

The Crosstown Trail Vision

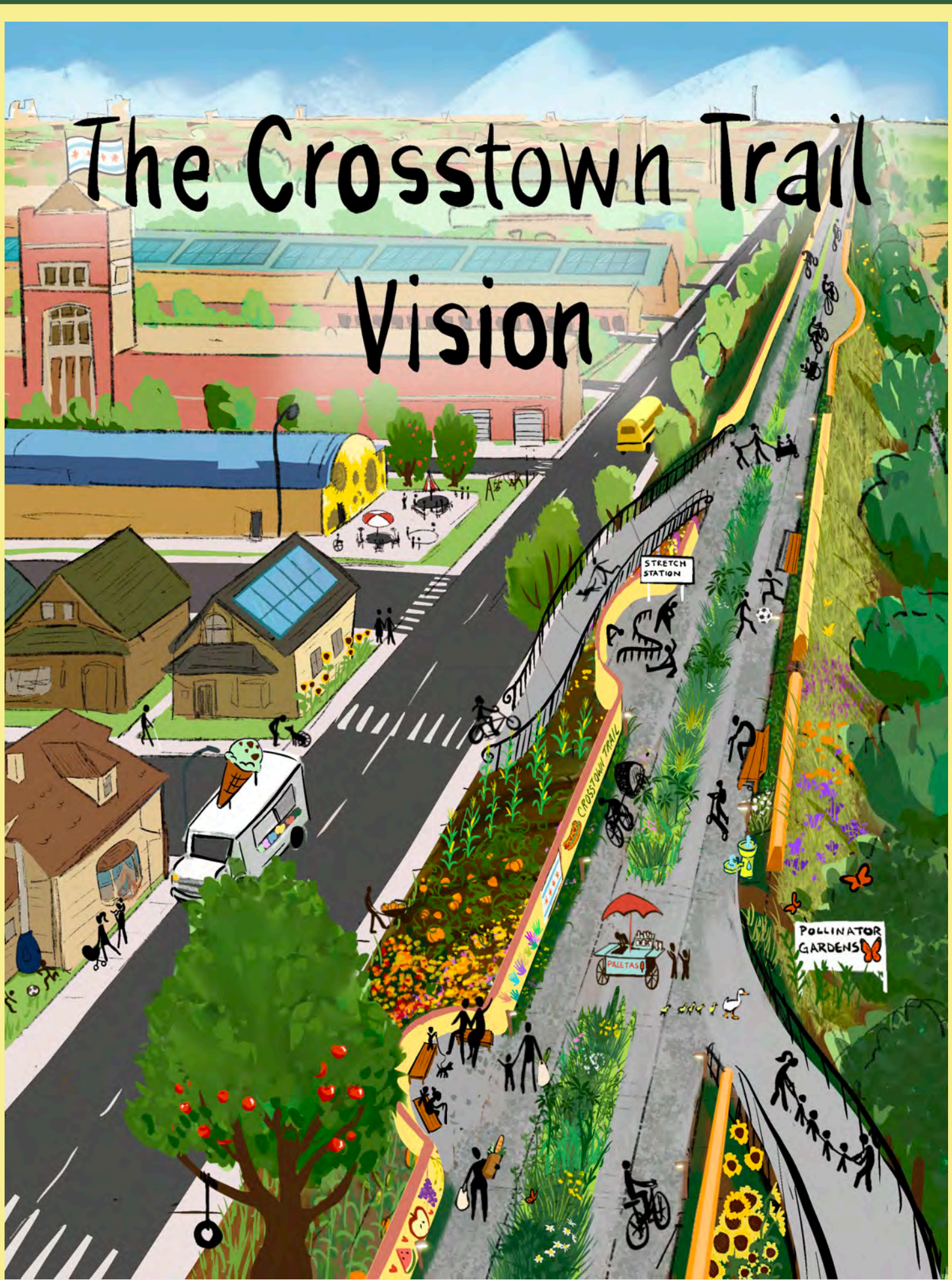


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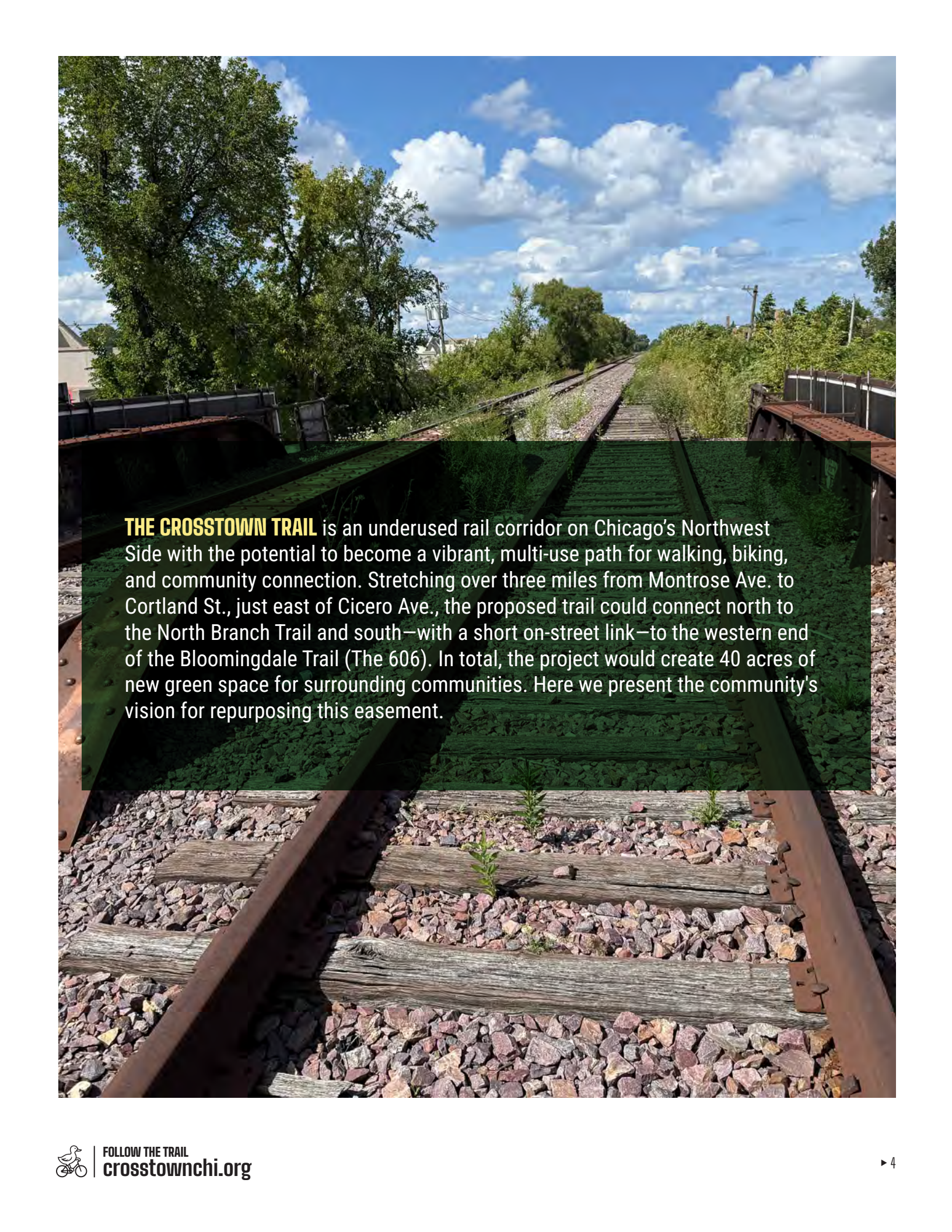
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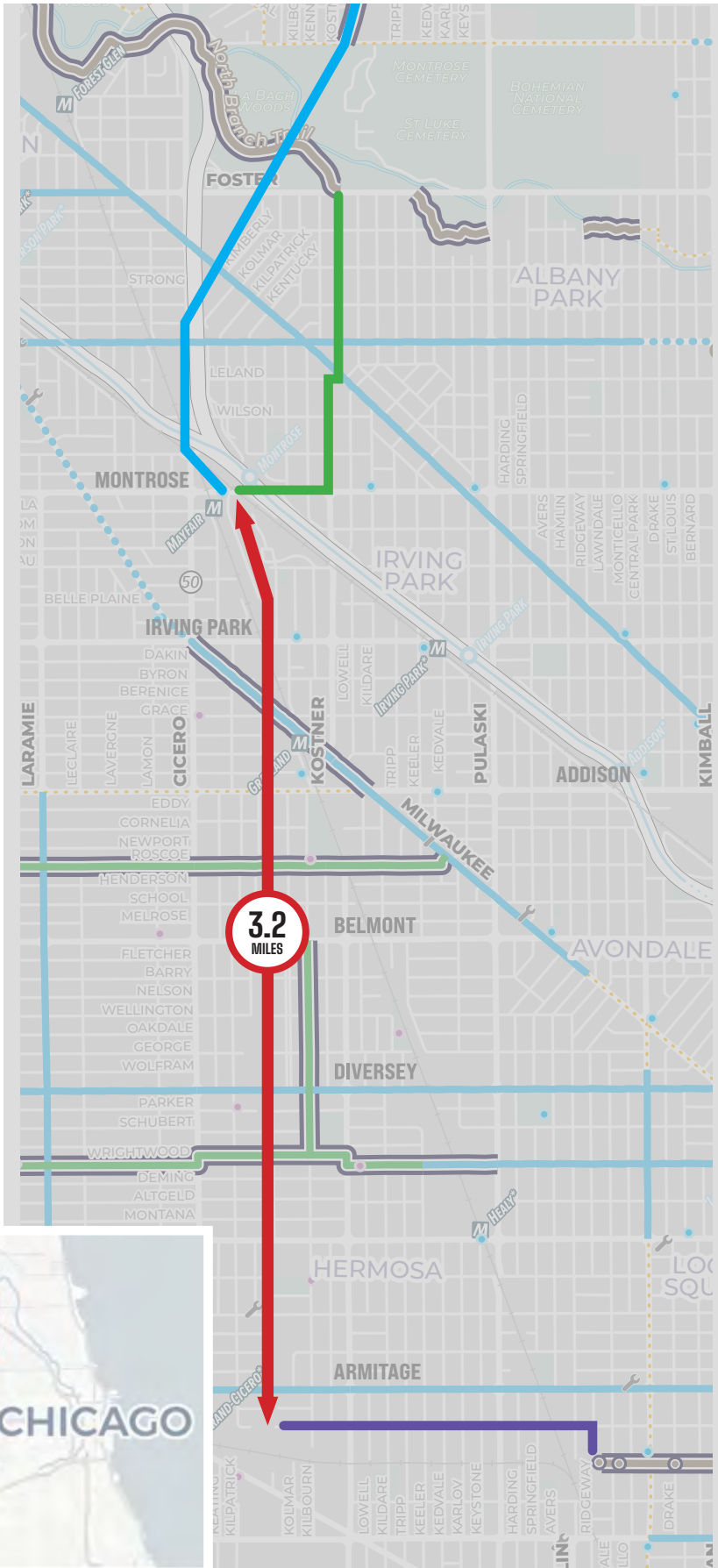
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THE CROSTOWN TRAIL is an underused rail corridor on Chicago's Northwest Side with the potential to become a vibrant, multi-use path for walking, biking, and community connection. Stretching over three miles from Montrose Ave. to Cortland St., just east of Cicero Ave., the proposed trail could connect north to the North Branch Trail and south—with a short on-street link—to the western end of the Bloomingdale Trail (The 606). In total, the project would create 40 acres of new green space for surrounding communities. Here we present the community's vision for repurposing this easement.





