

# Individuals

By 2040 our population will grow to over 11 million. Every day residents and businesses in our region make a multitude of decisions that have large impacts, but sometimes go unnoticed relative to those made by government. However, many seemingly small actions can have an additive effect and become a real tipping point for changing outcomes on a much larger scale.

This section describes how individual decisions affect plan implementation, and then provides a description of individual actions through a series of local case studies that support the implementation of GO TO 2040. Throughout this section are links to pages on CMAP's website where more information can be found.



For most of us, farming is not an occupation we'd associate with Chicago's south side. But for 37-year-old **JASMINE EASTER**, a small urban farm in the Englewood neighborhood was her leg up toward a better career. To read more about Jasmine, visit <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/jasmine>.



At 14, **ORLANDO GOMEZ** faced a life-changing decision. Should he spend three hours commuting daily to a top-rated magnet high school? Or avoid the arduous trip and attend his local school despite a hostile environment that had touched two older brothers who preceded him there? To read more about Orlando, visit <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/orlando>.

## How Individual Decisions Affect Plan Implementation

Individuals can help implement GO TO 2040 in many ways, including small localized actions, coordination with others to form stronger coalitions, or providing broad based support to elected officials implementing the kind of principles emphasized in these pages.

This section is primarily oriented to individuals as residents (whether renters or homeowners), with some other specific recommendations to business owners. Personal and household decisions affect level of involvement in one's own community, water and energy use, or personal transportation and food choices. Business decisions can have even larger repercussions on the environment and transportation systems.



Grocery shopping, getting to work, and taking kids to school can be a hassle for anyone. But when 56-year-old **CINDI SWANSON** lost her vision 15 years ago, she learned just how difficult these everyday tasks can be. To read more about Cindi, visit <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/cindi>.



When 8-year-old **JOHN HATCHER JR.** imagines the future, his first wish is for a clean world: "Then the sky can be blue, the grass can be green. There'd be no pollution, and people would care about each other. I'd really like a perfect world." To read more about John, visit <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/john>.



When **MIKE ABT** started recycling cardboard 20 years ago to help his family business become "more green," it wasn't just the eco-friendliness that appealed to him. To read more about Mike, visit <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/mike>.

## Livable Communities

GO TO 2040 seeks to support livable communities, and includes recommendations for land use and housing, resource conservation, open space, and local food. There are many things that individual residents or businesses can do to support the creation of livable communities in our region.

Individuals can help achieve GO TO 2040's vision by supporting planning efforts that strengthen community character and design. Some community gathering places have come about because of a resident with a vision and passion to accomplish something for the greater good of the community. Individuals can take on small projects that can bring community residents together, like turning a vacant lot into a garden or advocating for new bus shelters or participating in **local arts and culture** activities. To pick a common example, individuals can get involved in **historic preservation** efforts in their communities, either joining an existing organization or starting a new one. These projects can be catalysts for communities to come together or simply provide opportunities for people to get to know one another.

Urban design looks back to more **traditional neighborhood development** and typically includes a mix of uses, like putting stores next to offices and housing. This can help communities to be more walkable and can provide support transit service. Business owners have a large impact on creating mixed use areas by choosing to locate in existing community centers. Residents can support this type of development by choosing to shop locally and support businesses in their communities' downtowns. In particular, buying food from local farmers' markets supports **local food** production by investing in local farms.

Business owners can have a great impact on enhancing a community's **urban design**, and also be positively impacted by design efforts. Places that are considered to have good urban design generally reflect communities of the past with mixed-use downtowns, where one can walk to and from homes, businesses, and retail. Individual business owners can support and enhance local character by being sensitive to community context. Store signs, awnings, lighting, and other features should fit within the local community context. Besides physical appearance, businesses can also foster a greater sense of community by providing opportunities for individuals to gather and interact.

Individual households and businesses can have a significant impact on reducing carbon emissions by retrofitting existing buildings to be more energy efficient. In this region, the primary contributor to **climate change** is energy use in homes and businesses. Individuals can address **energy use** by both examining and improving their own practices, beginning with a household or business "energy audit" to take an inventory of everything from the age of appliances to the types of light bulbs used. Some municipalities offer financial incentives to replace inefficient appliances or to update inefficient windows with new, more energy efficient ones. Individuals can also calculate their "carbon footprint" through online tools like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's **Household Emissions Calculator**.



