

Chicago Tribune

PERSPECTIVE

A NEW PLAN OF CHICAGO

Building a bolder Chicago

It's time for modern-day Burnhams to come up with a new vision

BY TERRY MAZANY

We applaud the Chicago Tribune for creating a public square to discuss and define a new vision for our city and region. We have been living large off the Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett 1909 Plan of Chicago for more than a century, but the world is a different place. Bold for the times, the assumptions on which the 1909 plan was based are out of date. Our times demand a new, more inclusive vision that would be our legacy for the next 100 years.

A great place to live happens not by chance, but by serious and principled planning. And a great plan begins with values and vision. What is our vision for Chicago, a place that anchors a region that 9 million people call home, a place that is both a global player and the economic engine for the Midwest? A place that boasts the fastest growth of any urban center in the country, and at the same time is experiencing widespread abandonment in some neighborhoods. A place where one community's unemployment is an enviable 5 percent and another's is a devastating 40 percent. A place with the best schools in the state, and some of the worst schools. A place where some have access to world-class health care and others are without any health care at all.

The challenges of public safety, food security, housing affordability, income disparity and poverty are common to every city around the globe. What sets Chicago apart is its capacity to reinvent itself, from hog butcher to retail giant, to industrial powerhouse, to global center for business services.

Without a comprehensive plan, however, our future will be defined by larger global and economic forces that drive changes in our economy, affect our workforce and dictate investments in our neighborhoods and infrastructure.

Daniel Burnham not only admonished us to make no little plans, but he also captured our unique spirit, writing in the Plan of Chicago: "This spirit — the spirit of Chicago — is our greatest asset. It is not



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merely civic pride; it is rather the constant, steady determination to bring about the very best conditions of city life for all the people, with full knowledge that what we as a people decide to do in the public interest we can and surely will bring to pass."

Let's tap the energy and the spirit of Chicago during the time that gave us the Columbian Exposition, and the Burnham Plan. It is hard to imagine a more visionary and vibrant time in any city. This period shaped the enduring character of the city for the decades that followed, welcoming so many immigrants to Chicago; each wanting to live in what architect Frank Lloyd Wright called the "national capital of the essentially American spirit."

This was also the time when Chicago was enriched by the Great Migration that brought thousands of African-Americans who, in search of opportunity for a better life, helped to build this city. The influx of energy and vitality that new arrivals bring to our city has been repeated as recently as

the 1990s when Chicago's growth was fueled with Latino immigrants, stabilizing a population otherwise in decline.

D. Bradford Hunt and Jon B. DeVries give us a running start on the task of a new plan for Chicago in their book, "Planning Chicago," which the Tribune's architecture critic, Blair Kamin, describes as "provocative, sobering and lucid." Kamin's conclusion points the way forward, we need to move from "ad hoc, incremental, politicized planning" to planning that "calls for cities to be remade not from the top down, but from the bottom up."

This ideal of inclusion and a fair chance has historically defined the best of Chicago's character; in an era of growing disparity, that ideal should again serve as the basis for action. A worthy start is an inclusive conversation with Chicago's residents to set priorities and policies that build on an understanding of the diverse needs and smart ideas of our residents and communities.

The Tribune editorial board has opened the door for this conversation, and The Chicago Community Trust will do its part to help to sustain the dialogue, contributing what it can to a broadly embraced bold vision of Chicago as a place of opportunity. A place that will serve as the model global city, getting urbanization "right" in this century of the city; offering hope and genuine opportunities that break through the barriers that limit social and economic mobility in our country.

The good news is that we don't have to start from scratch. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's GOTO 2040 plan provides the framework for our regional context and gives strong bones to our work; as does the last comprehensive plan for the city, crafted in 1966. We can also learn from other flourishing cities such as Portland, Ore., which organizes its entire plan for the future around the core principle of equity.

The heart of our plan must be a similar commitment to equity and opportunity that extends to our most vulnerable populations. As a community, we must reject the temptation to plan around poverty, camouflaging the decline in many neighborhoods with enormous prosperity in just a few. An effective planning effort unifies the region, and actively underscores our inextricable link to one another. A growing Lincoln Square remains fragile and vulnerable if Roseland struggles; a prosperous Orland Park is eventually stunted by a neglected Harvey.

When those with the least are better off, we are all better off.

We are modern-day Burnhams and time has come for us to step up to the plate. We recognize that a broadly inclusive process to inform this bold plan will be messy, yet we are convinced that the plan for our collective future should be borne of debate in the public square. If we do this we will have a plan whose realization we all own and share — a plan that becomes the new badge of our civic pride.

Terry Mazany is president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust.