



# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS HOWARD STREET ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

The Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA) and the City of Evanston (Evanston) invite interested consulting teams to submit proposals to assist RPBA and Evanston with creating a collaborative post-covid economic recovery and commercial corridor revitalization plan for the Howard Street corridor from Sheridan Road to Western/Asbury Ave. The new plan will incorporate an equitable shared vision to chart a future course and assure the long-term resiliency of the commercial corridor and surrounding communities on both sides of Howard Street.

## SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

5:00 p.m. on Friday, October 28, 2022, via email. All proposals should be emailed to [cplante@rpba.org](mailto:cplante@rpba.org).

## RFP DOCUMENTS

All documents pertaining to this RFP (including addendums) will be posted to [rpba.org](http://rpba.org) during the duration of the procurement period.

## CONTACT

Any questions regarding this RFP shall be directed to:

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[cplante@rpba.org](mailto:cplante@rpba.org)  
773-508-5885

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847-448-8132

Please do not contact anyone else about this procurement between the RFP Launch and Consultant Selection dates listed under the Timeline section of this RFP.

## EVALUATION OF QUALIFICATIONS

RPBA and Evanston will review and rank all proposals and will select a shortlist of 3-4 consultant teams to participate in a one-hour interview with the Selection Committee. See the Timeline section for more information on schedule.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF CANDIDATE TEAMS

RPBA and Evanston will consider the following elements essential to a candidate team:

- Expertise in urban planning including land use/zoning, transportation, housing, economic development, workforce development, historic preservation and adaptive reuse, particularly in the context of multi-ethnic, urban commercial corridors
- Expertise in real estate development consulting and planning
- Demonstrated effectiveness and creativity in inclusive and multicultural community engagement
- Excellent graphic communication skills (drawings, diagrams, infographics, illustrations, etc.)
- Expertise in urban design (including streetscape, plazas, parks)
- Ability to communicate with a multicultural community

- High quality, visually appealing, and easy-to-read final deliverables including an implementation plan

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Forming much of the municipal boundary between the City of Chicago on the south and the City of Evanston on the North, Howard Street is a mixed-use corridor which includes many historic buildings featuring ground-floor commercial space with housing above, as well as a few larger auto-oriented retail centers at Howard and Clark and Howard and Western. Many of the ground floor commercial spaces are occupied by independent restaurants and retail businesses serving the area's diverse population, while tenants at the newer shopping center include national brands like Marshalls and Jewel-Osco. The Howard Street CTA station is a key transit hub, serving as the terminus of the CTA Red, Yellow and Purple lines as well as several CTA and PACE bus routes.

Despite millions of dollars in public and private investment on Howard Street in both Chicago and Evanston over the last 20 years, commercial vacancies have persisted throughout the corridor, and have increased due to the economic impact of the pandemic and subsequent social unrest. Since the arrival of COVID-19 in Chicago in 2020, many Howard Street businesses have permanently closed, particularly the independently owned restaurants and stores that make the area unique. In addition to the direct economic impact of the pandemic itself on area businesses, the increase in visible homelessness and drug activity has contributed to business closures and made commercial vacancies on Howard Street more difficult to fill.

According to the Urban Institute's Emergency Rental Assistance Priority Index, several of the census tracts bordering Howard Street are in the 96th to 99th percentile for COVID-19 Impact as measured by the share of adults relying on low-income jobs and lacking health insurance. Chicago's "North of Howard" area is home to one of the largest concentrations of affordable and subsidized housing on Chicago's north side, and many social service organizations maintain a physical presence on Howard Street and Paulina Avenue.

As we move forward in the wake of the pandemic, we seek to create a more equitable and inclusive plan that can address the community's concerns about poverty, vacancy, gentrification and crime on both sides of the Howard Street corridor. We intend for this plan to serve as a new model for inclusive economic development for diverse communities throughout the State of Illinois.

## **SCOPE**

The scope of this project consists of four elements: (1) Existing Conditions Assessment; (2) Stakeholder Engagement; (3) Real Estate and Market Study; (4) Vision Plan. Any additional elements that are recommended are encouraged to be included as part of this scope of work.

1. Existing Conditions Assessment
  - a. Physical elements  
Including but not limited to land use, zoning, urban character, transportation, wayfinding, landscape, streetscape, sustainability
  - b. Demographics  
Including but not limited to household income, vacancy, owner/renter mix, population statistics
2. Stakeholder and Community Engagement
  - a. Create a stakeholder and community engagement plan at onset of project

Conduct interviews with 10-20 business owners, nonprofit leaders, residents, and other stakeholders to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in play along the Howard Street corridor

