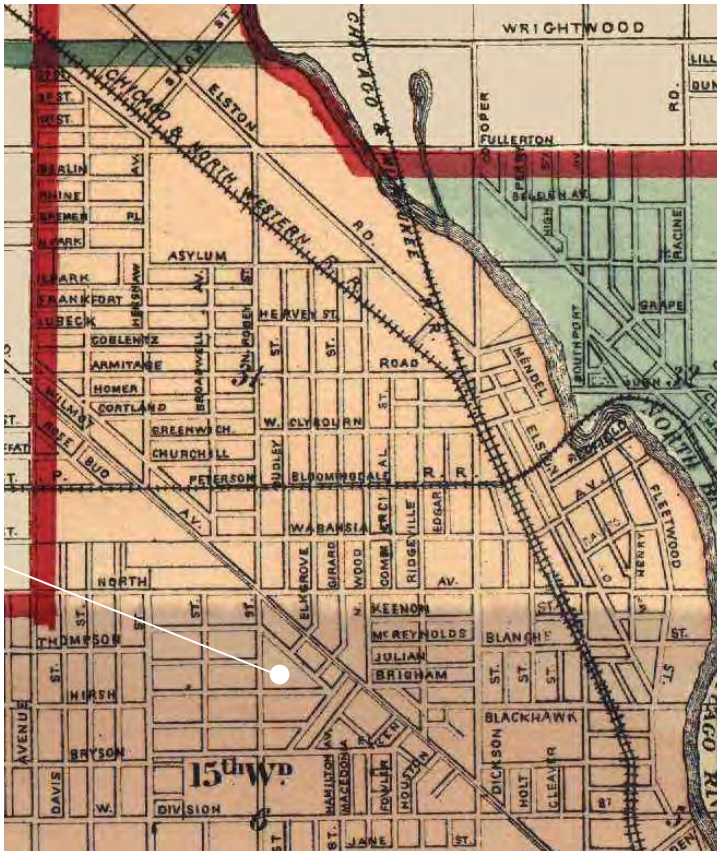


II Wicker Park Bucktown: yesterday and today

Wicker Park Bucktown: A Historical Overview¹

The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods carry with them a dynamic history largely centered on the rise of the immigrant working family in Chicago. Preceding the fire of 1871, the history of Wicker Park and Bucktown tells a story of steady growth in population, as manufacturing and mill jobs in the area flourished enticing immigrant families to fill the growing labor demand. Development crept steadily to the north and west along the major corridors, namely Milwaukee Avenue – first an Indian path, then a foot trail to downtown known as the immigrants’ “pathway to prosperity,” later upgraded with wood board paving and a toll booth, and still later accommodating horse drawn trolleys. The introduction of the Chicago and North Western Railroad to the area further solidified a market for manufacturing jobs and thus a demand for immigrant labor. Today’s six-point intersection at Milwaukee, Damen, and North has changed much since then – when small wooden residential structures dotted the street, churches and parishes defined the civic and social structure, and a small well at the corner of Damen and North Avenue provided fresh water to many of the local families.

It was the Great Fire of 1871 that further fueled the steady growth of this immigrant laborer community. Within weeks, homeless Chicagoans sought opportunity in the area, with many Scandinavians and Germans building large mansions of brick and stone to deter the threat of another such tragedy. Poles and other immigrant families soon followed suit along Division Street, and by 1900 the major retail corridors of today were established and bustling with cigar rollers, blacksmiths, carriage houses, and bakeries – a full range of services equipped to meet the local population’s daily needs. Wicker Park and Bucktown’s ethnic diversity around the turn of the century also spurred a strong religious presence including most notably Catholic and Jewish families. Many of the synagogues that served the Jewish community have since been converted to homes and other uses but are still visible today.



Milwaukee Avenue, 1922
Source: Chicago Daily News



1871 Great Fire Aftermath
Source: Chicago Historical Society

¹ Sources for the Historical Overview include:

Best, Wallace. “Wicker Park.” Encyclopedia of Chicago. 17 February 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2159.html>

Coorens, Elaine. *Wicker Park from 1673 thru 1929 and Walking Tour Guide*. Old Wicker Park Committee. August 2003.

Maggio, Alice. “Division Street and the Transformations of a Community.” Gapers Block. Chicago. 8 July 2004. http://www.gapersblock.com/airbags/archives/division_street_and_the_transformations_of_a_community
Wicker Park District. Wicker Park Chamber of Commerce. <http://www.wickerparkbucktown.com/play/history>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Town_Chicago

Newman, Scott A. “Lower Milwaukee Avenue.” Jazz Age Chicago - Urban Leisure from 1893 - 1945. 13 August 2008. <http://chicago.urban-history.org/dist/milwaukee/milwaukee.shtml>



L-R: Polish Kosciusko Guards at Division and Noble, 1890, Source: Chicago Historical Society; Christmas Shoppers on Milwaukee looking west from Ashland, 1910, Source: Chicago Daily News; Polish Triangle, Source: www.flickr.com; Intersection of Milwaukee and Paulina, 1926, Source: Chicago Daily News.

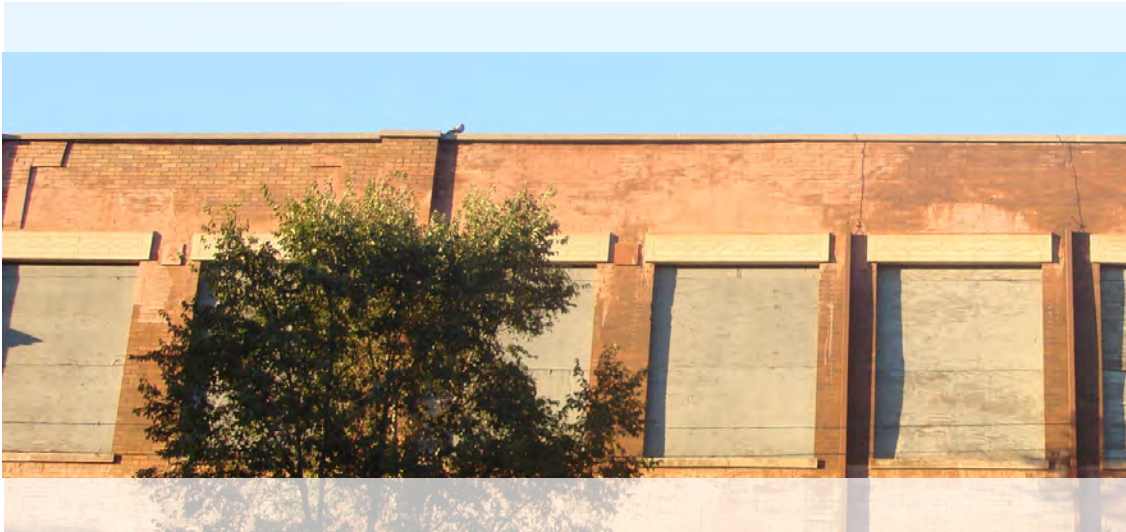
By the 1930s, another major shift in the area’s cultural composition occurred. The Germans and Scandinavians began to move farther northwest, leaving behind mansions that were soon divided into multi-unit structures for lower income workers seeking more affordable units. By the 1940s, the inhabitants of Wicker Park and Bucktown were predominantly of Polish descent, and Division Street, considered “Polish Broadway,” terminated at the “Polish Triangle” at the intersection of Ashland and Milwaukee Avenues and Division Street. The 1950s marked the start of a market decline in Wicker Park, Bucktown, and neighboring West Town, which would last through the 1990s.

