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THE DAILY REPORT

My Space

Brendan Crain | Wed, Jun 10th, 2009 | Category: [Report](#) | City: [Chicago](#) | Tags: [chicago](#), [public space](#), [wisconsin](#), [invent the future](#), [placemaking chicago](#), [plan of chicago](#), [metropolitan planning council](#), [websites](#), [growth patterns](#), [youtube](#), [zaha hadid](#), [un studio](#), [flickr](#), [chicago metropolitan agency for planning](#), [daniel burnham](#), [millennium park](#)

Brendan Crain is the founder of [Where](#).

In cities—especially densely-populated cities, where open skies are a precious commodity—getting people to use public spaces isn't usually a challenge. But getting people to talk about public space is another issue altogether. These days, the Internet is allowing planners and architects to reach out to Average Joe citizens to generate discussions about the built environment in new and increasingly creative ways; in Chicago, a number of recent public space-related initiatives have used the web to get people talking about the city's public realm—with varying degrees of success.

This past week the [Metropolitan Planning Council](#) launched a region-wide search for Chicago's best public spaces. [Placemaking Chicago](#) challenges Chicagoland residents from southeastern Wisconsin all the way down the lakefront to northwestern Indiana to send in photos and videos hosted at Flickr, YouTube, and their ilk, in order to determine the metro's most enjoyable and successful public spaces. MPC is offering users various [prizes](#), and winners will be determined by several rounds of judging, including an MPC-selected panel and a final public vote.

Meanwhile, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is generating discussion of its regional growth plan for Chicagoland through their [GoTo2040](#) website. CMAP has set up the [Invent the Future](#) web tool to gather public input on the future of Chicago and its environs, which uses videos and interactive, choose-your-own-adventure style features to help users understand how different planning decisions would affect future growth patterns. The tools focus on several key outcomes, including air quality and the preservation of open space.

The CMAP effort is borne of a larger program launched last fall to celebrate the centennial of Daniel Burnham's legendary 1909 Plan of Chicago. In addition to hosting events around the city and attracting the likes of Zaha Hadid and UN Studio to Chicago to design Millennium Park pavilions this summer (a la mini-Serpentines) the [Burnham Plan Centennial](#) has a variety of [interactive features on their site](#), including a clickable map, kids page, quiz, and online "exhibits."

So how do these sites stack up? MPC's Placemaking contest invites people to craft entries using various web tools and makes for a fun, interactive experience; if there's anything to criticize, it's that only the top entries will be available for public viewing until August, which seems like a missed opportunity for creating an interactive database of successful public spaces in the region. CMAP's Invent the Future tool, meanwhile, is somewhat simplistic, but is well-designed and provides a solid introduction to regional planning—and its impact on open space—to newbies. The site misses no opportunity to direct newly-engaged users to CMAP's series of summer seminars and public kiosks around the city, where people will be able to voice their opinion to impact the organization's regional plan. The Burnham Plan Centennial's site definitely wins points for the sexy renderings of the starchitect-designed pavilions on the home page, but the interactive features are a bit too text-heavy, and could use more of the playful spirit seen in the other two sites.

If nothing else, it's exciting to see a city taking the discussion of planning and public space—from the micro to the macro level—so seriously. If planning and design orgs keep improving their online features, we'll hopefully see the discussion of public space in the country's third largest metropolitan area growing more robust over the coming years.

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LATEST COMMENTS

- » **J:** The pink hat is actually a pork pie, not a bowler. (http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/neworleansjournal/2007/03/pink_id.html) ([read](#))
- » **Oliver:** And one of the biggest, most ironic errors of them all - the Spotted Cat, the ... ([read](#))
- » **car repair:** I wanted to thank you for this great read!! I definitely enjoying every little bit of ... ([read](#))
- » **Zack:** Hmmm, looking forward to both pieces in The Nation - particularly the review of Sugrue. I ... ([read](#))
- » **Rob:** Thanks for the links - these are all excellent pieces. ([read](#))



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COMMENTS +

[Mandy Burrell](#) in Chicago
Wed, Jun 10, 2009 at 2:58pm

Thanks for the nice words about the PlacemakingChicago “What Makes Your Place Great?” contest. We’re considering posting the entries sooner than August, and we’re starting to compile great stories of Placemaking in action on PlacemakingChicago.com under Places. Check it out.

Also, the Burnham Centennial site just launched a new blog by Patrick Reardon, one of my favorite former Chicago Tribune writers.

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