



Upper Minnesota Valley  
**REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

# Annual Report 2020



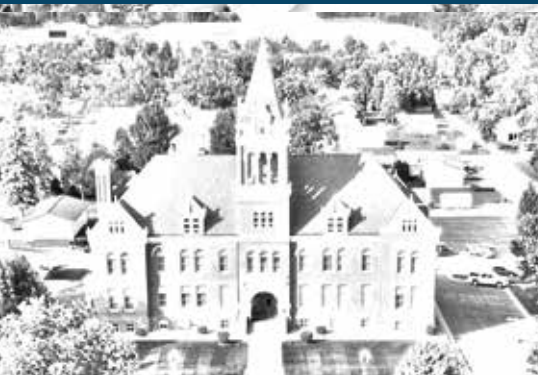
Swift County



Yellow Medicine County



Big Stone County



Lac qui Parle County



Chippewa County



## Message from the Executive Director

*Resilient. Flexible. Adaptable. Problem solvers.*

These are all words that we have used to describe our staff and our agency. We have certainly come to understand what this really means over the last few months. While health, economic and social issues have been in the minds and hearts of all our staff and board members, we have been looking for ways where we can make an impact with these topics. We are collaborating with many local organizations to connect local businesses and individuals with the changing resources available to them so that they can be resilient in these uncertain times. In some places in the region we have helped by sifting through the complex rules and opportunities and providing direction or support or grant writing. This sort of work is nothing new for us, but it does seem like the priorities of the day seemed to have shifted very quickly in 2020.

Inside this annual report you will find examples of our work helping local units of government with a wide variety of things. Developing complex plans and documents, writing and managing grants, connecting people to ideas and resources, marketing and promoting our region. These are all the mainstays of our work. You will also find a summary of our new strategic plan and how we collected information on priority issues in the region and are developing some products and services that can help our region with those issues. Due to the recent events in our region, state and nation we are already adapting our work to help solve new problems in order to help our region be more resilient. We stand ready to help do what we do best.

*Onward!*

**“If you always do what you’ve always done,  
you’ll always get what you’ve always got”  
-Henry Ford**



## Letter from the Board Chair

Greetings,

This was my final year as Board Chair of the UMVRDC and it has proven to be very interesting. Last year, I gave an update on changes about organizational structure and strategic planning. We were moving forward with implementation when Covid-19 occurred. It has been very challenging since. Our Executive Director and staff implemented the process to work from home when the order to shelter at home came. Their performance was unbelievable—very little disruption in office procedures and functions were noticed.

Thanks to all our staff, they also continued to implement strategic planning while out of the office. Currently, we have new projects being implemented after the virtual meeting of the full commission board. Staff also have recommended other programs to the board.

I have been honored to be Board Chair of the UMVRDC. Thanks to all other organizations and personnel that work with the UMVRDC. It has definitely been enjoyable and an honor.

Gary Johnson, UMVRDC Board Chair



Feel free to contact us at anytime via email or phone! Stay connected by visiting our website for project updates, funding opportunities, regional examples and more!

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## Stay At Home Order - Telecommuting

Like many other organizations, the UMRVDC did not expect all staff to telecommute for as long as we did. Though we did not expect it, we adapted. We just introduced a cloud base platform where all staff could access our files from any computer, which made it convenient when we were all forced to work from home due to the stay at home order.

This forced us to learn new technology that we will continue to utilize once we return to the office. Staff have been staying connected having daily video calls using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. We have learned together and will continue to teach one another throughout this new norm!



UMVRDC staff participating in a regular staff meeting

# Commission Board Members

## Big Stone County

## Chippewa County



**Jay Backer**  
County Commissioner



**Michele Backer**  
Big Stone Municipalities



**Harold R. Dimberg**  
Ortonville Township



**Jim Dahlvang**  
County Commissioner



**Jim Curtiss**  
Montevideo Mayor



**Jim Schmaedeka**  
Louriston Township

## Lac qui Parle County

## Swift County



**Roy Marihart**  
County Commissioner



**Jeff Olson**  
Dawson City Council



**Mark Bourne**  
Hamlin Township



**Gary Hendrickx**  
County Commissioner



**Warren Rau**  
Hegbert Township



**Lucas Olson**  
Benson City Council

## Yellow Medicine County

## Tribal Community



**Gary L. Johnson**  
County Commissioner



**Gene Bies**  
Canby City Council



**Gene Stengel**  
Granite Falls Township



**Amanda Luepke**  
Clarkfield City  
Administrator



**Chuck Swanson**  
Upper Sioux Community

## Public Interest

## School Board



**Carrie Bendix**  
SW MN Private  
Industry Council



**Dawn Regnier**  
MN West Community  
& Technical College



**Diane Kepner**  
Prairie Five CAC, Inc.  
Board



**Brett Buer**  
Dawson-Boyd School  
Board



**Bill McGeary**  
Benson School  
Board

# Financial Report

Contractual services the UMVRDC provided to the region \$655,663



Funds brought to the region as a result of our work \$4,803,488

The amount of money invested in our region as a result of the UMVRDC's work in FY20

## \$5,459,151

### Expenses:

	FY21	FY20
Salaries/Fringe	885,586	769,938
Commissioner's Expense	23,300	25,500
Audit	14,000	14,000
Contract for Services	32,650	25,976
Copy Charge/xerox lease	4,000	4,000
Depreciation	4,000	3,000
Dues	5,000	4,500
Insurance	1,300	1,300
Legal Fees	2,000	3,000
Miscellaneous	1,000	2,000
Office Rent	12,210	12,210
Postage	3,500	3,500
Printing/Advertising	4,500	4,500
RDC Marketing Item	2,000	2,000
Registration	4,000	5,200
Repairs/Maintenance	1,000	1,000
Software	8,650	8,650
Sub./Publications	2,000	2,500
Supplies	4,500	4,500
Telephone/Internet	8,000	8,000
Staff Travel	25,000	20,000
Morale	2,000	1,000
Wellness	2,000	2,000
Web Hosting/Maintenance	3,500	3,500
Meander	23,000	23,000
Prairie Waters Ads	16,000	16,000

