

## **What's in a name?**

### **THE CULTURAL STADIUM**

A "Cultural Stadium" is not only evocative but also strategically positions the initiative as an energetic, inclusive, and monumental place for culture, one that is both innovative and accessible, while fostering community and participation at a grand scale.

#### **Evokes Powerful Imagery and Scale**

It positions culture as something grand and integral to the city, implying that it's not just a passive cultural district but an active, bustling center of cultural exchange.

#### **Inclusivity and Community Gathering**

A stadium is a place where people from all walks of life come together,, conveying a central gathering place for the community, open to all,

#### **Active Participation and Energy**

Positions culture not as static or reserved but as a participatory experience, full of life and engagement.

#### **Appeal to Broader Audiences**

The term *stadium* is universally recognizable and cuts across demographics. It elevates culture to the same level of importance as sports, making it more relatable and exciting to a wider audience, including those who might not think of themselves as cultural enthusiasts.

#### **Symbol of Excellence**

Stadiums are places where excellence is displayed. It suggests that the space will be a competitive force on the national or global stage in terms of its cultural output, enhancing the city's reputation.

#### **Memorable and Unique**

The phrase "Cultural Stadium" stands out from more typical terms like *arts district* or *cultural hub*. It's a bold, memorable name that evokes curiosity and draws attention. It positions Chicago as a leader in urban cultural innovation and its application.

## **The Cultural Stadium**

Chicago has a rich history of transformation, from rebuilding after the Great Fire to Burnham's visionary urban planning and the development of Millennium Park and the Riverwalk. Today, we face a new opportunity to reimagine downtown as a vibrant, inclusive, and cultural hub.

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### **A New Kind of Town**

Envision downtown Chicago as a seamless mix of both surprising and familiar elements—a vibrant space to live, work, and play featuring dynamic workplaces, residential areas, and cultural experiences throughout the day and night. This reimagined urban hub will be welcoming, creative, and full of life, offering unique experiences around every corner.

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### **Bold and Unexpected Experiences**

The reimagined heart of the City will foster creativity at every turn. Streets will become stages for art, music, theater, and food markets. Public spaces will buzz with dynamic displays, drawing locals and visitors of all ages. Community-focused installations will celebrate Chicago's cultural diversity, making the downtown a lively, inclusive space.

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### **Culture Everywhere**

Bridges will light up with artistic displays, festivals will expand, and bold public art installations will animate streetscapes. Imagine tiny pop-up libraries, mobile theater trucks, and floating food truck barges. Every corner of the City will become an entry point to Chicago's rich cultural scene.

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### **Integrating Nature**

Green spaces will be woven into the urban fabric with renewed investments in Grant Park, the Lakefront, and the Riverwalk. Rooftops and light corridors will transform into community gardens and green spaces, creating a connection between nature and the City's core.

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### **Streets as Destinations**

Streets will evolve into pedestrian-friendly spaces, alive with activity year-round, enhanced with lighting, dining options, and community hubs. Even alleys and underutilized spaces will become filled with life as places to gather and explore.

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### **Uniquely Chicago**

Downtown landmarks like the Art Institute, Cultural Center, and the Riverwalk will be joined by reinvigorated streets such as Michigan Avenue, State Street and LaSalle Street. Together, these spaces will make Chicago's downtown an unparalleled cultural destination.

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### **Engaging Youth**

Downtown will offer programs and opportunities for youth to connect with cultural experiences. Free tickets and participatory initiatives will help the next generation view downtown as a place to learn, explore, and take pride in.

# The Cultural Stadium

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## Building Neighborhood Partnerships

Collaboration between downtown and Chicago's neighborhoods will highlight the city's diversity and bring cultural opportunities to life, enriching the experience for everyone.

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## Spotlight: LaSalle Street

This year, Chicago announced \$525 million to repurpose LaSalle Street, including the creation of affordable housing. This project presents an opportunity to integrate culture into the heart of downtown by:

- Supporting and inducing cultural gems like The Rookery into cultural hubs beyond a stop on a tour. This will breathe life into mixed-use space, combining affordable housing for artists with theaters, rehearsal stages, studios and galleries.
- Public art installations and rotating exhibitions could draw visitors, while street-level studios become vibrant places to engage with art in progress.
- As more people live, work, and create here, new businesses will follow, turning LaSalle Street into a lively cultural corridor.

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## What's Needed to Make This Happen?

