



THE NEWS

Welcome to the 34th Ward

By Maia McDonald

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Graphic by David Elutilo // The TRiBE



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INCUMBENT:Ald. Carrie Austin **Retiring****CONTESTING CANDIDATES:**

- Bill Conway **Newly elected**

POPULATION:

52,231

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 7.6% Black
- 7.9% Latine
- 57.3% white
- 22.4% Asian

NEIGHBORHOODS INCLUDED:

- Greektown
- Near West Side
- Chicago Loop

MEDIA HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

- For Near West Side, [\\$93,202](#), as of July 2022.
- For The Loop, [\\$113,599](#), as of July 2022.
- For the City of Chicago, [\\$62,097](#), as of July 2022.

TOP ISSUES, ACCORDING TO PEOPLE WE INTERVIEWED:

- Parking
- Business opportunities for Black business-owners
- Increased construction and development
- Gentrification

LANDMARKS

- Greektown
- Big Monster Toys
- Fulton Market
- Soul City Church
- University of Illinois-Chicago
- Jane Addams Hull House Museum

One of Chicago's wards that will arguably see some of the most significant change once the Feb. 28 municipal election is complete is the 34th Ward. Originally a far South Side ward made up of parts of Beverly Point, Beverly, Morgan Park, Roseland and other neighborhoods, the 34th Ward is moving across the city to the Near West Side this year after a lengthy and [controversial](#) ward remapping process.

The newly redrawn ward has relative political newcomers [Jim Ascot](#) and [Bill Conway](#) both vying to become its first alder following its move from the far South Side. Incumbent Carrie Austin, who faces federal indictment charges [for bribery](#) and isn't seeking reelection, [aims to retire in March](#).

The new 34th Ward will be comprised of parts of Chicago's Loop, Fulton Market and Near West Side — neighborhoods that, while cited for amenities like trendy restaurants, bars, galleries, shops and fast [population growth](#), are home to small communities of Black people.

Much of the area now known as the 34th Ward was once a [thriving meatpacking district](#) worked by low-income city residents and was known as "Skid Row." However, [key moves to the](#)

neighborhood of major businesses such as Oprah's Harpo Studios in the early 1990s and Google's Chicago headquarters in 2015 have, over time, not only brought with them trendy, upscale amenities, but also higher rent that's increasingly pushed out the few Black residents who remained.

Ahead of the election, *The TRiiBE* asked Black Chicagoans in the 34th Ward about their experiences in the area and how they will inform their voting decisions in the 2023 Chicago municipal election.

COREY GILKEY (AGE NOT GIVEN)

Neighborhood you live in: Hyde Park

Neighborhood you work in: West Loop

Occupation: Owner of Leaders 1354

Do you know who the 34th Ward alderperson is? "I don't. We know Ald. Walter Burnett (27th Ward). We've met him a couple of times and that's it." *(Reporter's note: Gilkey's store was in the 27th Ward before the 2022 ward remapping).*

What do you like about the 34th Ward? "The cleanliness. Some of the people are amazing. We get tons of tourists. It's now a hotbed of restaurants. Restaurant Row has all the best restaurants around the West Loop now. Some of the best retail is there right now; maybe the best retailers in Chicago are in the West Loop. So we have this whole synergy of food, clothing, sneakers, art, [beauty], low odor, it's all types of ages. It's very clean. Pretty safe."

What do you dislike about the 34th Ward?

- **Lack of street parking:** "The only challenge I have is parking. We can't get help with that. The Rainforest [Learning Center] preschool came in two years ago, and went to the alderman and bought up all the parking spaces so we don't have parking for our customers. That's the only negative that's around it."
- **Lack of attention from alderperson and City Council:** "We got no help from aldermen or anything like that. They don't know who we are or what we do. Most of the aldermen in Chicago are not interested in retail. They don't know anything about any of the stores or nothing."

Is there anything the next 34th Ward alderperson can do to improve the ward? "Nah... we don't even know who's running. We're only interested in politics where we have property, and that's Englewood and Bronzeville. We love Ald. Stephanie Coleman (16th Ward), and we love Ald. Pat Dowell (3rd Ward). But as far as the 34th Ward and West Loop, they're not interested in us and we just stay out the way and make our money basically."

What else would you like to see in the 34th Ward? "I just want more diversity. I think it needs more. It should be more African American restaurants [in the West Loop]. Retail is there. We're there retail-wise, but it should be more."

Do you plan to vote in the 2023 Chicago municipal election? "Yeah, I can always ask a friend who's in politics who to vote for."

KATHRYN MILES, 37 YEARS OLD

Neighborhood you live in: Marquette Park

Neighborhood you work in: West Loop

Occupation: Owner of Kathryn's Soul

Do you know who the 34th Ward alderperson is? "No, I don't know."

What do you like about the 34th Ward?

- **Accessibility:** "[I like] that it's right next to the trains. And it's easy for people to commute in. It's in downtown, located near offices and different things. So you have a lot of returning customers, because a lot of them are employees."
- **Lots of businesses:** "I think the neighborhood is wonderful for businesses. It's a very community-like area."

Are there any challenges with working in the area? Or anything you think can be improved upon? "[I'd like to see] businesses being opened later for residential and people that do not live or nor work in the area."

Since your soul restaurant started three years ago, what have been some challenges you've experienced? "Some of the issues I will say we have run into are supply chain issues with products and availability of things. And some of the mandates as from COVID, you know, with the vaccination requirements, just everything."

