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Minnesota's Regional Development Planning

By K. William Easter, Harald R. Jensen, and Robert Hoppe*

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING met with rural opposition when the Governor ordered pilot planning areas and economic regions to be delineated in 1967. And rather than speeding up the formation of regional commissions, the 1969 Regional Development Act increased the opposition. However, resistance declined when 1971 legislative changes extended more representation to townships. These changes also eliminated the governor's authority to unilaterally order formation of such commissions or to appoint the first chairpersons. Before a regional commission can now be formed, the governor must receive petitions from counties and municipalities representing more than 50 percent of the region's population. After a petition is received and a regional commission is authorized, this commission must develop and

adopt bylaws to guide its operation. Otherwise, it cannot receive full financial support from the State Planning Agency (SPA).

During its formation, each commission is assigned a staff person from the SPA. This person helps the commission organize. He also provides information and makes the commission aware of technical help available from the SPA. This assistance is particularly important before the appointment of the commission's executive director and staff.

The years since the Governor and the Legislature took action have been "a time to get organized for action." This issue of *Minnesota Agricultural Economist* describes this "organization for planning" period, suggests alternative ways in which the University of Minnesota can support regional development planning, and describes some of the university's supporting projects.

Organizing for regional development planning

Before 1973, only 4 of the 13 regions had established commissions which, in turn, had established bylaws. In 1973, 6 additional commissions had developed bylaws. Now the remaining three regions have framed their bylaws (see figure 1 next page). In addition, all but one of the commissions have hired or are hiring an executive director and staff.

Thus, most of the regions are just now able to function as a planning body. They have limited staffs but high expectations. With strong support from the SPA, the Governor's Office, and the State Legislature, the commissions have excellent opportunities to operate as

effective supporting arms of local governments.

The regional commissions provide a functional framework for: collecting and classifying planning data; coordinating planning activities; coordinating federal and state programs; unifying local resources to resolve problems that can be more effectively tackled at regional rather than at local levels; and providing a framework for inter-governmental cooperation, planning, and action.

The newly established regional commissions are now defining their goals and obstacles. These obstacles cover a wide spectrum. Only a few are mentioned here: inadequate transportation; inadequate housing and public services; and lack of land use regulations.

The four earlier established regional commissions are already regional clearing houses for federal programs. All the commissions are concerned about their roles in local governments. They have unique opportunities to fill service gaps and help provide more effective government. However, they must identify these gaps and define their roles in helping meet the needs of the people.

The regional commission's role in helping resolve community issues and problems

A definition of a regional commission's purpose is vital. It can begin with agreement of what is desired in that region by 1980 or 1985. The next task may be even more critical to a commission's success. It's the identification of key regional issues with which the commission believes it should become involved. Examples may be rural health services, intraregional trans-

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portation, and land use and development. These issues can be altered as needs and commission priorities change. Generally, regional issues, i.e., those involving two or more counties, will be "high priorities." Local issues (county or smaller) may be of concern to the commission, particularly when these issues have adverse or disturbing effects on other parts of the region. In these instances, the commission may be able to handle the issues most effectively by encouraging action by local governments.

The next step is equally important. This is defining the commission's role in resolving a given issue. Clearly, the commission will have unique opportunities to address regional issues, but these opportunities will vary from issue to issue. For example, the commission may define rural health services as an important issue. This issue may have several parts or problems such as: lack of transportation between towns in the region; and a shortage of doctors. The commission may organize a pilot project using school buses for intertown transportation. It may also encourage centrally located medical offices to serve two or three towns. It could advertise in urban areas to recruit doctors.

Problems may have to be specifically defined before the commission's role is clear. There may be a three-stage process: *issues*; *problems*; and *role*.

At times, it's best to provide local people and governments with only facts or a broader perspective.¹ At other times, a role as coordinator of local governments may be appropriate. The commission may "clear" the way for intergovernmental cooperation by stressing common interests. It can also be an intermediary between local governments on one hand and

¹Ideas on the roles of the regional commission came from a study of the lack of coordination among local governments in Ylvisaker, Paul N., *Intergovernmental Relations at the Grass Roots: A Study of Blue Earth Country, Minnesota, to 1956*, Intergovernmental Relations in the United States, Research Monograph Number 7 (University of Minnesota, 1956) p. 167.

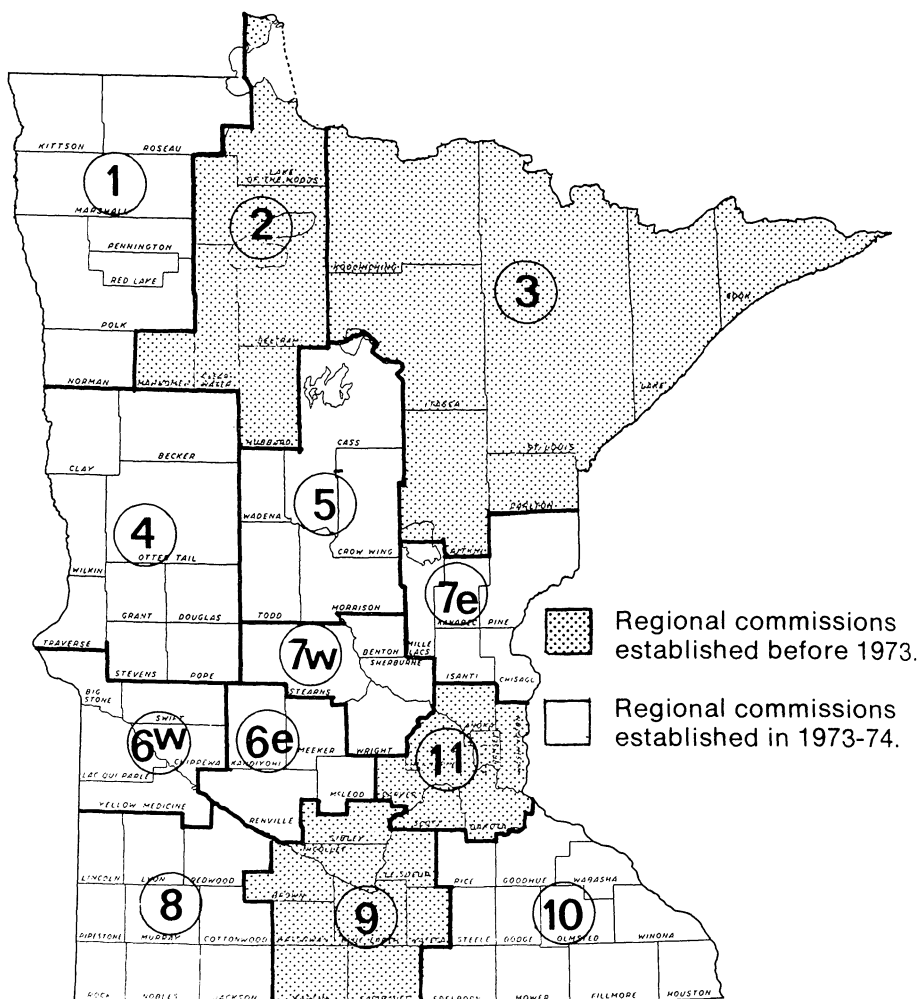


Figure 1. Minnesota development regions

state and federal governments on the other. As a representative of several local governments, the regional commission can deal with the state legislature and agencies better than could a single local government.²

Suppose the commission identifies poor roads as a specific problem of intraregional transportation. This could be partially solved by upgrading the region's highways. However, not all highways can be improved because the Highway Department has limited funds. Unfortunately, each local government will want the closest highway improved. The commission could play an educational role. Since the Commission consists of representatives from local governments, it could gather

²The list of roles mentioned here is not necessarily complete. Other roles may also be useful.

information better than could any local government. It could collect data about present highway use, Highway Department decision criteria, and similar information. Presenting these data to local people and groups may facilitate a compromise.

As another example, the commission may want to attack the land development issue. A specific problem could be the lack of adequate governmental control over land use. Here, the commission could be the coordinator. Since undesirable land use is likely to shift from counties that enact rigorous zoning to counties with more lenient laws, fairly standardized zoning ordinances could stop such shifting within the region. The commission could aid local governments in coordinating zoning ordinances.

Finally, what if adequate recreational facilities are a problem, but funds are available from state or federal agencies? The commission could be an intermediary. It could discuss the problem with local governments and then apply for assistance on behalf of the whole region.

The commission will need to define issues and then problems before it can determine what role to play in community affairs. The regional commission can play a variety of problem-solving roles. This flexibility exists because the commission is an unique body made up of representatives of local governments from the entire region. Thus, it has an opportunity to educate, coordinate, and represent its region.

Supporting role of the University of Minnesota

The University of Minnesota has and can continue to play a valuable supporting role in Minnesota's regional planning and development. It can play this part because it is funded, staffed, and equipped to carry on research and education activities. Through research, problems within the state are identified, data important to the solution of problems are assembled and analyzed, and alternative possible solutions are evaluated. Through resident and extension teaching, the University instructs and brings Minnesota's people information from studies and research. Thus through research, teaching, and the distribution of information, the university can help regional commissions coordinate and plan.

