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---

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---

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---

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---

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---

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---

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---

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### Planning as a way of life

By Patrick T. Reardon on Tue., 10/19/2009 –8:11 am.

#### *Second of two*

In 1909, civic leaders developed the Plan of Chicago to cope with the city's immense but problem-filled success. More recently, Orland Park had a similar problem --- and came up with a similar solution.

Chicago's dilemma was that it had grown so fast --- and so chaotically --- that it was strangling itself.

It was a city that had just sort of happened. Even the Great Fire of 1871 was just a minor blip in the city's ever-more-profitable commerce. The population was growing by leaps and bounds, but no one was in control. In the early 1900s, the central business district was hemmed in --- by the Chicago River on the north and west, by the Illinois Central tracks on the east (photo at right) and by more railroad tracks on the south.



So, yes, the Burnham Plan, named for its chief author Daniel Burnham, was influential in creating Chicago's lakefront park system and making the city a more beautiful place.

But, for the business leaders who bankrolled it, other less-evident provisions helped break the constricting collar around downtown:

--- A bridge extending Michigan Avenue across the river which led to the creation of the Magnificent Mile shopping district on the Near North Side.

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### ABOUT THIS BLOG

This blog is about history, planning and the future. It's rooted in the recognition that we live in a world that is created by plans – and by the failure to make plans. [\[MORE\]](#)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Patrick T. Reardon](#) is a Chicagoan, born and bred. He has been writing about the city, its region and planning issues, mainly in the Chicago Tribune, for nearly 40 years. [\[MORE\]](#)

--- The two-level Wacker Drive, a proto-beltway around the Loop, permitting quick movement from one end to the other and, on its lower level, permitting deliveries to be made without blocking traffic.

--- A straightening of the south branch of the river, which opened the way many decades later the development of the South Loop.

### **“A gigantic impact”**

Success was also the “problem” in Orland Park --- the success of the Orland Square Mall which opened in 1976 at the corner of 151st Street and LaGrange Road.

“That shopping mall had a gigantic impact on the town,” says Steve Reardon, a Lemont-based architect who has worked in and around Orland Park for the past quarter century. “It wrested control of the town from the way it had been growing and refocused it on the commercial strip. It took 20 years to gain control back. A lot of their planning became defensive.”

On the plus side, the mall provided so much tax revenue to the village that Orland Park has had a full-time planning staff since the mid-1980s.

“Planning here is definitely part of the way we think,” says village planning director Robert Sullivan.

Of course, Orland Park isn’t alone. Many suburban and suburban county leaders put a high premium on planning. But not all. “It varies dramatically from community to community,” says Reardon. “Other communities have done a lot less. Then you’re being controlled by your growth.”

Without advance planning, builders can come in and, in many ways, dictate how land will be developed. By contrast, if village officials have detailed plans in place, they can “fine-tune” what’s done with the land, he says.

### **Aggressively collaborative**

Some of Orland Park’s emphasis on planning is rooted in the legacy of the Plan of Chicago, such as the document’s proposal for a Cook County Forest Preserve District.

“We’re surrounded by forest preserves, and that colors what’s going on here,” Sullivan says. “There is a particularly heavy focus on the environment and open space. That’s one of the bases for the quality of life here.” For instance, the village has an open space plan, and has a \$20-million initiative to buy natural areas,

above and beyond parkland. Already 280 acres of such natural areas have been obtained.

Even more, the village uses planning to have a stronger say in what will be built and how it will look.

“We’re very aggressive in being collaborative in the design of each development,” says Sullivan. “We’ll work on site plans with the developer. We’ll work on the architecture with them. It’s important that the design fits our goals.”

As I described in my last post, the village is using its planning expertise and power to develop a new downtown and a new identity. Meanwhile, it’s taken a creative approach to water quality improvements --- with the result that the village now has eight waterfalls as part of its aeration system.

#### **“Almost always harder”**

Being innovative doesn’t have to be more expensive, but Sullivan notes, “It’s almost always harder to do it this way.”

Yet, the results are worth it --- eight waterfalls rather than some concrete conduits, for instance.

“A lot of things, if you look at them and plan ahead and everyone talks to each other, look what you can get then,” Sullivan says.

“If you don’t, you miss the boat.”