1. **Funding:** Establish a public-private collaboration, similar to Millennium Park, to secure funding from city, state, corporate, and philanthropic sources.
2. **Zoning Changes:** Incentivize cultural development by inducing developers in the cultural district to allocate space for culture, public art, event space, green space and an expanded public realm.
3. **Incentives for Developers:** Offer inducements to adapt and revitalize vacant buildings, focusing on livability and cultural uses.
4. **Highlight Talent:** Showcase a mix of world class talent and local artists, fostering pride and a sense of belonging.
5. **A Commitment to Action:** Draw inspiration from Mies van der Rohe's clarity of purpose and align design, function, and execution to realize the vision Bauen! meaning "Build," or having the will to as Nike says, "Just Do It!"

## Chicago Cultural Stadium – Where to Start?

CULTURE UMBRELLA – The kids  
THE FRESHMAN CLASS – Arts community  
THE TROVE – New access to art

### CULTURE UMBRELLA

- Introduce children (ages 3–13) and their families to Chicago’s cultural treasures—Broadway shows, museums, ballet, symphony performances, and more—at no cost.
- This initiative stems from two core beliefs:
  1. Many children from Chicago’s neighborhoods don’t perceive downtown as a space for them—it feels distant, inaccessible, not inclusive of youth
  2. Early exposure to culture can profoundly impact a child’s development, and when families share these moments, it strengthens their bonds through memorable, meaningful experiences.
- We view culture as a gateway. Initially unfamiliar, it soon becomes something kids actively seek, bringing their families along for the journey.

Reference:

<https://www.coolculture.org/> ; <https://ticketsforkids.org/tickets/>

### THE FRESHMAN CLASS

- Align with or create a not-for-profit entity with a mission to award year-long residencies of rent-free non-living studio space to an initial cohort of visual artists.
- Focus on supporting artists and on public art to create works that embrace an equitable city through inclusive design.
- Support projects that connect artists, residents, architects, engineers and city leaders for public installations and more.
- Foster a Cultural Space Subsidy Program that makes space available at below market rent, awarded to applicants that best demonstrate their capabilities and intent to provide a social benefit to the community

Reference:

<https://lmcc.net/resources/artist-residencies/>

### THE TROVE

- Museums typically display only a fraction of their collections due to space limitations, with the rest stored away. Major private collectors run out of space and store their artwork in warehouses where no one can see the work.
- Instead of hiding these works, The Trove serves as an art storage facility that allows unprecedented access to artwork.
- This architectural and cultural venue will allow visitors to explore art storage vaults, restoration workshops, and even view art pieces that aren’t on permanent display in museums.

Reference:

<https://www.boijmans.nl/en/depot;>



## TEAM CULTURE

3.12.25

Kimberly Bares  
David Baum  
Michael J Baum  
Rick Bayless  
Michelle Boone  
Andrew Broderick  
Greg Cameron  
Terry Clark  
Jahmal Cole  
John Colletti  
Nora Daley  
Gwen Perry Davis  
Steve Davis  
Lori Dimun  
Shaina Doar  
Edwin Eisendrath  
Phil Enquist  
Michael Fassnacht  
Joe Ferguson  
Lorna Ferguson  
Al Friedman  
Nora Gainer  
Sarah Galvin  
Marilynn Gardner  
Ryan Green  
Josh Grossman  
Jack Guthman  
Akilah Halley  
Francia Harrington  
Lori Healy  
Todd Hensley  
Sarah Herda  
Lamar Johnson  
Casey Jones  
Tony Karman  
Dacher Keltner  
Steve Koch  
Jan Kostner  
Reed Kroloff  
Tom Kuczmariski

Jack Lavin  
Kelly Leonard  
Peter Lieberman  
Kevin Lynch  
John Mangum  
Wendy Manning  
Cary McMillan  
Ryu Mizuno  
Juan Moreno  
Mateo Mulcahy  
Jack Newell  
Stan Nitzbeug  
Jose Ochoa  
F. Michael Pflieger  
John Pobjewski  
Erika Poethig  
Richard Price  
Billy Puckett  
David Reifman  
Claire Rice  
Floencia Rodriguez  
Kristin Rosebrough  
Lesley Roth  
Rebekah Scheinfeld  
David Schwimmer  
Jeff Shapack  
Scott Silberstein  
Beth Swanson  
Dorian Sylvain  
Michael Townsend  
Howard Tullman  
Pepe Vargas  
Doug Voigt  
Leon Walker  
Benjy Ward  
Michael Weber  
Bob Wislow  
Angel Ysaguirre  
Aleksandar Sasha Zeljic

# Lou Raizin: To revive downtown Chicago, we need to view it as a ‘stadium’ for culture

 [chicagotribune.com/2024/03/06/opinion-downtown-revival-culture-theaters-art-financial-support](https://chicagotribune.com/2024/03/06/opinion-downtown-revival-culture-theaters-art-financial-support)

Lou Raizin

March 6, 2024



People attend opening night of the Chicago Jazz Festival in Millennium Park's Pritzker Pavilion on Aug. 31, 2023. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)

Building a new stadium never makes economic sense, but we do it for other reasons.

