Ann Lui

Toward an Office of The Public Architect

What is the Office of the Public Architect? Where is it? Is it located in City Hall, buried in the labyrinth of offices inside the Department of Buildings? What does it smell like? Are the desks made of laminate, wood, or steel? Are they holographic? Is it distributed through the city – like a library or post office, close to your home – where you can visit at your convenience? Is it on a truck that travels to your door? Does the public architect smile?

During the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, at an international congress of lawyers, Clara Shortridge Foltz presented her idea of the public defender: an attorney provided by the state to represent those who cannot afford legal counsel. Foltz, the first woman admitted to the bar in California, had witnessed the crisis of poor defendants in the western courts. In her address to the Congress of Jurisprudence and Law Reform, "The Rights of Persons Accused," she shared her experience that defendants in poverty often found themselves without representation and in the "savage state" of defending themselves against well-funded and well-appointed public prosecutors.[1] Foltz proposed that "for every public prosecutor there should be a public defender chosen in the same way and paid out of the same fund." Core to Foltz's argument for the public defender was the urgent need for balance. She argued, "Make the law a shield as well as a sword."[2]

Today, in major cities across the United States, the Department of Buildings is a uniquely edged sword without an attendant shield. In Chicago, the Department of Buildings was established in 1875 and may be hard to recognize as a prosecutorial institution. The Kafkaesque bureaucracy comprises endless beige and wood veneer desks, tangled phone trees, chimerical regulations, and a legion of largely anonymous building inspectors. Yet in 2018, the Chicago Department of Buildings issued 103,967 building violations, notices of noncompliance with the city's municipal and building codes, which range from crumbling exterior walls to hazardous porch constructions.[3] Some of the most frequently issued violations require only small acts of repair, such as installing a missing smoke detector or removing

1. Clara Shortridge Foltz, "Public Defenders – Rights of Persons Accused of Crime – Abuses Now Existing," *Albany Law Journal* 48, no. 13 (September 1893): 248.
2. Ibid., 250. For further reading on Foltz's career, including her work in women's suffrage and other progressive causes, see Barbara Babcock, *Woman Lawyer: The Trials of Clara Foltz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
3. All data on building violations provided by the City of Chicago through the open data portal, updated daily: https://data.cityofchicago.org/Buildings/Building-Violations/22u3-xenr.

debris piled in a side yard. However, more substantial common violations require the work of a licensed architect to resolve, such as illegal attic and basement conversions to residential units, porch and rear deck reconstruction, and structural damage in foundations or exterior walls. All construction in the city, except small "repair and replace" improvements, requires drawings sealed with the stamp of a licensed architect. While the city employs inspectors to enforce codes, it does not provide the architectural services required for legal absolution.[4]

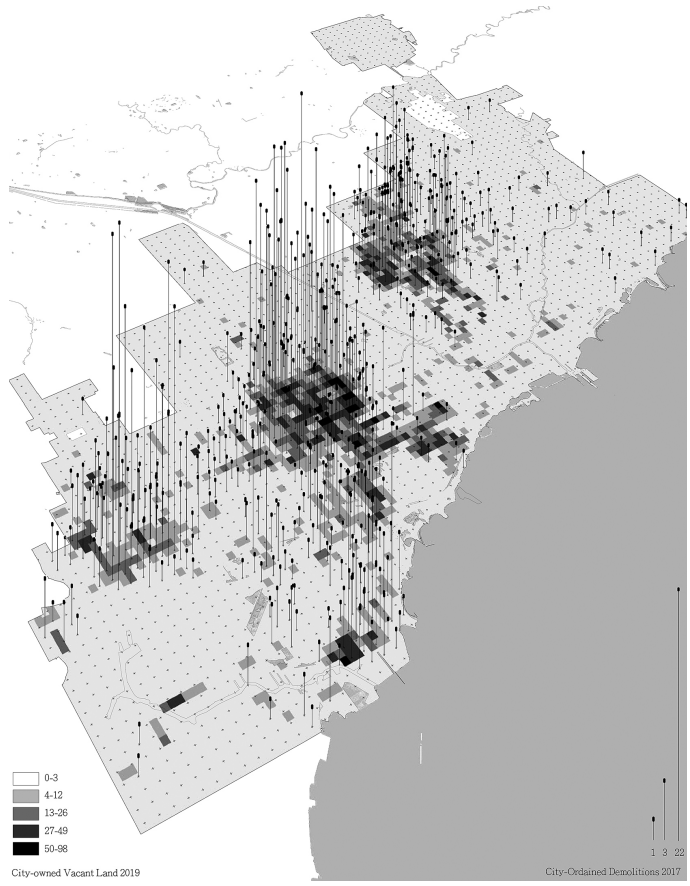
If you are entitled to a public defender when accused of committing a crime, then should you have a right to a public architect when issued a building violation?[5] Consider a revision of Foltz's statement: "For every *building inspector*, there should be a *public architect* chosen in the same way and paid out of the same fund."

