

Growth needs to be more sustainable, experts say at Aurora forum

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The divide between planning locally and regionally was the center of conversation this week at a forum in Aurora.

Some members of the panel said the problem is that regional planning doesn't have enough teeth and is often at odds with local planning.

Chuck Marohn, a professional engineer and president of Small Towns, a nonprofit advocate for financially strong communities, said the problem is that officials are often "anti-growth on a local level but pro-growth at the regional level."

"You have to sit back and realize they are at odds," he said. "Regional planning is often an exercise in wishful thinking. It does not work at the block level. Maybe we should start at the block level, see what works there, and work up."

It was perhaps ironic that Marohn made his comments at a forum convened by the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning](#), the Northeastern Illinois agency most responsible for regional planning. CMAP held its forum, "Development at the Edge: The Future of Regional Urbanization," as part of its Go To 2050 forum series, at the Two Brothers Roundhouse in Aurora.

Curt Paddock, Will County's land use department director, also a member of the panel, said part of the problem is that regional planning organizations often "don't have any political legitimacy."

"The average person has no idea what CMAP stands for," Paddock said. "But they do have an idea what Bolingbrook is, they do have an idea what Will County is. All these are political subdivisions of the state."

Paddock suggested that there may need to be an actual mechanism that has authority over the existing boundaries of governments before anyone takes regional planning seriously.

"Maybe a more practical approach is to have a different level of government," he said.

He acknowledged that Illinois already has more governmental agencies than any other state, and he pointed out that 50 more communities have incorporated in the state since 2010.

Also part of this week's panel were Carolyn Schofield, a McHenry County Board member, and Collete English Dixon, an investment manager with a focus on real estate investment, from River Grove. They agreed that planning is starting to adjust to the up-and-coming generations, particularly the millennials.

Marohn said the newer generations, while still indulging in the personal transportation the car offers, are making lifestyle choices making them "less culturally enamored with the automobile."

What that has meant is more planning toward redevelopment of older areas, particularly the older "ring" suburbs closer to Chicago. Dixon, who lives in such a suburb, said studies have shown that 52 percent of people want to live in a suburban environment but want some of the amenities of urban areas, such as public transit.

"They don't want to drive everywhere," she said.

Marohn said the problem with the style of development often associated with the post World War II era is that it is no longer sustainable.

"Cities were able to grow very, very quickly, and it helped the economy, but the cities also took on long-term liability," he said. "They've taken on more liability than they can support. They cannot fix what they have in the ground."

Schofield agreed, saying traditional development in McHenry County "is creating a significant burden."

Paddock was more skeptical about attitudes of new generations or new planning approaches and programs changing development.

"Having gone to these types of seminars for 40 years and hearing these discussions, I have come to believe that the only thing that will do that is \$5-a-gallon gasoline."

He added that the biggest change in development came about because of the recession, "more than any program initiative."

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