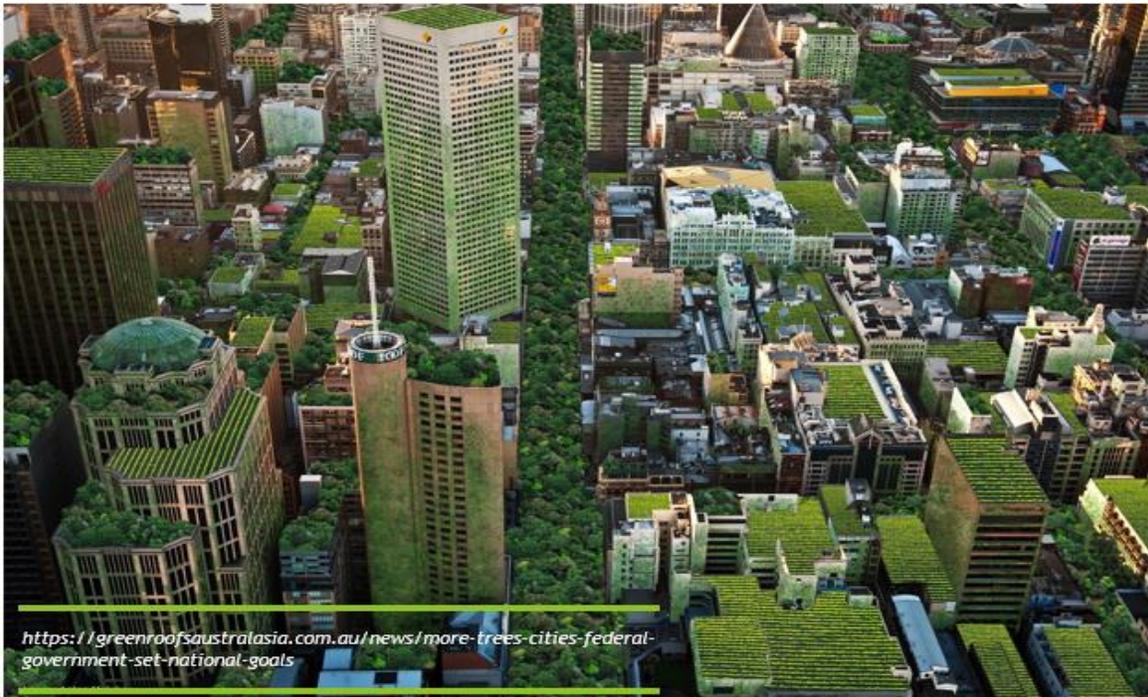


Green Amenity Gentrification:

Mapping Displacement Pressure from Rails to
Trails Projects.



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Table of Contents

1. Acknowledgements	iii
2. Executive Summary	iv
3. Introduction	1
4. The Challenge: Chicago’s New Englewood Line Trail	4
5. Case Studies & Methods	5
6. 606 Data Analysis	8
7. Recommendations	13
8. Conclusion	14
9. References Cited	15
10. Appendix	18

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Executive Summary:

Park projects have been used to beautify the city and bring other benefits to communities. As we adorn our cities, we are at threat of environmental gentrification or the influx of wealthy residents to historically disenfranchised neighborhoods due to new green spaces. How could we utilize parks to garner the benefits they provide without pricing people out of their homes? Research in recent years has focused primarily on uneven development patterns related to new "green" amenities or the emphasis on private gains. Through the development of case studies, analysis of state and federal data, and mapping environmental gentrification, this study explores two prominent examples of elevated greenways (the 606 in Chicago and Highline Park in New York City) to develop insights for emerging projects such as Chicago's new Englewood Line Park. Findings reinforce that gaining broader community impacts for these Rail to Trail Projects will depend on the city's ability to provide related affordable housing options, effective policy changes to protect the long-term residents, and engaging coalitions for broader and more holistic planning efforts.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that there are many positive externalities created by parks and open spaces. These spaces help to beautify a region. These externalities increase the surrounding area's tax base and attract more investments into the community. Green spaces also provide the denizens of the surrounding area environmental amenities, fulfill the gap of services for the surrounding neighborhood, and improve quality of life. More importantly, green spaces help build up the surrounding area's resiliency to help stand against environmental shocks due to climate change.

Parks and open spaces are crucial to the image of an area as well. Communities having well-known and well-maintained parks may be one reason to move to that new area over another one. There has, unfortunately, been a trend forming that has been seen a lot in modern times, where there is a focus on environmental improvement and economic growth at the expense of social equity. This is seconded by researchers from DePaul University. They state that "concerns are also growing about the role of public works investments in accelerating housing market change, reducing neighborhood affordability, and potentially displacing long-time residents" (DePaul University, 2016, pg. 4).

This impact on affordability and displacement, generally known as gentrification, is one of the core social equity challenges of our time. The literature of gentrification is rife with variances due to research on the topic being unclear, the most productive definition would be the socioeconomic reconfiguration of an area, usually followed by an increase of income due to market-driven policies, or new developments within a specified community. A sudden investment into such an area could lead to the displacement of the local populous, which is when households must move or are prevented from moving into a neighborhood due to conditions beyond their ability to control or prevent (e.g., rent increases). These displacements could be physical, economic, or exclusionary, and it occurs in all types of neighborhoods, not just the most impoverished communities.

