

Chicago



The Capital of the Prairies

Chicago grew up when the prairies, that vast expanse of flat land between the Mississippi and the Rockies, became inhabited. As people farmed they required markets and Chicago became the hub for the trade in commodities, particularly agricultural products. Even today Chicagoans are prone to boast of their cowboy heritage. During prohibition its success as a distribution centre was distorted by the running of liquor and later drugs. Chicago was hit hard by the depression and its reputation slid further as it became a centre for organised crime. Since then a dynasty of mayors, culminating in the current Mayor Daley has fought to renew Chicago's reputation and to make it a commercial and cultural focus for its vast prairie hinterland.

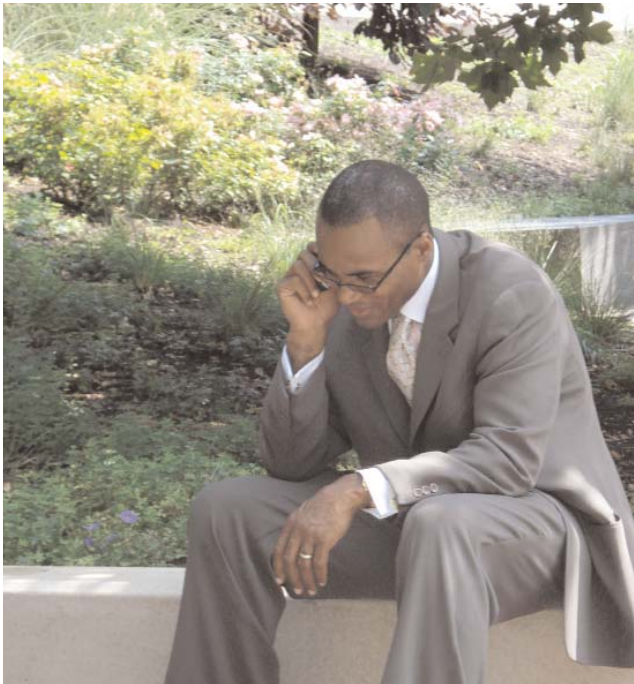
Chicago's modern form owes much to an early disaster. A fire in 1868 destroyed most of the city, clearing away unsanitary slums and allowing a new breed of architects such as Louis Sullivan to perfect the science of the skyscraper. His faience clad tower blocks are now overshadowed by some of the most iconic and tallest office buildings in the world. Though New York also has tower blocks those in Chicago are more concentrated, within the Chicago Loop, than in Manhattan. And perhaps it is the proximity of the lake that makes them seem to sparkle more?

More recently Chicago became the home of Mies van de Rohe who built numerous downtown buildings as well as the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, one of the USA's foremost universities.

Cover: The Calder stabile Flamingo adorns the centre piece of Mies van De Rohe's Federal complex in downtown Chicago.

Right: Relaxing in Millenium Park

If a prairie cowboy of the 1880's wanted to become more sophisticated and to "make it big" he would naturally gravitate towards Chicago. That gravitation still occurs, though today Chicago's marshalling yards, which brought freight to the city, have now been filled in to create lakeside parks. Modern industries include finance, medical and high technology, with Boeing being one of the major employers. Today Chicago has become a sophisticated, clean and enjoyable city to live in. It is continuing to attract a range of new industries focused around an expanded downtown office zone, satellite mixed use areas and a modern industrial park located close to O'Hare International Airport.



Developing a city that people want to move to

The key to Chicago's continuing economic success seems to be linked to very clear policies aimed at attracting population and business development. Policies recognise that in order to do this Chicago needs to become an attractive 21st century city.

The decision to locate or to re-locate a business is often a subjective decision. We have seen how issues such as crime and fear of crime can dissuade people from locating in a city. In Chicago Richard J Daley, who was mayor from 1955 to 1976, had to fight to re-establish the city's reputation after the war. One of his decisions was to bar film companies from making gangster movies in the city. Today Chicago is more well known for The Loop elevated rail system, for pizza and for its architecture.

