



Forecaster

Michael Dunn, Jr.

Executive Director, REGION 1 PLANNING COUNCIL

Planning for tomorrow, funding it and providing necessary information to meet future needs are all in a day's work for Michael Dunn, Jr., executive director of the Region 1 Planning Council. This multi-jurisdictional government agency assists municipalities in Winnebago, Boone, Stephenson and McHenry Counties with regional planning, grant services, economic development assistance, geographic information, research and analytics

"The goal of the Region 1 Planning Council is to focus on three areas: long-term planning, federal and state funding opportunities for local government and creating a data-rich environment. This provides elected and appointed policy makers with good, reliable localized data as they set priorities for future growth," he said.

One highly successful tool the Region 1 Planning Council utilizes for economic revitalization is the Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority. Properties in the Land Bank Authority are typically value diminished with liens and liabilities that make them unsalable in the private market. "If the court system deems a privately owned property to be abandoned, then the Land Bank can assist in removal of the back taxes, which allows a free and clear title to be issued in a judicial deed. The Land Bank is a mechanism where these abandoned properties can be inventoried, listed and sold," Dunn said.

"The Land Bank has been a great economic development apparatus and a way to grow our area's tax base. When an investment is made in a neighborhood and a new owner fixes up a previously abandoned property, it raises the property values throughout the entire neighborhood," he said. "We're receiving calls from city officials in other areas of the state and out-of-state, who are enamored with the success that we've had on Land Bank properties. We have been asked to consult with other municipalities on how those communities could also set up a Land Bank."

Dunn sees the Region 1 Planning Council's work as paramount to a vibrant, thriving community. "Every day we are working on different projects, from energy resiliency to environmental sustainability to the Land Bank to the future of transportation. We speak with a regional voice that stresses continued and future economic development."

By Lynne Conner

