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Nice to know our region has a plan

Comments

October 18, 2010

BY ESTHER CEPEDA

If you hadn't heard, last Wednesday the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning approved "GO TO 2040," the first strategic regional plan since Daniel Burnham's in 1909.

You'll be happy to know it's designed to guide development and investment decisions for the next 30 years in the seven counties that make up the Chicago area.

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**Esther Cepeda**

But I'll stop right there because I'd bet 10 bucks most Chicagoans have never even heard of the agency.

Five years ago, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning was formed with the aim of getting representatives from Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties to coordinate efforts to strengthen the entire region. The alternative was to continue to compete with each other for limited resources.

Considering the tensions that have existed between the city and the suburbs since the 'burbs started attracting more and more Chicagoans and businesses, the creation of the agency was a feat in itself and a long time in coming.

It would have been easy for the agency to fall on its face in trying to shape this regional plan. After all, planning isn't sexy, consensus-building can be painful, and frankly, though we've been in special pain for the last two years with the Great Recession, things have been rough for a lot longer than that.

But the plan presented by the agency last week is far-reaching, pragmatic and nuanced. It takes issues we face daily -- such as housing prices that make it hard for people to live near their jobs and traffic congestion that makes for soul-crushing commutes -- and calls for specific investment and development solutions.

The plan touches on water and energy conservation, open space and even on the promotion of sustainable local food. And it offers detailed recommendations for transportation projects -- the rehabbing of aging infrastructure, new construction, public transit improvements and expanded freight networks -- that promise the most bang for our limited bucks.

The plan points out that our schools and work-force development efforts are not keeping up with those in other major centers of commerce -- in the U.S. but also in other countries such as Brazil and China -- and lays out ideas for developing skilled workers to achieve the innovation that will help the Chicago area compete in a global marketplace.

The entire GO TO 2040 plan is a big, thick book, www.cmap.illinois.gov, chock full of ideas that came up through diverse committees and were shaped by the comments of more than 35,000 residents.

Think about that: The average block party committee goes to war over whether to have competitive lawn darts or bean bag tossing, yet the agency's strategy is the result of a consensus among organizations representing the whopping 1,226 separate and independent units of government in northeast Illinois.

The plan offers ideas for reforming state and local tax policy and for

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improving residents' access to government information.

But most importantly, the plan calls upon all these disparate units of government to coordinate investments of scarce dollars. The challenges facing the entire Chicago region require individual players to forgo a piece of the pie today in order to ensure that there's even a pie tomorrow.

It's worth your time to look into the bold recommendations the agency has outlined, and I'll be writing about them in depth in the coming months. Not every proposed offered will be carried out in the next 30 years, but it's comforting to know that, at long last, we again have a plan.

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