Urban Planning Vocabulary

1909 Plan of Chicago
an important planning document from Chicago’s history; commissioned by the Commercial Club of Chicago and written by Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, the 1909 Plan of Chicago outlined how the city should be arranged in order for it to grow, work more efficiently, and grow more beautiful

Aerial photograph
a photo of the earth taken from the air by airplane or satellite

Aldermen
the 50 men and women (also called Aldermen) who are responsible for many of the political decisions made within the city’s 50 Wards

Boulevard
a special type of road where each direction of traffic is divided by a green space in the middle

Building density
how close the buildings are constructed to one another

Commercial buildings
buildings used for business or commerce and where people sell things

Diivy Bikes
Chicago’s bike sharing program; with a small fee anyone can use one of the blue bikes provided by the city for 30 minutes, returning it to any other Diivy Station

Community Areas
Chicago’s 77 areas are non-political boundaries used to organize and provide services; each Community Area is roughly the same size and rectangular in shape

CTA
Chicago Transit Authority; the independent governmental organization that operates the nation’s second largest public transportation system, which includes buses and commuter trains

Function / Use
a description of how a particular building is used

Grid system
a method of laying out roads that run at 90 degrees (horizontal and vertical) to one another; the grid system is one of Chicago’s most recognizable features

Human scale
the size and proportion of an object compared to you

Industrial buildings
buildings used to make a product

Infrastructure
the system of utilities (electrical, gas, power, water, telephone) and transportation networks (roads, bridges, rail lines) in a city
Institutional buildings
(also called a public building or civic building) buildings used for providing a service to the public; examples include hospitals, schools, houses of worship, and government offices

Mixed-use buildings
buildings that have more than one use; typical mixed-use buildings in a city have commercial businesses on the first floor and residences in the floors above

Neighborhoods
non-specific geographic areas used to describe the character of various areas in a city; there are no specific definitions to neighborhood boundaries, as everyone may think of their neighborhood in a different way depending on their sense of the area, its people, and its buildings

Plan view (bird’s eye view)
the view of an object seen from above, looking straight down

Park / Open Space / Green Space
land set aside for recreation, as a natural landscape, or for agriculture; it typically has few or no buildings

Pedestrian
a person that moves around the city by walking or using public transportation instead of a car

Population density
how close people live to other people; population density is usually measured by counting all the people that live within one square mile of land

Public space
space that is owned by the city and can be used by everyone

Public transportation
a system of buses and trains for large amounts of people; provided by and for a city and funded in part by public tax dollars

Private space
space that is owned by an individual owner and may not be used by everyone

Residential buildings
buildings used by people as their home

Setback
the distance a building sits from the edge of street, the sidewalk, and/or the property line

Urban
relating to the city

Urban plan / Urban planning
a plan created to guide future development in a city

Urban planner
the person responsible for developing a plan that leads to the redesign or growth of a community; to determine how land and resources should be used, urban planners evaluate economics, the environment, federal, state, and local policies, community concerns, society’s trends, and existing problems

Urban designer
the person responsible for both the design and the drawings for a specific area of land; urban designers create preliminary designs for buildings and where the buildings will be located

Viaduct
a railroad bridge that passes over a road

Wards
Chicago’s 50 Wards are the political boundaries used to define the area governed by an Aldermen; each Ward roughly has the same amount of people in it but the boundaries are jagged and look like puzzle pieces to reflect the population

Zoning ordinance
a system of rules typically established by the local government to control the height, density, and use of buildings in various areas of a city