

Chicago Heights looks to plan its future

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Chicago Heights' proposed comprehensive plan could be on the city council agenda by June, according to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning staffer overseeing the effort.

"We are pretty close," CMAP Project Manager Kendra Smith said Wednesday evening at the Chicago Heights Park District Recreation Center.

Dozens of residents undaunted by frigid temperatures attended the two-hour open house that featured multi-colored renderings mounted on six easels, along with city government and CMAP representatives standing nearby to field comments and answer questions.

Smith said a revised version of the proposal, incorporating attendees' issues, would be sent to city planners for review and comment. Assuming no major issues, "it would go to the city council for approval," she said, estimating "one to two months."

Chicago Heights has been without a comprehensive plan for approximately 20 years.

The proposed comprehensive plan, in the third phase of a three-phase process, is intended to provide a framework of policies and strategy for land use and development, economic growth, infrastructure improvements and branding through 2030.

The grant-funded process began in 2013 with CMAP analyzing Chicago Heights' unique challenges and opportunities.

Attendees at a public "visioning workshop" in November 2013 told CMAP and Chicago Heights government staff they wanted the downtown revitalized, more community-oriented activities and a Chicago Heights Metra station.

As the process continued, CMAP staff asked participants such as Ed Cook, to focus on specific issues.

Cook, a 42-year resident, said he attended Wednesday's open house to get "kind of an overview of what the new plan would be. It's pretty close to what we talked about," he said.

But Wednesday's open house was also the first opportunity for many attendees to get a look at the process. Susan Paus said she came because friend Valerie Kearns, a local real estate broker, was attending. Ray Kudra came on behalf of his wife, who was curious, but couldn't handle the cold.

Returning to the process for the first time in two years were Maristelli Gozzi, and her husband, Giuliano.

Maristelli told a visitor she was a little disappointed with the presentation's emphasis on images.

"I would like to see it (written) on paper," she said.

"I wanted to see 'These are our plans and this is how we're going to exercise them,'" she said as Giuliano peppered CMAP and city representatives with questions.

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