



Community Meeting

ComEd Substation at 1111 W. Diversey

June 8, 2026



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AGENDA

- Welcome & Background
- Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD)
- The Potential for 1111 W. Diversey
- Minor vs. Major Utility
- Modern Alternatives
- Alternative Site Analysis
- FAQs
- What's Up Next?
- Call to Action
- Questions



WELCOME & BACKGROUND



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Diversey Community Coalition (DiverseyCC)

Collective of residents, business owners, parents, and transit-riders dedicated to the long-term vitality of the Diversey corridor.

- Diversey serves as a jurisdictional boundary (Wards, school districts, neighborhood groups)
- Serve as the unifying bridge that ensure cohesive, thoughtful planning.
- Champion Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (eTOD), school safety zones, and enhanced pedestrian infrastructure.
- Believe in growth that prioritizes people—making our streets safer for walkers and bikers while creating a vibrant, sustainable environment for local businesses.

Ensure the voices of those who live, work, and commute here are at the heart of every decision, building a responsible and inclusive future for our community.



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Why we are here...

ComEd is attempting to build an acre+ 138kV electrical substation at 1111 W. Diversey Parkway (Diversey & Seminary intersection).



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Our Progress...

We've made some great strides since the March community meeting...

- Diversey Community Coalition formed
- State and local leaders (Sen. Feigenholtz, Rep. Williams, Alderpersons Knudsen, Lawson & Waguespack) supportive
- Permits with the CDOT and CDOB on hold
- Formal Letter of Interpretation to the Zoning Administrator sent
- State and Local legislation submitted
- Illinois Commerce Commission intervenor
- Media coverage (BlockClub, Fox Chicago, CBS News, Chicago Sun-Times)



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EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (ETOD)



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Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD)

This site sits within the ½ mile ETOD zone around the Brown/Purple Line L stop and is meant for residential, businesses or mixed-use.

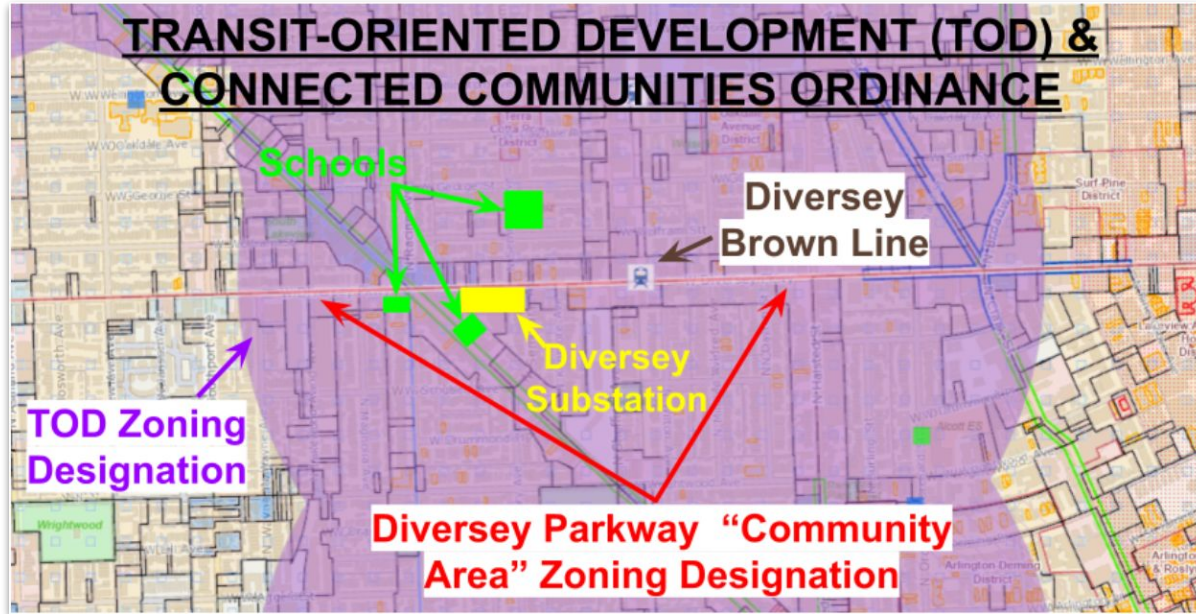
- Chicago Zoning Reform (2004)
- TOD Mandates (2013, 2015, 2019)
- Connected Communities Ordinance (2022)
- Pedestrian Street “P-Street” (via Connected Communities)

