



Chicago Metropolitan  
Agency for Planning  
**2023 Regional  
Excellence Awards**





# BUILDING TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE AND THRIVING REGION TOGETHER

In the last few years, we have seen our region's 284 communities respond to uncertainty with innovation, passion, and resolve. The many people, businesses, and ideas that make our region strong remind us of the work it takes to persevere and lead with excellence. Northeastern Illinois can learn from these individual successes and work together to create a more inclusive and thriving region.

Strong leadership, bold ideas, and a shared responsibility to improve quality of life for the nearly 8.6 million people who call our region home are a few of the reasons why the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) started the Regional Excellence Awards. The 2023 winners exemplify the ingenuity and dedication that makes northeastern Illinois a better place to live, enjoy, work, and do business.

Whether they worked to strengthen access to resources, redevelop long vacant properties, or build on careers devoted to public service, the 2023 winners have helped shape our region in positive ways, making it more resilient, equitable, and stronger — both now and into the future.

I always look forward to celebrating these accomplishments because it reminds me of how individual achievements add up to create a larger impact. It is an honor to celebrate the great accomplishments that have been made possible by your commitment to our region and its people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Erin Aleman', written over a dark background.

**Erin Aleman**  
Executive Director of CMAP

# Award winners



## Equity with Impact

Auburn Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Hub



## Equity with Impact

Bloomhaven development project



## Partners for Progress

Transit is the Answer strategic plan



## Regional Resilience

Project Zero: Pace's zero emissions commitment



## Regional Resilience

Climate Ready Oak Park plan



## Visionary Leaders

George Van Dusen Mayor of Skokie



## Visionary Leaders

Peter Wallers  
Chairman of Engineering Enterprises, Inc.



# Equity with Impact

Recognizes a plan, project, or initiative that advances inclusive regional growth and investment



## Auburn Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Hub

Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation and Milhouse Engineering and Construction

A community nonprofit that works to improve quality of life in underserved neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side, the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation opened a major redevelopment project to address community gaps in health care, healthy food options, banking, and education.

The Auburn Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Hub is a four-story facility renovated from a nearly 100-year-old building that once served as a furniture store and warehouse but sat vacant on 79th Street for years.

Working with Milhouse Engineering and Construction and many other partners, the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation revitalized the building, preserved and restored its terra cotta facade, and transformed it into a one-stop destination for medical, social, and community development services.

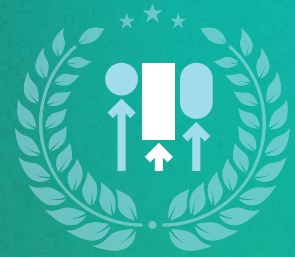
The redevelopment project responded directly to the community's quality of life plan by creating more than 150 living-wage jobs locally and providing a host of services for residents of all ages, from children to seniors. The investment in the Hub also is spurring investment elsewhere along the 79th Street corridor, generating more than \$170 million in new and proposed business development.

The Hub is home to a Bank of America branch, a Chicago Bears Community Room and Teaching Kitchen, and a Big Brothers Big Sisters office, with plans of hosting restaurants and other amenities. UI Health operates a medical facility that provides residents with primary and immediate care. A University of Illinois Chicago Neighborhood Center hosts a pro-bono legal clinic, and the Heartland Alliance — a social service nonprofit — operates a branch office.

The Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation also is relocating its headquarters to the Hub, which is earning a reputation for being the epicenter of health and wellness on the South Side.

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## Bloomhaven development project

City of Aurora and Fox Valley Developers

A major project in Aurora transformed the quarter-century-vacant Copley Hospital property into a mixed-use development that serves residents of different ages and abilities and provides numerous amenities for the surrounding neighborhood.

The Bloomhaven development turned a blighted health facility, originally built in 1888, into a home for seniors and a central office for East Aurora School District 131. It includes a five-acre neighborhood park and playground complete with trails and connections to the neighborhood.

Bloomhaven includes Weston Bridges, a first-of-its kind independent living community for people with intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities. The Bardwell Senior Living Residences provide seniors with 99 units of independent living space, as well as assisted living and memory care services for residents living with different stages of dementia.

Along with facilities that provide residents with a continuum of care, Bloomhaven includes space for an additional medical center that can address local healthcare gaps.

The project, created by Fox Valley developers and championed by city officials, opened in September 2022 and represents a \$129 million investment in Aurora's Broadwell neighborhood. It has turned a 330,000 square-foot health facility that closed in the 1990s into an innovative living community, helping revitalize the area for the residents there and surrounding communities in Kane and Kendall counties.



# Partners for Progress

Recognizes a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional plan, project, or initiative that targets regional investment in fiscally sound and equitable ways



## Transit is the Answer strategic plan

The Regional Transportation Authority

Big, bold solutions are needed to secure the financial viability of our region's transit system, and the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) took a major step to answer that call. Transit is the Answer, RTA's regional transit strategic plan, offers improvements to the transit system and revenue options to address a \$730 million annual operating budget gap in 2026.

Transit is the Answer's vision is safe, reliable, accessible public transportation that connects people to opportunity, advances equity, and combats climate change. The plan is the result of more than a year of development, along with input from and engagement with thousands of people, including residents across the region, transit riders past and present, and hundreds of other stakeholders. Community input and public engagement helped define the vision, outcomes, and principles of the plan.

The plan presents RTA's immediate commitments to improving the transit system and includes 14 Agenda for Advocacy and Action items, much of which will require the commitment of partners to advance over time.

