Planning group warns of explosive growth

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Northeastern Illinois could see another 2.8 million people in the next 30 years and the region must begin planning now to deal with that project future growth.

That was the message that came out of a Go to 2040 workshop hosted Tuesday night by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning at the College of Lake County Southlake Campus in Vernon Hills. About 40 people attended the meeting.

CMAP is the comprehensive regional planning organization for the northeastern Illinois counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will, and the agency responsible for producing the region's official, integrated plan for land use and transportation.

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The purpose of the workshop was to get public input on future land use, transportation and quality life issues affecting the region for the next 30 years and deal with the dramatic population growth's expected in the region. Currently, the seven-county region has a population of about 8.5 million people and CMAP estimates that could increase by another 2.8 million by 2040.

To put those numbers in perspective, "2.8 million is about the same number of people living in the city of Chicago today," said Ty Warner, a principal planner for CMAP.

CMAP officials informally polled those in attendance to get their opinions on what issues they felt were most important to the region's future. Most supported more compacted housing growth in urban areas to reduce sprawl, increased investment in roads, significant increases in transit funding and support for transportation alternatives, protecting the environment and improving air quality.

Quality of life

Vernon Hills resident Evan Craig, chairman of the Sierra Club's Woods and Wetlands Group in Lake County, said he's concerned about the potential negative impacts of the huge expected increase in population growth over the next 30 years, and what that means for the environment and quality of life of the region.

"If we get 2.8 million more people, it will not be a sustainable region that we like. I think we need to question that and open up dialogue on how we manage population growth in sustainable ways," he said.

Warner acknowledged it will be a challenge to control population growth, while at the same time remaining an economically thriving region.

"You want to be successful and sustainable in the long term, but the more successful you are the more attractive it is for people to come here," he said.

Bill Holleman of Lake Villa said he believes planners need to begin looking more seriously at transportation alternatives because of the rising price of gasoline and the need to reduce greenhouse gases in the environment. "We just can't continue going on the way we have," he said. "We're looking at a disaster if we continue to go that way for the next 30 years."

Phil York of Deerfield said he felt the workshop was a good meeting but would like to see more outreach into Hispanic areas and other population groups that are traditionally underrepresented.

"There's a huge group underrepresented here," he said.

CMAP officials said the Vernon Hills workshop is the first of about 50 that will be held in different communities throughout the seven-county region. In Lake County, at least two other workshop meetings will be held later this summer, possibly in Waukegan and Grayslake, according to Erin Aleman, an associate planner for CMAP.

In addition to the workshop meetings, interactive kiosks will be set up at various locations throughout the region, including Metra stations,

libraries, festivals and other sites, where residents can register their opinions about what they would like the region to look like in the future. A complete list of kiosk locations will soon be available at CMAP's Go to 2040 web site at www.goto2040.org. Residents can also register their input on-line via the Web site.

Feedback from the public will be used in helping CMAP officials develop its 2040 comprehensive plan, which is expected to be completed in the fall 2010.

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