TRAIL MAP

The Crosstown Trail offers something rare: a continuous, traffic-free route, creating access to neighborhoods, parks, businesses, schools, and recreation for everyone.

48K+

Residents within 1/2 Mile

12

Transit Routes Connected

40

Acres of New Green Space

13

Schools & Parks Connected

MAP KEY

- Proposed Crosstown Trail
- Proposed Weber Spur Trail
- Greenway Connection to North Branch Trail
- Greenway Connection to Bloomingdale Trail

[CLICK TO VIEW ON GOOGLE MAPS](#)



COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

The Crosstown Trail is a community-driven project. What follows is the synthesis of conversations with community members, elected officials, and experts conducted by volunteers who make up the Friends of the Crosstown Trail. Across nearly 30 public events in 2025, the Friends of the Crosstown Trail volunteers asked the question: “Would you like to see a trail in your neighborhood?” to which the response is a near-unanimous: “Yes!”.

Development does not come without challenges. Long time community members did express concerns about neighborhood stability, some of which are detailed and addressed in the following sections. This document is not the final trail design. It is the first concrete step in ensuring the community is centered in the potential development process.

SUPPORT IS CLEAR. QUESTIONS REMAIN.

On November 13, 2025, the Crosstown Trail Town Hall engaged over 275 unique participants from all neighborhoods touching the trail. Below you'll find a comprehensive analysis of the town hall chat and polling questions. The analysis and initial drafting of findings were conducted using a combination of Google Gemini and manual data review and validation by Lindenstar.

Overall, the findings reflect a community eager for improved infrastructure but cautious about its socioeconomic impacts. While there is strong baseline support for a new greenway—primarily for safe biking and neighborhood connectivity—the dialogue included concerns related to private development risks, specifically regarding property taxes, gentrification, and industrial rail logistics.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE & OUTREACH

- **Top Participating Neighborhoods:**
Old Irving (38), Kilbourn Park (20), Portage Park (19), Logan Square (18), and Humboldt Park (15).
- **Effective Outreach:**
Most attendees discovered the event via Social Media/Digital platforms (18) and In-Person/Grassroots efforts (15), followed closely by Word of Mouth and Community Organizations.
- **Attendance Motivation:**
The majority of respondents attended to Show Support (66) or for Information Gathering (27). Only a single participant explicitly identified "Opposition" as their primary reason for joining, though many supporters voiced significant conditions for their approval.

COMMUNITY VALUES & INTENDED USE

Participants identified the trail as a vital tool for recreation and safe transit:

- **Primary Uses:**
Biking is the dominant intended use (101 unique users), followed by Walking (52) and Jogging (18).
- **Core Benefits:**
The most valued benefits are Neighborhood Connectivity (63) and Safety from Traffic (49).
- **Environmental Interest:**
There is a high demand for Green/Nature Spaces (42), suggesting the trail should be designed as a park-like environment in addition to a transit corridor.

BENCHMARKING THE CROSTOWN TRAIL

The Bloomingdale Trail (The 606) is the City's most prominent rails-to-trails project and provides a clear benchmark for evaluating the Crosstown Trail's assets, constraints, and potential.

	BLOOMINGDALE TRAIL (606)	CROSTOWN TRAIL
EXISTING STRUCTURE	Concrete embankments ~7' thick.	Earthen berms that support grading and landscaping.
ACCESS POINTS	12 ADA-compliant ramps at quarter-mile intervals.	Extensive ADA-compliant access points due to relative ease of construction.
PROGRAMMABLE AREA	Typical width ~30', resulting in shared-use congestion.	Total easement width ~100', possibly allowing separated paths.
DISPLACEMENT RISK	Pre-construction housing makeup was about 60% renters/40% homeowners. Bucktown, Wicker Park, and Humboldt Park were already facing gentrification pressures due to private development.*	Current housing mix more balanced: ~50% renters/50% homeowners. Belmont Cragin and Hermosa face different pressures, with greater risk to single-family homeownership than in denser neighborhoods.*
PRE-CONSTRUCTION RAIL USE	One bakery used line for deliveries.	One bakery using line for deliveries.

