

- **Calumet River/Pullman-Blue Island:** Participants living near the Calumet River had few good things to say about it; most felt that the water and adjacent shore were severely degraded. Participants rarely used the river directly or indirectly for recreation, but a few have gone boating on it and the Cal-Sag or knew friends who did, and some mentioned marinas in the area. The odor of the water was the principal indicator of pollution for several participants, while others referred to its color, toxics, and hazards of eating fish or body contact. The landfills across from Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve were another major cause for concern, because of their increasing size and the smell and other forms of pollution they bring to the land and water. Most participants accepted the industrial nature of the corridor, but did not accept the need for barges and factories to pollute the water. One person in the group was very positive about the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's new Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration station near his home in Blue Island and hoped it and other plants would improve the water quality of the channel. On the whole, however, the Pullman-Blue Island group was the most pessimistic of all focus groups about river improvements:

*[Jerry] We originally bought in that area because they had grand plans of cleaning up all those boatyards and it was all supposed to be made into modern marinas. That was twenty years ago. We had a home built right there. It never came, none of the plans came to fruition...The river itself is polluted, there is no way that you can do anything right now. It will take a really long time, I think, to clean it up.*

### PART III FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE RIVER

Our discussions with participants about their current perceptions of the river established the context for looking at how they would like the river improved for recreation and related values. We combined structured exercises and open discussion to get at what people thought about the future potential of the river and how it might meet their needs for recreation.

#### IDEAL SETTING FOR RECREATION

We began our discussion of the future potential of the corridor with an exercise that asked participants to describe their "ideal recreation setting." Because the context of that exercise was general and did not focus on the river corridor, we do not detail those results here (see Table 2.3.5 for a statistical summary of responses). The exercise did, however, set the stage for discussions of future river enhancement options, and we thus note that participants' responses mentioned these key factors as important for making an ideal setting for recreation:

- Natural, scenic, pleasant surroundings
- Good maintenance

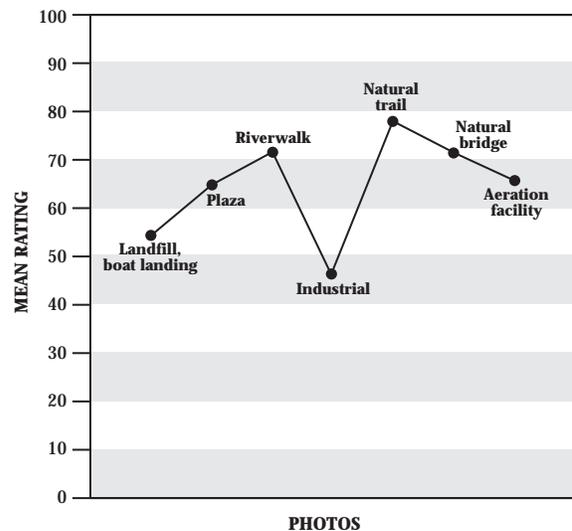
- Varied open space and facilities that support a range of passive and active pastimes
- Convenient, open access to all
- Safety

#### TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT PREFERRED ALONG THE CORRIDOR

##### ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF RIVER DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

A subsequent exercise related to ideal settings focused people's attention directly on the river corridor. In this exercise, participants passed around a set of seven 8" x 10" color photos depicting various places along the river and were asked to rate each on a 0-100 (low-high) scale of "overall appeal." These photos are shown on pages 28-30, and include: 1) a boat ramp across from a landfill site; 2) a small downtown plaza with a man seated on a bench; 3) a section of the Chicago Riverwalk downtown with formal tree plantings; 4) a concrete walk alongside a downtown factory/warehouse with no vegetation; 5) a paved bike path along a naturally vegetated river channel; 6) a footbridge crossing a small stream in a natural wooded setting; and 7) an aeration facility on the North Shore Channel with open grassy banks and walled shore.

The mean ratings for these photos, averaged over all individuals and groups, are shown in Figure 2.3. The highest rated scenes included the two that were the most natural appearing (scenes 5 and 6), and the downtown riverwalk scene (scene 3). The lowest rated scene was of the downtown factory/warehouse (scene 4).



**FIGURE 2.3**  
Mean score ratings for photos,  
averaged over all groups

Discussions of people's ratings were helpful in identifying the attributes of river development that affect visual appeal, and in defining which kinds of river development alternatives were preferred for the sections of the river in which participants lived (See Table 2.3.6 for statistical information). Important general attributes included river and landscape characteristics such as the natural environment and aesthetic surroundings; condition and maintenance of the water, vegetation, and landscape; the context of development and characteristics of open space development; and safety. Specific attributes were more important to some scenes than to others. Below is a summary of the major positive and negative attributes for each scene:

