

Finalists Named For \$10 Million Prize To Aid Chicago Communities

December 12, 2019



Natalie Moore/WBEZ

The redevelopment of an empty building on West 79th Street in the Auburn Gresham community is part of a joint proposal selected as a finalist for the Pritzker Traubert Foundation's \$10 million Chicago Prize. Projects in Austin, Englewood, Little Village, North Lawndale and South Chicago were also named finalists for the award to be announced next spring.

The Pritzker Traubert Foundation has named six finalists for its \$10 million Chicago Prize to strengthen the city's South and West sides.

All of the finalists are composed of teams with strong neighborhood ties that want to transform a swath of their corridors. They've proposed a range of ideas — turning an empty fire station into a commercial kitchen, creating a community performing arts center and developing affordable housing, just to name a few.

“Our goal in all this was to elevate a lot of big ideas, and I don't want to lose sight of that even though it's a very big deal for these six teams that are going to move forward and continue to build out their idea,” said Cindy Moelis, president of the Pritzker Traubert Foundation. (WBEZ receives funding from the foundation.)

The finalists were announced Tuesday, and each team receives \$100,000 to fine-tune their proposals. The grand prize winner will be named next spring. Another 14 teams will receive \$10,000 to support their work.

Kim Wasserman, executive director of Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO), wants to help the food industry in Little Village. Her team is a finalist that wants to convert the empty fire station into a commercial kitchen.

“Our community is very food and agriculturally focused — from street vendors to restaurants. There’s a food economy, but what we weren’t seeing was opportunity for that to grow,” Wasserman said.

The finalists were selected over a three-month period with 65 judges.

Lyneir Richardson, a business professor, said the proposals were exciting, and the challenge was balancing between what was visionary and achievable.

“What they all had in common is people would either walk past a corner or see a vacant building or see a lot that hadn’t had development on it, and the Chicago Prize gave people fuel to dream about what new realities might be,” Richardson said.

Charlie Corrigan, also a judge, is head of Midwest philanthropy for J.P. Morgan Chase.

“This prize can unlock new sources of capital in areas that have been disinvested for too long,” Corrigan said. “Philanthropic capital at this scale is able to create more investable opportunities for the private sector.”

The Chicago Prize finalists are:

Auburn Gresham Project: Revitalization of a long-vacant office building into a healthy lifestyle hub; converting a nine-acre vacant brownfield into a renewable energy and urban farming campus; and repurposing a former school into affordable housing, job training, and business incubation center. Team members: Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation, Green Era, Urban Growers Collective and New Pisgah Community Service Organization.

Economic Equity and Opportunity via A Little Village Community Hub

Community: Redevelopment of a vacant two-story fire station into a commercial kitchen for food entrepreneurs, community meeting space and food purchasing center. Team members: Delta Institute and LVEJO.

Go Green on Racine: An Englewood Rising Project: Transformation of the 63rd & Racine intersection by refurbishing a two-story building into a food co-op, building a mixed-use development on three lots and repurposing a vacant school into a local recycling enterprise. Team members: Inner City Muslim Action Network, Teamwork Englewood, Resident Association of Greater Englewood, and E.G. Woode.

Now Is the Time: Advancing North Lawndale Together: Multiple initiatives that include a new Sinai ambulatory surgical center; mixed-income housing and commercial development; affordable housing built on vacant lots; restoration of now-vacant affordable units (some earmarked for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families), conversion of a vacant building into a hub of workforce programs, social enterprises, pop-up retail and community amenities; and redevelopment of a vacant building into housing and programming for 16- to 24-year olds facing barriers to jobs and education. Team members: Lawndale Christian Development Corporation, Lawndale Christian Legal Center, New Covenant CDC, North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, North Lawndale Employment Network, Sinai Community Institute, Sinai Health System and Under the Grid.

The Aspire Initiative: Building A Stronger Cradle-to-Career Pipeline in Austin:

Building a new early learning, health and recreation facility to serve 200 families; investing in quality curricular options at Austin College and Career Academy; redeveloping a vacant school into a business incubator; and building 60 units of affordable housing on vacant and scattered city-owned lots. Team members: Westside Health Authority, Austin Coming Together, By the Hand Club, United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, LISC Chicago, IFF, Lamar Johnson Collaborative, Purpose Built Communities, and Applegate Thorne-Thomsen.

Working Together to Reinvigorate South Chicago: Revitalizing East 91st and 92nd streets, from the lakefront to Commercial Avenue, through nine projects (six repurposed facilities, three new public spaces) that collectively provide affordable housing, six multi-family units, a grocery store, community performing arts facility, indoor soccer arena,

outdoor play space, gym, and business incubator and workforce development café, along with streetscape improvements. Team members: Claretian Associates, Interfaith Housing Development Corporation, Special Service Area #5, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish/School, Pilgrim Baptist Church, NeighborSpace, and 10th Ward Alderwoman Susan Garza.

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