**FY21 Total Expenses = \$1,094,696**

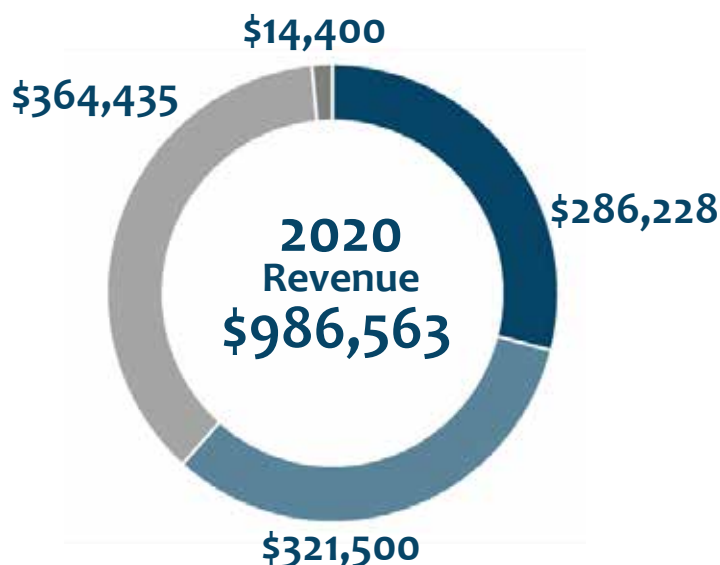
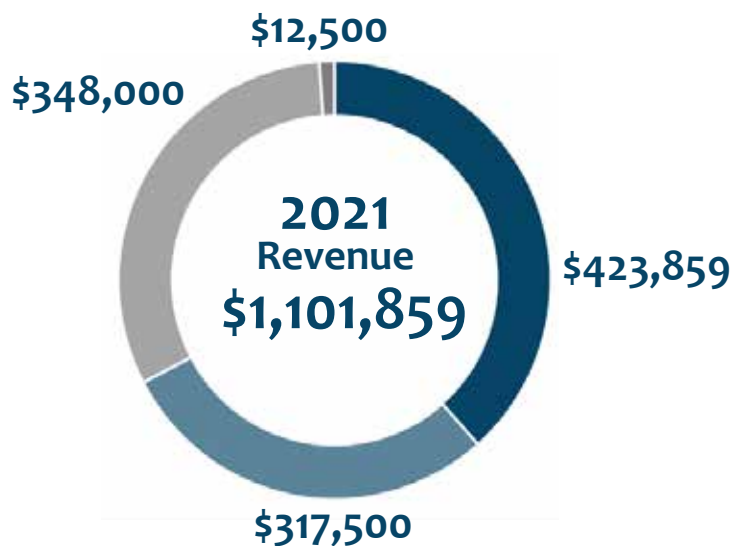
**FY20 Total Expenses = \$970,774**

### FY20 Ending Account Balances

General Checking	\$413,184
Money Market	\$22
CD	\$358,720
Scenic Byway	\$12,412
Auto	\$46,234
Equipment	\$16,343
RLF Available for Lending	\$293,888

The most recent audit report is available to view at [www.umvrdc.org](http://www.umvrdc.org).

### Revenue:



## UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund

A combination of 27.5 full and part time jobs were created or retained as a result of the six new business loans closed by the UMVRDC during this last year. In total, the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) lent \$357,100 to businesses in the five-county region. Loans for the businesses listed below were approved for equipment, inventory, fixed assets, and real estate.

**Krave Wellness, Canby - \$26,000**  
Equipment-New

**The Dryer Doctors, Montevideo - \$28,000**  
Real Estate and Inventory-Expansion

**Streblow Family Enterprise dba Carl's Bakery, Granite Falls - \$50,000**  
Equipment and Real Estate-Business Acquisition and Expansion

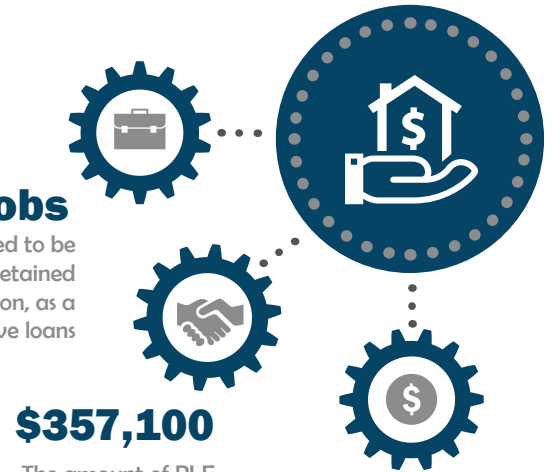
**Korthius Jewelry, Granite Falls - \$38,000**  
Inventory and Equipment-Business Acquisition

**Stony Ridge Foods, Inc, Benson - \$200,000**  
Equipment and Inventory-Expansion

**Falls Café and Canoe, Granite Falls - \$15,100**  
Equipment and Inventory-New

**27.5 Jobs**

Are expected to be created and retained within the region, as a result from the five loans



**\$357,100**

The amount of RLF funds loaned out this fiscal year

**\$2,149,680**

Was leveraged in public and private funding in addition to the RLF funds

### Business Lending

#### RLF Portfolio 6/30/20

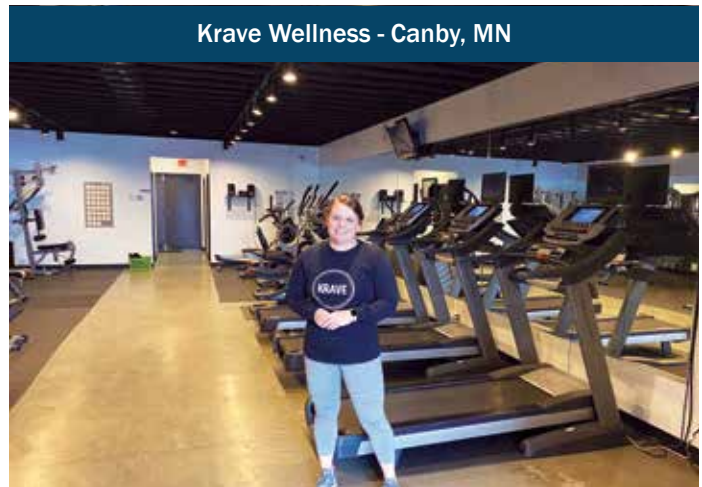
Total Loan Funds	\$1,724,702.97
Loans Current	12
Loans Default/ Deferred	20
Funds Committed	\$26,000
Total Receivables	\$1,430,814.98
Total Available for Lending	\$293,887.99