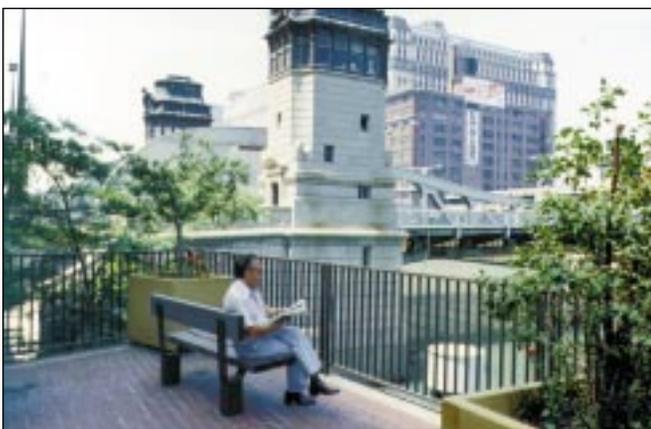
• **Scene 1—Landfill and Boat Landing**



Some viewers could not tell that the large hill across from the boat landing was a landfill. Thus, those who gave it positive ratings often did so because they thought the landfill was part of the natural topography. Most, however, didn't like this scene, and overall it was rated the second lowest. Representative comments from the Chinatown group include:

- [Adrienne] I gave it a 60. I'm not too interested in this place.*
- [Brian2] It's barren.*
- [Ken]...I just felt a little bit negative about it and put down a 40.*

• **Scene 2—Downtown Plaza**



Positive comments about the small downtown plaza revolved around its intimate scale; relaxing, user-friendly atmosphere;

and pleasant combination of natural and built elements. Representative comments include:

From the Glencoe group: *[Allen] It's an interesting concept of man-made material with nature. A very pleasant setting.*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Brenda] I got a peaceful feeling out of it, for being in the city. There's not all this hustle and bustle, and you can sit there and relax.*

*[Tom] Nice refuge.*

From the Chinatown group: *[Adrienne] There is not a lot of space in this picture. But it seems to be very nice and comfortable and very nice just sitting there.*

Negative comments referred to its overly urban setting, the small scale, and potential social problems:

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Dawn] I think it needs bigger trees, to make it seem more comfortable because right now although it's planted, you're still surrounded by concrete.*

*[Susan] It looks so crowded [claustrophobic], it looks like it's piling in on top of him and he looks uncomfortable sitting on what looks like a hard bench that just doesn't look like it's in place.*

From the Loop group: *[Gene] I can just imagine people walking by asking: "Any change?"*

• **Scene 3—Chicago Riverwalk**



This scene of the downtown Chicago Riverwalk was the second-most discussed photo among the participants. Comments were mostly positive, focusing on the trees, the cleanliness of the water and shore, the accessibility to the water, and the apparent safety of the surrounding area. Representative comments include:

From the Lake Forest group: *[?] The trees help beautify.*

From the Glencoe group: *[Jeremy] It's festive, it's inviting, a place to stop and you would stop there. I mean you would buy things, or walk through. You'd notice it.*

From the Loop group: *[?] You can get down close to the river and you don't feel like you're isolated from everyone.*

From the Metro West group: *[Kathy] It's neat, clean looking, it's colorful, the red awnings make that picture, it's bright.*

Negative comments were few and relatively minor in comparison to what people liked about the scene:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Mark] It's a little cold.*

*[Eliz.] My first impression was the trees. I like the trees but they don't look like they belong there, they're like potted plants or something. But it's pleasant, and the water looks clean.*

#### • Scene 4—Industrial Land Use



This scene was rated the lowest, mainly due to its industrial land use, stark expanses of concrete, and lack of vegetation. The following comments summarize the feelings of many who rated this scene low:

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[?] Number four has too much cement.*

From the Lathrop group: *[?] Well, this river is a highway, you know, just another road. And there's no green, no nature there at all.*

From the Loop group: *[?] With some work you can crack that up and put in some trees.*

*[?] Yea, but the way it is now there's no trees, no landscaping; you wouldn't want to sit there and look at the river, I'm sure.*

Comments about this scene were not entirely negative. Positive comments mentioned by participants focused on the issues of good maintenance and utility:

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Brian] I like the fact that you can tie up your boat along there, there's cleats and it provides a useful function as well as recreation.*

From the Loop group: *[?] At least [the path] continues, I mean you can ride a bike down there.*

From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[?]...You can go walking there, biking, keep it well lit. If industry is going to own river front property, they should make it look nice.*

#### • Scenes 5 and 6—Natural Areas



Scene 5

These two highest-rated scenes had much in common and were often discussed together within the focus groups. As a pair, they were also the most discussed of all the pictures. Many of the positive comments had to do with the mix of natural vegetation and recreational development. Representative comments include:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Monica] I gave it a 100 and said it was nice and seems like a very enjoyable place to ride your bike (scene 5).*

*[Phil]...My comment there is: "That was created by God." And all man has to do is respect it and keep it somewhat orderly (scene 6).*

From the Glencoe group: *[?] Wildflowers. It's natural yet managed and groomed (scene 5).*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Larry] It's natural (scene 6).*

From the Loop group: *[Chuck] I like it because it's one of the few [scenes] with trees that come right down to the water's edge with no retaining wall, so I feel like it's a real river (scene 5).*



Scene 6

Several participants imagined that natural recreation settings such as these might offer significant psychological benefits to users:

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Tom] Calm and pretty (scene 5).*

From the Lathrop group: *[George] It seems like an escape, that's what it seems to me that a river could provide—some greenery, maybe you can see some wildlife instead of belly-up fish (scene 5).*

[Terell] I gave it a 100 because it looks so peaceful and serene away from a whole lot of other stuff, city stuff. This looks great, I like it (scene 5).

From the Loop group: [Bradley] The greenery is excellent and it's obviously a continuous path which means you're not going to be teased with about a hundred yards of walking space and then find yourself out on the street...(scene 5).

The high levels of naturalness and density of vegetation were perceived positively by some and negatively by others. As the following comments illustrate, some saw these features as vestiges of wilderness while others saw them as signs of neglect or limits to human use:

From the Lake Forest group: [Brian] It's not overly manicured—people tend to want to manicure everything. This doesn't have that feel. It's just natural. It would be a place I'd want to take my kids to. I like that better than [photo] 5 actually (scene 6).

From the Glencoe group: [?] I think we like to be able to use nature, but if it's overgrown with trees everywhere, it's hardly used (scene 6).

From the Lathrop group: [Lee] Number 6 looks totally ridiculous to me. The trees need to be trimmed...

[?] You'd have to do stuff, go and cut stuff down (scene 6).

From the Palos group: [Jim] My favorite picture was one you just showed with just a simple blacktop and it looks like a sort of park off to the left or it might be the edge of a golf course or something, and leaving things wooded and as wild as possible (scene 5).

From the Metro West group: [Rudolf] I rated it 50 because it's an area of benign neglect (scene 5).

[Michelle] I like the way they did it because it preserves the wildlife area. It's not all commercialized and overcrowded. It's a relaxing picture to look at (scene 5).

The safety of river landscapes with dense vegetation, like those pictured in the scenes, was also discussed in several groups. There were varied responses to such conditions, as evidenced in this dialogue between two Ravenswood-Albany Park group participants about scene 5:

[Eliz.] First, it looks unsafe, too many high overgrown places, there's that little pond over there that somebody could wander into, a child and you know, get lost. It's not well kept, the path is OK but the whole setting would be one I wouldn't want to go into.

[Dawn] I like it a lot. I love the plants and the wildflowers, I love when things grow wild but you know I think it really looks nice and like anywhere else, you have to be aware of what's around you to be safe, regardless. I mean there's paths like that in the suburbs and they're nice.

[Eliz.] But I wouldn't want to go in there by myself

[Dawn] I disagree—some people are always kind of paranoid about going into places—I don't want to insult you—if you're afraid of everything, you just can't be that way and live. But you do need to be aware of what's going on around you.

Water quality was also an issue of some disagreement, much of it based on the color or clarity of the water portrayed in the scenes:

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: [Susan]...The river looks clean, it looks like you can just dive in head first without having to worry whether or not you are going to hit a couple of pairs of dirty tennis shoes or a car that was thrown in or something, or an old inner tube...(scene 5).

From the Metro West group: [Kathy] I would have rated it higher if the water didn't look so muddy (scene 5).

[Herb]...Whether the river is muddy or not, it would be nicer if it weren't muddy and you saw fish jumping, but I guess if it doesn't smell, you're not seeing debris floating or even under the surface, I can enjoy it if there are other things around it (scene 5).

From the Evanston-Skokie group: [Bernadine] The water looks dirty (scene 6).

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: [Susan] I liked the other one [scene 5] but I don't like this one because the water looks murky (scene 6).

[Brenda] It looks more like a creek, with a mud bottom and stuff (scene 6).

#### • Scene 7—Aeration Facility



Much of the discussion of scene 7 focused on trying to decide what was making the white foam in the water. Once they knew this was an aeration facility, several participants commented positively on the cleanup efforts and the well-maintained landscape, while others felt that the design of the facility could be more natural and user-friendly:

From the Lake Forest group: [Brian] Way too industrial.

From the Glencoe group: [Annette] I just put urban and controlled.

From the Lathrop group: [Lee] I really do like that one. It's better scenery that way. Everything is trimmed and everything looks perfect for a river.

From the Chinatown group: [Adrienne] Picture seven I gave an 80. For the green, trees, spaciousness, and it looks clean.

[Brian1] I gave it an 80, too. Clean water, it looked a little bit more artificial and stuff, it wouldn't be so ideal for people. The sides make it look artificial.

## ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES OF PREFERENCE

People's comments about the seven photos showed us how the elements of an ideal setting might play a role in river corridor development:

- **Clean water:** The apparent color and clarity of the water seem important indicators of preference, and signs of water cleanup activities are also viewed in a positive light.
- **Green vegetation:** Whether in formal urban plantings or in natural masses, trees and green vegetation are important contributors to river settings across the development spectrum.
- **A well-maintained landscape:** In urban and suburban settings, maintenance of natural and built features is important. Care is reflected in many things, including the appearance of water and vegetation; the presence of litter, graffiti, or vandalism; and the upkeep of facilities.
- **Good design:** Built features along the riverscape should show sensitivity to detail, have a good sense of scale, invite use, and respect the nature of the setting.
- **A relaxing, aesthetically pleasing atmosphere:** By their very nature, rivers seem to have special inherent qualities that foster relaxation and psychological renewal (Kaplan, 1977). Riverscape design and management of water, vegetation, and facilities can enhance these important psychological benefits, as well as enhance recreation and aesthetics.
- **A high level of safety:** As described in this and earlier sections, the perception of safety can vary widely among different people, and a place that is perceived safe by one person may be considered unsafe by another. Dense vegetation can be a potential threat to safety, and can thus affect the desirability of using river areas for recreation.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Although these attributes were mentioned as desirable in many of the scenes, there were marked differences in how some attributes were interpreted as a function of the *context* or setting in which the scene was discussed. Focus group participants made an important distinction between the kinds and levels of development that were appropriate where they lived and those appropriate to other settings. These other settings include urban commercial, urban industrial, and urban and suburban open space. Comments on the scenes below illustrate how participants saw the relationships between context and appropriate development:

### • Scene 2—Downtown Plaza

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Larry] Number two is for cities only.*

From the Chinatown group: *[Brian2] I liked it, but it's not really a park setting that I sort of envisioned [for the new Chinatown park].*

### • Scene 3—Chicago Riverwalk

From the Lake Forest group: *[Kathy] For downtown it is appealing.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Georgette] It's good for urban.*

*[David] I think that's good for the city, but I don't like it for the suburbs.*

From the Chinatown group: *[Gene] Three is good but realistically you can't...I don't think it's suitable for our neighborhood...*

### • Scene 5—Natural Area with Trail

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Larry] I would never touch that, that's pretty. You're talking about nature, but you know it depends on where you're looking at. If you're looking at Evanston or some place like it, that would be better up north along the Skokie Lagoons area...I think [the North Shore Channel in] Evanston still looks nice, but they need a little more openness...*

The next section elaborates on what specific levels of naturalness and development people felt were appropriate to the stretch of river they lived along. Referring to participants' discussion of the photographs, however, we did find some sketchy evidence of culturally based preferences for levels of naturalness and development. One comment by an older participant of the Chinatown focus group expressed this cultural distinction:

*[Ken] This one (photo 2) in terms of Chinese people would be better than the other one (photo 3). This (#2) is more like a setting for Chinese people. The other (#3) is for American people.*

Many participants in the Evanston-Skokie, Lathrop, and Pullman-Blue Island groups who were African American expressed greater preferences for scenes showing high levels of maintenance and facility development as well as vegetation that was more open, formal, and manicured. On the other hand, Anglo American participants in these groups and especially in the suburban Lake Forest, Glencoe, and Palos groups often expressed preferences for less developed scenes with a higher density of natural vegetation. It is not certain whether these variable preferences are based on ethnicity or are a function of urban-suburban residency, and there is evidence in the related literature to support both hypotheses (e.g., Schroeder, 1983; Kaplan and Talbot, 1988; Dwyer and Gobster, 1992). Nevertheless, the variability in preferences expressed by groups due to culture, location, or other factors makes it all the more important to consider the context of development in river planning and management.

## RIVER IMPROVEMENTS

With information about ideal settings and responses to photographs of river development alternatives to build on, we ended our focus groups with an open discussion of how the river could be improved for recreation and other purposes. Participants generally focused on many of the same issues as they did in discussions of ideal settings and photo ratings: an emphasis on improving the condition and maintaining the quality of river water, vegetation, and landscape; a focus on different river development alternatives; and a concern for protecting the natural and aesthetic characteristics of the

corridor (Table 2.3.7). Specific comments on these issues, however, are best understood by how they help to answer three important questions about improving the river for recreation and other purposes: 1) Can development proceed if the water is not clean? 2) What general recommendations can be made for improving the corridor? 3) What specific recommendations did participants make about the river in their particular neighborhoods? These questions are addressed in the following sections.

### **CAN DEVELOPMENT PROCEED IF THE WATER IS NOT CLEAN?**

Most participants did not expect that the Chicago River would or should be made into a pristine environment, and while most wanted to see water quality improvements made, they realized the urban nature of the river and its non-recreational uses. Many remarked that they can still bicycle, observe wildlife, and enjoy other in-stream and streamside recreational activities even though they know the water is polluted, as long as it doesn't stink. Most of all, our sample of nearby residents cared deeply for their river, and while they realized that water quality remains a significant problem, they held high hopes for the future:

From the Palos group: *[Helen] I may not see [the improvements] in my time, but I'm sure they're going to happen.*

From the Metro East group: *[Matt]...even the people who thought the river was polluted—and I think just about everyone here thinks that—it's still a wonderful resource and it's something that we really care about.*

From the Metro West group: *[Emily] I think the river just adds to Chicago and makes it all the more beautiful. I always thought the river was beautiful and I mean even though it's dirty, it's nothing that can't be improved.*

*[Herb] Look at cities in Europe and how important the rivers are there. And they maintain their importance to the state even though they are polluted.*

*[Kathy] The river itself doesn't do a lot for me. I think it's how they set it up. Obviously in that picture it's what they do along the river to make it look attractive, because the river itself is dirty. To me it is anyway, so how can they make it look attractive with the buildings and the settings and what not around it even though the water itself is dirty.*

This optimistic outlook was found in all the focus groups, except the Pullman-Blue Island group. Participants in that group had an underlying despair for the future of the river in their neighborhood:

