

Chicago's Newest Neighborhood

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New Eastside

New Eastside is Chicago's newest neighborhood. It's a mixed-use area comprised of full-service luxury condominiums, hotels and office towers sandwiched between the Chicago River and Millennium Park with a prime locale right on the lakeshore. The neighborhood is extremely vertical with several residential buildings and hotels topping the 40-story mark. For the most part, New Eastside caters to single working adults, couples and young families who the convenience of being steps from the lakefront and walking distance to the Loop.

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Just the Facts

Location: the northeast corner of the Loop

Boundaries: The Chicago River to the north, Lake Michigan to the east, Randolph Street to the south and Columbus Drive to the west

Demographics: For zip code 60601 which includes New Eastside neighborhood

Median Age: 46.0

Median Household Income: \$77,374

71.3% of population 25 and older have bachelor's degree or higher

White 74.8%

African American 11.1%

Hispanic or Latino 5.6%

Asian 10.3%

American Indian and Alaskan Native 0.4%

Other Race 1.4%

Two or more races 1.9%

(Source: US Census 2000)

Crime Statistics: Go to <http://gis.chicagopolice.org> to search specific streets and areas for crime incidents

Then and Now

The New Eastside was not even a part of Chicago 200 years ago. At that time it would have been in Lake Michigan. In fact, most of the land that is now the grand front lawn of Chicago, including Grant Park, was added as landfill starting in the 1800s.

Prior to 1830, the Chicago River flowed into Lake Michigan near the intersection of Monroe Street and Michigan Avenue, almost parallel with the north wall of the present-day Art Institute of Chicago. In the mid 1800s the river channel was altered to run closer to its current location just north of New Eastside, though it needed to be continually dredged because it was clogged on a regular basis by sand transported across its mouth.

It may sound hard to believe, but the natural waterways in and around Chicago were not respected at that time as the valuable resource we know them to be today. Most often the river was used for the disposal of raw waste, and contamination of the city's drinking water soon followed. Outbreaks of cholera and typhoid were common and the river became a foul-smelling, polluted body of water.

After the Great Fire of 1871, much of the debris and rubble from burned houses and businesses was not hauled away inland, instead it was pushed or carried to the lakeshore and dumped where the excess material eventually turned the entire area into a landfill.

In 1887, city officials started to get serious about the usefulness of Chicago's water passages and decided to create a canal from Lake Michigan to the Des Plaines River, and in so doing they would create what is today the South Branch of the Chicago River and the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. It took 13 years of digging and dredging, but the 28-mile canal was finally completed at the dawn of the new century. A complicated lock system was built by teams of engineers to control the flow of water, which now was effectively reversed, moving east to west from Lake Michigan into the Chicago River.

In 1909, famous Chicago architects Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett drew up a plan to create a double-decked roadway along the river. Charles H. Wacker, the chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission at the time, pushed the idea, so when the original two-level road was completed in 1926 (at a cost of \$8 million), it was named after Wacker. Further development and additions continued for the next 70 years, and the most recent improvement and beautification project was completed in November 2003.

From the beginning of the 20th century the land around New Eastside was a part of the Illinois Central Railway train yards. This area was used as storage space for rail cars when they were not being loaded or unloaded, or were waiting to be attached to trains. However, railroad companies soon realized that they could sell the "air rights" to the *land* above their tracks to other interested parties.

One of the first structures in the United States to take advantage of building on air rights was One Prudential Plaza completed in 1955 at Randolph Street and Stetson Avenue. It was the tallest building in the city during the period and attracted thousands of workers and tourists alike to the area. With the construction of Outer Drive East in 1963 at Randolph Street and Harbor Drive, residents soon followed. At the time it was the world's largest apartment building. A large glass dome on the northwest corner of the lot still covers the swimming pool to this day, although the building has long since been converted to condominiums.

Aon Center, formerly the Standard Oil Building completed in 1973, created another housing boom and soon Lake Point Tower and Harbor Point Tower, two large condominium projects, joined the other large towers in the increasingly dense neighborhood.