17-3-0501 Purpose. The regulations of this section are intended to preserve and enhance the character of *streets* and intersections that are widely recognized as Chicago's best examples of pedestrian-oriented shopping districts. The regulations are intended to promote transit, economic vitality and pedestrian safety and comfort.



The Conflict...

These laws require land near transit to be “vibrant, populated, and walkable.” An unmanned complex provides zero of these benefits, sterilizing a prime corridor for generations.



Housing Crisis

Federal: Skyrocketing interest rates, soaring construction material costs, and a national deficit of over 4 million homes have crushed entry-level buyers and stalled affordable development nationwide (FAST Housing Act, 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act)

State: While Illinois has introduced measures like the Affordable Housing Tax Credit and capital bills, local zoning restrictions still choke off the high-density construction needed to lower overall prices (BUILD Plan and Acts)

Local: Despite pioneering steps like the Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO), Chicago is missing over 120,000 affordable housing units, heavily locking working-class families out of high-opportunity neighborhoods.

While our city's Connected Communities Ordinance legally prioritizes the land surrounding transit hubs for affordable apartments, we face a severe supply shortage. We cannot solve the housing crisis if utilities are allowed to replace residential transit zones with industrial dead space.



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Systemic Issue of Squandered ETOD Land

A pattern has emerged where massive corporations (which includes for-profit utilities) are quietly locking down these prime, accessible transit zones...converting vibrant potential community spaces into permanent "dead zones."

- Gage Park (Amazon Distribution Center)
- Lakeview - Wrigleyville (Chicago Cubs Parking Lot)
- McKinley Park / Brighton Park (Auto-centric, Heavy Commercial)
- Division - Ashland - Milwaukee (Peoples Gas storage)
- Kinzie Corridor (Tech & Data Center Encroachment)
- West Lawn - Ford City Mall (Warehouses)



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THE POTENTIAL



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What do you want to see here?

An opportunity for people who rely on public transit for work, need to walk to local shops/grocers, want to send their kids to local schools, don't have a car, desire to plant roots with their family, etc.



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SURVEY ON
OUR
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The potential...



HUMAN-SCALE DESIGN



PEDESTRIAN FOCUSED



COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE



MIXED-USE LIVING



URBAN HARMONY



THE PROPOSED SUBSTATION

DESIGNED BY: Alicia Pederson, Courtyard Urbanist

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The numbers...

1111 W. Diversey has a **Transit Score = 9.66** (higher than the average TOD zone)

- Homes for over 450 people (200+ units including affordable units)
- \$5M in annual local spending remains in the neighborhood
- 150k transit trips & 5,000 kg of reduced GHG per year
- 950k jobs are accessible within a 30-minute transit trip
- 58% less transportation costs per household compared to non-TOD
- \$5M in tax revenue over 10 years
- ~100 on-site jobs



Metropolitan Planning Council ETOD Calculator

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Tax Increment Financing (TIFs)

1111 W. Diversey sits within a critical **Transit TIF corridor**. How we use this land determines whether we fund our future or freeze our progress.



THE TOD PATH: GROWTH

By building **Transit-Oriented Housing**, we generate massive **Incremental Tax** to fix sidewalks and support the 'L' station footprint.

- **Local Projects:** Direct funding for Diversey station accessibility.
- **Post-TIF Windfall:** Long-term revenue streams straight to CPS & Public Parks.



THE SUBSTATION: STAGNATION

An industrial structure is a "low-value" tax asset. It contributes minimal structural tax, effectively **starving the local TIF district**.

- **Blight Risk:** Windowless block arrays suppress surrounding property boundary values.
- **Opportunity Loss:** We forfeit 100+ households of economic local tax power forever.



