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## Humboldt Park to become a model of urban wellness

by DAYNA DION  
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Thanks to public and private grant money, Chicago's Humboldt Park community is set to receive a complete wellness makeover. In coming months, Humboldt Park residents can expect to see a half-acre vegetable garden, vending machines with healthy snacks in public parks and workplace wellness programs.

If all goes according to plan, Humboldt Park will serve as a model of community wellness for other Chicago neighborhoods with underused public space, said Jacquelynn Payne, program specialist for the Chicago Park District.

Plans for Humboldt Park were unveiled this week during Chicago's Eat Well, Live Well, Move More conference. The conference was organized by Building a Healthier Chicago, a coalition of local and national organizations working to make Chicago a healthier city.

The most immediate addition to Humboldt Park will be a vegetable garden, scheduled to break ground later this month. The Chicago Park District granted land for the garden to Humboldt Park's Pedro Albizu Campos High School. Students will harvest a mix of herbs and vegetables, such as red peppers, tomatoes and onions which are among the ingredients in Sofrito, the flavor base of several Puerto Rican meals.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Partnership Director Lucy Gomez-Feliciano, said the garden is a way to introduce children to fresh food and wants to encourage other community organizations to apply for Chicago Park District land grants. "Many people don't know that community groups can use park district property to grow edible foods," she said.

The Chicago Park District also is developing a contract that will require suppliers of vending machine snacks for its Humboldt Park facilities to comply with American Heart Association nutrition standards when possible, Fitness Senior Project Specialist Colleen Lammel-Harmon said. Ultimately, the park district's goal is to make all 556 Chicago Park District facilities "100 percent healthy" with items such as fruits, nuts, and whole grain snacks, she said.

Finally, the park district is partnering with businesses in Humboldt Park to institute programs that would encourage residents to bike to work and walk the stairs of office buildings. For instance, it hopes to change one Humboldt Park organization's policy prohibiting bikes in its building. The park district also wants to encourage organizations to open up their staircases for more than just emergency exits.

Change in Humboldt Park won't happen overnight or without challenges, Lammel-Harmon said. But, "through policy work and through coordinated efforts of different organizations, we are creating a healthier community," Payne said.

The Chicago Park District hopes to emulate its work in Humboldt Park in other Chicago neighborhoods, including Palmer Park, Sherwood Park and Douglas Park.

