

Zoning

The zoning map for the SSA supports the mixed use nature of the corridors. B3-2, which calls for a “broad range of retail and service uses” appropriate for a Community Shopping District, and C1-2, which calls for “small-scale business, service, and commercial uses” appropriate for a Neighborhood Commercial District, dominate the map, inviting residential uses to be built atop ground floor commercial spaces.³ Only the northern portion of Milwaukee between Western and Damen retains any reference to the area’s industrial past, with clusters of parcels zoned M1-2 to allow moderate-impact manufacturing, wholesaling, warehousing, and distribution, although the mix of uses along the corridor has started to shift toward those found elsewhere in the SSA. Of the 10.9 miles of parcel frontage within the SSA’s district, 9 miles or 83% require a ground floor commercial space. The remaining 1.9 miles or 17% allow alternative ground floor uses including parks, hospitals, schools, and the occasional at-grade residential unit.

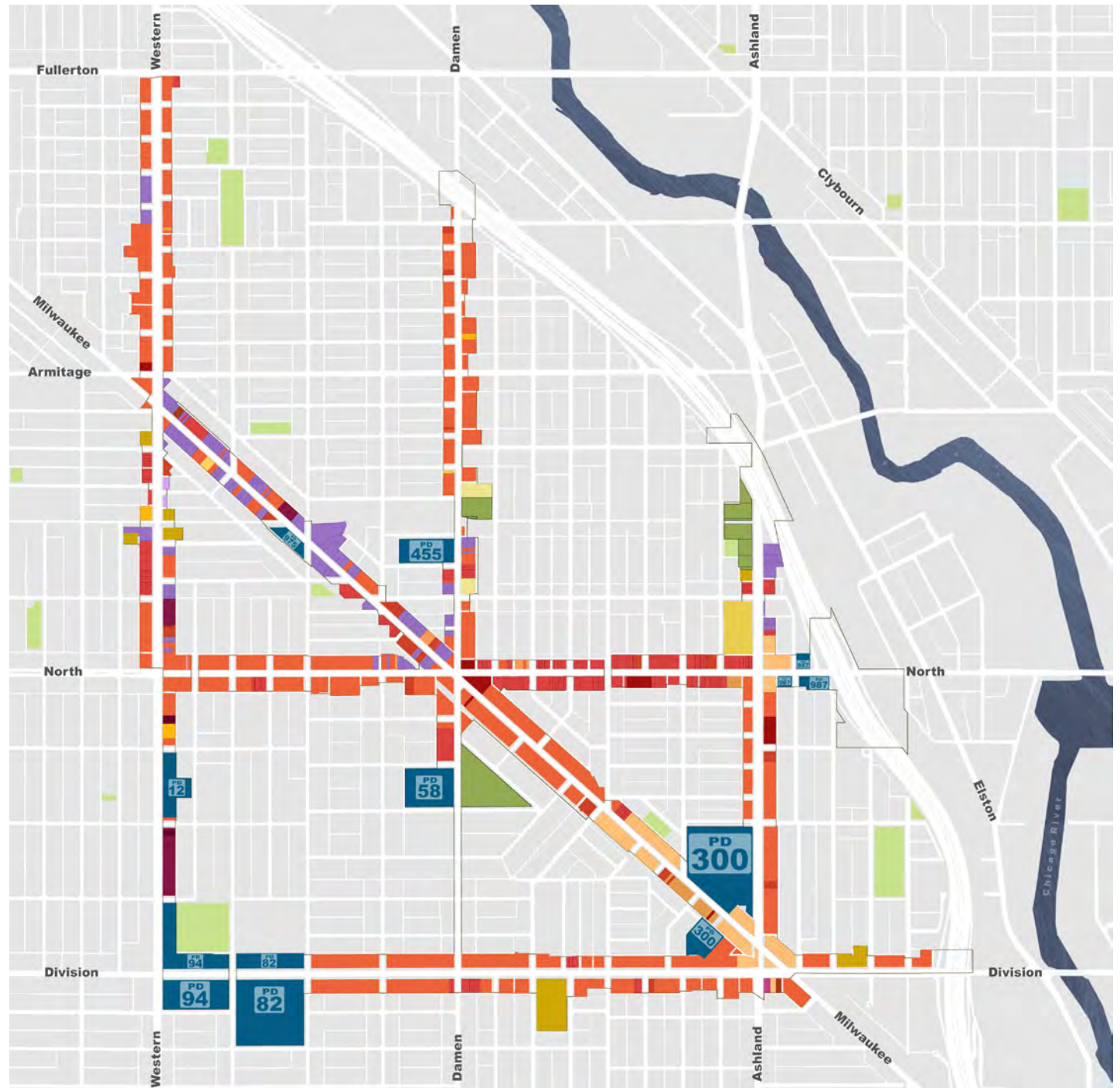


Figure 27. WPB Zoning
Source: City of Chicago Zoning Map

³ Chicago Zoning Ordinance, page 3-2.

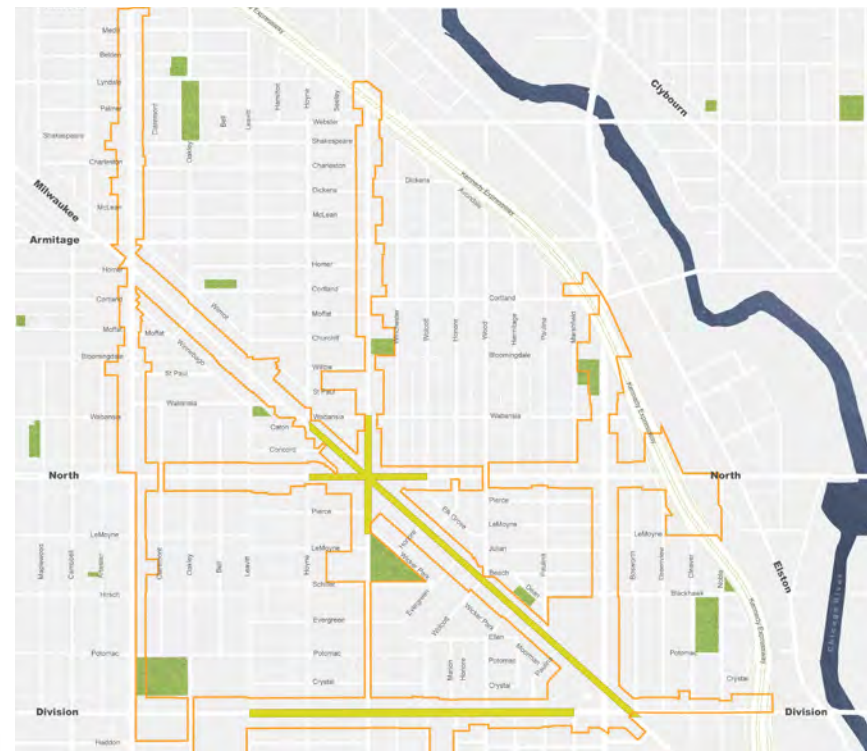
Zoning discussions in WPB center around several hot topics:

- **Up-zoning:** The housing boom encouraged developers to build larger product for families willing to pay top dollar for homes in WPB. The result has been new homes out of scale with their surroundings on larger lots and occupying more of their properties. The results have angered residents and galvanized local zoning committees around better managing new development that is in keeping with the spirit of the community.
- **Parking:** The Zoning Ordinance permits developers to locate parking on the ground floor of mixed use structures without counting that space toward the building's Floor Area Ratio (FAR). This arrangement reduces the viability of ground floor uses.
- **Pedestrian Retail Streets:** as described in greater detail in the Commercial Market Conditions section on banks and the Transportation section on the pedestrian environment, Alderman Manuel Flores recently sponsored a City ordinance to create Pedestrian Retail Streets in the SSA - most notably at the six-point intersection of Milwaukee, Damen and North. The Pedestrian Retail Streets includes all of the provisions of the existing Pedestrian Streets designation (see Figure 28 below for the location of existing Pedestrian Streets) as well as use restrictions including a provision that prohibits banks.