For many years Lake Shore Drive had an infamous S-curve at the Chicago River, running just to the west of Outer Drive East. The curve was dangerous, noisy and presented a hassle for both motorists and residents. This S-curve was on a viaduct over the Illinois Central Railroad's train yard, and was at the level of Upper Wacker Drive. A project to realign Lake Shore Drive and remove the curve was finished in 1986, and in 1987 Middle Wacker Drive was extended to meet the new alignment.

Once the S-curve was removed, a neighborhood dubbed New Eastside was born, but unfortunately a new debate began about what should become of the land where the roadway and rail yards once stood. The temporary solution was a nine-hole golf course that was created in the 1990s but removed when the Magellan Development Group began laying the groundwork for a planned community around the grounds of Lakeshore East Park.

Over the last several years the neighborhood has seen the rise of Millennium Park and Cancer Survivors Park just south across Randolph Street, and future development looks promising for the next several years. At least five separate condominium projects are underway in New Eastside, and just across the river, Santiago Calatrava's Chicago Spire, slated to be the tallest building in the United States, will soon drift upwards twisting like a white plume of smoke out of the North Bank of the Chicago River.

The Park is the Place

One of the greatest features of New Eastside neighborhood is its proximity to grand parks and recreation areas. Not only is it very close to the city's best lakefront beaches and parks, Navy Pier, Millennium Park and Grant Park, but it also has a beautiful new park of its own forming the heart of this young community.

Water flows everywhere in **Lakeshore East Park** reminding you that you are near one of the great confluences of water in the city: a mere few hundred yards away are the locks where the Chicago River meets Lake Michigan. This newly created 6-acre public park won a 2006 Tucker Design Award, which is awarded to architectural firms that exhibit excellence in concept, design and construction with natural stone. The natural stone in this case is Lannon stone, which is a type of limestone that has a rough texture and a shade that varies from creamy buff to golden rust. At each of the park's entry points, visitors are greeted by a series of five fountain-like basins with foundations built of beautiful Lannon stone that progressively narrow along the paths toward the center of the park.

At the park's main entrance off Randolph Street a grand staircase of Lannon stone provides a welcoming reduction to the vertical slant of the area—the grounds maintain a 40-foot drop over a span of 340 feet. From the top of the staircase there is a nice view of the park, and the drive that circles it, allowing condominium owners and visitors access to their buildings. Lakeshore East also has a gated dog-friendly area on the west side and a large area of open grass perfect for a pick-up game of football with friends or playing catch with the kids.

Home Sweet Home

New Eastside is a bustling neighborhood that looks to provide strong value in the condominium market for the next several years. Once a popular spot for working singles, the neighborhood is now looking more attractive to families. With the development of Lakeshore East Park and the plans for a new school, there is interest in the neighborhood that would have been unheard of a decade ago.

The neighborhood exudes urban sophistication and modern charm. With its hotels and soaring office and condominium towers, this is a great neighborhood for anyone who appreciates high rises and the history of the skyscraper. Within several blocks are two buildings that were once the tallest buildings in the city.

Even though residents are surrounded by glass, steel and concrete, the development of major parks nearby has made this a beautiful outdoor recreation area as well. When the weather is warm, the Pritzker Pavilion and its beautiful Frank Gehry-designed band shell is an easy five-minute stroll away. There are tennis courts in Grant Park, a running and biking path hugging the lakeshore, and the Museum Campus is within walking distance as well. Not to mention the waterfront is at your disposal anytime of day or night, and when those fireworks shoot off of Navy Pier throughout the summer (on Wednesday and Saturday evenings), New Eastside residents have front-row seating—in their living rooms.

Many of the older condominiums in New Eastside neighborhood have been updated over the years by their owners so prices can vary depending on the amount of upgrades that have been added. For a starter studio or one-bedroom condominium in this neighborhood, expect to pay around \$250,000. Just know various options such as balconies and parking can drive the price up considerably. The other major consideration is the view: In general, units on the north side sell for less than units on the south side.

On the higher end, condo units in New Eastside can cost as much as \$1.4 million for a three-bedroom place with breath-taking views or the water, luxury amenities and finishes, and garage parking space. Of course, not all residences in the neighborhood are million-dollar properties. There are plenty of good-size condos with a couple of bedrooms and parking that range in price from \$350,000 up to \$990,000. But no matter how much is spent on a New Eastside abode, new residents are sure to fall in love with the absolutely priceless setting of downtown waterside living.