Financial partners in these six projects include local banks, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Granite Falls Economic Development Authority, and the Benson Economic Development Authority.

## Dawson Revolving Loan Fund

The UMVRDC worked with the Dawson Economic Development Authority (EDA) and submitted a proposal to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a revolving loan fund in Dawson. The purpose of the RLF is to attract new and expanding businesses, support job retention and growth, and create a more entrepreneur friendly community.

Sources for available gap financing are critical to funding business growth alongside other commercial financing and regional resources for economic development financing. The advantage of multiple resources allows for shared risk among various funding resources. If awarded, these funds will be available to fund projects in partnership with regional partners such as RLF funds available through Lac qui Parle County, the Southwest Initiative Foundation, and the UMVRDC. Funds will be able to provide valuable gap financing to sustain and improve local commerce.



## Appleton and Lac qui Parle County RLF Administration

The goals for both Appleton and Lac qui Parle County were simple when the UMVRDC originally wrote their USDA grant applications. They wanted to be able to have additional gap financing available for new and expanding businesses in their communities. The UMVRDC has continued to provide USDA revolving loan fund administration services for the City of Appleton and Lac qui Parle County. While completing the communities' required USDA reporting, monitoring debt servicing, working with the borrowers, are some of the main tasks that the UMVRDC staff handle, this year UMVRDC staff also participated in conversations around ways these funds could be utilized for COVID-19 relief to business' in those communities.

# Small Cities Development Program Grant Management

UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide the general administration of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) which helps communities with funding for housing, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects.

With the assistance of the Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, the UMVRDC has been providing the administration to the **Benson** SCDP grant. The UMVRDC's authored grant in the amount of \$638,250 will wrap up in the fall of 2020 and will have benefited an estimated 21 owner-occupied homes and seven commercial properties and have a total project cost of around \$850,000.

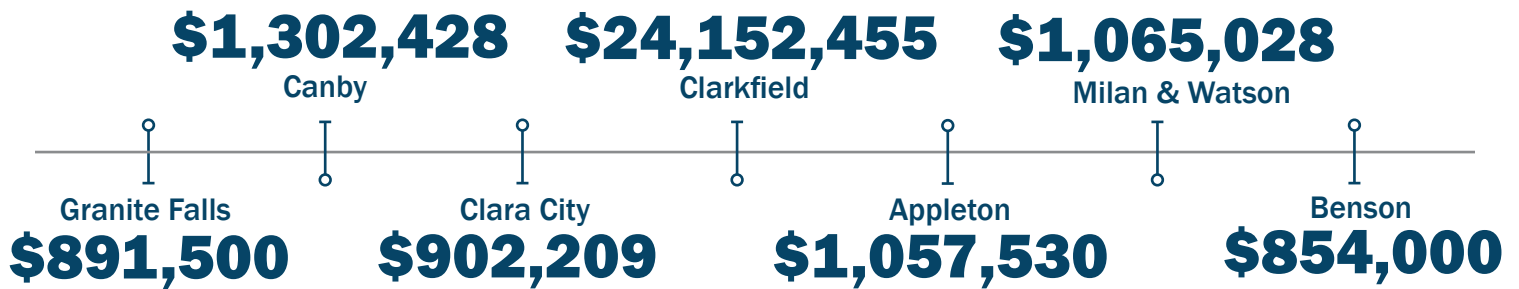
**Granite Falls** and **Clarkfield** are both in year two of the grant that the UMVRDC authored. Once again Prairie Five Community Action Council is providing the field administration for these two grants that will run through September 2021. Clarkfield's, \$1,107,430 SCDP grant will be used to not only rehab 15 owner-occupied homes and five commercial buildings, but also for their upcoming water tower project which is part of a \$24 million dollar project, and is set to start construction in July of 2020. Granite Falls will be able to provide \$625,888 in grant funds to 11 owner-occupied and seven single family rental homes, along with six commercial properties totaling approximately \$890,000 in improvements.

**Milan and Watson's** dual grant is in its first year of projects and will provide rehab to 14 owner occupied homes and 16 multi-family rental units. Four commercial properties will also receive rehabilitation through this almost \$1.1 million project, of which \$784,000 is SCDP grant funds.

With projects totally over \$1.3 million, **Canby's** first year into the grant will allow 17 owner occupied homes and 12 commercial businesses to receive needed rehabilitation. The SCDP grant funds totally over \$1 million will provide a significant amount of impact throughout their community.

The UMVRDC authored two additional SCDP grant applications during 2020. The communities of **Appleton** and **Clara City** were notified in June that they were awarded. Appleton's \$747,500 grant will assist in the rehab of eighteen owner occupied homes along with five commercial properties, totaling over \$1 million with matching dollars. While Clara City will be able to rehabilitate ten owner occupied, eight single-family rental, and four commercial properties with their SCDP grant of over \$701,000 for a total project of around \$900,000. UMVRDC staff alongside Prairie Five Community Action Council will be working together to implement the three-year grants.

## Total Community Rehabilitation Investment



Benson, MN



Clara City, MN



Clarkfield, MN

## Clara City Redevelopment Grant Application






Clara City requested assistance in planning, developing, and authoring a Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Redevelopment Grant & Demolition Loan Program application.

