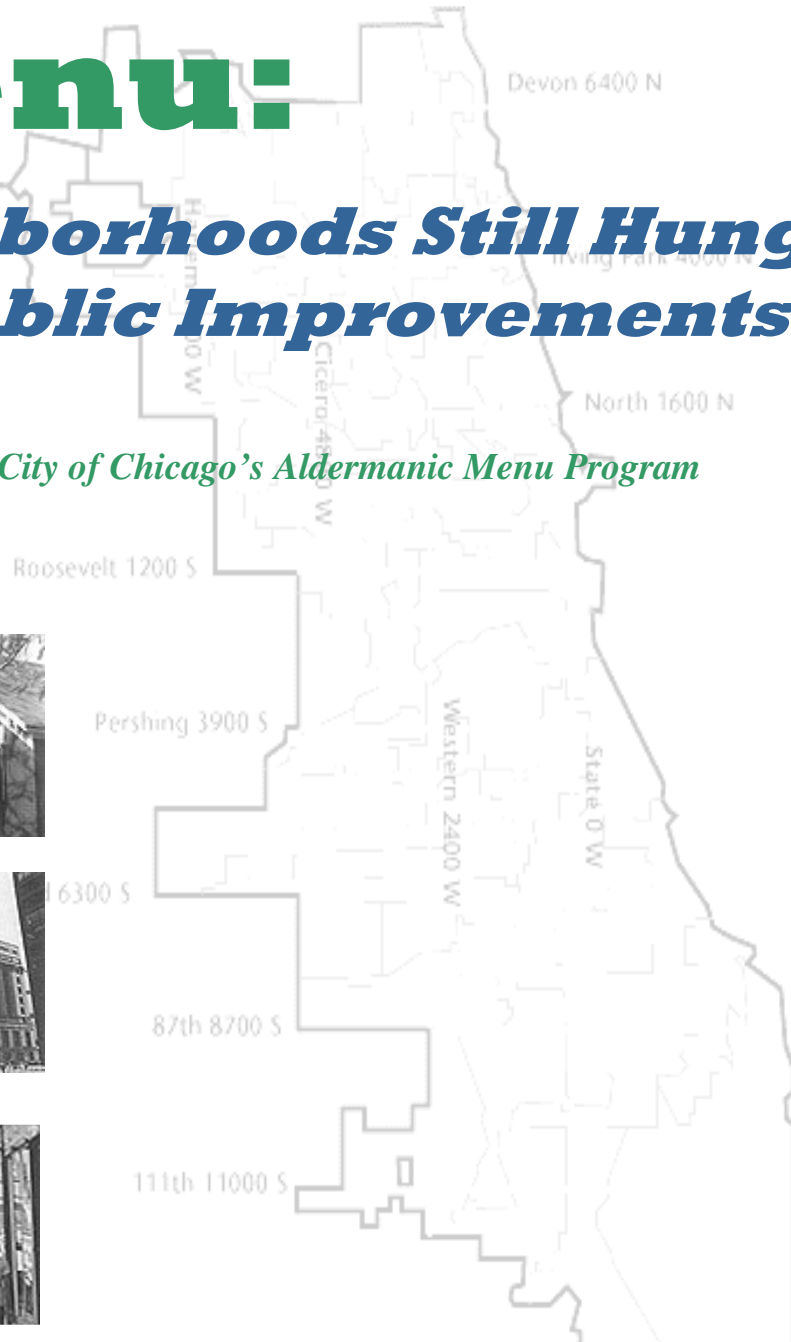


Digesting the Aldermanic Menu:

Neighborhoods Still Hungry for Public Improvements

A Report on the City of Chicago's Aldermanic Menu Program

April 2004



NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITAL BUDGET GROUP

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Executive Summary

The Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG) is a citywide advocacy organization working to ensure that all of our neighborhoods get a fair share of public works investment to rebuild and revitalize our communities. Over the past 16 years, NCBG has successfully advocated for greater public capital spending in neighborhoods, convincing the City to make infrastructure investment a high priority in Chicago. Since 1990, the City of Chicago has invested more than \$10.6 billion in locally generated funds on public infrastructure (excluding airport-related improvements), averaging \$750 million a year. The City reports on its public works projects through its “Capital Improvement Program,” or CIP, a five-year plan forecasting where and when infrastructure repairs will be made, how much those investments will cost, and how the City hopes to pay for them.

But despite the hundreds of millions of public dollars Chicago now spends annually on infrastructure, many neighborhoods continue to fall between the cracks of the CIP process. It is for this reason that NCBG continually monitors and analyzes the City’s capital plans, helping community-based organizations and local economic development groups identify and advocate for their local infrastructure needs. NCBG works on the issues of accountable, equitable and strategic allocation of the City’s infrastructure investments through a citywide task force of leaders from a wide variety of neighborhoods. This Community Capital Improvement Campaign Task Force asked NCBG to analyze the City’s Aldermanic Menu Program, a key element of the city’s “Neighborhood Infrastructure” program.