- b. Conduct community engagement activities
  - In-person and online focus groups and community meetings (open to the public), forum for business owners and on site intercept interviews in locations like grocery stores, etc.
  - Digital activities including but not limited to online surveys, social input mapping, website information (to be hosted on RPBA and the Evanston Economic Development websites)
3. Real Estate and Market Study
  - a. Real estate inventory
  - b. Supply/demand (or “highest and best use” recommendations) by land use type for a comprehensive range of commercial land uses and multi-family residential
  - c. Developer interviews to determine the challenges and opportunities for development and housing affordability
4. Vision Plan
  - a. Guiding principles, goals, and objectives
  - b. Clear and specific recommendations
    - Market-supportable development ideas (existing business mix, market potential)
    - Urban design/aesthetic goals (including streetscape)
    - Land use and zoning recommendations
    - Transportation and pedestrian circulation recommendations
    - Identification of catalyst development sites
    - Public safety ideas and recommendations
5. Action Items
  - a. Implementation strategies and resources (including funding)
    - Investment ideas (real estate)
    - Priority projects and pilot projects
    - Partnership identification
    - Responsibility matrix
    - Realistic timeline for implementation
  - b. Excellent graphics, visual drawings (including an overall master plan drawing and sub-area drawings), three-dimensional renderings to illustration elements of the Vision Plan

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE**

RFP Launch: October 7, 2022  
Proposals Due: October 28, 2022 at 5:00pm  
Consultant Interviews: November 9-10, 2022  
Project Start: January, 2023  
Project Completion: September, 2023

## **PROJECT DECISION MAKING**

RPBA and the City of Evanston will form a Steering Committee of stakeholders to provide input and recommendations throughout the duration of the project.

The RPBA Board of Directors, Howard Street Special Service Area #19 Commission and Evanston Economic Development Committee will share final decision-making authority for this project. The selected consultant team will present in front of the joint Steering Committee on at least three

occasions during the project: 1) project kick-off for information and input; 2) upon completion of the Existing Conditions Assessment and Vision Plan for information and input; and 3) upon completion of the Action Plan for final approval/adoption.

## **PROPOSAL ORGANIZATION AND OUTLINE**

Proposal responses shall be organized by the following chapter/tabs:

1. Statement of Qualifications
  - a. A statement describing the main reasons why the proposing consulting team is best qualified for the project and why this project is important to the consulting team
  - b. A statement on the applicants' commitment and approach to diversity, equity and inclusion
2. Team Organization
  - a. Profile descriptions of the prime firm and all sub-consultant firms (if applicable)
  - b. Organization chart illustrating hierarchy of decision making roles of all consultant team members
  - c. Description of the day-to-day project point-of-contact including that person's statement of availability over the duration of the project and 4-5 essential qualities of effective project management
3. Performance on Past Projects
  - a. Please include relevant past project examples
    - i. Submit up to three (3) project examples for the prime firm
    - ii. Submit up to two (2) project examples for the sub consultant firms (if applicable)
4. Planning Philosophy, Critical Issues, Approach, and Schedule
  - a. Describe your team's philosophy for planning commercial corridors in vibrant, multi-ethnic, urban communities
  - b. Identify what you think are the 3-5 most critical issues in this project
  - c. Describe your team's approach to this project including all scope of work elements
  - d. Describe your team's approach to effectively engaging stakeholder and community members
  - e. Provide a project schedule showing key milestones, phases, etc.
5. References
  - a. Provide three (3) references for the prime firm
  - b. Provide two (2) references for each sub consultant (if applicable)
6. Ability to Provide Services
  - a. Answer the following questions
    - i. Is the prime firm currently for sale or involved in any transaction to expand or become acquired by another business entity? If yes, please explain the impact
    - ii. Is the prime firm dealing with any pending or past litigation or claims that would impact the prime firm's ability to perform under a contract?
    - iii. Is your company in default on any loan agreement or financing agreement?
7. Resumes
  - a. Resumes of all consultant team members listed in Section 2: Team Organization
8. Fee for services
  - a. The fee proposal shall be a lump sum, fixed fee for planning services.
  - b. Reimbursable expenses shall be listed separately from the fee

## **Exhibits**

- A. Grant submittal excerpts
- B. Area map

## **Exhibit A - Grant Proposal Excerpts**

### **Executive Summary**

Howard Street is a historically significant commercial corridor that is home to one of the most demographically diverse communities in the State of Illinois. It forms the boundary line between the City of Chicago to the south and the City of Evanston to the north. These municipalities have not collaborated on any economic plans for Howard Street in the past. Now, Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA) on behalf of the City of Chicago and the City of Evanston (Evanston) are working together to develop a collaborative economic recovery and commercial corridor revitalization plan for Howard Street.

Over the years, the Howard Street commercial area has suffered from uneven investment and a reputation for being unsafe. Between 2010 and 2020, independently developed municipality-based planning initiatives by both Evanston and Chicago were having a spotty but measurable impact. However, those impacts have disappeared as Howard Street has been especially hard-hit by the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The RISE Planning Grant opportunity inspired both municipalities to come together to facilitate an equitable shared vision to chart a future course to assure the long-term resiliency of the Howard Street commercial corridor and surrounding communities on both sides of Howard Street.

We estimate that the highly inclusive planning process will take place over a nine-month period launching when funding is secured, ideally beginning in 2022 and completing in 2023. Costs are estimated at around \$99,000. A professional planning consultancy will be collaboratively selected by RPBA and Evanston. The consultants will engage stakeholders including elected officials and business owners to residents, social service agency and educational institution leaders in the planning process. The resulting plan's implementation will occur over an extended period. Regular reviews and updates to the plan will be facilitated by the collaborative partners and reported to the community at large.

RPBA and Evanston are committed to working together to develop the first comprehensive, collaborative economic development and recovery plan with an implementation matrix for Howard Street to assure economic equity, vibrancy and resiliency.

