

Proposed Bird-Friendly Building Design Ordinance

FACT SHEET

Prepared by Bird Friendly Chicago

Why do birds matter to the City of Chicago?

Birds are critical to a healthy, livable Chicago. They control rats and insects, and pollinate food sources. Chicago is a renowned birding hotspot to which bird enthusiasts travel from around the region and world, fueling the local economy.

How are birds impacted by buildings?

Glass fools birds into flying headlong into buildings to their deaths, with most strikes surprisingly occurring from ground level up to 100 feet. Birds cannot see transparent glass and do not understand the glass reflections of sky and landscaping. Chicago's volunteer Bird Collision Monitors collect roughly 10,000 dead birds annually. Many more such fatalities go unreported.

Why is Chicago important for birds?

Chicago lies in a major flight path for millions of migratory birds each spring and fall. They use this region to rest and feed during their migrations, with some traveling thousands of miles each way. Yet Chicago is the deadliest US city for migrating birds.

How can we reduce building collisions and bird mortality?

Many collisions can be prevented by using bird-friendly building design, glass and other materials, and strategic landscaping and lighting.

Do these measures really work?

Scientific research, product testing, and post-occupancy evaluation of buildings demonstrate the effectiveness of these measures. Bird-protection measures adopted in 2024 at McCormick Place – Chicago's biggest bird killer for over 40 years – have reduced bird strikes by 95%.

Why does Chicago need a Bird-Friendly Building Design Ordinance?

While the City includes bird-friendly measures in its Sustainable Development Policy, they are optional. Further, only buildings that must be approved by the Chicago Plan Commission need to adhere to the Sustainable Development Policy. Even then, there is a subset of buildings that do not need to. If Chicago is to join other major cities in effectively requiring high standards of bird protection, it must have a Bird-Friendly Building Design Ordinance.

What buildings does the ordinance cover?

Bird-friendly design would be required of residential projects of more than three units and all commercial development, with bird-friendly glass only required on a building's first 100 feet. Existing buildings in those categories would be unaffected, except for major renovations.

Are bird-protection measures expensive?

Using bird-friendly glass for new construction costs only 3% to 10% more than regular glass, with prices dropping as more cities require bird-friendly glass. Films and external screens can also provide energy savings by reducing heating and cooling costs. Reducing the number and area of windows can reduce initial cost, replacement and maintenance. Retrofitting existing structures to be bird-friendly is much more expensive, so including bird-friendly design from the start is the most cost-effective approach.

The ordinance:

<https://occprodstoragev1.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/matterattachmentspublic/db5032e3-9a29-4e72-add1-6287c87baec7.pdf>

Press coverage:

[Chicago Tribune: At peak time for migratory birds flying through Chicago, birding groups are tracking deadly window collisions](#)

[Chicago Sun-Times: Jeanne Gang's latest exhibition is for the birds — just as it should be](#)

[Chicago Tribune: Chicago Architecture Center exhibits show buildings and nature don't have to be at odds](#)

[WTTW: New Bird-Friendly Building Ordinance Stuck in City Council Purgatory, But Lead Sponsor Says Measure Still Has Wings | Chicago News](#)

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