

Redefining and Renaming the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal

Naming Committee Discussion Overview

Naming Committee Background and Context

A coalition of partners is building a movement to redefine the way people think about the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to spark future community and waterway investments. The coalition and supporters include nonprofits, community groups, government leaders, businesses, cultural institutions, and others from along the 28 mile canal corridor. One of the first tasks of the coalition is to propose new name options for this unique body of water that reflect its progress, renewal, and possibility. This work will be led by the Naming Committee made up of thought leaders and will include opportunities for public input. The Naming Committee discussion process is facilitated by a consultant team.

Naming Committee Role

- Helping to gather ideas, cultural context, history, and other information that can inform how we think about the re-branding of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal
- Reflecting on and reviewing community input gathered from surveys and other discussions to identify key themes about the identity of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal
- Identifying and refining three to five new canal names that will be shared in a public-facing campaign
- Supporting a formal application to rename the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to the selected new name

Naming Committee Workshop Discussions to Date

The Naming Committee has had two introductory workshops, on July 24 and August 6, to set the stage for the renaming discussion. The focus of the initial workshops was feedback on the proposed public survey, Naming Committee participation, and on the general approach to this work. Future workshops will be focused on reviewing naming best practices and using information from public input to gather and refine name options.

Naming Committee Meeting 1 Summary

Meeting Participants:

- Adam Flickinger, Friends of the Chicago River
- Amber Delgado, Landmarks Illinois
- Ana Koval, President, Canal corridor Association, I&M Canal NHA
- Andrew Schneider, Chicago Park District

- Brendan Daily, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District
- Daniel Hebreard, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
- Delilah Salgado, Artist in residence with Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization
- Elizabeth Blasius, Preservation Futures LLC (facilitator)
- Faryal Faizan, Friends of the Chicago River
- Hilary Denk, U.S. House of Representatives District Director at Office of Congressman Bill Foster (IL-11th)
- Jason Berry, Village of Lemont
- Jonathan Solomon, Preservation Futures LLC (facilitator)
- Marcella Corona, MK Corona (facilitator)
- Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River
- Nancy Meza, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)
- Rachel Havelock, The Freshwater Lab at University of Illinois Chicago
- Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Forest Preserves of Cook County
- Ron Henderson, Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT)
- Sergio Rodriguez, Village President of Summit

Meeting 1 Discussion:

1. An introduction to the vision, goals, and purpose of this initiative was given by Friends of the Chicago River's executive director, Margaret Frisbie and Hilary Denk from the office of U.S. Congressman Bill Foster.
2. Values for this process were reviewed and agreement was sought:
 - a. Transparency: The project's history, intentions, and constraints are shared up front. Committee and community members are clear about what they do and don't have the capacity to influence within the project scope.
 - b. Inclusivity: Meetings feel welcoming, connect committee members with each other, and prioritize bi-directional communication and co-education. Decision-making processes create a dialogue that prioritizes community voice.
 - c. Curiosity: The committee and community engagement processes value multiple ways of knowing, approach community voice as a source of wisdom, and provide an open forum for shared knowledge and discussion.
 - d. Accessibility: Engagement opportunities intentionally consider time capacity and offer different levels and types of engagement that committee and community members are able to commit to.
3. Participants were invited to share stories and collective knowledge about the canal to start to outline resources about the past, present, and future of this body of water. Resources and highlights of information shared include:
 - a. "Images of America" which describes the history of how the canal changes the course of the Des Plaines River through Lemont and Romeoville
 - b. Power of water transport to connect navigation and separate from Lake waters (mini-continental divide). Water transport is a forgotten history, "made the region work"
 - c. Map data such as MWRD parcel leasing map shows ownership and status of canal edge lands and the Cook County GIS viewer (aerials)
 - d. BackwardRiver.org
 - e. Crawford Power Plant on river for 100 years released coal ash

- f. Is it a canal or is it a river? From a fish perspective, it's a river. We should think about how it serves wildlife, and what that means to people.
 - g. Chicagoans grow up thinking it's a river, later learned that it's a canal.
 - h. Canal is on the national register of historic places. Affects planning, bridge and trail development. This requires 3 alternatives to be offered and IL SHPO makes a determination.
 - i. Differing opportunities for public connection to the canal, the Forest Preserve abuts in farther portions but area in the City of Chicago along La Villita Park lacks access (fenced off, private property).
 - j. Canal is both economic engine and natural area.
4. Participants discussed a draft public engagement approach and provided feedback on survey questions, and the general outreach strategy. Key feedback from this discussion includes:
 - a. Suggestion for adjustments to the survey included adding: How do you connect with the water that runs through your community? What does the canal look like by you? To allow for open naming ideas and answers, not to lead with the existing name. How would you like to connect to this water?
 - b. Other suggestions included opportunities to share and distribute the survey, including through online newsletters of Naming Committee participants, lists, and through in person / direct engagement.
 - c. It was also recommended that additional outreach for participating in the Naming Committee take place to include additional perspectives.