*Data from U.S. Census Bureau

POTENTIAL TRAIL CONCEPT

Armitage Avenue (south)



Current condition of trail at Armitage Avenue looking south.



Rendering showing potential future condition of the Crosstown Trail.



HEALTH & WELLNESS: CONNECTING COMMUNITIES, IMPROVING HEALTH

Healthy and Connected Communities

Transforming the former Crosstown rail corridor into a multi-use trail will create a 3.2-mile trail and over 40 acres of new green space, providing a safe place for residents to walk, bike, run and commute. By linking neighborhoods and providing accessible outdoor space, the Crosstown Trail has the potential to improve community health and connectivity.

Research shows that walkable neighborhoods and access to parks are associated with lower risks of diabetes and obesity and higher levels of physical activity.¹ Moreover, walkable neighborhoods and access to parks and green infrastructure are associated with increased physical activity and lower risks of obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.²

Community Health Facts

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the prevalence of obesity among U.S. adults reached 40.3% between August 2021 and August 2023. In addition, 1 in 5 children and adolescents have obesity, and obesity disproportionately affects lower-income households.³
- In Illinois 16.5% of youth ages 6-17 live with obesity⁴
- In Chicago, 12% of adults have diabetes which is higher than Cook County (11%), Illinois (10%), and the national average (11%)⁵

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago's 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment notes that diabetes, asthma, and obesity are linked to limited access to healthcare, green space and safe environment for physical activity.⁵

Furthermore, Lurie Children's note that a child's health is strongly shaped by the environment where they live, play and grow. Environmental factors such as pollution, extreme heat and limited green space can negatively impact both physical and mental health. These risks are not evenly distributed in Chicago—South and West Side communities, where Belmont Cragin and Hermosa are located, often experience higher

pollution levels, fewer safe public spaces and limited active transportation options due to long standing disinvestment and inequitable land-use policies. Addressing environmental hazards, improving infrastructure, and expanding safe transportation options are critical to creating healthier and more resilient neighborhoods for children and families.

How the Crosstown Trail Supports Healthier Communities

Studies show that access to parks and safer environments increase physical activity levels, and that urban greening can improve stress and cardiovascular health.⁶ Communities with more accessible parks and green spaces are also more likely to see residents walking regularly and maintaining healthier lifestyles. Moreover, building bike and pedestrian trails are associated to reducing healthcare costs with physical activities such as biking and walking.⁷

The Crosstown Trail would provide safe, accessible and free opportunities for physical activity for residents of all ages. Trails and green spaces encourage people to:

- Walk, run, bike and commute actively
- Spend more time outdoors
- Improve physical and mental health
- Connect with neighbors and nearby communities

For students, the trail could provide a safer route to commute to and from school, reducing reliance on busy streets or intersections and creating safer environment for young people.

For residents, the trail would make it easier to reach schools, parks, local businesses, and community spaces, while also supporting everyday physical activity and neighborhood engagement.

Building Stronger, Healthier Neighborhoods

By encouraging active transportation and outdoor recreation, trails and greenways can help:

- Increase physical activity among residents
- Reduce risk factors for obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases
- Improve access to green space
- Strengthen connection between communities
- Create safer and more vibrant neighborhoods

When communities actively use trails and greenways, they become healthier, more connected and safer for everyone. Communities within Belmont Cragin, Hermosa, Irving Park and Portage Park would benefit immensely from the Crosstown Trail.

***The Crosstown Trail is more than a transportation project—
it is a public health investment.***

Investing in projects like these means investing in healthier families, safer neighborhoods, and stronger communities. By transforming underutilized infrastructure into vibrant green space, Chicago and Illinois can create a future where every resident has access to safe places to be active and live healthier.