*[Jennifer] I'm pessimistic about the future of the rivers.*

*[Louise] Like I said, it would be nice if you could develop all the shore area there. I think there is a lot of possibility but as long as the landfill is there I don't see any potential. Because no matter how nice you make it look, it's still going to stink.*

*[Jerry] They have to stop the pollution that's coming from Indiana. They did try to clean up the Cal at one time and they noticed that just too much pollution was coming from Indiana and if you don't have cooperation between states you're not going to get anywhere fast. Unless they do some interstate cooperation, I don't really see any future for the Cal-Sag.*

One person had an interesting perspective on the sequence of water pollution cleanup and river development activities, and put it this way:

From the Metro East group: *[George] If they do it step-wise, if they beautify it first with trees and landscaping, then maybe people will force the politicians to clean it up. Because if you beautify an area, then the next thing is you don't want it polluted as much anymore. So maybe instead of going in there and cleaning it up, you beautify it first. It's like if you're wearing a clean shirt and you get a spot on it—maybe people will notice the pollution more once you get the trees and landscaping along all these different branches.*

### **WHAT GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS CAN BE MADE FOR IMPROVING THE CORRIDOR?**

Many of the recommendations participants made for improving the river in their neighborhood involved issues common throughout the corridor. These issues are itemized below, illustrated by comments from participants in different focus groups:

- **Continue to improve water quality:** For most groups, the need for water quality improvements was chief among the recommendations made. Again, various of perspectives were given from the different reaches along the corridor:

From the Glencoe group: *[Dan] I think it should be cleaned faster so that people can swim in it.*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[?] It would be nice if the river was clean and you could have picnics by it without worrying about rats or perverts.*

From the Lathrop group: *[George] If they are going to have riverboat gambling they are going to have to clean it up to make it attractive for the out-of-state business coming in, all the high rollers. But again, I'm rather cynical about that, I mean there's a lot that could be done that needs to be done—we have the mechanisms to clean water. There's other places where filth can be poured instead of the river. If there was some will on the part of the enforcement agencies. The river looks best on St. Patrick's Day when they dump green dye in it, that's when it looks good. Other than that it's just a waterway. You know transportation is something, but waterways can be much cleaner and also be used for more than transporting goods.*

- **Improve the vegetation:** Recommendations dealt mainly with adding trees and other greenery to the corridor:

From the Metro East group: *[Tim] More trees. Daley's got a good thing going with his trees. And certain people here would like the architecture and other parts of it preserved as well—don't just make the whole thing trees. It's a varied river, you know, it's quite a bit different along different parts of it. I like the variety, beautify certain parts of it, and clean it.*

From the Palos group: *[Ann] They really should plant more wildflowers and other things that will beautify the area. You know they've just got this, it just goes down this bank and then there's scrub grass and a few bushes and weeds. I would like it to be cultivated a little bit more so we had some color and flowers and stuff like that.*

- **Improve landscape maintenance:** Recommendations here related to cleanup of litter and maintenance of riparian vegetation:

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Susan] I would like to see the shoreline tree lined, the other vegetation cleaned up, and a lot of the glass and other garbage that has been thrown in there needs to be removed.*

From the Lathrop group: *[Maxine] If you kept [the chain-link fence] free of weeds and tall grass, you could see through it to the river and then maybe the kids wouldn't be tempted to climb over it.*

From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[Jennifer]...get the beer bottles and the litter out of there and get some nice, fresh, healthy land.*

- **Aim for an appropriate level of development:** Development recommendations varied greatly across the reaches of the corridor, but in general participants felt that development—whether for economic, recreational, or environmental purposes—should be carried out with sensitivity to the context of surrounding land uses:

From the Loop group: *[Bob]...I wish the Chicago River was developed with more of a promenade approach, where you have a place that people could come to with cafes or just stroll along on it. Right now you've got this discontinuous link: you kind of walk along it and then you have to go around it then come back to it.*

From the Palos group: *[Joe] I'd like to see a generally enhanced, limited development consistent with the country-fied ambiance that we have now...I think the pressure to commercialize it is going to be enormous. I like commerce naturally, but when the rush is on such as when Crestwell gets permission and sets a precedent by building that marina on the south side of the canal, I think it's going to go bonkers.*

From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[Jennifer] I think there could be more businesses. They might even create some jobs in the area. There would be a lot of potential there if it was clean, if it wasn't so bad, but people stay away because of that.*

- **Create a balance and variety of uses along the corridor:** Although each reach might dictate development-specific approaches, it is clear that no single theme can or should be forced upon the entire corridor. Instead, as one discussion from the Lathrop focus group illustrates, perhaps the best strategy for corridor planning might be to recognize, plan for, and celebrate the variety that is the Chicago River corridor:

*[George] There are many things you can have, many different views along different parts of the river, and the means of transportation to get to each of them. If you have functional areas like that area where the water was being aerated, grow some trees, grow some greenery, it doesn't have to be overhanging. However, leave some areas that are unspoiled where the trees can hang the way they would grow normally. Many different parts of the city have different uses, different functions; the river is needed in some areas for transportation—you won't get the kind of greenery there, it doesn't make any sense to have overhanging trees. Other places it can be more*

