

# Chicago group warns population losses may be hurting suburban economy

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By Cole Lauterbach | Illinois News

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Network

A planning agency is warning that the suburban business environment might be starting to slow down, but locals are skeptical.

The suburban counties are typically seen as one of the most economically stable parts of Illinois. But the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is warning that recent population losses may be causing that economic engine to sputter. CMAP is regional planning agency serving the northeastern Illinois counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will.

Cook County saw a total population loss of more than 20,000, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released last month. DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties are now experiencing net negative domestic migration as well. That's different from total population change, which factors in births and immigration. Kane, Will, McHenry and Kendall saw small gains in total population. The organization's report said the growth and economic viability could be affected if the losses persist.

"While it is typical for older metropolitan areas to lose residents to other U.S. regions, the persistent, growing outmigration from all of the region's counties is concerning," according to the report.

Elizabeth Schuh, CMAP principal policy analyst, said Chicagoans typically have moved to the suburbs, but that trend has begun to taper, leading to overall losses.

"When we see a population loss not just from the core county, but many of the adjacent counties, that's when we start to see overall small population losses in the Chicago region," she said.

For state Sen. Linda Holmes, D-Aurora, population loss is always a cause for concern. However, the local economy in her area is still on the upswing, she said.

"I'm seeing a lot more space for people to move into being created and little difficulty with people filling that," she said. "We have also seen a lot of new businesses moving into the area."

State Sen. Tom Rooney, R-Palatine, said the suburbs are having trouble attracting youth into the area over the allure of the urban Chicago lifestyle. When those families eventually seek out that quiet suburban cul-de-sac, Rooney says property taxes are a huge hurdle in convincing them to buy in the suburbs.

“It really makes them swallow hard and have to make some tough decisions,” he said.

The suburban region did, however, gain higher-income residents last year.

CMAP is in the process of creating a plan that addresses many of these problems that the area could face in the coming years. The agency's “On to 2050” plan will be released in October.