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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). [Adult obesity prevalence in the United States \(2021–2023\)](#).
4. [State of Childhood Obesity](#). (2022, September 27). State data: Illinois.
5. Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. (2025, September). [2025 Community health needs assessment](#).
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7. Wang, G., Macera, C. A., Scudder-Soucie, B., Schmid, T., Pratt, M., & Buchner, D. (2005). [A cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails](#). *Health Promotional Practice*, 6(2), 174-179.
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10. South, E. C., Kondo, M. C., Cheney, R. A., & Branas, C. C. (2015). [Neighborhood blight, stress, and health: A walking trial of urban greening and ambulatory heart rate](#). *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(5), 909–913.



NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY

To ensure current community members are primary beneficiaries of the proposed Crosstown Trail project, housing policies aimed at preventing displacement and maintaining affordability should be refined and implemented in the early stages of planning.¹ The rapidly changing housing market following the funding and construction of the nearby 606 serves as one of many examples of destabilization and displacement that can arrive with urban trail developments in the absence of adequate policy interventions.²

Urban planning research points to several proven tools to reduce residential displacement.³ These include:

Community Land Trusts: Already active in Chicago through groups such as the Chicago Housing Trust and the Here to Stay Community Land Trust.

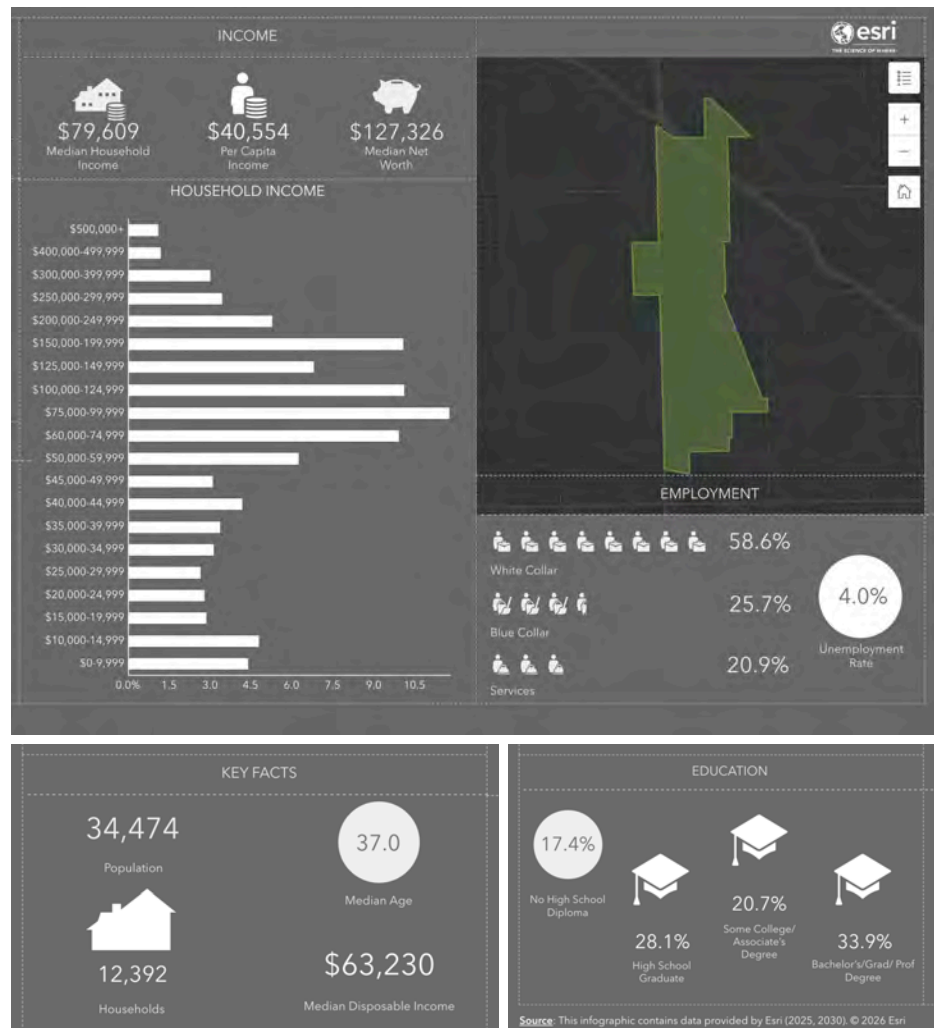
Right of First Refusal: Implemented locally through tenant purchase protections like the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act.