The Aldermanic Menu program gives each of the City’s 50 aldermen discretion to spend \$1.2 million per year in their respective wards. The types of neighborhood public works projects on which those funds can be spent are pre-identified by the Daley Administration. Aldermen are given a “menu” of neighborhood improvement projects from which to choose. *In 2003, 34% of the City’s \$175 million General Obligation Bond for infrastructure investment was earmarked for the Aldermanic Menu program.* Since 1999, an increasing proportion of the Neighborhood Infrastructure segment of the City’s total capital program has come from Aldermanic Menu selections. Thus, the Menu program is the capital-spending vehicle most likely to pay for basic capital improvements in residential areas. NCBG’s Capital Improvement Task Force wanted to know more about the decision-making governing such a significant and immediate source of neighborhood infrastructure investment.

- How do local ward offices set priorities for investing the \$1.2 million in Aldermanic Menu funds annually?
- How can the public have input into their Alderman’s choices?
- How will the public know what projects their Aldermen have selected?
- What changes in the program would make it more accessible and more accountable to the public?

NCBG utilized the Freedom of Information Act to obtain copies of each Alderman’s Menu recommendations for the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 (at this writing, NCBG has not received complete 2003 Menu information, since all Aldermen have not yet submitted their Menu selections).

Major Findings of NCBG’s Aldermanic Menu analysis:

- **Year after year, the majority of Aldermen are late in submitting their Menu requests.** The City Department of Transportation, the coordinating agency for the Menu Program, receives the majority of Aldermanic Menu requests well into the each year’s construction season.
- **There is no consistent or publicly disclosed deadline for the program. Every year for the past 3 years, the city agency administering the program, the Department of Transportation (CDOT), has changed the deadline for submission of Aldermanic Menu requests.**

- For 2001, four Aldermen failed to submit their Menu requests. For 2002, only 1 Alderman failed to submit a list.
- **For 2002, 23 Aldermen’s requests were at or below the \$1.2 million allotment, but another 26 requested more projects than their Aldermanic Menu appropriation could cover. The pattern for 2003 was similar – half of the City Council members asked for more than the Menu allotted them; half asked for less than the amount available to them. Does the City transfer funds from wards that ask for too little to wards who ask for too much?**
- There is no formal public input process to ensure that their Aldermen consider residents’ requests. While City officials stated at the 2003 capital budget public hearings that citizens could request infrastructure repairs on-line on the City’s website, as of this date, no form is posted.
- The City does not provide or require any ward-by ward disclosure of the Aldermanic Menu selections to the public. NCBG used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain the data analyzed in this study.
- There is no evaluation of the Aldermanic Menu program to assess its impact, whether the funding level is adequate, or whether the program should be revamped to give aldermen other “menu” items or broader discretion to direct capital dollars to local priorities.

NCBG’s conclusion: The City needs to dedicate more time and attention to assisting local Aldermen and their constituents with setting priorities for the Aldermanic Menu program. As the City Capital Improvement Program (CIP) allocated less funding for its Neighborhood Infrastructure program in recent years, the significance of the Alderman Menu program has grown. Since the Aldermanic Menu program is the critical delivery system to ensure that our neighborhoods get the basic infrastructure repairs they need, the City Council and city departments need to shore up the program, establish regular and clear guidelines, and work with Aldermen to increase community input to ensure these dollars are used wisely.

NCBG’s Recommendations for Action

- The City should provide a detailed ward-by-ward report on the Aldermanic Menu Program on an annual basis as part of its Capital Improvement Program document.
- City departments should provide Aldermen with a ward-level infrastructure needs assessment and infrastructure condition level reports, updated annually.
- The City should assign specific staff from the Office of Budget and Management and City Department of Transportation to oversee the Aldermanic Menu process, including meeting individually with Aldermen and ensuring that Menu lists are turned in on deadline.
- The City should establish a formal public participation process for the Aldermanic Menu program, including the establishment of a consistent annual deadline and timetable for community input that is widely publicized.
- The City should provide an easy-to-find and clear explanation of the Menu program on its website, along with a user-friendly on-line project request form for the public to request needed infrastructure repairs in their neighborhoods. These citizen requests should be forwarded electronically to the appropriate Aldermen.
- Citizens should be notified whether or not their infrastructure requests will be included in the Menu program, or in the broader Neighborhood Infrastructure and CIP program.
- The Office of Budget & Management should give the City Council Committee on Budget & Government Operations a quarterly report on General Obligation (GO) Bond spending, and the status of the Aldermanic Menu program.

- City Council should vote on the entire capital-spending plan prepared by the Executive branch of City government, debate spending priorities and levels, and enact an Annual Capital Budget.

The adoption of an Annual Capital Budget would ensure that our elected officials are fully informed and take responsibility for debating capital investment priorities. The result will be more equitable and strategic public works spending that is truly transparent and accountable to the taxpaying public.

What Is the City’s Aldermanic Menu Program?

Since 1996, each Alderman has been given control over a sum of General Obligation Bond¹ funds to spend on infrastructure projects in his or her ward. Aldermanic Menu projects include:

- Residential street resurfacing
- Alley resurfacing and speed bumps
- Sidewalks
- Curbs and gutters
- Neighborhood lighting

Initially, each Alderman received about \$1 million to distribute at his or her discretion – ideally based on public input – among the eligible project types. That amount was increased in 2000 to \$1.2 million per ward per year.

The Aldermanic Menu program is potentially an effective way to deliver public works dollars for the most pressing local infrastructure needs. If individual City Council members make full and fair use of the program, the Menu program can localize important decision-making powers at the neighborhood level. Unfortunately, some Aldermen do not make full use of the dollars allocated to them, and most distribute Menu monies without any sort of open public participation in selecting projects and prioritizing needs.