While the skyline of the Chicago Loop is well known, the residential building stock in the city's neighborhoods is what defines its architectural character. There are the ubiquitous, hundred-year-old, orangey-brown brick two- and three-flats, with multi-story bay windows, decorative cornices, and wide front porches. Stately greystones, with Indiana limestone Gothic facades boasting post-Chicago-fire decadence, line the boulevards of Bronzeville and the residential blocks of the West Side. The single-story workers' cottages, from historic Pullman to Uptown, and their odd, little garages – sheltering cars but also woodshops, artist studios, motorcycle repair shops – flank the city's extensive network of alleys. These are the buildings that, in addition to comprising the majority of Chicago's building stock, are often the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of building violations, which can extend beyond the initial fine and cost of repair.

Unlike a speeding ticket, Chicago's building violations are rarely one-offs: in 2015, the mean violations per building inspection was eight, but in some instances over 30 violations were issued.[6] For example, on a warm day in September 2019, Inspector No. BL00831 visited a wood-frame, one-story, single-family house in West Englewood near Ashland Avenue. While there, the inspector issued seven building violations in different locations in and around the house:
Rear yard – refuse accumulation; Interior of s.F.R. [single-family residence] – no response, unable to verify detectors and interior conditions; North elevation – broken window sash; North elevation – washed out mortar; All elevations – broken glass panes; Rear yard – weeds aprox. 5'-0" high; Front porch one story porch: rotted

4. Currently, Chicago has a "Homeowner's Assistance Program," which provides permit assistance to "owner-occupants of single-family homes with small renovation and single-story addition projects." This program is increasingly restricted, limiting both those who qualify for its support and the scope of work it covers. Additionally, many owner-occupied homes in Chicago are two-flats – a common building typology – which, when zoned for two units, regardless of whether the second unit is rented or occupied by the owner, are prohibited access to the program.
5. The idea of the Office of the Public Architect was originally proposed by Future Firm at the 2017 exhibition "Between States," curated by UrbanLab, Martin Felsen and Sarah Dunn, at the Chicago Architecture Center (then the Chicago Architecture Foundation).
6. Robin Bartram, "Going Easy and Going After: Building Inspections and the Selective Allocation of Code Violations," *City & Community* 18, no. 2 (June 2019): 599.

City-owned vacant land and city-ordained demolitions. © Ann Lui, 2020. All images courtesy of the author.



rim joists, south column buckling in.; missing guardrail sections and pickets, loose treads, north column rotted. Rear one story wood porch: missing south column.; stairs are missing handrails.[7] Triggered by a 311 complaint, this litany of violations issued during a single inspection from the exterior is not uncommon.

If unaddressed building violations accumulate, for whatever reasons, building owners find themselves in the Buildings Hearings Division, colloquially called "building court" or "housing court," an administrative and judicial process without the procedures of a criminal case. In housing court, the city prosecutes the owners of buildings that are deemed hazardous through a process called "receivership" – in which ownership is transferred to a third-party to execute repairs, collect rent, or bill the owner – or, in some cases, forfeiture to the city. Administrative hearings that lead ultimately to forfeiture can be triggered in multiple ways, including if any violations are immediately hazardous; if the cost for repairs exceeds the market value of the building or the owner does not have the funds to make the repairs; or if

7. See https://data.cityofchicago.org/Buildings/Building-Violations/22u3-xenr.

violations have not been addressed within 60 days. Unlike the (albeit labyrinthian) payment plans for parking tickets, there are no formal "triage" provisions for building violations. Repair plans submitted for permit to the city – and subsequent inspections – must show an entirely code-compliant building, which often causes a sudden financial burden. The consequences of not doing so are also steep: if the city ultimately acquires the building through forfeiture, hazardous buildings can be slated for demolition. Chicago's city-owned land inventory currently comprises 19,000 vacant lots, and it continues to add to this list through hundreds of city-ordered demolitions per year – over 3,100 since 2008.[8] An Office of the Public Architect would intervene upstream from these known issues of vacant lots in Chicago. The office would provide access to a small but legally mandated service at the moment when the constant and divergent pressures of market value, building maintenance, access to design services, and the unequal deployment of law converge.

