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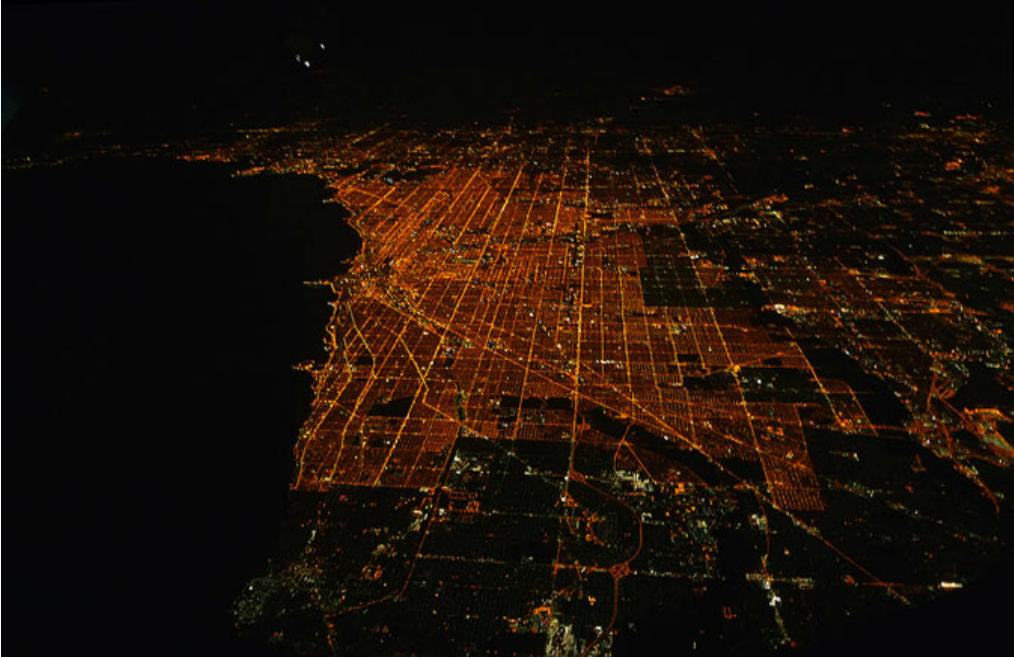


NEWS

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Urban Tally

Chicago loses population amid mixed regional census reports.



CHICAGO AT NIGHT
COURTESY ERIC KILBY / FLICKR

The 2010 census figures showed a surprisingly large drop in Chicago's population, down over 200,000 people since 2000. The drop was most dramatic in the city's African American population, which fell 17% overall. The drop has left planners in the Windy City looking for an explanation and pondering what it means for planning in the future.

"We were definitely surprised," said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). "Any time you see population decline in the central city, it's something to be concerned about." For CMAP, the job of analyzing the United States Census Bureau figures have just begun.

The pronounced drop in the African-American population may highlight specific planning and demographic issues. "We definitely need to look at what's going on in our African-American population," he said. "Are we not providing enough jobs, or adequate housing?" The census period, for instance, coincides with the Chicago Housing Authority's "Plan for Transformation," which eliminated almost all of the city's high-rise public housing towers, and replaced them at significantly lower densities with low-rise mixed-use neighborhoods. And while the towers have come down, many of the new neighborhoods have yet to be developed. "While we think the overall direction of the Plan for Transformation is the right one, we will definitely be looking at the impacts of the plan and the overall picture of public housing," Blankenhorn said.

In addition to the weak economy, high crime, poor schools in the South and West Sides are also likely contributors to the falling population in those areas. "It's not just a Chicago economy, it's a Midwest economy, and national and global economy," he said.

In spite of the sharp change in the figures, CMAP does not foresee a major shift in planning policy, or a continuing decline along the lines of other major cities in the region. "Planned shrinkage is not something we plan to consider in Chicago," he said. "We need to continue to grow. We need to maintain a balance between the city and the suburbs. Everything works better when you have a healthy central city."

The picture in the rest of the Midwest, though partial, is mixed. While the Midwest has undoubtedly suffered in the economic downturn, with the continuing loss of manufacturing jobs, population decline was not universal across the region, with some cities posting significant gains. Indianapolis gained nearly 60,000 people since 2,000, growing to 820,445 residents. Des Moines, IA, also grew slightly, gaining nearly 5,000 people for a total population of 203,433. Meanwhile St. Louis lost nearly 29,000 thousand people. Figures for Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan are still being tallied.

Alan G. Brake