How Significant Is the Aldermanic Menu Program?

The Aldermanic Menu represents an increasingly important share of all City spending on neighborhood infrastructure. Since 1996 when the program began, Aldermanic Menu projects have accounted for almost half of total Neighborhood Infrastructure spending. During that time period, of the \$913 million spent on neighborhood projects such as local streets, alleys, sidewalks, and gutters, \$449.7 million (49%) was paid for through the Menu program.

Of all the public monies that the City of Chicago plans to invest in infrastructure over the next 5 years, neighborhood improvements represents 16% of all capital spending, or \$ 384 Million. Since NCBG has been tracking the City’s capital program, this percentage has remained roughly the same, and has mirrored the rise or decline in overall capital spending for the City. For 2003 the City planned to invest \$ 112 million in the Neighborhood Infrastructure Program. Of this amount, the funds allocated through the Aldermanic Menu program represented 54% of all neighborhood public works spending in 2003.

¹ Every year since 1992, the City of Chicago has issued General Obligation Bonds (a form of long-term borrowing) to finance capital improvement projects. The City repays the bond purchasers with its property tax revenue.

**Total Capital Allocations by Infrastructure Category
City of Chicago Capital Improvement Plan 2003-2007**

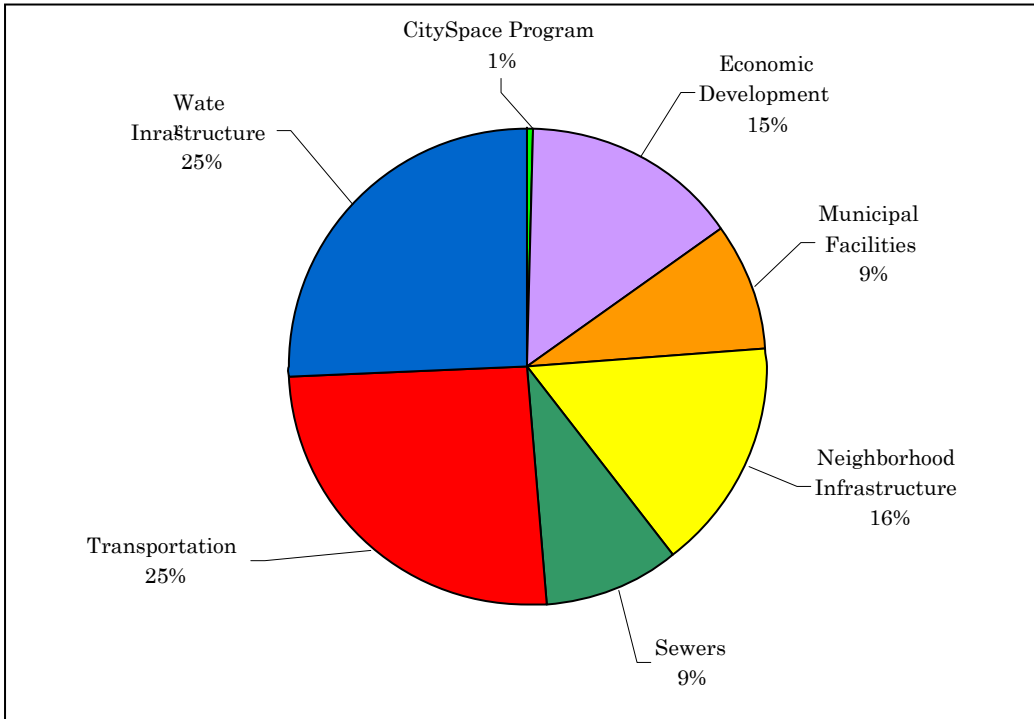


Chart 1.- Percentage of Overall Capital Allocations for 2003-2007 by Infrastructure Category.
Source: City of Chicago Capital Improvement Plan 2003-2007