It's about boosting our local pride, spurring economic stimulus through construction, guiding urban development, increasing tourism, and improving infrastructure and transportation. It's about creating conversations about Chicago that are heard throughout the country and around the world.

It's an opportunity to make big, bold architectural moves.

The Chicago Bears, White Sox and the Chicago Red Stars are all seeking government funding and financing for new stadiums and in some cases are threatening to leave Chicago if they don't get what they want.

But there is another team that has not threatened to leave the city. A historical team integrated into the fabric of Chicago. A team whose economic impact far exceeds that of any proposed stadium. A team whose pregame might be at Petterino's or the Italian Village or dozens of other restaurants from Michelin-starred to pizza parlors or popcorn shops. Its team pride might be exhibited by "Young, Scrappy and Hungry" hoodies or nutcrackers, sugar plums and candy canes.

That team is "Team Culture." And its stadium is Chicago's downtown.

Chicago's culture defines us. Our food, our theater, our museums, our symphony, our opera, our dance, our music, our sports. Culture is what makes us, us. It's about our quality of life and how others perceive us. And it's what drives tourists to our city.

We are approaching one of those rare times that comes along once in a generation when we break open the piggy bank, count the pennies and take the plunge. In this case, the moment is the quickly approaching end-of-term stadium leases, out clauses and maturity of long-term bond financing, whose primary funding tool, in the case of the Sox, has been a large portion of the city and state hotel tax.

If we're going to again commit those dollars to long-term bonds, we also need to reimagine all of our downtown as a stadium for culture.

The economic stimulus derived from construction, urban development, infrastructure and transportation improvements should prioritize transformational changes that support bold moves.

We could further integrate culture everywhere we can into the transformation of Michigan Avenue and State Street in a way that addresses the retail exodus and safety issues. We also could transform the historic LaSalle Street corridor into a iconic street with an innovative public realm and creative programming that is focused on reinvented mixed use in high-rise buildings, as recommended by an Illinois Institute of Technology study.

What revitalized our streets after COVID-19 in nearly every neighborhood? It was culture! When theaters illuminate downtown, Millennium Park teems with life. Locals and tourists stroll together through the theater district, Navy Pier and Chicago's neighborhoods. And these all become safer and more vibrant places energized with people.

It's our culture that yields that soft power when the Chicago Symphony or Joffrey Ballet travels worldwide carrying Chicago's flag, when the Art Institute or Museum of Contemporary Art unveils new international exhibitions, and when images of a bustling Millennium Park and outdoor art installations become those Instagram moments seen worldwide.

From a tourism point of view, culture differentiates Chicago from other cities and speaks to who we are. Whenever we can support culture, it not only affects tourism, but it also adds to the quality of life for all of us who live here.

Our culture is synonymous with economic development and Chicago's reputation. There is no other city in the world for theater like Chicago. Consider that Broadway In Chicago alone attracts up to 1.7 million patrons a year, making Chicago the third most important city in the world for commercial theater behind New York and London — more than twice the attendance of the Bears in a sold-out year. With more than 50% of Broadway In Chicago's audience coming from 100 miles away or more for its long-run shows, it is a tourism powerhouse.

For the good of the city, when that piggy bank opens, Team Culture deserves a seat at the table so all of downtown can be envisioned with the holistic thought, changes and financial commitment afforded a stadium.

Or are threats the only language that drives the conversation? "If you don't build a new stadium, we're leaving."

Have you heard Broadway In Chicago, the Goodman Theatre, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Lyric Opera, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Art Institute or the MCA say, "We are in conversations with Schaumburg, Oak Brook or Cleveland"? The answer is no.

Consider our downtown retail businesses that didn't threaten to leave; they just left. Our downtown office occupants didn't threaten to leave; they just decided to work from home.

It's time to design a new downtown, viewed as a "cultural stadium," that responds to our changing times. One that uses and maximizes culture for our residents and visitors and that boosts our local pride and stimulates our economy. A better downtown "stadium" would enhance all the cultural players who play in it.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't build new sports stadiums. It means we need to take a more holistic approach to how we use and maximize these funds for the health of Chicago and the generations to come.