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MAJOR VS. MINOR



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Major or Minor?

ComEd is attempting to take the “**easy route**” by claiming they have the right to build this massive facility “By-Right” under a minor zoning classification.

They want to convince city officials that this regional-scale project is just a routine, “minor change” to an existing utility site so they can obtain quick administrative approval with **no public hearings** with the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).



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Chicago Zoning Codes

- Official public hearings
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)
- Special-Use Permit

17-17-0103-K Utilities and Services, Major. Infrastructure services that have substantial land use impacts on surrounding areas. Such uses may be allowed when the public interest supersedes the usual limitations placed on land use and transcends the usual restraints of the district for reasons of necessary location and community-wide interest. Typical uses include but are not limited to: water and waste water treatment facilities, major water storage facilities, transit stations, bus turnarounds, and transit maintenance and storage garages. *Major utilities and services do not include waste-related uses.*

- No hearings
- No ZBA
- Build “By Right”

17-17-0103-L Utilities and Services, Minor. Infrastructure services that need to be located in an area where the service is provided. *Minor Utilities and Services* generally do not have regular employees at the site and typically have few if any impacts on surrounding areas. Typical *uses* include water and sewer pump stations; electrical substations; stormwater facilities and conveyance systems; and telephone exchanges.



Major Utility or Minor Utility?

Examples cannot
be used to
determine the
Use Category
(e.g. electrical
substation)

17-17-0101-C Typical Uses. Typical uses cited in the description of Use Categories are not intended to be exclusive or restrictive.

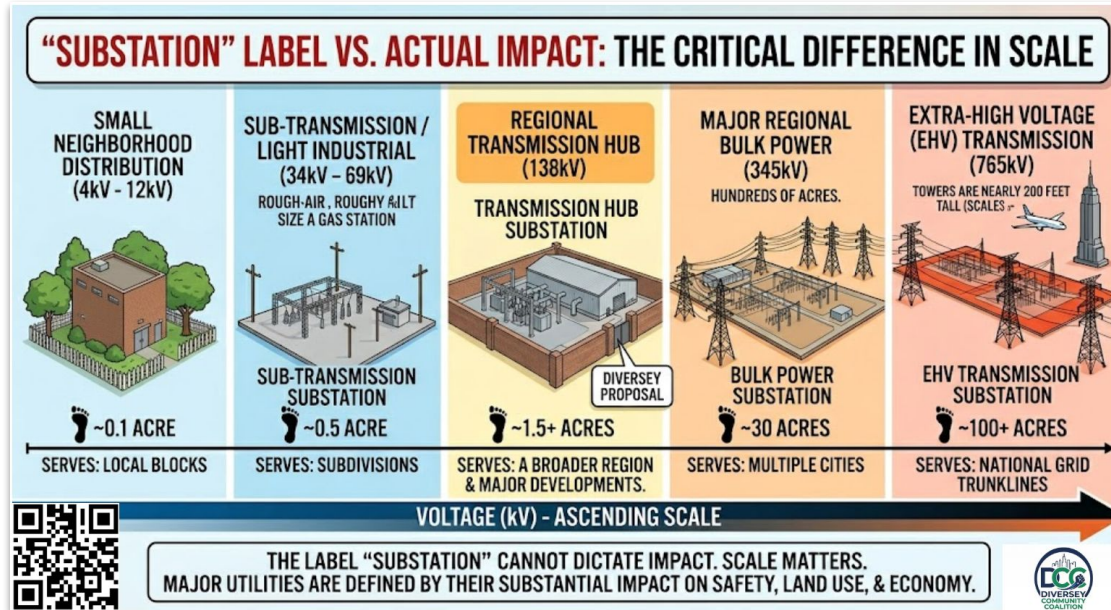
17-17-0101-D Determination of Appropriate Land Use Categories. When a specific use type cannot be classified into a Use Category or appears to fit into two or more Use Categories, the Zoning Administrator is authorized to determine the most appropriate Use Category.

Our Alderpersons are ready to submit another Letter of Interpretation to the Zoning Administrator (Patrick Murphey) if a 'Minor Utility' designation is determined.