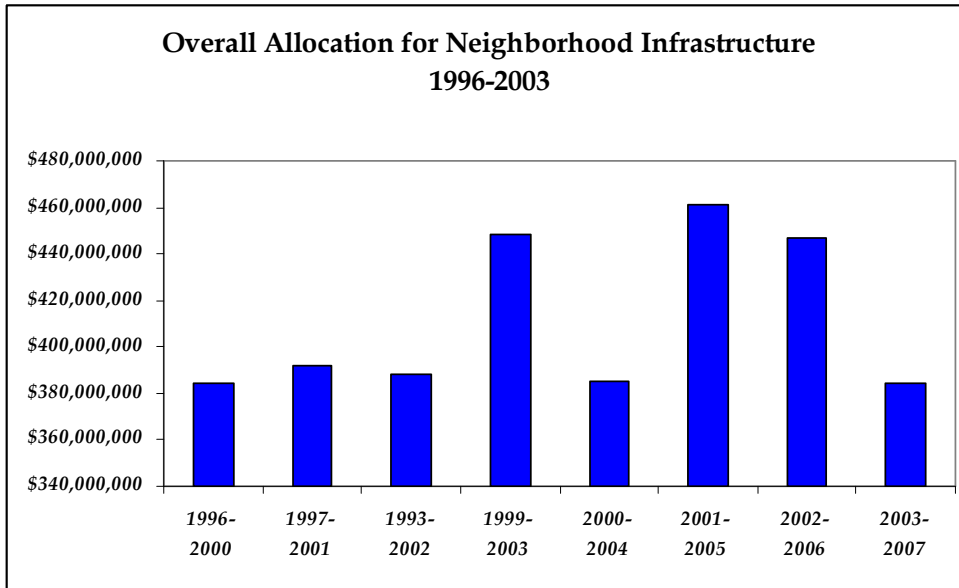
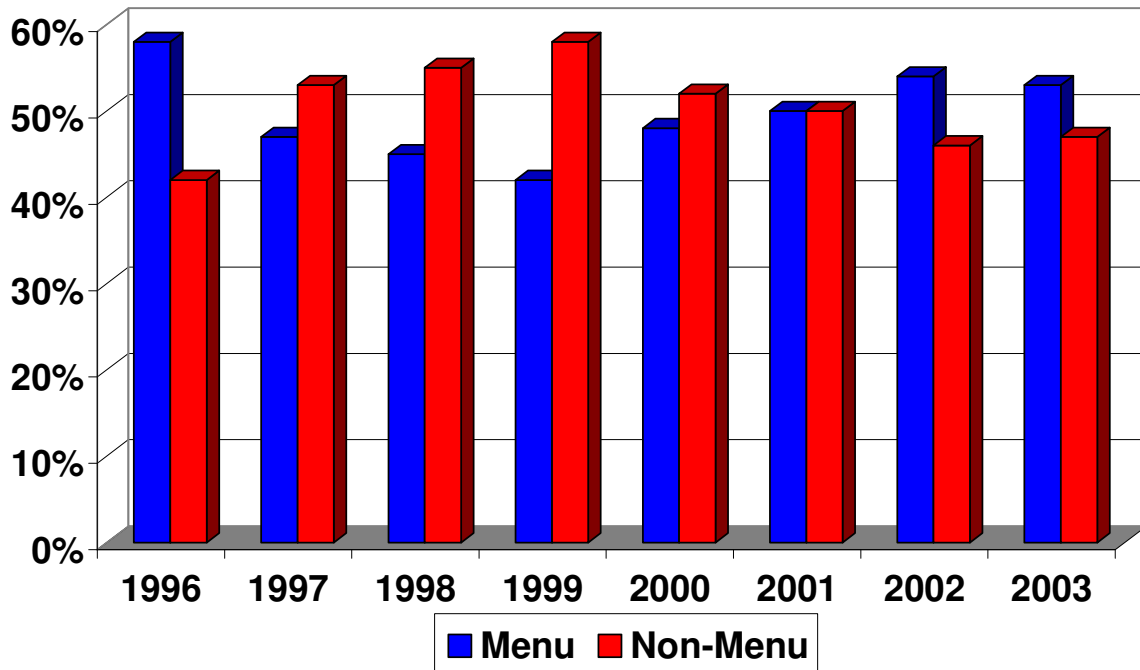


Chart 2.- Overall Allocation Amounts in Dollars for Neighborhood Infrastructure.
Source: City of Chicago Capital Improvement Plans, 1996 through 2003-2007.

Below is a year-by-year look at the relative importance of the Aldermanic Menu program compared to the larger category of Neighborhood Infrastructure. Clearly, the Menu choices made by our local Aldermen are very significant influences on all neighborhood infrastructure spending in the City.

Annual Aldermanic Menu Funding as Part of All Neighborhood Infrastructure



Source: City of Chicago Capital Improvement Plans 1996-2003

What Role Does the Public Play in Developing Their Alderman’s Menu Selections?

The public should have the opportunity to give input to the Alderman on choices of projects that will be paid for by Aldermanic Menu monies well before the Menu submission deadline. Unfortunately the public is not told when that deadline is. And there is no legal requirement that Aldermen seek their constituents’ input before submitting their list of priorities to the City’s Department of Transportation (CDOT). In the absence of any formal community input process assured by public policy or ordinance, NCBG helps community-based organizations and community development corporations advocate for and provide input based on residents’ own assessments of local infrastructure needs

Ideally, each Alderman should work with community groups to identify local infrastructure conditions in the Ward and prioritize projects. Indeed, some Aldermen proceed in this fashion, but many rely on Ward office staff to take condition surveys, meaning that their Aldermanic Menu selections are based on little or no community input. Unfortunately, many Aldermen are not forthcoming about their rationales for project selection. In addition, the City departments responsible for infrastructure do not provide Aldermen with an infrastructure condition assessment that could help guide their choices.

NCBG assists community groups developing their own inventories of infrastructure priorities and conditions by doing a physical tour their neighborhoods. NCBG’s online *Neighborhood Atlas* is designed to help the public easily view the physical features of individual communities and determine when and where capital improvement projects have been completed. With this information, compiled by NCBG’s monitoring of the City’s Capital Improvement Program since 1990, along with data recorded from a physical tour to assess current infrastructure conditions, community stakeholders can accurately and objectively determine where infrastructure work is most needed for the current year and ensuing years.