By the late 1960s, Division Street as well as the Milwaukee, North, and Damen six-point intersection were notorious for the presence of prostitution and an illicit drug trade. Shopping along Wicker Park and Bucktown’s commercial corridors all but ceased because “there was nothing to shop for.” Thus drained of residents and businesses, the new abundance of affordable properties and potential for business opportunities attracted an influx of Hispanic families, and by the close of the 1960s the ethnic composition of Wicker Park and Bucktown shifted significantly from predominantly Polish to Puerto Rican and later Mexican.

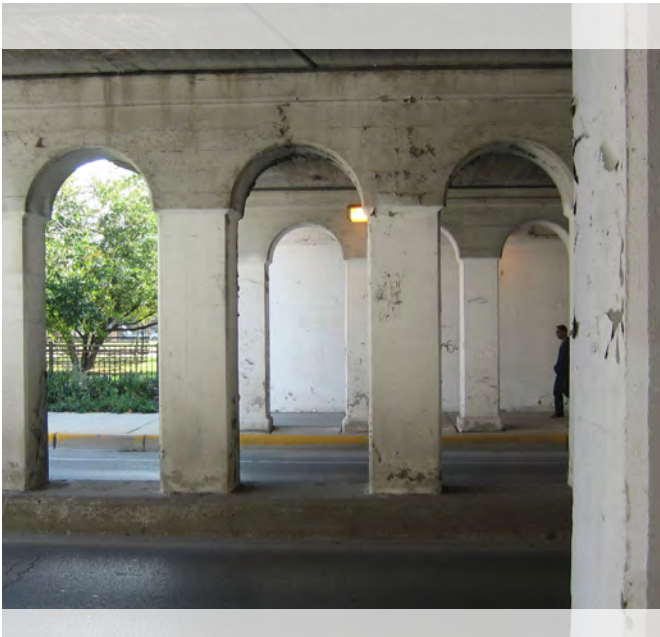
Attracted by the remnant spaces of Wicker Park and Bucktown’s industrial past, an appreciation of the local cultural arts history, and the coexistence of an eclectic mix of people and architecture, artists and arts organizations began reclaiming some of the neighborhoods’ abandoned spaces in the 1970s. This interest and influx coincided with a growing number of gay residents during that time. Their “urban pioneering” through the 1980s paved the way for a new era in Wicker Park and Bucktown, and the 1990s brought yet another demographic to the neighborhoods – the first of a wave of young professionals drawn by lingering low rents, a growing underground music and arts culture, and a gritty urban lifestyle in close proximity to transit. The early years of the 21st Century have marked a turning point in WPB’s unfolding history, bringing net growth to the neighborhood for the first time in decades.

Today, WPB is continuing to grow due largely to the area’s rich and textured history and an emerging “brand” that blends diversity – of people, of buildings, of places, opinions and ideas – with creativity and cool. The real estate and retail markets are so robust that banks are replacing community coffee houses and three-flat condominiums are replacing old homes. WPB is now a “hip” stop – on the local, national, and international radar – as opposed to when

[it just was what it was].



Remnants from WPB's industrial past and images of the artists who pioneered



Source: Roberto Lopez's 1988-1992 Archives



its creative present.



Figure 11: City Context

Proximity and Neighborhood Context

Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, a city divided into geographically confined and culturally similar areas. The interstate highways that course through Chicago play a strong role in determining these areas, and rarely do neighborhoods cross them. From the Loop, where the intersection of every “L” train encircles the downtown, a person could potentially reach every corner of Chicago. The Blue Line of the “L” provides an elevated transit line that leaves the Loop to rumble over many neighborhoods to its terminus in the far northwest reaches of Chicago at the O’Hare Airport; it is this Blue Line that serves the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods at Division Street, Damen Avenue, and Western Avenue. Traveling by “L,” WPB is approximately 15 minutes from the Loop and 45 minutes from O’Hare, depending on the time of day. Among other reasons, WPB residents love the area for its **["convenience!"]**

The Blue Line’s Damen stop at WPB’s six-point intersection at Milwaukee, North, and Damen Avenues can be best described as a node for neighborhood connection. Traveling just a mile in any direction from there finds one in another neighborhood, in a different scene, and experiencing a distinctive place. Chicagoans typically have qualms over the hardline boundaries of their neighborhoods – disputing where one begins and another ends. Over time, these boundaries change as people adopt the identity of a place and subscribe to the idea of belonging to a neighborhood in fact outside its boundaries.



View of downtown Chicago
from Blue Line Damen Stop.
Source: www.veerle.duoh.com

The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods share common eastern and western boundaries – Ashland Avenue and the Kennedy Expressway on the east, and Western Avenue to the west. Division Street marks Wicker Park’s southern edge, and the curving highway caps Bucktown at Fullerton. The internal dividing line between neighborhoods is blurred and changing – a source of ongoing dispute. Though the neighborhoods overlap and share a common commercial district maintained by the same SSA (#33), Wicker Park and Bucktown are, in fact, quite distinct.

Wicker Park’s high profile is attributable to the plethora of shops, niche bars, and nightclubs, of book stores and vintage clothing, and of course a community of artists and their studios. Bucktown is far different. Its physical character is composed of larger residential units, and the community is considered quieter and less rowdy than its neighbor, Wicker Park, which gleams as the life of the party. Stitched together by three major retail corridors (North, Damen, and Milwaukee) and bound by two of Chicago’s major auto routes (Western and Ashland), Wicker Park and Bucktown are learning to share a common or closely linked identity (WPB). This study views the two neighborhoods at once as unique and separate and, blended as one context.



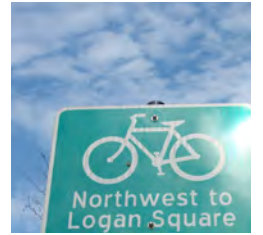
Wicker Park and



Bucktown.