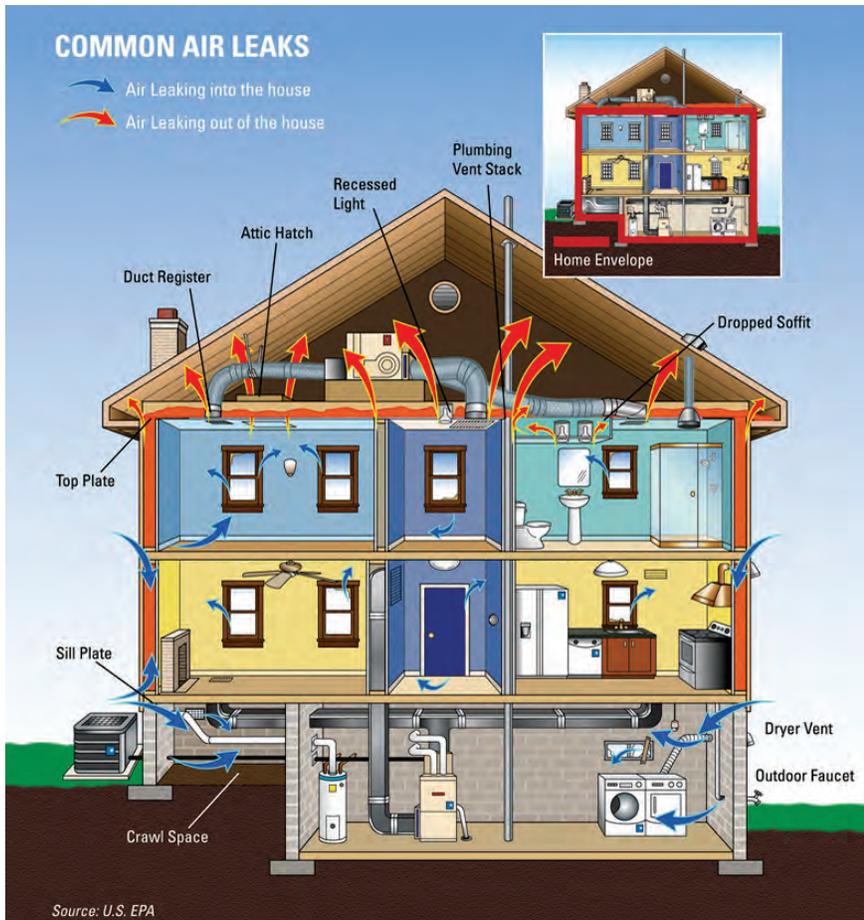
The Old Court House Arts Center in downtown Woodstock was originally constructed in 1857, designed by John Mills Van Osdel. In 1972, the building was slated to be demolished and converted into a parking lot. Woodstock residents Cliff and Bev Ganschow purchased the building, completed an extensive renovation project, opened an art gallery, and rented space to other local businesses. They maintained many historic features of the buildings, including original pressed tin ceilings and some old jail cells. The Old Court House and Jail are now on the National Register of Historic Places. Image courtesy of Flickr user [Steve McCoy](#)



Since 2004, the Village of Tinley Park has hosted its popular public art project "Benches on the Avenue," in which 20 handcrafted wooden benches are placed along Oak Park Avenue after being painted, sculpted, and adorned by local artists. Each year features a different theme, such as "When I Grow Up" (depicting occupations) and "Classic TV," which guides the transformation of these benches and must also retain their function as public seating. Image courtesy of the [Village of Tinley Park](#)



Part of the region's character is contained in its diverse businesses, and can be supported by purchasing local products. In 1996, brothers Jim and Jason Ebel founded Two Brothers Brewing Company. Brewing award-winning artisan beers such as Domaine DuPage (named after their home county of DuPage), the brothers have greatly expanded their production over the years, adding a successful brewpub and even operating their own beer distribution company. Image courtesy of [Two Brothers Brewing Company](#)



One of the quickest, easiest, and cheapest ways to see how you can make your home more energy efficient is to perform a home energy audit. Home energy audits allow you to assess how much energy your home uses and whether there are steps that you can take to cut down on current energy usage. These audits require about 5 minutes of your time, as well as access to the last 12 months of your utility bills. Both ComEd and Energy Star provide online tools for individuals to conduct home energy audits. Image courtesy of U.S. EPA

Another major step individuals and business owners can take to reduce **water use** inside homes and businesses is to install low flow toilets, Energy Star-rated appliances, faucet aerators and other water reducing appliances. The region could save 35.5 million gallons of water daily if 10 percent of the region took basic steps to reduce water waste, and if 50 percent of the population did so, the result would be a reduction of 177.2 million gallons per day.

