



Developing an Equitable Building Decarbonization Strategy for Chicago:

Recommendations Report of the Chicago
Building Decarbonization Policy Working Group



Executive Summary

Mayor Lori Lightfoot created the Chicago Building Decarbonization Working Group (referred to in the report as “the Working Group”) in June 2021 to recommend equitable solutions to address the nearly 70% of emissions that come from buildings in Chicago¹. From the iconic skyline to its historic neighborhoods, Chicago’s buildings play an outsized role in its reputation as a world class city that still feels like a small town and influences how millions of people live, work, play, and gather every day.

Chicago is a vibrant city with a rich history of coalition building and activism related to its built environment. The 1909 Plan of Chicago centered the people of Chicago as it laid ambitious plans for the lakefront, parks, streets, and civic and cultural centers among other city planning improvements. The upcoming We Will Chicago Plan continues the vision of a civically engaged and informed public, making multiple pathways of engagement so all voices and experiences may shape the plan. Civil rights and social activists, such as Ida B. Wells, Jane Addams, and Hazel Johnson, laid the foundation for community-based organizations and advocacy groups to use their voices to improve the quality of life their communities were experiencing in Chicago. Today, there are many kinds of civic, social and advocacy organizations that provide the capacity and opportunities for community voices to remain lifted and have also helped communities across the city bear the burdens of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Civic participation and activism across all communities and all sectors is quintessential to Chicago’s public identity and continues in the work of building decarbonization.

While reading the report, it is important to acknowledge that this work is informed by many decades of voices and votes that have transformed City policies and programs; and that the development of this report and the correlating work is taking place during a period of historical reckoning of injustices that have left communities across Chicago divested and under-resourced. The City and the Working Group led with equity to ensure that intentional, respectful collaboration and consideration of all Chicagoans lived experience drove the process for effectively addressing complex challenges in the built environment.

The priority for the Working Group was to develop an equity-centered building emissions reduction strategy that lowers economic burdens on residents and businesses, reduces energy insecurity for communities of color, and uses an equity lens to assess the cost and impact of these strategies. Equity was integrated throughout the development of this report – from stakeholder engagement and comprising the Working Group to developing each recommendation. The charge also called for considering multiple pathways to decarbonization – energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and others – and developing the social capital and resources that support those pathways, such as resilient communication networks with communities to engage them on decarbonization efforts, workforce development, and access to financial capital for building improvements. The Working Group was comprised of 53 experts, thought leaders and affected stakeholders from community-based and civic organizations, government, academia, architecture and development, energy and other utilities, industrial and manufacturing, trade organizations, workforce development, and non-for-profits across the same sectors. The Working Group met as a corporate body and were also divided into three sub-groups – Existing Buildings, New Construction, and Financial and Technical Assistance – to develop and technically assess recommendations within each subject area.

Chicagoans have a long history of actively participating in community-building activities that shape our neighborhoods and city.

¹ City of Chicago Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report (2017). AECOM. December 2019.