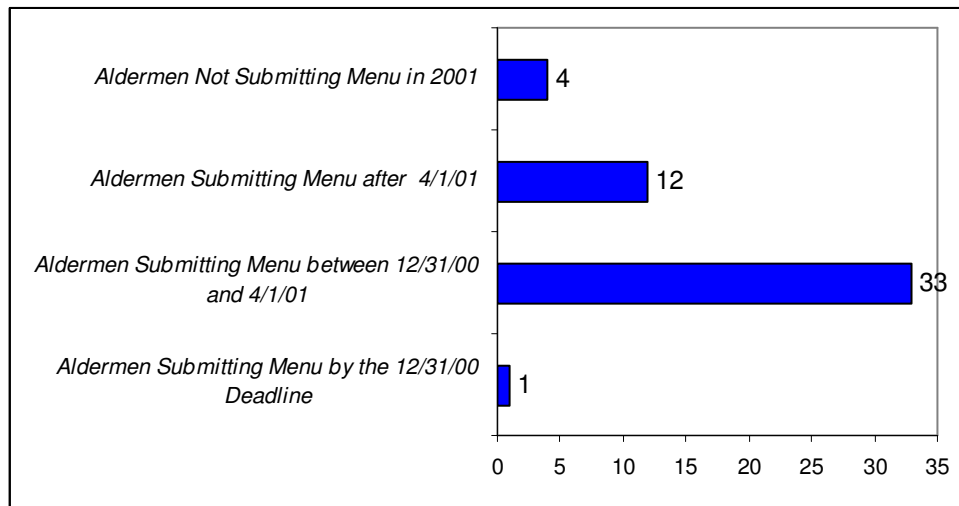
Using maps from the *Atlas*, community groups can conduct walking or driving tours through a community and document the specific location of problem areas. NCBG has developed survey forms to assist neighborhood groups with their infrastructure assessments and rate the physical condition of their communities' infrastructure. NCBG's Residential Area, Industrial Area, Commercial Area, and Public Facilities survey forms enable a community to develop a comprehensive assessment of local public works projects needed in their own neighborhoods. These forms can be found in NCBG's community planning and organizing manual, *Paving the Way*.

Since the City currently does not provide the public or elected officials with its infrastructure evaluations, local infrastructure condition assessments provided by community groups can be of immeasurable value to Aldermen in choosing their Menu projects each year. Proactive community groups that undertake their own capital planning process can influence the Aldermanic Menu selections by presenting their capital needs' findings to the local alderman, and advocate for inclusion of documented needs on the Ward's annual Menu request.

Did My Alderman Submit His/Her Menu Request on Time?

NCBG's research, based on data obtained from the City of Chicago through the Freedom of Information Act, shows that in 2001, 46 of 50 Aldermen submitted their Menu choices, but only one Alderman met the December 31, 2000 deadline. Thirty-four Aldermen submitted their selections before April 1, 2001.

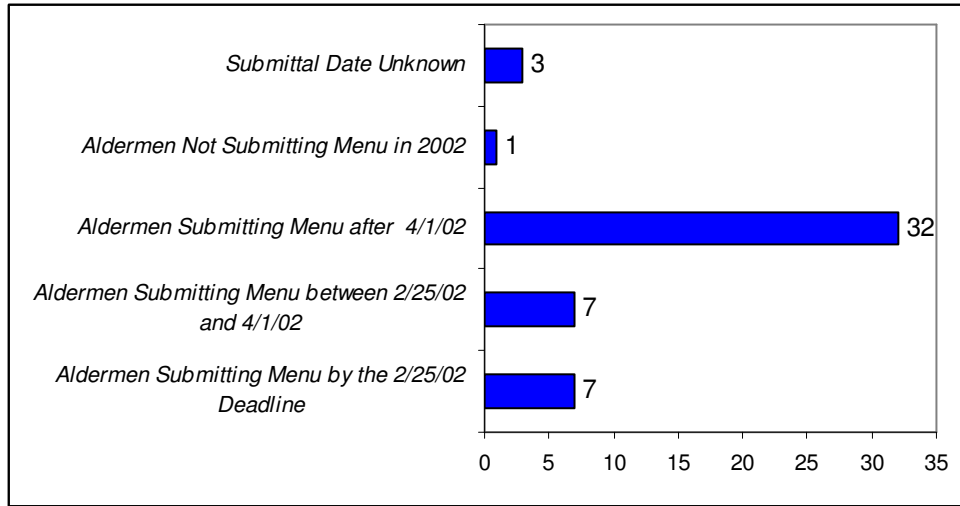
When Did Aldermen Submit their 2001 Menu?



Source: City of Chicago Department of Transportation Aldermanic Menu Request Forms, 2001.

In 2002, 49 of 50 Aldermen submitted their Menu choices, although the majority (42) submitted them after the February 25, 2002 deadline. Of those, 32 submitted after April 1, the start of the construction season.

When did Aldermen Submit Their 2002 Menu?