## ***a.) Economic Recovery Plan Coverage area***

Howard Street is a commercial corridor located on the far north side of the City of Chicago and is a shared boundary line between the City of Chicago and the City of Evanston. The defined coverage area for this economic recovery plan is the portion of Howard Street that runs from Sheridan Road on the east to Western Avenue/Asbury Avenue on the west. This historic commercial corridor is one of the most demographically diverse communities in the state, and has been especially hard-hit by the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because each side of the street is in a different municipal jurisdiction, previous economic development planning exercises have focused on one side of the street or the other. The RISE Planning Grant offers a rare opportunity for both communities to come together to chart a future course for this important, shared commercial corridor. To that end, Rogers Park Business Alliance will partner with the City of Evanston to retain a consulting firm to develop a plan including both the Chicago and Evanston sides of Howard Street between Sheridan Road and Western Avenue/Asbury Avenue for a comprehensive, collaborative economic development and recovery plan.

## ***b.) Past Howard Street Planning Efforts***

### **Howard Street - Chicago Plans**

Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA) is an economic development organization serving the Rogers Park community on the far north side of the City of Chicago, including the Chicago side of Howard Street. RPBA last commissioned a corridor plan for a small area of Howard Street from Sheridan Road to Ridge Avenue [in 2006](#), with minor [updates conducted](#) in 2018. This plan focused only on the Chicago side of Howard Street.

The southern side of Howard Street is part of Special Service Area 19 (SSA19), which is managed by RPBA. The district plan for Special Service Area 19 likewise only speaks to the Chicago side of Howard Street.

### **Howard Street - Evanston Plans**

The north side of Howard Street is part of the City of Evanston's Howard-Ridge Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, which was established in 2004 and expires in 2026. A [TIF redevelopment plan](#) for the Evanston portion of Howard Street was commissioned in 2004 when the TIF was created.

Evanston businesses along Howard Street have created a volunteer merchant association to help coordinate events, communicate available resources and determine ways to improve the experience for visitors. The association has not been as effective as other districts in Evanston due to a lack of a plan and dedicated funding source.

### **Opportunity to Collaborate - Chicago & Evanston**

Although the existing plans on both sides of Howard provided a wealth of information and actionable strategies for the 2000s and 2010s, the small business and retail landscape has been transformed by the rise of e-commerce and the impact of COVID-19. While competition from online retail has been

putting pressure on independent businesses for much of the last decade, the pandemic has exacerbated it while also putting a great deal of strain on the hospitality and performing arts sectors that had previously been seen as key to redevelopment of historic urban business districts like Howard Street.

By coming together, RPBA and the City of Evanston, with support from the State of Illinois through the RISE Planning Grant program, will create a recovery plan that addresses the needs of this shared commercial corridor, incorporates equity and inclusion, and enables businesses and residents of Howard Street to successfully address the challenges of this post-COVID era.

#### ***d.) Experience and expertise relevant to managing comparable state grants and successfully developing local and regional plans***

Rogers Park Business Alliance has been host to an Illinois Small Business Development Center since 2020 and is accustomed to managing State of Illinois grants thanks to this partnership. RPBA has been a frequent convener and collaborator in the development of local plans, including leading the planning and implementation process of the [Vision Clark Street Master Plan](#). Currently, RPBA is partnering with Edgewater Chamber of Commerce and Loyola University Chicago in developing a new commercial corridor plan for the Devon Avenue area through the “[Elevate Devon](#)” planning process. RPBA is also a community partner agency participating in [We Will Chicago](#), the City’s first effort to develop a citywide comprehensive plan since 1966.

In 2017, RPBA spearheaded the creation of the Vision Clark Street Master Plan, retaining The Lakota Group to conduct research and community engagement for development of a corridor plan for Clark Street between Devon Avenue and Howard Street. Implementation of the plan is ongoing and has included the installation of new public murals, crosswalk art, branded street pole banners and development of new brand standards for the Clark Street commercial corridor.

The success of the Vision Clark Street Master Plan and its implementation led RPBA to join forces with the Edgewater Chamber of Commerce and Loyola University Chicago to undertake a similar planning process for Devon Avenue between Sheridan Road and Ravenswood Avenue. This group developed and released an RFP which led to a contract in January 2022 with Teska Associates to create a vision plan for Devon. The Elevate Devon planning process has been underway since February 2022 and is expected to conclude by the end of summer 2022. The plan will include short-term and long-term projects to be implemented over the next few years.

In addition to its deep experience in community engagement and corridor planning, RPBA is experienced in securing city, county and state grants, including:

- Illinois Small Business Development Center at RPBA
- Cook County Small Business Assistance Program
- Cook County Transit Plan
- Sole Service Provider for 4 Special Service Areas (#19, #24, #43, #54)
- City of Chicago Generalist
- City of Chicago Business Specialist
- City of Chicago Capital Specialist

- City of Chicago Cultural Specialist

The City of Evanston has successfully developed and implemented several plans at varying scales. In addition to its comprehensive plan, the City has focused on specific areas in order to address their unique planning issues, including five neighborhood and/or corridor plans. They include the following:

- Downtown Plan
- West Evanston Master Plan
- Central Street Corridor Plan
- Chicago Ave. Corridor Plan
- Lakefront Master Plan
- Southeast Evanston Comprehensive Neighborhood Plan

More recently, the City of Evanston's Economic Development team developed and released an RFP in March, 2022, for a Business District Strategy and Implementation Plan. The planning process is anticipated to begin in late May and is expected to conclude by the end of 2022. The plan will include specific strategies and recommendations both city-wide and unique to each business district/commercial corridor, as well short- and long-term projects to be implemented over the next few years.