When these investments into a community are in green amenities (e.g., parks), you can cause Environmental Gentrification. Environmental gentrification can materialize in many forms but potentially causes increased housing prices and displacement the more extensive the green infrastructure project is. The type of project could create the most benefit but has the chance to create the most harm is called Rails to Trails projects (RTP). RTPs are different from other forms of green spaces in that " RTP's often link commerce, recreation, tourism, and real estate development to create signature projects in urban areas" (Rigolon & Nemeth, 2018, pg. 1). Examples of these large public infrastructure projects are the High Line in New York, the Beltline in Atlanta, and the 606 in Chicago.

This topic is rising in importance as Chicago initiates a new Rails to Trails project called the Englewood Line Trail (ELT). This project proposed as part of a community project in 2009 called the New Englewood Remaking America (ERA) Trail Community Vision Plan. The proposed trail then became a vital component of the Green Healthy Neighborhoods (GHN) Plan that the Chicago Plan Commission approved in 2014. The GHN Plan is a 10-20-year vision to maximize the use of resources and vacant land within Chicago's Englewood, West Englewood, Washington Park, and Woodlawn community areas. Plus, parts of the New City, Fuller Park, and Greater Grand Crossing community areas (seen in Figure 1).

The popular narrative that has been used during the process of the ELT tells a story of successful bootstraps community activism. However, there is a worry that "the folksy legend belies deep ties to the city's elite" (Loughran, 2014, pg. 55). In 1976, Harvey Molotch famously termed a concept called the 'growth machine'. Molotch explained that the "growth machine is an effort by city governments and elite private interests to leverage parks for-profit" (Loughran, 2014, pg. 49), and to continuously develop with only economic growth in mind. The issue is that many of the people this type of development ends up benefiting are people in a higher socioeconomic class. It is difficult on vulnerable populations because these populations have contributed the least to climate change, have had the least access to environmental amenities such as green space, are the most exposed to climate hazards and effects, have the fewest resources to utilize, and are among the social groups most likely to experience residential and social displacement. Another name for the growth machine is entrepreneurial public spaces.

Another similar core issue is what is known as Spatial Privilege. Spatial "Privilege" is a term defined as the "hegemonic ability to make claims on public space, based on high standing within socially constructed and intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, class, sexuality, and national origin" (Loughran, 2014, pg. 61). This spatial privilege is realized in the difference between parks that host daily cultural events and are funded by wealthy conservancies. Parks like Chicago's Washington Park serve more like lines of race and class demarcation than spaces of consumption where the trend is not one of development but disinvestment.

This research aims to examine different RTP case studies and compare the similarities and differences between the case studies and the new Englewood Line Trail and provide the City of Chicago recommendations on avoiding the pitfalls of previously built RTP's. The goal is to answer the question: How could we utilize parks to garner the benefits they provide without pricing people out of their homes? To begin to answer that question we first need an understanding of the historical context of the area before understanding what effect an RTP might have.

