



Regional Planning Board – Planning & Priorities Committee

A Discussion MarySue Barrett, President, Metropolitan Planning Council

May 10, 2006

I. Breadth of the Regional Planning Board's Charge

The formation of the Regional Planning Board last year created an historic opportunity for Northeastern Illinois to seize its potential. By making the most of NIPC's land use and natural resources planning capabilities and CATS' transportation modeling, we can ensure that we get more out of our infrastructure investments and create more attractive communities.

One of the many reasons that municipalities have increasingly supported the integration of transportation and land use planning is that the number of subjects that they must address regionally has expanded. Separated land use patterns and population growth are encouraging local mayors and managers to search for fresh approaches to increasingly complex growth management challenges. The Regional Planning Board should reflect this increasing complexity in the scope of its issue jurisdiction.

Research on the breadth of local concerns as well as the practices of other metropolitan planning organizations and cooperative development efforts across the country suggests that there is a strong interest, precedent, and need for the Regional Planning Board to organize itself around providing guidance on the following sensible growth issues (included are examples of those subject areas that MPC has worked most closely on):

- **Land use planning, transportation investment and travel options**
 - *Freight* – The RPB should integrate regional freight planning into its comprehensive transportation and land use planning process that already includes transit, roads, walking facilities, and bicycling facilities.
 - *Comprehensive planning* – With the pending 2040 Regional Transportation Plan, the region has the opportunity to finally unify the process of land use and transportation planning, ensuring issues like workforce housing, transit oriented development, efficiencies of transportation investments, and natural resource protection are all brought together in a single plan, where long range policies determine the framework for priorities and spending. A transparent process that consistently applies evaluation criteria is needed so that communities understand

how their local policies interact with regional priorities and decision-making and the public can easily understand how they can participate in the process.

- *State capital plan* – An anticipated debate in early 2007 on the next state capital investment package is a very near-term opportunity to lead advocacy for dollars being prioritized for those projects consistent with the region’s vision for balanced growth.
- Land use planning, housing options, and balanced development
 - *Employer-assisted housing* – Over 50 Illinois employers have already found it to be a valuable tool to help their workers live closer to their jobs while saving on bottom line costs. The RPB could institutionalize and market this public-private partnership to more employers.
 - *Workforce housing* – There are a number of new laws to help preserve affordable housing options for working families. Two from this spring:
 - Comprehensive Housing Planning Act transforms the state's first housing policy, created through executive order in 2003, into a law requiring state departments such as Human Services, Transportation, Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and others to work together with the Illinois Housing Development Authority and municipalities to ensure that all relevant state and local plans and budgets are coordinated to advance the preservation and creation of affordable, workforce housing. The Regional Planning Board needs to help define the region’s housing needs for the state.
 - The Location Matters Act provides incentives for employers to consider and invest in housing options for the local workforce. The RPB can help define needed incentives and prod the state to deliver and market the program to employers.
 - *Rental housing* – The new Rental Housing Initiative provides for 2,800 regional households annually financial incentives (via operating subsidies) to developers and owners of quality rental housing, addressing two pressing issues that resurfaced in recent census findings and reports: the shortage of quality, mixed-income rental housing located near jobs and transit, and the scarcity of housing affordable to households earning less than fifty percent of the area's median income. The Regional Planning Board can help devise a coordinated application process to disburse those funds.
- Natural resources and water (including open space, water supply, waste water treatment, and stormwater)
 - *Scenario planning* – The RPB has an opportunity to use scenario planning to link natural resource planning to transportation and other capital programs, including housing and economic development.

- *Technical resource* – The RPB’s planning legacy from NIPC positions itself as an objective, regional coordinating agency for both technical resources and natural resource planning. It’s a niche that no other agency currently has the depth and breath and is absolutely needed. Traditional services needed include:
 - *Facility planning* – Managing the facility plan area process in the region under contract from the state. A survey done by MPC last year demonstrated that nearly all municipalities had adopted the basic stormwater, runoff and sedimentation ordinances that NIPC advises, mostly as a direct result of the FPA process, while few municipalities in the outer ring of counties (beyond the RPB’s current scope) had adopted these ordinances. Also, to what extent should FPA boundaries for sewer extensions be linked to road, transit and other capital infrastructure?
 - *Water supply planning* – Regional water supply planning. NIPC has produced a regional water supply plan approximately every decade since its formation. The State of Illinois’ Executive Order 2006-1 establishes a new framework for regional water supply planning in Illinois. A total of \$1.05 million was allocated in the recently passed budget to update the science and data at the state level, with \$400,000 in direct grants to regional water supply planning in northern Illinois and central Illinois. County leaders have met several times over the spring and are coming to consensus that the Regional Planning Board should coordinate this process for northeast Illinois. MPC’s recent “Troubled Waters” report highlights the threats to long-term access to the quality and quantity of water we need. Armed with this information, the RPB can help chart a more sustainable course.
 - *Natural resource and greenways planning* – NIPC has had a strong technical and objective role in convening, partnering and staffing a number of natural resource initiatives over the years, including greenways initiatives and several projects with the Campaign for Sensible Growth and Chicago Wilderness. NIPC co-chairs the Campaign for Sensible Growth and has participated in the development of resources including “Sensible Tools for Healthy Communities,” and the soon to be released “Planning 123 series.” CATS has been a major resource on biking, trails, and other green transportation initiatives. The future participation of RPB in civic collaborations deserves careful thought.
- Research, data and analysis of metropolitan growth
 - *Knowledge source* – There is a dizzying amount of policy analysis on growth patterns and challenges. The RPB can cement its role as the regional resource by disseminating critical findings via Web site, invitation-only briefings, and public conferences. Fortunately, metropolitan Chicago has advanced from the mid 1990s, when we were still learning about our interdependence and the value of regional problem solving. Today, the critical need is to understand and plot a course to resolve challenges of immigration, ailing inner suburbs, water supply, educational attainment, and more.