Context matters with definitions...

Just because the example “electrical substation” appears in the “typical use” definition of a Minor Utility, doesn’t mean it automatically is a Minor Utility.



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This is a MAJOR UTILITY...

Based on the qualitative analysis of each definition, this project is a “Major Utility”

ADMINISTRATIVE RECLASSIFICATION CHALLENGE: MAJOR vs. MINOR UTILITY

'17-17-0103-K Utilities and Services, Major. '17-17-0103-L Utilities and Services, Minor.

- substantial land use impacts on surrounding areas. [1.08 ACRE SITE], A FOOTBALL FIELD SIZED UTILITY, IS NOT NEIGHBORHOOD SCALE.
- supersedes the usual limitations placed on land use
- transcends the usual restraints of the district [138KV TRANSMISSION NODE] IS INDUSTRIAL, NOT TRANSIT-ORIENTED-DEVELOPMENT (TOD) FOR HIGHER-USE RESIDENTIAL AND NOT B3 SHOPPING DISTRICT ZONING.
- necessary location
- community-wide interest. [COMED GRID PLAN] ADMITS NEED IS REGIONAL, NOT LOCAL.

located in an area where the service is provided. FALSE: SERVICE IS FOR REGIONAL GRID GROWTH.

Typically have few if any impacts on surrounding areas. OPPOSITE IS TRUE:
- SHARES PROPERTY LINE WITH PRESCHOOL.
- DEPRESSES AREA
- REDUCES TAX REVENUE VIA THE LOST OPPORTUNITY COST OF A HIGHER-USE COMMERCIAL/RETAIL DEVELOPMENT.
- CREATES SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIAL NOISE AND TRAFFIC SAFETY HAZARDS FOR RESIDENTS.

CONCLUSION: THE 1111 W. DIVERSEY SUBSTATION MEETS ALL MAJOR UTILITY CRITERIA AND MUST BE RECLASSIFIED.



MODERN ALTERNATIVES



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Modern Alternatives: Smaller, Smarter, Safer

- **Non-Wires Alternatives (NWAs):** Utilizing a mix of localized battery storage, smart microgrids, & energy efficiency to meet peak demand without a massive footprint.
- **Neighborhood-Scale Infrastructure:** Replacing one "Industrial Fortress" with a network of smaller nodes that are 70% smaller and designed to blend in.
- **Targeted Load Management:** Using modern "Smart Grid" software to balance the load in real-time, reducing the need for massive industrial overbuilding.
- **Siting:** Moving the heavy-voltage hardware into manufacturing zones away from residential and commercial zones.



Times have changed...

Neighborhood-scale substations take up 1-2 residential lots, not 15+

2004: NEIGHBORHOOD SCALE



Scale: ~5,000 sq. ft.

Voltage: 12kV (Local Distribution)

Impact: **MINOR UTILITY:** "Few if any impacts on surrounding areas"

2026: INDUSTRIAL SCALE



Scale: 47,000 sq. ft. (1.08 Acres)

Voltage: 138kV (Regional Transmission)

Impact: **MAJOR UTILITY:** "Substantial land use impacts on surrounding areas"



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Going against progress....

- **Bypassing State Clean Energy Laws (CEJA):** Ignoring the explicit directive of Illinois' Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, which legally binds utilities to prioritize modern, decentralized "Non-Wires Alternatives" (like smart microgrids and localized storage) before building massive fossil-fuel-reliant infrastructure.
- **Contradicting Federal Grid Modernization Goals:** Working directly against the U.S. Department of Energy's multi-billion dollar push for a decentralized, resilient "Smart Grid"...to deploy vulnerable, 20th-century centralized hardware.
- **Environmental Counter-Logic:** Forcing car-dependency by killing transit-oriented land...going against local, state, and federal carbon-reduction goals.



Public transit is the ultimate GREEN solution

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ALTERNATE SITE ANALYSIS



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Alternate Site Analysis

ComEd says this substation will service the “Northside” and it’s own ICC filings state a large portion of the capacity will be for Lincoln Yards.

