



## Parking

### **["Sorry I'm late. I couldn't find a parking spot."]**

If you have been in a coffee house, restaurant, or bar in the Wicker Park/Bucktown neighborhood, you have probably overheard that phrase more than once. On-street parking is important to the success of the SSA's businesses, but it can be very difficult to locate an open parking space on these roadways during many hours of the day.

The lack of available on-street parking affects everyone in the area, not just those drivers looking for parking spots. The act of searching for an available on-street space, which is referred to as "cruising," has many negative effects on the neighborhood, including increased traffic congestion in the area.

There are many different reasons for the difficulty of finding on-street parking, but the primary causes are the lack of supply and the lack of turnover. To assess the existing parking conditions in the area, a survey was conducted of the existing supply, demand, and turnover rate in the SSA.

#### **Existing Parking Supply**

The existing parking supply on the roadways in the SSA consists of on-street metered parking spaces, on-street un-metered parking spaces, loading zones, and off-street parking lots.

#### **On-Street Metered Parking Spots**

The SSA's commercial corridors contain a total of 429 on-street metered parking spaces. All of the on-street metered parking spots are classified by the City of Chicago as Zone 6, which means that they cost \$0.25 per hour with a two hour time limit, and they are enforced on Monday through Saturday from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM. There are no restrictions on these parking spaces on Sundays. Table 8 in the Appendix displays the number of parking meters, based on field counts and data provided by the City of Chicago's Department of Revenue, located in the SSA district.

#### **On-Street Un-metered Parking Spots**

The remaining on-street parking spaces in the SSA do not have parking meters and are free for anyone to use and for however long they desire.

### **[People park and walk to the "L." They stay parked for days, weeks, longer in the summer.]**

The lack of any time restrictions on these parking spaces significantly reduces the amount of turnover that these parking spaces experience. Un-metered parking does allow for more cars to be parked in an area than an area with parking meters.

### Loading

Land Strategies counted 138 loading zones in the SSA's district, which will be described in more detail below. Each of these loading zones occupy space that could otherwise be utilized as on-street parking.



Figure 67. Parking Restrictions including Loading Zones  
Source: Field Survey

## Off-Street Parking Lots

There are numerous off-street parking lots in the Wicker Park/Bucktown neighborhood, typically serving private businesses. Table 9 in the Appendix displays a list of the off-street parking lots, their size, and the land uses that they serve. In total, 52 at-grade parking lots were counted, which amount to roughly 14 acres of paved parking lot in the SSA. Some of the lots are quite large, specifically those serving the St. Mary's and St. Elizabeth's Hospitals, the commercial development that includes the Jewel and K-Mart, and the Holy Trinity Mission. Though surveys were not completed for all of the off-street parking lots, vacant spaces were observed numerous times throughout these parking lots. Given these observations and the mix of local uses, there may be opportunities to 'share' parking within some of these parking lots.



*Underutilized parking lot.*

## Parking Demand

In order to evaluate the existing demand for on-street, metered parking spaces in the SSA, parking counts were conducted on four separate occasions. The parking survey included the number of available metered parking spaces, the number of violations that were not ticketed, and the number of meters that were out of order. The results

of the parking demand study are shown in Table 10 in the Appendix. The existing demand for on-street parking in the surveyed areas is very high on Saturdays and in the evening peak hour. It is very difficult to find a metered parking space during these times, and because of this, cruising increases.

Cruising for parking has many negative impacts. For the driver looking for parking, cruising wastes time and gas, both of which have a monetary value. For the other vehicles in the area, the more cars that are looking for parking add to the traffic congestion in the area. This increases the amount of time it takes people to get through the neighborhoods. And all of this added congestion not only increases vehicle emissions but also makes it more difficult for pedestrians and bicyclists to navigate the corridors, having a negative impact on the local environment. The actual cost of cruising for parking is very high and affects everyone in Wicker Park and Bucktown.

