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A Coordinated Approach: Creating the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Transportation and land use shape the regional landscape. Yet, for most of the twentieth century, planning for these interrelated issues was led independently through two separate entities: the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). The result was inefficient and unsustainable.

Recognizing the threats this separation posed to the region's quality of life and economic growth, Metropolis 2020 drove legislation that created a single regional planning agency. Upon passage, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) was born, setting the foundation for a coordinated approach to regional policy and planning in northeastern Illinois. Civic Consulting Alliance and four private sector partners were there to stand it up.

Today, CMAP is a nationally-recognized

leader in regional planning, helping Chicagoland's 284 communities address the most important issues affecting our region in transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment and quality of life.

Challenge

During the last half of the twentieth century, the Chicagoland region grew in often uncoordinated and unsustainable ways. New homes cropped up in areas inaccessible by public transit, increasing congestion. Meanwhile, rapid consumption of land had serious implications for natural resources, air quality and open space. While regional planning organizations like the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) focused on transportation, and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) concentrated on land use, their policies were unable to meet the region's growing needs, as they were addressing two inextricably-linked issues separately.

Recognizing that coordination was one key to sustainable growth, Metropolis 2020 and Chicago's civic leaders developed a vision to

create a unified regional planning council for transportation and land use. To achieve this, the Illinois General Assembly passed a law consolidating CATS and NIPC into a newly formed body: the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the official regional planning organization for Cook, Lake, Will, McHenry, Kane, DuPage, and Kendall Counties.

Awards Received by CMAP

- Smart Growth Achievement award for a Policy, Program or Plan – Environmental Protection Agency, 2014
- National Planning Excellence Award for a Planning Agency – American Planning Association, 2013
- Chicago Vision Award – Urban Land Institute, 2013
- MPC Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning Metropolitan Planning Council, 2012
- Transportation Planning Excellence Award – Transportation Research Board, Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration, 2012
- Transportation Research Board Community Concepts with John and Jane Q. Public Award – Transportation Research Board, 2011

While this was a crucial step, the work didn't end there. To ensure this merger was enacted thoughtfully and effectively, the agencies needed help, and Civic Consulting was uniquely situated to ensure it was done right.

Action

With support from the MacArthur Foundation, Civic Consulting and pro bono partners Mercer Consulting, Mayer Brown, McKinsey & Company and EWK International got to work. Mercer Consulting created an organizational structure that included a single planning department to allow CMAP to focus on both transit and land use, and created roadmaps for merging support departments such as HR, IT and Finance. Mayer Brown developed the internal infrastructure to be successful, drafting its bylaws, recommending organizational best practices and navigating some of the complexities of the new legislation. McKinsey provided strategic planning advice and coached the newly-established board on how to articulate the unified vision and integrated governance structure, while EWK recruited a new executive director. By the time the project was complete, CMAP was a clearly-defined organization with bylaws, a governance structure, branding and a new executive director. Moreover, Civic Consulting and its partners facilitated this smooth transition 18 months ahead of schedule.

Results

Since 2005, CMAP has been at the forefront of regional planning. CMAP's GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan addresses the anticipated population growth of more than two million new residents in our region. GO TO 2040 outlines coordinated strategies around transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment and other quality of life issues for all the communities it serves. In 2014, GO TO 2040 was awarded the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Ten years after its inception, CMAP has been recognized as a national leader in regional planning, with awards from the American Planning Association, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration and Transportation Research Board. Thanks to the support from Civic Consulting Alliance and its partners, CMAP has the foundation to address some of Chicagoland's biggest challenges and improve the sustainability and quality of life of our region.

Pro Bono Partners

EWK International

Mayer Brown

McKinsey & Company

Mercer Consulting