II. Incentives

Simply merging two organizations that serve in an advisory capacity will not produce a new organization that offers the financial and technical assistance incentives to make coordinated regional planning a reality on the ground. The Regional Planning Board must be able to offer new, meaningful incentives for regional cooperation on capital planning and development decisions, while preserving the authority of local municipalities and public agencies.

Technical Assistance

- Many Chicago region communities need assistance with planning and development issues concerning specific policies or sites and often do not know where to go for help.
- Today, there is an array of technical assistance providers, including state agencies, universities, for-profit firms, and non-profit organizations—as well as NIPC and CATS—that offer various types of technical assistance, but there is no central source for the region’s local elected officials to learn about the types of available technical assistance or which organizations would best suit their needs.
- The Regional Planning Board could provide a valuable service to the region’s mayors by adding a clearinghouse function to its work plan that would help communities connect to the technical assistance they need at the local level.
- This central information source would build on the technical assistance resources that NIPC and CATS have provided to municipalities.
- The clearinghouse function could be carried out through outreach, such as an interactive Web site that would host links to technical assistance providers and information, and would require only a modest investment of staff time and resources.
- The RPB can both leverage the expertise of and provide leadership to an existing network of technical assistance providers:
 - Non-profits and universities have already agreed to coordinate internally- sharing information, policy recommendations, mapping; RPB could be the neutral convener.
 - RPB should help connect municipalities to the range of technical assistance providers with the appropriate expertise.
 - Analysis of this information will indicate “holes” in planning or technical assistance provision that either existing providers can satisfy, or that the RPB and the network of technical assistance providers can seek resources for and fill.
- The RPB should advocate with state officials to be the conduit of at least \$7 million of planning funds annually through dedicated funding for the Local Planning Technical Assistance Act.

Evaluation Criteria and Incentives

- Both the region and state need publicly approved, clear criteria for the selection of investment priorities. Municipalities and counties should be rewarded by the RPB and the

state for implementing policies and projects that are consistent with the adopted regional plan, and the RPB's decision-making should be transparent. We need to constantly promote the need and value of such criteria.

- The Regional Planning Board should help streamline regional and state programs, improve communication among state agencies and local governments in the region, and determine ways to offer financial and technical assistance incentives and regulatory relief to communities that develop capital projects and programs consistent with their local plans, regional land use and transportation plans, and Illinois Local Planning Technical Assistance Act.

Review of Capital Plans

- The Regional Planning Board should have the authority to review and comment on all state and regional capital plans and programs for consistency with the adopted regional plan. The Board can determine if a capital plan is consistent with regional transportation and land use plans and offer incentives, or withhold capital expenditures within its portfolio until projects are made consistent with the regional plans.

III. Public Accountability and Participation

The Regional Planning Board should be both an effective body and an accountable body that continually seeks cooperation and builds trust among local stakeholders, the public and communities – either large or small.

The Regional Planning Board is already required to create a Citizens' Advisory Committee to ensure a strong tie between Board policies and plans and the public interest. In addition, the Regional Planning Board should remain accountable to local stakeholders by involving the public in the creation of the regional indicators and evaluation criteria. The Board should also be required to report its progress to the General Assembly beginning in 2009.

The crucial question that the Regional Planning Board must answer is, “against what criteria should we be judged?” Of course, the answer will depend on the issue jurisdiction devised by the RPB and authorities granted to it by the General Assembly. As recommendations are refined and submitted to the legislature in Fall 2006, the Regional Planning Board should undertake a public process to create a set of regional indicators to:

- Provide accurate and trustworthy information and have the broadest possible “buy in.”
- Measure the results of specific regional actions and investments.
- Measure indicators of progress toward achieving the long term goals of the regional plan.

For example, consider:

- Urban footprint – extent of urbanization, population density, rate of undeveloped land conversion for urban uses, efficient land reuse
- Affordability index (% who can purchase median-priced home, households spending 31%+ on housing, income required for median priced home), median price/value
- Rental affordability index (by income, households spending 31%+ on housing), rental rates, vacancy rates, hourly wages needed
- Transportation work commute mode split (transit, car, walk, bike, etc)
- Freight mode split (rail, truck, water)
- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Transit ridership
- Average commute time/commute speed
- Days in violation of federal/state air quality standards, bad air days, ozone exposure
- Per capita water usage, urban water usage
- Solid waste generated/recycled/diversion
- Acres of open space/protected open space (includes farms as well as major protected habitats), land at risk, land trust holdings
- Job growth/labor force growth/employment trends overall, labor force participation rate