Several of the university's programs and projects (all in different stages), are described here to show the university's role in regional planning and development. These efforts include projects in west central Minnesota; in Region 6 E; and programs of the Agricultural Extension Service; the Minnesota Analysis and Planning System (MAPS); and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA).

Research for regional development and planning in 6E

This project began in November 1973 and is described in three parts. The first phase is compiling descriptive materials on the region's economy and helping identify prob-

lems. Only secondary sources of data and existing studies are used. An important part of this phase is the interactions among university staff, the regional commission, and interested community people.

An example from the first phase is a review of state and county population projections for Region 6E.³ When population figures for the region's four counties were combined, one projection indicated a substantial decline, while another showed a marked increase. On the other hand, population projections were fairly consistent from county to county. Projections for McLeod suggested future population increases, while the projections for Kandiyohi and Meeker suggested stable populations. Only for Renville County did the projections suggest continued decline.

Population projections also indicated that Region 6E will become increasingly urban. By 1985, urban populations in Kandiyohi and McLeod Counties are expected to be larger than these counties' rural populations. In addition, population distribution by age groups is likely to change. The projections indicate fewer people under 19 years old but slightly more people 65 years and older. Such shifts may mean excess school capacity, particularly in the rural schools, and a need for more local facilities for older people. An increase in the 20-39 age group was also projected. This suggests a larger work force and the need for growth in regional employment opportunities.

An analysis of change in Region 6E employment between 1960 and 1970 highlights agriculture's declining share.⁴ In contrast, manufacturing of durables and nondurables exhibited a substantially increased share of employment. Within the agricultural sector, there was a general shift out of dairy

into cash grain and livestock production. Continuation of the current price situation will encourage further shifts into corn and soybean production.

The second phase will be problem-related work. It will provide data and analyses of alternative solutions to problems such as rural transportation and land use planning. Some of this work may be short term to provide the quickest possible information. Again, a continuing interaction between university staff and the regional commission is important so that information will be relevant and used as soon as needed.

The final phase—several years in the future—will involve a larger economic model for the region. The results of the problem-related work will be an input to this model. Hopefully, the model will enable the regional commission and other community members to answer questions about possible impacts of projects and activities on the region's employment and income.

For example, what will be the impact of the new sugar beet plant on the region if the price of sugar stays at current levels? Alternatively, what will be the impact if sugar legislation is altered and the price of sugar beets changes by 25 percent? Since the sugar legislation expires Dec. 31, 1974, this question may be very important.

In summary, this project's research staff are a resource for the regional commission. The staff will help the regional commission gather data and information on the region's economy and identify and analyze problems. Hopefully, this research will help the region's people better understand what changes are feasible and what efforts and resources will be needed to improve their living levels.

Planning and development assistance in west central Minnesota

West central Minnesota counties have been involved in developmental issues and research for several years. Two programs, initiated in the mid-sixties, were rural development pilot programs for the nation. These programs were the West Minnesota Resource Conservation and Development Project (RC & D) and the Concerted Services in

³Robert Hoppe, *Population Projections for Region 6E*, mimeograph, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, 1974.

⁴K. William Easter and Harald R. Jensen, *A Profile of Minnesota Development Region 6E*, mimeograph, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, 1973.

Training and Education Program (CSTE).

The west central region—more recently identified as Region 4—ranges from the Red River Valley farmland on the west to the resort area of the central Minnesota lake region. Problems of outmigration, lack of services, and underemployment have become major concerns to the once thriving communities. Changing transportation patterns have shortened travel time to larger cities but have bypassed many villages and hamlets.

With the additional resources of federal programs and personnel, people in Todd, Wadena, and Otter Tail Counties began to organize community groups, to identify problems, to set priorities, and to seek answers and alternative solutions. In spring of 1969, about 75 local businessmen and farmers met in Wadena with University representatives to discuss local problems and seek university assistance to resolve these problems.⁵

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Institute of Agriculture responded. Dr. Wilbur Maki from the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics developed research projects in the 14-county area. This area included what was originally Region 4 plus the Concerted Services Counties (Todd and Wadena) now in Region 5. The first project was a detailed study of the region's industries. This project was followed by a study on financing local government (reported in University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service Bulletin 509—1973) and a study of health services for the elderly in Wadena, Todd, and east Otter Tail Counties.

