

## Uptown Entertainment District Community Guidelines

### BACKGROUND

Uptown has a rich, century-long history as an entertainment destination, with its many clubs and theaters which hosted the stars of the silent film industry, movie palaces of the 1920's and legendary rock venues in recent decades. Today, key destination venues such as the Aragon Ballroom and Riviera Theatre draw popular music fans from across the region, while the Green Mill remains one of the nation's premier jazz clubs. A handful of bars and restaurants serve concert and theater goers, and the greater Argyle street Asian enclave offers authentic dining options a few blocks away. However, the community lacks the quantity of small and mid-sized venues that bring nightly activity to a truly vibrant entertainment district, as well as investment in the historic properties to house them, and identifiers to bolster a sense of place.

With Mayor Emanuel's public recent support for an enhanced Uptown Entertainment District and the planned significant private-public investment in our showcase venue, the Uptown Theatre, we have an opportunity to build upon Uptown's existing strengths and support a multi-faceted Entertainment District which will greatly enhance the arts opportunities in Chicago while also providing an anchor for this diverse Chicago community.

In order to begin to shape the District planning effort, Uptown United recently hosted three focus groups, seeking input from local residents, entertainment business owners currently in the district and those who are not but could possibly relocate here as well local land owners and business owners. Topics included traffic planning, parking capacity, safety, business attraction, physical characteristics and overall appearance. This document gives a brief summary of the findings from that initiative. We see this, along with the results of the 48<sup>th</sup> Ward Retail Corridor Study and the Chicago Cultural Plan, as a basis for more significant planning efforts in 2013.

### GENERAL DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

The goal of an enhanced Uptown Entertainment District is to create a regional entertainment destination built upon the success of existing venues and to utilize the inherent potential of our historic structures, strong arts community, central location and plentiful public transportation. In order to achieve this, resources should be invested in:

- **Regulatory Structure:** A formal zoning overlay will be necessary to address the unique needs of the District. Changes from existing Code could include restriction of street-level uses to support a more activated pedestrian experience, relaxed signage and liquor license restrictions, relaxed parking requirements for Public Places of Amusement, and available licenses and zones for street performers and food trucks.
- **Placemaking Tools:** Branded signage and streetscape features, carefully designed to reflect the authenticity of the District, will enhance vibrancy and District identity.
- **Incentives for District Development:** A streamlined TIF program for entertainment uses, in combination with other incentives developed in conjunction with the Department of Cultural

Affairs and Special Events, would help to attract the type of organizations and venues necessary for a thriving district.

These and other tools should be developed with special attention to the following unique factors:

- **Adaptability of Boundaries:** The heart of the Uptown Entertainment District is and will remain around the intersection of Lawrence Avenue and North Broadway Avenue. However, significant venues which support and look to the Uptown Entertainment District are located several blocks away, and should be included in planning, incentive and marketing efforts, even if not designated as part of the placemaking initiatives.
- **Diversity of Entertainment Uses:** Uptown has always been about music, but the District should also reflect our strong theater scene, dining and bar options, and production studios.
- **Respect for Existing Community:** Uptown currently has a significant mixed-income residential community, one of the most diverse in the City. An Uptown Entertainment District should provide mechanisms for minimizing the impact of visitors on residents, while also creating and sustaining local jobs.

## TARGETED FINDINGS

The following represent significant specific recommendations and areas of focus for the District.

