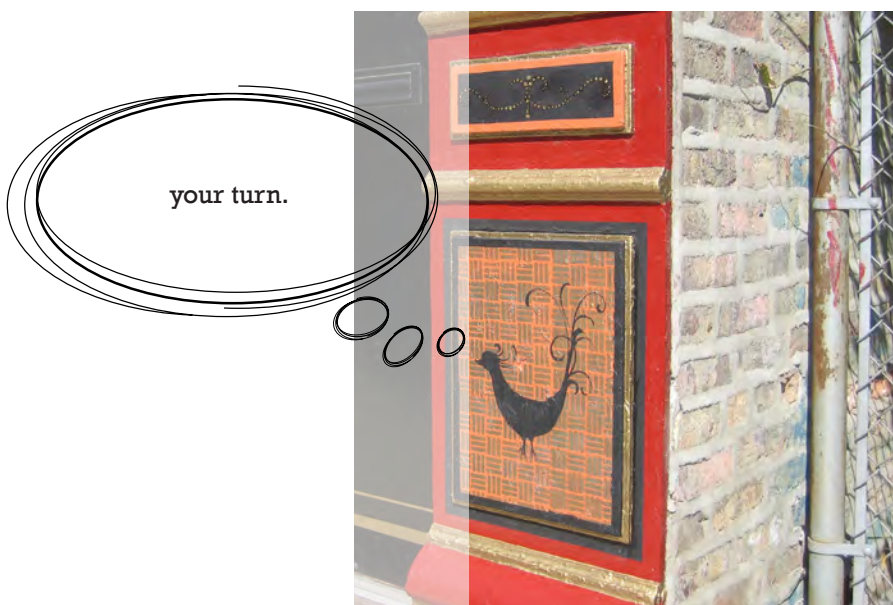
[you are WPB]

The overriding objective of the plan is to be consistent with the values, visions, and priorities of WPB community members. The creation of the plan required public input, and the WPB community offered it readily.

WPB Community Members participated in the Wicker Park and Bucktown Neighborhoods Master Plan planning process by attending small focus groups, participating in SSA Planning Committee meetings, offering

[candid, poetic, and passionate]

comments during interviews, and engaging in a series of WPB Open Houses hosted over the course of three Saturdays in a vacant storefront on North Milwaukee Avenue. These community members played an integral role in informing the analysis, enriching our understanding of the place with a wealth of information, anecdotes and memories, questions and challenges. Their visions for WPB's future and their ideas about how to achieve that future informed this plan's recommendations, and their energy and sustained interest will be required to help implement the plan. The community's words punctuate this report, adding local flavor and style and making the WPB Master Plan distinctly Wicker Park and Bucktown. Thank you, WPB.



Milwaukee Avenue detail.

[who are you???

INTERFACE STUDIO LLC, an urban design and planning firm based in Philadelphia, was the lead consultant for the WPB Master Plan. With the goal of promoting the long-term viability of urban neighborhoods by celebrating their unique and defining characteristics with fresh and inventive design solutions, Interface Studio adopts a comprehensive approach focused on identifying critical physical, social, and economic opportunities that will foster sustained and meaningful change. Interface Studio has extensive experience in planning for neighborhoods undergoing rapid change and redevelopment and in that capacity has successfully developed plans that are both innovative and achievable.

Land Strategies, Inc., a Chicago-based transportation consulting firm, was responsible for the transportation analysis and creative traffic and transportation solutions that emerged as part of the WPB Master Plan. Land Strategies is an award-winning firm that has built its reputation on providing sound and creative transportation solutions for its clients. The firm specializes in traffic impact studies, transportation planning, and expert testimony, with experience in a wide range of land use plans that include residential, retail, mixed use, and office developments, intermodal facilities, downtown redevelopment, and neighborhood planning. It is Land Strategies' goal to provide first rate service along with smart, sensible recommendations that solve our clients' transportation needs.

Civic Economics, an economic analysis and strategic planning consultancy with offices in Austin and Chicago, was responsible for the WPB Master Plan's economic and market analysis and commercial market recommendations. Dedicated since its founding in 2002 to the concept of *sustainable prosperity*, the firm has established a reputation for progressive economic development and creative application of the conventional tools of the trade. The firm has analyzed a wide range of economic issues: the relative merits of competing gaming proposals in Iowa; the impact of utility rate increases on different classes of ratepayers in South Texas; a proposed minimum wage increase in the seaside community of Santa Cruz, California; the capacity for biotech growth in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and the knowledge economy prospects for the Brownsville/Matamoros international metro, to name a few. Frequently cited in America's leading publications including the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and San Francisco Chronicle and such periodicals as Business Week and Harper's, the firm's innovative work has made a notable difference on American economic development practice.

