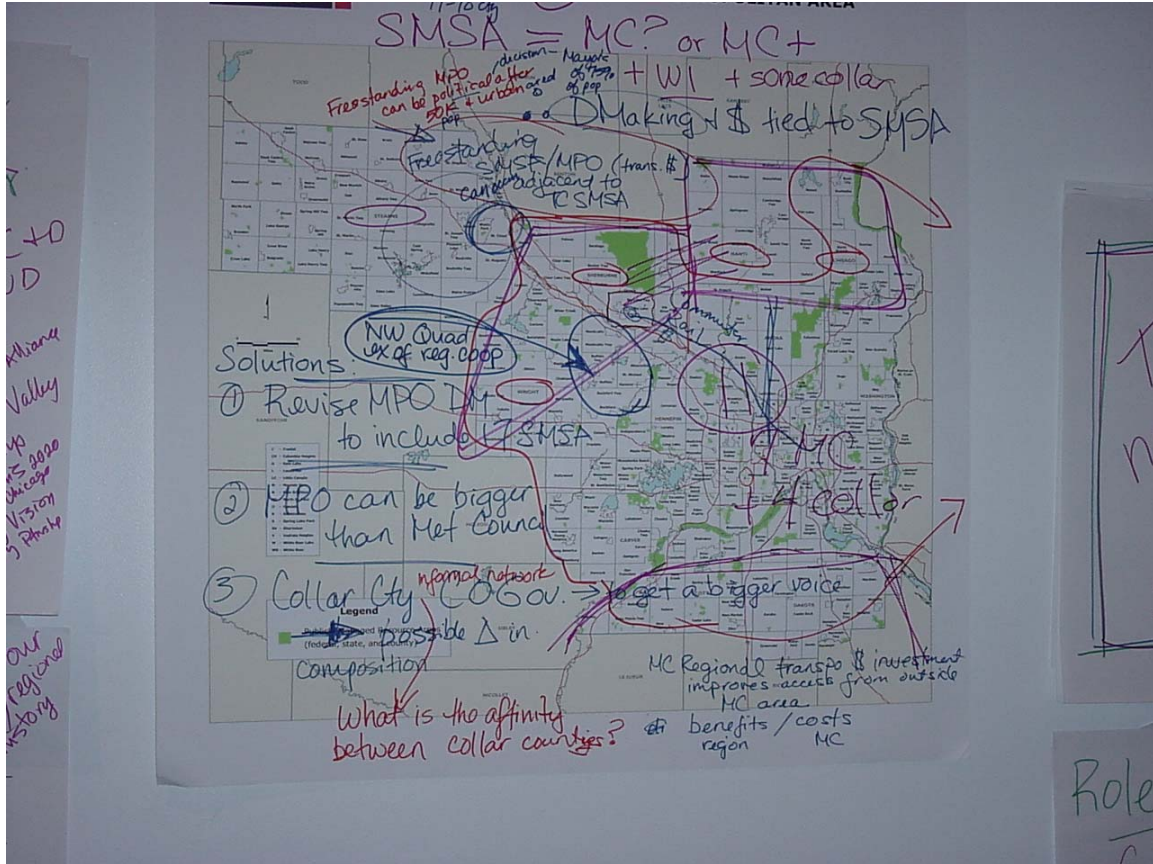


GREATER TWIN CITIES: A REGION IN TRANSITION



Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

June 21, 2006



Greater Twin Cities: A Region in Transition

Executive Summary

This report is the work of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, supported by the following Minnesota co-sponsors:

- Initiative Foundation
- Association of Minnesota Counties
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Central Region
- Mid-Minnesota Mississippi River Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Onanogozie Resource Conservation and Development Council
- 1000 Friends of Minnesota

The overarching purpose of this partnership is to provide a forum for people interested in land use planning and resource conservation in Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright counties to identify common regional interests, exchange ideas, and develop practical strategies to improve collaboration and planning across boundaries. The goal of this process is to build on, not duplicate, past or existing efforts to coordinate land use and planning in the region.

To prepare for a workshop on regional land use issues, we conducted an independent assessment of the interests and concerns of stakeholders. Matthew McKinney and Sarah Van de Wetering (representing the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy) conducted preliminary interviews with several dozen local government staff, elected officials, conservationists, and builders/developers in Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright counties. The list of people interviewed appears in Appendix A at the end of this report.

These discussions suggested that leaders in these fast-growing counties (sometimes referred to as the “collar counties”) express some different issues and needs than the counties that fall within the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan core. We found many people ready to engage in conversations to explore opportunities and barriers to coordinated regional responses to shared land use challenges.

We prepared a draft report representing our first summary of interviews and information gathered in preparation for a regional land use workshop held on June 8, 2006. We distributed the draft report to all workshop participants as a briefing document and a starting point for the day’s discussions. After the workshop, we revised the report to reflect the group’s discussion.

This report identifies the following key issues and concerns:

- Rapid population growth, with consequences for:
 - Transportation infrastructure
 - Water quality and treatment infrastructure
 - Parks and open space
 - Rural lifestyle
 - Civic engagement
 - Economic development
 - Housing prices
 - Annexation practices
- A need for better communication and information sharing among collar counties
- Intergovernmental challenges, including:
 - Limited state support for local planning
 - Concerns about plans and practices of the Metropolitan Council
 - Limited or no coordination among collar counties’ land use planning efforts

In addition, the initial convening report suggested the following areas for discussion about potential action items for regional cooperation:

- Expand communications and information sharing
- Build upon existing linkages and build new alliances
- Coordinate land use standards and policies
- Strengthen and adapt existing regional institutional structures
- Create new regional institutions
- Seek changes in state law to enable and/or require regional cooperation

Thus, we organized the agenda for the regional land use workshop to include the following elements:

- Introduction to regional approaches to land use issues
- Briefing on regional trends and transitions, featuring local experts
- Summary of report findings and conclusions
- Lessons from other places, including Chicago’s 2040 Regional Framework Plan
- Facilitated working sessions, focused on the following identified issue areas:
 - Transportation
 - Water Quality and Waste Treatment
 - Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Natural Resources
 - Economic Development

- Annexation and Comprehensive Planning
 - Financing Local and Regional Services
 - Regional Governance
- Reports from groups and discussion of next steps

Approximately 75 individuals attended the workshop, representing all four collar counties and the metropolitan area. The list of participants appears as Appendix C at the end of this report. During the small group discussions, the most pervasive call was for better information about the implications of population growth and development in the region. Groups also urged more frequent and strategic regional communication, as well as specific initiatives aimed at addressing cross-boundary issues. Several proposals may lead to action in the short term, but most will require additional discussions and coalition building beyond the group that attended this workshop.

In conclusion, this report represents a snapshot of a region in transition, highlighting issues and concerns to which the communities throughout this region will face in the months and years to come. It suggests that community leaders are interested and willing to work cooperatively across their jurisdictional boundaries. The regional workshop provided a starting point for this cooperation, but more work will be necessary to implement the visions expressed by participants.

Any further comments or questions about the report should be directed to:

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PREFACE

This report is the work of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, working in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other co-sponsors of a workshop on regional land use issues in Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright counties which was held on June 8, 2006.