Clara City and Chippewa County partnered with the hope to eliminate a severely blighted, dilapidated building and replace it with up to 12 single level town homes. These market rate town homes will be designed to attract independent seniors who are ready to leave their larger single-family homes and move into something that will allow them greater freedom and less maintenance activity. This would free up existing single-family homes to address some of the housing shortfalls in the City.

The location was the result of a housing study in 2018 that identified the 'Old Junior High' site as "a good location for housing development. The site is in an established neighborhood near the downtown and close to many amenities and services. The site has the potential to be a 'showplace' and a draw to the community" (Clara City Housing Study, Community Partners Research, Inc., 2018).

# UMVRDC Strategic Directions - 2019-2023

In the next five years the UMVRDC will work to increase our ability to address critical issues in our region by developing and implementing work in the following five categories. Each strategic direction will have its own annual process that will lead to a set of workplans that will be adopted each year by the UMVRDC.

	 <b>OPERATIONS</b>	 <b>OUTREACH</b>	 <b>REGIONAL TRENDS &amp; ISSUES</b>	 <b>NEW INITIATIVES</b>	 <b>CORE PROGRAMS &amp; SERVICES</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Evolve UMVRDC organizationally to grow staff and board effectiveness, satisfaction, and retention.	Systematically develop awareness of and interest in UMVRDC capabilities.	Provide an opportunity for LUGs in the region to learn through convenings and research.	Identify and proactively act on opportunities in the region that lead to new UMVRDC programs or services.	Continue existing UMVRDC programs and services.
<b>INTENT</b>	Internal improvements in policy or process that help attract and maintain talent, operate efficiently, and build capacity.	Efforts here will market the UMVRDC to key stakeholders in order to share information, develop relationships, and increase opportunities for new contracts.	In being responsive to our region's emerging needs, this direction will prioritize topics to research, exchange information about, or convene stakeholders around.	A limited amount of dedicated time to develop ideas for new, revenue-generating programs or projects.	This represents our ongoing or regular commitments, including contract work, and the bulk of agency revenue and staff time allocation.



Planners prioritizing the list of potential new projects



Staff participating in strategic planning process



# UMVRDC Strategic Planning - Annual Survey Recap

A survey was completed in December 2019 by local units of government to identify issues and trends in the region. The UMVRDC staff analyzed the results and worked with the UMVRDC board to come up with ideas to address the issues in our region.

## Issues identified as critical in regional survey (appearing in ranked order)

**1. Childcare Accessibility & Affordability**

**2. Workforce Recruitment**

**3. Marketing our Region to Attract New Residents, Workers, Families & Visitors**

**4. Improved Broadband Accessibility**

**5. Road/Bridge Planning or Funding**

**6. Demolition of Dilapidated Housing & Commercial Properties**

## *Projects the UMVRDC completed in 2020 as a result of the survey*

### Child Care Case Studies

The UMVRDC interviewed child care centers within the region to develop a series of case studies. Each center is set up slightly different, whether it is housed in a healthcare facility, school, church, home, etc., and the studies highlight the different ways a child care can be set up and operated. These case studies serve as a resource and guidance for those looking to start up or expand child care facilities and contain information on staffing, fees, enrollment, budgets, challenges, successes, and more. The case studies were made possible with funding help from the Southwest Initiative Foundation.

### Employer Toolkit

The UMVRDC interviewed employers to research their workforce recruitment materials needs, while showcasing our regional content and how they can best utilize it. In 2020 we will analyze the results and develop customized marketing packets for employers to utilize during their workforce recruitment efforts.

### Public Art Case Study

The UMVRDC has created case studies of past successful public art projects that offers ideas for redevelopment of vacant or underutilized property in the community. These are also community beautification efforts and often reflect community history or interests.

### Greenspace Fact Sheet

In response to the trend of communities demolishing unused buildings, primarily on main streets, and concerns about increasing the number of empty lots in the region, a Greenspace Fact Sheet was created. It contains benefits of greenspace, pocket parks and the value of green infrastructure, a guide to creating a pocket park, potential funding sources for greenspace conversion, case studies.

### Online Presence Fact Sheet

UMVRDC staff have developed a fact sheet to share with local units of government on the importance of having an online presence and how the UMVRDC can assist.

### Local Rehab Fund Administration

UMVRDC staff researched how a community can develop and administer local funds for rehabilitation, demo and redevelopment.

### Regional Rehab Fund

The UMVRDC wrote an Economic Development Administration grant that will help fund a feasibility study for the development of a regional fund that could help pay for demolition and redevelopment of dilapidated, vacant or underutilized property in the region.

# Economic Development Administration Funds Diverse Work in Region

The UMRDC annually receives funding from the US Dept of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) to develop a workplan that impacts economic conditions in the region. The UMRDC’s guiding plan is called Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and it outlines keys issues and strategies in the region.

At the end of 2015, Regional Development Commissions across Minnesota completed DevelopMN, an overarching plan that looked at common issues and opportunities between regions. This plan created a new framework that all regional CEDS across the state followed. The CEDS uses four cornerstones identified in DevelopMN. The UMRDC uses these cornerstones to guide our annual work in economic development. Below is a list of the cornerstones and the work that the UMRDC is performing under each.