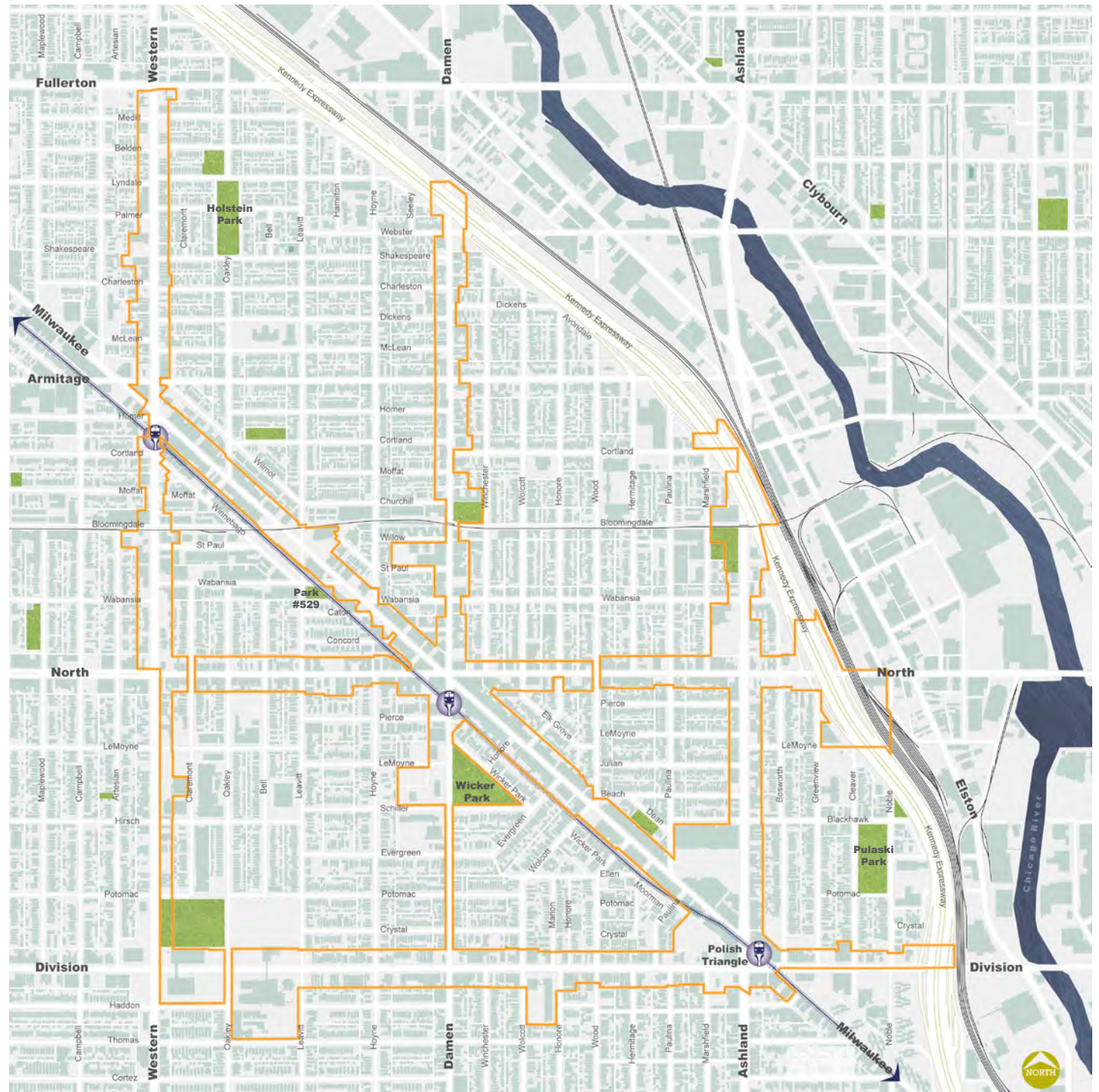


Figure 10. WPB Base Map



Study Boundaries

[WPB is “the center of the world”]

The boundaries of the WPB SSA encompass portions of Milwaukee, Division, North, Western, Damen, and Ashland as they course through Chicago’s Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods.