The Lincoln Institute is a nonprofit educational institution established in 1974. Its mission is to study and teach land policy, including land economics and land taxation. The Lincoln Institute is supported primarily by the Lincoln Foundation, endowed by industrialist John C. Lincoln. The Lincoln Institute's goals are to integrate theory and practice to better shape land policy and to share understanding about the multidisciplinary forces that influence public policy. The Lincoln Institute does not take a particular point of view, but rather serves as a catalyst to facilitate analysis and discussion of these issues.

The overarching purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum for people interested in land use planning and resource conservation in Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright counties to identify common regional interests, exchange ideas, and develop practical strategies to improve collaboration and planning across boundaries.

INTRODUCTION

This report examines land use issues and concerns in the greater Twin Cities region, with a focus on the fast growing “collar counties” adjacent to the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region. Until recently, the collar counties had little

in common with one another except their general rural character and proximity to the metropolitan region. Indeed, the very notion of the collar counties as a region is a relatively new idea, and an unfamiliar concept to many who live in these counties.

Many of the local officials with whom we visited in the early stages of this assessment pointed out that their communities identify more directly with their metropolitan neighbors than with adjacent collar counties. This is a natural consequence of transportation and commuting patterns, as well as historical approaches to grouping counties in a pattern that radiates outward from the metropolitan core rather than in concentric circles around it.

Thus, a discussion of regional cooperation in the greater Twin Cities region necessarily includes reflection about regional identity, shared concerns and experiences, opportunities for building upon existing alliances, and potentially beneficial new means of cooperation across boundary lines.

This report offers some food for thought on all of these subjects. We provide a brief overview of current patterns of growth and development in the region, and then move to a summary of local leaders’ expressed concerns about the consequences of this growth. We provide examples of both formal and informal cooperative efforts already underway in the region, some within counties and some crossing county lines to address shared concerns. Next we report on the ideas for new regional initiatives that were suggested during our interviews, and we conclude with a summary of the discussions at the land use workshop on June 8th.

This report summarizes what we heard. It is not an exhaustive study, nor an end in itself. Some interests and opinions may not be represented here. We are reporting what people said, and some factual inaccuracies may be present. Think of this report as a starting point for further conversations about planning and regional collaboration in the greater Twin Cities region.

TRENDS AND TRANSITIONS

Everyone we met with emphasized that the greater Twin Cities region is experiencing rapid population growth, particularly among the collar counties upon which this report focuses: Wright, Sherburne, Isanti, and Chisago.

As with many parts of the country, lands that once supported agriculture, mining, and forestry have experienced dramatic changes. Agricultural industries have centralized, family farms have been subdivided into 3-, 5-, or 10-acre parcels, and many of the residents in formerly rural counties commute to jobs in the metropolitan area. This has created a landscape of “ultra low-density scattered-site exurban development that fundamentally differs little if at all from conventional automobile-oriented suburbanization,”¹ although newcomers feel that they have moved into a pastoral country setting compared with where they lived before.

¹ John S. Adams, Joel A. Koeppe & Barbara J. VanDrasek, *Urbanization of the Minnesota Countryside: Population Change and Low Density Development Near Minnesota's Regional Centers, 1970-2000* 163 (Center for Transportation Studies, Univ. of Minnesota, 2003), <http://www.cts.umn.edu/trg/publications/pdfreport/TRGrpt10/TRGrpt10_front.pdf>.

This section summarizes key indicators of growth and change, drawn largely from a recent report by Ameregis and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.² A panel at the regional land-use workshop will present additional indicators of demographic and economic trends on June 8th.

1. POPULATION GROWTH

The collar counties experienced rapid population growth in the 1990s. Each grew at least 25 percent between 1990 and 2000, and Sherburne County expanded by more than 58 percent during this period. A summary of housing trends during this period appears in Appendix B at the end of this report.

The four collar counties are projected to add 100,000 people by the year 2030, with the highest rates projected for western Chisago County, all but the western tip of Sherburne County, and northeastern Wright County. This addition of 100,000 people represents an overall rate of 46 percent growth in population by 2030. Some cities within these counties will experience higher levels of growth.

Collar county growth areas are closely aligned with major transportation corridors, which is understandable given the high percentage of workers in these counties commuting into the metropolitan area. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that in 2000 nearly half of all resident workers living in the four collar counties commuted to work in the

² Ameregis and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, *Growth Pressures on Sensitive Natural Areas in DNR's Central Region* (2006), <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/nrplanning/communitiy/ameregis_report/index.html>.

metropolitan area. Comments in several of our interviews indicated that the numbers might be considerably higher today.

2. LAND USE PATTERNS

Many of the people with whom we spoke described the spread of population into the countryside. Census data show that the greater Twin Cities region has experienced substantial decentralization of population in the past several decades. Although the seven metropolitan counties remain the most highly urbanized part of the region, current trends show dramatic expansion of urbanized land far into the collar counties.

As a consequence of newcomers seeking more spacious homes and larger yards, the rate of land consumed by development exceeds the rate of population growth in the collar counties. This decentralization has presented local government officials with challenges for providing services, including utilities, emergency protection, and transportation infrastructure.

3. ECONOMIC TRENDS

Rapid residential growth in the collar counties results in increased traffic congestion, mentioned by a number of interviewees as a growing problem in their areas. While congestion (and the perception of travel delays) might reduce the attraction of these areas for commuters, it may also draw more employers out farther from the metropolitan areas to remain within a reasonable commuting distance for their workers.

In fact, Census data show that many jobs have shifted to the middle and outer suburbs of the metropolitan area, making

it possible for workers to live farther out in the collar counties. The total number of workers living in the collar counties and commuting to the metropolitan area increased by more than 600 percent between 1970 and 2000.

We heard that many residents in the collar counties would prefer to work closer to home, but find limited employment opportunities outside the metropolitan area.

4. IMPACTS ON NATURAL AREAS

Many people mentioned the attraction of open lands in the greater Twin Cities region for newcomers and long-time residents alike. As documented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the region contains significant natural resource areas, including forests, grasslands, lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands.

In addition, the DNR has identified a broad swath of sensitive natural areas in the Anoka Sand Plain, including lands experiencing rapid growth in Sherburne, Isanti, and Chisago counties. Although some sensitive natural areas are in protected public ownership, most of these lands are privately owned, and thus remain susceptible to development.

Although water is abundant in the collar counties (to the point of providing constraints on development and road construction), some areas may face water quality and supply issues in the future. The southern portions of the collar counties draw their drinking water from bedrock aquifers and the Mississippi River, which appear to be sufficient to satisfy projected demands. The northern parts of the collar counties draw from shallow sand and gravel aquifers, which may not provide sufficient water for

predicted population growth. These shallow aquifers are also susceptible to contamination from polluted surface water runoff.

In addition, groundwater withdrawals to satisfy demands of the region's growing population may impact sensitive natural areas such as groundwater-fed lakes, trout streams, springs, fens, and seepage swamps.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

1. GROWTH PATTERNS AND IMPACTS

Transportation infrastructure is inadequate now and may not be sufficient to meet future demands.

