

FY25 UMVRDC ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1 2024 – JUNE 30, 2025

Assisting Local Units of Government within the five counties of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine.



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In a year shaped by shifting policies, economic uncertainty, and strained budget planning, communities throughout this region responded with resilience, creativity, and collaboration. At the UMRDC, we were proud to stand alongside our local governments, businesses, and partners to help navigate change and implement key initiatives.

This year’s annual report reflects the impact of that shared effort. This document summarizes our collective work and offers stakeholders a glimpse into the momentum we’ve built together across the region.

One of the most exciting moments of the year was the collaborative effort to host the Southwest Minnesota Workforce Summit—an event that brought together employers, educators, and regional leaders to focus on solutions. In a time of workforce shortages and changing industry demands, the summit sparked critical conversations and laid the groundwork for long-term strategies.

We also made significant progress in clean energy and energy efficiency—developing a regional PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) revolving loan program, grant research and writing to support local projects, and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program that is providing energy audits on public buildings. These tools help invest in cost-saving, sustainable infrastructure that reduces the environmental footprint while creating long-term financial savings.

In five core downtowns and neighborhoods, we wrote and are managing Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) grants to help homeowners and small businesses make much-needed improvements—from fixing roofs to updating storefronts. These projects don’t just preserve buildings—they strengthen main streets, boost community pride, stabilize property values, and reinforce the economic vitality of our rural communities.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the outstanding work of the UMRDC staff. Their ability to adapt, problem-solve, and guide our partners through increasingly complex programs is at the heart of our success. I’m also deeply grateful for our 22-member board, whose thoughtful leadership and guidance keep us grounded in the values and needs of our region.

And to our funding partners at the state and federal levels: thank you for investing in rural Minnesota. Your support allows us to pursue bold ideas and deliver results that matter.

We know the work ahead won’t be easy. Rural communities continue to face steep challenges—from aging infrastructure to a changing economy to the pressures of doing more with less. But with strong partnerships, a clear vision, and a healthy dose of rural ingenuity—we’re more than ready for the challenge.

Thank you for your continued trust in the UMRDC. We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished, and even more excited for what’s to come.



DAWN HEGLAND | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Wow—four years sure fly by! As I look back over the past year, I’m really proud of the progress and positive changes happening at the UMRDC.

One of the things I’m most excited about is the change to our bylaws that now allows all board members—not just elected officials—to serve on the executive board. That shift opens the door to a more diverse set of voices and ideas, which is a big win. I’m also glad we’re rolling out a new mentor/mentee program for board members. The RDC covers so much ground, and the quicker new members get up to speed, the sooner they can jump in, ask the right questions, and get engaged. And an engaged board is a strong board.

The RDC continues to support our communities through Small Cities Development grants, and the RLF had a busy start to 2025, helping several local businesses with funding. We’re also diving into renewable energy opportunities—which, honestly, is a bit of uncharted territory—but I appreciate that we’re being proactive and exploring how these new technologies could benefit our local governments and their utility needs. Plus, we’re working with several communities on Safe Routes to School plans, and the list goes on. (Apologies to any staff if I missed your project—there’s a lot of good work happening!)

Now for some well-deserved thank-yous.

Dawn—thank-you for all the patience, honest conversations, and questions you’ve answered for me in my 4 years as chairman. I’ve learned so much! The amount of passion, time, and energy you put into this agency, your staff and our region is immeasurable. We’re very fortunate to have you!

To the Staff—I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: you are the best at what you do. So much of your work happens behind the scenes, but the impact you have on our five-county region is incredible. Thank you for always stepping up with a “yes” when communities come to you with challenges. We need problem-solvers like you.

Fellow Board Members — thank you for being here and for saying “yes” when asked to serve. I know everyone’s busy, and your time matters. I also truly appreciate the trust you placed in me to serve as chair these past four years. Stay involved, share your thoughts, and ask questions—your voice matters.

As always, I’m proud to call western Minnesota home. It’s been an honor and a pleasure to serve as chair of a commission that’s working hard to make this region an even better place to live.



