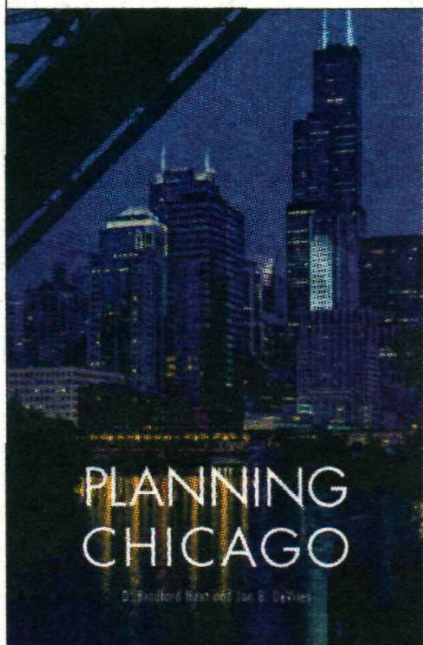


NEW EDITION OF ESSENTIAL "PLANNING CHICAGO"
CALLS FOR A RETURN TO "BIG IDEAS"



Bring Back the Big Picture

By Alan Mammoser

ANYONE WHO WANTS TO SEE HOW GOOD CITY PLANNING HAS HELPED Chicago—and if done right, how it can help the city again—should read Jon DeVries and D. Bradford Hunt's "Planning Chicago." The authors repeatedly make the following point: "The city that once embraced Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's 1909 Plan of Chicago no longer plans confidently." They call for a new comprehensive plan for Chicago, one that sees the city as a whole and receives strong support from political leaders at all levels.

The authors are well placed to make a convincing argument. DeVries, now director of the Marshall Bennett Institute of Real Estate at Roosevelt University, shares deep insights from his thirty years on Chicago's planning scene. He consulted on the Central Area Plan (2003), the Central Area Action Plan (2009), development plans for the Lake Calumet area and much more. Hunt, who is vice president for research and academic programs at the Newberry Library, brings a strong research acumen to the book. He is author of the book "Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing." "Planning Chicago" was republished in electronic format this summer.

DeVries and Hunt recount much of Chicago's storied past in city planning, even while they decry the lack of will to implement big plans in recent decades. They weave their critique into an interesting historical narrative that skillfully ties descriptions of plans to the people and politics behind them.

The story revolves around the poles of the two mayor Daleys, while also highlighting Mayor Harold Washington's "equity planning moment" between them. The Richard J. Daley administration. Daley pushed aside the old Chicago Plan Commission (a civic body founded forty years before to implement the Burnham Plan) and created a new planning department in City Hall, which during the fifties and sixties produced downtown plans in concert with a "growth coalition" of developers and business leaders.

These were bold plans that helped to slow and reverse the central area's decay and, through the course of five decades, secured the place of downtown Chicago as a major global center.

While the authors hail this success, they don't hesitate to point out what was left behind. Many of the city's outer neighborhoods suffered from decades of job loss, population loss and seemingly intractable social problems. Through several chapters, the authors show how community planning arose to combat these problems. They look at the very different neighborhoods of Englewood, Uptown and Little Village to see what's worked and what hasn't, and they examine the relative success of efforts to defend the city's industrial base through sector-based strategies initiated by Washington.

The often perceived contest in Chicago planning between downtown and neighborhoods is declared by the authors to be a false dichotomy. "The neighborhoods need a vibrant downtown to generate employment and tax revenue to fund neighborhood services...Further, despite perceptions of neglect, much public investment has gone into Chicago's poor communities. The 'downtown versus the neighborhoods' formulation implies a simple trade-off, but the city's ecosystems are more complex."

What most concerns the authors is the lack of effective comprehensive planning for the city as a whole, especially during the past thirty years under Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emanuel. "Instead of a plan," they write, "Chicago now has a collection of more than 150 TIFs (Tax Increment Financing districts) plus other ad hoc area plans, some of which are impressive but remain largely disconnected." The authors assert that this lack of effective comprehensive planning has led to numerous missed opportunities for Chicago.

They demonstrate how the Central Area Plan of 2003, which called for major upgrades to the city's transit system, has been largely neglected while mayors and aldermen have focused on one-off projects financed by TIF. The neglect of comprehensive planning became so bad that by the end of Daley's administration in 2011 the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) had actually been dissolved.

In a recent blog post for the American Planning Association, Hunt and DeVries point out that DPD was quietly reconstituted by Mayor Emanuel in 2014. They also applaud the city's new effort to organize and catalogue plans large and small, making these available on a very useful "Neighborhoods Now" website.

Despite these gains, they decry a continuing lack of bold, comprehensive planning for the city. They write: "The Emanuel administration keeps tight control over large and visible efforts while assigning DPD local-level planning—largely regulatory and zoning matters and aldermanic requests, as (Daley) had."

DeVries and Hunt assert that this is hurting the city as a whole. The sad result, they conclude, is that Chicago's remaking as a global city is only half finished. Meanwhile, other global cities such as Toronto are implementing plans and pressing ahead with impressive transit, housing and infrastructure programs.

Now in a new edition as an e-book, "Planning Chicago" continues to be helpful to all who care about the future of this great city.