The City of Evanston has extensive experience planning and executing similar projects with state and federal funding sources. The City has successfully managed state grants such as the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant (OSLAD) and the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP), as well as regional grants such as Invest in Cook. Economic Development staff is also overseeing ARPA distributions for projects addressing negative economic impacts.

### ***h) An assessment of economic distress or inequality in the proposed plan's coverage area;***

#### **Chicago Howard Street Economic Assessment**

Chicago's northernmost commercial corridor, Howard Street, is also a boundary line marking the city limits between Evanston on the north and the City of Chicago on the south. The Chicago side of Howard Street is located in the 60626 zip code, which was classified as being a "Disproportionately Impacted Area" for purposes of state and local COVID relief funding programs such as the State of Illinois' Back to Business and Business Interruption Grant Programs and includes two Qualified Census Tracts, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Howard CTA station at Howard and Paulina is also the terminus of the CTA Red, Purple and Yellow lines and is a significant bus terminal for CTA and PACE suburban bus lines. Although the area is anchored by a key public transit hub and has drawn significant public and private investment over the last 20 years, Howard Street and the surrounding neighborhood has struggled to overcome negative narratives around crime and public safety.

Despite the area's easy transit access and lengthy history as a major commercial thoroughfare, Howard Street has long suffered with commercial vacancy and disinvestment, which has been exacerbated by increased homelessness and crime since the start of the pandemic. Several Howard



Street businesses suffered damage from criminal activity during the civil unrest in the summer of 2020, and at least seven businesses have permanently closed since the start of 2021.

Chicago's "North of Howard" area is home to one of the largest concentrations of affordable and subsidized housing on the city's north side, and many social service organizations maintain a physical presence on Howard Street and Paulina Avenue. The area has also attracted several new mixed use and residential developments in recent years, including the Elevation Lofts apartment building on the Chicago side, plus the Ann Rainey Apartments and Evanston Gateway mixed use building on the Evanston side, both currently under construction. When another mixed-use building was proposed for a city-owned vacant lot at Howard and Ashland on the Chicago side of the street in 2019, many residents opposed the project due to concerns that any additional development would result in displacement and gentrification, and the project was ultimately scuttled. In December 2020, Metropolitan Planning Council completed a [community planning process](#) for the site in an effort to provide guidance for an eventual city RFP for redevelopment of the property.

As we move forward in the wake of the pandemic, we seek to create a more equitable and inclusive plan that can address the community's concerns about gentrification and displacement in and around the Howard Street corridor and serve as a new model for inclusive economic development for diverse communities throughout the State of Illinois.

### **Evanston Howard Street Economic Assessment**

Howard Street Commercial Corridor forms Evanston's southern border with the City of Chicago and has long suffered from excessive vacancies, aging infrastructure and a lack of community planning. In 2004, it was determined that this area met the qualifying criteria as a blighted area for a TIF designation. While City investment from the TIF helped to spur new redevelopment efforts and business attraction, the corridor continues to experience commercial vacancy rates higher than comparable business districts in Evanston. This has resulted in more limited retail and other services available to residents compared to other areas of Evanston.

The proposed coverage area of Howard Street has also been designated as a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) target area by the City of Evanston, where at least 51% of residents are low and moderate income and have the greatest needs and barriers to accessing services, and therefore a funding priority.

In Executive Order 14008, on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, President Biden directed the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to create a Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool to help Federal agencies identify disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. The screening tool provides socioeconomic information and identifies the census tracts on both sides of Howard Street as disadvantaged in at least one category, with the Evanston side landing in the 67th percentile for low-income households. The Chicago side falls in the 89th and 85th percentiles.

### ***i) An assessment of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on economic and social conditions in the proposed plan's coverage area;***

From 2010 to 2020, Howard Street made a great deal of progress in attracting investment and new businesses. On the Evanston side of the street, the Howard-Ridge TIF subsidized streetscape

improvements and the redevelopment of several long-vacant storefronts into destination businesses. On the Chicago side, private investment had started to draw new restaurants and businesses east of the CTA viaduct.

In 2020, much of the progress that had been made was lost as the pandemic forced the closure of community gathering places and limited availability of in-person services at businesses and social service agencies. Outdoor drug activity and loitering that had been declining on Howard Street for years came roaring back, especially on the Chicago side east of the CTA viaduct, as the Chicago Police Department saw a wave of officer retirements in the wake of the pandemic and redeployed police resources to other districts.

Several Howard Street businesses were hit by looting during the 2020 civil unrest and periodic vandalism of both occupied and unoccupied storefronts has continued ever since. Since the start of the pandemic, many Howard Street businesses left the community or closed their doors permanently, including Beachview Liquors, Best Massage, IM Beauty, YaMon Grill, Salerno's Pizza, I'm Soul Hungry, Edible Arrangements, and Uprising Barber Shop. Most of the closures came during 2021. Evanston businesses, mostly food establishments, temporarily closed, lost significant revenue and have not been able to hire staff either due to labor shortages or lack of funding. Palmhouse, an event space, is still struggling as a result of social distancing, masking, and crowd size limits that were in place until very recently.