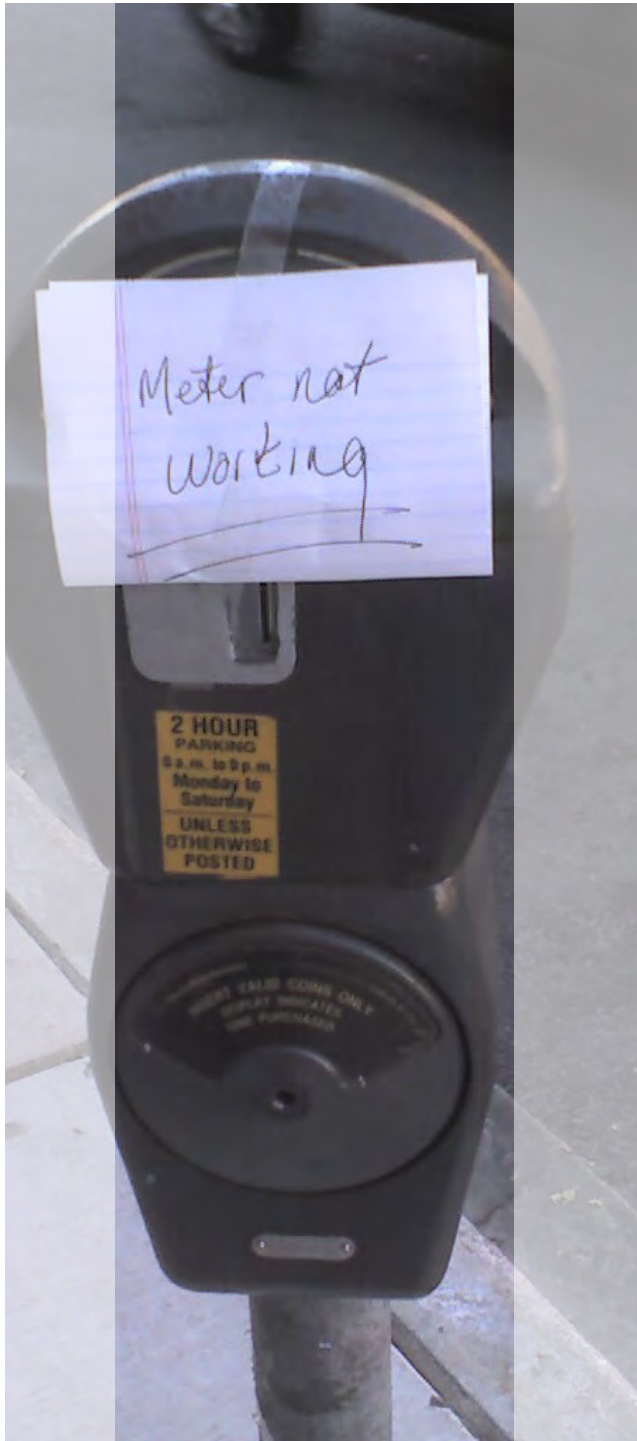
## Parking Turnover

### ["Chicago is a car city."]

Although WPB's commercial corridors draw customers because they are walkable and full of sensory information, many visitors and employees travel to the district via car. One of the key elements to making parking available for those that patronize the retail users in the area is the turnover of the on-street parking spaces. The most convenient on-street parking spaces should be available for patrons and experience frequent turnover.

At the metered parking spaces in the WPB, the parking demand far exceeds the on-street supply during the peak times. Because parking on-street is convenient and inexpensive (\$0.25 per hour), it encourages employees of the retail to park and feed the meters. This reduces the amount of parking that is available to patrons of the retail land uses.

Land Strategies conducted parking turnover counts of some of the metered parking spaces on Milwaukee Avenue, Damen Avenue and Division Street on a weekday and Saturday. The methodology of the study was quite simple; the license plate of a car was recorded at a location and the space was surveyed again three to four hours later to see if it was still there. The time restrictions on all of the parking meters are for two hours. The observed turnover rate on metered parking should be 100%, or all cars parked during the initial survey should not be there during the following survey, three to four hours later. Land Strategies observed a turnover rate of 71.5% during the weekday evening and 76.4% during a Saturday.



It is evident from the turnover study as well as our observations that people are parking their cars at metered parking spots and either feeding the parking meter after the initial two hours or are risking getting a ticket after their time has expired. This behavior reduces the turnover of the metered parking spaces, which makes it more difficult for patrons to find parking. The patrons then have to continue to drive around cruising for parking. There is a need to improve this situation so that the most convenient parking is available to the patrons willing to pay for it and to help minimize the cruising that people do looking for parking.

There is even less turnover of the metered on-street parking spaces on Sundays and of the un-metered on-street parking spaces because there are no time restrictions on these spaces. This allows people to park their car in these areas for as long as they desire.

The ideal parking occupancy ratio of on-street parking is 85%, which maintains a high demand for on-street parking but also allows for patrons to easily find a parking space in the other 15%. This only occurs when the demand for on-street parking is slightly less than or equal to the supply. There are two ways to accomplish this, either increase the supply or reduce the demand. Increasing the supply is typically done by installing more parking meters in an area. In order to reduce the demand of parking, the price of the parking must be increased. Obviously, there are fewer people that are willing to pay \$5.00 per hour for parking in the area than would pay \$0.25 per hour. The price for on-street parking in the Wicker Park Bucktown area is currently under priced, which leads to a demand for parking that far exceeds the available supply. The key is determining what price for parking will generate the desired parking demand.

