



Special Blog Post from Alliance of the SouthEast:

How is that development benefiting MY community? Fighting for Community Benefits Agreements

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and Coordinator for the Coalition for a Lakeside CBA*

On Chicago's southeast side, we have a huge "lot"- nearly 600 acres and a former Brownfield that has been vacant for over 24 years. It's an area that is more than twice the size of the Loop; the site of the former U.S. Steel plant, located between 79th Street and 91st Street.

Like many black and brown and low-income communities, Chicago's southeast side is facing high unemployment rates, underemployment, low graduation rates, and high levels of poverty resulting from years of disinvestment. We see Community Benefits Agreements, known as CBAs as a unique tool for economic development and revitalization.

A CBA is a legally binding contract between the developer and the community that outlines the developer's commitments to the community. A CBA represents a partnership between the developer and the community. However, if that partnership fails, residents can take a developer to court if they fail to deliver on the promised benefits.

The **Alliance of the SouthEast (ASE)** coordinates the **Coalition for a Lakeside CBA**, a coalition of 40 organizational members who are fighting for a CBA for the former U.S. Steel site. We want to make sure that the development benefits local residents who have worked in the community, built the community, and stayed in the community.

For the U.S. Steel site, \$119 million in Tax Increment Finance (TIF) funding has been approved, and another \$65 million in city and state funds were spent on the Lakeshore extension alone.

CBAs ensure that new developments serve the needs of local residents and taxpayers, not just the needs of developers. Our Coalition has proposed a CBA that includes jobs, training, educational opportunities for local residents, affordable housing with environmental protections, as well as supports tax-relief for long-time residents.

In April, ASE partnered with other organizations to hold a **CBA Conference** with over 30 Chicago organizations, seven CBA Coalitions (including ours), and public officials, who came together to share experiences on local CBA efforts and learn best practices from both local and national CBA experts. Guest speakers came from Chicago as well as six other states to share their experiences obtaining CBAs in their own cities, including the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, the One Hill CBA in Pittsburgh, and the Staples agreement in Los Angeles.

This convening has opened the way for discussions about the possibility of a citywide collaboration to support CBA efforts. We no longer feel alone, fighting for just our individual CBA. There are other Chicago area coalitions working on CBAs, and now we are all connected to organizations like the Westside Community Benefits Coalition working with Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and the Community Renewal Society, Blocks Together, Endeleo Institute for the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library Renovation Project, Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), The Law Project (TLP), and many more.

We know that band-aid solutions won't help our communities. We need long-term solutions that address the root causes of poverty and the lack of investment in our communities. This isn't just a job for you or me. It's not about one affordable housing project. It's about re-investing in our communities – long-term- in the way WE think it should be done. For us, and the U.S. Steel site, this means jobs for this generation and future generations. This is about keeping people and resources in our communities. Local job sources should hire local people. We think CBAs are the way to go. But, we also realize that we cannot do it alone. And, you can, too, by joining one of our coalitions, or by starting to ask... how is that development benefiting MY community?

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