Many people mentioned that growth pressures are stressing the collar counties' roadways and resulting in congestion in many areas. County roads were not designed for the heavier traffic they now experience, and the state transportation planning cycles can't keep up with the rapidly changing needs for infrastructure. Moreover, state funding formulas are perceived as inequitable, favoring out-state rural areas over the greater metropolitan area. Overlapping school district and county boundaries means that traffic from fast-growing counties spills over to adjacent counties

Several people mentioned the need for a regional mass transportation plan, while others noted that planned expansion of the North Star commuter rail into collar counties will require local governments to provide infrastructure such as feeder roads and bus service.

Water quality may be compromised by dispersed patterns of growth and inadequate treatment infrastructure.

Communities in the collar counties have varied in their approaches to water treatment, some opting for centralized services and others favoring dispersed development with septic systems. The region's clay soils and poor drainage combine with expansion of impervious surfaces (pavement, structures) to result in more contaminated runoff flowing into area waterways.

In the future, such water quality concerns may constrain growth in the collar counties. The recent halt of the proposed new Maple Lake/Annandale (Sherburne County) wastewater discharge to the Crow River was the result of a Total Maximum Daily Load-related litigation. In effect, this litigation prevents new or expanded discharges to the Mississippi River, pending a decision by the Minnesota Supreme Court. Depending on the outcome of this case, growth may be limited if the discharge from new wastewater treatment facilities further pollutes degraded waterways.

Parks and open space planning is not always incorporated into land use planning.

We heard frequently that the four collar counties vary dramatically in rules concerning housing density and open space preservation. Both county and city comprehensive plans seldom provide detailed natural resource elements, and the DNR's designated wildlife corridors are not implemented regularly in land-use decisions.

Some people we spoke with expressed concern about whether use of transferable development rights is providing optimal

open space protection in the fast growing region. Others worry about the tax implications of limiting development opportunities on private land.

The region's characteristic rural qualities are declining.

We heard frequently that people moving into the rural areas in the collar counties are surprised and disappointed when adjacent lands are developed. They seem not to understand that the lands adjacent to theirs are just as likely to be subdivided as the property they just purchased.

Several interviewees talked about the need for public education about what to expect when moving to rural and semi-rural areas such as those in the greater Twin Cities region.

It is challenging for long-distance commuters to engage with local government and volunteer for civic organizations.

As mentioned in the “trends” section above, the collar counties are home to a high percentage of long-distance commuters. Several of the people we spoke with commented about how difficult it is to involve commuter-residents in local affairs. For example, few commuters can attend daytime public meetings. And volunteer organizations (e.g. rural fire departments) have trouble relying on participants who work far away during the day and want to be with their families when they are home.

Economic development is not coordinated and may impact adjacent communities.

We heard from several local leaders that communities often compete with one another for commercial and business

development, when coordinated development might bring better results for all. Conversely, counties sometimes pass “problem” development proposals back and forth, rather than responding to them in a unified way. Because the collar counties vary a great deal in local tax base strength, they respond to development proposals differently.

Land and home prices are escalating rapidly.

The collar counties’ rapid growth has been fueled by housing that is comparatively less than in the metropolitan counties. In recent years, however, prices are rising quickly, especially in areas closest to the metropolitan area.

Several people we spoke with lamented the difficulty of building affordable housing on smaller lots in the collar counties. They noted that neighbors’ objections to denser development pose a major obstacle to building more compact, affordable housing units.

Cities’ annexation often outpaces planning for infrastructure, open space, and other community needs.

Many people mentioned that cities’ annexation decisions often are not coordinated with county comprehensive planning. In some cases, cities and townships are in conflict over annexation and responsibility for services required by new residents.

2. INFORMATION RESOURCES

Communication could be improved among collar county government bodies and agencies.

Based on our conversations, it appears that regional communication is strongest

among those sharing common positions. For example, planners in adjoining counties meet and share information regularly through statewide and regional professional organizations. There is little opportunity for similar communication among those in different fields or those working at different levels of government.

Shared data would be helpful.

Several local leaders mentioned that the counties' GIS inventories now under development should prove helpful to cities' planning work. We heard frequently that shared data provides a strong foundation for broader regional collaboration and cooperation.

Efforts to create a common data set can be challenging. A similar initiative among cities in the North Metro I-35W Corridor revealed that different planning offices might use incompatible file formats or have different rules for file access. Some data are unreliable or out of date. And separate jurisdictions use different land-use designations, requiring translation into generally applicable and comparable categories. In the end, these cooperating parties developed regional maps showing existing land uses, proposed or recent developments, and neighborhood centers (including parks, lakes, and schools) to help prioritize investments for transportation, trail, and street projects and understanding how they fit together.³

Collar counties could learn from each other's experiences with similar problems.

³ Summarized from *Community Redesign: Integrating Land Use, Transportation, and Natural Resources* 76-77 (Design Center for American Urban Landscape, Univ. Minn, 2002).

The counties on the western side of the metropolitan region experienced growth earlier than those on the northern and eastern borders. We heard from the counties now experiencing the early stages of rapid growth a desire to benefit from the strategies developed and lessons learned in counties that dealt with these issues earlier.

3. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

State support for local land use planning is insufficient.

We heard from some interviewees a desire for greater state support for local land-use planning and implementation. Several mentioned a wish for a reinstatement of the State Planning Office and Community Based Planning Act.

We also heard about cases in which state policies set counties against one another in competition (e.g. county-specific water quality grant programs) rather than encouraging cooperation to deal with cross-boundary issues.

We also heard that state planning and permitting processes are narrowly focused and often disregard larger cumulative impacts or opportunities to integrate with local land use priorities.

Met Council decisions impact collar county planning processes.

Many of those we spoke with expressed (or shared others') suspicions of the Met Council's intentions for expansion beyond seven metropolitan counties. We heard that the Met Council is perceived as overly controlling and prescriptive about land use policies.

At the same time, we heard a general agreement that the collar counties likely

will need Met Council's assistance with water treatment and transportation infrastructure in the future. Thus, it appears important to develop better lines of communication and trust among the collar counties and Met Council.

There is no coordinating body to link the collar counties' planning processes or priorities.

Despite the obvious connections among them, the collar counties do not coordinate their land use planning and implementation policies. We heard frustration from developers who face divergent rules in adjacent counties, making it hard to work throughout the region.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE COLLAR COUNTIES

In the face of these issues and concerns, public, private, and not-for-profit organizations, along with citizens, have been and are working across boundaries on a number of issues. These efforts, listed below (more representative than comprehensive), suggest that many people recognize the value of thinking and action regionally, at least on a case-by-case basis. They also suggest that people have a certain capacity to work across boundaries – which includes willingness, leadership, resources, and commitment.

1. COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SHARING INITIATIVES

- Various associations of mayors, planners, and other officials meet regularly and share information about ongoing issues, opportunities to cooperate with one another. In some cases, these are part of statewide organizations, such as the

Minnesota Association of County Administrators. The Minnesota Association of County Planning and Zoning Administrators is an active group with an independent legislative agenda. Its districts do not match the geographic layout of the collar counties, but instead radiate out from the metropolitan center. (E.g., the district including Isanti runs northward to the Canadian boundary rather than east and west to include other collar counties.)