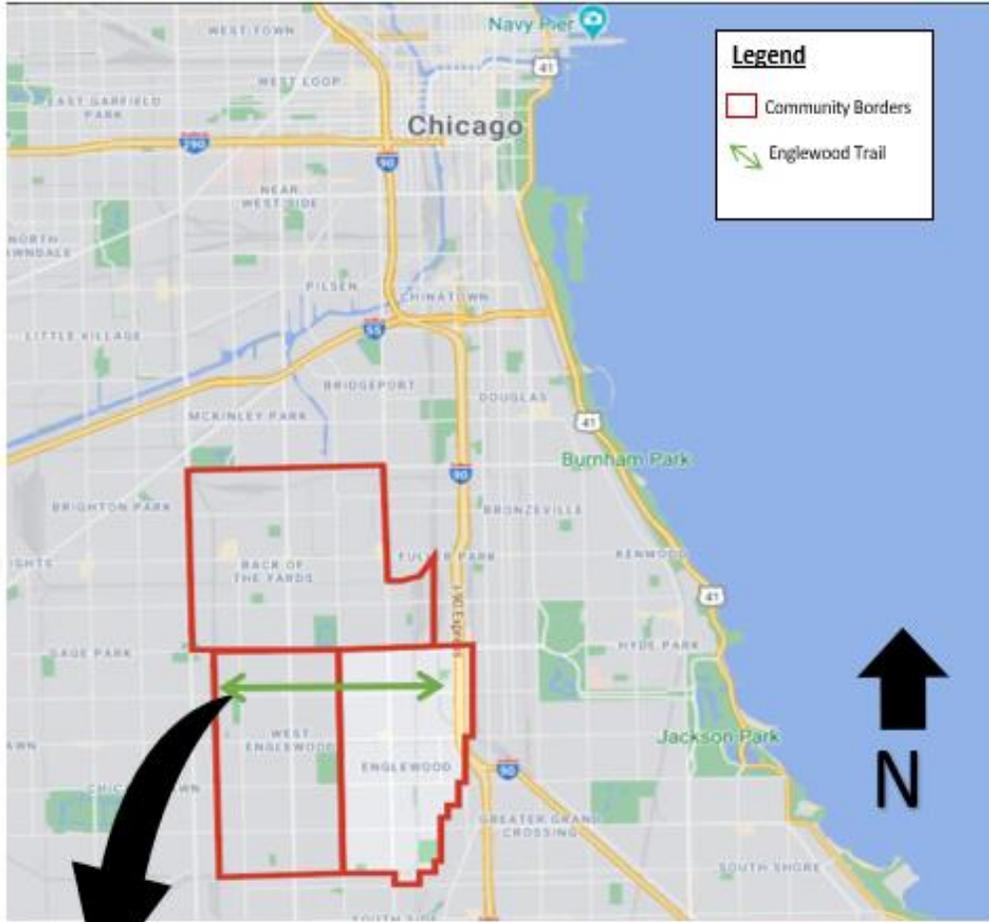


Figure 1: Locational Context for the Englewood Line Trail

The Challenge: Chicago's New Englewood Line Trail

Englewood is a predominately African American neighborhood that was once home to a bustling commercial district. The intersection of 63rd and Halsted streets in Englewood grew to become the largest commercial district in the 1920s. However, due to decades of disinvestment and a declining population, the under-resourced community was left with many abandoned buildings and vacant lots. According to the GHN Plan, "Greater Englewood, Washington Park, and Woodlawn lost nearly half of their housing units between 1960 and 2010, decreasing from 90,875 units to 45,509 units" (City of Chicago, 2021, pg. 10).

In 2013, Chicago's Plan Commission approved a deal giving "Norfolk Southern land owned by the city to expand its Englewood rail yard in exchange for the unused rail embankment for the trail" (Khut, 2017). The rail property was transferred from Norfolk Southern to the City in December 2018. The Englewood Line Trail was proposed in 2009, was not seen as having a greater chance to make a return on investment.

The elevated Englewood Line Trail will run parallel to 59th Street and eventually cover approximately 1.7 miles from Hoyne Avenue on the west to Wallace Street on the east. The City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and Teska Associates began work to design the trail in 2015. They planned to begin construction on one of the access points in partnership with Greencorps Chicago in 2017. Unfortunately, due to various reasons; including COVID; it has yet to break ground in 2021.

"ENGLEWOOD AREA WAS SEEN AS A HIGHLY STIGMATIZED NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WOULD NOT GENTRIFY VERY QUICKLY DUE TO AN INTERNALIZED RACISM."

Alessandro Rigolon

The city's goal was to "develop clusters of city-owned vacant land for urban agriculture along the Englewood Line trail" (City of Chicago, 2021, pg. 29). The City of Chicago has received funding from the USDA to develop more urban agriculture on the proposed trail banks. Funding was received from an Evanston-based Iroquois Valley Farms and Fresh Coast Capital, a Chicago-based company. Other than some city and other organizations' initial movements, the new park trail was mainly a grassroots movement from its early conception. The movement was due in part to Englewood's citizens asking the city for more green space and more economic development opportunities in the area. Just because it started as a grassroots movement does not mean it will be a successful plan, as we will see later.

Case Studies & Methods

There is an opportunity to make RTP's beneficial for everyone. The best way to learn how to handle mistakes is to look back to other similar projects to solve similar problems. New York's High Line, Atlanta's Beltline, the 606, and Seoul's Gyeongui Line Forest Park are a few examples that were intended to provide the neighborhoods with amenities but turned into more of a tactic to increase the value of land and property in surrounding neighborhoods (Checker, 2011). The two examples of RTP's that most pertain to this example are the Highline in New York and Chicago's own 606. These were chosen because of the considerable amount of information on the Highline and the local context of the 606. These projects are not complete failures. Many RTPs gained international recognition for being desirable urban amenities but failed to protect against displacement.

This analysis draws on journalistic accounts, minutes from Community Board meetings, press releases, official publications (from High Line and 606), further supported by qualitative interviews with project stakeholders and professionals. The additional analysis examined housing and rent price changes and the AMI (average median income) changes over time since the 606 completed in 2013. Key points from the cases and displacement literature are combined into a set of criteria that suggest guidance for Chicago's Englewood Line and other future initiatives.

The High Line is a 1.45-mile-long elevated trail in Manhattan that leads from Hudson Yards down to the Meatpacking District further down south and has roughly 8 million annual visitors (Figure 5). Before it was the Highline, it was called the West Side Elevated Line. The initial movement to redevelop the High Line in 1999 emerged not as a growth-oriented urban strategy but as a contestation to the Giuliani-led growth coalition of the 1990s. It was only after the "commitment of political, economic, and cultural elites that the efforts to save the High Line transformed from a grassroots contestation to the centerpiece of a postmodern urban renewal project" (Loughran, 2014, pg. 52). If not handled carefully, this could be the outcome of the Englewood Trail. Many of the city's mayors and real estate developers went on the record in favor of tearing the prior infrastructure down. Meanwhile, activists held out hope that the High Line could be saved and transformed into something of public value. This project started as a grassroots movement to get more green spaces and amenities but turned into a green growth machine-focused project to bring more tourism and investment.