Consistent governance

The current mayor has been in office for 19 years and his father was in command for a record breaking 21 years. Thus we have a man in charge who learned the governance of Chicago on his father's knee. Mayor Daley is not bashful about his achievements, every flyer, leaflet and city vehicle proudly proclaims his name and most city publications have an introduction written by the mayor. Mayor Daley has been able to drive forward his strategies because of public support. The majority of people that I met recognised his achievements and applauded them. The people of Chicago are on the side of the city.

Clear economic strategies

The city has had clear economic goals and these have been transformed into area planning strategies, the most important of

which is the Chicago Central Area Plan 2020 [1] which commences with the tag-line "This is no little plan". Benet Haller ran the project, coordinating input from the commissioners of Planning and Development and Transport and Environment within the city. The principle consultants were Skidmore, Owings and Merrill supported by Arthur Andersen. The most important element of the strategy has been to develop more offices downtown, with a recognition that this is Chicago's economic engine. In order to achieve this a series of improvements have been undertaken, including zoning reforms, landscaping, speeding the links to the airport and improvements to the ageing loop system. By expanding the central area office zone derelict land has been made available for the construction of more offices in a wider area around the loop.

The plan also envisaged a series of more mixed use developments surrounding the central office zone, including developments like the River North area and the high value residential district of Streeterville, which is wedged between the new lakeside Millennium Park, the commercial centre, the Magnificent Mile and the lake itself. The focus of this area will be the Chicago Spire [2]

The plan has just received its first full scale review. Today Chicago has 30 of the fortune 500 HQ's, most of them located in the downtown area and a further 63 HQ's of major traded companies, making it unquestionably second only in the USA to New York. However job growth went down by 63,000 between 2000 and 2006, as opposed to New York where it slightly increased (by 600) [3] To counter this Chicago is building offices as fast as it can.





The Chicago Spire © Shelbourne Development Calatrava

According to Cushman & Wakefield [4] nearly 3.5msf or 325,000 m² of new office space is set to complete construction in 2009, the largest amount of deliveries in one year since 1990. This will help to accommodate the 20,000 new office-using jobs that were added to the economy in 2007 and that are anticipated in following years. The professional and business service sector represents 16.8% of employment in Chicago with education and health and government sectors contributing a further 12.8% and 12.4%.

The city fathers hope that this building boom will ease the overcrowding in the downtown office sector where available space fell by 21% over the last quarter of 2007. Some large developments in West Loop and River North - i.e. just outside the loop continue to draw occupiers away from older property within the loop - which in turn gets done up. For example Chicago's own Trump Tower a mixed use leviathan just north of the river, is already climbing skyward.

The new Trump Tower overlooks Chicago's new retail hub, Michigan Avenue, which has been upgraded. It is one of the few streets Mayor Daley has deemed worthy of re-paving. Michigan Avenue is now called the Magnificent Mile and has department stores, a flagship Apple Store, as well as high fashion outlets such as Prada and jewellers like Tiffany. An unplanned effect of this has been the retreat of retailers from their traditional locations within the loop, including the closing down of the Carson's Department Store in the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building, which was located in one of the few remaining downtown buildings designed by Louis Sullivan.

Now renamed the Sullivan Building this exquisitely designed edifice has been taken over by a developer who plans, with the aid of substantial financial support from The City of Chicago, to redevelop the 24,000 m² of retail and 65,000 m² of office space. [5]

The fate of ground floor activities within the loop is still in the balance. When I visited in the summer of 2007 there was little to be seen of dynamic retail beyond the Magnificent Mile.

Buildings adjacent to the loop are not comfortable for office use, because of the noise of the trains. Often the first ten floors of towers are given over to car parking! Directly under the loop the environment, though evocative, can be rather gloomy. However this local reduction in attractiveness of properties does lead to the provision, right in the heart of the downtown area, of lower rental buildings. Quite naturally the loop streets have become populated by service industries, like couriers, warehouses, budget shops and as the loop extends outwards to new



Philip Johnson's 190 South LaSalle Street

residential areas. These under-loop-streets have become quite fashionable locations for trendy shops, galleries and cafés. This is a feature of the loop that is not yet adequately exploited by city planners.