- **Front-loading Garages:** the City's townhouse ordinance was adopted to eliminate bland walls and prohibit front driveways where alleys offer vehicular access. The ordinance emerged in response to a growing number of "tear down" situations where two lots were redeveloped with a new townhome and front-loading garage.
- **Key Properties:** given the level of interest and concern about the Polish Triangle, a small parcel of public open space surrounded by multiple banks and the heavy traffic along Division, Milwaukee, and Ashland, the re-zoning, or "right-zoning" of the Pizza Hut and Wendy's site at Division and Ashland is a WPB priority. Discouraged by plans for a single-story Walgreen's proposed for the site, residents, business owners, and neighborhood leaders are advocating for more density and activity to reinforce the corner and overlook the Polish Triangle.



Figure 28. Designated Pedestrian Streets
Source: City of Chicago Zoning Map



 Pedestrian Street

Historic Significance

Architecturally, WPB is varied and beautiful, containing a wide range of styles and a rich collection of historic structures. Wicker Park boasts a particularly high concentration of properties with some degree of historic significance, and the Wicker Park Committee has worked hard to document the neighborhood's architectural assets. WPC has long advocated for their preservation by encouraging landmark status designations, which restricts demolitions and requires design proposals to obtain support from community groups and the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Portions of Milwaukee Avenue, North Avenue, and Damen Avenue in Wicker Park have recently been granted preliminary landmark status to establish a "Milwaukee Avenue District."

Landmarking in WPB is based on a significant and unique foundation of architectural heritage. The Historic Properties map illustrates the results of the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS), completed in 1995.

- Properties highlighted in Red "possess some architectural feature or historical association that made them potentially significant in the broader context of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States of America."⁴
- Properties highlighted in Orange "possess some architectural feature or historical association that made them potentially significant in the context of the surrounding community."⁵
- Properties highlighted in Green, Yellow-Green, and Yellow are "generally considered either too altered or lacking individual significance to be included in the CHRS database. However, properties with this color ranking that are included in the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (ISS) or located within designated or potential Chicago Landmark districts were included in the CHRS."⁶
- Properties highlighted in Blue were "constructed after 1940. These properties are considered too recent to be properly evaluated for architectural and historical significance and were generally not included in the CHRS database. However, properties already considered for individual Chicago Landmark designation and properties located within designated Chicago Landmark districts are included in the CHRS."⁷