Naming Committee Meeting 2 Summary

Meeting Participants:

- Adam Flickinger, Friends of the Chicago River
- Amber Delgado, Landmarks Illinois
- Amy Heldman, Friends of the Chicago River
- Ana Koval, President, Canal corridor Association, I&M Canal NHA
- Andrew Schneider, Chicago Park District
- Brendan Daily, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District
- Delilah Salgado, Artist in residence with Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization (PERRO)
- Edith Tovar, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)
- Elizabeth Blasius, Preservation Futures LLC (facilitator)
- Faryal Faizan, Friends of the Chicago River
- Hilary Denk, U.S. House of Representatives District Director at Office of Congressman Bill Foster (IL-11th)
- Jason Berry, Village of Lemont
- Jerry Adelman, Openlands (former)
- Jim Sibley, Ozinga
- Jonathan Solomon, Preservation Futures LLC (facilitator)
- Marcella Corona, MK Corona (facilitator)
- Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River
- Mark Hauser, Friends of the Chicago River
- Nancy Meza, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)
- Rachel Havelock, The Freshwater Lab at University of Illinois Chicago
- Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Forest Preserves of Cook County

Meeting 2 Discussion:

1. The facilitator team opened the meeting by recapping what was discussed in the first Naming Committee meeting and reviewing and hearing feedback on established best practices for naming that will form the basis of this conversation. These will continue to be added to and refined throughout the process, and include:
 - a. Avoid honorary names for people
 - b. Avoid names too similar to existing features
 - c. Embrace history and character of place
 - d. Ensure the new name respects the language, tradition and meaning of local communities
 - e. Establish a clear connection between the new name and the river's identity or characteristics
 - f. Prioritize traditional or original names (especially if colonial names have erased them)
 - g. Inclusion of any Indigenous topics or words should be discussed and approved by tribal representatives.
2. Participants were shared the initial responses from the public survey prior to the meeting, and in small group conversations were asked: what they noticed in the survey responses so far, what was missing, what we don't know yet? Discussion highlights included:
 - a. Responses show a need for diverse perspectives in this process and on the Naming Committee. Particularly there is a need for participation by community leaders in canal adjacent communities and for Indigenous representation.
 - b. There is enthusiasm for the initiative. People identified that there is an opportunity for this idea by the quality and thoughtfulness of these initial responses.
 - c. Raw data is fascinating! So much engagement and profound emotion.
 - d. Taking each answer seriously would make the process richer. People are engaging and sharing a lot here. Not rushing through what people have taken the time to share. The more we can sit with it and the more answers we get. There is a lot here that goes beyond a name! Absorb, share, internalize.
 - e. Need to consider how might the canal industries respond to a name change?
 - f. People have shown many different approaches and relationships to the canal.
 - g. Words do matter but the words can change over time.
 - h. It would be interesting to write up an internal historical naming trajectory.
 - i. Focus on History and Nature. Many names proposed would misrepresent the canal historically. Accuracy is important.
 - j. Natural/man-made is an "artificial" distinction.
 - k. What is the vision for the FUTURE of the waterway, as articulated in a name?
 - l. How do you balance the experiences of connecting to the Canal: industrial in some areas and natural in others? How do we acknowledge that both of these things are true?
 - m. Indigenous place names are based on what is found there.
 - n. Survey respondents do have ideas. They agree that it is a living entity. Created by engineers but the water is a living entity. Making that honorific is disrespectful. Branches of the river are not named after people.
 - o. So many different communities along the canal way.

- p. Limited information from Indigenous communities, McKinley Park, Pilsen so far.
 - q. Can we ask about access? Not just do you use it, but can you?
 - r. A lot of people don't know what's possible and that makes it hard for them to respond to questions about vision.
3. Participants also provided input about further opportunities to engage the public in this discussion through the survey and other activities. Feedback and questions about this topic includes:
- a. How can we reach more people from directly abutting the canal?
 - b. Elders are having trouble engaging with online survey, how do we reach those not able to use the survey?
 - c. Canal Origins Park has many fishers and workers on lunch break, can we connect with them to do the survey?
 - d. Consideration of language justice is needed, there are populations that speak Mandarin. Different languages will help with engagement opportunities.
 - e. Several participants requested an extension of the survey to allow for more engagement.
 - f. Need for inclusion of waterway agencies (such as the Illinois River Carriers Association, American Waterway Operators, U.S. Coast Guard).
 - g. Urban Rivers is hosting a Kayak Day, could we work with them to get more input from attendees?
 - h. Recommendations for other groups to engage with included: South Branch PAC, McKinley Park Development Council, PERRO, N4EJ, Beyond the Ball (youth/ faith/ food), ENLACE (community development), Forrest Bruce iSTEAM, Libby Hill, among others.

Next Steps / Action Items:

1. Coordinate with coalition to explore ways to extend the public survey and engagement schedule
2. Make suggested minor edits to the survey language
3. Plan in person engagement opportunities to reach those not connected to the online outreach
4. Complete additional Naming Committee outreach to make sure other perspectives can join the next meeting
5. Continue to share survey link, and add additional translated versions to outreach materials