The health and vitality of a city is in its people. Luring the best and brightest young talent to the city is key to the city's success. And culture is paramount to keeping these residents here.

And we must never forget that the downtown cultural stadium belongs to us all.

*Lou Raizin is president and CEO of Broadway In Chicago*



INSIDE VINTAGE CHICAGO TRIBUNE • NATION & WORLD

OPINION

Chicago Tribune  
Founded June 10, 1847

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Mitch Pugh, Executive Editor

Chris Jones, Editorial Page Editor  
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EDITORIALS



LET'S GET TO WORK! THIS PLACE ISN'T GOING TO RENOVATE ITSELF..."

SCOTT STANTIS/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

DOWNTOWN CHICAGO NEEDS REIMAGINING  
IT'S OK (THIS TIME) TO THINK SMALL.

The famed civic architect Daniel Burnham uttered words that became both a mantra and a shackle: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood.” Well, today's Chicago is broke. And, in the short term, it's hard to imagine the city implementing anything like Millennium Park, the massively successful civic endeavor of two decades ago. We're entering the second week of December and we don't even have a 2025 budget or any clear consensus toward achieving one. Just plenty of red ink.

So we were glad recently to welcome Lou Raizin, the civic-minded CEO of Broadway in Chicago, and various other emissaries from an experienced pro-downtown group calling itself Team Culture and made up of the likes of Poetry Foundation President Michelle Boon, Joffrey Ballet Executive Director Greg Cameron, civic booster Michael Fassnacht, Obama Foundation Vice President Lori Healey, venture capitalist Howard Tullman, developer Al Friedman, Navy Pier CEO Marilyn Gardner, former Deputy Mayor Steve Koch, celebrity chef Rick Bayless, Civic Committee head Joe Ferguson, et al.

A selection of them showed up in our office with not so much a grand scheme to rival what Burnham came up with in 1909 but with an array of small, scaleable, potentially executable plans designed to breathe more life into Chicago's struggling downtown core. And do so in matter of weeks or months, not years.

To wit:

How about installing America's coolest bookstore inside a space such as The Rookery?

What about a floating farmers market on the Chicago River? Or a barge filled with food trucks that would dock at different spots? Or barges filled with actors, musicians and dancers plying the waterways? Or a lot more downtown festivals, especially ones taking place at night?

How about projecting opera on the colossal back wall of the Lyric Opera House so it would be visible from tour boats on the Chicago River?

Could we let visual artists activate the alleyways of the Loop? Or build light canopies over LaSalle and State streets, activating their vertical beauty? Or drape fabric over austere concrete buildings? Or build a food court with a hydroponic garden? Or use Lower Wacker Drive as a cool outdoor music venue? Or add light corridors, public gardens and green spaces as what once was a canyon of office buildings becomes a residential community?

Our visitors argued that Chicago needs to better understand that streets easily can be turned into interconnected destinations with the right kind of digital



Top: A farmers market floats on the Chicago River in a conceptual rendering. Above: New Loop sculptures in this State Street rendering. LOU RAIZIN

lighting installation, that outdoor dining needs massively to expand to help both State Street and Michigan Avenue, that rooftops and alleys remain underexploited civic assets, that cities such as Berlin and Rotterdam, where much of what is listed above has actually been executed, are leaving Chicago in the dust when it comes to repurposing and bringing to life an urban streetscape.

Not all the ideas were as practical or low cost: they also argued it's time to revisit decking not just over the Jane Byrne Interchange, reconnecting the Loop and the West Loop, but also Cermak Road, the connective tissue between Chinatown, Bronzeville and McCormick Place. Both good ideas, to our mind, although the Kennedy ship likely has sailed. But most of these ideas weren't asking so much beyond some

modest public incentives for private investment, more flexible zoning and other regulatory relief. Nothing was anywhere close in cost to a new stadium.

It's not like Chicago is totally new to all this. Those of us of a certain age remember how the late Lois Weisberg, a great commissioner of Cultural Affairs in the Daley administration, got Chicagoans to love a herd of cows that sprouted with various paint jobs all over the city. Some are still around two decades later.

And, for the record, the city of Miami Beach has been making all kinds of news of late with a herd of life-sized wooden elephant sculptures interacting with visitors on its famous sands. Created by Indigenous artists, investing in these pachyderms has paid off

and then some for Miami. Cows on parade come in many different guises.