#### Enforcement and Maintenance

One of the most difficult issues the City of Chicago faces with regard to most ordinances is enforcement. They are simply unable to be everywhere at all times for enforcement. This is definitely the case with on-street metered parking. The Department of Revenue enforces parking meters by having their employees walk around an area and check the meters. There are over 36,000 parking meters in Chicago, and it would be impossible for the Department of Revenue to constantly monitor all of those meters manually. Maintenance poses similar issues. In order for the Department of Revenue to fix a broken meter, they first have to be alerted that a meter is broken, and then they have to send a crew out to fix it. It would be inefficient if Revenue sent crews all over the City to fix one meter here and one meter there, so they most likely try to send their crews to a group of parking meters that need to be fixed that are close together.

Based on the existing parking counts by Land Strategies, there are obvious issues with the enforcement and maintenance of parking meters in the SSA. Vehicles that are parking in spaces where meters are expired or inoperable cost the City revenue that they should be accruing. But they also reduce the amount of on-street parking supply and the turnover rate, and this increases the amount of cruising that people must do to find an available parking space. The enforcement and maintenance of the parking meters contributes to the parking problem in the SSA district.

*Out-of-order parking meter.*

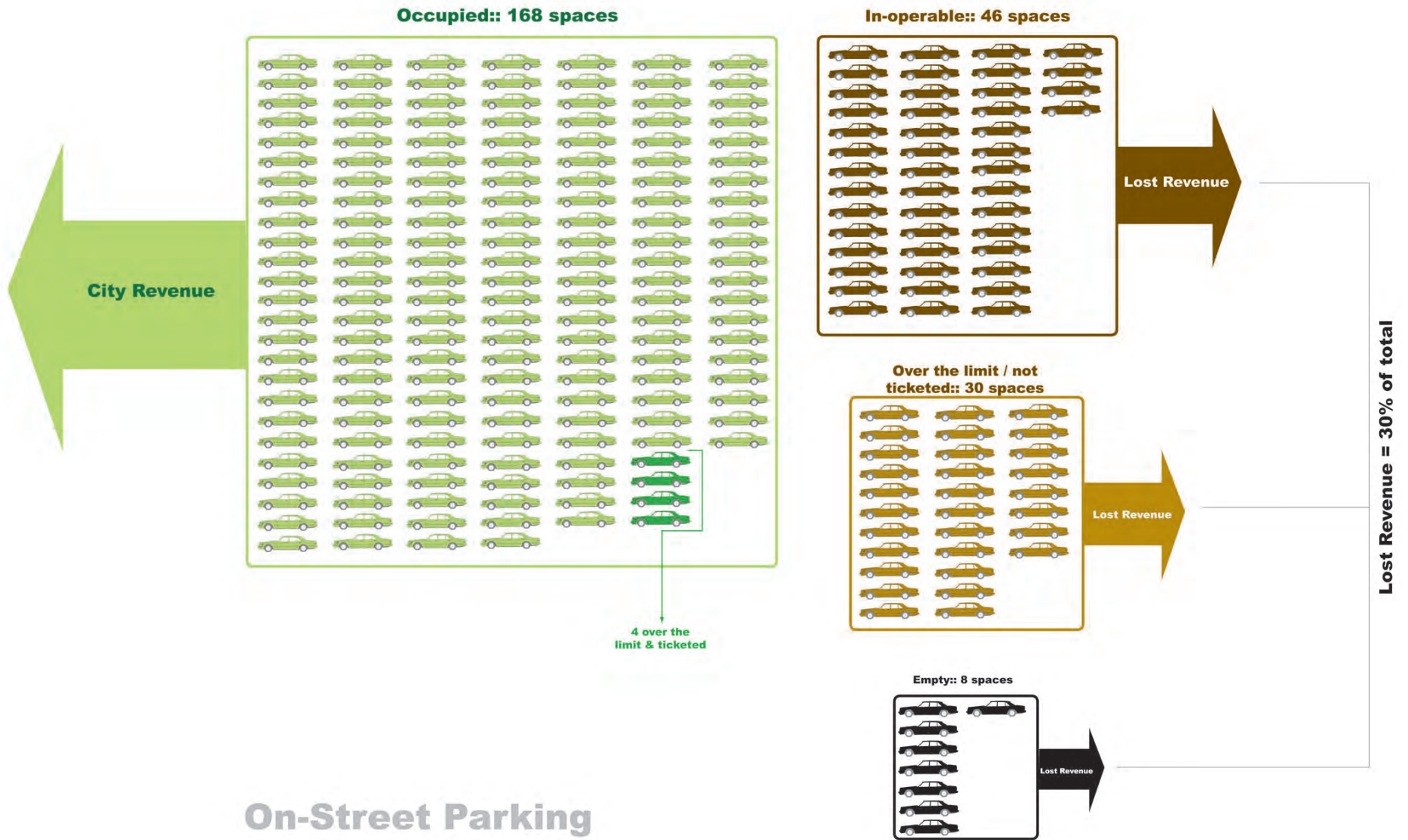


Figure 68. Parking Meter Maintenance and Enforcement  
Source: Field Survey

## Residential Parking Permits



Residential Permit sign.

