

170 YEARS OF PROGRESS 1837–PRESENT

THE GREENING OF CHICAGO

1837
City of Chicago Incorporates
and adopts the motto *Urbs in Horto*: “City in a Garden.”

1900
Reversal of the Chicago River
Considered a milestone in the history of Chicago, the flow of the river is permanently reversed to carry polluted water away from the city’s freshwater supply through canals connecting Lake Michigan with the Des Plaines River, preventing the death of thousands annually from water-borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera.



“IT’S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE, WHO THEY ARE, AND WHAT THEY STAND FOR.”

—ADAM D. TIHANY, DESIGNER, ONE SIXTYBLUE

1909
BURNHAM PLAN
Daniel H. Burnham’s visionary “Plan of Chicago” creates a picture of a City Beautiful: the integration of transportation and recreation to better organize buildings, streets, and parks. In the following decades it inspires the creation of a greenbelt around the metropolitan area, the development of lakefront parks with cultural enhancements such as the Field Museum of Natural History, and the establishment of new transportation elements.

1963
Openlands
Since its founding, this nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing public open space in northeastern Illinois has secured more than 45,000 acres of land for public parks, forest preserves, greenway corridors, and urban gardens.

“THE GREENING OF CHICAGO IS REALLY ANCHORED IN THE HISTORY OF CHICAGO, AND THE EVOLUTION TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY IS MORE RECENT WITH MAYOR DALEY’S APPOINTMENT” —SADHU JOHNSTON, CHICAGO’S COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

1976
Farmers’ Markets
Oak Park Farmers’ Market, the first of these markets, opens its first seasons, bringing regional produce to the city.

1989
MAYOR RICHARD M. DALEY ELECTED
“Hizzhonor” has been reelected in four subsequent elections and has served five consecutive terms, earning a national reputation for being “green” and for innovative community-based programs addressing education, public safety, and neighborhood development.

1989
Tree Planting
The city plants more than 400,000 trees, offsetting the pollution from 38,000 cars a year.

1991
Landscape Ordinance
A new local law is passed that outlines the responsibility developers have to integrate green elements into their city projects.

1992
Biking Initiatives
The Bike 2000 Plan represents the city’s vision for making pedal power an integral part of daily life, establishing a network of 114 miles of on-street bike lanes and 50 miles of trails along with 10,000 bike racks, more than in any city in the United States.



1995
Planted Medians
Landscaping begins on some 75 miles of median strips throughout Chicago.

1999
GREEN CITY MARKET
Chicago’s first sustainable market improves the availability of diverse high-quality local foods by connecting area farmers to chefs, restaurateurs, food organizations, and the public.



2000
Mayor Daley Rezones
In response to a boom in residential construction, the city launches an initiative to overhaul its zoning ordinance, envisioning a variety of regulations to enhance neighborhood aesthetics and encourage pedestrian-oriented environments.



2001
City Hall’s Rooftop Garden
Designed to test different types of green-roof systems, heating-and-cooling benefits, success rates of native and nonnative vegetation, and reductions in rainwater runoff, this initiative kicks off the Chicago Green Roof program.

2002
Center for Green Technology & Green Building Resource Center
Offering resources to those interested in incorporating sustainable-design and green materials into their building projects, the center is the first municipal building in the nation to receive LEED Platinum, the highest possible rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

2003
Water Agenda
A number of initiatives and policies are announced to conserve freshwater and manage rainwater to improve Chicago’s overall water quality.

2004
MILLENIUM PARK
First planned in 1997 as a way to expand Grant Park by transforming railroad tracks and parking lots, the park features Frank Gehry’s Jay Pritzker Pavilion, the most sophisticated outdoor concert venue of its kind in the United States.



2005–Present
Environmental Action Agency
The city commits to a wide range of environmental initiatives to continue improving the quality of life in neighborhoods, conserving and protecting natural resources, and encouraging Chicagoans to be healthy, smart, and environmentally conscious in their homes and businesses.

This page left, Charlie Westerman for Openlands; right Mike Innocenzi. Opposite page clockwise from top, City of Chicago, The One and Only Bob, Danielle Wiley