Human Capital	Economic Competitiveness	Community Resources	Foundational Assets
<p><b>Developing, retaining, and attracting talent are critical for Greater Minnesota to sustain and grow rural businesses and communities.</b></p> <p>Developing a regional interview project with child care providers to identify policy and regulation challenges to be shared with policy makers in FY21.</p> <p>Serve on the Launch Your Future Today (LYFT) Career Pathways Advisory Committee and participate in the Manufacturing and Engineering Advisory meetings between businesses, Minnesota West, agencies, and school districts (YME, Montevideo, RCW, MACCRAY, and Lakeview).</p>	<p><b>Making the region an attractive environment for growth requires communities to develop and link all available assets to support innovation and encourage business growth.</b></p> <p>Developed U of M partnership project to inventory regional developable properties along with visioning and concept design for select redevelopment.</p> <p>Exploring the development of a new regional rehab fund concept.</p> <p>Engaging with regional partners to exploit Opportunity Zone investment for EDA projects. We assisted the Granite Falls EDA with an application for the redevelopment of a property using this designation.</p> <p>Supported six new and expanding businesses in the region through the revolving loan fund.</p>	<p><b>Communities seek to maintain rural values, their heritage through the preservation and improvement of local social, cultural, and natural assets.</b></p> <p>Currently implementing new niche social media campaigns in the region (fishing, hiking, birding etc).</p> <p>Participated in regional strategic planning with the Workforce Investment Board.</p> <p>Currently doing interviews with employers to identify workforce recruitment needs and to encourage utilization of tools on Prairie Waters website and visitors guide.</p>	<p><b>Proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner by managing the access to, maintenance, replacement and growth of assets like transportation, utilities, and water.</b></p> <p>Continue to work with regional representatives to promote broadband deployment, specifically in Chippewa and Yellow Medicine Counties.</p> <p>Tracked broadband deployment by providers in the region.</p> <p>Helped organize a grant application to look at transit coordination needs in the region.</p> <p>Advised numerous communities on funding and resources for infrastructure improvements.</p>

## Benson EDA Grant

The City of Benson requested assistance to author a grant application to the Federal Economic Development Administration, Disaster Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity, to fund wastewater treatment facility flood mitigation and industrial park wastewater main upgrades.

Staff assisted the City to define project scope of work, including all relevant design and construction cost estimates in accordance with program-defined disaster recovery and resilience efforts and coordinate required information with the Federal EDA District Point of Contact (POC).

## Montevideo USDA Feasibility Grant

The Montevideo Economic Development Authority contracted for assistance to coordinate, author and submit a Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training application to the United States Department of Agriculture. Grant proceeds are to be utilized to coordinate scope of work for, and completion of, a Historic Structures Conditions Assessment for the Chippewa Bank building.

The Chippewa Bank building is on the National Register of Historic Properties identified as a regional developable property targeted for redevelopment and requires a Conditions Assessment in order to potentially access historic preservation funding to put the property back in to productive use.

# The UMRDC continues to improve the region's parks and have collaborated with numerous interested partners to make that happen.

## Swift County OHV Park Master Plan

The UMRDC has been working with Swift County on developing a Master Plan for their Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Park. A task force has been assembled to develop the project ideas and strategies to enhance the OHV park and develop a vision of the park for visitors and residents of Swift County. The completion of a master plan will make it eligible for regional designation by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, which would make the park eligible for funding to make improvements to the park.

## Granite Falls Memorial Park

The UMRDC continues to assist the City of Granite Falls with improvements to Memorial Park, which was designated a regional park in 2016 by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). The City is currently working on phase two which includes invasive species removal, a nature-based playground, and renovation of the RV campground. Signage and trail improvements are also part of this phase which was funded in the spring of 2018 for a total of \$732,261 from the GMRPTC. The UMRDC helped with the funding requests, environmental review, and master planning process. The UMRDC continues to assist with funding requests to the GMRPTC, which have gotten more competitive, to continue implementing their master plan.

## Lac qui Parle County Park

The Lac qui Parle County Park was designated as a regional park through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission in the summer of 2018 after working with the UMRDC to complete their master plan. The UMRDC continues to work with the Lac qui Parle County Park to identify steps needed to receive funding to implement the ideas outlined in the master plan. The funding request submitted in 2019 was not successful, but with help from the UMRDC, a committee explored funding from the Minnesota Historical Society for the cemetery area. While no grant was submitted, they took steps to transfer ownership to the County Park, discussed future plans, and started to remove brush around the cemetery area.



Swift County OHV Park



Granite Falls Memorial Park



Lac qui Parle County Park

## UMVRDC's Local Assistance Fund

The UMRDC set aside \$20,000 from our local levy to help subsidize the following work in FY 2020. This allocation was previously know as the Hedgehog Fund but was rebranded in 2020 as part of our strategic planning and is now called the Local Assistance Fund.

Applications and more program details are available at [www.umvrdc.org](http://www.umvrdc.org).

**\$4,000** City of Granite Falls  
*TAP Application*

**\$1,000** Lac qui Parle School  
*SRTS Engineering Grant*

**\$5,000** City of Appleton  
*SCDP Application*

**\$5,000** City of Clara City  
*SCDP Application*

**\$5,000** Swift County  
*Appleton Area OHV Park Master Plan*

## Benson Technical Assistance

For a second year, the UMRDC provided the City of Benson with technical assistance in a variety of ways. While assisting the Benson Economic Development Authority (EDA) through tasks such as reviewing new loan applications, coordinating processes with borrowers, and working through loan deferrals, UMRDC staff was able to provide support to their revolving loan fund.

In February, UMRDC staff represented the City in their booth at the International Biomass Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The updated marketing materials produced by the UMRDC were utilized at that conference along with being included in multiple requests for proposals from inquiring business' looking to possibly relocate to Benson.

While COVID-19 disrupted multiple facets in Benson, the City knew they wanted to be able to support their business sector. The Benson EDA contracted with the UMRDC to provide recovery coordination and outreach to the business community. UMRDC staff also worked with Benson RLF borrowers to defer loan payments for a period of time in hopes to provide relief while their business was being impacted by the new business guidelines.

## Lac qui Parle & Swift County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates

As a result of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) required that in order to be eligible for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds, a local unit of government must first have in place a multi-hazard mitigation plan. Lac qui Parle and Swift Counties with the assistance of the UMRDC were tasked with updating the All-Hazard Mitigation plans to meet the requirements of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

The counties' goal was to involve a great variety of people to ensure that key interests and issues were not left out and increase the chance for lasting solutions. Task forces were assembled to represent all participating jurisdictions in both counties and to guide the planning.

Homeland Security and Emergency Management and FEMA review was completed and each county formally adopted the plans by resolution.