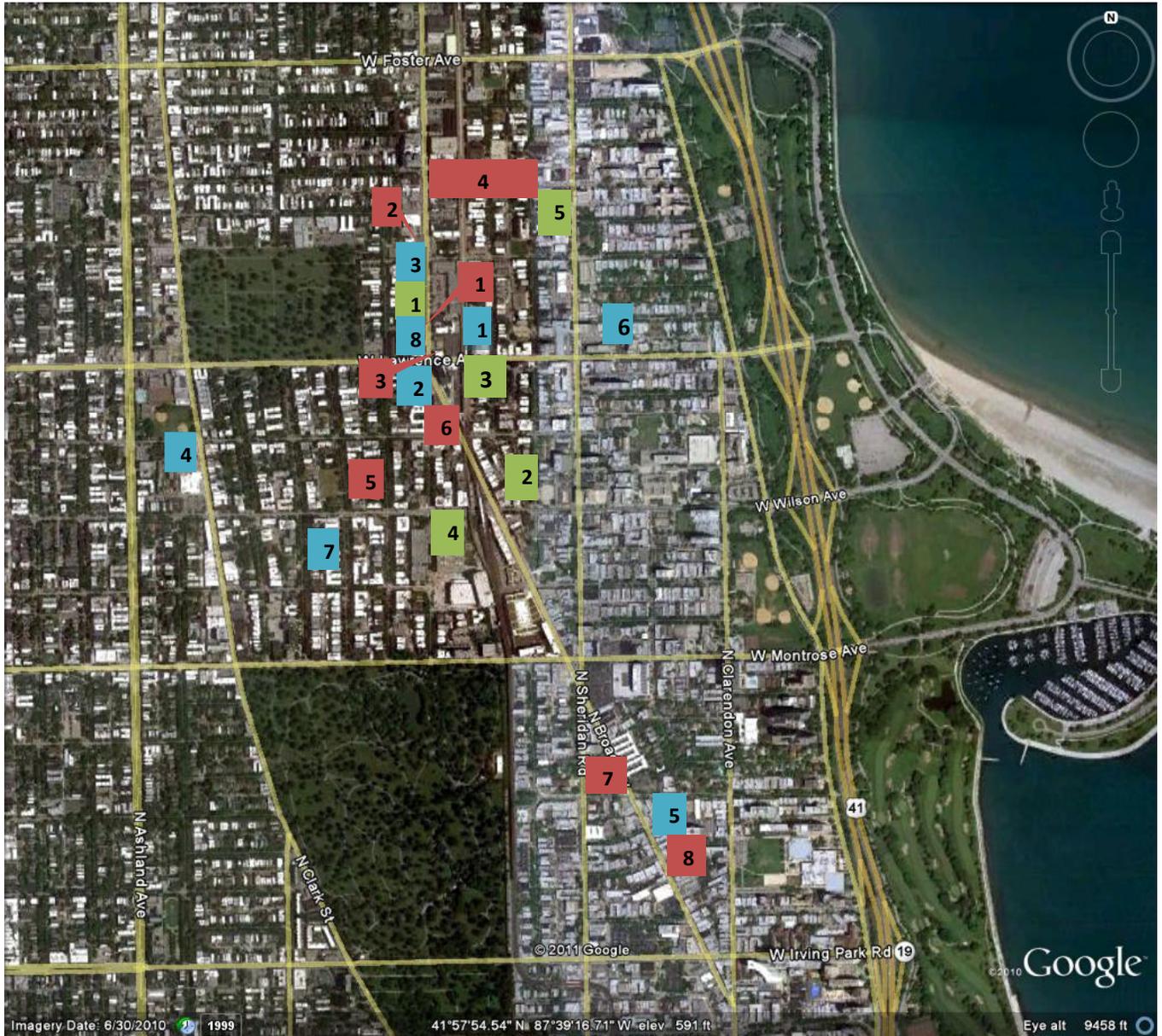
- **Small and Mid-Sized Entertainment Venues:** While the restoration of the Uptown Theater will represent a “gamechanger” for the District, smaller venues with easier spontaneous access will help to create the livelier atmosphere a more cohesive district. A focus on supporting venues suitable for local and independent acts with a capacity of 200-500 and cover charges of around \$10 would be ideal to sustaining the vibrancy of the district on the many nights that the larger venues are “dark.” Creative use of the Uptown Theatre space to carve out a smaller venue, or creation of a ground-floor Aragon Entertainment Center bar, would also help in this effort.
- **Events:** While existing festivals bring new visitors to the area, a more unique, branded event utilizing both the indoor venues and outdoor space could provide a valuable opportunity to showcase the District.
- **Traffic and Transportation:** North Broadway acts as a surface freeway through the heart of the District. It is unfriendly to pedestrians, unattractive and overly burdened by a heavily concrete streetscape. Traffic calming suggestions include angled parking, planted medians, increased vegetation, or the use of planted “bumpouts”. Significant public transit usage has kept parking and other traffic issues to a minimum, making the continued viability of the Lawrence Red Line station a key to the growth of the District. For those that do drive, better wayfinding signage for existing parking structures and shuttles to those parking areas slightly removed from the center of the District will help to increase parking capacity without threatening District character. Dedicated bike lanes and other bike amenities will also help provide a comprehensive approach to accommodating increased traffic in the District.

