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Chicago Needs to Reinvigorate Its Planning Efforts

New book examines Chicago's descent from an iconic city with "big plans" to a city struggling to plan with confidence.

CHICAGO — *Planning Chicago*, a new book from the American Planning Association, explores how planning made Chicago into a world-class city and looks at the present-day challenges that must be addressed to keep the city from failing. Where did planning steer the city right, where did it fail, and where was it ignored? Most important, what does planning have to offer the city today?

Available April 4, 2013, *Planning Chicago* does not shy away from examining the efforts that worked to save Chicago, and those that have fallen short from the postwar period to the present day. It is written by D. Bradford Hunt, associate professor of Social Science and History at Roosevelt University, and Jon B. DeVries, AICP, director of the Marshall Bennett Institute of Real Estate at Roosevelt University.

Hunt and DeVries write that the city is not planning well for its future. They caution that the lack of planning today will severely impact the city's infrastructure, future population and tax revenues. To reinvigorate planning in Chicago, the authors identify five areas for immediate action:

1. **Increase transit capacity** — Improve mobility into and out of the city, as well as around the city.
2. **Retain and attract new populations** — The Census shows that Chicago is losing population. Through planning, the city can retain existing citizens and attract new citizens, especially by focusing on Chicago's neighborhoods.
3. **Recalibrate the industrial corridor** — Due to the continued decline of available manufacturing jobs, changes in the city's industrial policy are necessary to match job prospects in sectors such as health care, education, logistics and support businesses.
4. **Implement existing plans** — Revisit, update and implement the goals and unfinished recommendations of a half-century of existing plans to keep the city positioned as a global competitor.
5. **Make planning matter** — Strengthen the city's planning efforts and begin to plan with confidence once again.

Hunt and DeVries write that the city has a great legacy of planning, but now the city is planning without confidence. The authors point out that the city lacks a department with the name "planning" and the last comprehensive plan was written more than 40 years ago.

While the city avoided the tailspin that the *Chicago Tribune* predicted in its 1982 series "City on the Brink," the city's planning efforts have been replaced with piecemeal, ad hoc and volunteer planning efforts. Further complicating planning efforts is the city's strong reliance on Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

The authors write, "Chicago has embraced TIFs more than any other city in America. As of 2011, Chicago has 163 active TIF districts covering 30 percent of the area of the city and encompassing roughly 10 percent of its property tax base. While the projects funded by TIFs are often reasonable and beneficial, the fracturing of capital planning into individual districts has prevented a citywide discussion of priorities."

Hunt and DeVries acknowledge that "Chicago *can* plan, quite effectively at times, and it can even find ways to implement its good ideas." And as the authors discuss in *Planning Chicago*, it's time for the city to stop reacting and to start planning with confidence once again.

Planning Chicago (ISBN: 978-1-61190-080-4) is the second in a series of Planners Press books that looks at a major American city. It is immediately available from APAPanningBooks.com for \$34.95 (\$24.95 for APA members). The authors also will be speaking at **APA's National Planning Conference** on April 14, 2013, in Chicago. Visit the **Meet the Authors page** for other upcoming author speaking events. Media review copies are available by contacting Roberta Rewers at rrwers@planning.org.

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