Philosopher Ivan Illich criticizes the institution of professions, including architecture, for being characterized by their "legal power to create the need that, by law, they alone will be allowed to satisfy."[9] The Office of the Public Architect pivots away from the tropes of architectural professional practice in the 20th century, marked by the hopelessly snarled legal relationship between expertise and need. The history of Chicago's building code is inextricably intertwined with architecture's 20th-century codification of private, licensed practice into the only appropriate custodian of public health, safety, and welfare in the built environment. Through these histories, the larger promise – of our collective right to a safe built environment in the frictions of the city – seems to have been lost in paperwork. The Office of the Public Architect is situated in an alternative future: one that critically engages Chicago's fraught histories of redlining and contract buying, the 20th-century forces that shaped contemporary conditions of deferred maintenance and unequal wealth distribution. The diversity of actors in these histories – state entities, real estate speculators, building professionals, activists, homeowners, and tenants – suggests that to begin to untangle this mess, a simultaneously more complex and more nimble form of architectural practice is needed, one that responds to issues across dramatically divergent scales.

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It is impossible to separate the system of building violations, in which the Office of the Public Architect seeks to

8. Data on the city-owned land inventory is publicly available. See "City-Owned Land Inventory," City of Chicago, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/city-owned_land_inventory.html. This does not include the empty lots now owned by the county through the Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA), many of which were the result of city-ordained demolition prior to acquisition by the CCLBA, which has the power to clear properties of back taxes and sell vacant lots within the mission of community-oriented development.

9. Ivan Illich, "Disabling Professions," in Ivan Illich et al., *Disabling Professions* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2000), 16.

intervene, from the fraught history of Chicago's residential building stock: namely, the history of contract selling and redlining.[10] These two exploitative practices, among others, targeted African Americans and led directly to the conditions in which the Office of the Public Architect is badly needed today: the existence of regions of Chicago where the building stock is in worse condition than others, and where homeowners have less access to resources to repair or renovate, including the legal requirement to hire an architect, through no fault of their own. Because these racially motivated practices were federally endorsed – until Black organizers and activists fought them in the Supreme Court – understanding their history reassigns the responsibility for building violations from individual homeowners to the collective city as a whole.

Redlining, a postwar policy that shaped discriminatory mortgage lending, and contract selling, a rampant form of exploitative real estate speculation in the same period, both robbed Chicago's African Americans of wealth and produced systemically poor building conditions on the South and West sides. Starting in the aftermath of the Great Depression, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) graded neighborhoods through redlining maps, which caused lenders to refuse Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgages to buyers in neighborhoods inhabited by African Americans. In the 1950s and '60s, speculators took advantage of the second Great Migration of African Americans who dreamed of owning property but were unable to secure the same federally backed credit that fueled white home buying during the same period. Real estate speculators instead sold houses to black families at double and triple their market value "on contract," flipping a $3,000 home into a $12,000 sale. In this agreement, contract sellers remained as owners, withholding deeds on the condition that buyers paid large monthly mortgage payments on time, with higher-than-market interest rates. Just one missed payment gave the owner the right to evict the buyer, resulting in the loss of their entire investment, and then to restart the process with another family at the same property, earning the same profit on the same home again and again.

As historian Beryl Satter writes, while contract sellers were getting rich "robbing Chicago's black population of one million dollars a day," black owners found themselves in untenable situations trying to make their payments: "Husbands and wives both worked double shifts. They neglected basic maintenance. They subdivided their apartments, crammed in extra tenants, and, when possible charged their tenants

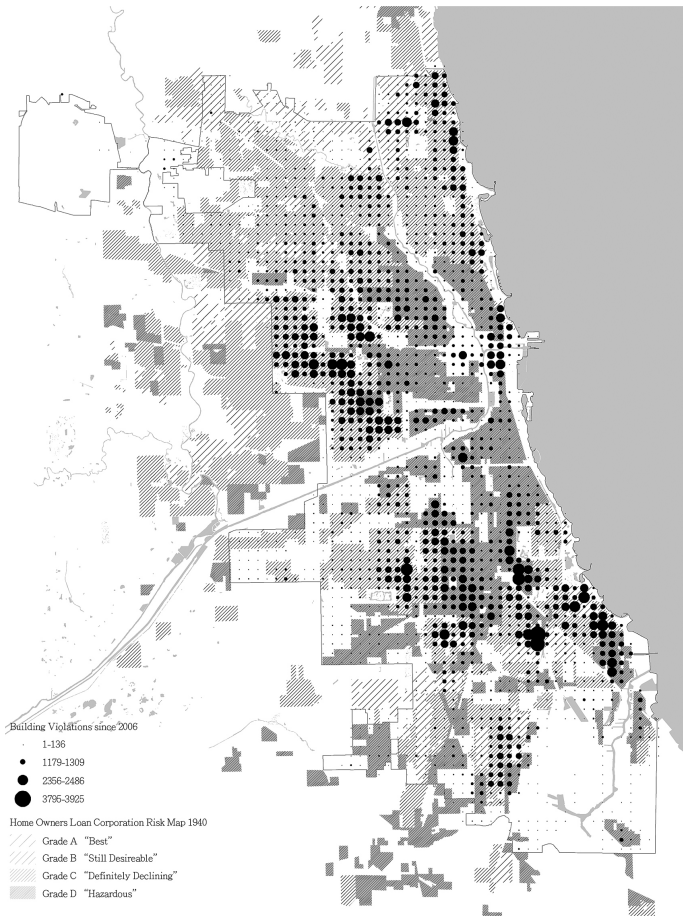
10. See Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America* (New York: Picador, 2010); Price V. Fishback, Jonathan Rose, and Kenneth A. Snowden, *Well Worth Saving: How the New Deal Safeguarded Home Ownership* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Margaret Garb, *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

hefty rents."[11] White residents perceived African Americans as responsible for the decaying conditions of redlined neighborhoods and continued to produce and reinforce segregation, backed by the FHA's lending practices, through on-the-ground strategies ranging from restrictive covenants to blockbusting to violence.

Like most of its neighbors, the aforementioned single-family home in West Englewood was built at the turn of the century.[12] If we overlay a map showing the density of building violations with the FHA redlining maps of Chicago from the postwar period, we can see the relationship of contract selling and unequal access to credit with contemporary building conditions. According to the HOLC report issued between 1935 and 1940, the house is located in D71, marked *D* for "hazardous," an area in which lenders should "refuse to make loans . . . [or] only on a conservative basis."[13] Deferred maintenance on South and West side building stock as well as the loss of generational wealth afforded by property ownership was caused by the extraction of capital from these neighborhoods in decades prior. Satter argues that due to contract selling schemes, "The greatest injuries were borne by ordinary Chicagoans, especially ordinary black Chicagoans – the janitors, mechanics, steelworkers, clerks, laundry workers, and domestics – whose dreams of owning a family property so often turned sour."[14] In today's South and West sides, these costs continue to be visible because homeowners in redlined zones lack the financial resources needed – resources that white Chicagoans amassed through home equity and rising property values across generations – to repair and maintain buildings, and the conditions for tenants often remains the same. Further, even for those on the South and West sides who became homeowners, predatory lending continues, exploiting the need for repairs. In 2017, scam artist Mark Diamond was charged with defrauding West Side homeowners, mostly elderly African American women, of 10 million dollars. Diamond's victims signed reverse mortgages, believing that they were signing up for a nonexistent city-sponsored home repair program.[15]

Chicago's complicated histories land in the contemporary city in messy, uneven ways: the experiences of past generations are reenacted in every transaction in the built environment. Consider the work of building inspectors who are responsible for enforcing the building code. In similar cities, including Toronto, New York, and Washington, DC, sociologists have found that building inspectors often act in the

11. Satter, *Family Properties*, 5.
12. Building construction date based on information from the Cook County Assessor's office cites construction date at 1904.
13. Robert K. Nelson et al., *Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America*, University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab, http://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining.
14. Satter, *Family Properties*, 12.
15. Curtis Lawrence, "After Years of Scamming Black Homeowners, Mark Diamond Finally Charged," *The Chicago Reporter*, May 31, 2017, https://www.chicagoreporter.com/after-years-of-scamming-black-homeowners-mark-diamond-finally-charged/.