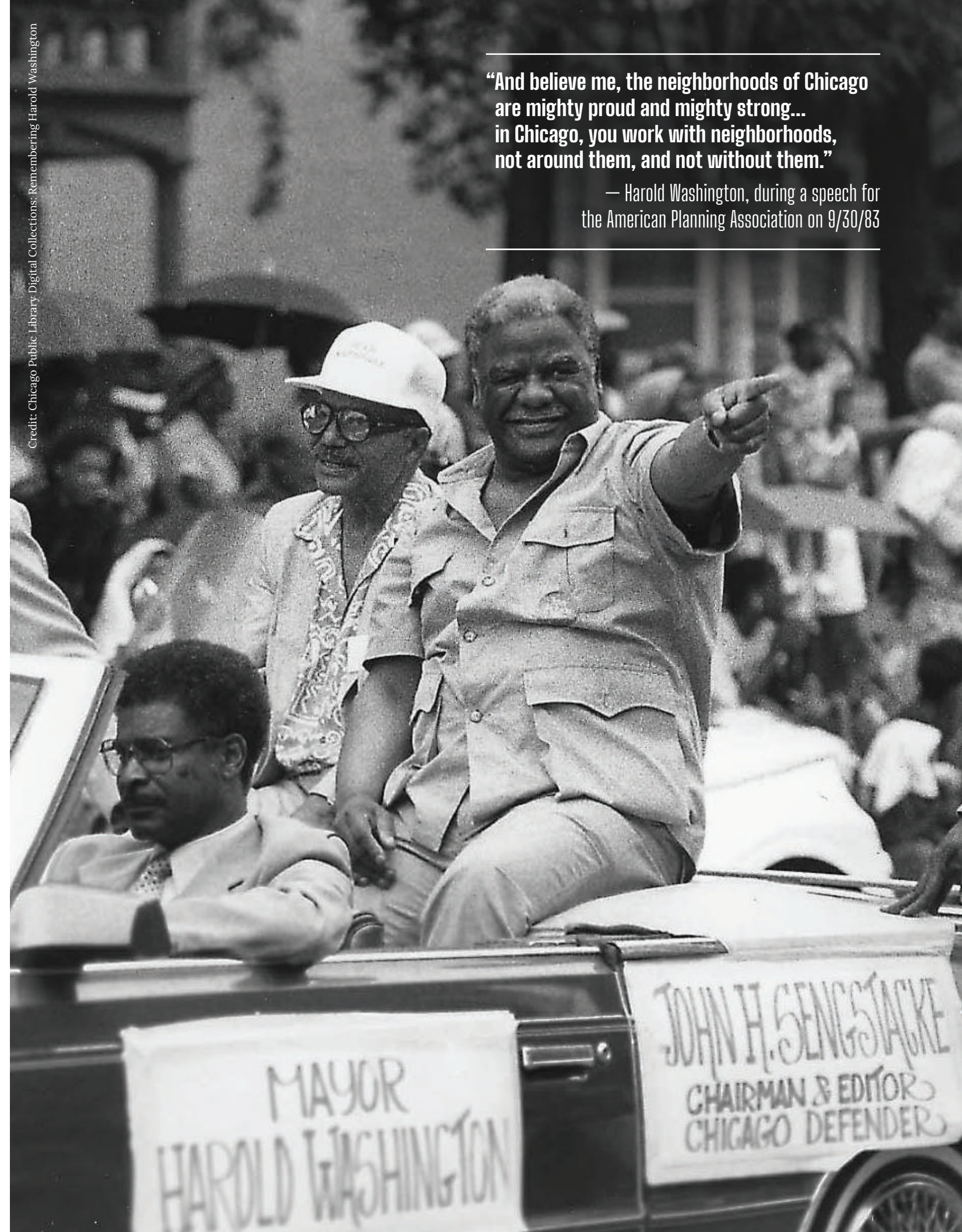
Section 3: Build, develop and support the social, financial and technical resources that result in a self-sustaining clean energy economy

13	Action	Develop a Building Decarbonization Hub and corresponding decentralized “community hubs” in priority neighborhoods.
14	Action	Form a Green Bank for Chicago.
15	Study	Conduct a study to better understand the viability of Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing and other low-cost green loan structures.
16	Action	Provide historically underserved communities with deep, local and inclusive engagement efforts that result in broad participation of energy efficiency, renewable energy and electrification strategies and incentives.
17	Action	Seek out state and federal funding to develop resources and fund the work.
18	Action	Seek support from public and private philanthropy.
19	Action	Develop and support multiple workforce development, career development and small business development trainings related to the growth in “green jobs” already occurring and expected to occur as the built environment embraces decarbonization. Further, target participation in historically marginalized communities as an avenue for building community wealth.
20	Action	Develop and sustain robust external-facing training on construction and zoning code requirements.
21	Action	Develop a building decarbonization directory of vendors, products and service providers that is accessible to the public.
22	Study	Create a just and equitable economic transition plan for the fossil gas industry in Chicago, which will be impacted by these decarbonization goals.

Section 4: Fund and prioritize equitable community engagement that cultivates resilient partnerships and advances hyperlocal benefits

23	Action	Develop an equitable outreach and engagement plan that prioritizes repairing, building trust, and investing in communities that have not been engaged in or informed about decarbonization initiatives, and creates pathways for strengthening relationships among stakeholders for coordinated and diverse cross-sector collaboration.
24	Action	Leverage cross-sector relationships to develop nuanced, multi-disciplined partnerships and funding opportunities.
25	Action	Strategically invest in demonstration projects.
26	Action	Fund and support the broad expansion of community solar and central community systems, other onsite/offsite renewable energy systems, and related resilience measures to advance a successful clean energy transition.

Mayor Harold Washington celebrates with Chicagoans at the 1987 Bud Billiken Parade on Chicago's south side.



“And believe me, the neighborhoods of Chicago are mighty proud and mighty strong... in Chicago, you work with neighborhoods, not around them, and not without them.”

— Harold Washington, during a speech for the American Planning Association on 9/30/83

Credit: Chicago Public Library Digital Collections: Remembering Harold Washington