## Maynard Bank Building Conditions Assessment

The UMRDC has been assisting the City of Maynard with their historic Maynard State Bank building. This past year has been focused on completing a conditions assessment to help identify the best first steps in preserving this historic building. Staff wrote a successful grant to the Minnesota Historical Society for a Historical and Cultural Grant for \$10,000 to help fund this project.



## Dawson Armory Building

The UMRDC continues to assist the City of Dawson with this city-owned historic building which houses their library and apartments. A conditions assessment was completed for the Dawson Armory which set the stage for a series of improvements for the building.

The UMRDC assisted with the grant to the Minnesota Historical Society for a Historical and Cultural Grant to fix the roof and repair interior water damage. This grant was approved in late 2019 for the amount of \$184,000. The UMRDC is now assisting with grants management as they implement this grant and preserve this historic building.



## Kerkhoven Comprehensive Planning

After months of working on a plan that will guide the City for the next 20 years (2020 – 2040), Kerkhoven adopted their comprehensive plan. A task force met regularly to go through data and conduct a community survey that informed the goals and strategies of the plan and gave voice to their shared vision.

A comprehensive plan serves as a legal basis for land use regulations and it provides guidelines for the city council and decision makers on how best to use City resources. The plan includes information on the past, present, and what it hopes for the future.



## Regional Developable Properties

The UMRDC continues to develop strategies for dealing with vacant and/or underutilized properties in a sustainable and responsible way, and to emphasize opportunities for newcomers to develop businesses and utilize available properties. Developable property information is critical not only to newcomers, but also to private developers, city clerks, economic development organizations, housing agents, school administrators, and real estate and property management agents.

The UMRDC was awarded funding through the U of M Extension Sustainable Regional Development Partnership, with matching funding awarded via the Southwest Initiative Foundation, to develop, coordinate, and aggregate a developable properties

inventory for the region. Funds covered the cost of student assistance through the Center for Small Towns and the U of M to assist with the project. Undergraduate students were recruited and completed Phase 1 including the database tool for the properties inventory and created a framework with which to conduct regional data procurement interviews. Interviews were completed in December and the site data was uploaded into the database.

Phase 2 project work took place from January through May 2020 and a graduate student was recruited and hired with work commencing in January. Phase 2 deliverables included development and completion of visioning and mock-up concept drawings for five developable properties in the region.

## Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

The UMRDC contracted with Prairie Five Community Action Council to assist with setting up a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) in our region. The process, funded by MnDOT, utilizes public input from a broad set of stakeholders to determine if an RTCC is a good fit for our region and how best to set it up. The ultimate goal is to fill a transportation gap by providing more rides using the same or fewer resources and make transportation easier to use by the customers. Some of the deliverables of this planning project include:

- Establish an RTCC that works for the Prairie Five Region.
- Define and establish a formal entity dedicated to coordinating transportation services in the Prairie Five Region.
- Define the geographic area of the RTCC.
- Plan and implement strategies that meet the regional transit coordination needs and goals identified in the Region 6W Local Human Transit Coordination Plan.
- Develop an operation implementation plan for the RTCC.
- Plan and develop the RTCC and a public participation plan.

The project was set to be completed by September 2020. Once the operational plan is approved by the planning committee, the RTCC can be formalized and an implementation grant can be written to start to carry out the duties of the Prairie Five RTCC. Some of these duties will likely include working with all transit providers in a direct way, research possible transit resources and work to find ways to better serve transportation needs in our region.

## Granite Falls Applies for Transportation Alternatives Grant

The UMRDC wrote a grant for the City of Granite Falls to construct a new section of trail that would connect neighborhoods on the north side of the community that currently have no bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure. In a year with a historically strong applicant pool, the community was not selected for the funds but developed a very competitive proposal addressing the safety concerns of residents walking on a busy county road.

The community was encouraged to apply for the funds again in the coming year. This reinforces the long-term nature of community trail planning and the need for broad community involvement in the planning process. The UMRDC will assist the City of Granite Falls with re-applying for the grant funds in fall 2020.

## Communities Awarded Safe Routes to School Engineering Grant

The Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg and Lac qui Parle Valley School Districts were each awarded the Safe Routes to School Engineering Grant. Stakeholders in these communities worked hard to identify improvements that could benefit their communities, and the UMRDC provided consulting and grant writing assistance to each community. The value of this grant is estimated to be \$70,00 for each community.



# Transportation

The UMRVDC continues to provide local transportation planning assistance to the region through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Transportation issues continue to be critical for our region to get to work, school, medical appointments, vacation, and to move products into and outside of the region.

Staff participate in the West Central and Southwest Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs) in MnDOT Districts 4 and 8 respectively. The ATPs review and rank federally funded road, bridge, public transit, and transportation alternative projects. The total federal transportation investment for projects using federal funds in this region for the next four-year time period of 2021 to 2024 is \$67.3 million.

In addition to serving on the two ATPs, other transportation planning work done by staff this year includes:

- Assisting local transit providers in navigating the planning phase of developing a Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) to better serve the transit needs of people who depend on transit in the region.
- Working with local communities to develop Transportation Alternatives projects such as a trails project in Granite Falls, Safe Routes to School projects in the Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg and Lac qui Parle Valley school districts as well as general parks and trails support.
- Completing a Safe Routes to School plan with the MACCRAY School District.
- Continuing to reach out to communities in our region with opportunities to update or complete Safe Routes to School plans.
- Encouraging communities to consider bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements coinciding with school or street construction projects.
- Assisting MnDOT with planning such as the District 8 Freight Plan, the Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan and a MnDOT Equity in Transportation research project. Communicating with local communities about state and federal transportation opportunities and programs to help them improve their transportation system is a top priority for the UMRVDC.

We would like to thank partners in our Region for helping to distribute surveys for the Statewide Pedestrian Plan. It is critical that the perspectives of local residents be captured in statewide planning efforts when given the opportunity.