The pandemic has increased poverty and homelessness in the neighborhood. This has become much more visible on Howard Street and in the wider community, with businesses noting a marked increase in the number of tent encampments in area parks and railroad viaducts. The combination of panhandling and camping along with the increased prevalence of violence, gang loitering and drug activity east of the CTA tracks has been a major concern for the remaining businesses as well as property owners and brokers trying to market vacant commercial and residential space in the area.

The Urban Institute developed an Emergency Rental Assistance Priority Index to estimate the level of need in a census tract by measuring the prevalence of low-income renters who are at risk of experiencing housing instability and homelessness. Three of the census tracts bordering Howard Street qualify as a high priority, and in the 96th to 99th percentile for COVID-19 Impact, which measures the share of adults without health insurance and low-income jobs lost to COVID-19.

***j) A plan to collect relevant data or information on issues impacting the current state of the local or regional economy. Depending on the scale and scope of the proposed plan, this might include elements such as the following. For any element included, please identify the implications of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis:***

In order to collect relevant data to identify opportunities and best practices for addressing the post-pandemic recovery needs of the Howard Street corridor, Rogers Park Business Alliance and the City of Evanston would retain a consulting firm to assist with collection of quantitative and qualitative data from the local community and surrounding trade area. We expect to conduct SWOT analysis and research on local demographics, economic structure and vitality, employment, industry clusters, public infrastructure, workforce development, housing and land use, and social and cultural resources and

conditions in the community as follows:

## **Economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats;**

### **Strengths**

The Howard Street corridor is distinguished by its transportation infrastructure, including the CTA terminal as well as the street itself, which has recently undergone streetscape and infrastructure upgrades. Although the area offers easy access to both transit and the lakefront, much of its housing stock has remained comparatively affordable, attracting a diverse population of primarily moderate to lower income residents, including many immigrants and people of color. Newer market-rate developments have also started to draw some wealthier residents to the area, further contributing to racial and economic diversity on and around the Howard Street Corridor.

The business community on Howard Street largely reflects the diversity of the surrounding community and is notable for its higher than average concentration of independent retail, restaurants, and personal services establishments, particularly Black-owned businesses. Area restaurants serve an array of international cuisine and represent countries including Jamaica, Senegal, and Belize. For all the area's challenges, the area is represented by a dedicated group of elected officials, city staff, community organizations, and merchant groups with a commitment to improving the corridor while preserving the diversity that makes Howard Street special.

### **Weaknesses**

Because Howard Street marks the border between the City of Chicago and the City of Evanston, coordinated planning for the corridor has been a consistent challenge. Although the two jurisdictions have successfully collaborated on public works projects like streetscape and infrastructure, economic development planning for the corridor as a whole has been limited by inconsistent communication and duplication of efforts in past administrations on both sides of the street. Noticeable manifestations of this divide for shoppers and visitors to Howard Street include different parking meter rates on the Chicago and Evanston sides of the street and different decorative banners on the light poles for each side. When calling 911 or 311 on Howard Street, it can be difficult to predict whether the call will be answered by Evanston or Chicago.

For both communities, the biggest challenge facing the Howard Street corridor has been crime and the perception that the area is unsafe, particularly near the CTA terminal and the blocks immediately to the east. Although a great deal of progress had been made to attract new businesses and shift the narrative on Howard Street from 2010-2019, the pandemic and its aftermath have led to a marked increase in drug activity, gang loitering, and gun violence, as well as nuisance crimes in and around the Howard Street corridor. Although we know that unhoused people and those with mental illness are statistically more likely to be victims of violence and crime rather than perpetrators, the increased concentration and visibility of these vulnerable populations on Howard Street have further contributed to the perception that the neighborhood is neglected and unsafe.

### **Opportunities & Threats**

While the presence of outdated and obsolete building stock and vacant lots has been a challenge for the Howard Street corridor, it also represents an opportunity for thoughtful, inclusive redevelopment to

meet the needs of this diverse community. Two new developments on the Evanston side of the street, the Ann Rainey Senior Apartments and the Evanston Gateway mixed-use development on the corner of Howard and Clark will draw new residents and businesses to the corridor in the near future. In the longer term, the vacant parcel at Howard and Ashland, which is owned by the City of Chicago, offers an especially unique opportunity to pilot new models for community wealth building through the use of limited equity mixed-use housing development and preservation of community garden space, consistent with the community-led planning initiative led by Metropolitan Planning Council in 2020.

There are also new workforce development opportunities available in the area, in addition to the existing employment resource center that has operated at Howard Area Community Center for many years. Legacy Barber College opened on Howard Street in 2021 and has developed partnerships with Evanston Township High School and other community organizations. They are also planning to expand the school's offerings to include hair braiding and cosmetology training. Potential expansion of the [ASPIRE Evanston Community Healthcare Workforce Development Program](#) to St. Francis Hospital just north of Howard Street could also open up new career and training opportunities for area residents.