After explaining the amount of money that the project would capture, mayor Bloomberg was sold. The administration believed that the High Line's redevelopment would help the city's bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics, and the project broke ground in 2006. The Highline led to significant spikes in housing costs in the Meatpacking District, Hudson Yards, and especially the Chelsea neighborhood due to the trail being primarily in Chelsea and that there was a considerable grouping of vulnerable populations in the area. Research done by Miller Samuel Inc. showed that "between 2003 and 2011, nearby residential property values grew 103%" (Miller Samuel Inc., 2013) and has seen almost another 100% increase in housing values, with many houses priced in the millions. The Chelsea area also saw a spike in rent costs overtime,

REAL ESTATE PRICES
Median Prices Per Square Foot



Figure 2 (Ideal Properties Group, 2021)



Figure 4: Median Gross Rent between the city, Manhattan, and Chelsea



Figure 3: Aerial View of the Highline (www.archtonic.com)

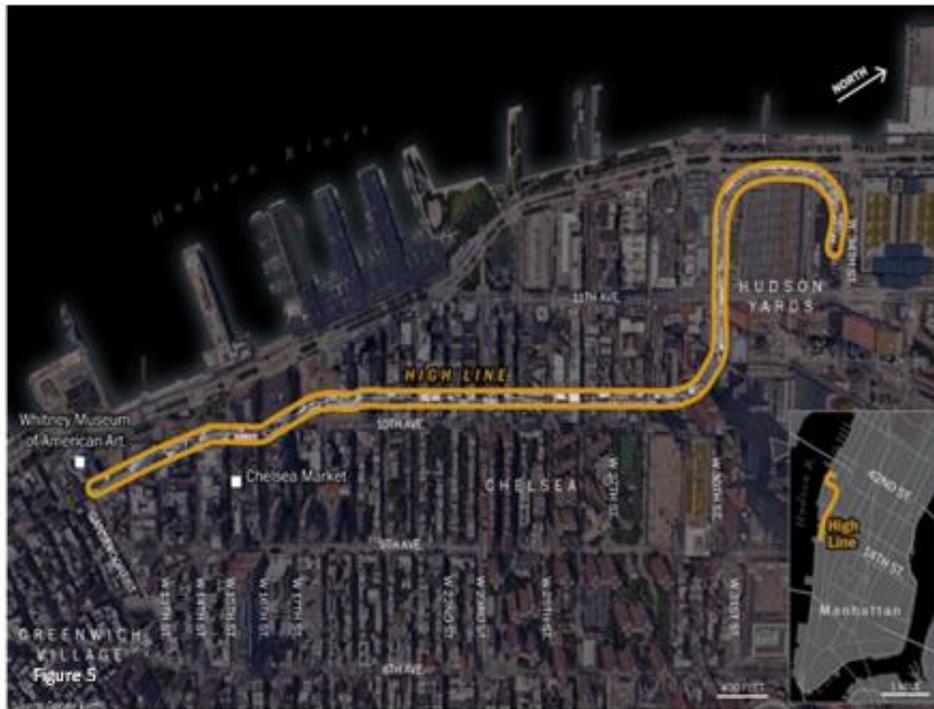


Figure 5: Map of the Highline (www.washingtonpost.com)

being one of the more expensive places to live (Figure 2 and 4). One of the worst parts about the park's development is after the High Line opened, the trail quickly became a commodified open space that was not available to everyone.

When the park transitioned from the city to a non-profit called Friends of the High Line; which was a non-profit in name alone; many things changed. Like other privileged parks and public spaces, the High Line's "design and management structure was based on consumption, leisure, and social control. With a privatized network of 'artisanal' food vendors, artists, security guards, and park personnel, the Friends of the High Line embed the park with commerce and covert surveillance" (Loughran, 2014, pg. 52).

The 606 is a 2.7-mile elevated park which runs West to East through Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Bucktown, and Wicker Park. It serves 80,000 people in the surrounding area and was initially known as the Bloomingdale Line (Figure 6 and 7). Some of the processes that the 606 went through were wholly unique compared to other RTPs. This uniqueness was due to a lack of coordination, communication, and poor use of non-profit leadership on the project. In fact, according to Rigolon and Németh, "the use of non-profit organizations to develop, maintain, and operate RTPs is most common in the U.S. 13 of 18 projects (72%)" (Rigolon & Nemeth, 2018, pg. 72). So, what is harmful about having non-profits lead development? One issue is that in all these cases, public agencies (including the city itself) have pushed power to non-profits who might rely on substantial private capital to deliver new green spaces. Some argue that has made these non-profits more responsive to private interests than the public good.

Such reliance on private capital can serve to "fragment groups concerned with environmental improvement from those concerned with affordable housing provision and protection, can engender depoliticizing arguments that place attention on the sustainability and public health benefits of parks at the expense of housing and socioeconomic questions, and can result in reduced accountability of both public agencies and non-state actors" (Rigolon & Nemeth, 2018, pg. 72). Environmental Justice groups and non-profits fighting displacement have more significant challenges to overcome now because when gentrification near the 606 began to accelerate, they were forced to fight against the environmental and health benefits they had long advocated for.

606 Data Analysis

During my time studying this topic, most scholarly work claimed the idea that the RTP's made a difference in housing prices, with only a handful conducting a quantitative analysis. To better understand the effects that these RTP's had on a local community I conducted my own quantitative research. I chose to examine housing and rent price changes and the AMI (average median income) changes over time since the completion of the 606 in 2013. There was an expectation that there would be differing results since many of the articles used throughout this report, and others that were read were from 2018 and earlier. Most of the quantitative data was found using 2013 to 2019 five-year estimate census tract data.

