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Planning Chicago



Synopsis

Urban planning might have been born in Chicago ("Make no little plans"), but that was more than a century ago, in a very different city. Today's city is not the product of Daniel Burnham, the White City, or Mrs. O'Leary's cow. It's the Rust Belt Metropolis That Could — the one that has not only thrived but shouldered its way onto the list of global cities. But what did planning have to do with it? 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? In *Planning Chicago*, Hunt and DeVries tell the real stories of the planners, politicians, and everyday people who shaped contemporary Chicago, starting in 1958, early in the Richard J. Daley era. Over the ensuing decades, planning did much to develop the Loop, protect Chicago's famous lakefront, and encourage industrial growth and neighborhood development in the face of national trends that savaged other cities. But planning also failed some of Chicago's communities and did too little for others. The Second City is no longer defined by its past and its myths but by the nature of its emerging postindustrial future. *Planning Chicago* looks beyond Burnham's giant shadow to see the sprawl and scramble of a city always on the make. This isn't the way other history books tell the story. But it's the Chicago way.

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Customer Reviews

Planning Chicago follows in the tradition of Burnham and Bennett's Plan of Chicago. Hunt and DeVries examine in detail plans for the central business district and its expansion over the encircling railroad tracks; top-down and bottom-up programs for the neighborhoods; industrial corridor programs to maintain manufacturing and promote high tech in a post-industrial economy; and the evolution of the city's intermodal transportation network. Despite over 70 plans identified, Chicago has not developed a comprehensive plan since 1966 and has not implemented the vast majority of those subsequently researched and crafted. The authors attribute this in part to changing conceptions of urban planning but more to the challenge that planning poses to mayoral discretion, alderman prerogative and NIMBYism. Hunt and DeVries' discussion of the interaction between growth in the urban core (again expanding) and the neighborhoods (some in serious distress) clearly illustrates the link between the core as a source of revenue and employment and the neighborhoods as the locus of a workforce and consumers. Their discussion of recent plans to promote ease of movement within the central business district illustrates the relationships between time, space, and enhancement versus constraint on CBD economic sustainability. The American Planning Association and the publication's sponsors have produced a glossy and richly illustrated volume. The graphs, maps and photographs add substantial value to Planning Chicago and would make it a most attractive work in digital media. I highly recommend this book to readers with interest in Chicago, urban planning and urban economics and to faculty teaching undergraduate or graduate courses on these topics.

DeVries and Hunt have created a lucid explanation of the planning (and at times lack of planning) in Chicago over the past seventy plus years. While recognizing successes that have allowed Chicago to emerge as a global city, the text clarifies a complex subject without oversimplification, while weaving a strong narrative that clarifies the players and their roles in the development of Chicago following World War II. I appreciate the organization the authors have used to educate the reader in understanding the problems faced by the city. The authors illuminate the various positions taken by the city's many players, and the plans and strategies developed by these persons at different times in the city's history and, when applicable, the outcome of these plans.

Following this explanation of the problems, players, and plans the text shifts to three neighborhoods, adding depth by exploring the unique difficulties faced by these communities and the manners in which they have responded to their issues such as economic change, depopulation, racial demographic change and the political landscape which affects these communities. DeVries and Hunt then present specific issues that afford a holistic understanding of the fundamental planning aspects that must be addressed including, post industrial strategies, tourism, transportation, etc. This book is now a required text for my students studying urban design in Chicago.

This history of Chicago city planning since the 1960's - essentially, of the city's growing neglect of planning since then - is demonstrably serving as a wake-up call to Chicago as the city strives, at the eleventh hour, to address multiple social and economic crises stemming in large measure from the city's neglect of . . . city planning. In a recent editorial, the Chicago Tribune quoted the book's central argument to make the case for its own Daniel Burnham-inspired* New Plan of Chicago: "Major plans from recent years have been largely ignored and 'deal making' has replaced structured planning processes. Planning has been too often demoted and replaced by one-off projects." This politically correct language quietly speaks truth to power. To back it up, streetwise researchers Hunt and De Vries offer a goldmine of evidence drawn from primary and secondary sources and from their own long associations with planners and players of the grand old game of Chicago politics. The book's measured tone and its factual content make it ideal for college classes, as one reviewer here is doing. It's also a book, as other reviewers suggest, that current planners would do well to get under their belts before moving forward on the planning front. Chock full of lessons learned the hard way, it will help planners plan sensibly, avoid errors and secure realistic objectives. The book is beautifully organized. It gives the reader easy access to any particular plan or decade of interest. Indeed it's just plain beautiful, with all of the full-color photos, maps, charts, graphs and fancy graphics you'd expect in a fancy oversize cocktail table book (ideal format for future editions?). I looked in vain, however, for an update on the current state of planning in Chicago, with attention to the three Burnham-inspired Plans of Chicago that are now on the table: those of Metropolis Strategies (Chicago 2020), the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (GOTO2040) and the Tribune's New Plan of Chicago. I'd also love to see Hunt and De Vries weigh in specifically on the critical question of integrated city/suburban planning.* For non-Chicagoans: Burnham's celebrated 1909 Plan of Chicago gave the city its glorious lakefront and many of the parks, boulevards and civic buildings that make Chicago a world-class city today.

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