- **Safety and Cleanliness:** As was previously mentioned, safety and cleanliness continues to be a major issue. Not only was the threat of gang violence still a concern, so is remediation of blighted stretches of N Broadway and the general lack of greenery in the Uptown landscape, in particular North Broadway. While most agreed that sidewalk cleanliness and graffiti removal have been effective, the areas near Sheridan and Lawrence, the 4600 block of North Broadway and practically all sidewalks which pass under a CTA track at North Broadway, Wilson, Leland and Lawrence are terribly dirty and unattractive and that nettings should be incorporated under these overpasses which should help to minimize pigeons and their resulting waste. Other issues include: aggressive panhandlers who continue to frequent the area; the Wilson corridor is unattractive and feels unsafe. However, all of these continuing issues are among the first three things anyone is likely to encounter when arriving or visiting Uptown and were identified as needing long term solutions as patrons who are waiting in line at venues, transferring to CTA busses, arriving via the CTA or when seated on local patios are particularly likely to encounter these conditions. For a smaller music hall to choose Uptown, the venue would likely need major assistance if it isn't a turnkey ready site at this time, but late night safety would need to be addressed as the area is already perceived poorly when compared to other corridors where smaller venues currently exist such as Lincoln Square or Southport.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the consensus of interested parties within the community is positive and excited for the development of an enhanced Entertainment District. However, key structural changes including regulatory initiatives, public safety assurances, traffic planning and CTA rehab need to occur for the District to become a successful destination and entertainment hub for Chicagoland and beyond. In addition, a thriving District will be dependent on the development of new venues that will enable a more constant flow of visitors to the neighborhood, especially smaller venues with live music or programming which operate most nights and are able to supplement the larger venues which are in use on a more sporadic basis. However, for this to occur, significant assistance may be needed for any developer or operator willing to invest or operate within Uptown at this time. If these priorities can be addressed, local stakeholders firmly believe that an Entertainment District in Uptown can be realized and that a friendly, pedestrian oriented district where visitors will be more likely to plan to spend an evening and once again lead Uptown into becoming "Chicago's Most Entertaining Neighborhood".

**Attachment A – Uptown Entertainment District Asset Map—**



**Current Entertainment Venues-**

- 1 – Aragon Ballroom
- 2 – Riviera Theater
- 3 – Annoyance Theater
- 4 – Black Ensemble
- 5 – Profiles Theater
- 6 – National Pastimes
- 7 – Pegasus Players
- 8 – Green Mill

**Potential Entertainment Venues –**

- 1 – Uptown Theater
- 2 – TCF Building and Lots
- 3 – Former Kinetic Playground
- 4 – Truman Theater
- 5 – 4932 N Sheridan Rd

**Entertainment Supportive Businesses**

- 1 – Crew Bar and Grill
- 2 – Fat Cat
- 3 – Uptown Lounge
- 4 – Argyle Corridor
- 5 – Magnolia Cafe
- 6 – Agami
- 7 – Bar on Buena
- 8 – Michael’s Pizzeria & Tavern

### **Attachment B – Discussion Group Participant List**

- Mike Krueger (Real Estate Professional)
- Jackie Loewe (local resident)
- Pete Klockau (resident and Bloodshot Records)
- Ann Linton (local resident)
- Jim Stoller (Real Estate Professional)
- Jay Michael (Real Estate Professional)
- Jan Bartoszek (Founder of Hedwig Dances)
- PC Gooden-Smiley (local resident)
- Chip Long (local landlord)
- Dave Barbel (Aragon Theater)
- Alexander Jorge (Aragon Theater)
- Jerry Mickelson (Jam Productions)
- Matt Denny (Uptown Recording)
- Lisa Wagner (Uptown Business Partners)
- Steve Milford (Crew Bar + Grill)
- Lawrence Brian (National Pastime Theater)
- Jennifer Estlin (Annoyance Theater)
- Mick Napier (Annoyance Theater)
- Bob Fiedler (People’s Music School)
- Alyssa Berman-Cutler and Wally Rozak (Uptown United)