Crime remains a top concern and potential threat to economic development and recovery in and around the Howard Street corridor, and the stigma surrounding public safety in the area has persisted as a barrier to business attraction and investment, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Demographic data and trends**

The area around Howard Street has long been one of the most racial and economically diverse communities in the state. Based on 2020 census data, Rogers Park and the southeast corner of Evanston both saw modest population growth, owing in part to new residential development in both communities. Although the population has increased overall, there was a decrease in the number of Black residents. As in many areas of the country, housing costs have increased steadily since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there's growing concern in the community that residents of color are being priced out, particularly in Rogers Park.

As part of the process of developing a recovery plan for Howard Street, we hope to gather additional data about community demographic trends, employment, and housing affordability in order to identify opportunities to preserve the area's diversity while closing the economic equity gap.

### **Economic structure and vitality;**

Howard Street itself is a mixed-use corridor which includes many historic buildings featuring ground-floor commercial space with housing above, as well as a few larger auto-oriented retail centers at Howard and Clark and Howard and Western. Many of the ground floor commercial spaces are occupied by independent restaurants and retail businesses serving the area's diverse population, while tenants at the newer shopping centers include national brands like Marshalls, Ross, Jewel-Osco, Dollar Tree and Walgreens.

Despite millions of dollars in public and private investment on Howard Street in both Chicago and Evanston over the last 20 years, commercial vacancies have persisted throughout the district, and have increased due to the economic impact of the pandemic and subsequent social unrest. Since the arrival of COVID-19 in Chicago in 2020, many Howard Street businesses have permanently closed,

particularly the independently owned restaurants and stores that make the area unique. In addition to the direct economic impact of the pandemic itself on area businesses, the 2020 civil unrest and the increase in visible homelessness and drug activity has made commercial vacancies on Howard Street more difficult to fill.

By collecting fresh data on retail leakage as well as commercial and residential occupancy, vacancy, pricing, and conditions on and around Howard Street we will identify opportunities for redevelopment and business attraction that will lift up the surrounding community and provide amenities for neighbors and visitors.

## **Employment**

Like most areas around the country, both Rogers Park and Evanston saw unemployment levels spike during the early days of the pandemic, though they have declined to pre-pandemic levels in recent months. As in most areas, minority unemployment was and is higher than the overall unemployment rate.

Households in the Evanston census tracts bordering Howard Street ranked in the 77th and 85th percentile of uninsured households and high percentage of adults who worked in lower income jobs lost during the pandemic.

On the Chicago side of Howard Street, the census tracts in and immediately bordering the Howard Street corridor ranked in the 96th and 99th percentile for households relying on low-wage employment. We intend to work with consultants to gather additional data on employment trends in the neighborhood in order to identify top employers for these census tracts and use that data to develop workforce and economic development programming that will advance equity and help to shrink the racial wealth gap in the community.

## **Prominent industry clusters**

Howard Street has been a commercial corridor since the early 20th century when it was anchored by the CTA station and the Howard Theater and known as a destination for nightlife and entertainment, particularly for residents of the North Shore suburbs, many of which banned liquor until as late as the 1970s and 80s. Today, the primary industries on Howard Street are storefront retail, food establishments and service businesses. Several social services organizations also maintain physical offices on and around Howard Street, including Housing Opportunities for Women, Howard Area Community Center, Access Community Health, A Just Harvest, and Good News Partners. Nearby St. Francis hospital is a Level 1 trauma center and serves the north side of Chicago and south Evanston.

## **Public infrastructure**

Howard Street is an important transportation corridor for both public transit and vehicle traffic. As part of the Howard Street Corridor Project, new water mains were installed in 2020. Streetscaping, roadway resurfacing, curb and gutter replacement, and sidewalk, bike lane, street light, and traffic signal improvements were completed in 2021. The CTA station at Howard and Paulina is an important community asset and anchor, serving as the terminus for the Red, Yellow, and Purple line trains as well as several CTA and PACE bus routes. Although the Howard station was renovated from 2006-2009 with funding from the now-defunct Howard/Paulina TIF, and transit improvements under the

Red-Purple Modernization Program have continued along the northern portion of the Red Line, CTA ridership declined precipitously during the COVID-19 pandemic. Average daily ridership at the Howard Station fell from 2,430 in 2019 to 1,206 in 2020, a drop of over 50%.

The decline in transit usage was accompanied by a dramatic rise in crime in and around CTA stations and vehicles. The Howard Street station was especially hard hit. Real or perceived lack of safety around the Howard Street CTA station represents another barrier to attracting businesses and residents to the Howard Street corridor.

In addition to gathering data on crime statistics and post-COVID traffic counts and transit usage trends, we also hope to research additional opportunities to develop technological infrastructure like broadband and 5g that could further support the local economy and help to close the equity gap.

### **Education and training resources**

Howard Street residents on the Evanston side are served by Evanston-Skokie School District 65 for K-8 education, Evanston Township High School District 202 for secondary education as well as Oakton Community College. Residents of the Chicago side are served by Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges, the closest of which are Gale Community Academy and Harry S. Truman College, respectively.