Is there anything the next 34th Ward alderperson can do to help Black-owned businesses in the area? "I just think that they should help businesses with resources, so far as getting capital or just different programs that are available."

Do you plan to vote in the 2023 Chicago municipal election? "Yes."

GARY STURDIVANT, 38 YEARS OLD

Neighborhood you live in: Austin

Neighborhood you work in: West Loop

Occupation: Barber

Do you know who the 34th Ward alderperson is? "I know nothing."

What do you like about the 34th Ward? "I like that it's not a lot going on. Like, on that specific block that I'm on, there's nothing going on. Like there's only things right, there's a school across the street, a church next door, and apartment complexes next to me. That's it. I like that. But I do like that I'm walking distance to nice coffee shops and some different types of food if I want to eat in a nice local deli."

Are there any challenges with working in the area? Or anything you think can be improved upon? "[Costs are] very high. For me, I can't open up a business. I can't open up a big barber shop over there because I can't afford it. It's just way too high to even make a local barber shop over there. A lot of the local barber shops that were over there are closing down because [costs are] going up so much. The rent has gone up so much over there. And I guess the area's only kind of like meant for the middle-class people. And when I say middle class, like over there, you've got to make a bare minimum \$100,000 [a year] just to live in a studio apartment."

Is there anything the next 34th Ward alderperson can do to improve the ward? "Help Black businesses. It's two Black business owners that I know are in the area and they're like, right across the street from each other. I don't know them personally, but I know they've been around for a long time. They probably got in and got a good rent before they all just shot up.

What do you think about the alderperson's ability to lead and change their wards? "It's like the presidency. You're trying to fix something in four years that might take 10. If you give them less space and more people to work with certain things, then that's great. But then it comes with leadership.

"A lot of people don't know their aldermen. Look, I don't even know the alderman in this area. But I think that's because the aldermen don't come out. They don't go around and knock on people's doors and say, 'what do you think is good for the neighborhood?' They just send out a postcard and say, 'Hi, I'm the alderman.' That's it. It doesn't say, 'if you need anything come to me.' What about people that can't read? Come and make yourself known.

Do you plan to vote in the 2023 Chicago municipal election? "I'm not a fan of politics. So actually, this is the year I declared I will never vote again because it doesn't mean anything. It hasn't changed my life since I voted. I once vowed to vote 'til I die because I'm Black and my people died for this, but I don't even know why they died now."

Is there anything that could be done in the future to convince you to vote again? "Seeing the change.

"I lived in Oak Park too, for a little while. It's totally different from Chicago. It may cost a little bit more but not that much. It's not that much to live in Oak Park. Everything's cleaner. The political structure of Chicago and Illinois as a whole is crap. Everybody's moving from the state. Everybody's moved from the city. My wife wants to move so bad. But I told her I can't start over. I can't go somewhere to start over."

DAVID WALLACE, 28 YEARS OLD

Neighborhood you live in: Near West Side, West Loop

Neighborhood you work in: Declined to answer.

Occupation: Works in healthcare technology.

Do you know who the 34th Ward alderperson is? "I'm not aware enough of that person. I do know that the ward is changing but I don't understand all the historical boundaries of it."

What do you think of the 34th Ward? "It's obviously in an affluent area and, as a renter, I do not consider myself a part of that affluence. I also live in a piece of the Near West Side, slash West Loop area, that hasn't had the same level of investment that you would kind of see in the Fulton Market area. It's also my understanding that the new part of the 34th Ward also includes parts of the Loop and South Loop and I would say that kind of where I live has not had the same level of investment that Fulton Market and the South Loop area have seen."

What do you like about the 34th Ward? "I like that it is walkable to an extent. I enjoy having access to the Blue Line. And my ability to get to and from downtown. Using the Blue Line, or like the Jackson buses as another route that I may take on occasion."

Are there any challenges with living in the area? Or anything you think can be improved upon? "I think bus access, kind of stretching north and south would be something that I would like to see. I find it easy to kind of go east and west, but going north and south from the city from where I live seems difficult.

"I also have concerns about safety on the Blue Line because of things that I've witnessed on

the Blue Line that impact safety, that affects not just me as someone who's on like a rider but also people around me as well as family or friends that I may travel on the CTA, specifically on the Blue Line. I have not encountered the same on the bus."

Is there anything the next 34th Ward alderperson can do to improve the ward? "I think focus needs to be put on making sure — I'm not a parent — but I think that the alderman needs to make sure that all the children that would kind of feed into this proposed high school for the Near West Side, that all the children have access, equitable access, into this kind of high school. I have concerns that people that kind of live in the southern part of the city would or would not be feeding into the school so if the new alderman were in charge of that, I think they need to make sure that there was some sort of like, equity into making sure that people in the West Side and out of the West Side have access to that.

"I think that another issue will kind of be mental health resources. It's my understanding that one of the aldermanic [candidates] proposed a mobile mental health unit. I think that could better reach some of the people in the Near West Side who have not been able to leave their homes.

"I think that homelessness is probably a big issue and it's my understanding that there isn't enough capacity in the homeless shelters, so I would like to see the City work with some of these entities to increase the capacity. In my time living here, I've kind of seen homelessness. I'm conscious of how the Blue Line is potentially serving as an outlet for these people. My perspective is that, you know, this new alderman really needs to make sure that these people have access to housing without being further disenfranchised, from kind of the wider Chicago community."

Do you plan to vote in the 2023 Chicago municipal election? "Yes, I do. I do intend to vote."

Maia McDonald is a freelance contributor for The TRiBE.

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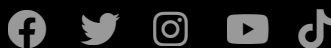


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