Starting in 2013 (denoted in Figure 8 and 9), we see a variety of different housing costs, with a large sum being within \$200,000 - \$500,000 range. This shows relatively high numbers for the area that is seconded by the University of Illinois-Chicago who also noted the idea that gentrification was already occurring by the time the 606 was built. By the time it was 2019, the \$400,000 - \$500,000 range stays relatively the same. Though, we see a large decrease in the amount of housing below \$300,000 and a large spike in the amount of housing costing \$500,000 and up within the census tracts that were researched.

Looking at the census tracts surrounding the 606 (in Figure 10, 11, 12, and 13), we see increases in gross rent and median housing price with gross rent in some cases increasing by almost 55% and housing prices reaching close to 85% more than in 2013. We see the largest increases happening closer to the two ends and areas near a trail entrance point, possibly due to the 606 being walled off and inaccessible from all other points but the few entrance areas. The result from this testing sees the AMI of some census tracts more than doubled between 2013 and 2019, possibly seeing the end stages of gentrification in the area. Lastly, a table was created to show a comprehensive look at all the data across the areas highlighted in the figures and compare them to the City of Chicago as a whole to see the difference in price averages.



Figure 6: Aerial view of the 606, Chicago (<https://www.asia.org/2020awards/300.html>)



Figure 7
Map of the 606 Trail, Chicago
<https://www.planetizen.com/node/78213>

INITIAL DIFFERENCE IN HOUSING STOCK PER VALUE BETWEEN TRACTS

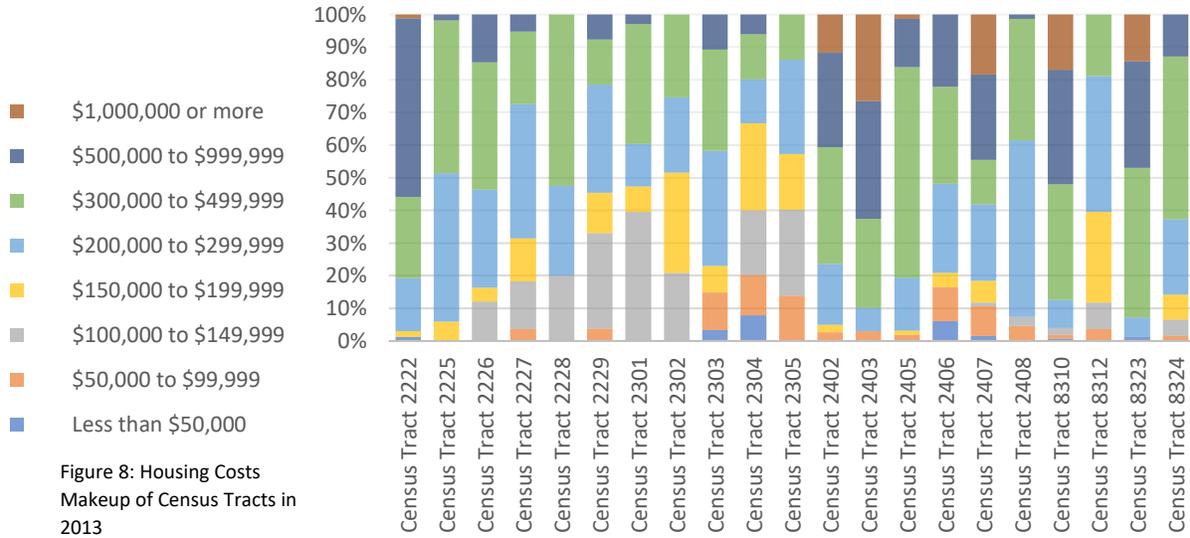