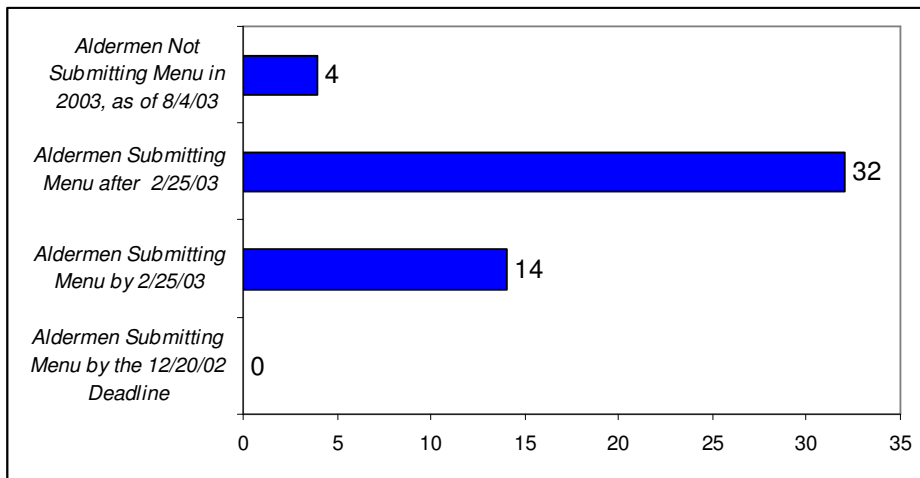


Source: City of Chicago Department of Transportation Aldermanic Menu Requests Forms, 2002

The deadline for the 2003 Aldermanic Menu program was considerably earlier than 2002; and was set at December 20, 2002. For 2003, four Aldermen did not submit Menu selections (two of these four were newly elected in 2003). Of the Aldermen submitting Menus, none submitted by the December 20, 2002 deadline. Fourteen Aldermen submitted their Menus by February 25, 2003, the same month and day as the previous year’s deadline. The rest (32) submitted their choices between approximately March 1 and November 1, 2003 (the most recent date for which NCBG has been able to obtain information).

Neighborhood Capital Budget Group collected 2003 Aldermanic Menu lists by making three separate requests to the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) through the Freedom of Information Act in 2002 and 2003. NCBG made an informal request for further information in September 2003, at which time CDOT staff told NCBG’s researcher that no further menu lists had been received from Aldermen. NCBG made another informal request in November 2003, at which time CDOT released several more Menus to us.

When Did Aldermen Submit their 2003 Menu?



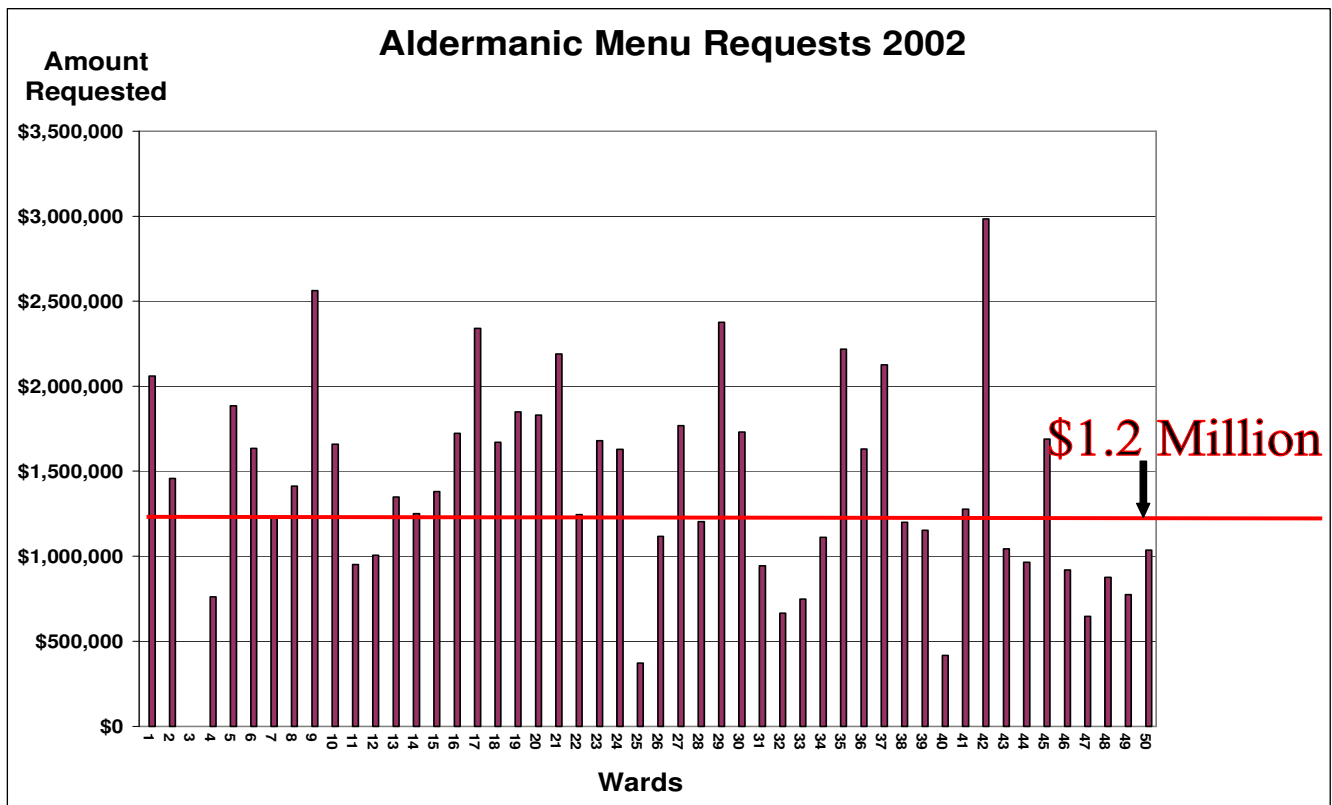
Source: City of Chicago Department of Transportation Aldermanic Menu Requests Forms, 2003

****A NOTE ON ALDERMANIC MENU DEADLINES:** The City does not provide a consistent deadline policy for Aldermanic Menu submission dates. As can be seen above, the deadlines for 2001, 2002, and 2003 changed each year. A consistent, widely publicized deadline, along with a firm policy outlining procedures and timetables for resident input would help Aldermen and City departments develop a more efficient and productive Aldermanic Men process.

