Time Out Chicago

July 2-8, 2009

Around Town

Track to the future

Two readers log on to a new website to see how their choices might change the city in the year 2040. By **Madeline Nusser**

After this year, Daniel Burnham might be history. With his *Plan of 1909*, he pounded out Chicago, with its grid system, diagonal streets, parks and open lakefront. But now, coinciding with Burnham's centennial celebration, a new development plan is in the works—the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's GO TO 2040. Before the agency tosses together its ideal city 30 years hence—as Burnham did back in the day—it's looking for your input. So it created GOTO2040.org, a new website that asks Chicago-area denizens to weigh in on topics, including their favored development density, transit system and resource policy. In turn, your responses help the agency better create the city's plan. And, according to the website, your choices all impact the Chicago area's unbridled growth—an estimated 2.8 million people in the next 30 years.

To produce the interactive website, the agency gathered loads of research that informs you how your decisions impact the area in the long run, e.g., love your suburban yard? Well, keeping it will cause your commute time to skyrocket.

Now the big question: Can the Chicago area's diverse population agree on what makes a brighter future? A city dweller and suburbanite log on to GOTO2040.org to find out.

GEORGE MONTELEONE
West Town resident, teacher and filmmaker

Development density

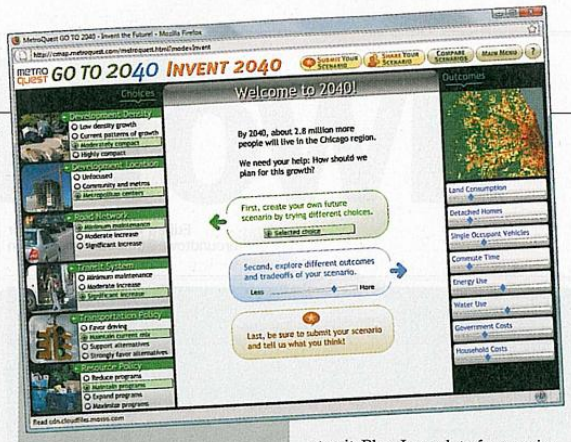
The first and seemingly most important question the website asks concerns how much land mass the city uses when the population increases. According to Monteleone, it looks as if high density, or growing upward—instead of low density, or growing outward—is favorable for the future; high density decreases water and energy use. "I guess I do favor it, because people can walk more or ride bikes, which makes urban community useful. But part of me thinks that we shouldn't raze every lawn for a condo unit," Monteleone concedes. "I want to have my cake and eat it, too."

Resource policy

This question asks: Want to maximize or minimize programs that manage natural resources? "The website tells you it's ridiculous not to maximize resources," Monteleone says. Energy and water use go down, and government costs barely budge. "But as far as the real world goes, I feel like that's hardly true. Look at the way that the city handles programs. That's not a factor in this website's interface."

Transportation policy

Monteleone, whose daily commute via car takes ten minutes, says "I'm not against driving, but the website seems to pit driving against all other modes of transportation." Monteleone chose a middle ground between driving and alternatives. "The road system is not lacking. But that's based on my short daily city commute. If I drove to Aurora, that would be a different story."



GOTO2040.com's opening page (above) looks easy-peasy. But just a few mouse clicks show how much your choices can affect the city's future.

ASHLEY RICHARDSON
Park Ridge resident, communications manager

Development density

You'd think Richardson, living in the 'burbs, would vote for low density growth—plenty of lawns and freestanding homes. But she's pulling for compact density in 2040, listing it as an even more important factor than Monteleone does. "My husband and I work out here. Sprawl is not attractive; we need to do something to stop it. Plus, I see a lot of vacancies in commercial space. It's terrible for resources."

Development location

How to center a city? Richardson opted for community centers over a more energy-efficient metropolitan center. "Locally, I want to support the people in my neighborhood who need resources. I think community is important," notes Richardson. "Additionally, I think a central authority is problematic."

Road network

This category asks how much money you want to pump into local roadways. "Look at the Minnesota bridge! Or all the potholes! We need to pay for these things now." Richardson notes that the website shows government and household costs taking a big hit, but, she says, "Ultimately, we need to make unpopular decisions now so that in the future we can accommodate people—11 million is a lot of people."

PHOTOS: METROQUEST.COM

GOTO2040.com's graphics aren't "real" like Wii; they're "real" as in, well, real. Its chart of Chicago reads, "These are not buildings—each ball represents ten people." Make choices about the future of Chicago and the ball pattern changes.