Raizin said that downtown was “the heart that pumps Chicago's blood” and that artists should be seen as “first responders.” He is branding his slate of ideas as an alternate to a sports venue, arguing that the economic and employment benefits would be far greater.

Ferguson argued vociferously that Chicago needs a better story as much as anything and it needs one pretty darn fast.

“The counternarrative needs to be built simultaneously with the dominant narrative,” he said, rhetorically thumping our table.

We all know the nature of the dominant narrative. You often can read about it on this very page.

When we asked about the buy-in from City Hall, our visitors either suddenly got quiet or looked at the floor. And we noted that many of those on the list of those involved in this project were thinkers, planners and administrators in previous mayoral administrations. Many, of course, have a vested interest in downtown's prosperity. But we also were struck by both their frustration and sincerity.

The people who were in our office, trying to get us on board to get some cool things going, are not alone. Take, for example, Nick Kokonos, the innovative Chicago restaurant entrepreneur who just cashed out his enterprises for many tens of millions of dollars. “Chicago needs to take \*risks\* again,” he wrote on X Thursday, sounding very much like someone considering whether to stay or leave. “In our history we used to do that. Now, it's about NOT doing things.”

He laid out his complaints with current leadership (“the lakefront? Zippo”) and finally wrote, “we need a Chicago Renaissance.”

We most certainly do. But we also have to live in the realm of the practical and get some things done, much as Kokonos got them done at his world-class restaurants such as Alinea and with his innovative reservation system, Tock. We have to start somewhere.

Aware of Chicago's love of sports and the power of branding, Raizin has written on our pages that he wants Chicagoans to “reimagine all of our downtown as a cultural stadium.”

Very Burnham-esque. But we think this is the time for one small idea at a time. Raizin and his crew have about 100 of them; we especially like the many that are connected to food.

We hope City Hall gives them a meeting. Kokonos should come along too.

## ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURE CHICAGO THEATER

# Imagining the 'next big thing' in arts and culture in downtown Chicago

A group of civic, business and community leaders — Team Culture — say they want to bring the arts to the city in new and unexpected ways.

By [Stefano Esposito](#) | Jan 14, 2025, 7:34pm CST



A group of civic, business and other community leaders is hoping to revitalize downtown. One idea, they say, would be to make better use of the Chicago River — perhaps having concerts on a floating barge. | Rendering courtesy of Lou Raizin

Some two decades after Millennium Park opened, it's time for the “next big thing” downtown, say a group of civic, business and community leaders.

Calling themselves “Team Culture,” the group wants to re-imagine major parts of downtown — filling vacant, often shadowy spaces with light and art.



“There have been two things in recent history that changed downtown. One was the Theatre District and the other was Millennium Park. It’s time for culture to do it all over again,” said Lou Raizin, president and CEO of Broadway in Chicago, speaking to a Tuesday lunchtime gathering at the City Club of Chicago at Maggiano’s Banquets downtown.

Raizin spoke of the potential for “huge economic opportunity,” pointing out that New York’s night-time economy generates about \$35 billion annually and supports some 300,000 jobs.

Raizin and his supporters envision expanding the use of the city’s existing spaces, such as having a barge plying the Chicago River — a barge turned into a concert venue or perhaps one that holds a farmer’s market. (Music of the Baroque [presented a full concert last summer from a boat](#) moving along the Chicago River.)



In this rendering, a floating farmer’s market that would make stops along the Chicago River on different days of the week, according to the newly formed Team Culture. | Courtesy Lou Raizin

And they imagine putting art in unexpected places, such as some of Chicago’s alleyways; a similar project in Detroit has created one of the “must-see” cultural things for visitors to the Motor City, Raizin said.

Or what if Lower Wacker Drive could be transformed into an “urban festival” site or art were to illuminate the gloomy below-ground corridors of the Chicago Pedway?

“What if at eight o’clock at night, you’ve gone to dinner, you’ve gone to a show, and a section of the pedway turns into a digital (light) experience?” Raizin said.

There were more questions than answers Tuesday, with Raizin and his would-be collaborators unsure where the money to fund the projects might come from.

“We are talking to a number of people,” Raizin said after the presentation, declining to mention names. “We are very close.”

“This is as much about the government getting out of the way and lifting constraints as it is about what we ask the government to do for us,” said Joe Ferguson, Civic Federation President and part of Team Culture.



