



**Redefining
Gentrification in
Chicago's West Loop:
How Commercialization
Transformed a Desolate
Meatpacking District
into the City's Trendiest
Consumption
Destination**

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

Background
Neighborhood Overview
Data & Methods
Key Findings
Policy Recommendations
Future Research

02

KEY TOPICS

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**WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR
PRIVATE CAPITAL TO
SATURATE A SPACE
THAT WAS NEVER
INTENDED FOR
RESIDENTIAL FUNCTION?**

HOW DOES THIS CASE BUILD UPON,
OR DISRUPT, ACADEMIC
GENTRIFICATION LITERATURE?

BACKGROUND

PRE-1970S

Great Depression leads to abandoned buildings and warehouses
Time Magazine calls it "land of the living dead" in 1949

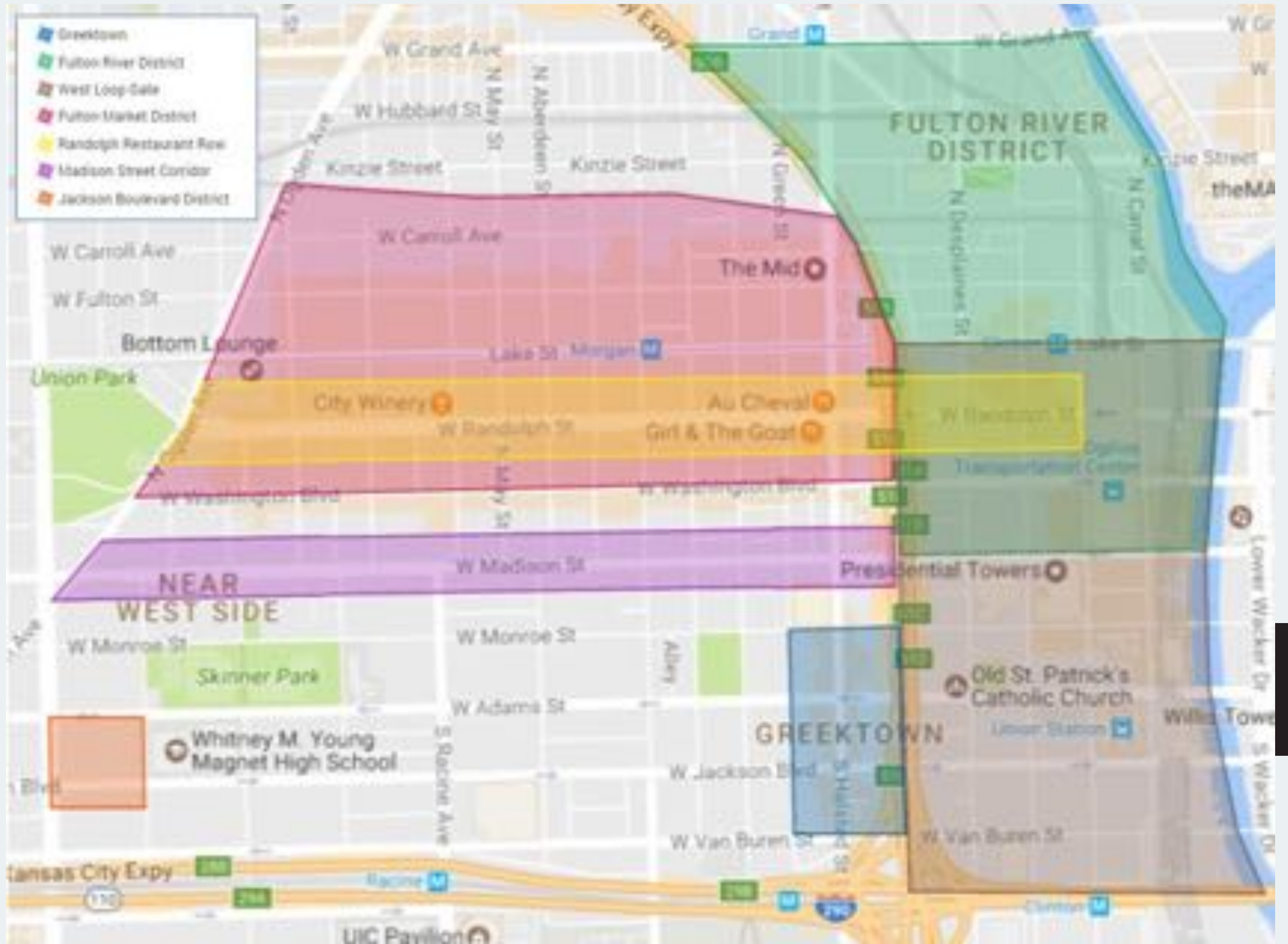
1970S-1990S

Near West Side predominantly occupied by meatpackers and commercial storage warehouses
Sidewalks occupied with alcoholics, prostitutes, blood pools from meatpacking activity

1990S - PRESENT

Influx of global capital, private investments (McD's HQ, Google, Twitter)
Transition from "Near West Side" identity to "West Loop"

Neighborhood Overview



TURNING POINTS



1990:

HARPO STUDIO OPENS

Put West Loop on the map as an up-and-coming corridor ready for revitalization

1996:

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

Held at the United Center, fueled planners and developers to invest in revitalizing Near West Side

1999: TIF PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT

City-backed plan to convert empty warehouses and storage to retail and office space

TURNING POINTS



2010:

GIRL AND THE GOAT OPENS

Put Randolph on the map for forthcoming slew of high-end restaurants

2012:

MORGAN GREEN LINE STATION

Made West Loop more transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly

2015: **GOOGLE OPENS**

MIDWEST HQ IN WEST LOOP

Significant indicator of growing economic engine

DATA

1. Interviews with stakeholders ranging from community organizers, small business owners, private developers
2. Community meetings that center around development proposals
3. West Loop community Facebook groups

METHODS

Transcriptions and visual spreadsheet





Key Findings

1. TENSION OVER GENTRIFICATION

- I find there are two camps of people who disagree on the extent that gentrification defines West Loop's Chicago
- First group do not believe WL gentrified because there was nothing and no one to displace
- Second group believe WL has and continues to gentrify because there are people later displaced by sky-rocketing property values and taxes

2. PROCESSUAL COMMERCIALIZATION

- Intention to commercialize drove WL's development
- No singular turning point was the impetus for change, each key moment produced its own ripple effect of consequences



