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Chinatown Parking Management Existing Conditions Report Executive Summary

About the Parking Management Plan

As recommended in the 2014 Chinatown Community Vision Plan, the Chinatown Parking Management Plan looks to develop parking management strategies that encourage better utilization of Chinatown's parking supply to support the neighborhood's vibrant businesses, while improving safety and mobility for all who live and work in Chinatown. The cultural and commercial success of Chinatown draws residents, workers, and visitors alike to the neighborhood.

The Existing Conditions Report documents seven months of research, analysis, and outreach activities. It is an overview of the current conditions for parking and transportation, and will be used as a tool to provide direction for the recommendations in the final Parking Plan. Appropriate parking management strategies will make it easier for those visiting, living, or working in Chinatown to safely walk or bike, visit local businesses, and find parking.

Public Engagement

Early in the planning process, many people gave their input on parking in Chinatown. Engagement opportunities have included: surveys of people walking, surveying residents and students at the Pui Tak Center, and interviewing key stakeholders, including business owners, elected officials, and other institutional leaders.

The engagement process highlighted a number of recurring themes that include safety concerns, attitudes about car ownership and parking, and difficulty finding parking during mealtimes. Most drivers expressed frustration with the inability to find free parking or any parking during congested hours. Stakeholders mentioned the potential role of mobile apps in finding and paying for parking spaces that are more convenient. Many people, especially older residents, walk for most trips; there are also many using bicycles for transportation. Safety for those walking and biking in the neighborhood is a primary concern.

Data collected, issues identified

Along with stakeholder information, a series of parking counts were conducted at different times of day and days of the week to better understand where and when people park. As predicted, mealtimes are when parking is busiest. Some residential lots are consistently underutilized, while more central on-street parking fills up early in the day. Most free parking is always full. There are only very limited programs to incentivize transit, walking and biking for employees in Chinatown. With its many destinations, including Ping Tom Park, Chinatown Square, and the Wentworth corridor, the most convenient parking fills up quickly and stays full while many options are restricted (residential lots) or underutilized (spaces west of the freight rail line, metered parking near Ping Tom Park).

Some additional observations about parking:

- The area south of Cermak and east of the freight rail yard has the most free on-street parking and the neighborhood's only permit parking
- Weekend parking is the busiest; weekdays at lunch is also a high demand time for parking, especially near Chinatown Square and Wentworth
- The area west of the freight railyard has no residential permit parking, and very little metered parking
- Large neighborhood barriers, such as poorly lit underpasses and tunnels, make some of the parking supply much less desirable to residents and visitors - and encourages driving for short trips
- Drivers prefer to park in the southern public lot, closest to Cermak
- Some metered spaces are frequently underutilized
- Many private parking lots are consistently underutilized

Moving forward

As a thriving, nationally recognized Chinese neighborhood, Chicago's Chinatown attracts visitors from Chicago, the region, and other states. Its strong sense of community makes it ideal for residents and businesses alike. Many employees, visitors, and residents are battling for the most convenient free parking spaces, causing traffic congestion and unsafe driving conditions. Yet some parking is consistently underutilized. The strategies to be developed in the Parking Management Plan aim to improve parking utilization throughout the neighborhood, while also ensuring safety and quality of life for everyone in Chinatown.

The priority issues to be addressed in the Chinatown Parking Management Plan will build off of many recommendations found in the Vision Plan, and include:

- Balancing supply and demand at peak periods
- Establishing a parking benefit district to retain parking revenue locally
- Increase shared parking arrangements to better utilize the existing supply
- Encourage employees to take transit, bike or walk to work
- Make improvements to the comfort and safety of walking in the area
- Make improvements to the safety and quality of public transportation and amenities
- Evaluate residential permit programs; and
- Harness new technology and trends for the betterment of the area