More specifically, the SSA’s service district encompasses:

- **Milwaukee** from Division to Western
- The south side of **Division** from Western to Milwaukee
- The north side of **Division** from Western to the Kennedy Expressway
- **North** from Western to the Kennedy Expressway
- The east side of **Western** from Division to Fullerton
- The west side of **Western** from North to Fullerton
- **Damen** from Schiller to the Kennedy Expressway
- **Ashland** from Division to the Kennedy Expressway

However, the SSA’s commercial corridors exist within two thriving, evolving urban neighborhoods (Wicker Park and Bucktown), adjacent to three others (Logan Square, Humboldt Park, and Ukrainian Village), and in close proximity to the big-box retail district northeast of the Kennedy Expressway. Though focused on WPB’s commercial corridors, this plan recognizes the relationships that exist between the corridors, the residential areas of Wicker Park and Bucktown, and the surrounding neighborhoods and retail destinations. The plan therefore embraces a larger view that places WPB and its commercial corridors in context.



The WPB SSA and surrounding urban fabric.

Planning Process

The year-long planning process for the Wicker Park and Bucktown Neighborhoods Master Plan began in August 2007 and ended in September 2008 with the adoption of a final plan by the SSA.

Given that the SSA exists to act for the benefit of the Wicker Park and Bucktown commercial district and the residents, artists, businesses, and institutions that inhabit and visit its corridors, this plan belongs not just to the SSA commissioners and property tax payers, but to the larger WPB community. The SSA firmly believes that “any community process should be open and transparent” and that “any planning, budgeting, or decision making process should be open to the public.” As such, this planning process endeavored not only to engage the public but also to help to build a sense of community among WPB’s diverse constituency – it identifies and reflects the collective concerns and desires of the people who live, work, create, invest, and play in Wicker Park and Bucktown.



Public Outreach

[the gossip, the good stuff, the concerns, complaints, and inner-most desires - in other words, an invitation to spill your guts and help us understand this place]

Creating a plan reflective of WPB – its people and its character – required an open and ongoing public dialog. Throughout the planning process, the Interface Studio team talked, listened, and brainstormed with over 250 community members in the following discussions:

- Over 25 confidential interviews with a sample of long-term residents, relative newcomers, community leaders, artists, designers, business owners, service providers, developers, and political representatives;
- A series of focus groups with representatives from distinct stakeholder groups in the neighborhood, each with unique concerns and opinions regarding the future of Wicker Park and Bucktown and their commercial corridors, in particular. Interface Studio, Land Strategies, and Civic Economics conducted discussions with the following constituencies: a group of residents, a group of business owners, and a group of representatives from local community groups and institutions;
- Close to 200 people attended the WPB Open Houses hosted in a vacant storefront on North Milwaukee Avenue on three consecutive Saturdays – March 29th, April 5th, and April 12th. With the Open Houses, the SSA invited the public to stop by, meet the SSA, learn a little, dream a little, and get involved in WPB’s future. The Open Houses allowed the Interface Studio team to share the information collected during the analysis of existing conditions and prompt WPB neighbors and visitors to share their memories, stories, gripes, and ideas, through:
 - A curated PHOTO CONTEST;
 - Interactive mapping projects with STICKERS;
 - 2028 POSTCARD visioning exercises;
 - PIGGY BANKS for allocating the SSA’s (pretend) money; and
 - A VIDEO STORYTELLING BOOTH and PHOTO SUGGESTION BOOTH.

There was a video projection filling the storefront window at night. There were posters to capture people’s attention. There were guest speakers, a kids’ corner, costumes and masks.

[for details see pages 113-124: good company, good times, great results]

- A WPB Commission Meeting, open to the public, hosted at the Wicker Park Fieldhouse – during which the Interface Studio team presented the preliminary recommendations for the WPB Master Plan to the community for comment and critique; and
- Ongoing coordination with the SSA’s Long Term Planning Committee throughout the duration of the project.



Project Phases

The WPB Master Plan planning process, led by the Interface Studio team and overseen by the SSA's Long Term Planning Committee, consists of three phases, the first two of which are now complete:

1 The **Research and Existing Conditions Phase**, defined by observation, research, and outreach to assess neighborhood dynamics and determine corridor needs included:

- A survey of each parcel within the SSA's district to create an up to date land use map, measure building conditions, locate recent investment, and estimate the SSA's current population density;
- An in-depth examination of the physical environment along the corridors to assess the existing commercial and retail mix, market synergies or lack thereof, the quality of the natural environment, architectural value and visual interest, local traffic and circulation patterns, the transit system, parking resources, and pedestrian and bicycle amenities;
- An exploration of the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods to place the corridors in context, document existing land use patterns, and locate neighborhood assets and institutions;
- Census and Claritas research to evaluate demographic and socioeconomic changes within Wicker Park and Bucktown over time;
- A review of old maps, photographs, and historical accounts as well as of pre-existing plans that will in some way touch or impact the future of Wicker Park, Bucktown, and the SSA's commercial corridors;

and, perhaps most informative,

- A public outreach initiative designed to get the gossip on the ground and access the qualitative aspects of the neighborhood – **[its vibe, its pulse, its soul]**. The public outreach for the first phase of the project comprised individual interviews, a series of focus groups, and ongoing coordination with the SSA and its Planning Committee.