*like a park. I mean, you have residential there, we have parks here. Picture number five comes closest to what I have in mind for this area.*

*[Lee] Yeah, yeah you hit it right on the button, brother. A variety of all of them.*

- **Develop a corridor trail system:** Along some reaches that do not currently have them, the development of trails was recommended to enhance recreational quality:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Kati] I think they could put in a path, not with gravel but with chips like a hiking trail almost.*

From the Lathrop group: *[George] Build it up, I've seen proposals for bike paths and stuff. With some greenery around the shore, it would be an area where you would want to go, where you would want to spend some time...*

From the Loop group: *[Bradley] I would like to see continuous jogging, walking, and biking paths along the river, ultimately leading out of the city. Where you can take the branches all the way out to the forest preserve areas. Some people can run that distance.*

From the Chinatown group: *[Brian2] I was thinking more in terms of the San Antonio Riverwalk...a riverwalk—to walk, shop, bicycle.*

From the Palos group: *[Ann] Great potential. I would love to see some of it blacktopped so we could walk along it...*

From the Metro East group: *[Matt]...I don't see any reason why you couldn't have a small strip of land along the river that was park-like and would be taken care of. And you could have a running path and a bicycle path and a few places where you could have other parks and ballfields...*

- **Increase safety:** Recommendations for increasing the safety were diverse, and in the case of vegetation management and fencing, were often conflicting:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Brian] If you maintain fairly heavy vegetation along the top of the embankment, it would act as a disincentive for a kid to try and get down there. And there's a lot of that now; I've never really tried to access it from the yards, but looking down the stream from the end of the road there's a pretty heavy cover of vegetation along it.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Dorsey] A fence on the steep embankment would help but, I think a lot of the greenery—the trees, the shrubs—a lot of that just needs to be cut away...*

*[Larry] Kids are going to jump cyclone fences, kids are going to do whatever they want to do. You can't stop them. People know they can't walk near the edge, I mean older folks walking in the neighborhoods aren't going to walk along the edge of the water and fall into it...*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Claire] Where we're talking about they need to put up a fence. There is one that they have, but a car crashed through and knocked the fence over and now it's pretty pathetic...*

- **Improve access:** As was mentioned in previous sections, the issue of access had many dimensions for participants. Few specific recommendations were given in this section for improving access, with most comments referring to physical access:

From the Loop group: *[Ann] I think they should really concentrate on just making a path where people could go continuously walking.*

From the Palos group: *[Ed] What they really need to do with it is make the area accessible; right now there are no pre-planned paths or anything...*

- **Tell current success stories:** Up and down the corridor we heard many positive stories of river cleanup efforts, recreational facility developments, and plant and wildlife preservation projects. In some cases this knowledge was widespread among participants, but in most instances only one or two participants were aware of activities going on. Better promotional campaigns by agencies, municipalities, and interest groups could raise public consciousness about these activities, as shown by the following two comments from participants in the southern reaches of the corridor about cleanup efforts by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District along the Cal-Sag:

From the Palos group: *[Dick] The only thing I would say is we know that this waterfall is in there and it's supposed to be aerating the water or it's cleaning the water; I don't think it's filtering it. But maybe there should be more PR as to just how well is it functioning. Has the pH level changed, what's happening? It's been running for a year except for when it was closed down...What was the water like when it started, and after all this money was spent, what's the water like now?*

From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[Bill] Well I'm hoping what they're trying to do is going to work. It remains to be seen. I know there were five projects on the books and I know that two of them are built and operating and they are both in nice-looking areas. The water is still dirty, but they're working on it.*

- **Use information to change perceptions:** Information about cleanup efforts and other ongoing projects can go far to change people's perceptions of the river corridor. These current efforts provide excellent opportunities to showcase the river. In many cases, however, the river can "speak for itself" in attracting people's interest and enthusiasm—all they have to do is see and/or experience the river, something those who do not live near it rarely do. As these comments from the Metro West focus group illustrate, the color photographs of scenes along the corridor changed the perceptions of two of the participants:

*[Brian] I was going to say you can change your opinion just from a picture. Her opinion was way down low and now all of a sudden she sees a picture and realizes it's the river she's just been downplaying the whole time, you know suddenly it just looked beautiful to her. A picture can tell you a thousand words and apparently it did for her.*

*[Herb] I guess I would say that the river's natural creative beauty is for the most part probably gone so what it's going to be is up to people. It can be many things and that's possible, certainly with a commitment on the part of people. As much as anything, it's a matter of knowing—and your pictures are one way—that there really are beautiful spots even now, and changing the negative perceptions that people have.*

- **Encourage local action and responsibility:** One final issue that cut across the focus groups concerned how such a formidable task as river cleanup can actually happen. Many participants looked to governmental bodies to clean up, regulate, and monitor the environmental quality of land and water resources. In several focus groups, however, participants also talked about the need for individuals and local groups to share responsibility for cleaning up the river:

From the Glencoe group: *[Robbie] Clean up. People should take responsibility for themselves more or less, I mean, it doesn't even have to be a group thing, it can be a personal thing. If everyone just picked a spot today you wouldn't even need to have these [focus groups].*