There are many streets in the City of Chicago that are zoned for residential permit parking. In these areas, parking is restricted for a certain time period to only vehicles with a residential permit parking sticker for that specific zone. The purpose of these residential permits is to prevent non-residents from parking. This may be done to prevent employees and patrons of businesses from parking in a residential area during the evening or to prevent people from driving in from other areas, parking close to the transit station, and taking the train into the City. Some residential permits prohibit non-residents from parking in an area overnight, and some permits are for 24 hours.

Though none of the SSA streets have residential parking restrictions, many of the side streets in the neighborhood do. The residential parking permits that directly affect the SSA are those that prohibit parking during all hours of the day. During the typical weekday work hours (9:00 AM to 6:00 PM), there is a large amount of available parking on the residential streets. This parking could be utilized by employees, freeing up the on-street metered parking for patrons.

### Loading Zones

Loading zones are designated on-street parking spaces used exclusively by businesses on the commercial corridors of the study area. When properly used, they provide locations for deliveries, valet and other occurrences that require immediate and relatively quick on-street parking in close proximity to the business. When improperly used however, owners and employees park for extended periods and valet services use them for longer term staging. The result of this misuse is oftentimes congestion and even unsafe situations when the real need for loading then occurs as double-parking on the commercial corridor.

There are three types of loading zones in the City of Chicago. They are: General Loading, Standing and Valet.

**General Loading Zones** are for deliveries, typically the loading and unloading of food/beverage and mail/courier deliveries. Drivers are not required to be in their vehicles, and there is no specific time restriction. The maximum size of a General Loading Zone is 25 feet, and they are intended to be used by commercial vehicles, although permits are available for passenger vehicles through the Department of Revenue.

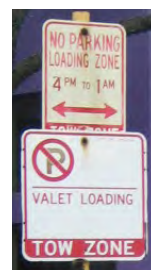
The cost of installing a General Loading Zone is \$110, which includes sign installation and one year of maintenance. There is also an annual charge of \$50 maintenance and an annual surcharge of \$14.00 per lineal foot of curb space, if the loading zone exceeds the 25-foot maximum. CDOT can remove a general loading zone “whenever public convenience or necessity warrants” (City of Chicago Municipal Ordinance, Section 9-68-030, Paragraph d).



General Loading Zone sign.



Standing Zone sign.



Valet Zone sign.

**Standing Zones** are for short-term (un)loading, whether it be for deliveries or passenger drop-off/pick-up. Unlike general loading zones, standing zones allow for passenger vehicles, although the driver must be in the vehicle or in the immediate vicinity in case the vehicle must be moved. All standing zones in Wicker Park and Bucktown are for either 15 or 30 minutes.

**Valet Zones** are loading zones used by restaurants to receive deliveries during off hours and for patron pick-up and drop-off when the restaurant is open.

