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### The next Burnham is.....you

By Patrick T. Reardon on Mon, 12/07/2009 – 8:28 am.

My initial plan for this final installment of the Burnham Blog was to argue that Mayor Richard M. Daley could be the next Daniel Burnham.

Daley controls Chicago, of course. He is also a growing force among suburban mayors. He respects them, and they respect him.

They know that he, like they, grapples every day with an overwhelmingly array of challenges ranging from public transit service to violence, from a sagging “grey” infrastructure to a fading “green” infrastructure, from housing patterns to zoning issues, from energy to elections to the environment to education.

But, unlike his suburban counterparts, Daley runs a city of nearly 2.9 million people. No one else comes close. So he wields an unparalleled influence.

Which means that, if he wants to, he could get behind the GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan that is now being prepared, and basically ensure its acceptance.

That plan is being put together by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), and its final version will go to the CMAP board next fall. Of the 15 members of that board, five are Daley appointees.

CMAP actions require 12 of the 15 board votes. And the fear is that attempts to produce and implement a plan with teeth to guide development in the region over the next 30 years will be undercut by politics.

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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. [\[MORE\]](#)

Well, Daley could do a lot to make sure that won't happen if he embraces the idea of CMAP. If he lobbies for the GO TO 2040 plan. If he puts his immense political and governmental might behind the effort to plan for the region in a holistic manner.

I hope he does.

### **Not the key person**

So, yeah, Daley could be the next Burnham. But, as I thought this through, I realized that he's not the key person.

You are.

You can be the next Burnham. You should be.

We've spent a year celebrating the 100th anniversary of the publication of the Plan of Chicago, written by Burnham and co-author Edward Bennett.

It's known as the Burnham Plan. And Burnham certainly was a moving force, a guiding spirit and a visionary presence behind the Plan.

But the reality is that there wasn't just one Burnham.

Edward Bennett and all the other planners and architects who worked to create the plan and then bring its proposals into being were Burnhams.

The generations of politicians who bought into it --- yes, even the corrupt aldermen Mike "Hinky Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse" John Coughlin --- were Burnhams.

So were the publicity geniuses who explained the Plan to the public. And the business leaders and civic activists who formed the Chicago Plan Commission and did the detail work to translate Burnham's visions into concrete and steel.

So too were the millions of Chicagoans who took the Plan to heart. School children, for decades, learned about the importance of the Plan and their role in making the city better through a civics textbook in the public schools, "Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago."

And, over and over again, their parents endorsed the Plan --- with their votes and their taxes.

Historian Carl Smith reports that, between 1912 and 1931, Chicagoans approved 86 Plan-related bond issues, costing a total of \$234 million. That's the equivalent of about \$4 billion today.

### **The same thing**

The same thing will happen now. Or it won't.

There isn't going to be one person to make regional planning succeed next year and in the decades to come, even if someone, like Daley, emerges as the major supporter of the idea.

No, if we are to look into the future and decide how we want our lives and the lives of our children to be better, it will take all of us. Together.

You can be a new Burnham if you put a rain garden in your backyard to help protect the region's green infrastructure.

You can be a new Burnham if you support efforts to bring a wide mix of housing to many areas --- so that people, whatever their jobs, can live near where they work.

You can be a new Burnham if you find ways to walk more or bike or use public transportation instead of getting the car out of the garage.

And you can be a new Burnham --- whether you live in Country Club Hills or Antioch or the Edison Park neighborhood of Chicago or the Chatham community on the city's South Side or Lake Forest or Elburn or Berwyn or Port Barrington --- if you support public leaders who support CMAP and its efforts.

Or not.

### **Your choice**

If you don't do it, it won't happen.

And, if it doesn't happen, our future will be left to chance. Things will get better or worse --- by accident. By the random clashing of our parochial interests. By the pressures of pressure groups, by the lobbying of lobbyists.

So, yeah, it's your choice.

And it's a heady one.

You can make history. You can be a leader. You can take part in a major shifting in the way things are done in this region.

And, a century from now, who knows, maybe someone like me will be writing something about you.

It's your choice.