## MACCRAY Completes Safe Routes to School Planning

The UMRVDC wrote a grant to complete a plan for the MACCRAY School District. The Safe Routes to School Team, which included MACCRAY's superintendent, principals, parents, teachers, and students, as well as representatives from the school board, City of Clara City, Clara City Police Department, Palmer Bus Service, MnDOT, Countryside Public Health, worked with the UMRVDC to discuss what it's currently like for students to walk and bike to school and why they may not be doing it. Because MACCRAY passed a referendum to consolidate their campuses after the planning process had already started, adjustments to the process were made to reflect this future reality. While Maynard and Raymond were included in community assessments, most of the focus was on the Clara City school campus and the City of Clara City.

The MACCRAY district will be able to address many infrastructure needs with the construction of their new campus and there are infrastructure improvements planned by MnDOT, Chippewa County, and Clara City. Other issues, such as the practice of young people crossing the railroad tracks at unsafe locations, will be addressed by utilizing the Operation Lifesaver programming when the new school year starts. Completing this planning process will help set a direction for the school for the near future and increase the odds that the district and communities will be awarded grant funds for programming and infrastructure.



Claire Swanson baskets



Diane Trew weaving

## 16th Annual Meander Art Crawl Success

It was another great year for the Meander Art Crawl! The UMRDC continues to provide technical and financial management for the Meander since its inception and is pleased to see continued growth and support for the event.

In 2019, the UMRDC found Meander attendees purchased \$116,944 worth of art over the three-day event. People came from near and far to meander through local artists' studios spread across the five counties. This popular event highlights the region's artists and their studios, provides a great opportunity to showcase the area, and provides a large economic boost to the small businesses.

**16th**  
annual Meander  
Art Crawl stats >>>

**75%**  
of customers said the  
quality of the art was  
excellent

**81%**  
of customers rated  
their experience as  
excellent

Average customers  
**\$37**  
spent on food/gas

Average spent  
**\$20**  
on lodging

Total Reported  
**\$116,944**  
Meander Art Sales

Average reported  
**\$2,911**  
art sales per artist

Average of  
**8 studios**  
customers visited



Kayaking the Minnesota River





Madison Arts Project



The River Trail Mural - Montevideo, MN



## Madison Arts Council: Biome

Madison has just installed their first public art project: Biome. The UMRDC has been providing grant writing and project coordination services to the Madison Arts Council to help them towards their goal of adding public art to their community. The UMRDC wrote a successful grant to the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council for \$25,000 that will fund 80% of this piece created for Madison by Tim Adams of Webster City, Iowa. The goal of the project was to have a lighted public art sculpture that will help celebrate rural life.



## Montevideo Arts Project

The “River Trail” mural was completed in the summer of 2019. This latest of four public art projects over the past six years utilized art and landscaping to improve and brighten the area. Artist Victoria Fortenberry-Jones painted the publicly owned cement staircase which is visible from main street. The UMRDC has been providing grant writing and project implementation services to the Montevideo Arts Project (MAP) for several public art projects; this project received \$15,000 from the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council.



## Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway

The UMRDC has been providing staffing and fiscal services to the byway since 1996. The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway (MRVSB) is a partnership of committed individuals from the 287-mile byway corridor, representing a variety of interests including chambers of commerce, various attractions and historic sites, state parks, local and state governmental bodies, private businesses, and concerned individuals. The byway plays an important role in linking and promoting historical sites and stories to better tell the history of the Minnesota River Valley through a variety of efforts, including its programs, website, roadside signs, brochures, and other marketing materials.

In the past year, a major accomplishment is a new Tear Map for the central portion of the byway. A grant from the Minnesota Historical Society funded the \$10,000 project to hire the UMRDC and consultant mapformation.

The MRVSB has also worked on marketing, keeping the website up to date, and distribution of the new visitor’s guide. The byway received a partnership grant that will start in July 2020 to work on updating past publications and continue building relationships with the Dakota communities along the byway.



## Prairie Waters/Get Rural

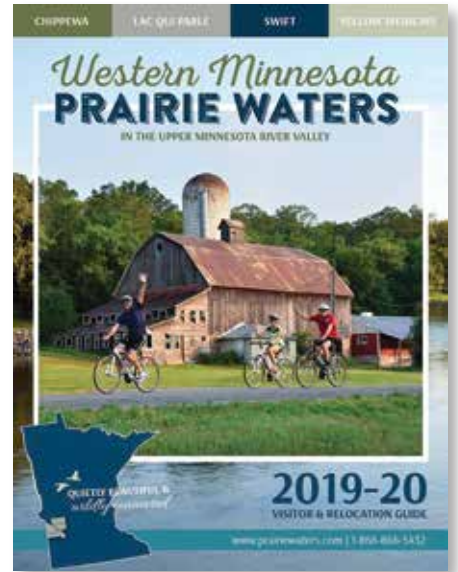
Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is a regional marketing effort of the four counties of Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, and Swift and their communities. The purpose is to promote the area as a great place to visit, work, and live by highlighting the region’s natural, cultural, scenic, historic assets, and lifestyle. The program is managed by the UMVRDC and is funded by counties, cities, chambers, and economic development organizations in the region.

*Thank you!*

A huge thanks to our 2020 Prairie Waters Members for making this program possible and most importantly helping our communities better market themselves to attract new residents and visitors to our region!

Chippewa County, Clara City, Montevideo/CVB, Milan, Swift County, Benson Appleton, Lac qui Parle County, Dawson, Appleton, Yellow Medicine County, Canby, Clarkfield, Granite Falls/EDA

## Visitor/Relocation Guide



### Regional Website

www.prairiewaters.com is a one-stop-shop website that includes information on employment opportunities, housing, education, healthcare, childcare, things to do, etc.



### Annual Gathering

Each summer we host an annual gathering at a unique location throughout the region and invite visitors and locals to come enjoy free entertainment, food and prizes while learning about the Prairie Waters program.



### Advertising

In 2020, Prairie Waters received a \$10,000 CRISIS Grant through Explore Minnesota Tourism that we can spend locally advertising our communities and events.