Redlining zones from 1940 Home Owners' Loan Corporation Risk Map and open building violations since 2006. © Ann Lui, 2020.

service of the status quo: through either discretion or implicit bias, they maintain middle- and upper-class white property values. Comparatively, sociologist Robin Bartram's 2019 study of Chicago's building inspectors, based on both local data and field study, argues that the city's enforcers act the opposite to these previous findings – yet the outcomes may remain the same.[16] Inspectors, most of whom are white working-class men who started their careers in construction or carpentry unions, see themselves as agents in a battle between the "little guys" and the "bad guys" in a class war. Trained through workplace culture rather than official edict, the inspectors use their leeway when issuing building violations to "go easy on" single-family home owners and owner-occupied properties and "go after" landlords whom they perceive as unscrupulous in an effort to rectify economic disparity.

But do these efforts ultimately produce a more equitable built environment? Chicago building inspectors' on-the-ground Robin Hood efforts to punish "bad guy" landlords

16. See Bartram, 594–617.

can result in the cost of building violations and repairs being passed on to tenants through increased rent or eviction. Further, going easy on single-family houses risks perpetuating the existing inequitable conditions at the city scale by holding some neighborhoods to different standards because of the perceived burden a violation puts on those already in precarious situations. Bartram's study also returns to the question of systemic racism: inspectors levied more violations in census tracts with higher concentrations of African American and Hispanic/Latinx residents.

Key to Foltz's case for the public defender was the constitutional right to the presumption of innocence. In the case of building violations, no such presumption exists. Those who want to contest building violations have some recourse in administrative hearings, but given the histories of discriminatory and predatory lending, as well as the irregularity of code enforcement, what constitutes innocence or guilt? Do individual homeowners bear the full weight of "guilt" for crumbling parapets in the wake of exploitative real estate practices? In the late 1960s, the Contract Buyers League, a group of African American homeowners organized out of North Lawndale on Chicago's West Side and comprising buyers from across the city, organized door-to-door activism to render visible the schemes of contract sellers. They eventually litigated their cause at the federal level in two landmark cases, ensuring that "a dollar in the hands of a black man" might have the same purchasing power as "a dollar in the hands of a white man."[17]

The work of the Contract Buyers League, in concert with other housing activists in the coalition called National People's Action, resulted in the revision of the FHA's mortgage underwriting policies under the aegis of two congressional acts: the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (1975) and the Community Reinvestment Act (1977), which encouraged fairer access to credit. Other progressive causes also found traction in this period. In 1963 – almost 70 years after Foltz first advocated for the role – the Supreme Court ruled in *Gideon v. Wainwright* that states must fund and provide public defenders to defendants who cannot afford an attorney. Yet old scams take new guises. In *Race for Profit*, writer Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues that regulation against redlining was transformed into "predatory inclusion," in which African American homebuyers continue to be victims of inequitable lending practices: "Racial discrimination persisted . . . because it was good business."[18]

17. Satter, *Family Properties*, 13. See James Alan McPherson, "'In My Father's House There Are Many Mansions – And I'm Going to Get Me Some of Them Too': The Story of the Contract Buyers League," *Atlantic*, April 1972, 51–82, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *Atlantic*, June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

18. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 6.

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Can architects design new models for practice that work to undo and resist the chimeric forms of predatory real estate practices, pivoting from the acknowledged individual responsibility to a shared responsibility for the collective city? Architecture practice in the US in the 20th century was characterized by the rapid professionalization of the Victorian-era craftsman.[19] This process was codified through the institutionalization of knowledge in accredited schools, regulation of licensure, codes of ethics that govern pricing and advertising, and professional organizations. In architecture as in other disciplines, these institutions produce what sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson calls the "monopoly of competence," which draws boundaries around access to expertise: "The services that rest on cognitive specialization are almost exclusively reserved to the small literate elites on whom specialists depend for their existence."[20] The relationship between who defines what counts as "hazardous," who can rectify that assignation, and who receives absolution is constructed in concert. As Illich argues, "[Professions] claim special, incommunicable authority to determine not just the way things are to be made, but also the reasons why their services are mandatory."[21] In Chicago, this begins with the intertwined legal definitions from the city's municipal and building code and the Illinois State Practice Act, which regulates the licensure of architects. In the city's earliest building code on record, printed in 1905, the Practice Act is cited in the requirement that a licensed architect author plans for any construction work to be permitted.[22] Building codes in major cities are similarly intertwined with the management of practice. For example, the professional organization of licensed architects, the AIA, has lobbied since the 1970s for cities to adopt a uniform consolidated code, to which the AIA is critical for development.[23] This professional "monopolization," as Larson calls it, of the oversight of health, safety, and welfare in the built environment profession not only catalyzes the need for a public architect – design services for those who cannot afford them – but also poses questions about how that public practice might avoid reproducing the conditions that led to its need.