Did My Alderman Request His/Her Full Share of Menu Dollars for 2002?

The estimates of cost for each capital improvement requested by the Aldermen are based on the Office of Budget and Management's published cost estimates for local capital improvement projects. NCBG used the costs that are reported on the "Typical Project Costs" sheet provided by the City's Office of Budget and Management. NCBG tallied each Alderman's request (for example, 4 blocks of sidewalk repaving) on his or her Aldermanic Menu form, and calculated the estimated total cost based on the OBM typical project costs values. In addition to the Typical Project Costs document, we used costs estimates for electrical enhancements for 2003, which were supplied to NCBG by the City's Bureau of Electricity.

For 2002, 30 of the 49 Aldermen (61%) who submitted Menu selections asked for at least \$1.2 million, the annual sum allotted to each Ward for Aldermen-selected Neighborhood Infrastructure projects.



How Much in Neighborhood Improvements Did Each Alderman Request for 2003?

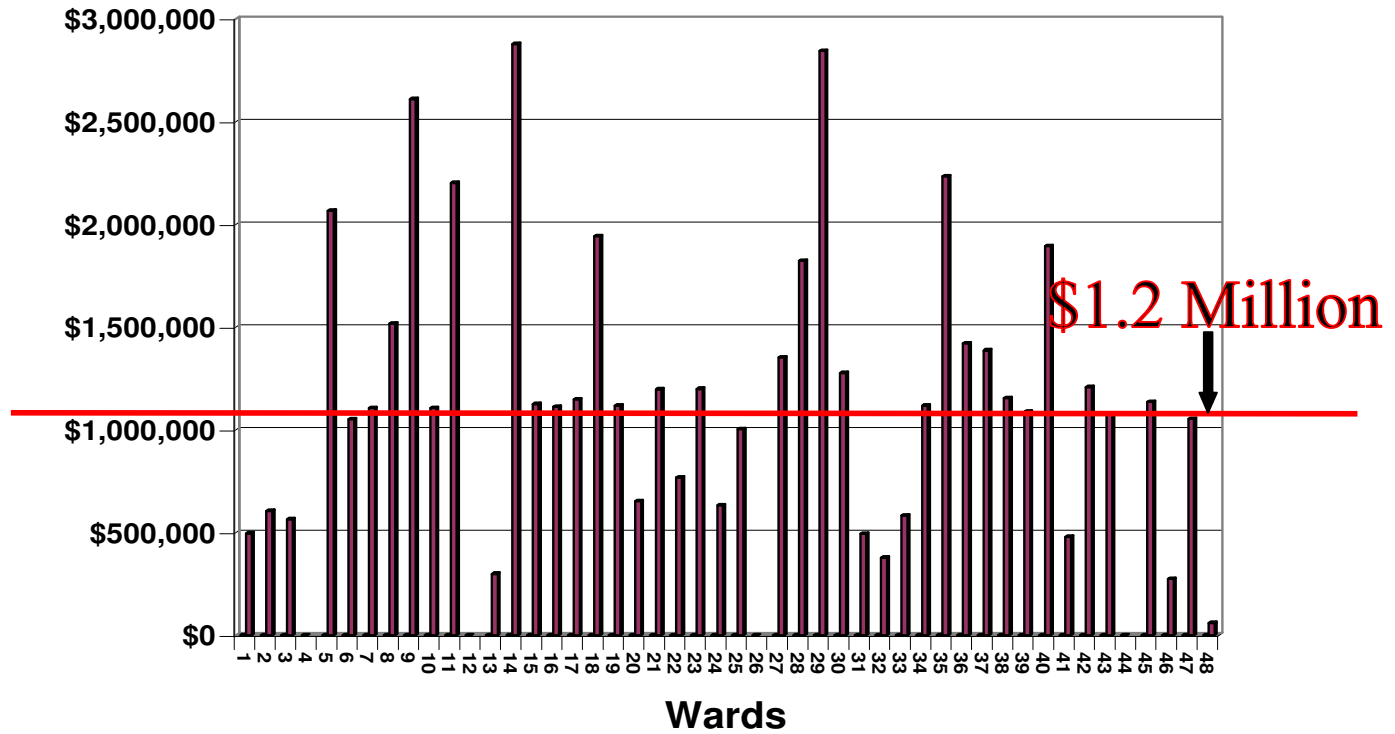
Twenty-six (26) of the 46 Aldermen who submitted menus for 2003 (56%) requested at least the \$1.2 million allotment for their Wards.