BEN BOTHUN | UMRDC BOARD CHAIR

WHAT’S INSIDE

PAGE 2-3: Message from the Executive Director; Message from the Board Chair

PAGE 4-5: UMRDC Staff; UMRDC Board of Commissioners

PAGE 6-7: Financial Report; Annual Survey

PAGE 8-9: OHV Park Improvements; Appleton Trail, Benson Flood Protection, Graceville Sidewalks

PAGE 10-11: LQP County Park Improvements; MN West Equipment; Granite Falls Electrical Infrastructure; Clean Energy; Graceville Stormwater

PAGE 12-13: Canby & Ortonville SRTS; Planning

PAGE 14-15: New Initiatives/ Regional Trends; Local Food; EDA Planning Grant; Transportation Planning Grant

PAGE 16-17: RLF, Workforce Summit; Employer Webinars

PAGE 18-19: Housing Inventory; Main Street Revitalization; Housing Case Studies; Developable Properties

PAGE 20-21: SCDP; Meander

PAGE 22-23: Prairie Waters; Byway

UMVRDC STAFF

MEET OUR TEAM



Dawn Hegland
Executive Director
dawn.hegland@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 101



Jackie Sigdahl
Administrative Assistant
jackie.sigdahl@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 100



Matt Moe
Finance Director
matt@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 114



Kristi Fernholz
Planning Director
kristi.fernholz@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 106



Kevin Ketelsen
Sr. Community Development Specialist
kevin@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 111



Bernice Robinson
Grant Administration Specialist
bernice@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 103



Nicholas Gjerde
Community Development Specialist
nick@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 107



Dalen Roe
Loan Specialist
dalen@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 102



Missy Streich
Sr. Communications Manager
melissa@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 105



Jordan Schreck
Program Assistant
jordan@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 104



Savannah Hundley
Community Development Specialist
savannah@umvrdc.org
320.289.1981 x 113



Paige Meyer
Summer Intern
intern@umvrdc.org

COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERS

Big Stone County



Chad Zimmer
County Commissioner



Francis Chalupnik
Graceville Municipalities



Harold R. Dimberg
Ortonville Township

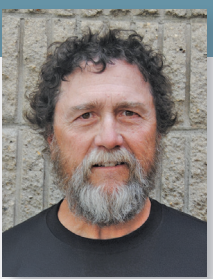
Chippewa County



Bill Pauling
County Commissioner



Dean Matthys
Montevideo Municipalities

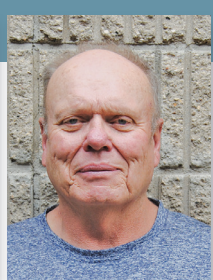


Jim Schmaedeka
Louriston Township

Lac qui Parle County



Ben Bothun
County Commissioner (Chairman)



Jeff Olson
Dawson Municipalities



Jann Oellien
Hamlin Township

Yellow Medicine County



John Berends
County Commissioner



Scott Peterson
Granite Falls Municipalities



John Cole
Fortier Township

Swift County



Gary Hendrickx
County Commissioner



Aaron Koosmann
Hegbert Township

School Board



Chris Schacherer
Dawson-Boyd School Board



Harmon Wilts
KMS School Board

Public Interest



Carrie Bendix
SW MN Private Industry Council Executive Director



Diane Kepner
Prairie Five CAC, Inc. Board



Scott Marquardt
Southwest Initiative Foundation President



Rebecca Weber
MN West Community & Technical College Director of Enrollment

Tribal Community



Vacant
Upper Sioux Community

FINANCIAL REPORT

EXPENSES	FY25	FY26
Salaries/Fringe	1,262,984	1,386,820
Commissioner’s Expense	19,100	20,900
Audit	18,200	18,500
Contract for Services	26,600	24,700
Copy Charge/Xerox lease	2,800	3,600
Depreciation	4,500	4,500
Dues	3,500	7,000
Insurance	1,300	1,300
Legal Fees	175	2,000
Miscellaneous	200	1,000
Office Rent	17,500	17,938
Postage	4,000	3,500
Printing/Advertising	3,500	4,500
RDC Marketing	2,000	2,000
Registration	2,500	4,000
Repairs/Maintenance	3,000	2,000
Software	5,650	8,650
Sub./Publications	3,000	2,000
Supplies	5,000	3,500
Telephone/Internet	4,500	4,500
Staff Travel	20,000	20,000
Morale	2,000	2,000
Wellness	2,000	2,000
Web Hosting/Maintenance	3,500	3,500
Byway Website	47,700	
Meander	28,000	31,000
Prairie Waters Ads	5,000	11,000
	\$1,498,209	\$1,592,408