Key Findings

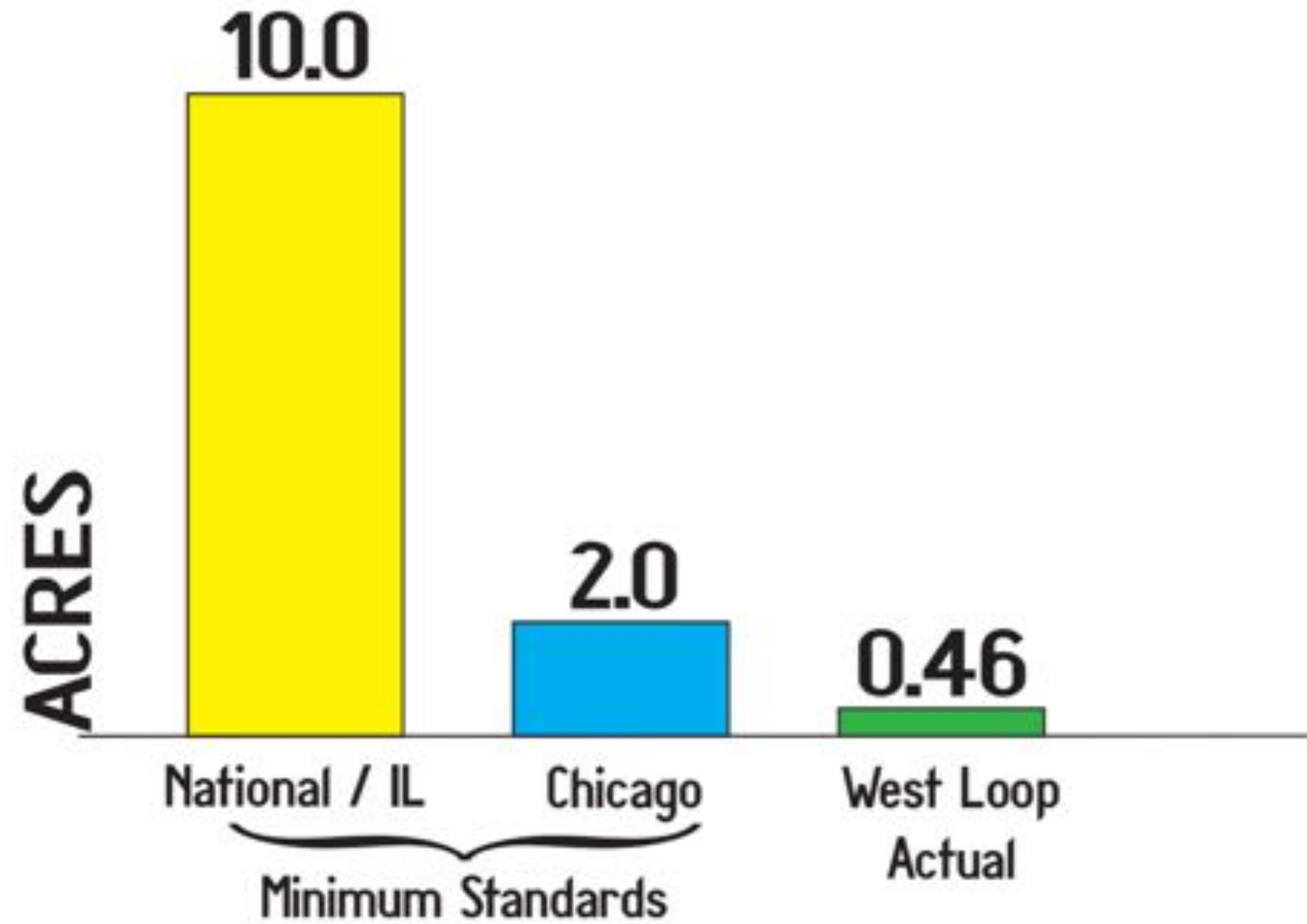
3. PREDICTABILITY \neq PREPARATION

- Sudden and massive influx of private investments did not leave enough room for public investments
- Commercial amenities such as restaurants, bars, salons are abundant but public spaces, parks, and public schools aren't
- Grappling with obsolete infrastructure that was intended for warehouses, not residents

4. CONSUMPTION DESTINATION

- Abundant transience, few people establishing "roots" in WL
- Lack of capacity for community building efforts
- Urban gatekeeping due to high cost of living

Open Space per 1,000 residents



West Loop's concerning lack of open space for public uses

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. COLLABORATE WITH PRIVATE DEVELOPERS TO ENHANCE PUBLIC SPACES

Suggest private developments to have ample green space and mixed use functions for street level plans

2. HOLD COMMUNITY MEETINGS THAT DISCUSS MORE THAN PRIVATE DEVELOPMENTS

Provide opportunities for neighborhood stakeholders to voice their visions and opinions on community building

3. ENFORCE MEASURED GROWTH

Alleviate frustrations that West Loop development boom is untethered

CONCLUSION

In a space that was never intended for residential functions, the West Loop is a case of processual commercialization instead of gentrification. It increasingly resembles a consumption destination and community building capacity is noticeably absent.



13



FUTURE RESEARCH

Investigating placemaking in a newly established neighborhood. Can placemaking forces come from dominantly private investments and global capital?