- Cambridge-Isanti Transportation Council: Formed in 2004 to develop a master plan extending beyond the city boundaries of Cambridge; areas of inquiry included interregional corridors, internal corridors, trails and sidewalks, and public transportation. This group involved county, city, DNR, and MDOT representatives.

- Southern Chisago County Coalition: An informal gathering of city and county officials who met several times a year to share information and discuss pending development proposals; currently inactive.

- East-Central Landscape Advisory Committee (multi-county)

- Collar Counties Association (not active now)

- Met Council's periodic meetings with leaders of counties in the greater Twin Cities region (extending to Wisconsin) to share information and discuss opportunities to work cooperatively.

2. FORMAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE PROCESSES

- Orderly annexation agreements (e.g. City and Township of Monticello).

- County comprehensive planning, which ties together county and township land use decision parameters. County comprehensive plans are not binding on city annexation decisions.
- Cooperative law enforcement initiatives (e.g. methamphetamine campaigns): These were mentioned as among the most effective boundary-crossing initiatives to date.
- The Northstar Commuter Rail Corridor: An 82-mile transportation corridor that runs along Highway 10 and I-94 from downtown Minneapolis to the St. Cloud area. This project has required extensive multi-jurisdictional cooperation and collaboration.
- Shared city-county services (e.g. libraries, emergency services)
- Region 7W Transportation Policy Board: A nine-member policy board consisting of local elected officials from Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright counties. Region 7W addresses regionally significant transportation issues, conducts regional transportation studies and plans, and solicits and selects projects seeking federal funding through the Area Transportation Partnership process.

3. OTHER CROSS-BOUNDARY ASSOCIATIONS AND INITIATIVES

- Lake protection associations and coalitions of lake associations.
- Minnesota Alternative Shoreland Management Standards: Standards that local governments may adopt to govern development practices along shorelands of public waters; developed by the multi-agency/stakeholder Shorelands Standards Update Advisory Committee in 2005.

- Regional Greenways Collaborative: An alliance of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and individuals dedicated to protecting, restoring, connecting, and managing a green network with significant ecological areas, important open spaces, recreational areas, and working lands within the 13 counties of the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area.

- Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D): Each RC&D Council is established by volunteers representing sponsoring organizations within a multi-county region. The RC&D “helps people protect and develop their economic and natural resources in ways that help improve their area’s environment and quality of life. Local RC&D Councils provide a way for people to plan and implement projects that will make their communities better places to live.” See <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/marcd/>. The Mid-Minnesota Mississippi River RC&D includes Sherburne and Wright counties; the Onanogozie RC&D includes Isanti and Chisago counties.

- Regional Development Commissions: Multi-county planning and development districts that encourage cooperation between citizens, local government officials, and the private sector. Several of these commissions cover the area included within the greater Twin Cities region, providing a useful avenue for cross-jurisdictional communications and planning initiatives.

- Campaign for Conservation: Initiative involving various private, nonprofit, and public sector participants to draw attention to impacts of growth patterns on Minnesota’s natural resources. Recently

published report titled *Minnesota Calling: Conservation Facts, Trends and Challenges*, available at http://www.campaignforconservation.org/sites/3fb33134-6e71-466a-aa62-d6de3045fa4d/uploads/Minnesota_Callin_g_Full.pdf.

- Mississippi River Wild & Scenic River Corridor
- Minnesota Green Communities: A collaboration of Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, the Family Housing Fund, and Enterprise.
- Greater Minnesota Housing Fund's Growth Corridor Initiative: Initiated in 2005-06, this program provides support for area-wide integrated planning efforts, capacity-building for planning and implementation staff, and capital funding to foster large scale model projects in the four collar counties.
- McKnight State Policy Initiative
- State Department of Natural Resources' inventory of "sensitive natural areas," and DNR's resources for using natural resource information in local decision-making. See, e.g., http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecological_services/.
- Met Council's *2030 Regional Development Framework* acknowledged the metro area's linkage to surrounding counties: "The Metropolitan Council and regional partners must build closer relationships with local governments and their associations in the adjacent counties. We need to be sensitive to mutual impacts of decisions relating to development, transportation, water quality and other natural resources."

SUGGESTED OPTIONS TO ADDRESS ISSUES AND CONCERNS

While some of the issues presented above can be addressed by individual jurisdictions acting alone, and some are already the subject of regional initiatives such as those listed above, interviewees suggest that other issues require (or at least would benefit) from a more coordinated, regional approach.

These common values and interdependent interests are the catalysts for regional, trans-boundary collaboration. We list here some of the specific suggestions offered by interviewees in response to the identified issues and concerns.

Encourage regular communications and information sharing across the region.

- Encourage more regular communications through county newsletters and local-access cable coverage of public meetings.
- Create a formal process for sharing information regularly among government bodies in the region.
- Share information on comprehensive plan development in the collar counties and seek opportunities to share lessons learned and effective approaches.

Build upon existing links and develop new alliances where possible.

- Seek opportunities to reward cooperation among cities, townships, and counties (e.g. grants for regional pilot projects)

Coordinate standards and policies to ensure consistent response to chronic issues.

- Pursue more coordinated annexation strategies among various levels of government.
- Coordinate tax policies and development fee assessments across multiple jurisdictions so that the impacts of development are fairly addressed and builders are treated consistently.
- Provide better resources for professional planning and effective conservation measures to protect the qualities that are important to residents of these counties.

Adapt existing institutional structures to foster regional coordination.

- Add collar county representatives to the Met Council in an advisory capacity.
- Create some type of intermediary (association, forum, partnership) to engage collar counties and the Met Council
- Reform Met Council.

Create new regional institutions.

- Organize an informal regional advisory body to review and comment on proposed major developments and other planning initiatives.
- Create a multi-county citizen study commission to investigate common issues and design strategies for collaboration.
- Create a multi-county parks authority with power to levy taxes and pursue more strategic park/open space land acquisition.

- Create a Sewage Service District across county lines.

- Form one or more watershed management authorities as authorized by state law to identify and prioritize natural resource areas of high quality and to advocate for development that protects sensitive natural areas. Districts are required to develop plans that provide for integrated water resource management for their entire watershed and require the municipalities within their watershed to develop ordinances consistent with the parameters of the water resource management plan. These districts are the only type of government body in Minnesota that can levy taxes solely for the conservation of surface water resources.

- Create a regional transportation planning body, focusing on east-west travel (non-metropolitan) corridors.

- Form a new regional planning body with authority similar to that of the Met Council, but focused on the collar counties.

Seek changes in state law to enable and/or require regional cooperation.

- Reinvigorate the State Office of Planning.
- Renew funding for the Community Based Planning Act.
- Adopt statewide land use planning policy and planning framework, with specific elements and processes defined.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP: DISCUSSION SUMMARY AND ACTION ITEMS

Approximately 75 individuals attended the regional land-use workshop in Monticello on June 8, 2006, representing all four collar counties and the metropolitan area. The full list of participants appears as Appendix C at the end of this report. During the small group discussions, the most pervasive call was for better information about the implications of population growth and development in the region. Groups also urged more frequent and strategic regional communication, as well as specific initiatives aimed at addressing cross-boundary issues. Several proposals may lead to action in the short term, but most will require additional discussions and coalition building beyond the group that attended this workshop.