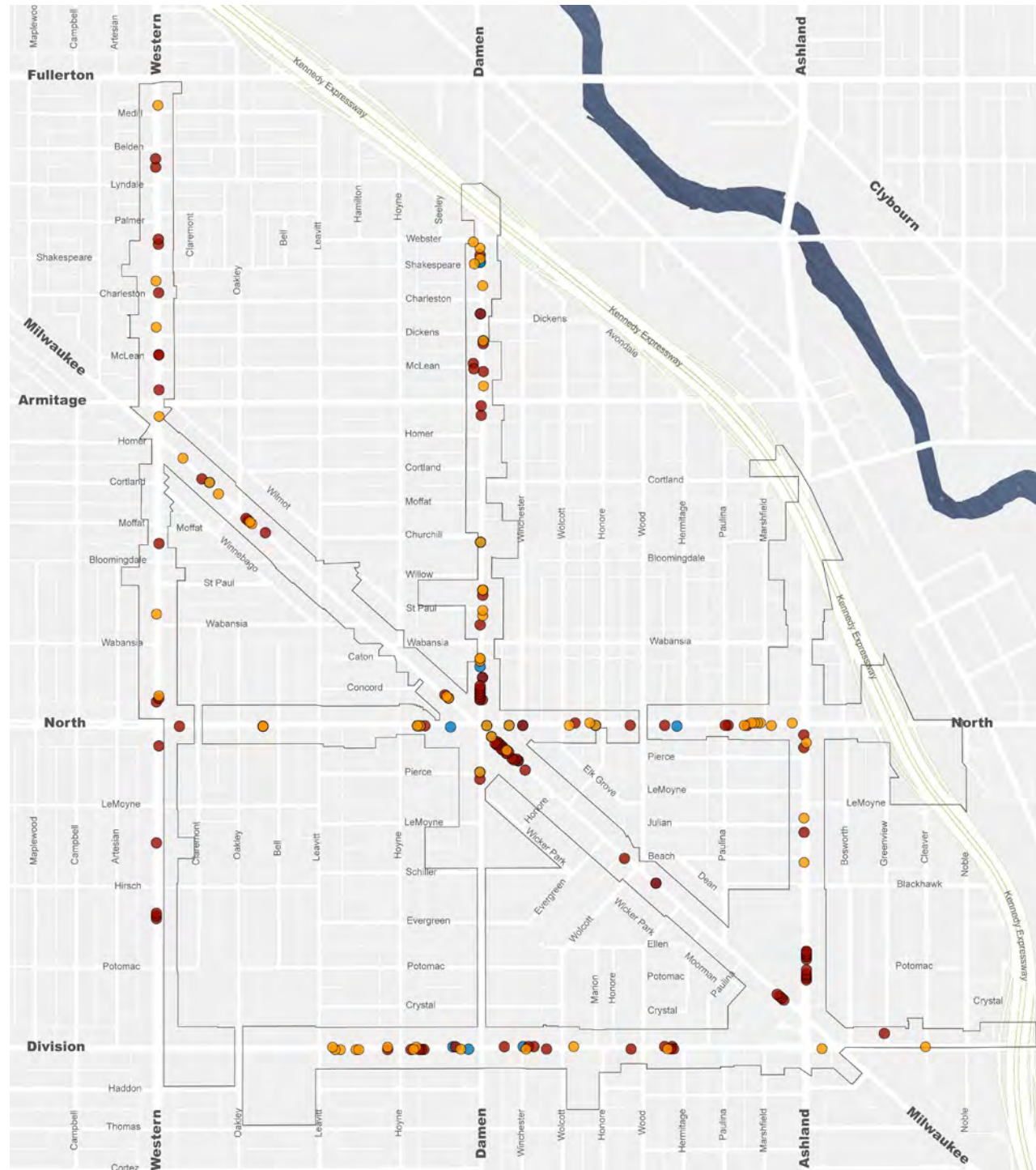
In order to obtain a loading zone, a business must make the request to their Alderman. If the Alderman approves the request, they introduce an ordinance to the City Council to approve the loading zone. If City Council approves the Ordinance, the Chicago Department of Transportation installs the proper signs identifying the type of loading zone and the location.

A field survey was conducted of all loading zones in the SSA. Table 11 displays the data, and as can be seen there are a significant number of the three types of zones along the corridors of Wicker Park and Bucktown. The most heavily used areas with three or more loading zones are:

- Milwaukee Avenue, between Honore Street and North Avenue
- North Ave, between Ashland Avenue and Paulina Street
- South side of Division Street, between Damen Avenue and Leavitt Street
- West side of Damen Avenue, between North Avenue and Wabansia Avenue
- East side of Damen Avenue, between Wabansia Avenue and Bloomingdale Avenue
- West side of Damen Avenue, between Armitage Avenue and Dickens Avenue
- East side of Damen Ave, between Shakespeare Avenue and Webster Avenue

Figure 69. Loading Zones by Type  
Source: Field Survey

- Loading Zone
- Valet & Loading Zone
- 15 or 30 Minute Standing Zone





Loading zone territoriality.

Loading zone contention occurs with the issue of who the specific loading zone “belongs” to arises. Although one business typically obtains and pays for the loading zone, it is still public space and can be used according to loading zone specifications by any commercial vehicle making a delivery. However, many businesses place additional signage on the loading zones in front of their property, designating ownership of the loading zone and warning that any other vehicles will be towed. This exclusivity is not the intent of loading zones and is a misuse of public space.

It is difficult for the Department of Revenue to enforce violations of loading zones because the typical restrictions are not time sensitive or the time restrictions are too broad to follow-up on. The only vehicles they can ticket easily are passenger vehicles parked in the general loading zone that do not have a permit to be in commercial loading zones. Since enforcement of loading zones is difficult, they can be abused by owners and employees who use them as personal parking spaces. When loading zones are not used properly, it has many negative consequences. As opposed to loading occurring in the proper loading zones, deliveries must take place on the streets, which, in WPB, are heavily traveled by both cars and bikes. This creates an unsafe situation for the delivery vehicle, the vehicles on the road, and bicycles.



On-street delivery.

The cost to a business for a loading zone is under priced, especially in an area with a lot of commercial development that has a high demand for loading zones, such as WPB. This low cost does not discourage any business in the area from applying for a loading zone or from keeping their loading zone on a year to year basis. If the cost for loading zones was priced at a “market rate”, it might lead to the reduction of loading zones in the area and create more parking spaces for patrons.

Input was also received from the community regarding the operations of the valet zones. **[“Valets think they own the street.”]** The two issues with valet zones are the number and density of valet zones in some areas and where the valet operators park the cars. As can be seen from the loading zone map, there are a few areas, like the west side of Damen Avenue, north of North Avenue, and the west side of Milwaukee Avenue, south of North Avenue, where valet zones take up space that could be used for four to five parking spaces. There may be opportunities to consolidate valet zones where appropriate.