REVENUES

	FY25	FY26
Contractual Services	1,100,068	1,184,025
Levy	373,200	384,300
Reserves	37,000	2,500
Interest	23,000	24,000
	\$1,533,268	\$1,594,825

FY25 Ending Account Balances

General Checking	21,307
Magic Interest	362,404
Money Market	22
CD	399,020
Scenic Byway	18,198
RLF Available for Lending	1,001,307

\$12,653,063

The amount of money invested in our region as a result of the UMRDC’s work in FY25

\$1,100,068

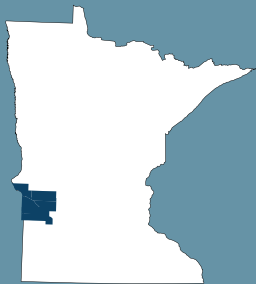
Contractual services the UMRDC provided to the region

+

\$11,552,995

Funds brought to the region as a result of our work

The FY24 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.



UMVRDC REGIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

In December 2024, the UMRDC conducted its annual survey of all Local Units of Government to identify the region’s most pressing issues and needs. The ten highest-priority topics are listed below (full survey results available on our website). These responses play a key role in shaping the UMRDC’s annual workplans by highlighting the priorities that matter most to the communities we serve.

1. Planning or Funding to Retain/ Increase Childcare
2. Expose Youth to Local Career Opportunities
3. Marketing & Promoting our Community/Area
4. Demolition of Dilapidated Housing
5. Planning/Funding for new Single Family Housing
6. Increase Road/Bridge Funding
7. Fixing up Commercial/Retail/ Industrial Property
8. Fixing up Homes/Apartments
9. Planning or Funding for new Rental Housing
- 10 Planning or Funding for Water/ Sewer Infrastructure



FY24 ANNUAL SURVEY RESULTS

Scan the code to view all the survey results



IMPROVING OUR REGION'S INFRASTRUCTURE

APPLETON AREA OHV PARK IMPROVEMENTS

The UMRDC assisted Swift County in applying to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) competitive grant programs. Swift County received funding under the ARPA Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Program for improvements to the Appleton Area Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park in the amount of \$1,034,196 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 total project cost is estimated to be \$1,477,423.

The UMRDC continues to provide grant administration services for the project. Recent accomplishments over the past year include the completion of project design. The project was bid in May 2025, but unfortunately bids came in higher than anticipated. The County decided to rebid the project this fall with construction starting later this fall or early next spring and concluding by the end of summer 2026.

\$1,034,196 - FEDERAL FUNDING
Awarded by the U.S. Department of
Commerce EDA

APPLETON TRAIL REHABILITATION

The UMRDC assisted the City of Appleton in securing federal funding to move forward with needed repairs to a 0.7-mile segment of the Appleton Trail—a vital link connecting the city's parks, recreational facilities, and natural areas. In spring 2025, Appleton was awarded \$216,000 through the federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), a major milestone that ensures the trail improvement project will move forward. The TAP program, administered through MnDOT, requires a 20% local match and does not cover engineering costs.

In addition to the TAP funding, UMRDC also prepared a grant application to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Local Trail Connections program, which is still under review. If awarded, the DNR grant would provide additional support for the project and help lower the city's overall contribution.

With TAP funding secured, the city will be able to begin construction in the summer of 2028. These improvements support Appleton's long-term vision of a connected, walkable community with equitable access to outdoor spaces and recreational opportunities.

