On November 28th the Electronic Visualization Laboratory (EVL) here at UIC was the location of an Open House with its industrial partner Mechdyne Corporation for the Chicago Urban River Edges Ideas Lab. The Ideas Lab consists of nine architectural firms with extensive experience designing award-winning riverfronts, public spaces, and parks around the world. Launched by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD), and the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) earlier this year, the Ideas Lab was tasked with helping the city create new concepts and guidelines for extending Chicago’s current and successful Riverwalk.

Each of the nine firms submitted formal concept design proposals to the city in June 2017, which are currently on public display at EXPO 72, 72 E. Randolph, across the street from the Chicago Cultural Center. Along with the physical exhibition, WSP, a buildings engineering firm, with support from Comcast, produced digital exhibition components that included augmented and virtual reality experiences (viewed via cell phones). Additional installations used California company Owlized’s virtual reality technology.

Mechdyne, who has worked with UIC and EVL for decades, and licensed its CAVE™ and CAVE2™ virtual environment systems, is also involved with the Ideas Lab. They wanted the participants to see the city of Chicago, and their architectural designs, in a large collaborative virtual environment. Hence, the Open House at EVL and continual demos in CAVE2. Over 40 people attended from architectural and engineering firms as well as MPC. The 3D views of Chicago and their renderings, shown at scale, were very well received, and attendees also appreciated learning more about EVL and understanding how they might make use of both the Lab’s technology and its talented students.