The architect called by a Chicago resident who has been issued a building violation is very different today from the architect of 1905. With professionalization, architecture evolved into a discipline divided between large firms and sole practitioners. In 1947, historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock noted the emergence of two dominant forms of practice, "the

19. See Mary N. Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

20. Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: Monopolies of Competence and Sheltered Markets* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 3.

21. Illich, 16.

22. "No permit shall be granted or plans approved unless such plans shall be signed and sealed by a licensed architect, as provided in 'An act to provide for the licensing of architects and regulating the practice of architecture as a profession in the State of Illinois,' approved June 3, 1897." Edgar Bronson Tolman, *The Revised Municipal Code of Chicago of 1905* (Chicago: Lawyers' Co-operative Publishing Company, 1905), 73.

23. See American Institute of Architects, *AIA Introduction to Codes and Standards*, April 2016, http://content.aia.org/sites/default/files/2016-04/Ind-AIA-Intro-to-Codes-and-Standards.pdf.

architecture of genius" and the "architecture of bureaucracy." For him, large corporate firms like SOM approached the practice of architecture in fundamentally different ways than individuals like Frank Lloyd Wright: each produced at vastly different scales and speeds, with different approaches to authorship and collaboration.[24] The divergence of these two modes accelerated in the 1970s, when anti-monopoly laws dismantled architects' fee schedules, which fixed rates for services across the field, cementing the transition from the trope of white-gloved gentleman (a trope maintained, in part, by the AIA Code of Ethics) to a marketplace competitor.[25] Today, an increasing majority of architects work for firms with staffs of 50 or more, the kinds of practices that rarely, if ever, take on residential building violation work. The landscape of architectural practice has grown both flat and broad, acquiring the managerial and organizational intelligence of large corporations as well as media and communication technology for working at faster speeds and larger scales. This includes publicly traded, transnational firms like the giant AECOM, which has 45,000 employees.[26] Today, the remaining sole practitioners compete in a changed field.

In parallel to these changes, Chicago's idiosyncratic building code continues to reinforce the need for professional expertise. Established around 1900 in the wake of the Great Chicago Fire, the city's building code is a constantly evolving set of provisions. In the 1920s, changes included new standards from industry and public organizations, such as the American Society for Testing and Materials, the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the National Fire Protection Association, and the American Public Health Association.[27] In the 1950s, the code evolved to accept postwar building technologies such as plywood and drywall. In 2020, as the last major American city to do so, Chicago will adopt an amended version of the International Building Code, which includes best practices for sustainability and green technology. These changes – which over time have produced an incredibly specific and complex building code – functionally enforce the need for specialized architecture professionals.

Notably, however, there were moments when public activism and advocacy, rather than building professionals, shaped regulation. In the early 20th century, advocacy and reform movements led first by Hull House founder and head resident Jane Addams, followed by the City Homes Association, and then by activists, educators, and scholars Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge – contemporaries

24. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius," *Architectural Review* 101, no. 601 (January 1947): 4.
25. Jay Wickersham, "From Disinterested Expert to Marketplace Competitor: How Anti-Monopoly Law Transformed the Ethics and Economics of American Architecture in the 1970s," *Architectural Theory Review* 20, no. 2 (May 2015): 138–58.
26. According to the 2018 AIA firm survey, 50.8 percent of architects work for firms of 50 people or more, which represent six percent of firms overall – double their percentage since 2011.
27. Joseph C. Bigott, "Building Codes and Standards," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, 2005, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/179.html.

of Foltz – led to more stringent requirements for access to light, air, ventilation, and plumbing based on studies of tenement conditions in Chicago. Decades later, in the 1970s, activism around disability rights led to new provisions for accessibility. A guide to architectural standards titled *Accessibility Standards, Illustrated* was published in 1978 by the Illinois Capital Development Board – 12 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act. The guide was a product of disability rights activism in Illinois, including by architect Jack Catlin, who uses a wheelchair and worked with officials to draft the standards, as well as the broader efforts of artists with disabilities in an organization called Access Living.[28]

How can an Office of the Public Architect help us to rethink ways to collectively produce a safe and ethical city? As the primary form of legal defense services in the United States, despite its chronic underfunding, today the institution of the public defender seems obvious. Initially, however, many scorned the idea of the public defender. In 1897, the *New York Times* called it "absurd," the "strange project of a female attorney."[29] Others believed it would lead to a flood of criminal behavior. At first, Foltz's proposal was primarily supported by other women lawyers whose advocacy for the public defender emerged from their joint experiences in serving "poor, sick and despairing clients," many of whom hired women lawyers because their rates were lower than their male colleagues' as well as for their work on progressive causes like women's suffrage and prison reform.