- Manufacturing Zones: There are several available lots to build a substation of this size and scale in nearby zones meant for industrial builds
- Lincoln Yards: This mega development contains zones already designated for “Manufacturing”
- A substation like this should go through a rigorous, public process with the Zoning Board of Appeals (similar to a Planned Development)

“Lincoln Yards will utilize the added capacity at ~62% of the customer build out.” ComEd ICC Filing for alternative build on decommissioned site



Planned Developments

The *planned development* regulations of this chapter are intended to:

17-8-0101 ensure adequate public review of major development proposals;

17-8-0102 encourage unified planning and development;

17-8-0103 promote economically beneficial development patterns that are compatible with the character of existing neighborhoods;

17-8-0104 ensure a level of amenities appropriate to the nature and scale of the project;

17-8-0105 allow flexibility in application of selected use, *bulk*, and development standards in order to promote excellence and creativity in building design and high-quality urban design; and

17-8-0106 encourage protection and conservation of natural resources.

Special-use ZBA Permits or Planned Developments provide the necessary rigor for industrial infrastructure of this size and scale

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School Safety Zones



History of Safety Concerns...

Examples of some ComEd incidents in the past.

OCT 2025

Hoffman Estates Substation: A massive transformer fluid fire burned for over four hours along an isolated tollway corridor—resulting in zero community exposure or school health hazards. Verified via [CBS Chicago ComEd Incident Logs](#).

APR 2021

Norridge Substation Blowout: A major thermal equipment blast at 8275 W. Montrose Ave. blanketed nearby parking lots in heavy petroleum smoke. Tracked in the [CBS News Norridge Response Report](#).

AUG 2024

West Loop Vault Fire: A cooling oil and heavy insulation fire generated dense black smoke and explosive gas detonations in a commercial hub, cutting power and forcing evacuations. See the [CBS Chicago West Loop Live Coverage](#).

MAY 2018

Loop Substation Arc Flash: A high-voltage arc explosion at a transit substation blew heavy structural panels completely off a transformer housing, causing critical burn injuries to three crew members. Documented via [NBC Chicago On-Scene Report](#).



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...including at the existing Diversey substation site.

Neighbors recall loud explosions and thick black smoke at this site.

 **CRITICAL SAFETY HISTORY AT THIS SITE**

The Historical Blueprint: Longtime neighbors draw directly from unvarnished history. On February 18, 2006, the original Lakeview substation at this exact location suffered a catastrophic equipment failure. Pressurized cooling oil leaked and ignited, creating heavy plumes of black smoke and breaching structural walls before forcing a full decommissioning audit filed with the [Illinois Commerce Commission \(ICC\) on page 6.](#)



The current decommissioned substation infrastructure on site—serving as a stark physical reminder of the block's long-term utility footprint and the 2006 infrastructure failure.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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FAQs

There is already an existing decommissioned substation structure on that lot. Doesn't that mean a substation belongs there?

Absolutely not. The existing, historical substation is a compact, **neighborhood-scale** facility. It occupies only 1 to 2 standard residential lots—which is exactly the type of small-scale utility footprint seamlessly integrated all throughout the city without disrupting neighborhoods.

What ComEd is proposing now is a massive, regional hub that expands across **15+ residential lots**, creating a football-field-sized industrial barrier along Diversey. Just because a small, local asset once sat here does *not* make this location the right fit for an industrial project at this extreme scale, nor does it justify ignoring modern, non-wire technology.



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FAQs

ComEd claims the neighborhood needs more power. Won't blocking this project cause blackouts?

No. Grid reliability is essential, but building a single, football-field-sized industrial box over 15 residential lots is an outdated 20th-century approach to energy. Modern, sustainable cities meet rising electrical loads by deploying **Non-Wire Alternatives (NWAs)** and **Distributed Energy Resources (DERs)**, such as advanced battery storage and smart-grid infrastructure.

Instead of one massive regional hub, local power needs should be met using a distributed network of smaller, lot-sized substations that blend into the neighborhood framework rather than destroying active transit corridors. We are demanding an independent engineering audit to prove that these modern alternatives can meet the local load without sacrificing our Pedestrian Street.



