

Richton Park part of climate change study

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Richton Park and four other communities will be part of a study to help the Great Lakes region incorporate climate data into development and capital improvement plans.

The American Planning Association received a \$300,000 grant from the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), which it will use for a two-year study with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning as well as climatologists from the University of Illinois and the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Consortium.

Called "Incorporating Local Science to Help Communities Plan for Climate Extremes," the project will involve five Chicago-area communities. Berwyn and Richton Park have been announced and the others will be named later this month. The planning is meant to help communities better prepare for everything from flooding brought on by heavy storms to drought conditions.

Richton Park already is working with CMAP on a long-range capital improvement plan that, among other things, will include stormwater management for the village's largely undeveloped west side, west of Interstate 57, said Kate Evasic, a CMAP planning associate who is working on the project.

With the expectation that land in that part of the village will be developed at some point, climate data and climate change information gathered during the study can be used to help craft a plan to guide it, she said.

Being part of the study "keeps us on the cutting edge," Richton Park Mayor Rick Reinbold said. With work on the stormwater plan getting under way, "the opportunity seemed like a logical next step. A lot of that area is in flood zones."

The five pilot communities will be urban and rural, essentially built-out and those with developable land, said James Schwab, manager of this project and manager of the American Planning Association's hazards planning center.

"Ultimately, we want to have some techniques and methods that are applicable throughout the Great Lakes region," he said.

The pilot towns are contributing staff time to gather information for the study, but no money, Schwab said. An advisory committee of experts from a variety of fields will meet quarterly as part of the process, he said.

Data provided by climatologists will tell researchers "what do we know (now) and what is reasonable to project in terms of climate conditions that will prevail in the next generation or two?" Schwab said.

While more frequent and prolonged periods of drought and a hotter climate in general are expected, more frequent and heavy storm events are also issues planners have to prepare for, said Bob Dean, CMAP's deputy executive director. Those storms that trigger severe flooding are "expected to only intensify," he said.

While infrastructure such as the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's Deep Tunnel system and its series of reservoirs have been valuable in containing stormwater, planners are looking to incorporate more "natural infrastructure or green infrastructure" in developments, Dean said. That could include permeable pavement, which allows water to pass through rather than run off, or green roofs that have water-absorbing vegetation, he said.

When it comes to implementing any recommendations from the research project, the scope and cost will require a high level of "regional cooperation," Schwab said.

"None of these communities is going to solve a problem of this nature by itself," he said.

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