During this time, CURA placed a research coordinator at Fergus Falls to be a field contact for university faculty. The research coordinator worked with representa-

tives of the region's colleges and assisted in a Title I Higher Education Act Consortium concerned with community services. As part of the Title I project, regional development meetings were held throughout the region, a regional newsletter was published, and a citizens' regional advisory group was organized. As a result of this pilot project, a regional college consortium still exists. It works with the regional commission and includes University representation.⁶

As the University of Minnesota-Morris developed, faculty involvement in regional planning increased. Recently, a Center for Community Services and Regional Affairs was located on campus and funded through Continuing Education and Extension. This office is shared with an Area Community Resource Development agent. The combination brings a strong complement of university extension resources to western Minnesota.

Agricultural Extension Service's role in regional planning

The basis for current and future relationships between the University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service and the regional development commissions rests upon extension's long tradition of working with rural people and with community organizations and local governments. This tradition includes assisting in the analysis of individual and community needs and conducting educational-informational programs aimed at meeting those needs. Establishment of regional commissions provided an additional means to coordinate extension programs with those of public and private agencies. Most recently, a guidelines statement has been prepared in conjunction with the SPA. It describes the Agricultural Extension Service's relationships with the regional commissions.

⁶The University has also been active in providing studies for the Souris Red-Rainy River Basin Commission. In partnership with the North Dakota State University, the staff of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Minnesota have completed a series of economic research studies for that commission.

At the state level, the administration of the Agricultural Extension Service maintains a continuing liaison with state and federal agencies which work with and through regional commissions. The focus at this level is to keep agencies informed of extension's programs and activities.

District extension directors are encouraged to meet with the executive boards, chairmen, and executive directors at least once a year. In addition, district extension directors are the administrative contact between regional commissions and the Agricultural Extension Service. Programmatic liaison between the Agricultural Extension Service and regional commissions is provided by the area Community Resource Development (CRD) agents. These agents are responsible to the district extension directors. Area CRD agents help coordinate county extension programs and programs of the regional commissions. They also inform the commission about programs and resources which may complement commission activities. Emphasis is placed on maintaining close working relationships between area CRD agents and executive directors of regional commissions.

County extension staff must understand the purpose and organization of regional commissions and must communicate with their county's representatives on their region's commission. Where appropriate, county extension programs should be coordinated with those of regional commissions. County extension staff may serve as resource persons and ex officio members of commission committees when this is appropriate.

State extension specialists may work with area CRD agents and county extension staff to meet educational needs and requests of regional commission staffs, committees, and local people. They may also relate to regional commissions by providing technical information and by suggesting specific research needs to colleagues in the University.

Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) currently

⁵West Central Minnesota has also been one of the first and most active rural comprehensive health planning regions. It became one of the leading national examples for rural comprehensive health planning. With the help of the State Planning Agency, it has documented the health-related needs of the region.

supports three projects directly connected with the regional commissions. It has completed several other projects.

In selecting and evaluating these projects, CURA assumes that, in its early years, a regional commission's major role is to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the multitude of federal, state, and local government services affecting its territory. Coordination needs extend to the activities of neighboring local governments within the region, state programs which overlap the region, and relationships with adjoining regions. Regulatory powers, enforcement authority, and related detailed operational planning will continue to be local and state functions. The main power of the commissions depends on their comprehensive knowledge of local governments' and agencies' plans and actions and the consequences of those actions. Hence, the commissions' initial functions will concentrate on information and analysis as well as standardization of the regional data base which, for the most part, already exists in scattered and unrelated sources. As they evolve, commissions may eventually assume operating responsibilities for some regional programs, especially ones which may emerge in the future.

In 1972, CURA organized and carried out a study of over 300 state and federal programs which affect Region 2.⁷ For each program, the study shows the service center from which the program operates, the area served, and the other programs to which it is functionally related. An analysis indicates the gaps and overlaps in areas served both geographically and functionally. The project was sponsored by the SPA and carried out by faculty and students from the university and Bemidji State College.

A second study, refining and enlarging the techniques and procedure of the first, was completed for Region 9 in early 1973.⁸ This one served the same purposes and was carried out by students and faculty from the University of Minnesota and Mankato State College.

As a result of these two projects, the SPA and CURA have subsequently expanded the inventory and analysis to cover all Minnesota development regions. Emphasis is placed on those newly organized. The statewide study—to be published this spring—will be accompanied by a manual designed to help use the study to identify regional problems and priorities.

A continuing CURA program—the Minnesota Land Management Information System (MLMIS)—is currently emphasizing development of a method to assign suitability and priority rankings for different broad classes of land development to any given 40-acre parcel or combination of parcels. Rankings are based on selected site and location characteristics. The project is in its pilot stage, and it is being tested in the Arrowhead Development Region 3. Work is being done by students and faculty from six University departments and the Agricultural Extension Service in cooperation with staff of the State Planning Agency and the Arrowhead Regional Commission. The system's second pilot application is scheduled for Region 9.

