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Southland Chamber Program Targets Growth

Posted by [Bob Bong](#) | March 16, 2011

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CMAP certainly is not a household word, but after a packed Monday business event in Tinley Park, Southland residents can expect to hear the acronym when talk focuses on regional growth.

More than 150 members and guests of the Chicago Southland Chamber heard a panel of three speakers from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning outline the agency's [GO TO 2040 objectives](#).

"We've got to plan and think about the entire region comprehensively," CMAP Executive Director Randall Blankenhorn said.

Richton Park Mayor Rick Reinbold and Will County Executive Larry Walsh also spoke, addressing priority Southland goals within the same time period.

Job growth stands as a priority issue for the region, they said.

"Our communities need to provide access to jobs and bring jobs here," Blankenhorn said. Jobs navigate toward population centers that can provide an educated workforce for tomorrow, he said.

Community growth also depends on the quality of its schools, he said. Private citizens and business people look at education opportunities when settling on a new location, he added.

"We have to do better with public education and also make college available to any high school graduate. College should be an option for anyone who wants to attend.

"We also need efficient government with local agencies working together. That is, tax policies and regulations should attract commerce, not turn it away.

"Our tax system needs to be restructured in a way that makes sense. It was developed in the 1960s" and does not work for the 21st century, Blankenhorn added.

"There also needs to be greater mobility. We have to invest in public transportation, and it should be an option for people, not a last resort."

Addressing the municipal perspective, Reinbold, a CMAP board member, said individual communities ought to evaluate where they want to be in 2040 and plan for growth with eyes on that future.

"We also need to engage in dialogue with other municipalities in order to move forward together," he said.

Walsh, a member of the CMAP policy committee, said Will County is "the fastest growing county in Illinois, just shy of 700,000 residents.

"A lot of activity takes place in Will County. Half of it is agricultural and people are looking to buy land and develop it, but I would like to see some of the (farm) land stay.

"The South Suburban Airport is an issue that has dragged on and dragged on," he said. The Federal Aviation Administration has not received the final documents from the state needed for evaluation. However, that study is close to completion, and the FAA should have it soon.

"Still, after that, it will take 18 months to two years for the FAA to answer (whether an airport is

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feasible), “ Walsh said.

Will County also wants to see the proposed Illiana Expressway become reality, linking Interstate 65 to I-57 and then on to I-55.

CenterPoint properties has invested \$2 billion into Will County for intermodal centers that put the Joliet area into the global market, Walsh said. That means the county will need infrastructure to deal with a much higher concentration of truck traffic than exists today. And as an intermodal hub, the region should be looking at high-speed rail, Walsh said.

What are some sticking points?

“Business thinks government is the problem with too much regulation and too much in the way of taxes,” Walsh said.

Ultimately the GO TO 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan is about “sustainable prosperity,” Blankenhorn said.

“If the business community gets behind 2040, it will work.”