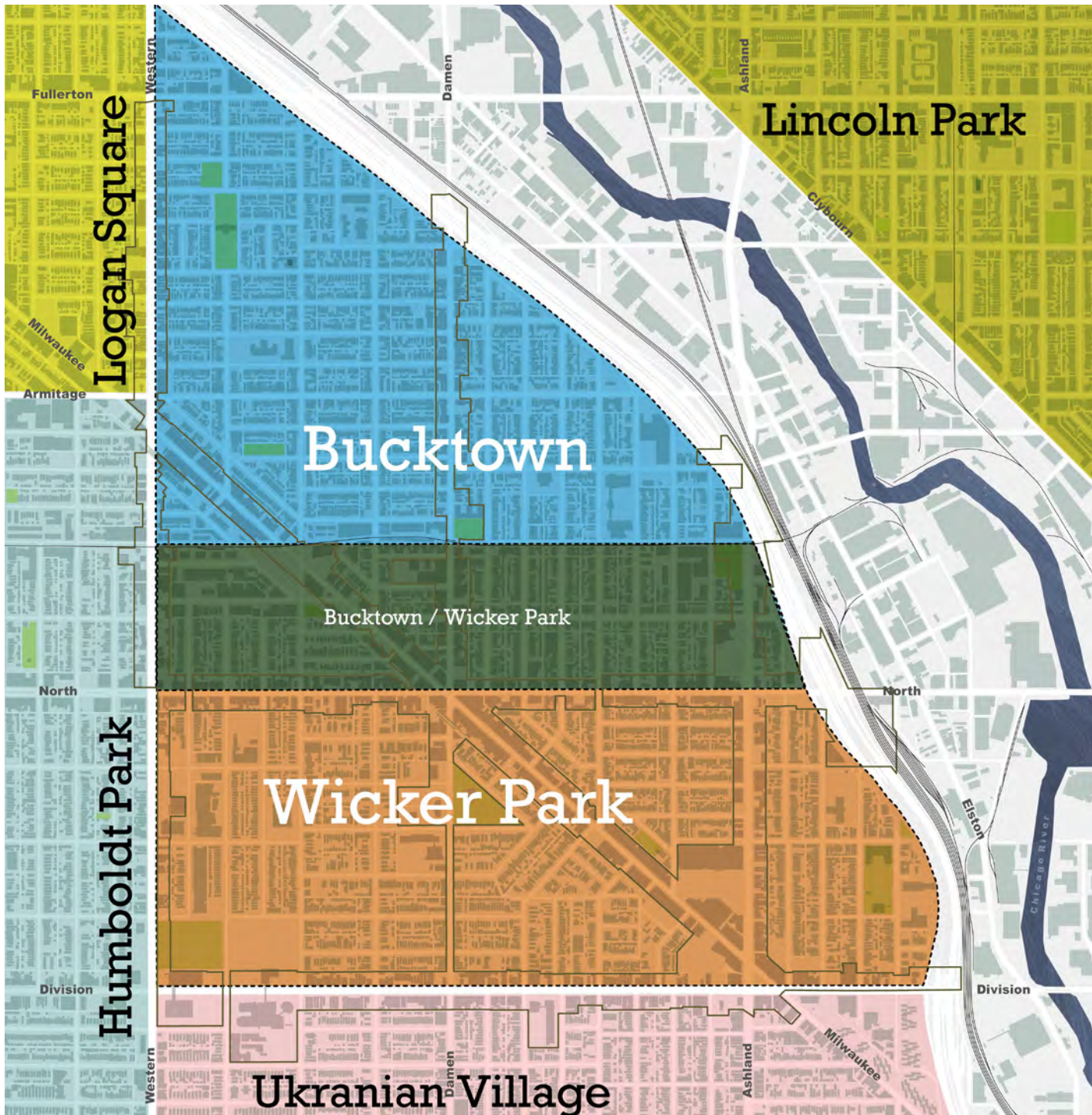
Surrounding Wicker Park and Bucktown is a diverse array of neighborhoods each of which are changing in their own right and informing the experience of what it is like to live, work and play in WPB. To the south of Wicker Park are Ukrainian Village and East Village, both diverse and largely working class neighborhoods that rely heavily upon the commercial services in WPB while also heralding Chicago Avenue as a once booming retail corridor and opportunity for future redevelopment. Across Western Avenue is the Humboldt Park neighborhood, a stable community home to a large portion of Chicago’s Puerto Rican population and a continually growing number of other middle-class Latino families. Unfortunately, some residents unfairly perceive Humboldt Park as unsafe. Western Avenue, a clear dividing line between Humboldt Park and WPB, suffers from this perception, with a higher vacancy rate and fewer retail options compared to WPB’s other commercial corridors.

North of Humboldt Park, above Armitage, is the Logan Square neighborhood which is centered at the Logan Square “L” stop, reachable further north along Milwaukee Avenue. Logan Square consists mostly of residential uses, sporadically blooming with a small shop, restaurant, or auto oriented use. Intersecting with Chicago’s pearl necklace, Logan Square contains expansive boulevards connecting it to the network of linear parks surrounding the entire City. Many young people who choose to veer away from the limelight and expense of WPB view Logan Square as the next spot to drop their bags, a destination still perceived as gritty and more affordable.



To travel northeast of Wicker Park and Bucktown is more challenging than in any other direction. The Kennedy Expressway and the Chicago River are major boundaries, dividing Wicker Park and Bucktown from an area that once served as one of Chicago’s major industrial districts. Today, the Expressway and River frame a mixture of some remaining industry, vacant buildings and an expansive collection of national chain, big-box oriented retail along Clybourn and Elston Avenues. These chains have brought a significant number of new shopping opportunities to the doorstep of WPB but also represent challenges in terms of traffic and retail competition.

Past Clybourn Avenue is Lincoln Park defined by high-end retail shops and bars, a mass of De Paul students, and young families. To many WPB residents, Lincoln Park offers a completely different scene which is more homogenous in population, less unique in commercial environment, and a reminder of what WPB should avoid.



**WHOLE
FOODS
MARKET**

GVS/pharmacy
DRUG STORE PHARMACY FOODMARKET

**TRADER
JOE'S**

**GAP
KIDS**

OLD NAVY

**BEST
BUY**

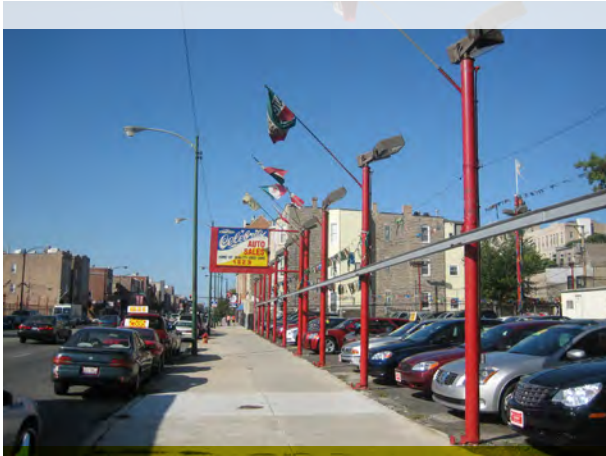
**BEDBATH &
BEYOND**

**Crate&Barrel
OUTLET STORE**

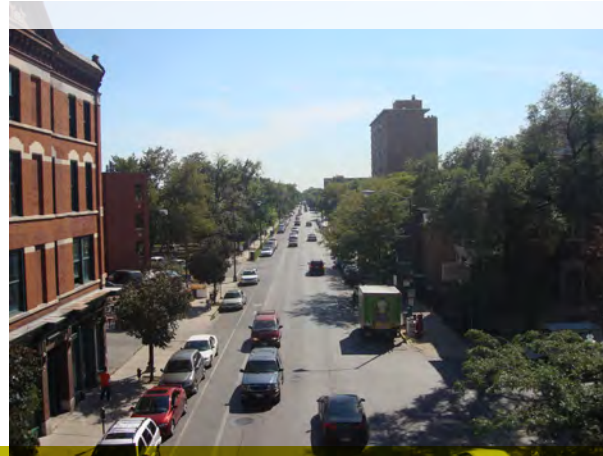
etc.