Ward	Alderman	Amount Requested
9	Anthony Beale	\$3,874,500
17	Latasha Thomas	\$3,269,000
14	Edward Burke	\$2,878,100
29	Isaac Carothers	\$2,844,750
21	Howard Brookins	\$2,625,500
18	Thomas Murphy	\$2,579,250
35	Rey Colon	\$2,234,500
11	James Balcer	\$2,202,250
5	Leslie Hairston	\$2,067,125

40	Patrick O'Connor	\$1,895,500
28	Ed Smith	\$1,823,500
45	Patrick Levar	\$1,789,500
19	Virginia Rugai	\$1,684,000
16	Shirley Coleman	\$1,678,000
34	Carrie Austin	\$1,672,000
10	John Pope	\$1,659,000
6	Freddrenna Lyle	\$1,621,625
36	William Banks	\$1,621,500
42	Burton Natarus	\$1,605,750
37	Emma Mitts	\$1,575,000
38	Thomas Allen	\$1,568,250
8	Todd Stroger	\$1,558,000
24	Michael Chandler	\$1,532,625
30	Ariel Reboyras	\$1,363,250
27	Walter Burnett	\$1,352,750
23	Michael Zalewski	\$1,200,000
3	Dorothy Tillman	\$1,197,375
15	Theodore Thomas	\$1,126,000
7	William Beavers	\$1,106,000
39	Margaret Laurino	\$1,088,875
43	Vi Daley	\$1,077,375
47	Gene Schulter	\$1,054,175
25	Daniel Solis	\$1,004,625
2	Madeline Hitchcock	\$864,125
22	Ricardo Munoz	\$769,000
49	Joe Moore	\$757,125
20	Arenda Troutman	\$653,000
33	Richard Mell	\$583,250
1	Manuel Flores	\$497,000
31	Ray Suarez	\$494,000
50	Bernard Stone	\$487,900
41	Brian Doherty	\$480,000
32	Theodore Matlak	\$379,125
13	Frank Olivo	\$300,000
46	Helen Shiller	\$274,500
48	Mary Ann Smith	\$60,500
4	Toni Preckwinkle	\$0
12	George Cardenas	\$0
26	Billy Ocasio	\$0
44	Thomas Tunney	\$0

Aldermanic Menu Requests 2003

Amount Requested



Are Aldermen and the Public Getting What We Need from the Aldermanic Menu?

Currently the City has no formal means of tracking the Aldermanic Menu Program in a public and systematic fashion, or evaluating its impact on our neighborhoods. Do aldermen always get what they request? Based on the documents released to NCBG by CDOT, apparently they don't. Several Aldermen noted their frustration that projects they had requested in prior years still remain to be implemented. Aldermen often expressed concern about--and requested-- types of infrastructure investment that are *not* offered on the Menu selection list. Since the City's CIP does not provide a ward-by-ward report on what aldermen requested, what the Budget Office approved, and what happens to aldermanic requests that were not approved, the public is left wondering about how effective the program really is. Since aldermen themselves express frustration about follow-through and tracking of their requests, clearly this is an area of common concern shared by taxpayers and their elected officials.

The results of NCBG's analysis do show that for the past two years, several aldermen were aggressive in seeking additional infrastructure improvements for their wards. For 2002, 8 aldermen submitted Menu requests that would cost more than \$2 million per ward; for 2003, nine aldermen requested more than \$2 million in local projects. For those 2 years, 5 aldermen consistently asked for more than \$ 2 million, those representing the 9th, 17th, 21st, 20th, and 35th wards. For 2002, more than half of the City Council, 26 aldermen, requested more neighborhood infrastructure investment than the Aldermanic Menu program allocates; for 2003, nearly half (23 aldermen) asked for more local capital investment than the program provided.

The public needs to know much more about this program than the City currently discloses. Are Aldermanic Menu selections reflective of the community's priorities? Have Aldermen's choices been strategic, that is, are they well placed and coordinated with other efforts to stabilize or improve their wards? What safeguards, if any, are in place, to ensure that the same street or alley isn't repaired over and over again, or too frequently? Even though aldermen generally drag their feet in getting their requests to CDOT, does their consistent call for greater local investment than the program currently provides indicate a higher level of need? What objective data about infrastructure conditions do Aldermen get from key City departments on which to base their Aldermanic Menu choices? Certainly the letters that CDOT sends to aldermen each year lack any such detail, or even suggestions as to how the Aldermen might weigh potentially competing projects for inclusion in their Menu selections.

The other critical and unanswered question raised by our study is: What happens to the Aldermanic Menu dollars *NOT* used by an individual alderman? Because the City has no rulebook or public disclosure of how the program is governed the public cannot know if our tax dollars are being used wisely or equitably. There does not appear to be any detailed feedback to aldermen on what their Menu selections will cost, and whether they have utilized their full allocation. Are aldermen even informed by CDOT and the Budget Office when their Menu requests have come in "under budget"? If so, then the process must be informal, since it was not included in any CDOT documents released to NCBG, or published in the City's CIP. Do other aldermen then get to re-allocate unspent allocations in their wards instead? Since the ground rules are neither clear nor public, we are all left wondering about what happens to the taxpayers' money in such a case.

Summary

The findings and trends found by NCBG in analyzing the City's Aldermanic Menu program are symptomatic of the City's lack of a clear strategic planning process for neighborhood capital investment. The City's Aldermanic Menu program and its overall CIP process should include equal measures of City staff and Aldermanic expertise, community planning and prioritizing, and the input of the public. With such a process, all concerned would be ensured that the neighborhood infrastructure projects the City

invests in each year are addressing the greatest needs first, and helping to advance a systematic, prioritized plan to rebuild all areas of the City.