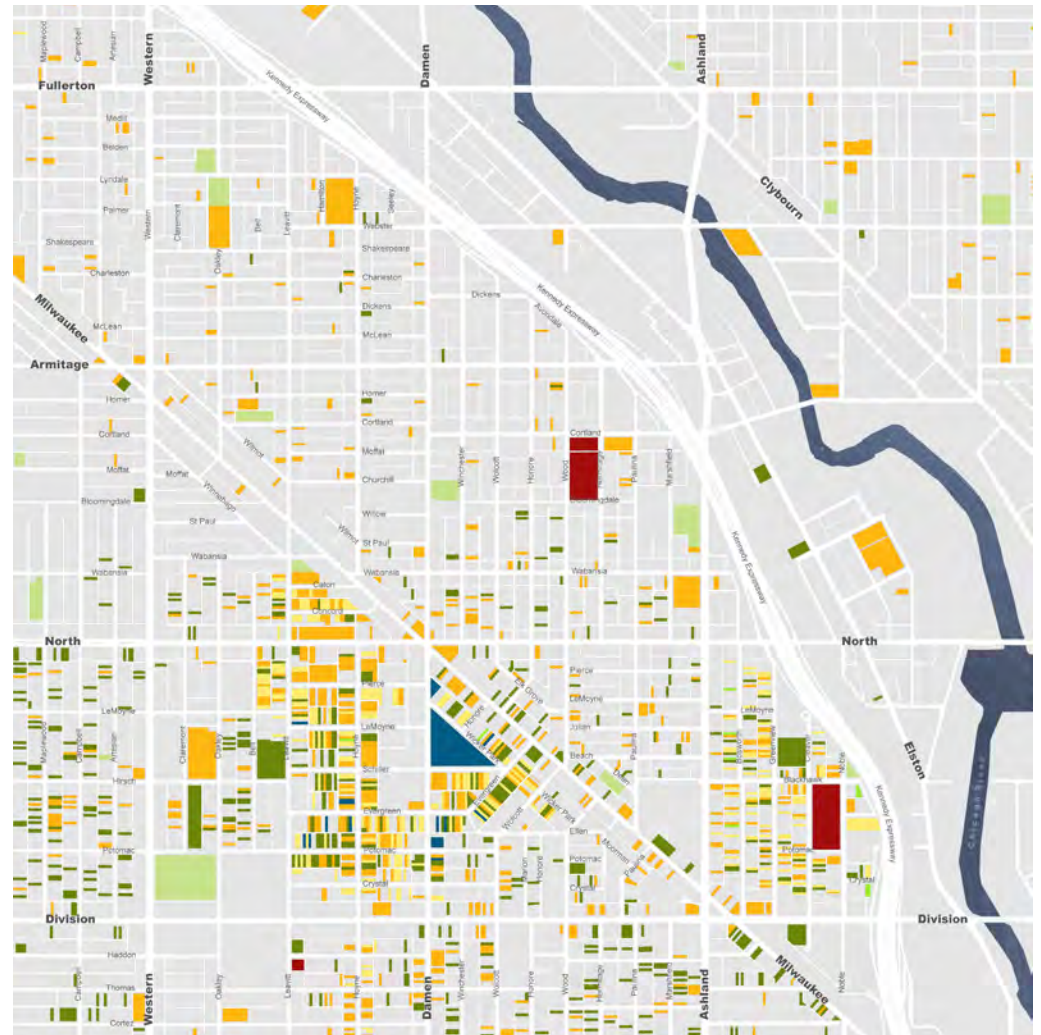


Figure 29. Historically Significant Structures
Source: Chicago Historic Resources Survey



⁴ <http://www.ci.chi.il.us/Landmarks/CHRS.html>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