Figure 12: Neighborhood Context





Western Avenue



Damen Avenue



Ashland Avenue

Study Area

While inclusive of the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods and neighborhoods that abut them, this study focuses on the commercial corridors that comprise SSA #33 – Western, Damen, Ashland, North, Division, and Milwaukee. These corridors – their diversity and character, off-beat charm, and remaining grit – unite Wicker Park and Bucktown as neighborhoods and are the driving force behind WPB’s success as a cultural icon, but also represent some of the most serious challenges that the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods face.

Western Avenue

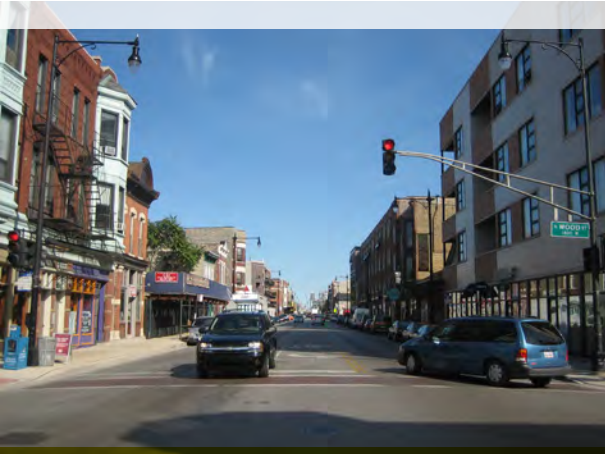
This auto-centric corridor, one of the main north-south arteries in the City of Chicago, forms WPB’s western edge. Lined with businesses and homes, traversed by speeding cars, and marking a socio-economic divide between neighborhoods, Western Avenue is poorly defined. It is primarily a backdoor to multiple neighborhoods, a highway and service corridor for the City’s traffic.

Damen Avenue

Damen Avenue bisects the study area, running north to south and contains a mixture of housing, boutiques, restaurants and institutions. South of Wicker Park (the park), this relatively narrow corridor hosts a school and housing stretching to Division Street. Near the six-point intersection, Damen Avenue is a lively and vigorous commercial core for both shopping and entertainment. The intimate street width and mix of stores gives Damen Avenue a quieter tone and slower pace than other local commercial corridors.

Ashland Avenue

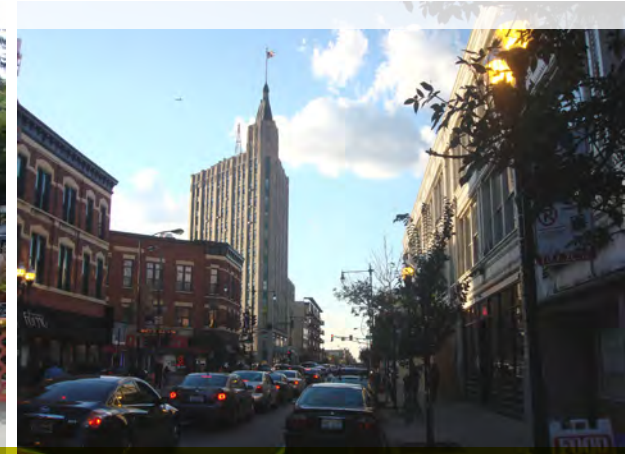
Congestion and high speed auto traffic define the “character” of the thoroughfare. Its intersection with Milwaukee and Division at the Polish Triangle is chaotic with buses, trains, cars, and pedestrians coursing through the intersection in all directions. While Ashland Avenue maintains a commercial presence, the marketplace caters to its proximity to the Kennedy Expressway and the automobile. These factors make bicycling along the corridor a significant and dangerous challenge.



North Avenue



Division Street



Milwaukee Avenue

North Avenue

North Avenue bisects the study area from east to west acting as a funnel for cars seeking access to the Kennedy Expressway. North Avenue has two very different identities which change at the six point intersection. East of Damen, North Avenue is full of night life and businesses including many fashion boutiques. The interest in this stretch of North Avenue can be readily gleaned from the corridor's evolving physical form as new development projects have brought a greater density of housing and commercial space to the street life. West of Damen Avenue, commercial uses are far less frequent and the number of vacant buildings and storefronts are a jarring site for a community so recognized as a retail destination. Despite the comfortable pedestrian scale and recent streetscape improvements, the high volume of traffic makes North Avenue remarkably difficult to cross.

Division Street

Division Street has a unique personality and physical character characterized by its extremely wide sidewalks. The discovery of these sidewalks as outdoor seating options for restaurants has helped spur the spread of businesses which currently extends from Ashland Avenue to Leavitt Street. The combination of outdoor seating and small boutique stores give portions of Division Street a relaxed and "European" persona. In contrast, other portions of Division Street are defined more strongly by the large and adjacent institutional uses and gaps in the retail fabric.

Milwaukee Avenue

Milwaukee Avenue, sometimes referred to as the "hipster highway", cuts through WPB diagonally, from the northwest to southeast. Milwaukee supports a mix of national retailers and local businesses, everything from clothes to records, books, art galleries and studios, forming a street that bustles year-round. One lane of travel in each direction, narrower sidewalks, and a signage and building frontage unsurpassed in diversity form a pedestrian experience incapable of boring the frequent foot soldier. Beyond its clubs, bars, and restaurants, the second, third and fourth floor uses remain a mixture of apartments and office uses.

the W I D E :