2 The **Preliminary Recommendations Phase** involved:

- Inviting everyone in the area to come out to one of three (or all three) WPB Open Houses to learn about Wicker Park and Bucktown, the commercial corridors, and the SSA, to meet the neighbors, to participate in a visioning session about the future of WPB, and to become *active* effectors of change;
- Using the WPB Open Houses to transition from the analysis of past and present, here and now, to recommendations about WPB tomorrow and the next day by capturing the community's collective vision for WPB and generating a list of goals and objectives based on public input;
- Beginning to imagine opportunities and strategies to achieve such goals and balance observed trends and projections with desired outcomes;
- Incorporating Best Practices research collected from neighborhoods elsewhere in the country and around the globe – neighborhoods of similar values and shared characteristics, neighborhoods experiencing exponential growth and transition – to inform a relevant set of innovative and attainable planning strategies for WPB;

- Developing a series of preliminary recommendations that address commercial and business development within the SSA; transportation and mobility improvements designed to prioritize pedestrian, bicyclist, and transit travel; ways to grow greener and preserve the area's unique character, diversity, architecture, and cultural heritage; strategies to create and reinforce engaging, multi-use public spaces; and a process for ongoing outreach and sustained community involvement;
- Sharing the preliminary recommendations with the SSA and its Long Term Planning Committee to ensure that the ideas were on target;
- Presenting the preliminary recommendations to the community for feedback, critique, and approval a WPB Commission Meeting, open to the public, at the Wicker Park Fieldhouse in July 2008; and
- Revising the recommendations to reflect public input and then composing and posting a Draft WPB Master Plan online for further comment by the SSA and the public

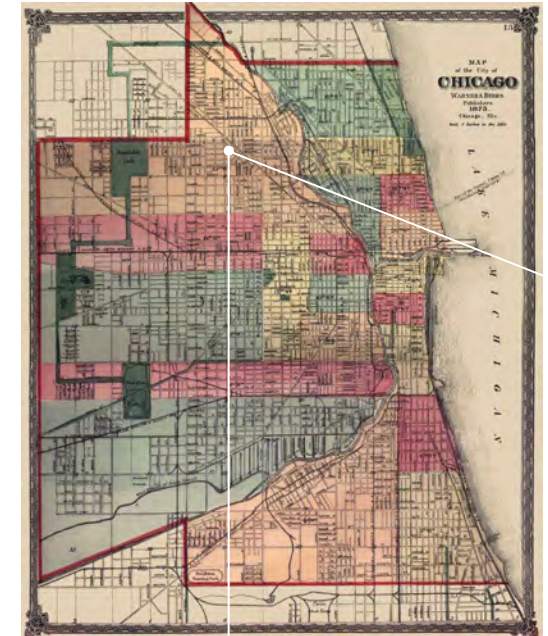
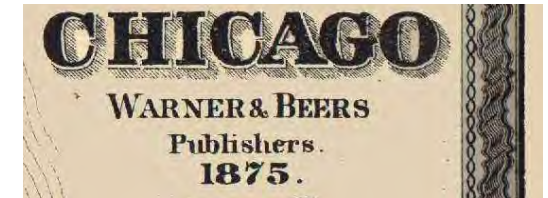
[tell us what you really think].

Phase Two is now complete.

3 The planning process culminates with the delivery of the **Final Plan**. The Interface Studio team will edit the Draft WPB Master Plan to address further comments offered by the SSA, WPB residents, artists, business owners, neighborhood institutions and organizations, political representatives, City agencies, and other stakeholders. Together with the SSA Long Term Planning Committee, the Interface Studio team will then edit the Action Plan and Implementation Matrix that defines WPB priorities and indicates a timeframe and potential partners for each recommendation. Upon completion of the plan, the team will be available to **[take the show on the road]**, presenting the final plan to the Wicker Park and Bucktown community, to SSA property tax payers, to City officials, and to other entities whose support is necessary for successful implementation.

The target completion date for the Final Plan is September 2008.

The SSA, as a Special Service provider for WPB's commercial corridors and an empowered effector of change – **["cultural defenders, art creators, park beautifiers, business makers, neighbors"]** – will then assume responsibility for the WPB Master Plan, its adoption, and its implementation.



Chicago Wards, 1875. Source: www.city-data.com



Historic Wicker Park