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## Hearing to target needs of Latino community

BY DAVID SCHWAB

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South suburban Latinos — a demographic officials say is “traditionally underrepresented” when it comes to planning for economic, transportation and health care development — will get a chance to have their voices heard at a community forum Wednesday in Chicago Heights.

The session is the fourth and final event in a series of discussions run by the Southland Health Care Forum, an agency that received a \$5,000 grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning to run the programs.

The Metropolitan agency is in the “visioning stage” of collecting information and gathering input from dozens of community forums like this one taking place across northeastern Illinois, Erin Aleman, assistant community planner for the agency, said.

Using information from these sessions, the agency will develop a “Go to 2040” document in the next few years, a guide for the public and private sectors for long range planning in the region.

Wednesday's session will be from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Chicago Heights Park District, 1400 Chicago Road. A dinner will be served.

The event is open to the public, but is mainly targeted at Latino community members and the politicians who represent them.

“If the weaknesses that exist in this area (for Latinos) aren't identified, the 2040 plan could go forward without them,” said Maria Crews, programs coordinator with the Southland Health Care Forum.

Some of the specific needs of the south suburban Latino community that already have been identified are better access to jobs, improved transportation to get to available jobs, access to health care programs, more bilingual doctors and nurses, a reduction in unreported domestic violence incidents and a reduction in school dropout rates for Latino youths.

People interested in attending the session may contact Crews at (708) 756-1000, Ext. 3443, to reserve seating.

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