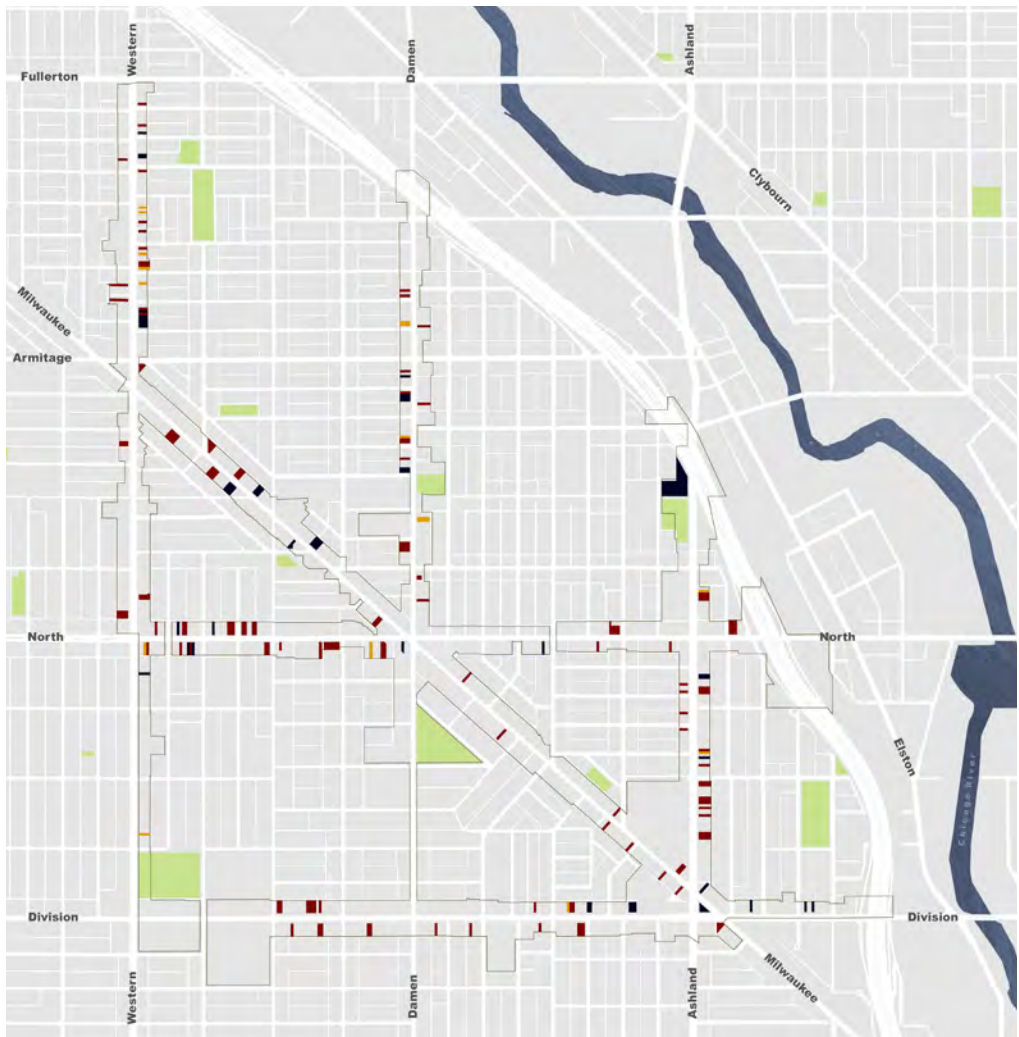


Figure 30. Vacancy
 Source: Field Survey, September 2007

- Poor Condition
- Vacant Commercial
- Vacant Residential



Vacancy

Despite the robust residential market and strengthening commercial corridors, vacancy – in several forms – remains a visible component of the SSA’s streets. Though rare and becoming rarer still, vacancy in the forms of vacant land and vacant buildings in WPB is most concentrated on Milwaukee Avenue, north of North, with scattered vacant parcels and buildings along Milwaukee south of North as well. Some of these larger parcels, like the one across Milwaukee from the Aldi supermarket have pre-existing plans awaiting review by the City. Ashland, likewise, has several larger vacant properties, one of which, near the Kennedy Expressway, belongs to the City’s Park District and has been identified as a potential on/off ramp for the proposed Bloomingdale Trail, described in greater detail in the Open Space section below. Western has a few remaining smaller-scale vacancies, resulting from the weaker market for housing and pedestrian-oriented retail along this auto-dominated thoroughway.

Though the area’s vacant land is sparse and quickly being acquired for redevelopment, a new form of vacancy is emerging in WPB – brand new, not yet fitted-out commercial space on the ground floor of recently built condominium projects. These spaces, discussed at length in the Commercial Market Conditions section below, are most prevalent along North Avenue, especially west of Damen, on Damen north of North, and along Division Street.

Inactive Frontage

The map of WPB’s inactive frontages locates the unoccupied commercial spaces, noted above, as well as the other vacant parcels in the SSA, parcels dedicated to at-grade parking or auto uses, and parcels hosting building façades with few windows and doors. Western between Fullerton and North, Milwaukee between Western and Damen, and Ashland between the Kennedy Expressway and Division contain the largest concentrations of these parcels, which detract from the pedestrian experience and thus deaden street activity. Taken together, these parcels comprise 3.45 miles of the SSA’s 10.9 miles of parcel frontage, equivalent to 31% of the commercial district – hard to believe, given the area’s commercial vitality and vibrancy.

