

CHICAGO WORKS COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

# Skinner Park Accessibility & Garden Improvements

**skinner** 

**park advisory council**

*Friends of* SKINNER PARK  
LOOMIS ST. GARDENS

all volunteer nonprofit community group

*Thank you!*

**We are honored to be selected as a semi-finalist.**

**All the projects are worthy.**



**WHO:** an all volunteer non-profit group of neighbors & park patrons

**WHAT:** Build community through safe beautiful public spaces & free events

**HOW:** Advisory and Advocacy | Philanthropic | Volunteerism

# Equity and Inclusion | Welcoming and Inviting

Skinner Park is where we build community & where we serve the community. Public parks are for everyone and they should be safe, beautiful, inclusive & welcoming.

Skinner Park is located in the SW corner of the West Loop.

Our Community :

- Densely populated (20K+ within a 20 min walk). 99% do not have green space
- Other communities served: Near West Side, Pilsen, West Town, & Loop
- Very diverse by age groups, socio-economically, race & ethnicity.

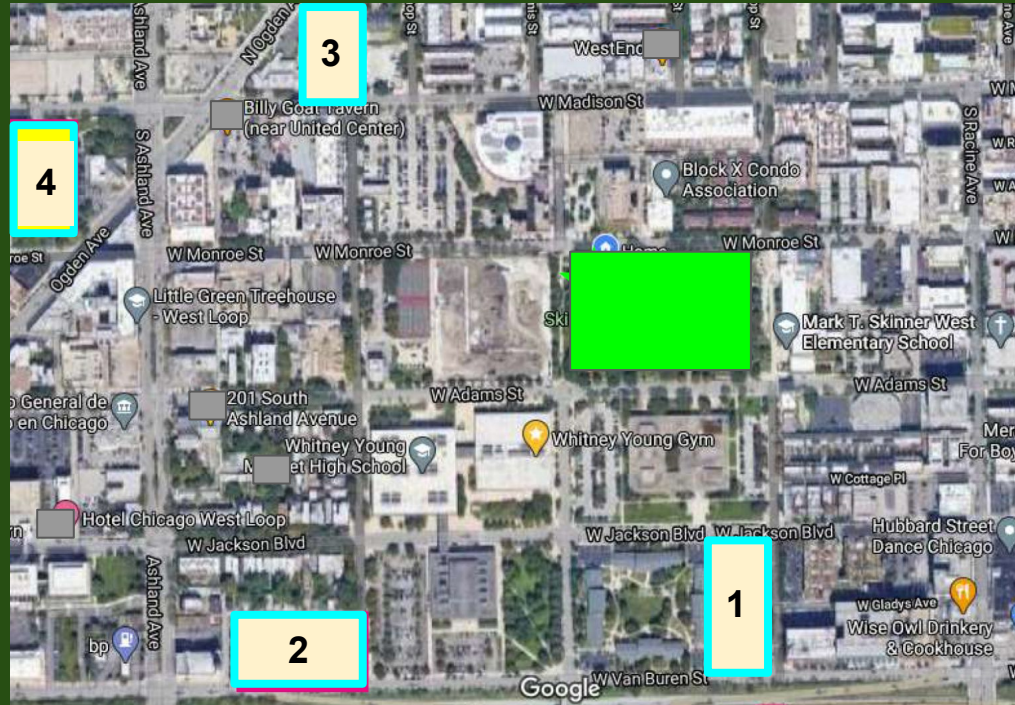
Our Work :

- We fundraise so that all the all SPAC special events held at the park are free
- Scholarships to park district programs
- Maintain gardens & grow food to donate
- Work to ensure that all abilities & income can participate.

# Why Is This Project Important for the Community?

Skinner Park should be inclusive and welcoming to all people including seniors and people with disabilities.

