

CMAP Director Sees Evanston's Future Tied To Regional Plans

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The executive director for Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning spoke Nov. 29 to the Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse chapter about his agency's "Go To 2040" initiative, relating it to the work being done by Evanstonians on the local Evanston150 initiative.

Chicago 2040, released last year by CMAP, was a follow-up to the 1909 Plan of Chicago often called the Burnham Plan. Randy Blankenhorn told his audience at the Hilton Garden Inn, 1818 Maple Ave., that it was a tough act to follow.

"We're not trying to be Daniel Burnham," Mr. Blankenhorn said. "But we're trying to think boldly. How do we think about the region from a bold perspective?"

Mr. Blankenhorn described Chicago 2040 as being focused on building both economic prosperity and strength in the region's communities, emphasizing that the initiative is different in scope from many other development plans. It addresses education and tax policy, for example, alongside land use, transportation planning and the environment.

"We talk about what it takes for us to be competitive in a new global world and a new global economy," Mr. Blankenhorn said.

He emphasized that local government bodies must utilize resources efficiently in order to contain costs and pointed to the large number of governmental bodies in the region as an example of wasted tax dollars.

"Our taxpayers are disturbed by the number of units of government in Northeastern Illinois – 1,284 different units of government in the seven counties," Mr. Blankenhorn said. "Municipalities taxed their bonding authority limits, and so they created a new unit of government. ... [But now] those small governments have no access to the bond market anyway."

In Evanston, he added, "There is hope to have a ballot measure to combine City government and township government. The boundaries are coterminous; the aldermen are also the trustees."

The real hindrance, however, comes from state regulations. "The state doesn't make it easy on us," Mr. Blankenhorn said. "There are so many hoops to jump through to eliminate a township that people just give up."

CMAP was last year awarded a \$4.25 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The agency used the money to implement its Local Technical Assistance Program, which sends staffers to assist with community initiatives.

"When we announced this program, we thought we might get 30 or 35 applications. We got 220," said Mr. Blankenhorn. As part of the initiative, CMAP staffers have been working with Evanston's Office of Sustainability to make sure the City gets the most efficient use out of its water supply.

"We're lucky. People are talking about water as the 'oil of the 21st century,' and we have it here – and we need to use it wisely to make sure that we have it as an asset," said Mr. Blankenhorn.

He also praised the City's work on developing its downtown areas. "We feel very strongly that communities that are successful have solid downtowns. ... Evanston's working very hard on its downtown areas. We think that's a real plus, and we need to do that across the region."

The Evanston150 initiative, he added, would "put some solid, doable things on the table" in a number of areas. "The things you're trying to do with technology, water and education for children link so well with what we're trying to do for the region."