The population of greater Chicago is almost 9.5million. To keep the level of density of activity and living within the central zone the integration of the transport system was a necessity. The loop is being upgraded and extended and new underground lines have been built to link areas of growth or public transport deficit. Key routes, like the route to the airport have been prioritised. A global ticketing system has been introduced and downtown routes cost a flat rate of 85¢ with a transit card. [6] Maps are widely available, although because of the complexity

of the system they can be difficult to decipher. Chicago is currently undertaking a very detailed transit survey to try to establish more information about trip generation within the City. [7] However 553.5 million trips within the CTA, Metra and Pace transport systems were recorded in 2003.

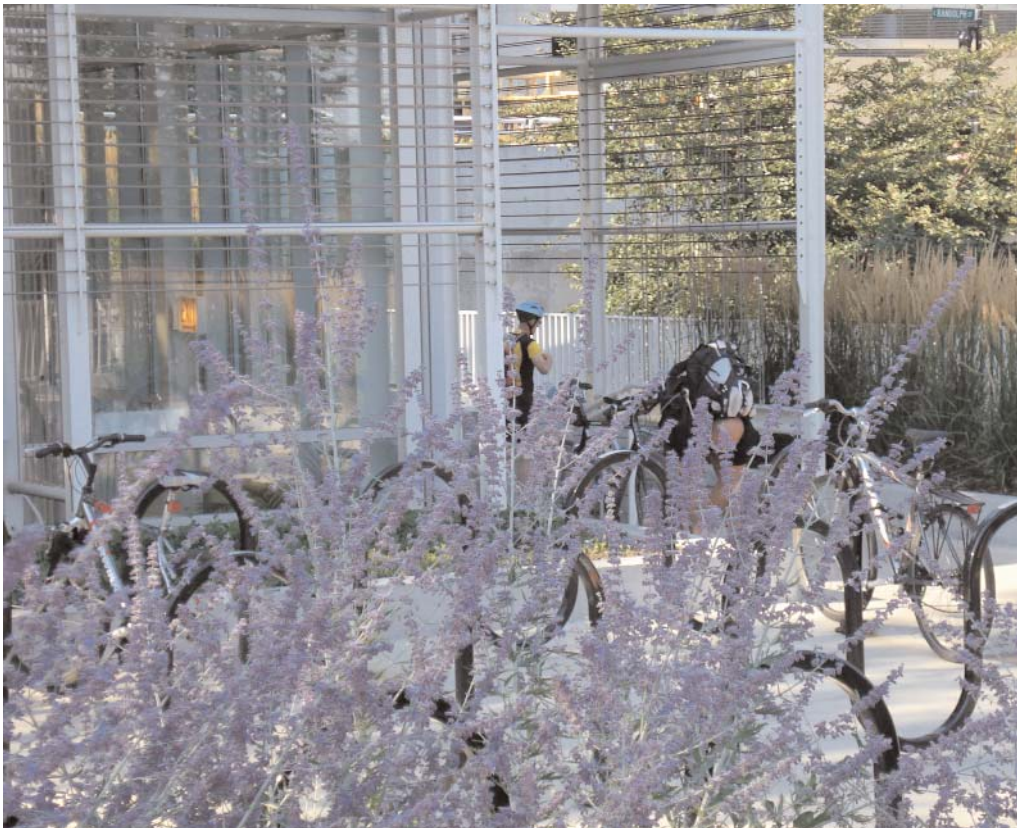
Of particular interest in Chicago is the fact that cycling has also been embraced. In 1991 Chicago's Bike 2000 plan was adopted which aimed for 10% of all short trips by bicycle by 2000. (Short trips were defined as 5 miles & under, individual vehicle, single occupancy trips.) Though this rather optimistic ambition was cut back to 5% in the Bike 2015 plan. There is now a comprehensive walking and cycling plan being made for the whole metropolitan area called Soles and Spokes. [8]