Writing on the architecture of migration, architectural historian Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi argues that to understand the environments of migration and expulsion, we must incorporate two expanded modes of design into our understanding of practice. Siddiqi describes the first mode as the production of work that "posit[s] architecture not as exceptional, but as entangled with many other forms of cultural production."[30] The most profound moments of transformation of the bureaucratic systems that invisibly shape the built environment have emerged from coalitions of diverse accomplices: homeowners, community organizers, lawyers, and activists. To address the issues produced by code violations today, the Office of the Public Architect must be defined by these other kinds of work and knowledge, thereby expanding architectural practice beyond the limitations of professional licensure mandated by generations of risk management.

Siddiqi's second mode of expanded architectural practice is the inclusion of "designs, built forms, and constructed

28. This historical moment was recently documented in a 2018 group exhibition at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois Chicago titled, "Chicago Disability Activism, Arts, and Design: 1970s to Today," https://gallery400.uic.edu/exhibitions/past-exhibition/chicago-disability-activism-arts-and-design-1970s-to-today/.
29. Editorial, *New York Times*, January 23, 1897, as cited in Babcock, *Woman Lawyer*, 289.
30. Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, "Writing With: Togethering, Difference, and Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration," *e-flux Architecture*, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/structural-instability/208707/writing-with/.

environments [that] have not been understood as authored, or in anonymous objects, illegible within the frameworks of modern architectural history."[31] Architects may see addressing building violations as unglamorous and unprofitable work, but it is in the very ubiquity and anonymity of this work that its potential lies. Designing for (and in prevention of) building violations *in aggregate* produces effects at the civic scale. Set against both the histories of unequal development and the opportunities for potential change, service to Chicagoans who cannot individually afford design fees represents an opportunity for an ongoing, horizontal recalibration of the built environment. How can constant ground-level data about architecture at the city scale change design methods? Consider a set of similar structural concrete foundation violations, which produce an inquiry into ground water management in a certain geographical region, a concrete mix, or a concrete subcontractor. Further, what leverage could an Office of the Public Architect have with code agencies, material manufacturers, city governance, and even architectural education in the role of representing and answering to thousands of clients per year? If Siddiqi's argument rethinks the architectural histories of global migration, one could argue that Chicago's future architecture will also be shaped by movement between nations, neighborhoods, and generations, as well as by the challenges of staying in place. Inspired by Foltz's vision of a more equitable legal system, the work of the Office of the Public Architect represents the need for these expanded modes of practice, if only in service of a more balanced enforcement of the building code. By acting as a shield, the Public Architect has the potential to affect change from the scale of the parapet detail to the site of the collective city.