\$216,000 - FEDERAL FUNDING

Awarded by the Transportation Alternatives
Program

CITY OF BENSON FLOOD PROTECTION

The UMRDC assisted the City of Benson in applying to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration for the construction of a new flood protection berm/levee around the existing wastewater treatment facility to protect it from flooding from the Chippewa River. The project was funded in October of 2021 for a total project cost estimate of \$1,767,105.

The UMRDC continues to provide grant administration services for the project. The project was bid in summer of 2024, but unfortunately bids came in higher than anticipated. The city decided to apply for a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency grant and was awarded it in the winter of 2025 to help offset the additional cost. The city rebid the project in May of 2025 and project construction to start later fall of 2025.

\$1,413,684 - FEDERAL FUNDING

Awarded by the U.S. Department of
Commerce EDA



GRACEVILLE UPDATES SIDEWALKS

The City of Graceville was awarded \$283,000 in FY 2027 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding to implement Phase 2 of its Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements. The UMRDC was contracted to write the successful TAP application on behalf of the city. Shortly after submitting the TAP application, the city learned that a separate Safe Routes to School grant—also written by UMRDC—had been awarded and would fully cover the local match requirement for the TAP funding. The project will enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility by constructing ADA-compliant sidewalks, ramps, and a defined crossing of US Highway 75. These improvements directly support the planned relocation of all elementary students to the Graceville campus and build upon Phase 1 improvements funded for construction in 2025.

This project was made possible through the strong partnership and collaboration between the City of Graceville, Big Stone County, and the Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley School District. Big Stone County's willingness to lead project engineering and construction was especially critical to its success.

\$283,000 - FEDERAL FUNDING

Awarded in FY27 by the Transportation
Alternatives Program

LQP COUNTY PARK IMPROVEMENTS

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). 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 assisted this past year with completing the environmental review.

\$595,370

Awarded to the Lac qui Parle County Park by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

MODERNIZING TRAINING EQUIPMENT

The UMRDC assisted the Minnesota West Community and Technical College with a successful funding application through EDA’s FY23 Disaster Supplemental Funding Notice of Funding Opportunity. The funding was used to purchase 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. Minnesota West received \$1,597,062 in EDA funding to go toward approximately \$2 million in equipment.

\$1,597,062 - FEDERAL FUNDING

Awarded by the U.S. Department of Commerce EDA

GRANITE FALLS UPDATES ELECTRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

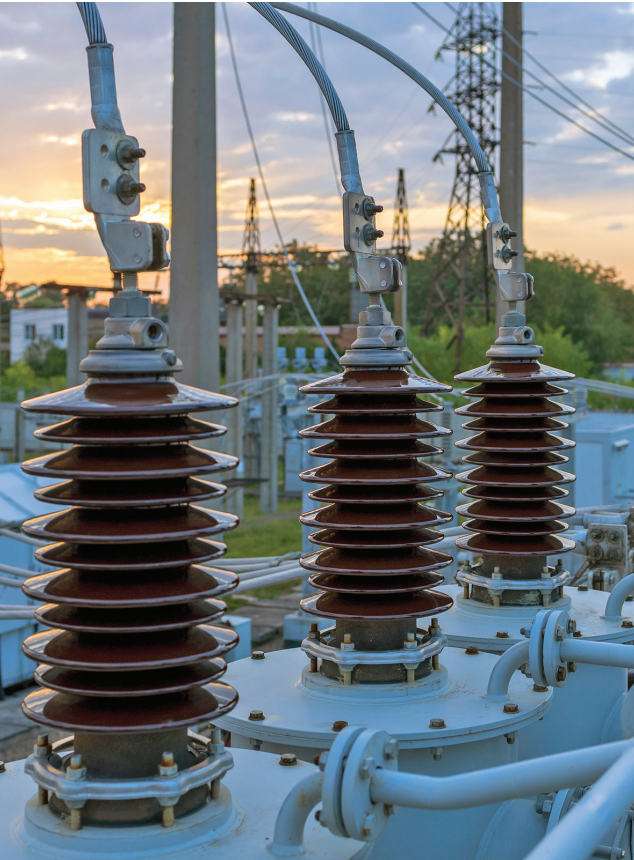
In 2023, the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) announced available funding through the FY23 Disaster Supplemental Funding Notice of Funding Opportunity. The funding is designed to support those regions that were impacted by natural disasters of 2021-2022, including the strong winds that impacted our region in May 2022.

The UMRDC assisted the City of Granite Falls with a successful funding application 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 awarded \$2,353,292 in federal funding, with the total project cost estimated at \$4.2 million.

The UMRDC also assisted the City of Granite Falls with grant writing assistance for the Minnesota Electric Grid Resilience Grant Program via the Minnesota Department of Commerce. The grant application requested and was awarded the maximum award amount of \$250,000 and will be used as part of the local match for the EDA grant award.

\$2,353,292 - FEDERAL FUNDING

Awarded by the U.S. Department of Commerce EDA



CLEAN ENERGY & CLIMATE RESILIENCE SUPPORT

The UMRDC continues to assist local governments and schools in exploring clean energy and climate resilience funding opportunities under funding provided by the McKnight Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

City of Danvers – Geothermal Planning Grant: UMRDC provided technical assistance as Danvers explored a Minnesota Commerce Department grant (up to \$150,000) for a geothermal energy feasibility study. The city did not apply but may pursue future opportunities.

City of Danvers – Stormwater Resilience Grant: UMRDC assisted Danvers in evaluating a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency grant (up to \$5 million with a 10% match) for stormwater infrastructure improvements. The project timeline didn’t align with the deadline, but future applications may be considered.

Ortonville & Dawson-Boyd Schools – Renew America’s Schools: UMRDC and Southwest RDC submitted a joint application to the U.S. Department of Energy on behalf of 16 Minnesota schools. The \$300,000 proposal for HVAC upgrades, efficient lighting, and renewable energy was not selected.

Benson School District – Solar for Schools: UMRDC supported Benson Schools in evaluating a state-funded solar energy program, with additional 30% federal tax credits. The district chose not to apply but may revisit the option in future rounds.

City of Montevideo – Solar on Public Buildings: UMRDC helped Montevideo complete a Readiness Assessment for a 40 kWh solar array at its new public works building. The project could receive 70% funding (up to \$84,000) plus 30% federal tax credits. A developer will now be selected to finalize the application.

City of Madison - The UMRDC partnered with four other regional development commissions to submit a concept paper to the U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Improvements. The grant aimed to support rural energy system improvements. Madison planned to use the funds to upgrade part of its electrical system from overhead to underground to reduce outages and prepare for future energy needs. However, the program was canceled by the new federal administration before any proposals were reviewed.

ENERGY AUDITS

The Minnesota Department of Commerce provided the UMRDC with funding through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program utilizing funds from the US Department of Energy. The purpose of this funding is to improve energy efficiency, reduce energy use, and decrease fossil fuel emissions in communities throughout the region.

Five communities have applied and been awarded funding to conduct energy audits on their public buildings to reduce energy consumption and optimize energy efficiency to lower their operating costs and reduce pollution. These communities are Appleton, Dawson, Graceville, Lac qui Parle County, and Chippewa County.

GRACEVILLE LOOKS FOR STORMWATER SOLUTIONS

The UMRDC submitted a grant on behalf of the City of Graceville for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s Small Community Planning Grants for Stormwater, Wastewater, and Community Resilience. The nearly \$64,000 grant will go toward studying and identifying an improved stormwater management system with sensitivity calculations of climate change related to stormwater runoff impacts. Rain events with as little as 1.5 inches within a short period of time causes water to rise over roads, sidewalks, and even against homes and businesses. In rain events of three to four inches, flooding becomes a significant detriment to the community.



PLANS FOR OUR REGION'S FUTURE

CANBY SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The UMRDC is finishing work on the Canby Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan, funded by a planning grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The goal of the plan is to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school, promoting healthy habits and improving traffic safety near school campuses. The UMRDC led the planning process in close partnership with a local steering committee made up of city and school staff, MnDOT representatives, and the county engineer. The completed plan includes phased recommendations organized by location and is designed to be both actionable and grant ready. The hope is that Canby schools and the City can use the plan to secure funding and begin implementing these much-needed safety improvements.



ORTONVILLE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The UMRDC was recently awarded a planning grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation to develop a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan for Ortonville. The plan will focus on identifying and addressing safety concerns to make it easier and safer for students to walk and bike to school. Data collection is anticipated in the fall of 2025, followed by additional meetings in winter and spring 2026 to develop and review the draft plan, with final recommendations ready by next summer.

UMRDC staff will engage the community throughout the process by attending events, distributing surveys, and conducting interviews with school and city staff. The resulting plan will be both actionable and community-driven, helping Ortonville pursue funding for future safety improvements.



YELLOW MEDICINE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Yellow Medicine County contracted with the UMRDC to update 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 covers 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.

A countywide public survey was conducted last summer to guide the development of the County's future goals and strategies over the next 10-20 years. UMRDC met with the County task force over the past year to discuss issues and opportunities in the aforementioned topic areas and is nearing completion of the project. UMRDC will present an initial plan draft to the task force for review soon with hopes of adoption later this summer.

UPPER SIOUX COMMUNITY DEVELOPS EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN

The UMRDC is contracted with the Upper Sioux Community to update their Emergency Operations Plan. The basic purpose of an Emergency Operations Plan is to provide a guide for emergency operations. The plan is intended to assist key reservation 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 this summer.

SOLID WASTE PLANNING

UMRDC was contracted by Chippewa, Grant, Stevens, and Swift Counties to assist in updating each of their 10-year Solid Waste Management Plans. UMRDC staff and the respective county environmental departments worked 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% (or higher) recycling rate by 2030. These plans are required to be updated every ten years by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Chippewa County – The completed plan was adopted by the Chippewa County Commissioners in April 2025 and approved by MPCA.

Grant County – Work is nearing completion on the plan with a completion date expected later this fall.

Stevens County – Work is nearing completion on the plan with a completion date expected later this fall.

Swift County – The completed plan was adopted by the Swift County Commissioners in April 2025 and approved by MPCA.

SWIFT COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

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.

Swift County has contracted with UMRDC to assist in updating their 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan. Work began with a kick-off meeting with County stakeholders in October 2024. UMRDC and County Emergency Management staff are in the process of meeting with individual communities in the county to discuss past accomplishments and new mitigation strategies to be included in the plan update.

RESPONDING TO CRITICAL ISSUES

REGIONAL TRENDS & NEW INITIATIVES PROJECTS

Through the UMRDC’s strategic planning process, it was determined that our agency should be proactive in addressing the critical issues in our region. We developed a process where staff can work on either a Regional Trend or a New Initiative project. These projects are developed in response to the annual survey or to an opportunity that is available in our region, and we add them to our annual work plan.

Regional Trends & Issues	New Initiatives
Provide an opportunity for LUGs in the region to learn through convening and research. <i>In being responsive to our region’s emerging needs, this strategic direction will prioritize topics to research, exchange information about, or convene stakeholders around.</i>	Identify and proactively act on opportunities in the region that lead to new UMRDC programs or services. <i>A limited amount of dedicated time to develop ideas for new, revenue-generating programs or projects.</i>

SW MN Workforce Summit – Project Leader: Kevin Kettleson

UMVRDC partnered with Southwest RDC, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Private Industry Council and several regional partners to put on the Southwest Minnesota Workforce Summit on April 29 at the Heritage Event Center in rural Taunton. Over 100 people attended the event, including employers, economic development professionals, elected officials, and education professionals.

Marketing for Local RLF Funds – Project Leader: Dalen Roe

UMVRDC staff actively promotes the UMRDC’s loan support services through marketing, reporting, and fund management—available to local revolving loan funds. Offering services directly to RLF administrators, and compiling a comprehensive list of local funding programs with contacts and available fund amounts.

Housing Research – Project Leader: Kristi Fernholz

This project aims to assess regional housing needs and identify ways UMRDC can support solutions. A Housing Needs Assessment template has been started to guide future research and analysis.

Streetscape Application Fact Sheet – Project Leader: Berny Robinson

This project involves creating a fact sheet to market the streetscape grant program to cities with upcoming main street improvements. Streetscape projects can enhance other street projects as they contribute to the safety, health, and aesthetics of a community. The fact sheet is completed, and a list of potential cities to market has been started.

Social Media Development – Project Leader: Jordan Schreck

UMVRDC staff created a menu of services offering Facebook start-up services and content creation for cities that currently lack a social media presence.

Chamber Capacity Support – Project Leader: Missy Streich

This project promoted UMRDC staff support services available to local chambers of commerce for event planning, marketing, social media content creation, and strategic planning assistance.

LOCAL FOOD

The UMRDC is part of a multistate grant from the Regional Food Business Centers Program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to support local food systems by building a stronger connection between producers, consumers, and community partners throughout the region. This effort began with the development of a comprehensive local foods action plan, which laid out strategies to increase access to locally grown food, strengthen regional food networks, and foster cross-sector collaboration. For a couple of years, the UMRDC actively implemented items from that plan, helping launch new partnerships and initiatives. However, due to the indefinite pause of core grant funding most of UMRDC’s direct work in the local food space is currently on hold.

The UMRDC remains committed to this work and is actively seeking new funding sources to continue supporting the local food economy. Most recently, the UMRDC developed a collaborative project with funding from the West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF), and Minnesota Grown to help local food producers increase their visibility and sales through being listed in the Minnesota Grown directory who will also test a new regional filter on their online directory, making it easier for consumers to find local producers.

To further expand engagement, a student intern will visit farmers markets this summer to assist producers with registration on-site and collecting data to help shape a follow-up survey to gather feedback on the program’s impact and guide future improvements, including the possibility of ongoing free memberships for local farmers.



PRIDE OF THE PRAIRIE DIRECTORY
Scan the code to learn more

EDA PLANNING GRANT

Through a planning grant provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA), the UMRDC develops and works to implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region by carrying out a variety of economic development activities. Our CEDS was last updated in January 2022, so over the next year, UMRDC will begin the process of updating the document with completion scheduled for January 2027.

Some of the economic development activities funded through this grant include the 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 and housing development inventories; planning the recent SW MN Workforce Summit, and coordinating regional Employer Lunch & Learn webinars.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GRANT

The UMRDC continues its Transportation Planning Grant contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), allowing the agency to provide a wide range of transportation planning services that benefit the region. Highlights include:

- Education and outreach for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Active Transportation, and Safe Routes to School
- Updating the 2013 regional trails guide by gathering current input from communities to support future trail funding applications
- Supporting zero-emission vehicle efforts, climate resilience, and expanded transportation options
- Assisting with statewide plans like the Minnesota GO Multimodal Transportation Plan, Greater Minnesota Transit Plan, and Statewide Bicycle Plan
- Maintaining the statewide Functional Classification System
- Contributing to local and regional transportation planning, including comprehensive and capital improvement plans
- Serving as a technical advisor for two area transportation partnerships and hosting an annual public transportation open house

This grant strengthens local planning capacity and supports safer, more sustainable, and better-connected transportation networks across the region.



HELPING OUR REGION'S BUSINESSES

UMVRDC REVOLVING LOAN FUND

The UMRDC Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is designed to provide gap financing for business and industry starting up or expanding in the five-county region. The four million dollar fund was capitalized by multiple grants from the U.S. Department of Commerce EDA and counties. The primary focus of the program is to assist businesses to remain or grow in our region to create or retain local jobs.

UMVRDC New Loans in 2025

- Anderson-TeBeest Funeral Home Benson/Appleton **400k**
- Beech Properties Montevideo **100k**
- Extreme Fabrication Racing Clara City **150k**
- Madison Tire & Repair Madison **61k**
- Dawson Auto Glass Dawson **48K**

The UMRDC also provides technical and fiscal support for two local loan funds.