Figure 13:
Western Avenue

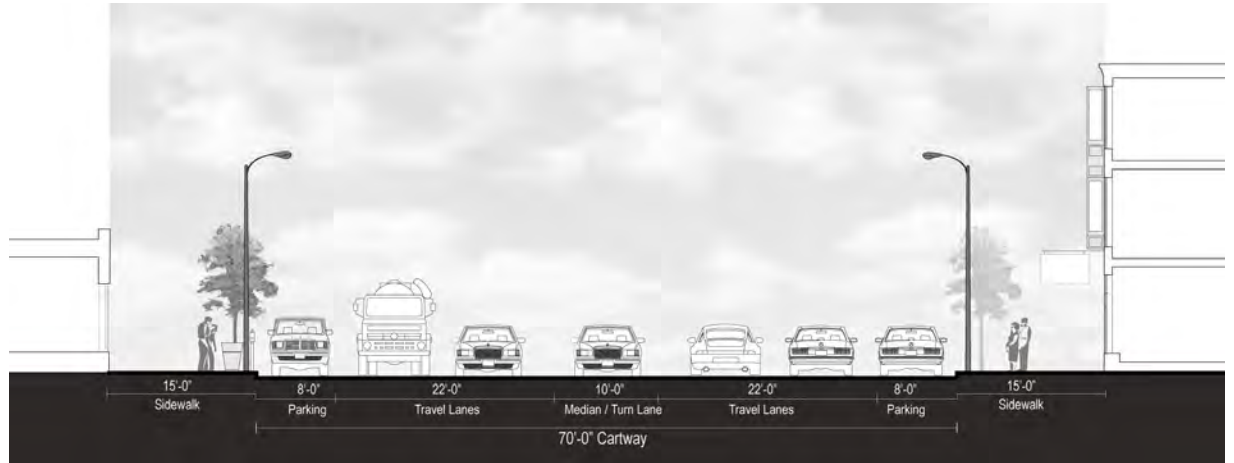


Figure 14:
Ashland Avenue

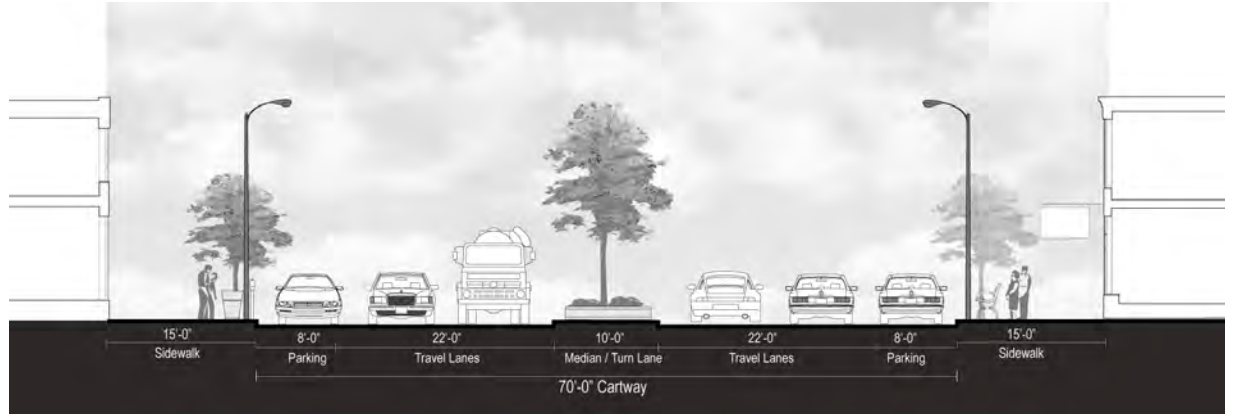
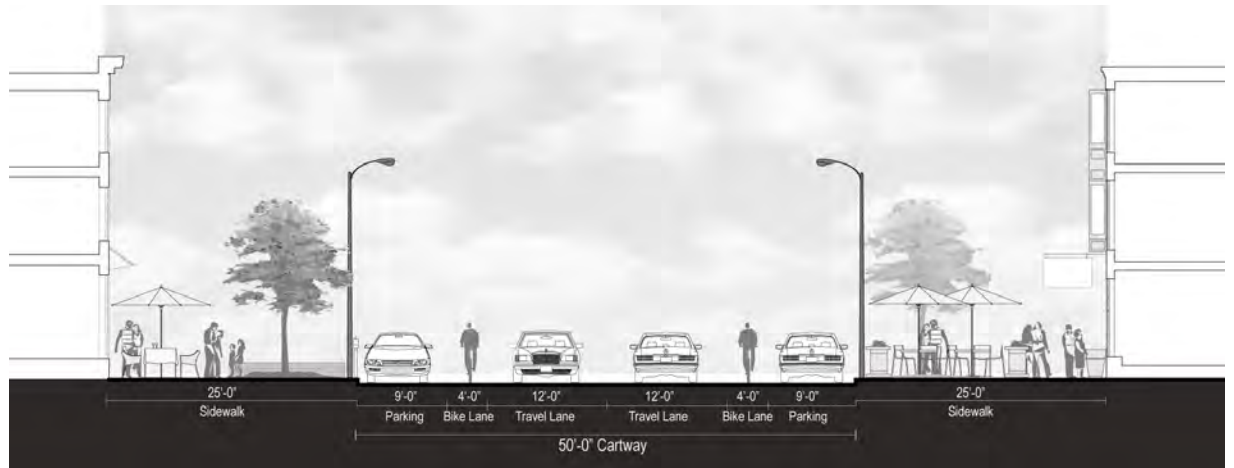