Figure 9: Comparison of Housing Costs Shifts Between 2013 and 2019

Percent Gross Rent By Value 2013-2019

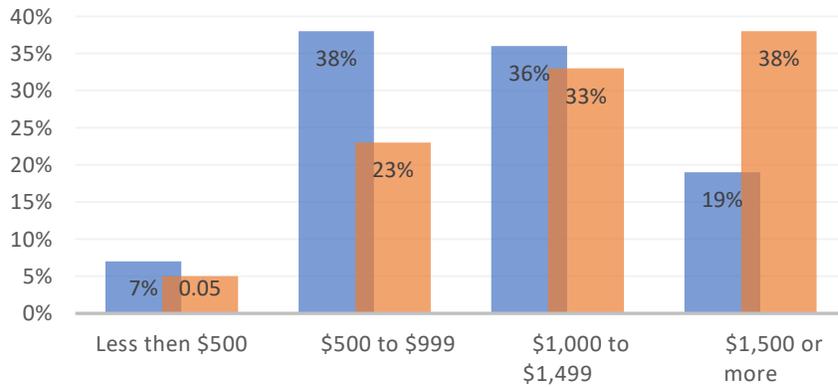


Figure 10: Rent Value Comparison Between 2013 and 2019

■ 2013 ■ 2019

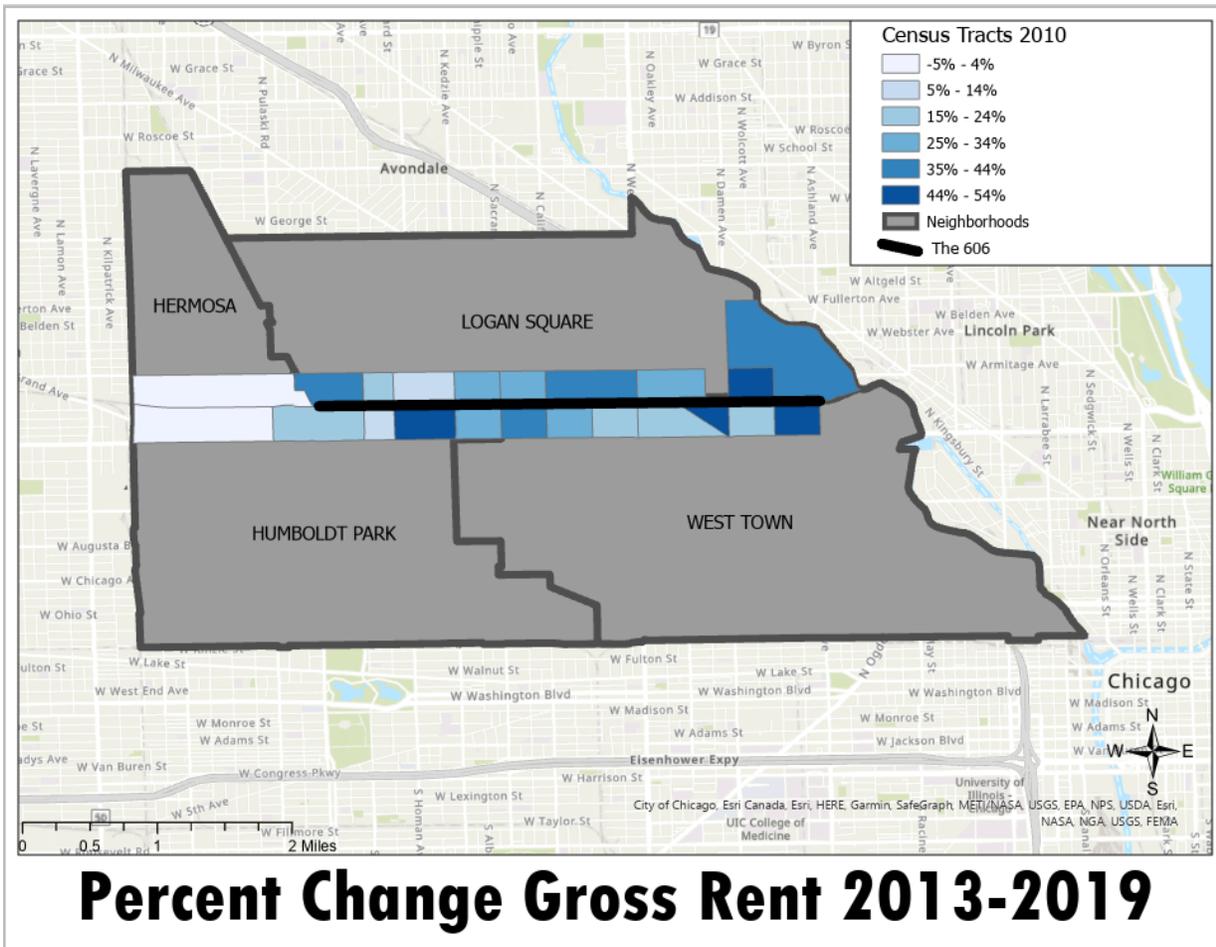


Figure 11

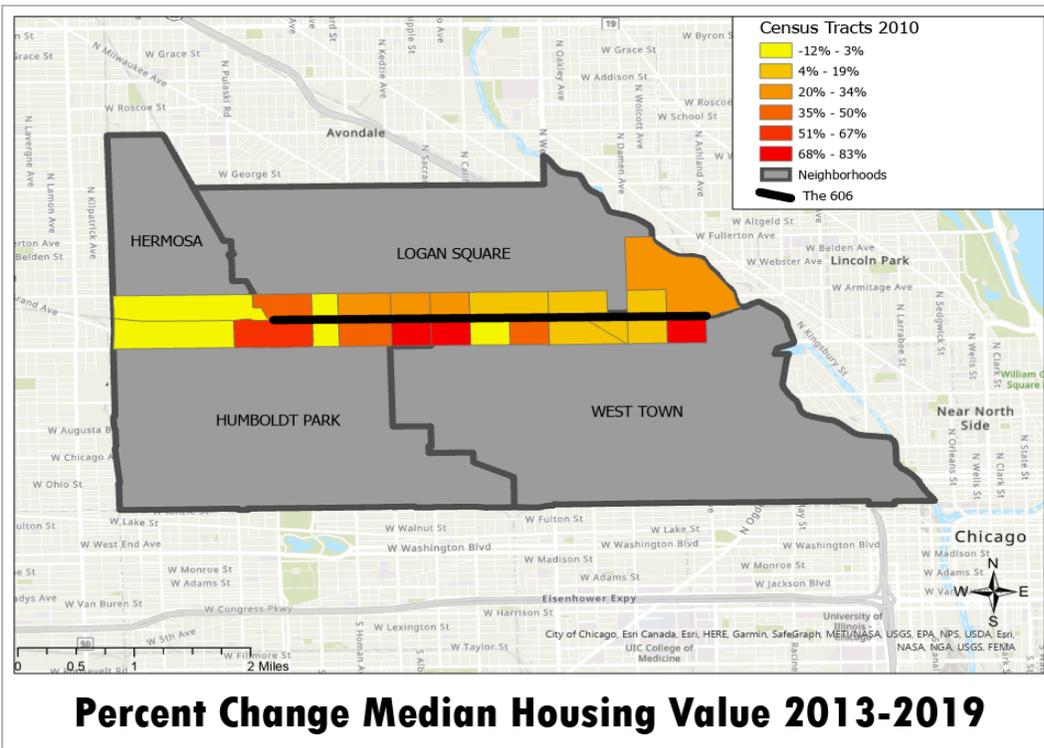


Figure 12

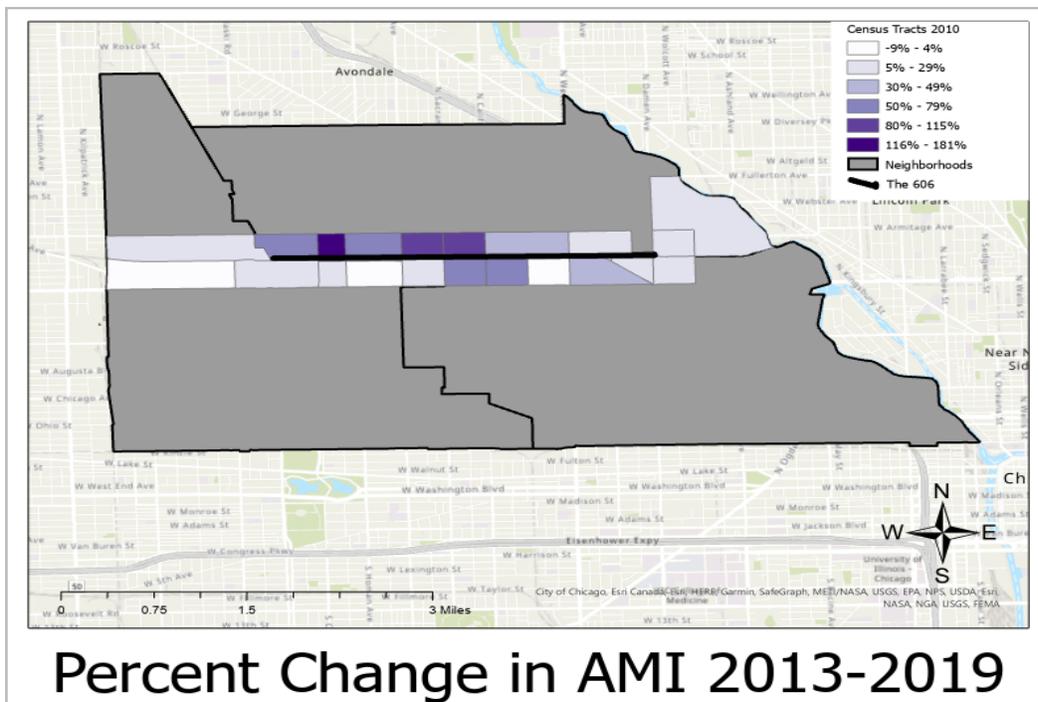


Figure 13: 2019\$

Recommendations

Seeing the shortcomings of previous RTPs and the statistical analysis of the neighborhoods near the 606, we can see how to avoid the pitfalls of the past and develop a project like the Englewood Line trail successful in its goals. The recommendations fall into three categories policy changes, the reworking of community development/engagement, and reworking project management.

"With future projects, policymakers may need to focus on implementing policy interventions early in the planning process to be most effective" (DePaul University, 2016, pg. 14). One of the policy changes that could be introduced to a project is inclusionary zoning (IZ). IZ policies are a tool for ensuring that affordable housing units are part of new residential development. With IZ policies, developers provide affordable units or pay fees towards housing, in exchange for development incentives (City of Madison, 2019). Project personnel could also implement housing trust funds/housing levy used to build up funding to preserve affordable housing options. In the Englewood Line case, land banking would also be highly effective with the amount of city-owned vacant land near the Englewood Line. Holding said lots could keep private personnel from buying the lots and developing luxury developments near the proposed trail. These options are legal in Illinois and could be utilized effectively to avoid the displacement of people from the neighborhood.

Projects need to create more robust alliances of public and non-profit actors that integrate the housing, environmental, and recreation sectors, with adequate communication and updates from one another as to avoid issues seen in the High Line case study. Environmental justice advocates play a heavy role here because they must "expose such cooptation and promote more joined-up efforts across these currently fragmented sectors" (Rigolon & Nemeth, 2018, pg. 78). It is necessary to understand that the communities' continual input on a topic that involves them is vital for an RTP.

To help with future RTPs, a criterion needs to be in place to double-check the development process's stability (an example can be found in the appendix). There are multiple criteria to review before getting too far into the process, and it becomes exceptionally arduous to reverse. The criteria explain differing extremes on a scale from bad to good, etc., which is up to the planning department to mark where they believe the project falls on each criterion's scale. The specific criteria looked at are level/degree of cooperation amongst entities, the stability of housing prices, policies in place to support the local community from harm. The number of involved stakeholders/participants, the amount of a certain type of land ownership, and lastly the type of businesses in the project area. Although the research done on gentrification is still being developed, it is important to note that with every RTP, it is critical to keep tracking the benefits that were created for the people who were initially.