A more detailed summary of the work groups' discussions appears in Appendix D. Here we summarize the key points of each group's discussion and suggested action items.

1. ANNEXATION AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

This group concluded that lack of trust is the greatest obstacle to coordinated annexation and comprehensive planning. Participants agreed that cities, townships, and counties could benefit from better and more regular communications, as they frequently "reinvent the wheel" by not sharing information. Group members suggested that regional planning should start by focusing on individual issues, and should be advisory rather than mandatory.

2. TRANSPORTATION

This group pointed out that transportation is a social issue, as both individuals and their families are seriously impacted when a person spends 500-600 hours commuting per year. Participants talked about how to raise awareness of this cost through educational initiatives, similar to the resources aimed at changing public attitudes toward smoking. They identified several components necessary to reduce commute time and encourage better transportation habits.

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This work group focused on the flow of labor from the collar counties into the metropolitan area, and discussed various approaches to keeping workers closer to home. Their most significant recommendations were to improve education for local workers to give them more employment opportunities and to develop alliances between local government, educational institutions, and employers to provide more local opportunities.

4. WATER QUALITY AND WASTE TREATMENT

This work group recognized the important link between rapid growth and increased wastewater, noting that the limit to what watercourses can absorb may ultimately prove a limit on development in parts of this region. These issues lend themselves to a regional approach because many of their challenges relate to the difficulty planning over large areas. The work group concluded that watershed-based work necessarily transcends political boundaries and thus is an appropriate area for regional cooperation.

5. PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

This work group identified financing as the key problem to open space acquisition, noting that local governments are unduly burdened with (and unprepared to meet) this challenge. They pointed out that there is no coordination among jurisdictions, and that the fragmentation of governments leads to fragmented land ownership as well. Group members called for improved data collection and communications to address this problem, and proposed seeking legislative authority for a regional parks plan.

6. REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

This small but focused work group examined the many challenges to regional governance, starting with the definition of a region. Group members looked at the various entities that already work on a regional basis, and discussed whether the MPO should be expanded to include the collar counties. They concluded that state leadership combined with improved information and communications would be necessary to address regional issues in a coordinated fashion.

7. FINANCING LOCAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES

This work group looked at the links between finance, environment, and local government, considering “who benefits” and “who pays.” Group members noted the unfortunate trend to push fiscal burdens downward to the local level.

Group members discussed a number of possible reforms, concluding that the key to implementing any of them is a better-informed Legislature.

CONCLUSION

This report presents preliminary findings of our independent assessment of the interests and concerns of stakeholders in Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright counties. The information presented here reflects discussions with several dozen local government staff, elected officials, conservationists, and builders/developers in these counties, as well as additional information provided by the project co-sponsors.

These interviews and the discussions at the regional land-use workshop on June 8th suggest that leaders in the fast-growing collar counties are ready to engage in conversations to explore opportunities and barriers to coordinated regional responses to shared land use challenges. While they do not necessarily agree as to the best approaches to deal with these challenges, we were impressed with their enthusiasm for discussing a number of options, ranging from more regular communications to formally creating a new regional planning authority for the collar counties.

We thank our co-sponsors for their help gathering this information, as well as all the individuals who gave generously of their time and thoughts during this process. We look forward to participating in this continuing conversation.

APPENDIX A: PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

John Adams, University of Minnesota
Maurice Anderson, Isanti County Parks Board
Tim Anderson, Isanti County
Stacy Becker, Consultant
Laureen Bodin, City of Buffalo
Al Cottingham, City of North Branch
Franklin Denn, Monticello Township
State Rep. Rob Eastlund, Isanti County
Tim Edgeton, Sherburne County
Jim Erkel, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Jim Greenlund, Builders Association of Minnesota
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APPENDIX B: HOUSING TRENDS IN COLLAR COUNTIES⁴

Housing Data – Chisago County

	2000 Census	% of 2000 Total	1990 Census	% of 1990 Total	Change from 1990 to 2000
<u>General Housing Data</u>					
Total Housing Units*	15,533		11,946		30.03%
Occupied	14,454	93.05%	10,551	88.32%	36.99%
Vacant	1,079	6.95%	1,395	11.68%	-22.65%
Vacant Seasonal	679	4.37%			
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	1.00				
Rental Vacancy Rate	2.50				
Owner-occupied	12,587	87.08%	8,964	84.96%	40.42%
Renter-occupied	1,867	12.92%	1,587	15.04%	17.64%
<u>Units Per Structure</u>					
Total Housing Units*	15,533		11,946		30.03%
1 Unit, Detached	12,533	80.69%	9,463	79.21%	32.44%
1 Unit, Attached	426	2.74%	199	1.67%	114.07%
2 Units	157	1.01%	149	1.25%	5.37%
3-4 Units	211	1.36%	156	1.31%	35.26%
5-9 Units	226	1.45%	181	1.52%	24.86%
10-19 Units	339	2.18%	354	2.96%	-4.24%
20 or more Units	472	3.04%	286	2.39%	65.03%
Mobile Home	1,124	7.24%	1,061	8.88%	5.94%
Other	45	.29%	97	.81%	-53.61%
<u>Bedrooms per Unit</u>					
Total Housing Units*	15,533		11,946		30.03%
No Bedrooms	42	0%	32	0%	31.25%
1 Bedroom	974	6.27%	793	5.11%	22.82%
2 Bedrooms	2,687	17.30%	1,861	11.98%	44.38%
3 Bedrooms	3,462	22.29%	2,424	15.61%	42.82%
4 Bedrooms	1,286	8.28%	946	6.09%	35.94%
5+ Bedrooms	238	1.53%	158	1.02%	50.63%
<u>Year Structure Built</u>					
Previous 15 Months	936	6.03%	338	2.83%	176.92%
2 to 5 Years Previous	2,321	14.94%	1,346	11.27%	72.44%
5 to 10 Years Previous	1,979	12.74%	1,414	11.84%	39.96%

⁴ Source: U.S. Census profiles reported on the League of Minnesota Cities web site, <<http://www.lmnc.org/census/census.cfm>>.