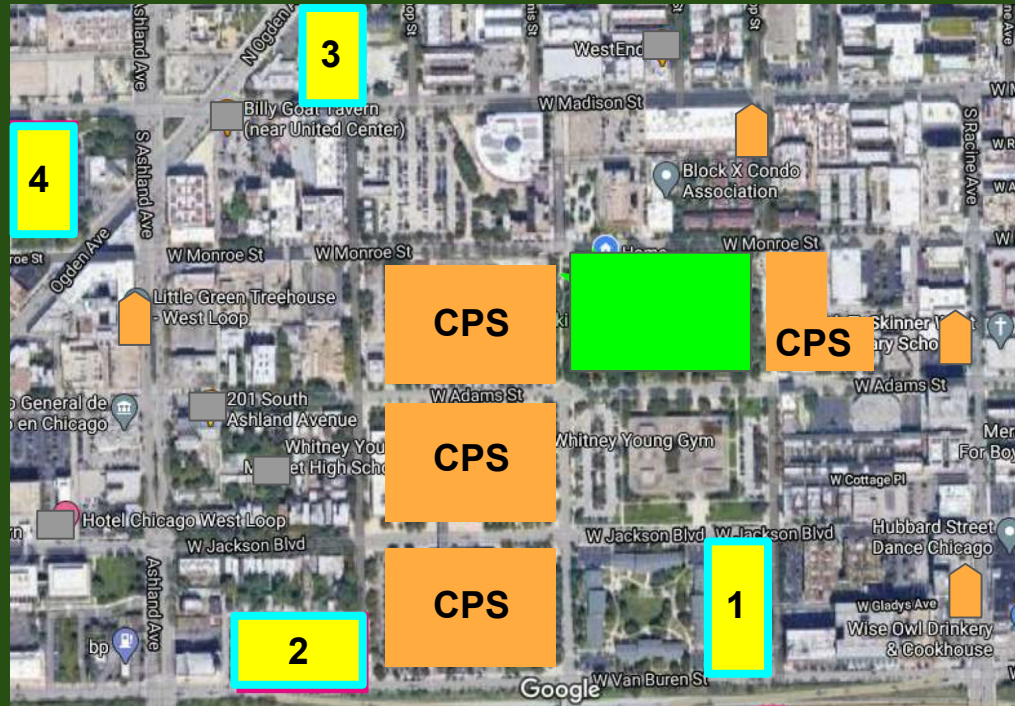
- 4 senior buildings within three (3) blocks of Skinner Park
  - 1) Academy Square ( HUD )
  - 2) Van Buren Place ( HUD )
  - 3) Booth Manor ( Salvation Army)
  - 4) Patrick Sullivan ( CHA )
- 700+ units/1000+ people
- Other seniors & people with disabilities living in other buildings



# Skinner Park Heavily Used by Schools and Students

Six (6) schools are located within 3 blocks of Skinner and rely on the park for their outdoor activities. Total enrollment of 4,200+.

- Skinner West Elementary (1,200+)
- Whitney Young (2,200+)
- Intercultural Montessori
- Gardner School
- Learning Experience
- Little Green Treehouse



# ISSUE of EQUITY: access for seniors & people with disabilities

- 20 years ago, many seniors expressed that there was no place for them at Skinner Park. Seniors asked for a tranquil area to commune with nature.
- We conducted a community survey.
  - Over 90% supported building the Tranquil Garden.
  - Top vote-getter across all age groups
- Seniors would like to participate in the edible community garden but barriers exist.

*Gardens help with mental health & social interaction.*

# Seniors volunteering for the Skinner Park Eggstravaganza





Elese Dennard  
Treasurer, Skinner Park Advisory Council  
Chair, SPAC - Senior Committee

“ I’m Elese Dennard and I live at the Academy Square Senior building located just one block from Skinner Park. I’m the Chair of the Senior Committee for the Skinner Park Advisory Council (SPAC). We have seniors from all the senior buildings around Skinner Park on our committee representing over 1,000+ seniors. Many seniors are living on fixed and low income and don’t own cars.

The Skinner Park Advisory Council brings seniors fresh vegetables from their vegetable plots but some seniors want to be able to grow their own vegetables.

