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Development planning workshops offer public an imaginary trip to 2040

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July 12, 2009

By DAVID GARBE For The Courier-News

The region's top planning agency has a question for you: What should our cities look like in 30 years?

Should suburban expansion continue, or should development focus on a few high-density downtowns? Should more money be put into roads or public transport? Should public money be spent to conserve water and green spaces?

To get a sense of what the public wants, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is conducting a large outreach effort that includes a series of public planning workshops in the Fox Valley.

Using computer simulations, participants will explore how different investments in infrastructure and land-use regulation will shape daily life in the Chicago region of the next three decades.

The first of the local forums is scheduled for Wednesday night at Waubonsee Community College's Sugar Grove Campus, with three others coming up in August.

For those who cannot attend the workshops, CMAP is also seeking public input through its website (www.goto2040.org) and hosting computer simulation pavilions at public events through the summer.

"We're trying to reach as many people as possible," said CMAP associate planner Erin Aleman. "It's important to have a sense of what trade-offs people might be willing to make."

Development planning is essentially a matter of compromise: Since everyone can't live in a pristine forest and commute to work on an electric bullet train, communities have to figure out the best possible way to grow.

The only thing that seems certain is that growth itself is unavoidable. The seven-county Chicago region, which now has a population of about 8 million, is expected to gain another 2.8 million residents by 2040.

Based on the top priorities and preferences expressed by the public over the course of this summer, CMAP will draft a plan for where all those millions of people will live and how they will get around.

CMAP plans have traditionally been focused on transportation, and they play a significant role in the allocation of federal infrastructure money.

For the "Go To 2040" campaign, CMAP is broadening the scope of its planning efforts to include land-use and environmental concerns. The agency's plans will not override local land-use codes, but the agency hopes a comprehensive regional plan will help guide individual cities toward better development.

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Upcoming planning workshops

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• Waubonsee Community College: Academic %26 Professional Center, Sugar Grove; 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Wednesday

• Geneva Public Works Department: 1800 South St.; 7 to 9 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 11

• Kendall County Health Department: 811 John St., Yorkville; 6 to 8 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 12

• Montgomery Village Hall: 200 N. River St., 7 to 9 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 26

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