Local parks are central to communities, and have always been an amenity that families, individuals, and businesses have looked to when considering where to live. Parks serve as great places for people to gather and relax, for kids to play and can be a great source of recreational activities if actively programmed. Research has shown that well maintained parks are associated with increased property values in neighboring communities.



Rain barrels are a great way to reduce stormwater runoff and can prevent water from seeping into your basement. Typically available in 55 gallon drums, rain barrels should be placed at the base of your home's downspout. The barrels help relieve the burden of storm sewers from heavy downpours. Many rain barrels have a spigot near the base that can be hooked up to a garden hose so that the water can be used to water plants. Often your County Soil and Water Conservation District is a good first place to ask about where to purchase a rain barrel. Image courtesy of Andrew Bayley

Parks provide many environmental benefits and have also been linked to increased public health. Individuals can volunteer with their local park districts or forest preserve districts to help during spring clean-up days. Businesses can also sponsor employee volunteer days which serve as great ways to support the local community they exist in. Charitable giving is another way individuals and business can support the creation and enhancement of local parks.

During heavy rains and periods of melting snow, parts of the region experience flooding. Effective stormwater management minimizes damages associated with flooding and prevents the degradation of aquatic resources. Residents and business owners can take steps to reduce stormwater runoff by employing stormwater management best practices, which can help to reduce the impact of heavy storms on storm sewer systems, thereby reducing flooding. **Rain barrels** are a simple way to collect rainwater and reuse it on site to water plants or landscaping. Another method of naturally slowing stormwater runoff is to plant **rain gardens** in places that are naturally wet. Other home improvements — including natural landscaping, or using permeable pavements — can also improve stormwater management.

Individuals can also have an impact on the amount of household waste that is produced. Many communities presently have recycling programs by way of curbside pick-up or drop-off stations, and also provide information on recycling items like motor oil or household paints. Perhaps the easiest way to reduce the amount of waste we as individuals create is to consider the packaging of the products we buy in the first place, like bringing your own reusable bags to the grocery store.

Business can also participate in recycling programs. Everything from batteries and computers to plastic to-go containers can be recycled and it doesn't take much for businesses to support greater recycling at work. Businesses can also replace Styrofoam coffee cups with reusable washable mugs as a simple way to be more environmentally conscious.

There are many civic or volunteer organizations that take on initiatives that affect all areas from community planning, to the environment, to transportation initiatives. As individuals, community issues affect us all in different ways. If you are interested in getting involved in proactive planning, there are a variety of not-for-profit agencies that are working to increase opportunities for public transit to rainwater harvesting. You, as an individual, can make a difference by getting involved, volunteering, voting, attending a public workshop, or writing a letter to your legislators or locally elected official.



Downers Grove Park District has a wide variety of volunteer opportunities available for anyone interested in contributing towards strengthening the park district's services. Volunteers are used to staff one of the park district's several information centers, to provide outdoor education classes, and to provide much needed preservation and restoration services. Volunteers are solicited from all age and social groups, providing special opportunities for youth volunteers and community groups. Image courtesy of [Downers Grove Park District](#)



For three hours every other Saturday, residents of the Village of Oswego bring telephones, radios, TVs, computers, and other recyclable electronics to the Village's public works facility. The goal is to keep electronic material from ending up in landfills, and since the first event in August 2007, the Village E-Recycle program has succeeded in preventing over 113 tons of electronics from doing just that. Image courtesy of Michael Surran



In October 2007, the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corp. started the Litter Free Zone Initiative. Through the initiative, approximately 100 students go door to door every other week in the Auburn-Gresham neighborhood, speaking with residents about the importance of recycling, passing out blue bags, and picking up trash. Since the initiative began, volunteers have collected more than 230,000 pounds of recyclable materials and "encouraged hundreds of residents to throw their paper, metal and plastic into blue bins rather than trash cans." Image courtesy of [Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation](#)

# Human Capital

GO TO 2040 recognizes that our region's greatest asset is its people. Residents who are educated are more likely to contribute to our economy, be active in their communities, vote in elections, and overall participate in society.

Pursuing further education or receiving training in new work skills can be done at any age, and in our rapidly changing economy, many people will need to learn new skills several times over their careers. Individuals can advance their own educations, or volunteer to help others improve their skills at reading, math, or English as a second language, for example.

Businesses are encouraged to get involved with local educational or workforce training institutions to help provide links between the skills that these institutions are teaching and the actual needs of employers. GO TO 2040 also recognizes and supports the importance of economic innovation, which results from businesses developing and commercializing new ideas. Individuals can benefit from increased government efficiency, including improved access to information and coordinated investments to improve the region's infrastructure.