Many seniors like me helped to plant and maintain the Tranquil Garden when we were "young" seniors but now many of us are now "older" seniors after volunteering for 10 to 15 years. We are not as able to help out as much as before but we still want to be able to go to Skinner Park to enjoy peace and tranquility, grow our own vegetables and continue to volunteer and help wherever we can. We want to bring our grandchildren to the park but it’s unsafe with the sidewalks in such bad condition. And we need bathrooms not just to be ADA accessible but bathrooms to be open also.

We should be able to connect to nature in the Skinner Park gardens for our mental and physical health but we need sidewalks and gardens to be accessible.”

# Skinner Park & the Gardens We Work On

## Skinner - Tranquil Garden

- Ornamental Community Garden
- Volunteer maintained
- Managed & funded by SPAC

## Skinner - Community Roots Garden

- Harvest Garden (Youth)
- Demonstration Garden (Teaching)
- Community garden-allotment plots
- Managed by Chicago Park District
- Supported in part by SPAC

## Loomis St. Community Gardens

- Ornamental Community Garden
- Community edible allotment plots
- Communal & Donation plots
- Volunteer Maintained
- Managed & funded by SPAC

## Tranquil Garden

## Skinner Park



## Community Roots Demonstration Garden

# Gardens We Work On

## ➤ **Loomis St. Community Gardens**

- **Ornamental & Edible Community Garden on closed section of Loomis St.**
- **Edible allotment and communal plots - organic**
- **Maintained by volunteers & Managed and funded by SPAC**

## ➤ **Skinner Park - Tranquil Garden**

- **Ornamental Community Garden in the Parks**
- **Maintained by volunteers & Managed and funded by Skinner Park Advisory Council (SPAC)**

## ➤ **Skinner Park - Community Roots Garden**

- **Harvest Garden - organic gardening for children**
- **Demonstration (Teaching) Garden - organic**
- **Edible community garden with allotment plots - organic**
- **Managed by Chicago Park District and supported by SPAC**

# Some of Our Great Volunteers



**3,500+ volunteer hours / year**

# Holistic Approach - Universal Design

Several years ago, we started “a universal design review” so that park improvements would benefit all age groups and all abilities irrespective of socio-economic levels.

Holistic approach looking at the community as a whole and not just the park.

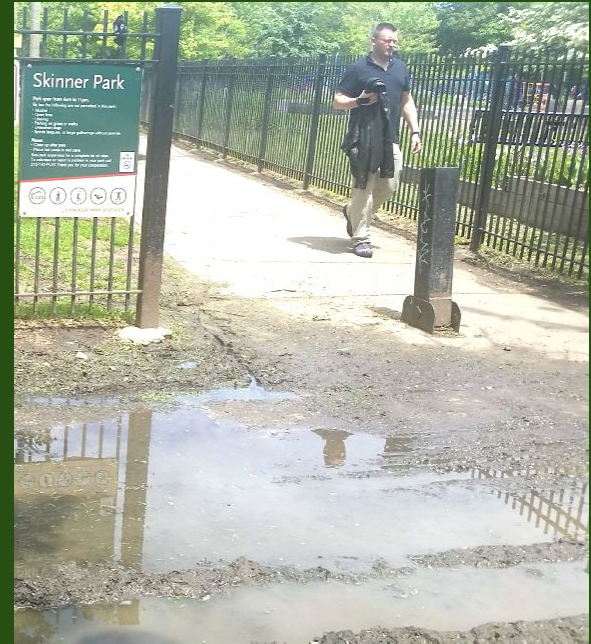
Improvements will allow for intergenerational use of both park & gardens.

