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Local News

Giannoulis, Kirk, Jones Share Plans for Improving Metro Chicago's Economy, Infrastructure and Communities at MPC Annual Luncheon

At its 2010 Annual Luncheon, Metropolitan Planning Council also awards the Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning to Whistler Crossing in Riverdale, Ill.

Illinois' U.S. Senate candidates Alexi Giannoulis (D), Mark Kirk (R), and LeAlan Jones (Green) explained their plans for improving Illinois' economy, infrastructure, communities and environment at the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) 2010 Annual Luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Chicago this afternoon. Nearly 1,000 Chicago-area corporate, civic, government and community leaders attended the event.

In a non-debate format, Lynn Sweet, Chicago Sun-Times Washington bureau chief, interviewed Giannoulis, Kirk and Jones about their plans to support regional planning, improve coordination among federal agencies, achieve positive returns for metropolitan Chicago through the next federal surface transportation bill, and ensure the region has enough clean water now and in the future.

"The purpose of the Metropolitan Planning Council's forum is to hear what remedies candidates would apply to cure some of what ails Illinois," said MPC President MarySue Barrett. "We're thrilled to get these candidates on the record about issues that are critical to improving metropolitan Chicago's economy and communities."

Each candidate responded separately to four questions Sweet posed as emcee of the forum.

For her first question, Sweet asked each candidate whether they would direct federal funds consistent with adopted priorities of regional planning organizations, such as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Giannoulis said it's "imperative" that the federal government empowers organizations such as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

"This isn't necessarily about more money, this is about the better use of existing funds," he added.

Kirk said he "absolutely" supports the work of CMAP and other metropolitan planning organizations, because they can cross county, municipal and even state lines to support the right investments for a region.

Jones said he also supports regional planning, but "communities need to be at the table."

Sweet's second question was whether each candidate supported the Livable Communities Act, sponsored by U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), which would foster equitable and sustainable development by providing resources to local and regional communities to coordinate land use, housing, transportation, and infrastructure planning. The legislation also establishes an Interagency Council on Sustainable Communities, which would coordinate the work of agencies including the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

Giannoulis said he "applauds" and supports the Livable Communities Act and would vote in favor of it.

Kirk said he "leans yes" in support of the bill, and is supportive of its goals, but added, "One note of warning: Congress does need to live within its means." He said he would want to review the bill once it reaches the House floor.

Jones said he thinks about livable communities in a different way than his opponents, adding that 40 people were shot in Chicago communities over the weekend. "Livable Communities is not something political, it's a passion," he said.

Sweet's third question pertained to the next federal surface transportation bill, expected in 2011, which would authorize billions in federal funding to support the nation's roads, rail systems and other infrastructure. She also asked each candidate specifically what his position is on earmarks.

Giannoulis discussed his proposed National Infrastructure Fund, which he said would provide \$45 billion to improve the nation's roads, rail network and other infrastructure over the next 10 years. Sweet asked Giannoulis who would appoint people to manage the fund, and he said he would look to experts to select projects based on merit, not earmarks.

Kirk called himself a "recovering earmark addict," and added, "I don't support the current earmark system." He added he does not support increasing the gas tax to fund infrastructure, as he believes the gas tax is regressive. In response to Giannoulis' proposed infrastructure fund, he said the idea has merit but the "funding source has already been claimed by the [Obama] administration."

Jones said, "I live in a community where you have more unemployment and joblessness than anywhere. I'd have to seriously look at earmarks," as an option for increasing employment opportunities.

Sweet's final question was about how each candidate would protect metropolitan Chicago's water supply. She also asked them whether they support re-reversing the Chicago River to prevent the threat of invasive species.

Giannoulis said it's essential to support policies that protect and preserve our existing water

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supply, encourage conservation, and invest in water infrastructure to reduce costly leaks. Ultimately, he said, he does support re-reversing the River.

Kirk said he is opposed to re-reversing the River, preferring instead to “dramatically increase” the voltage of the electric barrier currently used to stop the Asian carp from breaching the canals.

Jones said he would have to look at the issue further before making a decision.

Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning

At the event, MPC and Annual Luncheon Presenting Sponsor PNC awarded the 2010 Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning to the Whistler Crossing development in south suburban Riverdale, Ill. MPC has presented the award – named in honor of Daniel H. Burnham, the creator of the 1909 Plan of Chicago – since 1988.

Whistler Crossing is a new community in Riverdale, Ill., located at the site of the former Pacesetter development, a troubled neighborhood that had been on the decline for many years until Riverdale decided something needed to be done. Village leaders enlisted the help of Holsten Real Estate Development Corporation, Turnstone Development, and Farr Associates to engage the community in a plan, acquire properties from dozens of owners, secure financing from 15 different sources, and design a beautiful, walkable, energy-efficient community. Whistler Crossing is Illinois’ first community to achieve LEED for Neighborhood Development criteria, which promotes compact, mixed-use development; housing that is near jobs, services and transit; pedestrian and bicycle-friendly streets; and accessible open space.

To learn more about the award, including a complete list of past winners, visit [MPC’s](#) web site.

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PNC was the Presenting Sponsor of MPC’s Annual Luncheon. The Allstate Corporation and The Crown Family were Co-Chair Sponsors of the event.

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Since 1934, the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) has been dedicated to shaping a more sustainable and prosperous greater Chicago region. As an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, MPC serves communities and residents by developing, promoting and implementing solutions for sound regional growth. www.metroplanning.org

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