



Upper Minnesota Valley  
**REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

# UMVRDC FY24 Annual Report

*July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024*



Big Stone • Chippewa • Lac qui Parle • Swift • Yellow Medicine



# Message from the Executive Director

Dawn Hegland

I am proud to share the accomplishments of the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC) in this annual report. Our talented team has worked to address critical issues identified by local leaders and to provide technical assistance to diverse local initiatives across the region.

We continue to support small businesses through our lending programs, securing grant dollars to repair their buildings, organizing our first workforce summit and regular employer virtual workshops, sought out funding for workforce training programs, and provided employer and community toolkits that can help with the recruitment of new employees. Our efforts have led to the creation of new jobs, business expansions, and increased economic stability in the region.

Our community development projects have secured millions of dollars for improving infrastructure, public spaces, and community services. This year, we worked collaboratively to secure funding to support the growth of childcare businesses in the region, which continues to be one of the top issues in the region. Additionally, we worked with local governments to write numerous plans that will further enhance our communities.

New programs were also initiated this year like our participation in a multi-state effort to look for opportunities to support and grow the local food system in our region. This effort will work along with other organizations and agencies to provide technical assistance to producers, retailers, processors, and anyone in the food ecosystem to allow more food to be grown and consumed in our region.

In addition, we added staff to our team to provide education and technical assistance to local governments and organizations who are interested in planning or implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. All of our cities, counties, and schools have the opportunity to access significant new funding streams that can be used on their buildings, vehicle fleets, or community services.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to our mission of enabling the region to thrive by assisting local units of government. The efforts to update our strategic plan are going to help us with continuous improvement internally so that we can maximize our services and support local projects. We are excited about the opportunities ahead and are confident in the success of our region.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our board members, staff, and partners for their support and dedication. Your contributions have been invaluable in making our accomplishments possible. Together, we will continue to build a stronger, more vibrant region.





# Message from the Board Chair

Ben Bothun



As I wrap up my third year as Chairman of the UMRDC Board, I strain my brain to try and recall everything that has taken place within the agency this past year. Like many others can relate, life just continues to get busier and busier for my family of four. I sometimes cuss at all the time commitments that come with having two teenagers in the house but also need to remind myself that these years will soon be over and to enjoy them while I can.

It's with this perspective that I truly appreciate all the board members that are willing to sit on the UMRDC Board. I have no doubt that their lives would be a little less chaotic if they didn't

have to travel to Appleton every fourth Tuesday evening of the month for our meetings but they recognize the importance that their presence brings. At least, I hope they do. We as a region are fortunate that there are people like this that are willing to offer their time and energy to offer their different perspectives and ideas on what we can do to help our region prosper. Thanks again, board members.

As an agency, we have many things to be proud of this past year and many things to look forward to as well. We are smack dab in the middle of our new strategic planning process and I'm excited for what that brings. We were able to secure for our region a sizeable grant to help with daycare projects as well as a grant to fund a new staff position to look at renewable energy in our area. Our Small Cities Development grants continue to help cities in our region with housing and commercial property rehab. The Revolving Loan Fund continues to help local businesses with gap financing and our new Prairie Waters Tourism and Recruitment guide came out this Spring.

To Dawn and her staff at the UMRDC, thank you for all you do!! Please keep pouring your passion and effort into what you do. Never stop trying to come up with creative solutions for problems that seem unsolvable. In my eyes, you're the best of the best and our region is lucky to have you.

As always, I'm proud to call Western Minnesota my home and I am honored to chair a commission that is trying to make it an even better place to live.

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# Meet our team!



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# Commission Board Members

## Big Stone County



**Chad Zimmer**  
*County Commissioner*



**Francis Chalupnik**  
*Graceville  
Municipalities*



**Harold R. Dimberg**  
*Ortonville Township*

## Chippewa County



**Bill Pauling**  
*County Commissioner*



**Erich Winter**  
*Montevideo  
Municipalities*



**Jim Schmaedeka**  
*Louriston Township*

## Lac qui Parle County



**Ben Bothun**  
*County Commissioner  
(Chairman)*



**Jeff Olson**  
*Dawson  
Municipalities*



**Jann Oellien**  
*Hamlin  
Township*

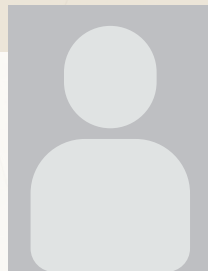
## Swift County



**Gary Hendrickx**  
*County Commissioner*



**Aaron Koosmann**  
*Hegbert Township*

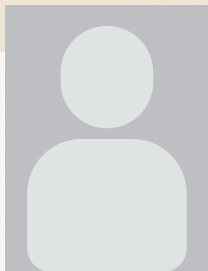


**Vacant**  
*Swift County  
Municipalities*

## Yellow Medicine County



**John Berends**  
*County Commissioner*

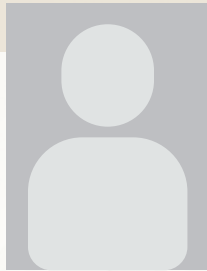


**Vacant**  
*Yellow Medicine County  
Municipalities*



**John Cole**  
*Fortier Township*

## Tribal Community



**Vacant**  
*Upper Sioux Community*

## Public Interest



**Carrie Bendix**  
*SW MN Private  
Industry Council  
Executive Director*



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



**Scott Marquardt**  
*Southwest Initiative  
Foundation President*



**Linda Pesch**  
*MN West Community  
& Technical College  
Director of Enrollment*

## School Board



**Brett Buer**  
*Dawson-Boyd School  
Board*



**Harmon Wilts**  
*KMS School  
Board*



# Financial Report

| Expenses                | FY24               | FY25               |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Salaries/Fringe         | 1,102,839          | 1,308,284          |
| Commissioner's Expense  | 22,100             | 21,500             |
| Audit                   | 16,800             | 17,500             |
| Contract for Services   | 79,696             | 31,100             |
| Copy Charge/Xerox lease | 3,600              | 3,600              |
| Depreciation            | 5,700              | 5,700              |
| Dues                    | 7,000              | 7,000              |
| Insurance               | 1,300              | 1,300              |
| Legal Fees              | 2,000              | 2,000              |
| Miscellaneous           | 1,350              | 1,000              |
| Office Rent             | 16,675             | 17,500             |
| Postage                 | 3,500              | 3,500              |
| Printing/Advertising    | 4,500              | 4,500              |
| RDC Marketing           | 2,000              | 2,000              |
| Registration            | 4,000              | 4,000              |
| Repairs/Maintenance     | 2,000              | 2,000              |
| Software                | 8,650              | 8,650              |
| Sub./Publications       | 2,700              | 2,000              |
| Supplies                | 3,500              | 3,500              |
| Telephone/Internet      | 5,000              | 5,000              |
| Staff Travel            | 20,000             | 25,000             |
| Morale                  | 2,000              | 2,000              |
| Wellness                | 2,000              | 2,000              |
| Web Hosting/Maintenance | 3,500              | 3,500              |
| Meander                 | 22,000             | 28,000             |
| Prairie Waters Ads      | 15,000             | 15,000             |
|                         | <b>\$1,359,410</b> | <b>\$1,527,134</b> |

pass through



| Revenues             | FY24               | FY25               |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Contractual Services | 914,161            | 1,103,757          |
| Levy                 | 362,000            | 373,000            |
| Reserves             | 78,000             | 37,000             |
| Interest             | 11,000             | 15,000             |
|                      | <b>\$1,365,161</b> | <b>\$1,528,757</b> |

### FY24 Ending Account Balances

|                           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| General Checking          | 107,022   |
| Magic Interest            | 235,336   |
| Money Market              | 22        |
| CD                        | 379,877   |
| Scenic Byway              | 21,787    |
| Auto                      | 58,984    |
| Equipment                 | 8,137     |
| RLF Available for Lending | 1,299,059 |

\$7,607,467

The amount of money invested in our region as a result of the UMRDC’s work in FY24

\$914,161

Contractual services the UMRDC provided to the region



\$6,693,306

Funds brought to the region as a result of our work

*The FY23 audit was conducted by Dana F. Cole & Company out of Montevideo, Minnesota. The auditor’s report expresses an unmodified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the UMRDC. The audit report is available online at [www.umvrdc.org](http://www.umvrdc.org).*



### UMVRDC Regional Annual Survey

The UMRDC conducted an annual survey in December 2023 to all Local Units of Government to find out what the biggest issues and needs are for the region. The top ten most important issues that need attention are listed below (visit website for full survey results).

#### 1.Planning to Retain and Increase Childcare

2. Expose Youth to Local Career Opportunities

3. Marketing & Promoting our Community/Area

4. Increase Road/Bridge Funding

5. Planning or Funding for new Single Family Housing

6. Demolition of Dilapidated Housing

7. Increase Access to Capital for Business Development

8. Fixing up Homes/Apartments

9. Planning or Funding for new Rental Housing

10. Fixing up Commercial/Retail/Industrial Property

**The list above drives our workplans each year, which you'll see examples of throughout this report.**



## Welcoming Back Paige!



Paige Meyer is in her second summer of interning at the UMRDC. She is a 2023 graduate of LQPV High School and just finished her first year at South Dakota State University where she is enrolled in the Community and Regional Planning program and is the recipient of the UMRDC's \$2,500 planning scholarship. Paige is working on developing an all new housing developable inventory to promote available lots/areas that could be developed into future housing units. She's been gathering information about any available lots/areas that could be used for future housing development – including locations of properties, lot dimensions, unique features, available utilities, available incentives (if any) and site photos/maps. Paige is working with Kevin and Melissa to assemble the data into a useful format that can be easily shared with prospective residents and area developers and will eventually be included in our Prairie Waters – Live Here webpage. Paige is also working on updating our inventory of developable properties, which are compiled under our Prairie Waters Site Selector webpage. These are sites and buildings in the region that are available for development. In addition, Paige is helping us start weekly promotions called "Developable Property Spotlights" which will feature a building/site in the region and will be shared via Facebook and email blasts.

## Improving our Region's Infrastructure

### Graceville Funded to Implement Safe Routes Plan

The UMRDC worked with the City of Graceville and Big Stone County to write three grants to implement projects from the Clinton Graceville Beardsley Safe Routes to School Plan the UMRDC completed earlier in 2023. The grants were all for the same project- new sidewalks, repair and replacement of existing sidewalks and ADA improvements for areas in and around the school. The original concept was split into two phases to allow the CGB School District to finalize designs for the additions planned for the Graceville school location. The grant applications were submitted to the following programs: Transportation Alternatives, Safe Routes to School Infrastructure, and Active Transportation. In May, Graceville was awarded \$349,199 from the Safe Routes to School Infrastructure program.

**\$349,199**

Grant Awarded



### Lac qui Parle County Park Receives Grant Funding

The UMRDC continues to assist Lac qui Parle County with improvements to Lac qui Parle County Park, which was designated a regional park in 2018 by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). The UMRDC has helped with funding requests, environmental review, and master planning process.

In 2023, the UMRDC wrote a grant to the GMRPTC for the first in series of phased improvements. They received \$595,370 with a \$150,563 local match to install a bridge over the Lac qui Parle River, create a parking lot, develop trails and add signage. The UMRDC will also assist with implementing the grant.

**\$595,370**

Grant Awarded





## Appleton Area OHV Park Receives Federal Funding



In January 2022, the UMRDC assisted Swift County in applying to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's (EDA) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) competitive grant program. Swift County applied for funding under the ARPA Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Program for improvements to the Appleton Area Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park. The County received \$1,034,196 in EDA funding to carry out many of the identified projects listed in their 2021 Appleton Area OHV Park Master Plan, such as the creation of a day use beach area, walking trails, improved parking areas, permanent restroom facilities, new wells, vehicle wash stations, and improved signage.

The UMRDC continues to provide grant administration services for the project. Recent accomplishments include Swift County contracting with Widseth Engineering to design and oversee construction activities. Project design is scheduled to be completed in fall 2024 with construction expected to begin in Spring 2025. The total project cost is estimated to be \$1,477,423.

**\$1,034,196**

Grant Awarded

## Granite Falls Receives Funding for New Electrical Transformers



In the Spring of 2023 the U.S. Economic Development Administration announced available funding through the FY2023 Disaster Supplemental Funding Notice of Funding Opportunity. The funding is designed to support those regions that were impacted by natural disasters of 2021-2022, including the strong winds that impacted our region in May 2022. Only counties included in FEMA's federally declared disaster areas were eligible to apply for this funding, which included all five of our counties. The funding is intended to address economic challenges in the declared disaster areas and help communities devise and implement long-term economic recovery strategies through a variety of construction and non-construction projects.

The UMRDC assisted the City of Granite Falls with an application in fall 2023. Granite Falls requested \$3,380,012 in EDA funding to replace their two aging electrical transformers and accompanying switchgear to provide a reliable source of power for local businesses and residents. The City was notified in July that they received an award of \$2,353,292.

**\$2,353,292**

Grant Awarded

## Energy Improvements for Local Governments

In the winter of 2023, the UMRDC applied for and was awarded a State Competitiveness Fund grant through the Minnesota Department of Commerce to assist with free outreach, education, planning, coordination, and grant writing assistance to local units of government and their partners in the five-county region for various federal clean and renewable energy funding initiatives.

The UMRDC also wrote an additional grant to the Department of Commerce's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program and was awarded funding to set up a grant program to cities in the region to conduct energy planning or technical work related to an energy project. This program will be in place over the summer of 2024.

Finally, the McKnight Foundation awarded Regional Development Commissions across MN funds to further support our work in connecting energy related information and funding with the region.

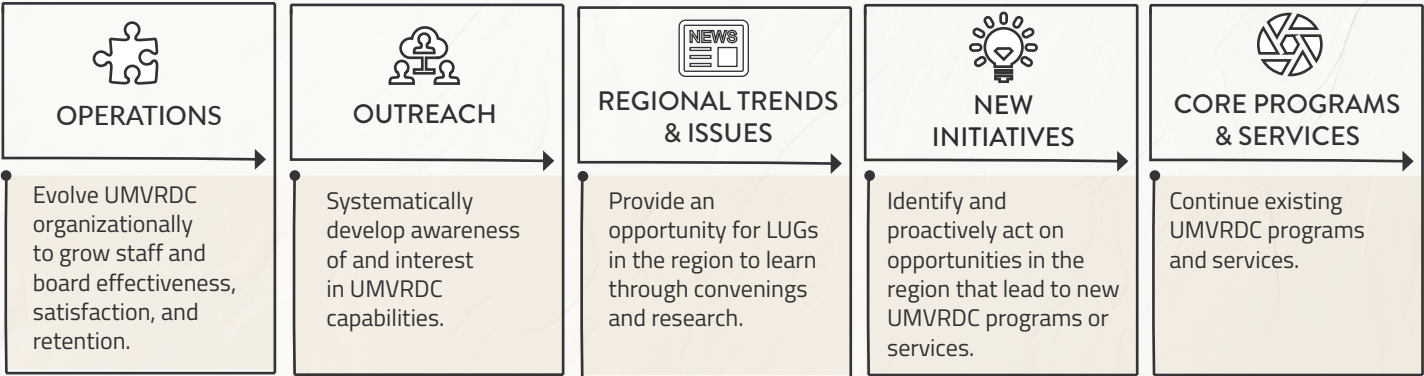
The UMRDC is using the funding to add a dedicated staff member to focus on energy improvements for our local governments with areas of interest including procurement of solar energy systems for public buildings and schools, electric vehicle infrastructure, as well as energy efficiency upgrades for air conditioning, ventilation, heating and lighting systems, and more.

Most of the programs require a focus on disadvantaged communities as part of the federal Justice 40 Initiative, which aims to allocate 40% of all overall benefits to communities marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.



# UMVRDC Works on Improvements to Strategic Plan

Throughout the last year the UMVRDC staff and board members worked with consultant Steve Etcher from MarksNelsen to review the strategic plan and develop concepts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency. UMVRDC is divided into five strategic directions.



## UMVRDC FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENTS

**Our primary customers are the units of government in our region.**

Through our work with cities, counties, townships, school districts and tribal governments we indirectly serve businesses, organizations and the residents of the region.

**We leverage our local tax authority to provide reasonable fees for our services.**

Our fees allow the agency to hire staff to work on the needs of the region. Our staff will provide excellent products for a reasonable cost.

**We provide excellent customer service.**

The UMVRDC strives to set a positive and professional impression in every interaction.

**We provide diverse services based on the needs and requests of the region.**

Sometimes this means ongoing programs like transportation, economic development, Prairie Waters, and the revolving loan fund, other times this means one-time services to help a government with their needs.

**We work hard to understand the needs and issues in all our communities and to help in any way we can.**

This will be done through building relationships, research, and through employee’s personal connections to the region and will lead to work that is reflective of the local interests and values.

**We bring a unique regional viewpoint to the work we do.**

Our work across the region is influenced by our knowledge gained from relationships throughout the region, state and nation. In addition, our board is multijurisdictional and provides a diverse regional perspective for our work.

**We believe in the region.**

We advocate for and promote the region as a great place to live, work and recreate because we know what it is like to live work and recreate here!

**We are a resource center.**

We connect people, ideas, information, agencies, funding and other resources. Many of our communities lack time and staff to take on complex planning processes, apply for public grants, or research resources that can help address local priorities.

Throughout the year, we met to identify keys areas as shown below and will be making improvements to the agency’s systems and programs based on the study.

- 1.) How to define, measure and report the success and impact of the organization.
- 2.) How to increase board members understanding of the UMVRDC programs and services.
- 3.) How to improve meetings and enhance board member’s experiences with the organization.
- 4.) How to identify, encourage, educate, and develop future leaders for the agency.
- 5.) How to improve the development, progress, accountability, and reporting of the annual work program.
- 6.) How to improve the process for identifying, vetting, prioritizing and pursuing regional trends and new initiatives, while maintaining excellence in core programs and services.



## Canby Initiates Safe Routes to School Planning

The Canby School District was awarded \$29,485 from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to create a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan. Through a planning process with public outreach and assessment of current infrastructure and program, the SRTS team will be able to identify a list of potential infrastructure and non-infrastructure solutions to help more children walk and bicycle safely to and from school.

**\$29,485**

Grant Awarded



## Yellow Medicine Comprehensive Plan

Yellow Medicine County contracted with the UMRDC to begin work on updating its 2003 Comprehensive Plan. A comprehensive plan is a tool that presents a community's or county's vision and policies for the long-range future by incorporating public input and goals gathered through a robust planning process. The plan will cover such topics as land use, housing, public infrastructure/facilities/services, transportation, economic development, and parks/recreation/natural resources. In addition, the plan serves as the legal basis for zoning and provides guidance for elected officials and other decision makers when considering future development and expenditures. The planning process kicked off in May with work on a public survey, which will drive the development of future goals and strategies. Work will continue on the plan over the next year as the UMRDC and a planning task force committee meet to develop goals and strategies to guide the County over the next 10-20 years.

## Upper Sioux Community Emergency Operations Plan

The Upper Sioux Community contracted with the UMRDC to update their Emergency Operations Plan. The purpose of an Emergency Operations Plan is to provide a guide for when emergencies happen. The plan is intended to assist officials and emergency organizations to carry out their responsibilities for the protection of life and property under a wide range of emergency conditions and scenarios. Work on the plan is nearing completion and is anticipated to be completed in summer 2024.

## Madison Comprehensive Plan

The UMRDC contracted with the City of Madison to update its 2003 Comprehensive Plan. A comprehensive plan is a tool that presents a community's vision and policies for the long-range future by incorporating public input and goals gathered through a robust planning process. The plan covers such topics as land use/zoning, housing, public infrastructure/facilities/services, transportation, economic development, parks/recreation/natural resources, and community vitality. In addition, the plan serves as a legal basis for zoning and provides guidance for elected officials and other decision makers when considering future development and expenditures. The planning process occurred over a 14-month timeframe,

starting with a community survey in January 2022 which yielded over 320 responses. In February 2023, the UMRDC and City staff facilitated a community meeting with over 125 residents in attendance. From there, the UMRDC continued to meet with a local planning task force committee to develop goals and strategies based on the community input. Once a draft of the plan was ready, the City held an open house for residents to provide comments and feedback on the document. A public hearing was held by the City's Planning and Zoning Commission in March with formal adoption by the City Council in April. The adopted plan will serve as a guide for the city over the next 10-20 years.



## Hazard Mitigation Planning

Hazard mitigation planning helps identify strategies and projects to prevent or lessen the impacts of disasters on communities, infrastructure, and natural environments, making them more resilient against future disasters and thus reducing the costs of recovery. Jurisdictions with plans in place are also eligible to apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) hazard mitigation grant funding. Hazard mitigation plans are required by FEMA to be updated every five years.

### Chippewa County Plan Approved by FEMA

Last fall, the UMRDC completed work with Chippewa County Emergency Management on updating the County's Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The UMRDC and emergency management staff met with local committees in each of the communities, as well as a County committee to collect information and update their strategies. A draft of the plan was available for public review and comment last fall before being submitted to Minnesota Homeland Security/Emergency Management and FEMA for review. The County was notified in January that the plan was approved by FEMA.

### Swift County Receives Funds to Begin Update

The UMRDC assisted Swift County in securing FEMA funding to update their 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan in February. The County has since contracted with the UMRDC to assist in updating their plan. Work has begun and a kick-off meeting will be held with County stakeholders later this year.



## UMVRDC Assisting with Three County Solid Waste Plan Updates

After completing the Big Stone Solid Waste plan last year, the UMRDC was contracted by Chippewa, Stevens, and Swift Counties to assist in updating each of their 10-year Solid Waste Management Plan. The UMRDC staff and the respective County Environmental Departments are working to develop a policy-based road map for how they each intend to reduce waste, increase recycling, and divert waste from landfills with the goal of having a 35% recycling rate or higher by 2030. These plans are required to be updated every ten years by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

**Chippewa County** – Began working on their update in fall 2023 and hope to be completed and approved in late summer 2024.

**Stevens County** – Contract was executed in early 2024 and work on the update has begun. The deadline for completion of this plan is early 2025.

**Swift County** – Began their update in June 2023 and is expected to be completed and approved by MPCA in early summer 2024.



# Responding to Critical Issues

## Support and Development of Local Food Systems

The North Central Regional Food Business Center is a collaboration of 35 partner organizations who have been provided funding from USDA to help coordinate technical assistance and build capacity for farmers and food businesses in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The UMRDC is one of the 35 partners and will provide technical assistance for our five-county region for the next five years.

The goal of the project is to provide direct technical assistance to small- and mid-sized food and farm businesses (producers, processors, aggregators, distributors, and other businesses within the food supply chain).

Highlights of our first year:

- Completed our **Action Plan**
- Worked with the Land Stewardship Project to convene local foods stakeholders in our region to identify key issues and opportunities
- Worked collectively with several other regional development commissions to submit a Mn Dept of Ag Meat Processing Train and Retain Grant to support local meat processing employment
- Wrote and received two proposals to the Emerging Small Minnesota Communities Program
- Assisted three local applicants submit applications to the North Central Regional Food Business Center' Business Builder Sub Award Grant Program with the goal of supporting supply chain resiliency and pandemic response by building the capacity of small and midsized food producers, businesses, or networks of businesses.



## EDA Planning Grant

Through a planning grant provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA), the UMRDC develops and maintains the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region, as well as carries out economic development activities. The CEDS was last updated in 2022 and in January 2024, we submitted an annual performance report which provides the EDA with a summary of accomplishments over the past year related to the goals of the CEDS.

Some of the economic development activities funding through this grant include:

- Convening of our region's economic development professionals on a quarterly basis to share ideas, hear from speakers, and network with each other;
- Regularly sharing information about funding programs/resources;
- Maintaining our developable properties inventory;
- Coordinating a workforce summit for area employers in November 2023 and regional employer lunch & learn webinars;
- Developing childcare case studies

EDA Planning Grants are awarded on a three-year basis and our previous grant period recently ended on March 31. The UMRDC wrote and was awarded a new three-year planning grant which will provide funding through the spring of 2027.

**\$210,000**

**Grant Awarded**



# Transportation

The UMRDC is contracted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to promote and facilitate information and resources regarding transportation programs and funding. We work with counties and cities and school districts to look at funding for roads, bridges, transit, Safe Routes to School Programs, trails and sidewalks.

\$75,000

Grant Awarded

A few of the key activities in the last year include:

## Public Open House for Draft Area Transportation Improvement Plan (ATIP) for 2025-2028

The UMRDC hosted a public meeting to share the draft list of projects to be included in the ATIP. This list outlines the schedule and funding of transportation projects over the next four years. It included all state and local transportation projects utilizing federal highway funding along with 100% state funded transportation projects.

## Graceville Safe Routes to School/Active Transportation/ Transportation Alternative Funding

The UMRDC advised communities and schools in the region about funding that can help with bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The City of Graceville contracted with the UMRDC to write a grant to implement a sidewalk project that was identified in the recently complete CGB School District Safe Route to School Plan. They were awarded \$349,199 in funding for implementation in 2024/2025.

## Canby Safe Routes to School Plan Assistance

The UMRDC advised schools in the region about creating or updating their Safe Routes to School Plan. The Canby School District decided to apply for planning funds and was awarded funds to work with the UMRDC to create a plan in the 2024/2025 school year.

## The UMRDC represented the Upper Minnesota Valley region on several boards throughout 2024, including:

- MnDOT District 8 Area Transportation Partnership (ATP)
- MnDOT District 4 Area Transportation Partnership (ATP)
- Transportation Alternatives Program, Carbon Reduction Program, PROTECT Program selection committee for MnDOT District 4 and District 8
- Prairie Five Rides Transportation Advisory Committee



# Helping Minnesota West Community and Technical College Fund Mechatronics Training Equipment

In the Spring of 2023, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) announced available funding through the FY2023 Disaster Supplemental Funding Notice of Funding Opportunity. The funding is designed to support those regions that were impacted by natural disasters of 2021-2022, including the strong winds that impacted our region in May 2022. Only counties included in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) federally declared disaster areas were eligible to apply for this funding, which included all five of our counties. The funding is intended to address economic challenges in the declared disaster areas and help communities devise and implement long-term economic recovery strategies through a variety of construction and non-construction projects.

The UMRDC assisted Minnesota West Community and Technical College with an application in fall 2023. Minnesota West requested and was awarded \$1,597,062 in EDA funding for modern, mobile mechatronics and welding training equipment to be used at their Worthington campus, as well as all over southwest Minnesota through their Customized Training program.

Grant Awarded

\$1,597,062



## Workforce Summit

The UMRDC led the planning for a regional workforce summit was held on November 8, 2023 at Prairie's Edge Casino Resort, just outside of Granite Falls. The UMRDC, along with 11 regional partners, including representatives from city, county, and regional economic development organizations, workforce partners and private industry met regularly to plan the all-day event. The purpose of the summit was to assist area employers and communities in addressing the ongoing shortage of workers across the region. Most of the presenters were from our region and shared examples of successful projects or strategies to help attract workers.

The summit featured presentations on: workforce data and trends; strategies in employee recruitment and retention; employer/youth connections; childcare examples; available workforce resources; update on mandatory family and medical leave laws; successful workforce housing projects and resident recruitment

Approximately 85 attendees from across the region and beyond attended the all-day event. These individuals were business owners/managers, human resources, school administrators, elected officials, community development workers, and workforce development professionals.

After the event, the presenters' slides and video recordings of the sessions were posted on the UMRDC website.



## UMVRDC Collaborates to Find Funding to Support Childcare Expansions

The UMRDC partnered with the Southwest Initiative Foundation and Prairie Five Community Action on developing a regional application to DEED's Childcare Economic Development Grant program. Initially 29 providers said they were interested in the grant project but after thorough discussions about the eligible activities and timeline, five projects were identified as shovel ready and were included in the application.

The application proposes to create 134 new childcare slots between five local projects that will include two existing centers and four new providers. One of the five projects is a pod model that will include two different family providers. Among the five projects identified in this application, 23 new childcare worker jobs are proposed. These funds will also protect 33 existing jobs located at the two centers that are proposing expansion. The application requested \$421,225 in funding that will be sub-granted to the five projects and will be leveraged by \$1,195,435 in additional local project funding. Project funding comes from the projects and several other local community partners who have made funds available to childcare projects in their community. In addition, the \$33,000 in state project administrative funds requested from this application are over-matched by local partners who have prioritized childcare as an important economic issue. Prairie Five was notified in May that they were a grant recipient of \$380,000. This program would provide grant funding to local projects that will increase the number of childcare slots in the region. Prairie Five will act as the project administrator and manage the subaward process.

Grant Awarded

**\$380,000**



# Helping our Region's Businesses

UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund Portfolio  
as of 6/30/24

Loans in portfolio | 39  
Total Receivables | **\$2,604,096**  
Total Lending Available | **\$1,299,059**

**\$4M**  
Total loan Funds

## UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund

The UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is designed to provide gap financing for business and industry starting up or expanding in the five-county region. The primary focus of the program is manufacturing and industrial-related businesses that will create or retain jobs. New this year disadvantaged borrower criteria interest guidelines include a discounted interest rate to minority groups, plus paying only half percent origination fee. Minority groups include people of color, people with disabilities, women, and Veterans.

**\$200,000**

**Granite Falls Eyecare**  
Granite Falls, Benson,  
Madison, Ortonville

**\$45,000**

**Andersen Hardware**  
Madison

**\$225,000**

**Dairy Queen**  
Ortonville

If a business start-up or expansion is in Lac qui Parle County or the City of Appleton, the UMVRDC also manages loan funds for those jurisdictions. Eligible businesses will employ 50 or fewer new employees and have less than \$1 million in projected gross revenues.

New owners purchased the Appleton Sinclair Station and partnered with the Appleton RLF to receive a **\$30,000** loan.

In addition to the **\$45,000** loan from UMVRDC another loan for \$45,000 has been approved by the Lac qui Parle County RLF for purchase of Andersen Hardware in Madison.



### Small Business Lending Forum

On Thursday April 11th, the UMVRDC hosted a Small Business Lending Forum at the UMVRDC offices in Appleton. There were 53 commercial lenders, along with Economic Development leaders who met to learn how to partner with non-traditional lenders to help entrepreneurs and business owners grow and succeed. Presenters included:

- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- Minnesota Business Finance Corporation
- Southwest Small Business Development Center
- UMVRDC



# Revitalizing our Communities

## Clarkfield MNHS

The UMRDC worked with the Clarkfield EDA to write a grant to evaluate the Clarkfield State Bank Building to see if it is eligible for the National Register. The grant was written to the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program through the Minnesota Historical Society. They received \$9,150 in the fall of 2023 to complete this evaluation.

**\$9,150**

Grant Awarded

## Maynard Bank Building

The UMRDC is working with the city of Maynard to write and implement grants to replace the roof on the Maynard Bank Building. The grant was written to the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program through the Minnesota Historical Society. They received \$155,000 in the fall of 2022 for the roof replacement. The roof was replaced in the fall of 2023.

**\$155,000**

Grant Awarded

## Funding to Repair Homes and Businesses

UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide general administration of the MN DEED Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) which helps cities and communities with funding for housing rehabilitation for owner occupied and single-family rental homes along with multi-family rental unit rehabilitation, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects.

**Milan** and **Watson's** grant rehabbed 10 owner-occupied homes along with eight multi-family rental units and four commercial properties with improvements close to **\$1.1 million**.

**Canby's** grant goals were 11 owner occupied homes and eight commercial businesses rehabilitation totaling over **\$1 million**.

**Appleton's** grant rehabbed 18 owner occupied homes and five commercial properties, totaling **\$1,057,530** in improvements.

The **Clara City** grant is for **\$701,500** and the goal is to rehab 10 owner occupied homes, eight single-family rental homes and four commercial properties.

**Benson's** total grant impact will be **\$1,194,700**. The grant will rehab 20 owner occupied homes and 10 commercial properties.

The **Dawson** grant will fund 18 owner occupied homes and four commercial properties to be rehabbed. The total impact to the community is **\$769,300**.

The **Ortonville** total project will be over **\$900,000** and will rehab 16 owner-occupied homes and seven commercial properties.

**Granite Fall** will rehab 40 units in the Riverview apartment building along with eight commercial properties. The total impact for the community is **\$1,245,800.00**.

The UMRDC partners with Prairie Five Community Action County, Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority and the

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership to administer these grants.

The UMRDC wrote three new Small Cities Development Program grant applications during 2024. The communities of **Granite Falls, Montevideo, and Appleton** are waiting to be notified from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, if they will be awarded a grant.

The **Granite Falls** application is a Public Facility – Streetscape grant and will provide new sidewalks and additional improvements to Prentice Street (Main Street) in Granite Falls.

The **Montevideo** application is for **42 units** of Multi-family rental rehab grant and the **Appleton** application is for **20 Owner-occupied** and **eight commercial property** rehabilitation.

The UMRDC is providing general administration of the SCDP funds and Davis Bacon labor standards for Gra-Mar Court Multi Family Rental property located in **Kerkhoven**. The project will extensively renovate the 16-unit building. The total rehabilitation costs will be **\$1,000,019**. The project is utilizing funding from the SCDP, USDA Rural Development, Minnesota Housing Finance Authority Rental Rehabilitation Deferred Loan Program, Federal Home Loan Bank, Swift County and the Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.



## Developable Properties & Cottage Housing

One of the recurring issues in our region is that of vacant and dilapidated buildings and sites. These properties can be a public safety hazard, hinder development in their surrounding areas and contribute little to the tax base, in fact, many are tax delinquent, while some are perfectly fine and move-in ready. The UMRDC continues to look for ways to address this issue and one of the strategies we have implemented is the developable properties initiative. In 2021, the UMRDC collected data on available buildings and sites throughout our region and uploaded it to LOIS (Location One Information System). LOIS is a nationwide interactive database of available sites and buildings that developers and site selectors utilize.

The UMRDC has worked with communities on a visioning and design concept phase for several properties in the inventory. This has included working with an architect and a local committee to develop concepts for redevelopment. This past year we worked with the City of Appleton on developing concepts for two adjacent City-owned residential lots. The City was interested in converting the lots into a cottage housing development to provide four to six new, affordable housing units for one or two-person households. These homes would be 700-900 square feet, slab on grade homes, with detached garages and a shared community space. The City is currently working on further design and implementation of this project.



## Promoting our Regions Assets



### Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Regional Marketing

Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is a regional marketing effort promoting the five counties of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, 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 UMRDC and is funded by counties, cities, chambers, and economic development organizations in the region.

The 2024 Prairie Waters Members include: Big Stone County, Graceville, Chippewa County, Montevideo/CVB, Milan, Swift County, Benson, Kerkhoven, Appleton, Lac qui Parle County, Dawson, Madison, Yellow Medicine County, Canby, Clarkfield, and Granite Falls/EDA.

**Regional Website:** [www.prairiewaters.com](http://www.prairiewaters.com) The website is a one-stop-shop that includes information on employment opportunities, housing, education, healthcare, child care, things to do, etc.

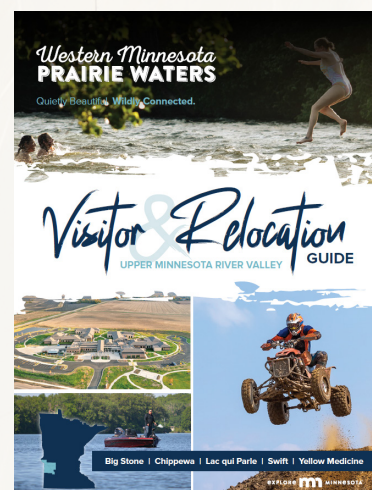
**Advertising:** Prairie Waters received a \$10,000 grant through Explore Minnesota Tourism to spend locally on advertising our communities and events.

**Live & Work Here:** The Prairie Waters website and social media pages highlight the region's lifestyle with information on the following: housing, healthcare, education, child care, cost of living, and things to do. The website also includes information on employment opportunities, technology/ broadband services, site selector, start/expand a business, and more.

**NEW Guide:** A new guide was printed in the Spring of 2024. Staff distributed guides through the communities to businesses, chambers and encouraged employers to utilize the guides for workforce recruitment. The guides are also displayed in the visitor kiosk at the Mall of America, and available in a digital format.

**Workforce Recruitment:** Has created toolkits that includes lifestyle information for an employer to send to a potential new employee as a welcoming package.

Learn more about the region at <https://prairiewaters.com/>





## Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway



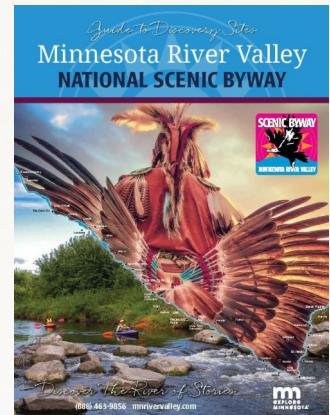
## Minnesota River Valley NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY

The UMRDC has been providing staffing and fiscal services to the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway since 1996. The Byway is a partnership of committed individuals from the 300-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.

The Byway received a grant for \$30,000 to update their Corridor Management Plan (CMP) from the Minnesota Department of Transportation in July 2023. This grant enables the Byway Alliance to review their goals and work towards new projects. One project that was identified is to look for funds to develop a new Byway website. The new CMP is scheduled to be completed in December of 2024.

Learn more about the byway at <https://www.mnrivervalley.com/>



## Meander *Upper Minnesota River Art Crawl*

Total reported **\$124,506** Meander art sales

**78%** of customers said the quality of the art was excellent

**82%** of customers said their overall experience was excellent

Customers spent an average of **\$45** on food/gas

Customers spent an average of **\$19** on shopping outside of the Meander art

**\$2,895** Average reported art sales per artist

Customers visited **11** studios on average

## Arts Meander

2023 marked the 20th year of 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 2023, there was a total of \$124,506 art sales throughout the weekend. Eventgoers came from near and far to visit the 43 artists located throughout Big Stone, Swift, Lac qui Parle, Chippewa, and Yellow Medicine counties. The Meander provides a great opportunity to showcase the area and provides a large economic boost to the small businesses.







Upper Minnesota Valley  
**REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

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