

Civic Committee of the Chicago Commercial Club



Overview

The Civic Committee was formed in 1983 as an outgrowth of The Commercial Club of Chicago's study of the economic well-being of the Chicago metropolitan area. The Civic Committee was created to examine the problems affecting the metropolitan area and to devise a long-term plan to address those problems.

The Civic Committee pursues economic development in its broadest sense by supporting efforts to improve the general business environment — the structure and processes of the local economy — so that businesses can prosper and generate jobs. It gives special attention to efforts that relate to the entire Chicago metropolitan area in the belief that the City of Chicago and its surrounding territory constitute a single, interdependent economic region.

The organization works to improve those parts of the local environment on which employers depend: sound and effective local government services, good transportation and communication networks, strong education and training systems, good health care delivery and reasonable local tax and regulatory structures.

Overall, The Civic Committee focuses its efforts in the following areas: improving the efficiency and capacity of the regions' airports; stimulating inner-city economic development opportunities to strengthen Chicago's neighborhoods and create jobs for inner-city residents; and reform of the Chicago public school system and public school financing.

Regional Priorities

The Civic Committee believes that reinvesting in the innercity is essential to building a strong regional economy. The Civic Committee places a special emphasis on creating new opportunities for innercity communities. For example, the Committee has been working with the Mayor's Council of Technology Advisors and the region's research universities in a discussion on how Chicago's business community and public-sector leaders can facilitate the commercialization of university-based research. In another example, the Civic Committee is working on a planning initiative in North Lawndale, an underserved community on Chicago's West Side, to draft redevelopment plans. The plans include implementation recommendations and cost projections to spur mixed-income housing as well as retail, commercial and industrial development.

One of the Civic Committee's top priorities is Chicago school reform. It supported enactment of the 1988 and 1995 Chicago school reform laws, and it continues to work with the Chicago Public Schools through its affiliated organizations, Leadership

for Quality Education and the Financial Research and Advisory Committee. The Civic Committee has promoted school choice and competition and has been tracking the academic performance of the region's public schools since the introduction of state-wide, standards-based testing in 1999. In July 2003, the Civic Committee issued its findings in a 104-page report.

The organization has also been active in boosting access to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. It believes that a strong and efficient aviation system is essential to the economic vitality and livability of the Chicago area. The Civic Committee's Aviation Task Force has been working to improve Chicago's aviation system for 20 years. The main goal has been the expansion of O'Hare International Airport, an aviation hub and the economic engine of the Chicago region.

The Civic Committee scored a success in 2003 when the state Legislature approved legislation to add one new runway, reconfigure five additional runways and make other improvements at O'Hare. Planning and environmental review for the improvements are now underway.

Structure and Operations

The Civic Committee is the civic arm of The Commercial Club of Chicago, one of the oldest organizations representing the region's business, professional, educational and cultural leaders. The Civic Committee is structured into six subcommittees on topics such as school reform, aviation and promotion of the region for high-tech business.

The Civic Committee includes some of the region's most high-powered business leaders. "Only a few words are needed to sum up the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago: powerful, exclusive, elite," declared a May 2001 *Chicago Sun-Times* article.

Today the Civic Committee meets four times per year and has 75 CEO members, 40 to 50 who are active. By comparison, the larger Commercial Club has 325 CEO members.