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Open Forum for Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Supply Planning

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Summary

Morning Presentations

The Open Forum held at Hamburger University in Oak Brook, Illinois, a public launch for the new three-year regional water supply planning process, was by all accounts an informative and successful effort. Hosted by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the Open Forum attracted 166 attendees, 85 of whom participated in the afternoon roundtables for stakeholder-interest groups.

Opening remarks were provided by Mr. Randy Blankenhorn, Executive Director of CMAP, Ms. Karen McConaughay, Chair, Kane County Board, the Honorable Pamela J. Althoff, State Senator, 32nd District, and Ms. Deborah Stone, Deputy Director, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). (The IDNR is funding this three-year planning effort as one of two priority water-supply planning regions that implements Governor Blagojevich's Executive Order 2006-1.) This group of dignitaries collectively provided a multi-scaled perspective on the need for water supply planning at this moment in our region's history.

Opening remarks were followed by four presentations. Dr. Tim Loftus, Principal Environmental Scientist, CMAP and regional water supply project manager, opened with a presentation titled, "The People and Water of Northeastern Illinois." Dr. Derek Winstanley, Chief, Illinois State Water Survey, followed with a presentation titled, "Studying Water Availability in Illinois." Mr. Phil Bus, Executive Director, Kane County Transportation, Development, and Resource Management Department, teamed up with Mr. Paul Schuch, Director Water Resources, Kane County Transportation, Development, and Resource Management Department on a presentation titled, "Lessons Learned

from Water Supply Planning in Kane County.” After a short break, Mr. Bill Mullican, Deputy Executive Administrator for the Office of Planning, Texas Water Development Board, gave a presentation titled, “Regional Water Planning: The Texas Model.” All presentations are available for viewing at the CMAP website: <http://www.chicagoareaplanning.org/watersupply/talks/default.asp> .

Following the presentations and prior to lunch, the audience was given the opportunity to ask questions of the day’s presenters and share pertinent thoughts. The morning proved to be information rich and highly relevant to those in attendance.

Afternoon Stakeholder-interest Group Roundtables

Mr. Ron Thomas, Deputy Executive Director of the Planning Group, CMAP, and Executive Director of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, opened the afternoon session with both guidance for the impending roundtables and discussion of what is expected of the nascent Regional Water Supply Planning Group (RWSPG). Afterwards, seven stakeholder-interest or caucus groups, facilitated by CMAP staff, convened for the first time. The seven groups are as follows:

1. Academia and Public Interest in Regional Planning
2. Agriculture
3. Business, Industry, and Power
4. Conservation and Resource Management
5. Environmental Advocacy
6. Real Estate and Development
7. Wastewater Treatment and Non-municipal Water Suppliers

The caucus groups had with three objectives:

1. Identify top issues and concerns about water supply and water-supply planning for this caucus group.
2. Discuss delegate-selection process and a next meeting date.
3. Answer the question: “Who’s missing from the caucus group?”

Numerous issues and concerns emerged during each of the caucus-group roundtables and were then clustered into representative themes. Dot voting following to rank themes and highlight the most important thematic issues to each caucus group. Issues centering on the theme – “sustainability” or concern for what can be described as “sustainable development” were ranked highest by

two groups (Academia and Public Interest, Environmental Advocacy). Using different terms (i.e. Growth/Demand) Wastewater and Non-municipal Water Suppliers expressed top concern for matters that also fall beneath the “sustainability” umbrella. Top vote-getting themes for Agriculture and Real Estate and Development centered on “planning” or “planning process” (or lack thereof) where issues expressed also enumerated several aspects of the need for sustainable development. Emphasis on “recharge” by the Conservation and Resource Management group calls for more enlightened resource planning management; another principle of sustainable development. Elsewhere, the Business, Industry, and Power group clustered a plurality of concerns on a “politics/legislative” theme. This last group also expressed a concern that was unique among the groups: under representation - three somewhat different interests placed within one caucus group.

With the exception of the Business, Industry, and Power group, the theme of “education” was consistently expressed across all other groups. Some groups chose the terms “public awareness / participation”, “awareness and motivation”, or “public relations”. But the underlying issues within these similarly-named themes called for the need to raise public awareness of the many issues related to water-resource planning and increase outreach for achieving such. Thus, a consistent appreciation for education and outreach to engage the public and raise awareness of the issues emerged even if it was commonly ranked lower among other concerns expressed.

A majority of the seven groups expressed concerns that might be described as “forward-looking” or alternately, concerns that could be grouped under a theme called “plan-implement questions?” Such concerns were related to uncertainty regarding plan-implementation authority, funding for implementation, fear of regulation as an outcome, and strategy for conflict resolution, etc. These aspects of the planning process, while somewhat different from other themes, will nonetheless have to be addressed during the next few years and beyond.

Given that this is a water supply planning process, it was somewhat surprising that “water quality” emerged as a theme for all but one group; albeit with a typically lower ranking. The lone exception seemed to capture this issue nonetheless in a theme called “resource protection”. An apparent opportunity to link issues of water quality to water supply planning exists, therefore, to support and strengthen ongoing efforts at many levels to raise the profile of the water quality as major water resource planning objective.

Closing comments were brief and pointed to the next caucus-group roundtables, to be conducted in December, where delegates to the RWSPG will be selected. A hearty “Thank you” was offered to those remaining for what

turned out to be a very productive Friday and an ideal start to a new day in collaborative-regional planning.