



**DESIGNING A BETTER CHICAGO ANNOUNCES GRANT PROGRAM RECIPIENTS
Chicago Mobile Makers and Maplewood Housing for the Visually Impaired (dba
Friedman Place)**

(Chicago, IL, June 2020) Designing a Better Chicago is pleased to announce the inaugural recipients of the 2020 Design Impact Grant program, which provides annual project-specific grants to individuals and organizations using design or design principles to directly address pressing issues in Chicago communities. The 2020 grantees are Chicago Mobile Makers, a nonprofit that offers youth design-thinking and problem-solving workshops and Maplewood Housing for the Visually Impaired (dba Friedman Place), a nonprofit supportive living community for adults who are blind or visually impaired.

The Design Impact Grant program is a key component of Designing a Better Chicago, a collaborative initiative organized and supported by NeoCon® and theMART, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and the Design Museum of Chicago, which is focused on highlighting and supporting Chicago's extraordinary design legacy and community. The Design Impact Grants are generously funded by NeoCon and theMART.

Chicago Mobile Makers was founded in 2017 by Maya Bird-Murphy who grew up in Oak Park and was no stranger to Chicago's injustices in the built environment. "We're honored to have been awarded the Impact Grant. It will allow Chicago Mobile Makers to grow and to engage more youth all over the city. We're excited to continue fighting for an equitable Chicago through the Designing a Better Chicago grant program," says Bird-Murphy. The Design Impact Grant will support the Chicago Mobile Makerspace, a retrofitted USPS delivery van to be transformed into a classroom, tool shop, design studio, gallery, and community gathering space for Chicago youth. Design education programs—including meaningful design thinking, problem-solving, and skill-building workshops—will be able to be held anywhere the facility on wheels can travel, from an empty lot, to a parking lot, or even a summer street festival. The project's long term

objective is to help create the next generation of civically minded and responsible designers, architects, makers, and doers for a city built by, and for, all.

Maplewood Housing for the Visually Impaired, known as Friedman Place, is a non-profit supportive living community in Chicago for adults who are blind or visually impaired. It has been highly successful in its design of spaces that promote the independence and self-determination of its residents. Alexander Brown, Executive Director, Friedman Place, remarks, "Friedman Place is grateful to be included as an inaugural grantee from Designing A Better Chicago. This grant will fund a video and college level course materials in efforts to widely and freely share design concepts that have allowed for increased independence of blind or visually impaired Friedman Place residents. Over 15 years Friedman Place has cultivated a community that features non-visual markers using sound, touch, and smell—all of which serve to orient a person who is blind, much like a sign or a building directory informs a sighted person. Most of the elements are easily installed and are not costly, facilitate communication with the sighted, and if universally adopted, would make Chicago a more inclusive city."

Chicago Mobile Makers' Maya Bird-Murphy and Friedman Place's Chief Development Officer Kathy Gregg will join Tanner Woodford, Founder and Executive Director of the Design Museum of Chicago, in conversation on Friday June 26 at 2pm CST as part of NeoConnect, NeoCon's digital community hub. Details and registration can be found at neocon.com.

Additional information about Designing a Better Chicago, including plans for a 2021 Chicago Riverwalk design Installation, can be found at designingabetterchicago.org.

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About NeoCon: NeoCon is the world's leading platform and most important event for the commercial interiors industry, held each year at theMART in Chicago. Since launching in 1969, NeoCon has served as the annual gathering place for the commercial design world's manufacturers, dealers, architects, designers, end-users, design organizations and media. The three-day event showcases game-changing products and services from both leading companies and emerging talent—providing unparalleled access to the latest and most innovative solutions. A robust educational program of keynote presentations and CEU sessions offers world-class expertise and insight about today's most relevant topics as well as the future of commercial design. www.neocon.com

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About theMART: theMART (formerly The Merchandise Mart), located in the center of the sought-after River North submarket, is interwoven into the fabric of Chicago as an innovator in business, technology, culture, art, media and more. As the largest privately held commercial building in the United States, it is one of the world's leading commercial buildings, wholesale design centers and the preeminent international business location in Chicago. Encompassing 4.2 million gross square feet, theMART spans two city blocks, rises 25 stories, and is visited by an average of 30,000 people each business day and nearly 10 million people annually. Offering continuous innovation and creativity from leading manufacturers and design forward showrooms, theMART serves as the home to Chicago's most creative and technologically innovative companies.

About the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events: The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events is dedicated to enriching Chicago's artistic vitality and cultural vibrancy. This includes fostering the development of Chicago's non-profit arts sector, independent working artists and for-profit arts businesses; providing a framework to guide the City's future cultural and economic growth, via the 2012 Chicago Cultural Plan; marketing the City's cultural assets to a worldwide audience; and presenting high-quality, free and affordable cultural programs for residents and visitors.

About Design Museum of Chicago: A local, non-profit cultural institution with a gallery in the Chicago Loop, the Design Museum of Chicago strives to meet people where they are and make design accessible to everyone, facilitating conversations comprised of a variety of voices, backgrounds, and viewpoints. They believe that design is not just a single discipline or process, but rather a persistent element in our everyday experiences with the fundamental capacity to improve the human condition. Formerly the Chicago Design Museum, they create free and low-cost programming about a wide variety of topics, from architecture in Ireland to games in modern culture.