Also in Region 3, a pilot program has been initiated to standardize and computerize county building permit data. Although this is routine in one sense, the task is complex both conceptually and technically because of the need to organize a very fragmented data base on the one hand and to develop regional planning applications on the other. This work

involves faculty and students from both the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses and staff of the Arrowhead Regional Commission.

In addition to the 1972 and 1973 studies on *Public Programs and the Role of the Regional Commission* for Regions 2 and 9, CURA has helped complete other projects, including: detailed updating of the lakeshore development study in both Region 3 and Region 9,⁹ a study of land requirements, land resources, and zoning needs around the periphery of the new Voyageurs National Park,¹⁰ and various studies of transportation and housing in Region 11.¹¹

The Minnesota Analysis and Planning System (MAPS)

An important input to any planning unit such as regional commissions is data and information. MAPS is a good source. Knowing "how many" often provides better decisionmaking for individuals, businesses, and state and local government; and that's what the Minnesota Analysis and Planning System (MAPS) of the Agricultural Extension Service is all about.

A county board or regional commission wants to apply for a federal grant. However, it needs to know facts about population change,

⁹*Lakeshore Development in the Arrowhead Region, 1967-73*. Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, forthcoming.

¹⁰*Land for Development Adjoining Northern Minnesota's National Recreational Corridor* (MLMIS Report Number Two). Pamela G. Rusch, John R. Borchert, and George W. Orning. 1972.

¹¹*New Homes, Vacancy Chains, and Housing Sub-Markets in the Twin City Area*. John S. Adams. Office for Planned Residential Development & Housing Research, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. August 1973.

"Catching Up:" *Bus Operations and Potential in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area*. Russell B. Adams, Scott R. Dickson, and Aaron R. Isaacs. A report of the Program in Urban Transportation.

⁷*Public Programs and the Role of the Regional Commission. Minnesota Development Region Two*. Prepared for the Minnesota State Planning Agency by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. December 1972.

⁸*Public Programs and the Role of the Regional Commission. Minnesota Development Region Nine*. Prepared for the Minnesota State Planning Agency by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and the Urban Studies Institute, Mankato State College. March 1973.

business income, number of unemployed, and average size and income of farms. MAPS can help them.

A computer-based data system was needed. This resulted in the formation of MAPS in the spring of 1967 to serve extension and its clientele. The initial objective was to investigate the feasibility of providing extension with a pilot, prototype, county level data file as the base for a statewide information system.

The first 2 years, a part-time staff of four extension faculty members—assisted by a systems consultant and contractual support from the Data Center's Division of Control Data Corporation—engaged in this research and development effort. Considerable encouragement and direct data base support was provided by the Information Systems and Services Division of the Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce. EDA provided a large initial county level data base for the MAPS program and full support of its information system programs. Initial funding also provided for the purchase and installation of

the University Control Data Corporation 6600 Computer. This facility has been important to the development of a generalized storage and retrieval file management system known as Qwick Qwery. Since February 1969, MAPS has functioned as an operational information system providing data services to a broad range of clientele. These clientele are within the Agricultural Extension Service and the university as well as in state, local, and federal governments, other educational institutions, and private industry.

In 1971, there were about 400 users of MAPS services. They were located in many Minnesota counties and in a dozen other states. As of 1974, requests for data services have been received from over 1,500 governmental, educational, and private enterprise clientele from each of Minnesota's 87 counties; from 24 other states; and from a broad spectrum of Minnesota state and local governmental units.

In January 1971, MAPS became an operational Summary Tape Processing Center for the 1970 Census of Population and Housing. It has provided data services from the Census Tapes throughout the Upper

Midwest. MAPS provided the data base for the court-ordered Minnesota legislative reapportionment and helped the court verify its redistricting plans. Working closely with the Metropolitan Council and with the State Planning Agency, MAPS has made detailed census data available on an extensive basis for Minnesota, its regions, its counties, and its cities, townships, and villages.

MAPS conferences for Census Data Users have been attended by over 540 people, including representatives of many states. MAPS User Seminars are designed to increase the accessibility to the MAPS data base to individuals from within the university and from other organizations. These are usually conducted six times each year. Registration is limited to 20 individuals per seminar. In 1973, with seven seminars, 140 persons representing 61 different organizations attended.

You can get more information about the MAPS program and the data services you need by writing to: MAPS, 415 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.



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