10 to 20 Years Previous	2,501	16.10%	3,386	28.34%	-26.14%
20 to 30 Years Previous	2,925	18.83%	1,395	11.68%	109.68%
More Than 30 Years Previous	4,871	31.36%	4,067	34.04%	19.77%
Pre-1940	2,408	15.50%	2,800	23.44%	-14.00%

Year Householder Moved In

Previous 15 Months	2,279	14.67%	1,476	12.36%	54.40%
2 to 5 Years Previous	4,593	29.57%	3,361	28.13%	36.66%
5 to 10 Years Previous	2,977	19.17%	1,706	14.28%	74.50%
10 to 20 Years Previous	2,290	14.74%	2,423	20.28%	-5.49%
20 to 30 Years Previous	1,458	9.39%	772	6.46%	88.86%
More Than 30 Years Previous	857	5.52%	813	6.81%	5.41%

Value of Owner-Occupied Units

Less Than \$50,000	102	.66%	753	6.30%	-86.45%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	1,957	12.60%	3,845	32.19%	-49.10%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3,777	24.32%	786	6.58%	380.53%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1,803	11.61%	133	1.11%	1,255.64%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	989	6.37%	44	.37%	2,147.73%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	233	.66%	7	6.30%	3,228.57%
More Than \$500,000	19	.12%	2	.02%	850.00%
Median Value	132,500		72,900		81.76%

Gross Rent of Rented Units

Less Than \$200	149	7.98%	233	14.68%	-36.05%
\$200 to \$299	215	11.52%	213	13.42%	.94%
\$300 to \$499	458	24.53%	629	39.63%	-27.19%
\$500 to \$749	640	34.28%	244	15.37%	162.30%
\$750 to \$999	157	8.41%	44	2.77%	256.82%
\$1,000 or More	51	2.73%	14	.88%	264.29%
No Cash Rent	71	3.80%	70	4.41%	1.43%
Median Rent	506		375		34.93%

*General housing data are from the Census short form completed by all households. All other housing data are estimates based on responses from approximately one of every six households. Because of this difference, the total number of housing units in these two groups may not match

Housing Data – Isanti County

	2000 Census	% of 2000 Total	1990 Census	% of 1990 Total	Change from 1990 to 2000
<u>General Housing Data</u>					
Total Housing Units*	12,062		9,693		24.44%
Occupied	11,236	93.15%	8,810	90.89%	27.54%

Vacant	826	6.85%	883	9.11%	-6.46%
Vacant Seasonal	417	3.46%			
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	.80				
Rental Vacancy Rate	8.10				
Owner-occupied	9,630	85.71%	7,321	83.10%	31.54%
Renter-occupied	1,606	14.29%	1,489	16.90%	7.86%

Units Per Structure

Total Housing Units*	12,062		9,693		24.44%
1 Unit, Detached	9,891	82.00%	7,805	80.52%	26.73%
1 Unit, Attached	205	1.70%	154	1.59%	33.12%
2 Units	199	1.65%	199	2.05%	0.00%
3-4 Units	180	1.49%	151	1.56%	19.21%
5-9 Units	140	1.16%	99	1.02%	41.41%
10-19 Units	137	1.14%	175	1.81%	-21.71%
20 or more Units	622	5.16%	431	4.45%	44.32%
Mobile Home	651	5.40%	594	6.13%	9.60%
Other	37	.31%	85	.88%	-56.47%

Bedrooms per Unit

Total Housing Units*	12,062		9,693		24.44%
No Bedrooms	56	0%	47	0%	19.15%
1 Bedroom	793	6.57%	517	4.29%	53.38%
2 Bedrooms	1,180	9.78%	1,071	8.88%	10.18%
3 Bedrooms	1,173	9.72%	871	7.22%	34.67%
4 Bedrooms	462	3.83%	343	2.84%	34.69%
5+ Bedrooms	90	.75%	44	.36%	104.55%

Year Structure Built

Previous 15 Months	567	4.70%	202	2.08%	180.69%
2 to 5 Years Previous	1,083	8.98%	871	8.99%	24.34%
5 to 10 Years Previous	1,228	10.18%	914	9.43%	34.35%
10 to 20 Years Previous	1,812	15.02%	3,131	32.30%	-42.13%
20 to 30 Years Previous	2,957	24.52%	1,255	12.95%	135.62%
More Than 30 Years Previous	4,415	36.60%	3,320	34.25%	32.98%
Pre-1940	2,134	17.69%	2,209	22.79%	-3.40%

Year Householder Moved In

Previous 15 Months	1,639	13.59%	1,117	11.52%	46.73%
2 to 5 Years Previous	2,793	23.16%	2,520	26.00%	10.83%
5 to 10 Years Previous	2,282	18.92%	1,458	15.04%	56.52%
10 to 20 Years Previous	2,152	17.84%	2,400	24.76%	-10.33%
20 to 30 Years Previous	1,641	13.60%	678	6.99%	142.04%
More Than 30 Years Previous	729	6.04%	637	6.57%	14.44%

Value of Owner-Occupied
Units

Less Than \$50,000	152	1.26%	908	9.37%	-83.26%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	2,151	17.83%	2,928	30.21%	-26.54%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2,480	20.56%	261	2.69%	850.19%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	725	6.01%	37	.38%	1,859.46%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	325	2.69%	15	.15%	2,066.67%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	31	1.26%	0	0.00%	0.00%
More Than \$500,000	18	.15%	0	0.00%	0.00%
Median Value	110,700		64,300		72.16%

Gross Rent of Rented Units

Less Than \$200	152	9.46%	228	15.31%	-33.33%
\$200 to \$299	169	10.52%	247	16.59%	-31.58%
\$300 to \$499	332	20.67%	535	35.93%	-37.94%
\$500 to \$749	426	26.53%	220	14.78%	93.64%
\$750 to \$999	185	11.52%	53	3.56%	249.06%
\$1,000 or More	121	7.53%	4	.27%	2,925.00%
No Cash Rent	98	6.10%	54	3.63%	81.48%
Median Rent	527		357		47.62%

*General housing data are from the Census short form completed by all households. All other housing data are estimates based on responses from approximately one of every six households. Because of this difference, the total number of housing units in these two groups may not match

Housing Data – Sherburne County

	2000 Census	% of 2000 Total	1990 Census	% of 1990 Total	Change from 1990 to 2000
<u>General Housing Data</u>					
Total Housing Units*	22,827		14,964		52.55%
Occupied	21,581	94.54%	13,643	91.17%	58.18%
Vacant	1,246	5.46%	1,321	8.83%	-5.68%
Vacant Seasonal	843	3.69%			
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	.80				
Rental Vacancy Rate	2.50				
Owner-occupied	18,151	84.11%	10,977	80.46%	65.35%
Renter-occupied	3,430	15.89%	2,666	19.54%	28.66%
<u>Units Per Structure</u>					
Total Housing Units*	22,827		14,964		52.55%
1 Unit, Detached	18,619	81.57%	11,901	79.53%	56.45%
1 Unit, Attached	753	3.30%	214	1.43%	251.87%
2 Units	166	.73%	236	1.58%	-29.66%
3-4 Units	124	.54%	129	.86%	-3.88%
5-9 Units	318	1.39%	355	2.37%	-10.42%
10-19 Units	746	3.27%	630	4.21%	18.41%
20 or more Units	1,538	6.74%	909	6.07%	69.20%
Mobile Home	540	2.37%	470	3.14%	14.89%
Other	23	.10%	120	.80%	-80.83%
<u>Bedrooms per Unit</u>					
Total Housing Units*	22,827		14,964		52.55%
No Bedrooms	45	0%	81	0%	-44.44%
1 Bedroom	1,048	4.59%	532	2.33%	96.99%
2 Bedrooms	2,869	12.57%	1,857	8.14%	54.50%
3 Bedrooms	3,617	15.85%	2,377	10.41%	52.17%
4 Bedrooms	2,083	9.13%	1,045	4.58%	99.33%
5+ Bedrooms	477	2.09%	202	.88%	136.14%
<u>Year Structure Built</u>					
Previous 15 Months	1,369	6.00%	753	5.03%	81.81%
2 to 5 Years Previous	3,963	17.36%	2,677	17.89%	48.04%
5 to 10 Years Previous	3,568	15.63%	1,663	11.11%	114.55%
10 to 20 Years Previous	4,687	20.53%	4,588	30.66%	2.16%
20 to 30 Years Previous	4,364	19.12%	1,957	13.08%	122.99%
More Than 30 Years Previous	4,876	21.36%	3,326	22.23%	46.60%
Pre-1940	1,570	6.88%	1,639	10.95%	-4.21%