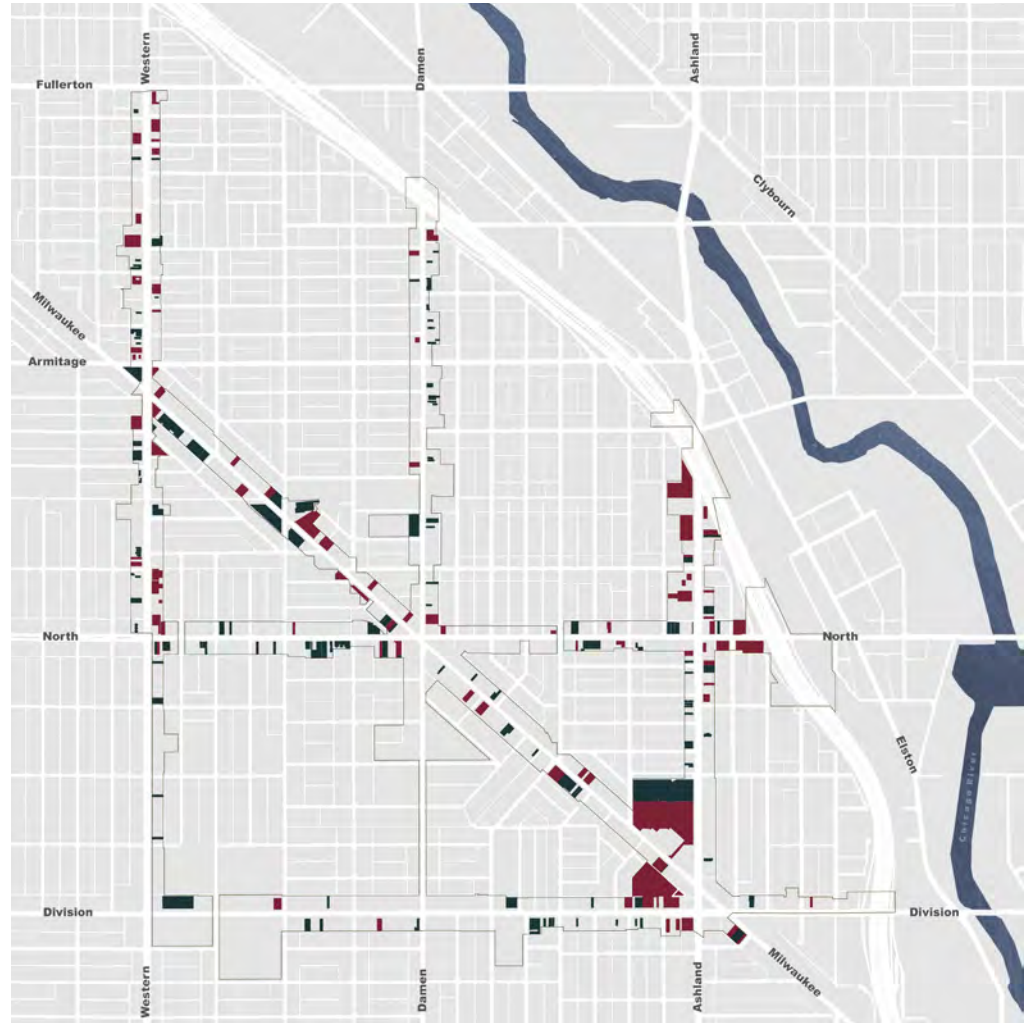


Figure 31. Inactive Frontage
Source: Field Survey, September 2007

- Pavement & Vacant Land
- Inactive Frontage & Vacant Structure

Examples of inactive frontage created by blank fencing, auto-oriented uses, and at-grade parking.