## Regional Mobility

Individuals can also take actions that affect our region's transportation system. This contributes to both livable communities and regional mobility. The following pages discuss the ways that individual residents or businesses can contribute to improving the region's transportation system.

An important element of livability involves having access to transportation modes beyond driving. Residents of the region spend millions of hours in traffic delays each year. The extensive public involvement process undertaken for GO TO 2040 has demonstrated that residents want transportation alternatives that are safe and efficient. People know that there are other ways besides driving to get places — walking and bicycling, carpooling, bus, train — but these options aren't always available. The biggest role that individuals can play in the development of multimodal transportation is to support its development and then use it.

Walkability is also a key component of good urban design. Places that feel comfortable are usually places where there is lots of street activity. When a community is walkable more people — families, couples, elderly, and youth — tend to go out and spend time in their neighborhood. Walkable neighborhoods provide opportunities for chance meetings. It's a way for people to interact with one another, meet their neighbors, and to foster a "sense of community." Individuals can support sidewalks and complete street initiatives by advocating for these changes at the neighborhood or municipal level.

Walkability is an integral aspect of livability, as it not only supports an active lifestyle and positively impacts personal **health**, but it can promote **safety** by increasing the number of people out and about in the community. Pedestrian and bicycle access is particularly relevant around schools, giving students the opportunity to walk or bike to school rather than being driven or bused.

Beyond recreational walking and **bicycling**, individual businesses can support bicycling as a form of transportation to and from work. Businesses of any size can support their employees biking to work by providing incentives like shower facilities, bike storage facilities or by providing annual bicycle safety workshops for employees. Businesses of any size can support bicycling by participating in "Bike to Work Week."



Jane Healy, a parent and school board member in Blue Island School District 130, wanted to give her kids the experience and health benefits that come with walking to school. So every day, she put on her walking shoes and took her kids to school. There were a lot of neighborhood kids who were being driven to school, just a few blocks away. They would see Jane and her kids walking up to the school while waiting in the long drop-off lines of traffic. Soon enough, many asked to join them.

District principals, concerned with traffic congestion around pick-up and drop-off times at the school, offered to support Jane's walking efforts. And she created a program that she called the "Walkable School Bus." After nearly two and a half years, there were so many people walking to school that the program seemed superfluous. Then she decided to ride bikes with her children to school, and that garnered attention and envy of other local school kids, so she created a "Bike Train." They had a set route, like the Walkable School Bus, and picked kids up along the route. This program has also been very popular and the group has now grown to include a Friday Night Bike Club, where dozens of kids congregate at Jane's house to go on a bike ride through the community.

The community of Blue Island has also done extensive Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program planning, prioritized installation of bike racks and bike education for students, successfully won Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) SRTS grants for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure activities, and hosted SRTS training for parents. They have definitely seen biking to school increase due to Jane's efforts. Image courtesy of Jane Healy

If **public transit** options are available, business can also support the use of public transit by participating in pre-tax transit benefit programs. These programs save employees money by reducing their taxable income. Another workplace program that can affect regional transportation systems is offering flexible work schedules; this allows employees to travel at off-peak travel times and can reduce individual commute times.

Many residents would like to have public transit options to get to work or to the grocery store. There are limited resources to provide new transit opportunities across the region. Individuals can support existing transit by getting involved in local civic organizations like the Active Transportation Alliance (ATA), a membership organization that not only educates people on safe alternatives to driving but also supports statewide legislative changes that support transportation alternatives.



Christopher B. Burke Engineering Ltd. (CBBEL) goes the extra mile to encourage employees to ride bicycles to work. Converting a company-owned condo into a locker room gives cyclists a place to shower before heading into the office. They purchase shower passes from a local gym for employees who prefer that option, and allow employees to bring bikes inside the office. CBBEL rewards bicyclists with food and with money; they sponsor a monthly breakfast at a nearby restaurant and pay employees \$0.75 per mile. In 2006, employees logged 3,000 miles biking to work. By 2009, after implementing many of these incentives, the number of miles logged jumped to 20,000 miles for the office of 220 employees. Image courtesy of Clifton Trimble



Abbott Labs, as a member of the Lake Cook TMA, is committed to helping employees take transit where it would otherwise be very difficult to do. They provide workers with a daily shuttle to and from the nearest Metra station. They also have a transit reimbursement incentive program that allows employees who commute by public transit or van pool to pay for transit expenses with money deducted from their paycheck before federal, state and local taxes are applied. From CMAP Library