How State Street might look with new art installations, according to Team Culture. | Courtesy Lou Raizin

[OPINION](#) | [COMMENTARY](#)

**Laura Washington: Post-pandemic Chicago needs a revival. Downtown is where it can happen.**



The Art Institute seen from Adams Street on June 18, 2020. (Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune)



By [LAURA WASHINGTON](#) | Chicago Tribune

PUBLISHED: January 15, 2025 at 5:00 AM CST

Chicago has a problem that must be solved: how to revive our downtown. Frank Sinatra’s “State Street, that great Street” is no more, replaced by blocks of empty storefronts.

LaSalle Street, once a major financial hub, is now more like a discarded hubcap lying by the side of the road.

The heart of our “toddlin’ town” has become dark, scary and obsolescent.

The hallowed Art Institute of Chicago has been closed every Tuesday and Wednesday for years, a casualty of the pandemic. Have you walked around the old Palmer House Hilton lately? The grand old hotel seems lost to the world. Its environs are a decrepit ghost town. Even the ghosts are afraid to take up residence there. Stroll by the Harold Washington Library at State and Van Buren streets, and watch as pedestrians dash by, avoiding the desperate eyes of the people who languish there.



Downtown restaurants are dropping like pigeon guano, and, conversely, new restaurants are popping up throughout the suburbs. Suburbanites are no longer flocking to the Loop to wine and dine, but staying in Wheaton, Winnetka and Glencoe, as those towns attain gastronomic distinction.

Post-pandemic Chicago needs a revival. Downtown is where it can happen. The energy of our great metropolis emanates from its center. Its centrifugal force can reenergize all.

A group of prominent leaders understand and recently unveiled the concept “Team Culture” at the City Club of Chicago. The civic, business and community leaders want to “reimagine Chicago by harnessing the power of arts and culture,” with a plan that “envision[s] and redefines the urban landscape to create a downtown that is vibrant, dynamic, and inclusive for all,” a City Club promotion cites.

The idea was teased in March in [a Tribune opinion piece](#) by Lou Raizin, president and CEO of Broadway in Chicago. It’s time for a new game in town, he argued, to be played by “Team Culture.” “Chicago’s culture defines us. Our food, our theater, our museums, our symphony, our opera, our dance, our music, our sports,” he wrote. “Culture is what makes us, us. It’s about our quality of life and how others perceive us. And it’s what drives tourists to our city.”

A new downtown, a “cultural stadium,” Raizin continued, “responds to our changing times. One that uses and maximizes culture for our residents and visitors and that boosts our local pride and stimulates our economy. A better downtown ‘stadium’ would enhance all the cultural players who play in it.”

Not just the cultural folks. We need creative thinkers, planners, lawyers, activists, entrepreneurs, corporate titans, restaurateurs and eaters, and people. Chicago is not alone. Cities around the nation are struggling with disintegration and degradation.

Chicago’s predicament recalls my recent travel destination, Angkor Wat, the remains of the famed Hindu temple complex in Cambodia. Angkor Wat is an exquisite object of history, a wonder of the world. It is also the ruins of ancient temples that perished hundreds of years ago, when the jungle rolled up and swallowed a once-great city. We are a long way from Angkor Wat, but let’s not take any chances.

Here are my prescriptions for Team Culture. Some may seem like low-hanging fruit, but we need all the juice we can get.

Recall my longtime rant about the Art Institute. This magnificent, world-class museum graces Michigan Avenue and draws visitors from all over the planet. It is the pride and joy of the art world, but it has been closed two days a week for years now.

The museum just announced it will shift to six days a week beginning March 5. It’s about time, but a seven-day schedule would send the message that downtown is truly back.

Our schools are key. Let’s take the culture out of the ivory tower and bring it to the streets. Our center city is blessed with a plethora of higher education institutions: Columbia College, Roosevelt University, DePaul University, the School of the Art Institute, the University of Chicago, all with



thriving downtown campuses that host tens of thousands of students, faculty and staff. Put all those brains to work on devising innovative ideas and strategies to revive downtown.

Workers need to get back to the office. Now. Major corporate voices, CEOs such as Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase and Andy Jassy of Amazon, have sounded that call, demanding that their employees be in the office five days a week, starting this month.

There is power and strength in the office, but people must be in them. They need to be shopping on State Street, hitting the lunch counters, toasting at happy hour. Bring back the workers for the purpose for which they were hired.

And this is no time for the flurry of new taxes and fees that come courtesy of the new city budget approved last month by the Chicago City Council.

Notable is a 2% hike in Chicago's personal property lease tax, which would produce an estimated \$128 million, Block Club Chicago reports. The tax will impact use of the cloud and could cripple the promise and payout of the city's burgeoning technology industry.