Rent Control: Would require state-level change, as Illinois' Rent Control Preemption Act currently prohibits local rent control ordinances.

Preservation of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing: Supported in Chicago through measures like the 606–Pilsen Demolition Permit Surcharge Ordinance.

Interventions should be tailored to the area near the proposed Crosstown Trail in coordination with existing neighborhood groups committed to increasing access to housing and preventing displacement.

Regional planning and research groups, such as Metropolitan Planning Council and the Institute for Housing Studies at



Above: Key demographics of the census tracts touching the proposed trail. Data from U.S. Census Bureau.

DePaul University, should also be consulted, particularly regarding data analyses that will inform the development and implementation of anti-displacement efforts. Important considerations include home ownership and rental rates, housing density, and neighborhood demographics. In the case of homeowners, property taxes should also be considered as potential drivers of displacement. While less studied, interventions aimed at preventing displacement of small businesses should also be prioritized and developed with input from groups like the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network at the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth.

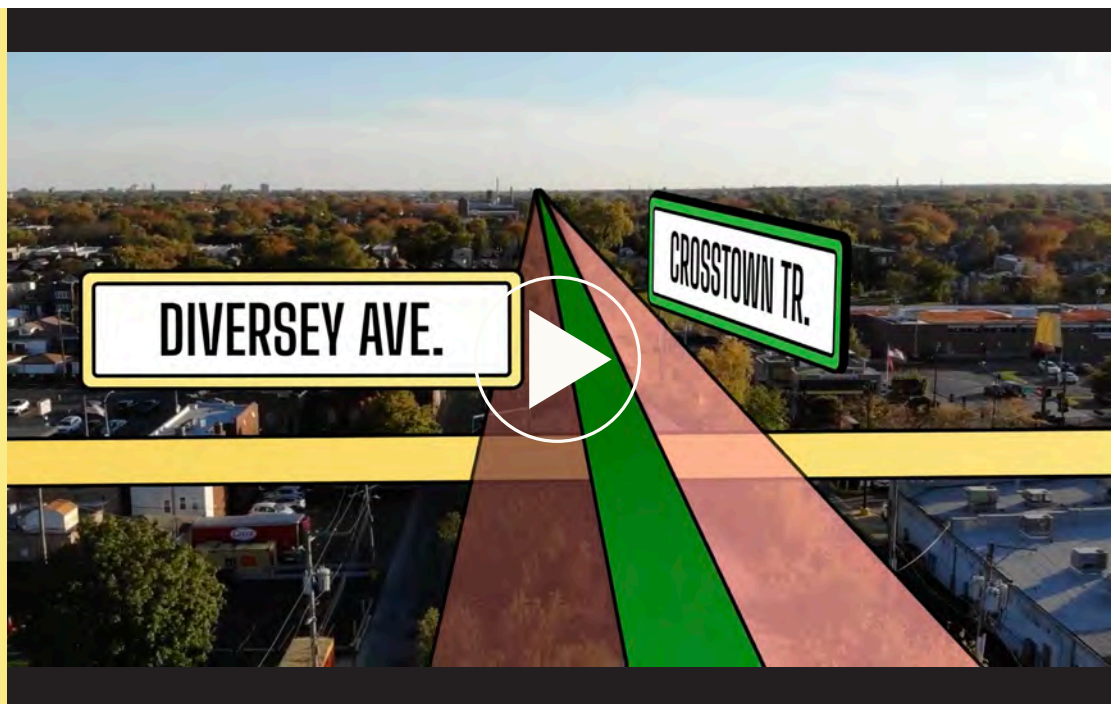
1. "Measuring the Impact of The 606: Understanding How a Large Public Investment Impacted the Surrounding Housing Market." Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, November 1, 2016.
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3. "Gentrification and Neighborhood Change: Helpful Tools for Communities." Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, March 2015. Jacob Lefkowitz and Mac McComas, "Strategies to Preserve and Build Affordable Housing Near Green Amenities and Urban Trails." Johns Hopkins 21st Century Cities Initiative, February 2022. John Dorazio, "Localized Anti-Displacement Policies: Ways To Combat the Effects of Gentrification and Lack of Affordable Housing." Center for American Progress, September 26, 2022.