Year Householder Moved In

Previous 15 Months	4,045	17.72%	2,806	18.75%	44.16%
2 to 5 Years Previous	7,059	30.92%	4,287	28.65%	64.66%
5 to 10 Years Previous	4,205	18.42%	1,829	12.22%	129.91%
10 to 20 Years Previous	3,381	14.81%	3,248	21.71%	4.09%
20 to 30 Years Previous	2,005	8.78%	791	5.29%	153.48%
More Than 30 Years Previous	886	3.88%	682	4.56%	29.91%

Value of Owner-Occupied Units

Less Than \$50,000	142	.62%	884	5.91%	-83.94%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	2,539	11.12%	5,645	37.72%	-55.02%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	6,482	28.40%	1,168	7.81%	454.97%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3,618	15.85%	240	1.60%	1,407.50%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	1,555	6.81%	61	.41%	2,449.18%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	262	.62%	0	0.00%	0.00%
More Than \$500,000	45	.20%	0	0.00%	0.00%
Median Value	137,500		74,600		84.32%

Gross Rent of Rented Units

Less Than \$200	168	4.90%	169	6.34%	-.59%
\$200 to \$299	255	7.43%	205	7.69%	24.39%
\$300 to \$499	683	19.91%	1,252	46.96%	-45.45%
\$500 to \$749	1,699	49.53%	632	23.71%	168.83%
\$750 to \$999	307	8.95%	139	5.21%	120.86%
\$1,000 or More	151	4.40%	0	0.00%	0.00%
No Cash Rent	99	2.89%	70	2.63%	41.43%
Median Rent	570		442		28.96%

*General housing data are from the Census short form completed by all households. All other housing data are estimates based on responses from approximately one of every six households. Because of this difference, the total number of housing units in these two groups may not match

Housing Data – Wright County

	2000 Census	% of 2000 Total	1990 Census	% of 1990 Total	Change from 1990 to 2000
<u>General Housing Data</u>					
Total Housing Units*	34,355		26,353		30.36%
Occupied	31,465	91.59%	23,013	87.33%	36.73%
Vacant	2,890	8.41%	3,340	12.67%	-13.47%
Vacant Seasonal	2,060	6.00%			
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	1.10				
Rental Vacancy Rate	3.10				
Owner-occupied	26,560	84.41%	18,866	81.98%	40.78%
Renter-occupied	4,905	15.59%	4,147	18.02%	18.28%
<u>Units Per Structure</u>					
Total Housing Units*	34,355		26,353		30.36%
1 Unit, Detached	26,829	78.09%	19,793	75.11%	35.55%
1 Unit, Attached	1,226	3.57%	448	1.70%	173.66%
2 Units	398	1.16%	447	1.70%	-10.96%
3-4 Units	422	1.23%	321	1.22%	31.46%
5-9 Units	542	1.58%	447	1.70%	21.25%
10-19 Units	881	2.56%	810	3.07%	8.77%
20 or more Units	1,467	4.27%	986	3.74%	48.78%
Mobile Home	2,509	7.30%	2,564	9.73%	-2.15%
Other	81	.24%	537	2.04%	-84.92%
<u>Bedrooms per Unit</u>					
Total Housing Units*	34,355		26,353		30.36%
No Bedrooms	242	1%	102	0%	137.25%
1 Bedroom	1,951	5.68%	1,537	4.47%	26.94%
2 Bedrooms	5,747	16.73%	3,714	10.81%	54.74%
3 Bedrooms	8,234	23.97%	4,346	12.65%	89.46%
4 Bedrooms	4,581	13.33%	1,829	5.32%	150.46%
5+ Bedrooms	619	1.80%	324	.94%	91.05%
<u>Year Structure Built</u>					
Previous 15 Months	1,652	4.81%	775	2.94%	113.16%
2 to 5 Years Previous	4,653	13.54%	3,055	11.59%	52.31%
5 to 10 Years Previous	3,870	11.26%	2,554	9.69%	51.53%
10 to 20 Years Previous	5,626	16.38%	8,365	31.74%	-32.74%
20 to 30 Years Previous	7,334	21.35%	3,149	11.95%	132.90%
More Than 30 Years Previous	11,220	32.66%	8,455	32.08%	32.70%
Pre-1940	4,782	13.92%	5,008	19.00%	-4.51%

Year Householder Moved In

Previous 15 Months	4,970	14.47%	3,900	14.80%	27.44%
2 to 5 Years Previous	9,770	28.44%	6,828	25.91%	43.09%
5 to 10 Years Previous	6,255	18.21%	3,303	12.53%	89.37%
10 to 20 Years Previous	5,097	14.84%	5,456	20.70%	-6.58%
20 to 30 Years Previous	3,278	9.54%	1,724	6.54%	90.14%
More Than 30 Years Previous	2,095	6.10%	1,802	6.84%	16.26%

Value of Owner-Occupied Units

Less Than \$50,000	244	.71%	1,487	5.64%	-83.59%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	3,702	10.78%	8,868	33.65%	-58.25%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	8,620	25.09%	1,787	6.78%	382.37%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	4,497	13.09%	292	1.11%	1,440.07%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	2,256	6.57%	107	.41%	2,008.41%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	509	.71%	11	5.64%	4,527.27%
More Than \$500,000	98	.29%	3	.01%	3,166.67%
Median Value	135,300		75,000		80.40%

Gross Rent of Rented Units

Less Than \$200	337	6.87%	480	11.57%	-29.79%
\$200 to \$299	330	6.73%	614	14.81%	-46.25%
\$300 to \$499	1,279	26.08%	1,713	41.31%	-25.34%
\$500 to \$749	1,974	40.24%	725	17.48%	172.28%
\$750 to \$999	334	6.81%	43	1.04%	676.74%
\$1,000 or More	175	3.57%	8	.19%	2,087.50%
No Cash Rent	229	4.67%	162	3.91%	41.36%
Median Rent	526		380		38.42%

*General housing data are from the Census short form completed by all households. All other housing data are estimates based on responses from approximately one of every six households. Because of this difference, the total number of housing units in these two groups may not match

APPENDIX C: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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APPENDIX D: WORK GROUP DISCUSSION SUMMARIES

Each work group met for several hours of productive discussion and brainstorming at the regional land-use workshop on June 8, 2006. The following summaries provide a necessarily abbreviated version of these rich discussions, and are drawn primarily from the groups' reports at the conclusion of the workshop.