Figure 15:
Division Street



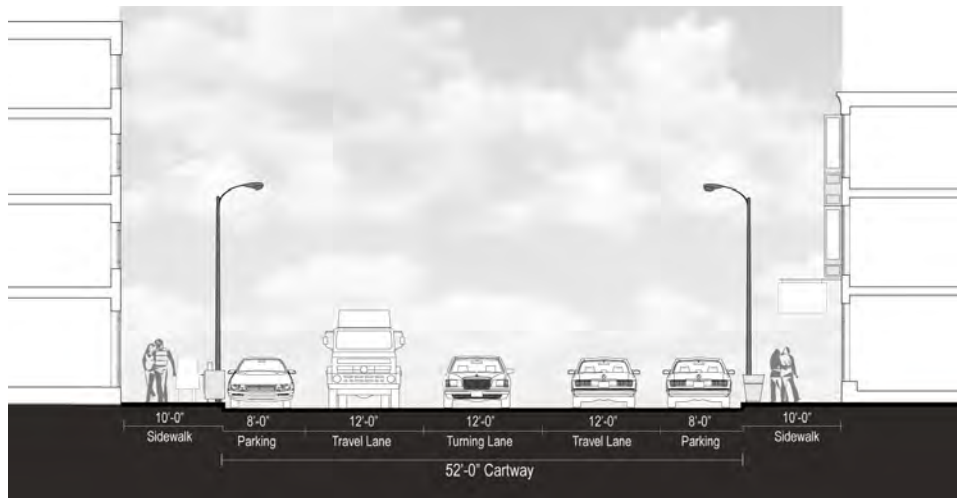


Figure 16:
North Avenue

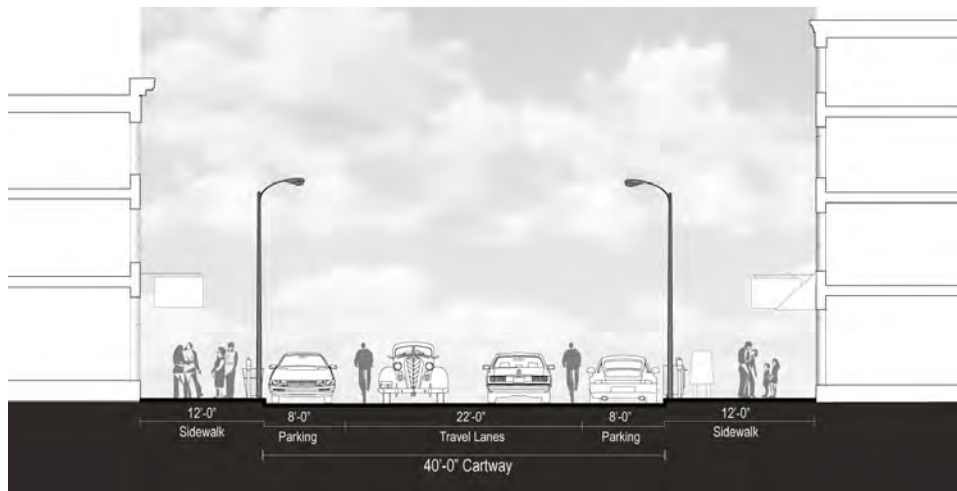


Figure 17:
Milwaukee Avenue

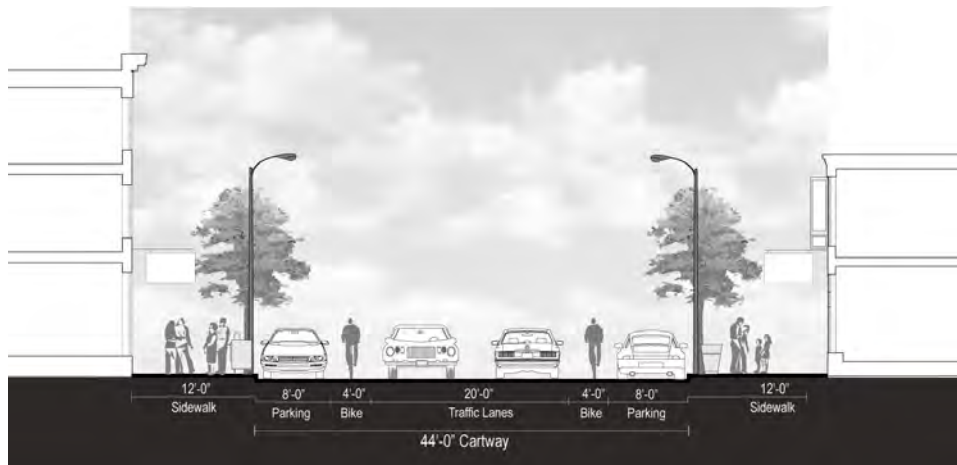


Figure 18:
Damen Avenue



WPB Vibe

The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods were traditionally a haven of low rents, underground music venues, edgy cultural statements, a local network of artists, and a permanent population of homeless. The past five years have, to a degree, eroded this beloved identity and self-perception clung to by

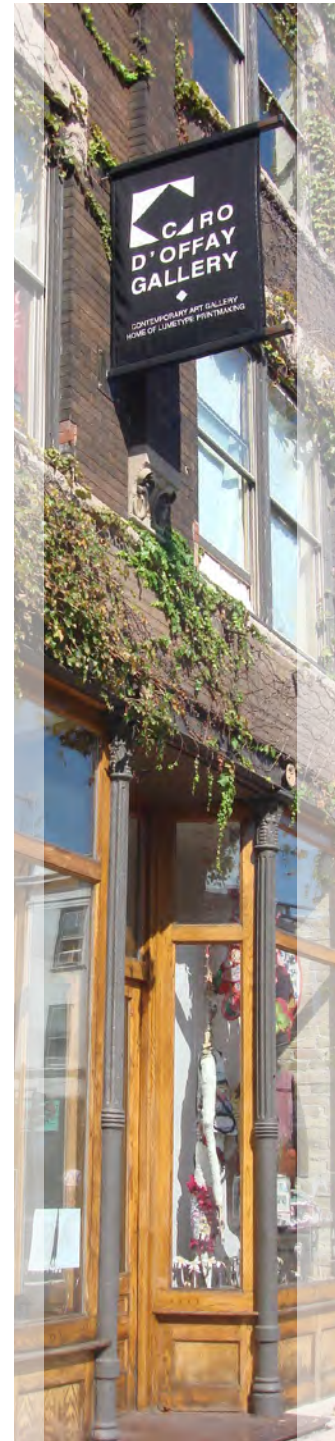
["neighborhood loyalists"]

and the area in general. WPB is becoming more of a hodgepodge of artsy, hipster, professional, straight arrow types beaming down the Damen Stop "L" platform looking for a social event. Ten years ago the scene would have been noticeably different, with more homeless occupying the benches in Wicker Park, punk music venues directing the rhythm of the streets, and an enclave of artists and eccentrics prepared to become activists to fight for something they believe in.

Today, shops and clubs are filled with a wide range of people that now see the community as a destination. With an expectation for urban grit and a unique experience, people from all over come to the area to dance, drink, find an original outfit, or take in a show. The significant interest in WPB can be seen physically along the streets during the weekends as well as in the media, with Wicker Park recently making Forbes' list of the nation's "Most Lucrative Neighborhoods." The reactions to these visible trends vary. Many long-time residents see change as an erosion of values, of community, and of spirit. Other residents who have lived in WPB for a long time or recently moved because of its unique personality are noticeably conflicted. On the one hand these residents recognize that services are more available and more convenient. On the other hand, residents are concerned that if the current trends continue, all the stores and uses that make WPB special will be lost.

The loss of Filter, the coffee house and "soul" of the community previously located at the intersection of Milwaukee, Damen, and North, this past year was a major blow to the local long-timers. Although Filter was only four or five years old, its closing was the latest in a series of lost WPB coffee houses where anyone could go to hang out on a couch without ever purchasing a coffee, to enjoy the mix of people knitting scarves or cuddling in the corner of a torn and battered sofa, or to digest the new wave of displayed art work hung on the walls. Filter was a standing definition for what WPB is, and though the area is evolving, the need for a "Filter" persists as the scene that Filter supported is still active and thriving in WPB.

Older stock meets new construction.





The Flat Iron Arts Building with Chicago's skyline.

SSA Demographic Profile

The following data was compiled using the United States Census for 1990 and 2000 and Claritas estimates and forecasts for 2007 and 2012. It is not possible to get Census data for a geography matching the boundaries of the SSA. Therefore, the data was gathered for all census tracts that touch the SSA's boundaries. A full listing of included Census Tracts is included in the Appendix.

Population and Population Change

The total population of the census tracts encompassing the SSA has not changed dramatically since 1990. The population has risen by 2.5%, from 72,116 in 1990 to an estimated 73,914 in 2007. With a population of 70,856 people in 2000, Claritas estimates confirm that the amount of building, development, and buzz surrounding WPB has, in fact, resulted in a neighborhood rebound; 2000 marks a turning point in the area's history.