The former Thompson Center is now being re-created as Google's new Chicago headquarters. It promises a hub for the technology giant's offices and data centers and an anchor of innovation and creativity. The Google complex will also house restaurants, retail and other operations, as a crucial driver of innovation, commerce and just more fun. This new tax could stifle timely growth.

The city's powers need to join forces to abolish this tax. Downtown needs a turnaround, not a teardown.

*Laura Washington is a political commentator and longtime Chicago journalist. Her columns appear in the Tribune each Wednesday. Write to her at [LauraLauraWashington@gmail.com](mailto:LauraLauraWashington@gmail.com).*

###

## OPINION



*The Chicago skyline on Feb. 13. E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune*

### **When reimagining downtown Chicago, don't forget the power of taxes**

By George Cardenas

Chicago has always been a city defined by reinvention. From the ashes of the Great Chicago Fire came the world-renowned skyline we see today. Ours is a legacy of resilience and bold action. The pandemic tested that spirit as it changed the nature of the central business district. As Chicagoans, we need to respond.

At the heart of this vision needs to be investment, both public and private. At the City Club's Jan. 14 luncheon and in an opinion piece in the Tribune, Lou Raizin brought forth the "cultural stadium," a bold transformative idea. This innovative idea goes beyond traditional notions of urban development. It's a vision for a flexible, multi-use cultural hub — a dynamic concept that merges live performance, community engagement and economic opportunity. Such a bold plan signals to the world, once again, that Chicago's transformation is not a fluke — it's in our DNA.

In a recent Tribune column, Laura Washington, paints a grim portrait of our city center. She describes downtown as “dark, scary and obsolescent,” a place that has lost the luster and vibrancy that defined Chicago. Washington’s reflection on the Palmer House, a crown jewel of Chicago’s hotel landscape, is particularly telling: “The grand old hotel seems lost to the world. Its environs are a decrepit ghost town,” she laments. Although we would like to think otherwise or maybe even pretend the problem does not exist, assertions such as those are hard to dispute. These observations are not Washington’s alone. We all see it, we all live it, and we all understand that a course correction is desperately needed.

Let’s then get to work. Beginning with public investment, Chicago can look at property tax tools as a starting place, specifically property tax financing mechanisms. Originally designated in 1984 and expanded in 1997, the Central Loop tax increment finance (TIF) district catalyzed the redevelopment of downtown. According to its 1997 eligibility study, it outlined specific tasks to make the redevelopment of the central business district a reality. One specific expenditure category in the study was the designation of \$74.5 million for the rehabilitation of theaters. Where bold plans fail is when the anchors of those plans are afterthoughts rather than their North stars.

In addition to TIFs, Cook County’s property tax system also has tax incentives for commercial investments. Existing property tax financing and incentive mechanisms can be modified to better channel investment to cultural institutions. Creating a tax mechanism to bring in private investment is not about picking one tax structure over another.

With a nod to Raizin’s visionary plan, it is about working with all the tools available to us and coming up with a reasonable and sustainable plan. Sometimes, property tax tools used in the past need to be modified to meet the new ideas of the present, which then lead to our future.

To be clear, the Central Loop TIF was not about public expenditures in a vacuum. It was designed to foster private investment through the leverage of public dollars. In the 2008 Central Loop TIF annual report, there is an accounting of private and public investment. For example, the Goodman Theatre used approximately \$18.5 million in TIF funds, while \$40.8 million came from private investment, a 2.2-to-1 ratio of private/public investment. In another example, the Chicago Symphony used approximately \$2.5 million in TIF funds, while \$64.5 million came from private investment, a 25.8-to-1 ratio of private/public investment.

Past success stories, such as Millennium Park referenced in the City Club discussion, show that when the public and private sectors collaborate on public projects, great results happen.

History is our guide. Bold initiatives propelled us into an era of architectural greatness and, to Raizin’s point continue to make us a destination.

If we develop a resilient property tax financing structure and the public and private sectors work collaboratively, then a transformative idea like the “cultural stadium” becomes a reality.

George Cardenas is a Cook County Board of Review commissioner who represents the 1st District and is a former member of the Chicago City Council.

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**jahmal\_cole** Shouts to Lou Raizin for making big and bold civic moves. Lou is the President and CEO of [@broadwayinchicago](#) and he spoke at [@cityclubchicago](#) yesterday about reimagining our downtown. Y'all know I'm always at the City Club listening and learning.