Loop Residential Real Estate Info (Includes New East Neighborhood)

Type of Housing	Average Sales Price 2005-2006	# of Units Sold	One Year Price Change	Price Change Since '94
Single Family Detached	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Single Family Attached	\$373,413	859	↑15%	↑181%

Source: Multiple Listings Service of Northern Illinois

What's on the Menu?

New Eastside is a glamorous destination for tourists and residents alike, and there are several excellent restaurants in the vicinity to satisfy the tastes of visitors from around the world, or right down the street.

The power lunch was invented 20 years ago and perpetrators of its mythical stature still meet at **The Palm Restaurant** in the Swissotel (323 E. Wacker Drive, 312-616-1000) to get down to business and spare themselves the stuffy board room. The Palm does steak in a polished environment of brass-buttoned leather booths and private businessmen's tables. The gleaming wood floors usher you into a world of fat cats and fatter caricatures of local and national celebrities that line the walls. The aged beef deserves its reputation, and so do those three-pound lobsters. Whether you feel like a filet or some prime rib with punch, the menu surely won't disappoint. At lunch, it's hard to go wrong with their cheese steaks. Of course, it can get a little pricey so watch your martini intake, and the service can be a tad slow, so if you plan to head out to a movie or a show, you may want to pick a different spot to dine.

Another great place for steak right down the street is **Stetson's Chop House** at the Hyatt Regency (151 E. Wacker Drive, 312-565-1234). The grilled calamari with Tuscan white beans makes an excellent starter. The prime rib is a must at this spot and they even bring around warm towels to clean up after digging into the entrée. Now this kind of pampering we could get used to.

If we are looking for more pampering, and a trendy, relaxing place for a pan-Asian meal, we step into the multi-layered spice of **Aria Restaurant** at the Fairmont Hotel (200 N. Columbus Drive, 312-444-9494). This New Eastside neighborhood restaurant combines the tastes of China, Japan and Thailand in a low-lit environment that begs you to kick off your shoes and stay awhile. After a hectic day, a nice way to greet the evening is with the Metrosexual—a classic martini that is served with several samples of skin care products and a manicure gift certificate on the side. Once we're relaxed we can dig into the menu without feeling rushed. The lobster spring rolls with dollops of vanilla foam dance across the tongue as do many of the noodle dishes. The food is light and doesn't over power with spice, unless you ask for it, of course. If anyone in your party is a vegetarian or vegan, the menu offers a wide array of choices for your non-meat-eating friends, too.

Some prefer their meals a little more toned down. For that, New Eastside locals take a walk over to 400 E. Randolph Street, then take the elevator up to the seventh floor. **Seven** (400 E. Randolph St, 312-856-9526) is a restaurant focused on the luck of the superstitiously blessed number, and everything except the pizzas can be had for less than seven bucks. That should certainly bring a big smile to anybody who's watching their dough. The specialty cheeseburger combines three cheeses (your choice) on a sesame seed bun that is good to the last bite. Other standouts include the BLT, the Polish sausage, and the grilled chicken breast sandwich. This high-flying neighborhood favorite serves lunch and dinner, and stays open until midnight for New Eastsiders who get the late night munchies.

Night on the Town

New Eastside is Chicago's smallest neighborhood, so we can't expect the nightlife here to be totally raging—there's just not enough room for it. That doesn't mean there aren't some über cool hangouts for a nightcap, dancing and hanging out with the co-workers or friends.

Things come in three sizes at the **BIG Bar** (151 E. Wacker Drive, 312-565-1234 x 1355) in the Hyatt Regency: big, bigger and colossally big. This is one bar that really lives up to its name. Have a seat in the enormous atrium-like bar space and behold the glass wall behind the bar stacked with multi-tiered shelves of alcohol. The shelves are so high that a rolling ladder is needed to reach some of those *top shelf* bottles. When coozied up to the bar, there is a grand view of the Chicago River and the Wrigley Building in the distance. The room is decorated with big, colorful Asian-inspired paper lanterns, and the BIG Bar claims to have the longest freestanding bar in North America. Who are we to argue the point? Why waste our time, when we could be checking out the more than 1,400 wines, champagnes, liqueurs and cognacs? The bar also serves up 48-ounce specialty drinks, huge appetizers and mammoth desserts.