There have been occasions when the valet operators have parked vehicles on-street, either on one of the roadways in the SSA or a residential street, as opposed to parking in a lot. This reduces the parking supply for patrons and residents of the area. Based on observations of the off-street parking lots, it appears that there are opportunities for partnerships between the valet operators and the off-street parking lots.

## Summary of the SSA Today

### The Wicker Park-Bucktown Community Network

Underlying the physical characteristics, retail environment, and local transportation system is a network of agencies, organizations, and individuals dedicated to improving WPB. It is the capacity and long-term commitment of these organizations that will determine the area's future.

WPB has no shortage of grass-roots activism and energy. The Bucktown Community Organization (BCO) and Wicker Park Committee (WPC) are active neighborhood associations with strong relationships with their local Aldermen. Supplementing these organizations is a number of non-profits dedicated to a wide range of specific issues such as the Bloomingdale Trail (Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail), local arts (Around the Coyote), and gardening (Wicker Park Garden Club).

### Wicker Park-Bucktown Commercial Leadership

The commercial corridors have long served as one of the most treasured, unique, and challenging aspects of Bucktown and Wicker Park. As documented in this analysis, the six corridors that comprise the SSA are vastly unique. Determining how to best market, promote, and invest in WPB is a corridor by corridor challenge. Thus, any effort to solve an issue that particularly hampers the quality of one or two corridors will bring with it reciprocal concerns that the other streets are being overlooked.

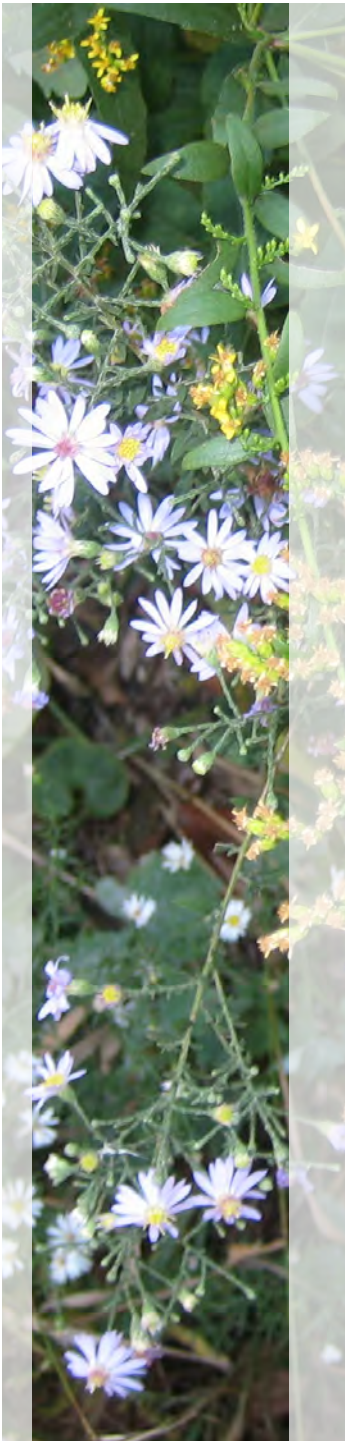
Besides the SSA, there are three primary organizations focused on WPB's commercial environment. These include:

- Wicker Park-Bucktown Chamber of Commerce: In existence for 30 years with over 260 members, the Chamber is the parent organization of the SSA and responsible for business retention, attraction, and marketing for the Bucktown and Wicker Park neighborhoods.
- West Town Chamber of Commerce: Covering an area with fewer commercial corridors, the West Town Chamber focuses primarily on Chicago Avenue and Division Street. The West Town Chamber also has an SSA (#29) for Chicago Avenue.
- Division Street Committee: A group of merchants have organized to collaboratively market Division under the slogan "Do-Division Street." The Committee got its start by throwing annual events such as "Dancing Down Division."

These organizations do not account for the additional impromptu collections of businesses that collaboratively develop joint marketing materials and sponsor block parties. Every year, for instance, block parties take place on Evergreen Street (just off Milwaukee Avenue) and on N. Damen, both of which are organized (all or in part) by local stores. The 1400 and 1500 block businesses along Milwaukee Avenue have developed postcards of local "Hot Shops" and "Unscene – Chicago's New Voice for Independent Business" has developed a free marketing brochure of local boutiques.