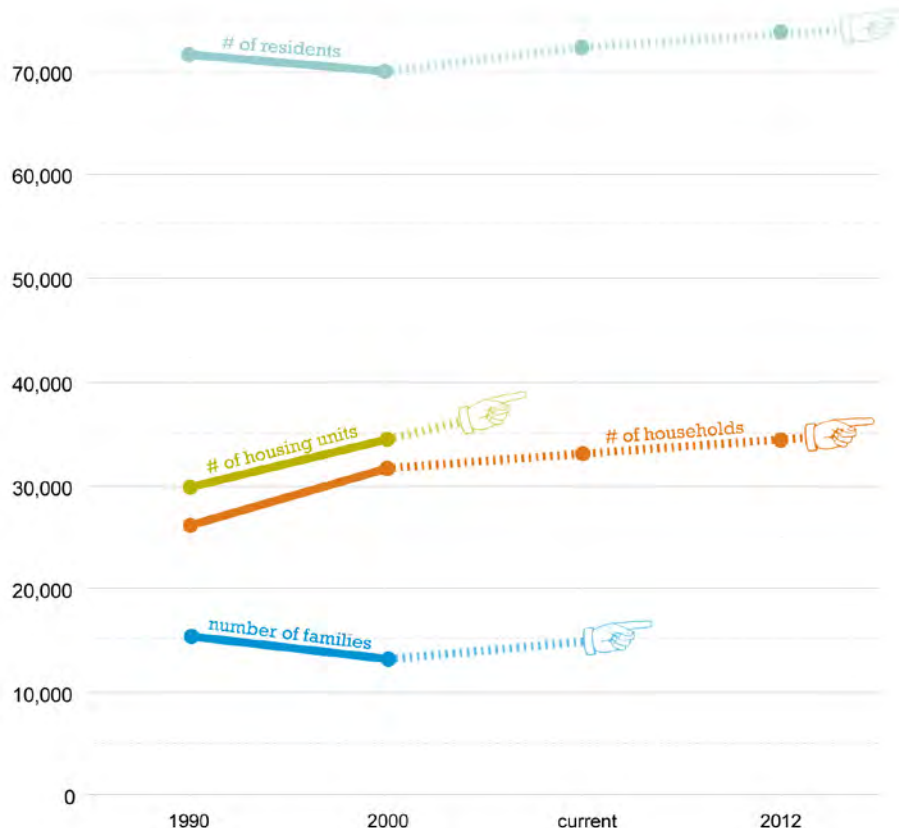


Figure 19. Population Trends
Sources: U.S. Census and Claritas

Despite the slight population loss in WPB between 1990 and 2000, WPB experienced dramatic increases in the number of households (20%) and housing units (13%). This trend is explained by the shrinking size of local households, as families have been leaving the area, replaced primarily by many singles or younger couples. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of families in the area fell by 15%, resulting in overall population loss for the decade.

Claritas estimates that the number of households in WPB has continued to climb since the 2000 census, by roughly 5% from 31,463 in 2000 to 33,191 in 2007. Projections suggest that the number of local households will increase by an additional 3% between 2007 and 2012 to 34,178.

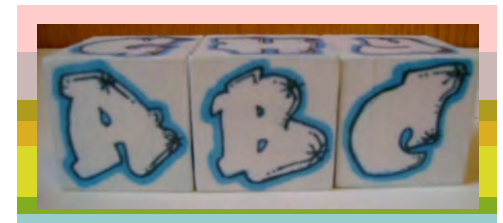
Age Structure

The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods have become substantially younger than Chicago as a whole. In 2000, the neighborhood consisted of a large population in the 18-35 year old age range which is 45% of the total population. Over 50% are between the ages of 20 and 39 compared to 29% nationally. Nearly one in ten males are between the age of 25 and 29. While over represented by young adults, the percentage of youth and seniors were underrepresented relative to the City of Chicago and national trends.

According to Claritas in 2007, Wicker Park and Bucktown appear to have lost residents between the ages of 18 and 35 which now stand at 34% of the total population. There is still, however, an immense number of young residents with 44% of the population between 21 and 44 years old. Estimates also suggest that the young couples and singles of 2007 have produced a localized baby boom. The area is now 8.9% infants and toddlers compared to the citywide share of 7.8%.

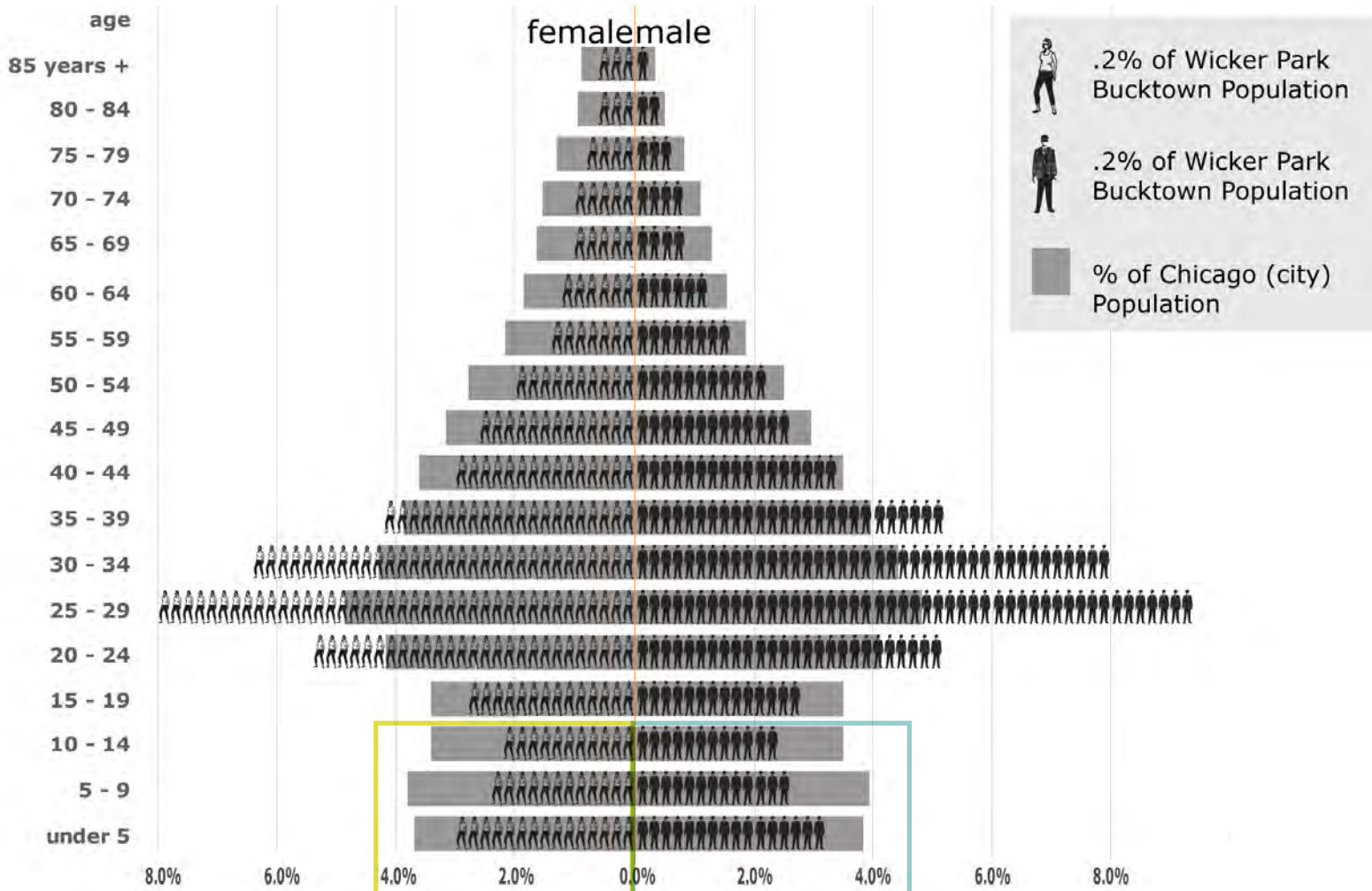
[“There are a lot of new moms – more than ever.”] [“We are becoming a neighborhood of tattooed mothers.”]

