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# Tracking quality of life data for Chicago's MetroPulse

**CMAP, Chicago Community Trust, will follow plan to gather data on city**

A new website making its debut in Chicagoland will monitor the pulse of northeastern Illinois through analyses of quality of life data and policy indicators.

MetroPulse, a collaboration between the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Chicago Community Trust, was launched on Nov. 17. The site will attempt to compile data from a variety of sources—including the U.S. Census, various city departments and the Woodstock Institute, among others— to better inform the public on the progress of the agency's "GO TO 2040" plan.

As previously reported in The Chronicle on Sept. 7, "GO TO 2040" is the region's first comprehensive, long-term plan since Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago in 1909. The plan aims to create more livable communities in the city, and ensure the region continues to be a global economic center.

The new project is a co-branded website that looks at 12 indicators of the region's progress throughout time, in terms of transportation, education, civic involvement and the environment.

"Our purpose in making this website hasn't been to make it into some zero to 10 index—it's just not that simple—and I think it would be insulting to the region to do that," said Drew Williams-Clark, a senior planner for CMAP. "We've instead opted to put data in the hands of people so we can all have a dialogue about what is quality of life over time and how we can improve it."

A common theme throughout the "GO TO 2040" plan, quality of life includes many factors that affect life in northeastern Illinois, including safety, wellness and transportation, among others. According to Williams-Clark, one has to picture a multi-variant diagram to describe its functions.

MetroPulse will compile data from organizations in various sectors to present a more comprehensive and accessible view of life in the city.

One of those organizations is the Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2125 W. North Ave., which promotes urban sustainability through such issues as transportation, community development and energy since 1978.

"We come up with ways to generate new ideas and new solutions to urban sustainability, then we look at how to implement them," said Nicole Gotthelf, director of development and communications at CNT.

According to Gotthelf, CNT was involved, along with other organizations, in the process of deciding what long-range factors could best indicate progress and sustainability in the region.

Those factors were later used in the formation of MetroPulse.

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Though centralization of data itself isn't unique, CMAP wants MetroPulse to differ in that it will be a tool for policy makers, researchers, the media and the public to continuously track various data sets in order to better analyze local policies.

The site is a work in progress, according to Williams-Clark, because much of the data that has been collected has not yet been included in the current version of the site.

"We'll be updating as often as we possibly can," Williams-Clark said. "Our objective is to make sure we're able to update data as soon as it's updated by the provider."

According to Ken Fidel, professor of sociology at DePaul University, a common problem with data is its freshness, or lack thereof. With the rate of change that occurs in communities, Fidel said it's hard to keep accurate track of data when census data from 10 years ago is still being used, and also that people have a need for current information.

"There are lots of people who are terribly interested in knowing about their local area," Fidel said.

As a continuation in the line from Burnham's Plan for Chicago, through MetroPulse, CMAP aims to make it possible for residents to access quality of life information on the city through a frequent rate of collection and updates.

"I think Burnham would be geeked out about this site for sure," Williams-Clark said. "I think he'd be into it."

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