31. Ibid.

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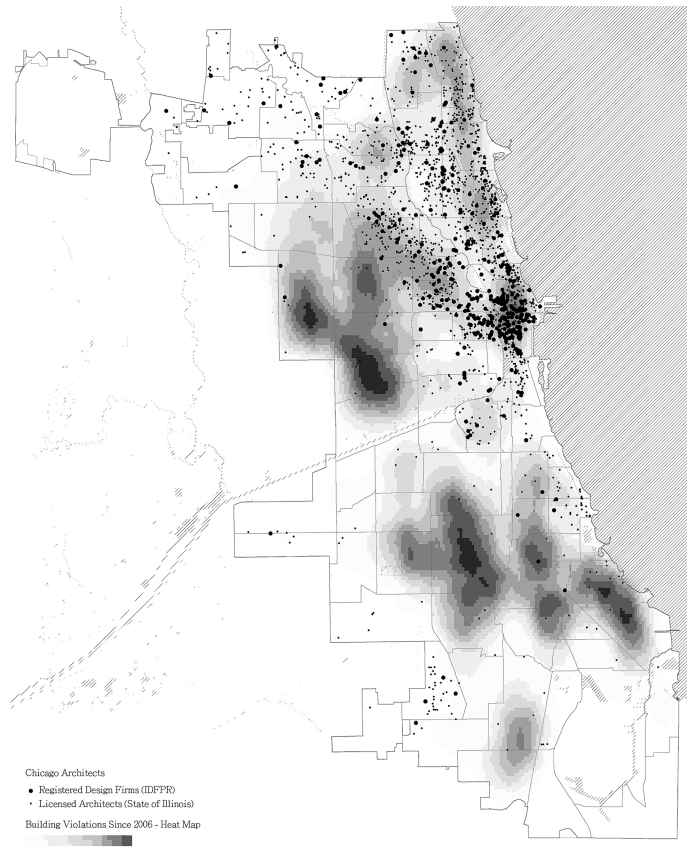
Imagine yourself in a near (or distant) future when the Office of the Public Architect is funded and appointed in the same way as the city's building inspectors. Stop – correct that. Both are well-funded, and both are thriving, but the Office of the Public Architect is a center for all things civic in the built environment. As a model of practice, it skips over the well-worn tropes of the 21st-century sole practitioner who minimizes overhead and fulfills your code requirements with necessary speed and leanness. Instead, it leverages scale and the tactics of socially engaged and activist practices in order to work nimbly and horizontally. It becomes a network, a hive, a coalition, an office in the public interest.

Consider meeting a public architect. They help you resolve your building violations (some are easy, some are still a pain). You sit



Location of current architecture firms and licensed architects in juxtaposition with a city-wide building violation heat map. © Ann Lui, 2020.

adjacent to each other at a large table with pens and drawings. If you've been issued many building violations, they help you to create a plan to address them over time, in accordance with your budget (they don't require you, as they did in 2020, to address them all at once). You collaborate to do a form of triage. The lights are warm; they glow.

In the waiting room, you meet some of your neighbors. You chat about your week. Some of them attended events at the Office of the Public Architect a few days before. They met with general contractors, material representatives, tradesmen, all of whom have been vetted by the city. Someone found a plumber who seemed okay; they give you the plumber's business card. There's a schedule on the wall that almost seems overfull: workshops on design and construction, lectures and events organized by local groups, an opportunity to sign out the space for a program of your own devising.

Maybe you find out that some of your repairs can be addressed through an "EZ Permit," without an architect's stamp. You get help filling out the application and make plans to start work. You pull additional information on other permits for the built environment available from the Department of Transportation, which can

issue you a permit for a sidewalk cafe, planter boxes, signage hanging over the road.

A large digital map floats above you, glowing a rich blue for Lake Michigan: little LED lights flicker on and off, showing the resolution of building violations and the issuance of new ones. Red circles blink slowly over buildings owned by the city's "Problem Building Owners." A weather forecast radar washes across the screen, producing signals for sites of possible storm sewer overflow. Small peaks indicate aldermanic contributions by ward to infrastructure spending.

What happens behind the desk? Architects buzz about. They argue with each other. A junior architect has forgotten to reference the most up-to-date stock detail for parapet repair, which was revised last month to adhere to more efficient masonry methods. The other young designers – many recent graduates join the ranks of the Public Architect for on-the-ground experience, the desire to serve, or simply the reputation of the office for quickly producing licensed architects – remind her of the update and send around a meme about bricks in a group chat. Everyone cackles. One senior architect puts on her coat to head to building court to testify about a predatory landlord in a porch collapse.

The back of house at the office looks like a chaotic mess, with some kind of underlying organization only known to those who work there: maps, data analysis, material samples, mock-ups, flyers, tax records. The architects always expect to work at the scale of the city. Their guidelines on insulation, for example, give them leverage with insulation manufacturers – the impacts in energy use were visible across the city in just one year. They work across the city's departments, keeping conversations open with Water Management, Transportation, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. They open new partnerships with activists, schools, and community groups.

Later in the day, a big developer who wants to build on a series of vacant lots in your neighborhood will present their plans in a forum at the office. A public architect will moderate. You plan to attend. The alderman seeks feedback. Dinner from the neighborhood pizza place, you hear, will be served.

Before closing up for the day, an architect checks the big countdown clock that notes how many violations are currently active. After a long period of battling down the backlog of hundreds of thousands, these days they watch it flicker up and down in the low hundreds. When the clock reaches zero – which happens a few days every year – an annoyingly loud buzzer goes off and everyone celebrates.

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