In addition to local public school and community colleges, several social services agencies in the area also provide workforce development and training programs in the community, including A Just Harvest and Howard Area Community Center. Howard Street also recently welcomed the opening of [Legacy Barber College](#), which opened in 2021 after being delayed by the pandemic. St. Francis hospital system could be a workforce development opportunity for the community. Additional research and data collection is needed in order to identify ways we can best connect Howard-area residents with education and workforce training opportunities that will open the door to living-wage employment and family wealth building.

### **Land use and housing;**

In 2013, RPBA and SSA19 worked with Counselors of Real Estate to commission a report and recommendations on potential redevelopment of key properties on Howard Street. That study identified physical deficiencies and obsolete uses limiting the potential for adaptive reuse of several existing commercial buildings, and identified development of mixed income and market rate housing in the area as a priority, particularly on the vacant Howard/Ashland site. That particular property remains mostly vacant to this day, although a portion of the land has been repurposed as a temporary community garden. A handful of new developments are in process or have been completed since the 2013 report. Much of the area's housing stock consists of older multi-unit buildings, and includes a high concentration of subsidized units, particularly in the North of Howard community on the Chicago side of Howard.

The City of Evanston has a Climate Action Resilience Plan and requires sustainable building practices through its building code. Both cities have affordable housing requirements for new residential construction. A coordinated corridor plan will likely include the need to provide mixed income housing with new commercial development to encourage new residents who will provide the "eyes on the street" similar to many of the successful mixed use business districts elsewhere.

## **10. Social, recreational, arts and cultural development;**

The Willye White Park field house was constructed in 2008 and serves as a community anchor, offering sports, arts, and fitness programming for youth and adults. The Howard corridor is also home to two storefront theaters; Factory Theater performs original comedy works in the historic Howard Theater building on the Chicago side of Howard, and Theo Ubique performs musicals in a newly-built theater on the Evanston side of Howard that was completed in 2019 with significant philanthropic support as well as funding from the Evanston-Ridge TIF.

Through SSA19, RPBA funds neighborhood beautification and maintenance as well as special events like the Chalk Howard Street festival on the Chicago side. Although the festival pivoted to a virtual model during COVID-19, an in-person street festival will be returning in August, 2022.

In Evanston, the newly formed Howard Street Business Association is considering collaboration with the Rogers Park Business Alliance to fund and promote music and market festivals. Further planning and funding sources are needed.

### ***k) Documentation of the public outreach strategy and a list of stakeholders that will contribute to the Economic Recovery Plan.***

Effective community outreach is crucial to creating an actionable and inclusive plan for the Howard Street corridor. Based on the success of past community planning efforts in both Rogers Park and Evanston, our teams would work together to ensure that a variety of diverse stakeholders are included in the planning process, including local businesses, residents, elected officials, and community organizations. A sample list of the organizations and officials we plan to include in this process through a steering committee and focus groups includes:

- **Economic Development & Business organizations**
  - Evanston Chamber of Commerce
  - Howard Street Merchants' Association (Evanston)
  - Howard Street SSA #19
  
- **Nonprofit agencies & community organizations**
  - A Just Harvest
  - C247 Ministries
  - Family Matters
  - Gale Local School Council
  - Good News Partners
  - Housing Opportunities for Women
  - Howard Area Community Center
  - Willye White Park Advisory Council
  
- **Elected officials;**
  - Evanston Councilmember Devon Reid
  - Chicago Aids. Maria Hadden & Debra Silverstein

- State Rep. Kelly Cassidy
- State Sen. Mike Simmons
- US Rep. Jan Schakowsky

***1) A list of specific economic issues the Economic Recovery Plan will cover. Depending on the scale and scope of the proposed plan, this might include elements such as the following. For any element included, please identify the implications of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis:***

### **Employment and jobs**

Workforce development and access to quality jobs will be key components to the long term vitality of the study area. Pandemic-related job loss, particularly low-income jobs, is disproportionately high in the neighborhoods surrounding Howard Street. The study will include opportunities to increase entrepreneurship and find linkages between employers, schools, and community workforce development partners.

The City of Evanston recently implemented a new Workforce Development Coordinator position to focus on and coordinate workforce development initiatives. The result of this plan could help direct the City of Evanston's workforce strategies. Expanding the NorthShore University Hospital ASPIRE program, potentially partnering with AMITA Health St. Francis Hospital, could also bring additional workforce development opportunities that create quality living wage jobs to nearby residents.

Other opportunities to address pandemic-related job loss and underemployment could include entrepreneurship training programs tied to City incentives and small business incubator programs, as well as partnerships with area colleges and anchor institutions.

### **Population and demographic trends**

Black population loss in the Chicagoland region is well documented, with relocations to the southeast and southwest of the US. Reasons for this include school quality, safety, job opportunities, and most notably generations of segregation and structural racism. But like other populations, weather, housing affordability and job growth in other regions is attractive to middle and upper class Black households.

### **Condition and adequacy of physical infrastructure (transportation, water & sewer, broadband, etc.)**

The study area has below average access to quality infrastructure and, according to the EPA Environmental Justice Screening Tool, ranks above the 90th percentile for toxicity of wastewater discharge. The City of Evanston and City of Chicago are embarking on lead service line replacement in residential districts. It is not clear how these efforts will be rolled out in mixed use commercial/residential districts like Howard Street. Planning efforts should address this important health initiative.