Lou's got vision like no other—he wants to bring Black and Brown kids between the ages of 3-13 to the Theater District for free. I love big ideas like that! We already know that a lot of kids have never been downtown- they've never waved for a taxi, never been on an elevator, and DEFINITELY never been to the theater. Our Explorers program shows kids better so they can do better and in that way, Lou and I are

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## Editor's Letter: February/March 2025

BY [BRIAN HIEGGELKE](#) | FEBRUARY 11, 2025

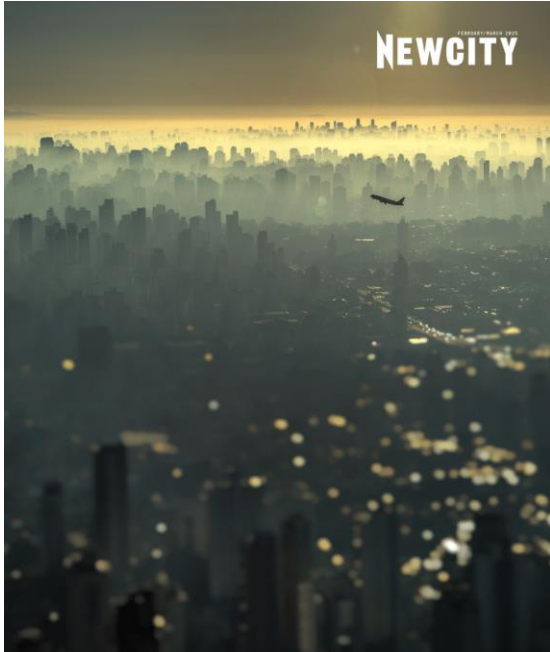


Photo: Claudio Edinger, "Machina Mundi SP" (detail)

If Harry Weese had not told Larry Booth to go check out the then-derelict Transportation Building, Printers Row might not have been born;

If Printers Row had not been born, then still in its infancy but with a restaurant and an international magazine shop to make it cosmopolitan enough for Jan and I to move here, *temporarily*, while she finished up at the University of Chicago;

If Hollywood Knights had not opened Printers Row's first video store back in the mid-eighties, I would not have shelved my plans to start one and soon decide that running a newspaper might be fun;

If former Maroon editor Frank Luby had not been crashing at my brother Brent's fraternity house while looking for a job after graduation from the University of Chicago, we might not have had that dinner where he told us it *would* be fun and he knew how to do it;

If not for all of this, Newcity would not have gotten started as a neighborhood newspaper for Printers Row thirty-nine years ago this month.

And if Ted Fishman had not approached us at a South Loop street fair back in the eighties about writing for that then-new neighborhood newspaper we'd started;

And if Ted had not gone on to a career as a writer of bestselling books that led to speaking engagements around the world;

And if Ted had not invited me to join him on one of those engagements in Brazil nearly twelve years ago;

And if we had not met Eric Lovric on that trip, who gave us a taste of the visual art culture and the generosity of spirit of Brazil;

If not for all of this, Newcity Brazil would not have been started ten years ago, culminating in the magazine inside the magazine this month, designed to share all the wonders of that nation's art world with you.

And if I had not met Lou Raizin at a gathering at the Poetry Foundation a few months ago, and asked to hear more about his photography practice which turned into a meeting where he shared his vision for a "Cultural Stadium" in downtown Chicago, a vision we, now thirty-nine years into our own cultural project from downtown Chicago, share;

We would not have Todd Hieggelke's in-depth exploration of the future of Chicago culture in this edition.

There is so much more of course, than these moments, these connections. Serendipity shapes our lives if we let it.

—BRIAN HIEGGELKE

Look for Newcity's February/March 2025 print edition at over 300 Chicago-area locations this week or subscribe to the print edition at [Newcityshop.com](#).





1 Cube Floating Stage Barge

JPG



2 Farmers market barge

JPEG



3 Food truck barge

JPEG



1871 for Arts

JPEG



Elevated LaSalle 1

JPEG



Elevated LaSalle 2

JPEG



River Fest 1

JPG



River Fest 2

JPG



Cap on Kennedy

JPEG



7 Artists 7 Streets 3

JPEG



7 Artists 7 Streets 2

JPG



7 Artists 7 Streets 4

JPEG



Spring Fest

JPG



Spring Fest Duck 2

JPG



Civic wall fest

JPG



Hand In Hand 2

JPG



Artist Studios

JPEG



Poetry way

JPEG



hydroponic garden restaurant

JPEG