Above
The evocative streets underneath
Chicago's loop transit system.
Right
Even Chicago's toughest locations
are fair game to the cycling fraternity



The city has benefited from a major donation from McDonald's in order to construct new bike nodes, where you can park and have your bike repaired or hire a bike for the day. Cycle routes run on dedicated though not guided tracks along the wide main roads and a dedicated route along the lake shore from Bryn Mawr, a leafy university suburb in the north, to South Shore Cultural Centre in the south - a distance of 24km. The route, which runs through lakeside parkland for most of the way, encouraged even me to try some recreational cycling in the city. I noticed that it is also heavily used by commuters at peak times as well.



Millenium Park Cycle Centre built with the aid of a generous donation from MacDonaid's

In many American cities redundant downtown buildings have been refurbished to create trendy new residential zones. But in Chicago, where much of the existing stock is of very poor quality and low density, the building of modern residential tower blocks has become the norm. Many of these blocks have views of the lake or of the river, which winds its way through the downtown, and is being opened up for recreational use. This housing is not cheap, a typical downtown flats costing in the region of \$500,000. In particular the new development zone of Streeterville focuses on Calatrava's Chicago Spire [2], a spiralling residential tower with health clubs, crèches, retail and a full sized swimming pool on its lower levels. In this development studio apartments are selling for a premium \$750,000 and the penthouses command above the \$8M mark. Construction started in July 2007 and the first residents will move in, in 2011. The new neighbourhood has shops, cafes and other facilities which are built around a new neighbourhood park. They are both well linked to the transport system and within walking distance of the downtown commercial area.

River North redevelopment area

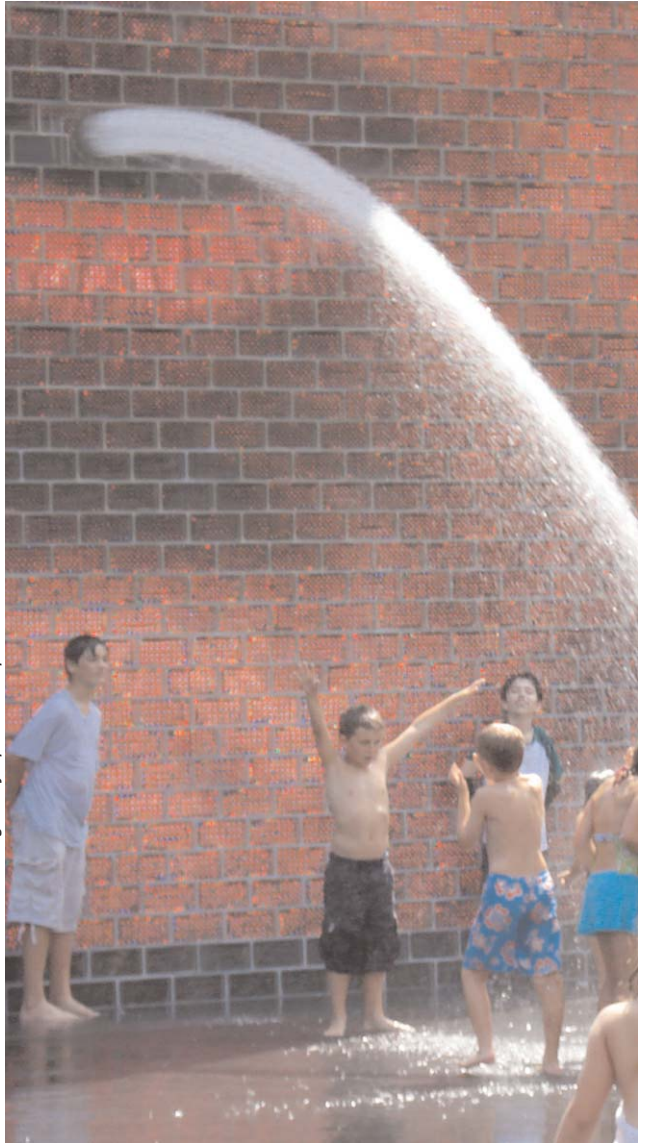


The Residential Tower

Traditionally Chicago has been seen as a tough city. But today one of its great transformations has been to become a green city, which children as well as adults can enjoy. The natural advantage of the lake and historic parks north and south of the city have finally been linked by the over-construction of marshalling yards to create Millennium Park, a development which includes a new theatre, art galleries, a marina and an outdoor concert hall designed by Frank Gehry. The landscape is dotted with sculpture and there is a child friendly interactive sculpture park. The variety and quality of these areas is exceptional and the fact that they were funded by large private contributions is also extraordinary.