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FAQs

Don't we need this industrial substation to support Electric Vehicles (EVs) and the green transition?

Public transit is the ultimate green technology. Providing transit-adjacent housing for hundreds of families allows people to embrace low-impact, car-free living, which removes cars from the road entirely. This eliminates the massive environmental and structural strains of transportation far more effectively than an industrial utility block.

Forcing people to live further away from transit hubs because a windowless industrial box took over residential land actually increases suburban sprawl and driving dependency. True environmental progress means pairing Illinois' green energy transition with smart, walkable urban density.



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FAQs

Is the coalition just a group of “NIMBYs” fighting neighborhood density?

Actually, the exact opposite is true. Traditional NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) groups fight *against* housing and increased local density; the DCC is explicitly **THIMBY (Transit-oriented Housing In My Backyard)**.

We are actively fighting *for* more neighbors, more transit riders, more affordable housing options, and continuous storefront foot traffic to keep our local economy alive. We welcome neighborhood growth. We are simply stopping a pattern of corporate land-grabs that treat valuable pedestrian zones as empty industrial dead zones.



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FAQs

Are you just trying to push an unpleasant utility project into a poorer neighborhood?

This is an issue of **Zoning and Transit-Oriented Development**. Industrial-scale, regional infrastructure belongs inside established **Manufacturing and Industrial Zones**, completely separated from high-density transit-oriented residential sidewalks and school safety zones.

Chicago has a systemic history of squandering transit land meant for people—from Gage Park being turned into an Amazon distribution center to Ford City’s transit extensions being stifled by warehouses. We believe that transit-oriented development land belongs to the people across every neighborhood in Chicago, and protecting it here sets a precedent that protects communities citywide.



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FAQs

Isn't a substation better for the community than leaving the lot completely vacant?

A vacant lot is temporary, but a 100-year industrial substation is a permanent economic and structural mistake. ComEd has owned this lot since 2021 when they purchased it from the Mini Dealership. Since that time, several developers have stepped forward wanting to build vibrant, community-facing projects on this land. ComEd rejected all of them and intentionally chose to keep it vacant to serve its own corporate timeline. We should not let ComEd dictate the next century of our neighborhood by forcing us to choose between a blighted empty lot and a football-field-sized dead zone.

An unmanned substation provides almost zero property or sales tax revenue to the community. Conversely, an ETOD mixed-use residential building creates ongoing economic life: new residents become daily customers for local small businesses, and the development generates significant property and sales tax revenues that directly fund our local public schools.



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WHAT'S UP NEXT?



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We have a lot of work ahead of us...

- **Letter of Interpretation 2.0** after ComEd official files their plans (Alders)
- Monitor **Chicago permits** related to this project to ensure they remain on hold (Alders, DiverseyCC)
- Officially **appeal a Minor Utility ruling** from the Zoning Administrator immediately (Alders)
- Coordinate and attend **official public hearings** with the Zoning Board of Appeals (everyone)
- **Reject split-zoning** requests from ComEd to connect the two properties (Alders, City Council)
- Attend hearings and testify with the **Illinois Commerce Commission** (individuals)
- Planning **neighborhood action days** (e.g. block parties, protests) and petitions
- **ComEd meeting** with the community scheduled for June 22nd



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP



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CALL TO ACTION!

Visit DiverseyCC.org to...

1. Fill out a form to **Volunteer to help** (forms also available in the room)
2. File an **ICC Public Comment** opposing ComEd's Grid Plan and this specific site
3. Take the **1111 W. Diversey Vision Survey** to let us know what you would like to see here
4. Sign-up for our **DiverseyCC Newsletter** to keep informed
5. Follow us on **Instagram and Facebook** (also BlueSky, Threads, X)
6. Get a **yard sign** to show your support
7. Find out how you can **support future state & local legislation** to prevent this from happening in the future (also the BUILD and POWER Acts)
8. Attend any **neighborhood action days** to protest against this substation



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QUESTIONS?



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