Lastly, there is a need for a holistic research agenda on environmental gentrification and a reworking of project management. The research agenda should examine the distribution of benefits and burdens from the development of a new RTP, and whether the resulting green space

and surroundings provide quality experiences to marginalized residents. It is imperative to ensure that Englewood residents manage the Englewood trail project. Plus, once the project has reached completion, the RTP should be maintained and managed by community personnel through trust or subcommittee. Without the community's support, the project dynamics could be changed drastically, and the same issues that we have seen before will repeat.

Conclusion

These recommendations are not going to solve every problem that may arise, but they make a practical foundation when dealing with RTPs on the scale of the High Line and the 606. Both these RTPs are similar, but all have unique elements that have led to their success being questioned. Although we have seen many RTP's in the past that have caused havoc among the long-term residents in multiple ways, there are still benefits to RTP's if they are effectively ethical and efficient. If we were to ask again, how could we utilize parks to garner the benefits they provide without the effect of pricing people out of their homes? It is now possible to answer. Planners and Developers should create a foundational understanding that there will be severe negative externalities to this project land in vulnerable areas. Public servants should be leading the project to avoid any change in end goals. Environmental justice groups need to help ensure that the project's goal is met and that all project entities are communicating effectively and efficiently. Plus, the community needs to be updated consistently, and there needs to be a compromise if the community demands it. New policies must be implemented, or existing ones must be utilized before the project gets too far into the process. The sooner they are put into place; the less complex the situation will be later. Some helpful policy interventions could be the use of Inclusionary Zoning, housing trust funds/housing levy, and land banking, to name a few of the more effective policies to be used in the current situation.

RTPs can provide more benefits than many parks. The Englewood Line Trail is no exception, but it needs to be handled with care, and elements need to be put in place early to avoid problematic situations. Suppose we want to make the most use out of these green infrastructure projects. In that case, we will need to promote policy interventions, and we need to provide affordable housing options with it. We will need more non-profit coalitions involved to create a broader and more holistic planning effort. We will need to make sure there is an understanding of what the project might do to the chosen community. There needs to be an understanding of the best party to control the project upon completion.

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Appendix

(Table 1: Comparison of prices in 2019\$)

Census Tract	2013			2019		
	AMI	Housing	Rent	AMI	Housing	Rent
2222	120,513	534,700	1,551	132,256	586,804	1,702
2225	43,966	297,600	1,021	48,250	326,600	1,120
2226	37,065	317,900	928	40,677	348,878	1,018
2227	39,063	245,900	1,070	42,869	269,862	1,174
2228	17,917	304,800	924	19,662	334,501	1,014
2229	31,389	210,700	824	34,448	231,232	904
2301	49,250	217,300	933	54,049	238,475	1,024
2302	55,000	191,300	782	60,359	209,941	858
2303	42,105	278,300	932	46,208	305,419	1,023
2304	46,477	173,500	943	51,006	190,407	1,035
2305	25,813	182,300	908	28,328	200,064	996
2402	96,250	398,100	1,037	105,629	436,893	1,138
2403	105,875	666,000	1,422	116,192	730,898	1,561
2405	108,917	373,600	1,770	119,530	410,005	1,942
2406	108,156	307,500	1,361	118,695	337,464	1,494
2407	55,132	439,100	925	60,504	481,888	1,015
2408	31,964	277,000	814	35,079	303,992	893
8310	119,542	523,100	1,420	131,191	574,073	1,558
8312	35,680	240,300	912	39,157	263,716	1,001
8323	106,250	483,800	1,344	116,604	530,944	1,475
8324	84,207	343,700	1,296	92,413	377,192	1,422
Average 606 Area	64,787	333,643	1,101	71,100	366,155	1,208
Average City of Chicago	47,270	186,000	1,071	58,247	264,579	1,853

(Figure 15: Example Criterion Filled Out)

Large Green Infrastructure Project Criteria

Name of Project: The Highline

Department/Agency/Organization Completing Criteria: New York City Planning Department

Non-Profits/Community Organizations Involved: Friends of the Highline

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>Description</u>
Level/degree of cooperation amongst entities:		The level of cooperation here is decent. The city administration plans to work with the Friends of the Highline and other consultants. City plans on providing expertise when requested.
Stability of housing prices:		Housing prices are increasing all over Manhattan, showing an increasing level of volatility. There should be an emphasis put towards providing affordable housing.
Policies in place to support the local community:		There are policies that could be utilized to provide affordable housing options and community business improvement. though, more could be put into place.
Number of involved stakeholders/participants:		The number of stakeholders seems to be on the low end. The city and the Friends of the Highline are important players, but there doesn't seem to be many others. Also seems as though the community is being ignored too.
Are there more private parcels or city-owned parcels?		Seems like much of the land within the project area are privately owned. This may cause issues going forward.
Jobs initially in the project area.		With the area being of a more industrialized nature, the housing is more affordable and the jobs are more blue collared. This might be an issue continuing forward.