

Chicago Metropolis 2020

Overview

In 1996, The Commercial Club of Chicago, a membership organization of top business and civic leaders, launched the Metropolis Project, an effort to maintain the prosperity of the Chicago Metropolitan Region in the 21st century. The project's premise was that economic and quality of life issues facing Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Kane and Will counties are interdependent. More than 200 members of The Commercial Club formed committees to examine regional issues in six areas: education, economic development, taxation, governance, transportation and land use, and housing. The committees consulted with experts and met with regional community, civic and government representatives.

The culmination of their two-year effort was a report, "Chicago Metropolis 2020: Preparing Metropolitan Chicago for the 21st Century," released in 1999. A key recommendation called for the creation of a new organization, Chicago Metropolis 2020. Today, Chicago Metropolis 2020 implements the ideas contained in the report.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 is a business-led organization with a 47-member Board of Directors. A major theme in the organization's work is that current regional growth patterns are inefficient for business and inequitable for residents. Chicago Metropolis 2020 seeks to convince people that the way their region grows affects how they live and work. The group's regional priorities include housing, transportation and regionalism.

Regional Priorities

One of Metropolis' foremost regional priorities is housing. In 2002, Chicago Metropolis 2020 issued a 40-point Workforce Housing Action Agenda. It was the culmination of three years of coalition-building and research. The Agenda calls for local zoning reforms and increased emphasis on building code enforcement and property maintenance by local governments; increased state government assistance and rewards to communities that create a broad range of housing; expansion and improvement of federal programs to increase affordable housing; and corporate action to create workforce housing. Housing issues have traditionally been pushed by the advocates, but once the business community became involved, the issue drew more attention. "At first the housing advocates looked at Metropolis and thought 'Why are you involved?'" said Nancy Finfer, a senior executive at Chicago Metropolis 2020. "[They] had some skepticism because the advocates had been doing it for years without business involvement."

Metropolis has been able to persuade over 100 Chicago-area employers to sign the "Metropolis Principles for Livable Communities," a pledge to make access to affordable housing and mass transit a significant factor when making business location decisions.

AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

Chicago Metropolis 2020's emphasis on social equity has led to partnerships that might be unexpected for a business-led organization. Don Turner was President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, which represents over 300 Chicago-area labor unions, when Metropolis executives Frank Beal and George Ranney asked him to join the organization. Turner said the approach of the two men — both former senior executives in the steel industry — surprised him. He knew the Commercial Club, which gave rise to Chicago Metropolis 2020, had an anti-union history. But Turner listened when the Metropolis executives offered to pay a researcher of Turner's choice to prove that Metropolis' idea of "Smart Growth" was good for labor. And after Turner's researcher issued his report approving "Smart Growth," the Chicago Federation of Labor endorsed the concept and so did the national AFL-CIO. When Turner retired from the Federation of Labor, he took a part-time position at Metropolis 2020. He said he and Ranney have become good friends.

Some of the principles include consideration of locations for expansion that have zoning and codes that permit the construction of affordable housing as well as locations that have commuter rail or bus lines near work sites.

Metropolis has also worked to get affordable housing on the state agenda. Chicago Metropolis 2020, in partnership with the Metropolitan Planning Council and Business and Professionals for the Public Interest, successfully lobbied the Legislature and Governor to create an affordable housing task force. The task force is charged with adopting a statewide affordable housing plan.

Metropolis is also preparing a region-wide assessment of future housing needs compared to current expectations of housing supply.

A second regional priority has been transportation. Chicago Metropolis 2020 played an important role in creating a Regional Transportation Task Force to examine ways to improve the region's transportation and land use planning. Once it was created, Metropolis 2020 provided background material to task force members. Chicago Metropolis President and Chief Executive Officer George Ranney, Jr. told the task force in February 2004 that Chicago-area residents spend more time commuting than residents of any other region except New York. "We must transform the way we make transportation and land use decisions or else face regional gridlock on a scale that will starve our economy and compromise our quality of life," Ranney told the task force.

Metropolis 2020 has also worked hard promoting the interconnectedness of the region's city and 10 counties — a third area of priority for the organization. The Regional Learning program is a public outreach campaign based on the idea that a strong region requires communities to cooperate on issues that transcend local political boundaries. One initiative within this area is the *Metropolis Index*. Released each

year since 2001, the *Index* assesses the state of the region with data on housing, education, the economy, the environment and other measures. Don Turner, former President of the Chicago Federation of Labor who is now a Metropolis 2020 senior executive, said Metropolis has succeeded in raising the region's profile. "They have gotten people to talk about this region. Nobody talked about the region before," said Turner. "Before they were all thinking about the city or their own municipality."

Underlying Chicago Metropolis 2020's various efforts is a focus on social equity. This focus appears to have created strong relationships with regionally-focused faith-based and community organizers. It has also led to a partnership with the Chicago and Illinois Federations of Labor around smart growth issues. Metropolis has also made enemies, by assailing some entrenched regional functions. For example, Chicago Metropolis 2020 has recommended dismantling regional transportation and planning organizations and has criticized the 'winner take all' mentality of the region's municipalities.

Structure and Operations

An Executive Council governs Chicago Metropolis 2020 and includes representatives from business, labor, civic, religious and governmental organizations. Half of the representatives on the Executive Council are members of The Commercial Club of Chicago. There are 47 Board members.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 has approximately 11 staff people — not including several volunteers — with an annual operating budget of \$2 to \$5 million. Top level staff at the organization are term-limited. An indication of Chicago Metropolis 2020's influence is its cadre of senior members of the business, civic and educational community. It calls this group its "senior executives." These high-powered leaders have agreed to volunteer a substantial portion of their time and energy in support of the Chicago Metropolis 2020's regional agenda. Many volunteer more than half of their time for Metropolis projects.

For example, the Chairman of Chicago Metropolis 2020, Donald G. Lubin, is a Partner and former Chairman of a Chicago-based law firm with offices in eight cities. The President and Chief Executive Officer of Metropolis, George A. Ranney Jr., is a former Vice President of Inland Steel Industries. Frank H. Beal, former President and Chief Executive of Ryerson International, is the Executive Director. Chicago Metropolis 2020 also counts among its senior executives the retired President of the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the former Director of the Primary Care Institute at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, the former President and Chief Executive of the multinational Pittway Corporation, and the former President of Governors State University.