# Regional Resilience

Recognizes a plan, project, or initiative that helps communities prepare for and recover from economic or environmental challenges



## Project Zero: Pace's zero emissions commitment

Pace Suburban Bus

Pace Suburban Bus made a significant commitment to ensuring its fleet of public buses, serving northeastern Illinois' many suburbs, can better support the environment by launching Project Zero.

Pace took major strides to reducing the transit agency's carbon footprint and improving the quality of our region's environment when it committed to converting the entire Pace fleet to zero-emission vehicles by 2040. Carrying out its plan to combat climate change, Pace received its first electric bus in November 2022 and ordered 20 additional buses that are scheduled to arrive in 2023.

The electric buses will be deployed based on the results of a fleet transition plan and a forthcoming facilities study. Vehicles are being obtained through various funding sources, including Pace's 2022 capital budget, operating funds, and federal and state grants.

Pace's Project Zero represents a significant initiative to strengthen our resilience to the rising risks of climate change, creating tangible results that can address our regional challenges.



# Regional Resilience

Recognizes a plan, project, or initiative that helps communities prepare for and recover from economic or environmental challenges



## Climate Ready Oak Park plan

Village of Oak Park

To support an inclusive and thriving region, communities in northeastern Illinois need to take proactive steps in the face of a changing climate and the economic and fiscal uncertainties that come with it. The Village of Oak Park provided the region with a blueprint in summer 2022, when it approved Climate Ready Oak Park, a comprehensive sustainability and resilience plan.

Climate Ready Oak Park lays out ambitious goals with concrete commitments and actions to improve air quality locally and reduce greenhouse gas emissions 60 percent relative to 2019 levels by 2030. In addition, the plan strives to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Climate Ready Oak Park helps direct 40 percent of public climate and sustainability funding to community members most vulnerable to a changing climate, and dedicates 30 percent of the village's land as green infrastructure or toward improvements that can diversify local habitats. It also raises awareness about electric vehicles, solar panels, energy-efficient best practices, and clean energy initiatives for residents and the broader community.

The village's Office of Sustainability led the development of the plan, which was informed by input from the public. The months-long public engagement process involved workshops, community events, and a dedicated website. The village prioritized equitable engagement — setting up avenues for two-way conversations with underrepresented groups and community members most impacted by a changing climate. The plan calls for those conversations to continue as Oak Park looks to develop more local climate and sustainability programs and policies.



# Visionary Leader

Recognizes a person or organization whose leadership has made northeastern Illinois more inclusive, resilient, and economically competitive



## George Van Dusen

Mayor of Skokie

In the 40 years that George Van Dusen has been serving residents as a trustee and mayor, the Village of Skokie has become a racially diverse and inclusive community with a strong local economy. A longtime resident of the northern Cook County suburb, Mayor Van Dusen first started serving Skokie residents as trustee in 1984, a job he kept until 1999, when he was elected mayor. Mayor Van Dusen has held Skokie's top elected position ever since. Known for being a tireless worker who emphasizes quality of life, Mayor Van Dusen has helped lead efforts to improve access to transit, diversify Skokie's economy, and institute sustainable policies.

During Mayor Van Dusen's tenure, Skokie successfully has worked with the Chicago Transit Authority to extend transit service and bolster the downtown area with a mix of housing and entertainment. Despite upheaval to retailers and shopping centers, Skokie's Westfield Old Orchard outdoor shopping mall remains a regional destination, attracting more than 10 million visitors a year and employing 4,000 workers.

Skokie also worked to convert an old business park into a haven for scientists, researchers, inventors, and innovators — the Illinois Science + Technology Park is home to 12 tech and pharmaceutical businesses that collectively employ more than 1,900 workers.

Mayor Van Dusen also recently led the effort to create a comprehensive sustainability plan, laying out ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address housing affordability and poverty. Mayor Van Dusen has governed with a collaborative approach, serving as president of the Northwest Municipal Conference and chairman of the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County.

Mayor Van Dusen's career in public service exemplifies CMAP's core values to lead with excellence and serve with passion.

# Visionary Leader

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## Peter Wallers

Chairman of Engineering Enterprises, Inc.

Throughout more than 45 years in engineering, Peter Wallers has remained passionate about one asset critical to a strong quality of life — water conservation. Wallers has enjoyed a long and successful career at Engineering Enterprises, Inc., a firm based in Sugar Grove that has worked with numerous communities in northeastern Illinois. He started at Engineering Enterprises in 1977, was named president and CEO in 2006, and became chairman in 2020.


Throughout those milestones, Wallers often has worked behind the scenes, consulting and providing communities with expert insights on infrastructure improvements, community development, and water resource planning. Known for his ability to solve and distill the complex problems facing municipalities, Wallers has helped collaborate and coordinate solutions alongside communities in Kane and Kendall counties.

He helped develop Streamline Montgomery, a long-term water sustainability plan of action that identified alternative water sources for the village, eliminate water waste, and increase transparency with residential water use. Wallers' contributions helped position Montgomery to implement sustainable water solutions by 2030.

Similarly, Wallers helped shape and guide WaterLink. This collaborative effort between Montgomery, Oswego, and Yorkville looked at water conservation regionally, and the logistics of switching to Lake Michigan as a primary water source and reducing reliance on depleted groundwater sources.

Additionally, Wallers helped form the Northwest Water Planning Alliance, which includes more than 80 communities and 1.4 million residents, and he has served on the Illinois State Water Survey and the Metro West Council of Government as an engineering advisor. He also contributes to a planning group in the Joliet area that has been studying the ongoing efforts to connect communities in Will County to Lake Michigan water. Wallers' dedication and passion for sustainability and water conservation emphasizes the importance of leading with excellence and serving our region with passion.





**Thank you  
for your hard  
work, which  
makes this  
region great!**

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