New Eastside residents and other local Chicagoans who like a super-sophisticated lounge that's big on style, duck around the corner to **Aria Bar** in the Fairmont Hotel (200 N. Columbus Drive, 312-565-7444). The oval room is awash in amber and violet lighting. Stools line the bar but grab a seat at one of the inviting lounge chairs, which are definitely more comfy. If you are with a special someone, try sliding into one of several nooks created by the coiled drapes that offer supremely private seating. A sushi bar of glass glowing blue dominates the room and offers a late-night indulgence if you are up to it. Techno beats pump through this place late into the evening, so be ready to bump and grind the night away. This is a great spot to people watch on the weekends as scene stealers make their way through the sometimes crowded bar. But whether the place is packed to the gills or there's hardly a soul in sight, Aria Bar keeps the nightlife in New Eastside happening with fabulously prepared beverages and a super hip setting.

Best Shopping Stops

Steps away from some of the best shopping stops in the country on Michigan Avenue, the New Eastside has a few small shops of its own, primarily centered in the two hotels that anchor the neighborhood: The Hyatt Regency and the Swissotel. There are also several mini-markets that cater to quick snacks, lunches and groceries. So, unless you are just going out for pack of gum or need a quick pick-me-up from the corner store, we suggest heading a few blocks west to the Magnificent Mile where Chicago shopping comes to life. Just don't forget to bring the charge card!

Getting Around

One of the oddities of New Eastside neighborhood is that it is built on three tiered roadways: one at street level called Upper Wacker Drive, and two beneath it—Lower Wacker Drive and Sub-Lower Wacker Drive. The levels are confusing even to people who have driven them countless times because the ramps connecting the levels are not well marked, and unless you know where you are going, it is easy to become disoriented. You may remember the *Blues Brothers* movie and that car free falling for what seemed like miles into the abyss! Don't worry that movie was filmed during construction of Upper Wacker Drive and we're almost certain it's not possible anymore.

The easiest way to think of it is as a two-tiered roadway. The street level tier (Upper Wacker Drive) is for pedestrian traffic and local motorists, while the second level (Lower Wacker Drive) is for through traffic and truck deliveries. The third tier (Sub-Lower Wacker Drive) is primarily for parking. Lower Wacker can be accessed via South Water Street from Stetson Avenue and provides access to Columbus Drive and Grant Park.

The other main thoroughfare used by New Eastside residents to get around is the heavily-traveled Lake Shore Drive, which runs through the neighborhood along the eastern most edge—right next to the water. It provides a perfect route if you need to go anywhere north or south as there are multiple exits to local streets, and truthfully, the Drive offers motorists one of the best views of the city skyline. So we don't even mind that much when traffic backs up and we're stuck bumper-to-bumper during rush hour.

It's also easy to connect to the nearest highway from New Eastside as Congress Parkway is only a few blocks south where you can pick up I-290 (Eisenhower Expressway) to head west. The interchange for I-90/94 (Kennedy Expressway) comes up quick once on I-290, in case you want to go northwest out toward O'Hare International Airport or south out of town.

Pick a color, any color. If you need to catch the Chicago Transit Authority's "El" trains (so-named for their segments of elevated tracks) walk four blocks over to the corner of State and Lake Streets. Here you will find one of the Loop's transfer points for all of the major lines, whether it be the Brown, Pink, Red, Purple or Green you are seeking. The only El mission is the Blue Line and that is available one stop west at Clark Street. In addition to being able to easily access the El, a brand new multi-million dollar Metra Rail station has been constructed below Millennium Park near the corner of Randolph Street and Michigan Avenue. The trains from this station run through many south side neighborhoods including Hyde Park before finally arriving in the south suburbs.

The public transportation options in New Eastside neighborhood don't end there. Residents who need to head over to State Street to do some shopping or get to work, can hop on the #6 bus running west on Upper Wacker Drive. Conveniently this same bus will take you to the Museum Campus, as it jogs through Grant Park on Balbo Avenue heading south.