The sheer number of resources, some of which overlap in service areas, are on the one hand, an extremely positive characteristic of WPB. There are clearly many businesses and stakeholders trying to further cement WPB's identity as a unique place for business. On the other hand, the activity fueled by different organizations breeds confusion, and some business owners lament that many people are

**[active but not involved].**

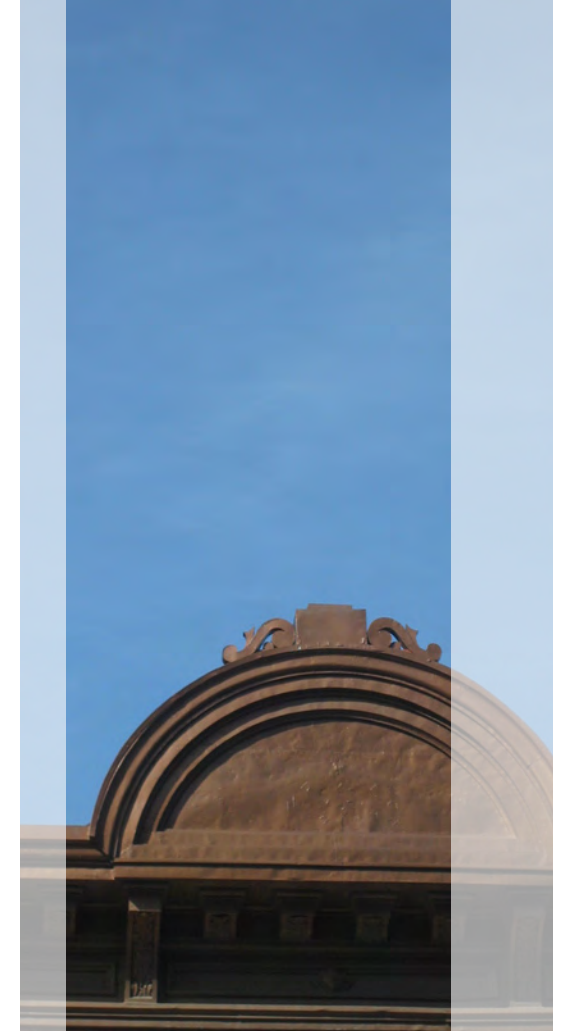


Given the size of WPB's commercial core, the range of business types, and the large number of active community organizations, the need for a strong coordinating voice is apparent.

With a healthy budget and large service area, the SSA is well suited to play this role. To meet this potential, it is important to review the key concerns participants in this study have identified with regard to the SSA, as these are the core challenges the organization will need to overcome to be even more effective in the near future.



- **“What does the SSA do?”** – Despite information distributed through multiple channels about what the SSA does and does not do, there is still confusion as to its role in the community. Part of this is due to low awareness of the SSA. The SSA is only a few years old, and it takes time to cement an identity and presence in the community. That said, participants expressed frustration that it was unclear with whom they should speak regarding specific concerns. Some feel it is too easy to get lost between the Alderman's office and the SSA if they have a concern that might be addressed by one or both entities.
- **“The SSA does not spend its money fast enough.”** – In the first years of any organization, spending dollars can be remarkably challenging as the commissioners have to prioritize their ideas. Often times the ideas of one conflict with those of another. Planning efforts, like this one, can greatly help to smooth this process by identifying and documenting collective priorities for the coming years.
- **“The SSA is not in touch with the community.”** – Many participants feel that what is lacking from the SSA is direct contact with *them* during the year, but this cannot happen without additional staff. Most new organizations are weary to grow beyond one person, but the ability to improve the organization's legitimacy, spend money and even raise additional dollars all hinge on having enough staff to direct these activities.
- **“The SSA does not distribute its dollars evenly.”** – As noted above, addressing an issue in one location may come at the real and / or perceived expense of another. Some participants feel the SSA should carve its budget into an allocation for each corridor. Others feel the SSA is simply too large and that the ability to address both Western Avenue as well as Milwaukee Avenue, for instance, is too great a task for one organization given that the issues and opportunities are so vastly different. Spreading the money evenly across the corridors would likely diminish the potential impact of the overall investment. However, high profile and cost-effective strategies should be pursued for each corridor such that the SSA has a visible presence throughout the area.



## WPB Challenges and Opportunities

In addition to the organizational challenges described above, WPB faces a number of broader challenges that threaten the area's commercial marketplace. But with every challenge is an opportunity to make a difference and improve WPB's future. The following challenges and opportunities summarize some of the key findings described in this analysis of existing conditions.

### Community-Wide Challenges and Opportunities

- Maintaining socio-economic and cultural diversity in the face of widespread reinvestment and rising prices for homes, apartments, work spaces, and stores.
- Retaining the new crop of babies (and their families) as they approach school age.
- Improving the highly visible and active gateways to Wicker Park and Bucktown, which are currently unattractive and unwelcoming.
- Continuing to support the arts and ensure that the presence of local artists is maintained despite the increasingly expensive space for both living and working.
- Bringing together long-term residents and new residents around common goals and priorities.
- Promoting high quality design in keeping with the texture and fabric of the community and better using zoning as a tool to guide redevelopment.
- Balancing the reinvestment in the area with the desire for continued "grit" and "attitude."
- Improving the environmental footprint of the area by managing storm-water, improving landscaping, and promoting alternative transportation.
- Strengthening the connection of parks and plazas to their surrounding community context.



