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[Home](#) / [News](#) / [The big sell](#)

FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2009

## The big sell

by Mark Thomton  
Chicago

Randall Blankenhorn may specialize in planning and development, but make no mistake; in 2010 the head of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning will step into perhaps the biggest sales job that this city has ever seen.

It's often difficult to get people to look ahead.

Long-term planning is generally a quick way to draw apathy and disinterest and it's all too common to leave tomorrow's worries for ... tomorrow.

Blankenhorn and the aforementioned CMAP have taken on the difficult role of rallying support for the metropolitan area's 30-year plan.

On the 100-year anniversary of the Burnham Plan CMAP has launched its Go To 2040 campaign. This will be the suggested comprehensive plan for the entire metro area. "Suggested" is the key word, as CMAP has no zoning or taxing authority, leaving its well-laid plans to a litany of community and county officials that can adapt what they choose.

Currently, CMAP is in the process of developing a plan. It will use the remainder of the year to compile information from metro areas around the globe and solicit ideas from local community planners, developers and businesses. The organization has taken it one step further and included an interactive portion of its Web site for any member of the public to share their insights and ideas.

Blankenhorn knows that overall public support for an innovative metropolitan plan will be crucial to its implementation.

"Fourteen straight bonds were passed in 1909 in public support of Burnham," says Blankenhorn. "Our job is to gain public support now. We are finding that the public is very passionate about the community's future. They want to do what is best for their grandkids."

The real heavy lifting will begin in October of 2010, when the plan will be finalized and Blankenhorn will have to approach local officials to "sell" the vision. CMAP will rely on these local officials to adapt zoning ordinances and tax structures that the plan recommends.

Blankenhorn says that the plan will take into consideration the difference in density and development in a county such as west suburban Kane when compared to the much more urban Cook County. The plan will adapt to each environment.

How much will actually be accomplished or changed is the big question, but Blankenhorn promises that no sacred cow will be spared. The plan will open the discussion regarding long-standing tax policies that may signal fundamental changes in how communities develop.

"Traditionally, sales tax has driven local development," says Blankenhorn. "We want to start the conversation with local leaders. How could we fund services other ways and not rely so heavily on sales tax?"

He is pragmatic in his approach, understanding that not every suggestion may be enacted, but the length



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of the process leaves hope that maybe many will join CMAP's cause over time.

"We understand that this won't happen overnight," says Blankenhorn. "This is the 2040 plan, not the 2012 plan. We are 100 years into Burnham's plan and there are still some good ideas of his that have not happened yet."

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