### **Housing**



Opportunities to expand housing along Howard Street, perhaps built on the upper floors of a mixed use commercial/residential developments will add retail customers and a constituent base who will become committed to the neighborhood. The addition of housing units will help slow the growth of housing prices (i.e. prices stabilizing as more units are added to the marketplace). City of Chicago and Evanston affordable housing ordinances require the inclusion of affordable housing in new developments. New housing developed on Howard Street will likely be rental, considering the mixed use nature of the corridor. Furthermore, investors and lenders continue to limit funding to rental housing.

The need for additional affordable housing options within this area is a high priority, as housing instability has increased during the pandemic. The area surrounding Howard Street, particularly on the Chicago side, includes a high percentage of severely cost-burdened low-income renters, severely overcrowded households, and unemployed people. Future plans could include limited equity/ownership models for affordable housing and measures to prevent displacement and homelessness.

### **Quality of life**

For a successful post-pandemic recovery, and to make Howard Street a more vibrant, equitable, and sustainable place, a holistic and unified approach to corridor planning must be taken which considers the overall well-being of all who live, work, and travel along both sides of the street.

High levels of crime, both real and perceived, has long been a deterrent for private investment and business attraction, impacting both nearby residents and existing businesses. Many different strategies are needed to combat this complex issue. An in-depth analysis and plan can help guide strategies for design, lighting, community engagement, public space activation, and reducing storefront vacancies (putting more “eyes on the street”), which can work in concert to increase community safety.

Additionally, this planning process can help the City of Evanston and RPBA identify opportunities to enhance existing neighborhood amenities, uncover unmet community needs, and recommend new ways to increase the vibrancy of the retail environment. To ensure that improvements will benefit everyone, it will be critical to engage a wide spectrum of stakeholders, prevent resident displacement, and develop strategies to retain local businesses.

### ***m) Strategy for identifying specific investments and initiatives that will support economic recovery from the pandemic in the locality or region, including investments and initiatives that are eligible for SLFRF funds;***

Currently, there are several organizations, including City of Evanston and RPBA, working on various efforts to retain businesses and attract new businesses to Howard Street. We are also working to enhance the streetscape and pedestrian environment for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. The pandemic forced a lot of activity outdoors in many business districts. However, alfresco dining and outdoor markets have been limited on Howard Street. This is partially explained by lack of space in an urban environment, but also due to different municipal codes, traffic management, and the absence of a cohesive plan. Efforts to make improvements and to market the area are often duplicated and

overlapping; there is no cohesive plan and little is done to measure effectiveness. This grant provides the opportunity for collaboration and to align all of our efforts for a successful recovery .

An in-depth study of Howard Street, including an extensive community engagement process, reflective of the diverse stakeholder base, an assessment of existing conditions (i.e. residential, commercial, social, etc), identification of consumer expenditure gaps, comparison to similar corridors, and an analysis of policies and regulations impacting the area will all help better guide future planning efforts. Based on the recommendations included in the Howard Street corridor plan, the City of Evanston and RPBA can begin to identify actionable strategies and initiatives to help bring about equitable changes to make Howard Street a vibrant commercial corridor.

The City of Evanston economic development staff and the Evanston Howard Street merchant association will collaborate with Rogers Park Business Alliance's SSA leadership to have a unified approach to corridor improvements, business attraction/retention, marketing, and events. In addition to potentially pursuing a shared or coordinated Special Service Area for Howard Street, the following are additional opportunities for post pandemic recovery:

- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for Chicago side of Howard
- Amend Howard Ridge TIF on Evanston side to extend the life of the TIF
- Pursue opportunities for mixed use/affordable housing development throughout the district including on city-owned properties (e.g. 727-29 Howard Street in Evanston and the Howard/Ashland site in Rogers Park)
- Support of community nonprofits
- Neighborhood schools & workforce development
- Improved child care options to improve work opportunities for families
- Coordinated retail, service, and food establishment retention and attraction effort improving collaboration, decreasing competition.

***n) Letters of support from stakeholders and the public. This shall include documentation of support from affected counties and/or municipalities as required by Section C.1;***

The application includes letters of support from Howard Area Community Center and several elected officials, which are being submitted as separate attachments:

- Howard Area Community Center
- 49th Ward Ald. Maria Hadden
- 50th Ward Ald. Debra Silverstein
- State Rep. Kelly Cassidy
- Evanston 8th Ward. Ald. Devon Reid
- Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss

***o) Commitment to review and update the plan periodically.***

The City of Evanston and Rogers Park Business Alliance have significant experience with plan implementation, accountability and transparency. We project that the Plan will have an online presence via our respective organizational websites - and perhaps even its own website - where ongoing implementation updates will be posted publicly. In addition, the collaborative City of Evanston and

RPBA Team will present periodic updates to the City Councils of Evanston and Chicago, to our respective organizational Economic Development Committees, to constituents, stakeholders and at regularly scheduled Ward meetings on both the Evanston and Chicago sides of Howard Street. The Team will provide at minimum an annual review/status report summarizing aspects of the plan that have been implemented as well as an update on the status of ongoing efforts. We estimate that plan implementation will unfold over several years, with measurable impacts within three years from the completion of the plan. At the end of that period, our two organizations will pursue an update to the plan.

**Exhibit B - Area Map:**