# Chicago Works Community Challenge Project

1. Basic Infrastructure Repairs : Sidewalks and Surfaces
2. Gardens: Remove Barriers and Increase Accessibility
3. Greenhouse - Environmental Education & Capacity Building

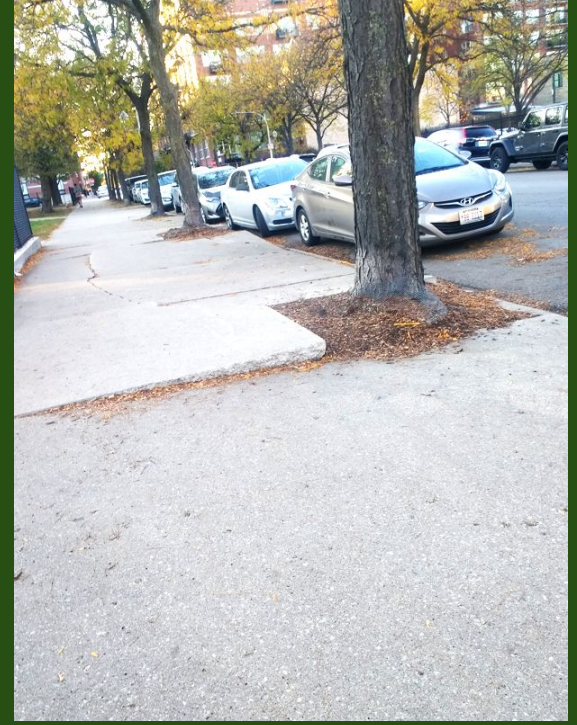
# Basic Infrastructure Needs : Sidewalks and Surfaces

Sidewalks and entrances are sometimes flooded for days limiting access to the park. People walk on the street which is unsafe.



# Basic infrastructure needs: Sidewalks & Surfaces

Sidewalks leading to the park on Monroe St. are buckling & dangerous for everyone.



# Basic Infrastructure : Interior sidewalks/paths are broken



# Basic Infrastructure Needs : Sidewalks & Surfaces

The playground surface has holes all over. The holes are a tripping hazard and the surface is not ADA compliant anymore. It's 12 years old and 2,000+ kids use it every school day. It's at the end of its life cycle despite maintenance & repairs.



# Tranquil Garden - Interior Paths - Not ADA compliant

This year, SPAC volunteers dug out the weeds in the interior paths for a short term fix but the gravel path is not wide enough or stable enough to be ADA accessible.



# Tranquil Garden - Remove Barriers and Improve Accessibility

Provide a concrete pad for a mobility chair or stroller next to benches, currently wheelchairs and strollers have to be placed in the pathway.

Add more benches, ideally in a shaded area for a mix of environments for people to enjoy.



# Community Roots Demonstration Garden - Remove Barriers

Relocate Picnic tables that block access to garden entrance



# Community Roots Garden - Improve Accessibility

- Add concrete pads & paths / pads
- Add universally designed accessible beds



# Community Roots Garden - Repairs

- Make infrastructure repairs as needed



# Skinner Park - Current Facilities built in 1950's

- The 1-room fieldhouse and the bathrooms are not ADA accessible.
- Skinner Park is one of the few parks left with a size “D” fieldhouse.
- Not cost effective to rehab current fieldhouse.



# ADA Compliant Greenhouse

## SPACE FOR:

- Classes & workshops to enhance environmental & gardening education
- Important to teach about climate change and how gardening helps
- Incorporate ADA bathrooms into greenhouse. Bathrooms are a basic necessity.
- SPAC & Park District can grow plants to support park & gardens including other community gardens across Chicago.
- Capacity building for larger impact



# Greenhouse Location

Greenhouse would be constructed on Park District property replacing flower beds that Skinner West school no longer uses or want to maintain at Adams & Throop. They have not been used for several years. The Skinner West entrance would be relocated North closer to the play equipment.



Greenhouse Location

# Greenhouse - Amenity benefiting many people and age groups

- No need to cancel environmental-gardening classes due to inclement weather
- After school programming, Park District day camp field trips
- Gardening Therapy Programs: Special Recreation, Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Adult workshops and senior programs during the day, evenings, and weekends
- SPAC can also offer programming support with workshops & materials



# **Universally Designed Gardens Benefits Everyone**

**welcomes & invites**

**children + adults + seniors + people of all abilities**

**to participate & build community**

**Inclusive + Equitable + Nurturing**