### Live Here

On the Prairie Waters website and social media campaigns we highlight our region’s lifestyle with information on the following: housing, healthcare, education, childcare, cost of living, things to do!



### Work Here

The website includes information on employment opportunities, technology/broadband services, site selector, start/expand a business and more!



### Visitor/Relocation Guide

This two year guide has a print distribution of 25,000 (plus digital version). The only regional visitor guide in our 5-county region!



Walking path downtown Granite Falls

## Granite Falls EDA Wins Award

The UMRDC was asked to author an Opportunity Zone Project Plan for redevelopment of the former Marr Building in Granite Falls and submit the plan on behalf of the Granite Falls Economic Development Authority (EDA) to the Community Exchange 2019 Minnesota Opportunity Zone Challenge. The challenge is intended to develop projects in Minnesota Opportunity Zones and result in actual projects that can utilize MNvest for funding. A project plan portfolio was completed and submitted for the Opportunity Zone Challenge and project representatives made a presentation for funding at an event in Minneapolis on September 18th followed by a site visit in October. The project presentation won a Challenge prize of \$5,000 to assist in further funding its planning efforts on the project.

The proposed new development plan for the site will be for demolition of currently vacant dilapidated site and construction of a five million-dollar, 10,000-12,000 square foot, three-story, mixed-use building. The first floor will consist of retail/commercial storefronts. The upper two levels will consist of units available for market-rate housing. Total new residential unit occupancy will be approximately 28 units. With the development of a mixed-use commercial building focusing on apartment rentals on the upper floors, the project will bring a much-needed face lift to the proposed location. In addition, the added foot traffic will support downtown business while the new retail space will provide opportunity for existing businesses and the EDA to attract new businesses to the area.



Accepting the Opportunity Zone Award

## Browns Valley Grant Administration

The UMRDC is in the third year of a contract to provide the City of Browns Valley fiscal agent and technical assistance for their \$750,000 Department of Natural Resources Flood Damage Reduction Grant. The construction to complete this project will be taking place early this summer with completion expected by this fall.

The Browns Valley Diversion Project will reduce future flooding in Browns Valley. The project includes completion of a levee, culverts, ditch restoration, and excavation. The project is state funded. UMRDC staff are assisting the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District and the City of Browns Valley.

## MADO All-Staff Retreat

In October 2019, more than 80 employees from regional development organizations in Minnesota came together to learn from one another at a Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) All Staff Retreat. The two days were filled with presentations from RDC staff and local partners on a variety of topics like cyber security, housing, childcare, branding your RDC, health and wellness in the office, infrastructure, and making communities welcoming. Several UMRDC staff presented on projects from our region and received excellent feedback from attendees. It was an excellent opportunity for staff to meet face to face from around the state and to learn from the work we are all doing in our communities.



Staff celebrating a special birthday!

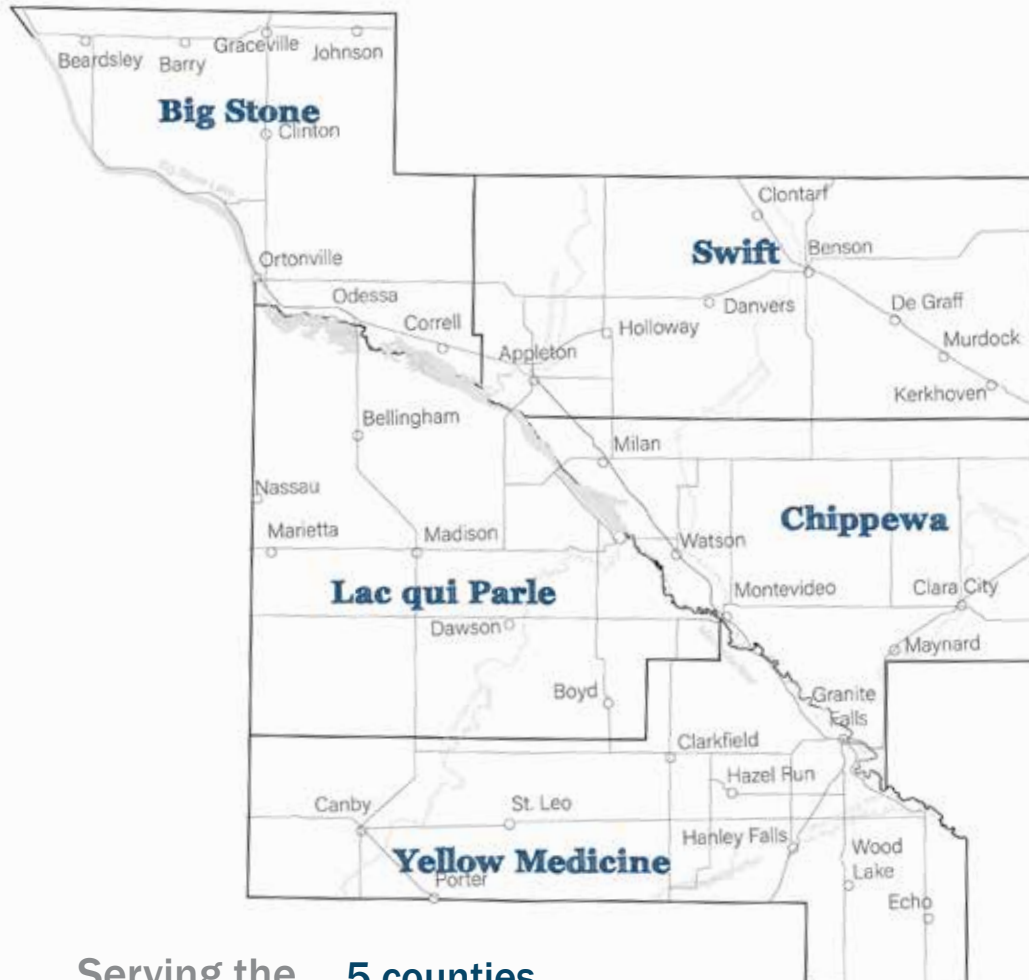


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