The challenge in Wicker Park Bucktown will be to retain these new families as children approach school age. The share of residents over the age of 45 is 29.3% within the City of Chicago but only 23.6% within Wicker Park and Bucktown.



Graffiti baby blocks for hipster babies.

2000 Age Pyramid



2007 Age Pyramid Estimates documenting WPB Baby Boom

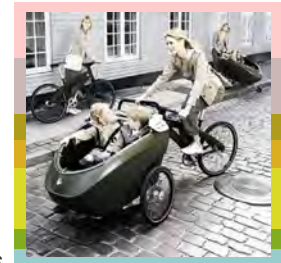
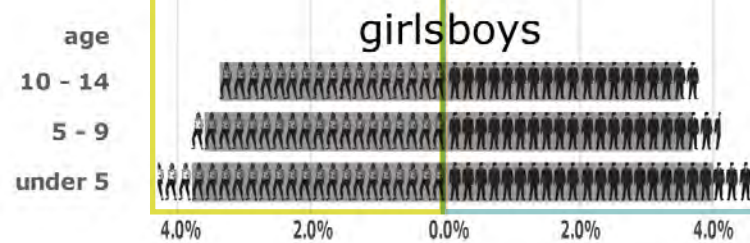


Figure 20. Age Pyramid, 2000 and Baby Boom Estimates, 2007
Sources: U.S. Census and Claritas

Convertible bicycle-strollers.

Homeownership

Wicker Park and Bucktown tend to have a more transient composition than Chicago as a whole. According to Claritas, 32% of neighborhood housing units are owner-occupied, compared with 44% city-wide in 2007. These proportions have remained relatively static since 2000, as the Census for that year lists owner occupied units as 33% of housing units with 59% renter occupied and 8% classified as other. The perception of an unusually large renter population came up anecdotally through focus groups and interviews, and the data supports the perception. The high percentage of rental units usually suggests that residents are less invested in the area and less willing to engage in civic involvement in a meaningful way. However, interviews completed for this project indicated that many long-term residents and activists are, in fact, renters moving from one apartment to another all within the community. It must be recognized that affordability remains a barrier to homeownership for many in the community. The challenge, therefore, is twofold: 1) To remove some of the barriers toward homeownership in the community and; 2) To instill the same sense of ownership and pride in the community for new renters.

Race and Ethnicity

Although the overall population has risen by 2.5% between 1990 and 2007, this is not the case for all races and ethnicities in the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods. While the population of non-Hispanic whites has risen steadily over the past seventeen years, from 35% of the population in 1990 to an estimated 58% of the population in 2007, the Hispanic population has experienced an equal decline of 23%, from 55% in 1990 to 32% in 2007. Many Hispanic families had to move as renting in the area became unaffordable while some others choose to leave, “cashing in on a great real estate investment.” Despite the decline in Hispanic families, focus group participants explained that others “have stayed and are staying because the area is home. It’s convenient, it’s close to so much, and it has personal and emotional value in addition to monetary value.”

[“People have roots in the neighborhood.”]

The African American population has remained relatively constant, declining from 9% in 1990 to 8% in 2007. Meanwhile, the local Asian population has enjoyed small growth, from 1% in 1990 to 4% of the overall population in 2007.

Educational Attainment

The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods enjoy a higher degree of educational attainment than the City as a whole. The area exceeds citywide averages for high school diplomas (75% in the neighborhood compared to 72% citywide), bachelor’s degrees (44% to 26%), and master’s degrees (16% to 10%). Along with the outsized share of residents in their early working careers, these figures speak to the long-term strength of the workforce in Wicker Park and Bucktown.

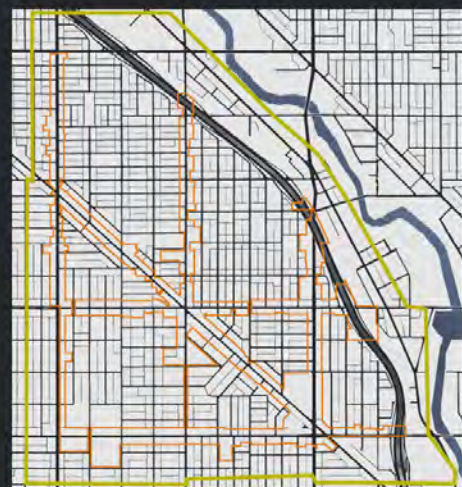
Income and Poverty

While the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods are becoming more affluent overall, the area is still home to pockets of lower-income households, resulting in a quickly widening gap in household incomes and growing concerns about the neighborhoods’ long-term affordability and diversity. In 1989, the median household incomes by census tract ranged from \$11,250 to \$65,104. Ten years later, in 1999, median household incomes by census tract ranged from \$13,889 to \$127,031, marking an increase 95% at the upper end of the spectrum. Correspondingly, the poverty rate for the area fell by 9% between 1989 and 1999, from 26 to 17%. For comparison purposes, the median income for the City of Chicago in 1999 was \$38,625 with 19.6% of residents living below the poverty level. Nationally, the median income and poverty rate is \$44,339 and 12.7% respectively.

Claritas suggests that household incomes have continued to rise in the area. The estimated 2007 median household incomes by census tract range from \$14,705 to \$139,453; projections for 2012 range from \$17,142 to \$149,152. However, Claritas data also confirms concerns about continued neighborhood affordability, reporting falling household effective buying incomes due to tax increases.²

Resident comments reinforce the need to retain local diversity by preserving housing options in Wicker Park and Bucktown that are affordable to people of a range of incomes, calling for a reasonable balance with regard to new housing development such that both affordable and market-rate demands are met. Institutional partners and concerned residents also note the need for more social and financial services in the existing community to enable residents of all incomes to benefit from WPB’s economic and social progression.

² Household effective buying incomes adjust total earned household income by removing the tax burdens from the total figure, to reflect how much actual money households have to spend.



white

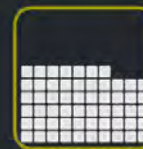
1990



2000



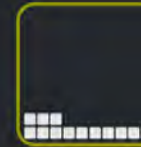
Estimated 2007



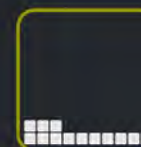
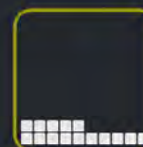
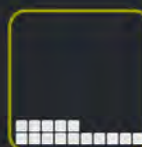
Projected 2012



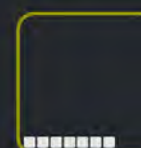
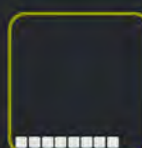
hispanic non-white



hispanic white



black



asian



other



total pop

72,116

70,856

73,914

75,533

Figure 21. Population by Race and Ethnicity Over Time, 1990-2012
 Sources: U.S. Census and Claritas