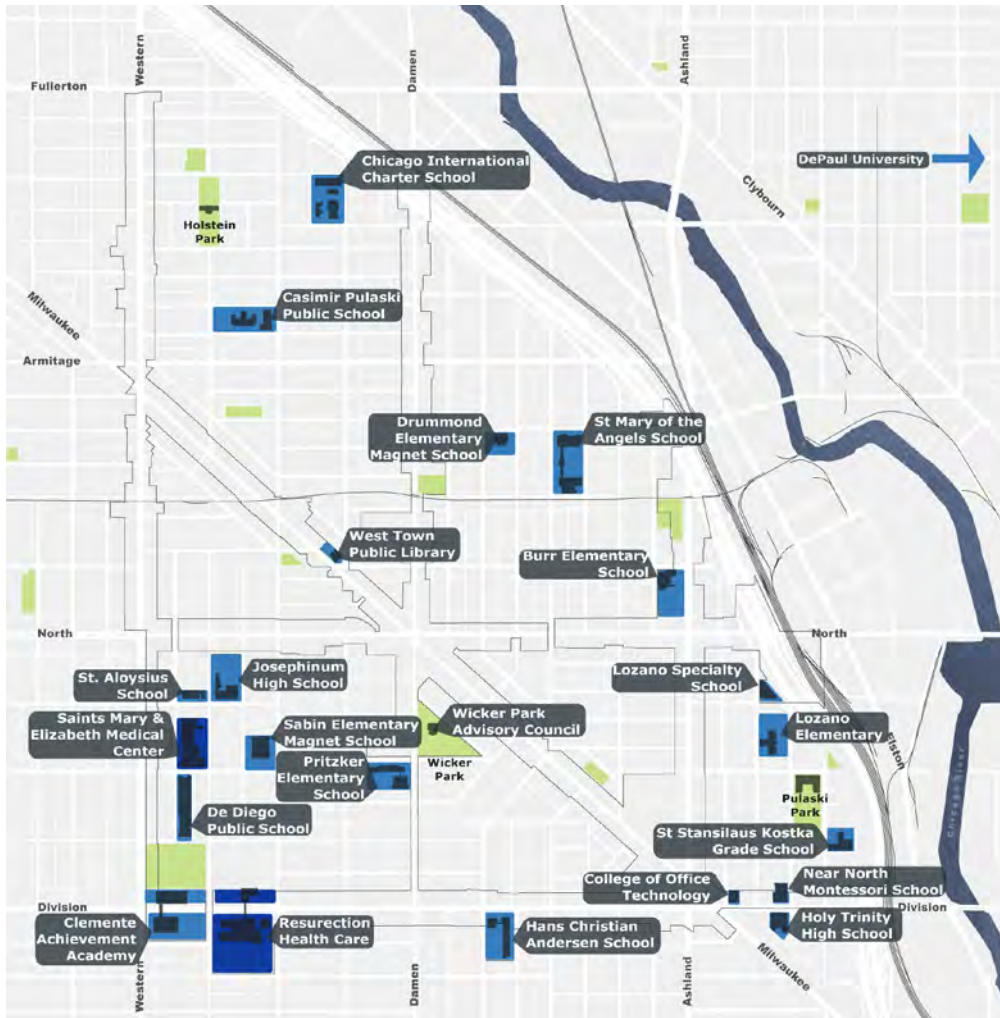


Figure 32. Institutions

Institutional Uses

Wicker Park and Bucktown host an impressive collection of institutions: historic churches, hospitals, public and parochial schools, an adult continuing education school, and the new Bucktown Wicker Park Library Branch. However, as the neighborhoods change and the community evolves, the roles of the institutions are shifting as well. As the population becomes more transient, local institutions find themselves no longer serving the local community because that “community” is less involved and grounded in WPB.

Instead, people from elsewhere in the City are drawn to the programs offered by local institutions and community facilities. At the same time, the new generation of residents are often first

attracted to the neighborhood for its social scene and rarely utilize local institutions and the services they provide. As the population becomes more affluent, service providers with missions of serving the local community find themselves without a local clientele and confronting organizational

["identity crises."]

Among residents, education is a central concern. Private schools are at capacity and both charter and public magnet schools have grown steadily in popularity to the point that acceptance rates are extremely low - there is simply not space to meet demand. As noted in the Chicago Tribune, for instance, the Drummond Montessori school in Bucktown is more difficult to get into than Harvard. The difficulty in gaining access to private and magnet schools combined with the localized baby-boom, the effect of which is now hitting the schools system, places a much greater emphasis on local public schools. Many local public schools, like Pritzker Elementary, have solid reputations. However, negative perceptions of public schooling persists, primarily by those less familiar with the City, the community and the qualities of local schools. The Bucktown Community Organization (BCO) has decided to tackle these negative perceptions about local schools and runs an education forum to teach parents of young children about the neighborhood’s schools and teachers. The BCO and its education committee also promote the open houses hosted by local public schools. The Wicker Park Committee (WPC) also has an active and growing education committee focused on many of the same issues from involving parents in local schools to improving communication between school administrators and the community.

During interviews and focus groups, representatives of institutions and organizations within the SSA’s district voiced much concern about WPB’s community and sense of community. Service providers suggest that given the “local community of experts,” there should be more cross-fertilization. The network of relationships between institutions is weak, and many providers do not recognize local resources. They are interested in ways to strengthen the relationships between institutions and the neighborhoods as well: Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center, a major employer in WPB, would like to learn more about its role as an anchor, and the College of Office Technology would like to find new ways of serving the area by matching students with available jobs in WPB specifically. Institutional representatives also note the need to involve local schools and churches in the planning and decision-making processes and the need to find new ways to communicate with a changing constituent base, including radio to reach the Hispanic community.