RECENT/ONGOING RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS

AGENCY	PROJECT	STATUS	RELEVANCE TO CROSSTOWN TRAIL
DPD	Cicero Avenue Land Use Study	In progress	~¼ mile from trail
DPD	Irving Park Road Study	In progress	Northern segment crosses study area
CDOT	Portage Park Neighborhood Bike Network	In progress	Connects via existing bike network
CDOT	Weber Spur Trail Phase I	In progress	Would link north segment to North Branch Trail
CTA	Bus Priority Corridor Study	In progress	Pulaski & Fullerton corridors run along/near trail
DPD	Armitage Industrial Corridor Framework Plan	Adopted 2025	Just outside study area; recommends improved non-auto mobility
CDOT	Northwest Side Vision Zero Plan	Adopted 2024	Includes Belmont Cragin
MPC	Reconnecting Communities Report	Published 2022	Recommends rails-to-trails on Kenton Easement

AERIAL OVERVIEW

A brief aerial overview of the Crosstown Trail corridor—highlighting its scale, the neighborhoods it connects, and its potential as a continuous, car-free route for safe transportation, recreation, and community use.



2025 BY THE NUMBERS

~5K

PETITION
SIGNATURES

17

BOOTH
EVENTS

12

TOWN HALL
SPONSORS

275

NEIGHBORS AT
TOWN HALL

20

COMMUNITY &
AGENCY MEETINGS

MOMENTUM: 2025 ▶ 2026

2025 MILESTONES

- Launched the Crosstown Trail [website](#)
- Secured 501(c)(3) status ([donations now open](#))
- Formed a Planning Committee
- Formed a Volunteer Committee
- Hosted a community town hall
- Earned media coverage in Block Club Chicago (2 features linked below) and the Chicago Tribune ([Crosstown Expressway history](#))

Block Club Chicago

JEFFERSON PARK, PORTAGE PARK, NORWOOD PARK

Failed Crosstown Expressway Could Become Bike Trail Connecting Bucktown To Botanic Gardens

The 3.2-mile trail would follow a Union Pacific rail line and connect The 606 to the North Branch Trail. The freight rail line was once proposed for the Crosstown Expressway, which was successfully shut down by neighbors.

Block Club Chicago

JEFFERSON PARK, PORTAGE PARK, NORWOOD PARK

Proposed Crosstown Bike Trail Gains Traction But Needs Anti-Gentrification Measures, Some Say

Thursday's virtual town hall was the first of many to discuss the proposed 3.2-mile trail that would run through Old Irving Park, Irving Park, Portage Park, Kilbourn Park, Belmont Cragin and Hermosa.

2026 WHAT'S NEXT

- Canvass 2,000 homes near the trail
- Show up at 30 booth events
- Release a [Built World](#) short film
- Publish annotated drone footage and a 3D trail rendering
- Participate in 15 community and agency meetings
- Publish our Vision Document

TOWN HALL 2025 WITH SUPPORT FROM 12 ELECTED OFFICIALS



Friends of the
CROSSTOWN  **TRAIL**

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