The "action items" presented here represent ideas generated at the sessions and are not intended as consensus recommendations of workshop participants or the organizers.

ANNEXATION AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

This group concluded that lack of trust is the greatest obstacle to coordinated annexation and comprehensive planning. Participants agreed that cities, townships, and counties could benefit from better and more regular communications, as they frequently "reinvent the wheel" by not sharing information.

Group members suggested that regional planning should start by focusing on individual issues, and should be advisory rather than mandatory. They felt that communications among elected officials several times per year would be a good beginning, and encouraged staff members to maintain similar communications.

Action Items:

- Develop a communication strategy that crosses sectors and involves both elected and appointed government officials.
- Establish regional planning based on identified high-priority issues.

TRANSPORTATION

This group pointed out that transportation is a social issue, as both individuals and their families are seriously impacted when a person spends 500-600 hours commuting per year. Participants talked about how to raise awareness of this cost through educational initiatives, similar to the resources aimed at changing public attitudes toward smoking.

This work group identified several components necessary to reduce commute time and encourage better transportation habits. Members discussed the obstacles to encouraging participation in mass transit, including people's desire for flexibility and unwillingness to pay more than a token price for riding a bus from the collar counties into the metropolitan area.

Action Items:

- Build a public education campaign highlighting the costs of congestion and long-distance commuting.
- Seek economic development closer to where people live to reduce the need for long commutes.
- Provide alternatives to private automobiles, with sufficient incentives to encourage people to use them.
- Seek funding through such sources as gas taxes.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This work group focused on the flow of labor from the collar counties into the metropolitan area, and discussed various

approaches to keeping workers closer to home. Their most significant recommendations were to improve education for local workers to give them more employment opportunities and to develop alliances between local government, educational institutions, and employers to provide more local opportunities.

Group members identified a need for more data on existing jobs and the knowledge needed for employment in these jobs. They also expressed a desire to calculate a living wage for each of the collar county communities, as these vary a great deal. Finally, they asked for help understanding the types of jobs people are currently commuting to, and what incentives would bring these jobs closer to where people live.

In the general discussion following this work group's presentation, several people pointed out that jobs have migrated outward from the metropolitan core, and that bringing jobs closer to the collar counties may encourage people to live further out (since their commute time will be reduced). Another participant urged the collar counties to look beyond attracting industries, as these are rapidly being moving overseas. Instead, he said that education and encouraging homegrown businesses will have the most direct benefits on economic development.

Action Items:

- Develop data on existing and potential jobs in the collar counties, and on the jobs for which collar county residents are commuting into the metropolitan core.
- Build local economic capacity by developing alliances between educational institutions, local government, and local employers.

WATER QUALITY AND WASTE TREATMENT

This work group recognized the important link between rapid growth and increased wastewater, noting that the limit to what watercourses can absorb may ultimately prove a limit on development in parts of this region. Specifically, the group identified the following key problems:

- Impaired waters—lakes, streams wetland and groundwater resources—as impacted by excess nutrients, sediments and runoff volumes as well as bacteria, mercury, and PCBs.
- Enormous growth and development in the near past, present, and future.
- New infrastructure needs (roads, schools, sewers, storm sewers) can overwhelm local ability to plan and manage.

These problems arise from many sources. The group's list included septic tanks, illicit (straight pipe) discharges, runoff from fields and storm water from urban areas, municipal wastewater, discharges from growing areas when waters are already impaired, challenges to courts in fully understanding and prioritizing environmental compliance issues, the fact that historical accumulations can have long term effects and sources be forgotten, and the reality that cumulative impacts of numerous sources to downstream waters make improvement difficult.

These issues lend themselves to a regional approach because many of their challenges relate to the difficulty planning over large areas. The group identified a number of following challenges to

planning over large areas. First, municipal and township decision makers need help to deal with wastewater and storm water management before the design phase of development. Second, city, township, and counties are overloaded with water quality issues, making it hard for them to see the big picture of water quality issues. Third, municipalities, townships and counties are managed via political boundaries while water managed by watershed drainage areas. Different and usually unshared data processing makes transfer of information along political boundaries very difficult

The work group concluded that watershed-based work necessarily transcends political boundaries and thus is an appropriate area for regional cooperation.

Action Items:

- State agencies must do better job at information, education and planning assistance covering the big picture and make relevant for local needs planning (MDNR, MPCA, BWSR)
- Seek to overcome multijurisdictional difficulties by larger scale cooperative planning across political and watershed boundaries (transportation corridors, community needs, wastewater, stormwater, water quality) Start with MDOT and incorporate others
- Develop better information and educational materials (UM Extension, MDNR, MPCA, BWSR)
- Improve planning over various scales (local, watershed, regional).
- Develop better joint powers agreements, perhaps watershed district formation. Beyond that, the group

identified no clear options for multijurisdictional entities.

- Seek consistent funding for locally led efforts from the Legislature.

PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

This work group identified financing as the key problem to open space acquisition, noting that local governments are unduly burdened with (and unprepared to meet) this challenge. They pointed out that there is no coordination among jurisdictions, and that the fragmentation of governments leads to fragmented land ownership as well. Group members called for improved data collection and communications to address this problem.

The group identified a number of opportunities to increase public awareness, act sooner rather than later to acquire undeveloped lands, capitalize on the willingness of government staff members to work with one another, and take advantage of improved and accessible technology to manage open lands and other natural areas in a more coordinated fashion throughout the region. Obstacles include manmade barriers and local leaders who view parks as burdens rather than assets.

Action Items:

- Convene a multi-jurisdictional planning group to propose a regional parks plan to the Legislature. This would have to include county staff, elected officials, and others, and may be convened by the Trust for Public Lands or the Department of Natural Resources.

- Begin with a small group (about ten individuals) to draw up a framework within the next month.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

This small but focused work group examined the many challenges to regional governance, starting with the definition of a region. Group members looked at the various entities that already work on a regional basis, including alliances between Sherburne and Wright counties and Chisago and Isanti counties. There was additional discussion of whether the MPO should be expanded to include the collar counties, which would not necessarily entail enlarging the Met Council beyond its current boundaries.

The group identified the key obstacle to regional governance as a desire for autonomy, and concluded that state leadership combined with improved information and communications would be necessary to address regional issues in a coordinated fashion.

There were no action items, but the group remarked that any regional initiative will need both a good catalyst and an organizing presence that will stay involved for the long term to ensure implementation.

FINANCING LOCAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES

This work group looked at the links between finance, environment, and local government, considering “who benefits” and “who pays.” Group members noted the unfortunate trend to push fiscal burdens downward to the local level.

Group members discussed a number of possible reforms, concluding that the key

to implementing any of them is a better informed Legislature.

Action Items:

- Reform development fees so they are based on rational formulas and the purposes for which they can be assessed are broader. There was some desire expressed for better information about development fees currently in place in the collar counties.
- Reform the incentives in the transfer of development rights for conservation.
- Revise gas tax distribution to be more equitable.
- Use state grant programs to benefit regional resources such as parks and open space.
- Collar counties could join the Fiscal Disparities Tax-Base Sharing Program, as proposed by Steve Hinze in the morning session of the workshop.