According to greenbuilder [9] Skidmore, Owings & Merrill had been commissioned to design a plan that would continue the original Grant Park scheme. After work had begun on the enabling infrastructure for the park, an adjacent 1,800-space underground garage and an additional five acres (2 ha) became available, causing the city to re-examine the park plan and funding program to take advantage of the new opportunities. A fund-raising flurry ensued. John Bryan, former chair and CEO of the Sara Lee Corporation in Chicago, pledged to raise \$30 million. The Pritzker family, sponsors of the Pritzker Prize for Architecture, pledged \$15 million if the 1989 prize winner, Frank Gehry, would design a music pavilion for the park. The Frank Gehry association brought forth more gifts, and a total of \$145 million was raised before a design was completed. (Another \$60 million had already been raised for construction of the Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theatre, an underground performing-arts theatre that was incorporated into the final plan for Millennium Park.) The city bore the remaining \$270 million of the project's cost. The private donor group has since raised an extra

Crown Fountain in Millenium Park designed by Spanish sculptor Jaume Plensa





\$25 million endowment to fund the upkeep of the park.

The planting has received much praise and started a fashion for what is termed prairie planting. On my visits to the park I found this match between Chicago as a focus for the commerce of the prairies and the prairie quality of open space in Millennium Park to be very powerful.

The Frank Ghery designed Music Pavilion hosts free concerts throughout the summer, including a lot of Jazz, providing an upgrade to Chicago's cultural offer as well as its recreational offer.

But Mayor Daley has also paid attention to the quality of education in the city. One of his major moves has been to take direct control over the running of the educational administration. He has built new schools and city academies, using his talent for fund raising. These new schools offer hope in poorer areas of the city and in areas where they wish to encourage housing. The Mayor has deliberately built schools where the existing demographic would not demand it, knowing that good infrastructure must come before people will invest in living in an area.

Chicago is definitely a success story. A visitor cannot fail to be impressed by the city. When I was in Millennium Park, admiring the landscape, I got talking to a Boston doctor, who was taking a break from a medical conference. She told me that Chicago had delighted her. She also said that her son was considering going to university in Chicago and before her visit she had wanted to dissuade him. But having seen the city she had now contacted him to try and persuade him to apply to Chicago!

It is this mechanism which is the success mechanism for cities. If a city does well it must invest in its infrastructure - landscape, shopping, public transport, culture and sports. This in turn (along with access to housing and commercial space) will start to differentiate the city from other places and in turn this will persuade people to immigrate, and dissuade emigration. Success breeds success if the wealth is invested wisely. Perhaps the doctors' son will like Chicago so much he decides to settle there. That may well be Boston's loss, but it will be Chicago's gain!





Far left

The Chicago Board of Trade building 1930 Holabird & Root , at 184m high it was the tallest skyscraper until 1965. The sculptures are by Alvin Meyer.

Left

Frank Ghery's Jay Pritzker pavilion is dwarfed by the Standard Oil Building, now the Aon Centre.

Over

One of Chicago's alleys - now rid of any menace but still evocative of past eras.

1] www.cityofchicago.org

[2] www.thechicagospire.com

[3] www.worldbusinesschicago.com

[4] www.cushmanwakefield.com

[4] www.josephfreed.com

[5] See statistics chapter for more details

[6] Chicago Transit Authority www.transitchicago.com

[7] www.nustats.com/chicago/

[8] www.cmap.illinois.gov

[9] www.greenerbuildings.com