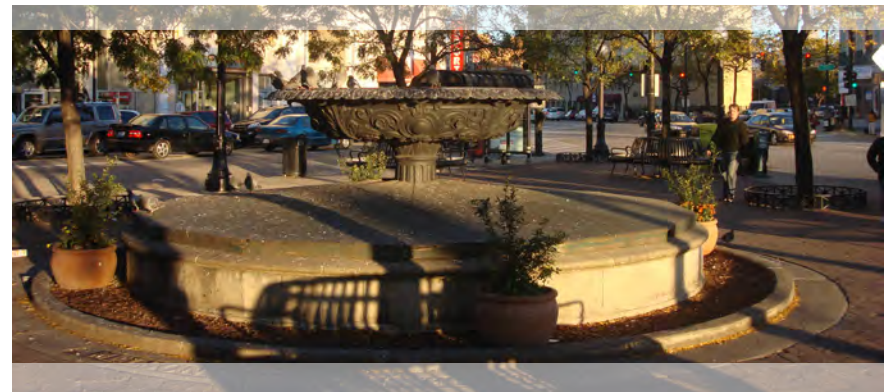
Challenge and opportunity areas: under the highway and at the Polish Triangle.

### Retail Market Challenges and Opportunities

- Maintaining a vibrant retail environment with a strong presence of locally owned businesses as rents continue to increase.
- Maintaining the unique identities in each business district while facing increasing rents and competition from national chains.
- Reinforcing the established identities and leadership in place in the more established business districts to move their ideas forward. Corridors with less established business districts such as Western Avenue need an advocate to play this role.
- Addressing the large stretches of inactive uses (empty storefronts, banks, undeveloped land, etc.) along major corridors, which inhibit the continuity of business. These spaces provide opportunities for both temporary and permanent uses.
- Managing the prevention and removal of graffiti, which is an ever present distraction to businesses and shoppers alike.

### Pedestrian Experience Challenges and Opportunities

- Slowing down traffic on the two lane roadways (Damen, Milwaukee, North, and Division) and creating an intimate system of pedestrian crossings.
- Improving pedestrian connectivity across the roadways, especially at primary pedestrian destinations such as transit stations and bus stops, civic spaces, parks, and retail nodes.
- Maintaining pedestrian amenities such as plantings, lighting and other street furniture along the corridors.
- Reinventing the highway underpasses as welcoming and pedestrian friendly entranceways into the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods.





- Enforcing and monitoring café seating, valet parking, and loading rules so as not to impede walkability.
- Balancing the need to accommodate the car while welcoming walking along Ashland and Western Avenues.

#### Bicycling Challenges and Opportunities

- Improving safety for existing bicyclists as well as for those who do not ride because of a fear for their safety.
- Making drivers more aware of bicyclists on the road and encouraging bicyclists to be more aware of the rules of the road.
- Receiving approvals from the Chicago Department of Transportation and the Illinois Department of Transportation for bicycle improvements that have not been implemented before in the City or State.
- Establishing new bicycle routes, including the proposed Bloomingdale Trail, to safely accommodate the large number of local riders.

#### Transit Challenges and Opportunities

- Stimulating transit use to and from the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods.
- Reducing automobile use in the SSA.
- Promoting transit use and car sharing in coordination with all new developments.
- Redeveloping the vacant or underutilized land in close proximity to all three rail stations that diminishes the quality and experience of those stations.
- Improving the amenities at bus stops to make taking the bus a more attractive transit option.
- Getting business owners to work with the SSA to market transit use for their employees and customers.
- Upgrading the Metra train station at Ashland and Clybourn to improve its physical appearance and connectivity with the surrounding community.

#### Traffic Challenges and Opportunities

- Slowing vehicles down while maintaining the same system efficiency.
- Increasing the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists with the many available tools already in practice by CDOT.
- Leveraging relationships with CDOT, DPD, the Aldermen, and others to work collectively on traffic solutions that can be costly.
- Changing the culture from the current one of vehicle dominance to one where the streets are shared between vehicles, bicycles, and loading.

#### Parking Challenges and Opportunities

- Setting the price of on-street parking correctly to create an 85% occupancy rate while assuring business owners that increasing the cost of on-street parking will *help* their businesses.
- Improving the enforcement of both parking meters and loading zones.
- Creating more on-street metered parking spaces to serve the retail land uses.
- Using technology to improve the enforcement and maintenance of the parking meters.
- Educating businesses on the proper use of loading zones.
- Consolidating loading zones to create more on-street parking.
- Establishing effective communication between valet services and off-street parking lots.
- Utilizing off-street parking lots during non-business hours for residents/visitors/valet services.