*[Jeremy] It's been said but I'd also like to say that I'm glad all the people out there are willing to clean it up, helping to clean it up, and I'd like to see that continue and have people go out there everyday to clean so it's not dirty anymore.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Larry]...people just have to police themselves and police their neighborhoods...*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Susan] I think a lot of the time we depend on other people to do the work for us, and I think a lot of the time a community effort would be a heck of a better idea, because when you depend on the city to do it for you, you could sit on your backside until the millennium comes and you know that it ain't going to happen. But if you can get a bunch of people that are actually saying: "I'm tired of this," you can really get something done.*

The issue of local responsibility and need for community action is well summarized in this dialogue from the Lathrop focus group participants:

*[James] Instead of talking about it, they should do something about it.*

*[Lee] Who do we need to contact for the making of a better river?*

*[Terell] Let's get some action.*

*[Maxine] We can start this weekend by helping out on the river cleanup.*

*[Lee] But is that our job?*

*[Maxine] Yes. It's our community and if we don't put something into it, no one else will, either.*

## WHAT SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS CAN BE MADE FOR IMPROVING PARTICULAR REACHES?

In addition to corridor-wide recommendations, issues of concern within particular focus groups inspired participants to recommend specific actions for improving conditions in their neighborhood and along their reach:

- **Middle Fork/Lake Forest:** One suggestion was to deal more effectively with flooding by cleaning up some of the downed trees and other obstructions that cause water to back up into people's yards and basements. Another was to increase safety near the river and lessen the chance that children will slide down the bank and into the water.

Suggestions here included planting denser vegetation along the crest of the hill to deter access and installing a natural path with rope railing at key use areas, e.g., where roads dead-end at the river.

The most important discussion dealt with the appropriate level of development for the Middle Fork Savanna area. An initial suggestion by one participant was questioned by others, but soon a general consensus was reached by those living near the savanna on how they felt it should be developed for use:

*[Brian] A paved bike path near where we go would enhance the area. The other thing I think would enhance it without changing the nature area is, and some people will disagree with this, but since I have little kids I would love to see some understated swing sets or something down in that area for kids to play...*

*[Vern] I have an objection there. I think the savanna should be made for nature study. I think there are other facilities available for baseball and so forth, but that's a rare, a very rare thing and if we lose it, it's gone forever.*

*[Meredith] I agree that it should be left in its natural state; the area behind our house is going to have paths so there are other wildlife preserves available where you could do that type of thing. I don't know whether putting in a natural path or something would disturb it, but it's supposed to be one of the rarest pieces of savanna in the State of Illinois, there's such few left, and I don't know about tampering with it.*

*[Kati] Yea, I think they could put in a path, not with gravel but with chips like a hiking trail almost.*

*[Sharon] People get carried away once they start cleaning it up and putting in a path. Lake Forest always does the biggest and the best, but then pretty soon you're going to have tennis courts and everything else.*

*[Brian] What I've seen in other areas first they put in a path, then they do fences and pretty soon you're decorating it up. Just a simple path without decoration is what's best.*

- **Skokie Lagoons/Glencoe:** Participants in this focus group agreed that the naturalness of the area should be maintained, except in some recreation areas where a more groomed look could prevail. The Skokie Lagoons cleanup effort should be continued; some participants imagined a future in which the Lagoons would not only be fishable, but swimable as well. Cleanup efforts should also be increased along the shore areas, with better self-policing of litter by forest preserve recreationists and some removal of fallen trees near areas of human use.

Perhaps the biggest problem that participants would like managers to focus on is the exploding population of deer and their impact on people and the native vegetation of the forest preserve:

*[Sheldon]...I would also like to see animal control where...I think the Skokie Lagoons offers, it's such a natural thing where you have animals and people in a playground you know. That's where people meet nature, you know you have the animals here but I would like to see the deer controlled*

*somewhat but not killed. Perhaps something could be done to prevent them from roaming and still maintain them there. Like an electronic fence. It's really going to be I think dangerous. I would hate to see a deer lying dead on Forest Way.*

*[Francine] There was one on Dundee Rd. last week.*

*[Nancy] I think everything has been said. I guess it's the balance between the deer and the wildflowers that I see as the problem, but it is the loss of the wildflowers in particular that I most deplore.*

- **North Shore Channel/Evanston-Skokie:** Most recommendations from participants dealt with the safety issue. The dilemma for management is: How do you maintain the natural, pleasing quality of the landscape yet maintain a comfortable level of perceived safety? Recommendations included the following:

*[Larry] I think Evanston and that area still looks nice, but they need a little openness.*

*[David] Yeah, it's a little dangerous, a little dense, but it's like Larry said, you don't want to touch something like that, it's beautiful. The only problem is that late at night you probably would want to close it off like [they do in the forest preserves]. Close it off, fence it off late at night so you can't cross it, but in the daylight I think that's ideal.*

*[June] The main thing is the patrolling, because the park is already really nice.*

*[David] Either that or open up that street again. I think that would be a big help.*

- **North Branch/Ravenswood-Albany Park:** Increasing the safety was the main suggestion of participants in this focus group; their solutions echoed many of those touched on by Evanston-Skokie participants. Community-based strategies to increase safety and clean up water and shore areas were seen as playing important roles in an overall effort:

*[Brenda] Like neighborhood watches; get together everyone in your neighborhood that lives in the general vicinity of Horner Pk. [to police the area by the river], because you formed the neighborhood watch with the neighbors so the community ought to get together and do it.*

- **North Branch/Lathrop:** The main suggestion of participants was to improve the water quality of the river—to decrease the smell, reduce the garbage thrown into it, and make it more usable for boating and fishing. Solutions here included community-based initiatives and fines for polluters who dump or throw trash into the river. Another set of suggestions was aimed at improving the shoreline area so that it could be better used by residents:

*[Maxine]...They need to cut some of the weeds down and clean up and then people can have more respect for it.*

*[Emmet] If they made a major change to the shoreline it would be better; it would give a good outlook on life. It maybe would help people have something to do instead of just sitting around in the house, talking, hanging out.*

- **Main Branch/Loop:** Recommendations specific to the downtown sections of the corridor included increasing the safety of walkway areas, increasing the continuity of the riverwalk, and developing more cafes and restaurants that can be reached on foot and by boat. The proposal to develop a riverboat gambling facility near the downtown area was a major topic of discussion, and opinions were mixed on what the city should do:

*[Chris]...I think it would probably improve the quality of our building, as far as we could get more out of our condo and things like that. It would improve our value because I think if it would be done, they would have to make sure they did it right and it would beautify the area instead of degrading the area, and they would have to be responsible for that branch of the river, too.*

*[Chuck] I say if it does come, I say put it on a boat instead of Navy Pier*

*[Gene] I think it's ridiculous to put it on a boat when you've got all this undeveloped land. We're talking about 30,000 jobs. What is the point in having it, what Daley is talking about now is a moat, a moat boat, that's basically it. That's ridiculous, why not just build it on the ground? People come to Chicago, the rest of the state lives off Chicago. Definitely put it on land. We're talking about two billion dollars worth of development.*

*[Chris] It doesn't matter to me.*

*[Bradley] I don't like it. I don't like organized crime, period.*

*[Mary Anne] I think we're still lucky to have such a wonderful resource like the Chicago River and the whole lakefront, and anything that gives people more access to that, I think it should be utilized. There is a certain charm and sense of freedom that you get on a boat that goes along with recreation, gambling, or being in a nightclub atmosphere. I think it's a lot of fun.*

- **South Branch/Chinatown:** Recommendations by Chinatown participants for their stretch of the river were to increase river cleanup efforts, and develop park space and a riverwalk along the South Branch. Some participants were concerned that while increased river development might be good for the local economy, shoreline restaurants, recreational boating operations, and the like would not meet the needs of Chinatown residents:

*[Facilitator] Is there potential in your neighborhood for this kind of development?*

*[Brian1] None that I see.*

*[Ken] No, not in my neighborhood...you know, you have to consider if people can afford that type of thing.*

- **Cal-Sag Channel/Palos:** Recommendations included cleanup of the river, restrictions on further industrial development, some limited commercial-recreational development including the construction of a marina (already proposed), and enhancement of recreational opportunities with path development along the shore of the canal. Palos participants were highly concerned that further develop-

ment should respect and enhance the natural qualities that now exist:

*[Jim] I'd just really like to see them continue with their efforts to clean it up. As far as developing along it, try to preserve as much of the wildness as you can. Keep it clean, keep it simple...*

*[Ann]...I think there is great potential there and I would just love to see that developed as they have talked about through the years, and having some little areas where there are restaurants or recreational facilities so that you could stop to watch the ducks or whatever.*

*[Ed] Maintain its current natural setting, don't really upheave the whole thing to make it professional looking. Let it be the natural look. And make it accessible to people so that they don't have any fear about walking through it, either.*

*[Helen] I want it kept pretty much the way it is. I like the way it is.*

*[Marie] I pretty much feel the same way, I'd like to clean it up, not a lot of building and things but I would like a marina where you could stop in and walk. Of course, the path sounds great.*

- **Calumet River/Pullman-Blue Island:** Participants would like to see their river enhanced for recreational and business opportunities. But before any development can happen, they overwhelmingly stressed the need to clean up the river and adjacent landfill:

*[Regina] If they cleaned up Mount Trashmore that would be a big help. A lot of the pollution coming into the Cal-Sag is coming from Indiana and they are not stopping it because it's Indiana's so it's coming over the border and polluting everything. If they cleaned up the river, even if they got 30 percent of it out of there, it would make the area a little bit nicer. You know, it would bring some of the summer boating in and some of the people back, and maybe rebuild the area around there.*

*[Jennifer] I think what she said about Mount Trashmore is holding up a lot. I think the water should be cleaned up—it's a living thing, it needs to breathe basically. I think it needs to be cleaned somehow, just to bring the life back to it—it's like a big sludge puddle.*

## PART IV CONCLUSIONS

This study provided some insights into how an important constituent group, nearby neighborhood residents, perceive and use the Chicago River corridor. Although many specific thoughts and ideas were generated from the different focus group exercises and discussions, these findings can be condensed into three general themes to guide future planning efforts: the issues of central importance, the dynamics of the corridor, and the means to successful implementation of planning goals and objectives. We conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of each theme.