Appleton RLF

68,169.96 outstanding balance of two loans
\$90,309.55 available for lending
Total loan fund \$158,479.51

New Loans in 2025

Anderson-TeBeest Funeral Home Appleton **50k**

LQP County RLF

\$117,520.03 outstanding balance of three loans
\$40,628.43 available for lending
Total loan fund \$158,148.46



REVOLVING LOAN FUND

Scan the code for program information

WORKFORCE SUMMIT

The Southwest MN Workforce Summit welcomed 106 attendees to the Heritage Event Center in rural Taunton. The event brought together employers, community leaders, and workforce professionals from across southwestern Minnesota to address shared challenges and opportunities related to workforce recruitment and retention. Keynote presentations covered workplace culture, employment law updates, and the emerging role of artificial intelligence in hiring and operations. The summit offered a valuable space for networking, collaboration, and exploring innovative strategies to attract and retain talent in southwest Minnesota.



EMPLOYER WEBINARS

The UMRDC continues to host a series of Employer Lunch & Learn sessions designed to support local employers with relevant workforce resources and strategies. These sessions provide practical insights on topics such as labor law updates, job posting best practices, and hiring trends and marketing. Additional sessions focused on strengthening employer/youth connections through initiatives like “Talent Tourism” and community engagement, and highlighted programs such as the KMS Internship and CDL Training. Employers also learned about valuable tools and funding opportunities, including the Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Prairie Waters Workforce Recruitment Toolkits. These informative, hour-long sessions offer employers a valuable opportunity to connect, learn, and enhance their recruitment and retention efforts across the region.



EMPLOYER RESOURCES

Scan the code for recordings of past webinars & workforce summit resources



UMVRDC RLF FY25 PORTFOLIO

\$2,983,575.97

41 outstanding loans

\$1,093,093.77

Available for lending

\$4,076,669.74

Total loan fund

REVITALIZING OUR COMMUNITIES

MAIN STREET ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

In November, the UMRDC partnered with Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) and the cities of Appleton, Benson, Holloway and Ortonville to submit a grant application for the third round of MN DEED’s Main Street Economic Revitalization Program.

Eligible applicants were limited to foundations engaged in economic development, community development financial institutions (CDFIs) or nonprofit organizations engaged in housing and commercial development. SWIF served as the applicant on behalf of the four communities that were identified for this project due to their status as disadvantaged communities according to the Justice40 Initiative’s CEJST tool. SWIF had submitted successful regional applications in prior rounds of funding which included Montevideo and Granite Falls.

Grant funds could be used to establish local funding programs in each city for businesses and organizations to use toward property repair or renovation, building construction, landscaping and street scaping, demolition and site preparation, predesign and design, engineering, non-publicly owned infrastructure or related site amenities in the form of 30% matching grants.

Unfortunately, the application was not funded, but this was a great example of regional collaboration among several local and regional entities working together to address a regional issue.

HOUSING CASE STUDIES

The UMRDC continues to hear from cities in the region that housing is a critical issue. In some cases, there isn't the right mix of housing choices available or the cost of developing new housing infrastructure is prohibitive or maybe there is a need to better understand the housing tools cities can use to support housing development.

Throughout 2025 and with support from the Southwest Initiative Foundation the UMRDC will talk to communities in the region about successful housing projects and initiatives they have undertaken to then share these stories in a set of case studies in an effort to help other communities address some of the challenges noted above. Our goal is to provide inspiration, information and hope for other communities.



HOUSING CASE STUDIES

Scan the code to view the case studies

HOUSING INVENTORY

Housing remains a top concern across the region, with five of the top 11 priorities in our recent Regional Survey tied to housing-related issues. In response, the UMRDC is working to bring tools, resources, and technical assistance to support local solutions.

In summer 2024, we gathered data from communities on available housing lots—including size, amenities, incentives, and utilities—and created a regional Housing Development Inventory. This resource helps promote local housing opportunities and will be updated regularly. A new Housing Resource page on our website now features this inventory and available lots, with plans to expand content.

Additionally, on March 18, the UMRDC hosted Leah Hall from the Minnesota Housing Partnership to present the Housing Institute program. This 14-month initiative supports regional teams—made up of local government, nonprofits, schools, and businesses—to collaborate on specific housing projects like workforce housing, senior housing, and rehab programs.

For communities interested in adding available lots to the inventory, contact kevin@umvrdc.org.



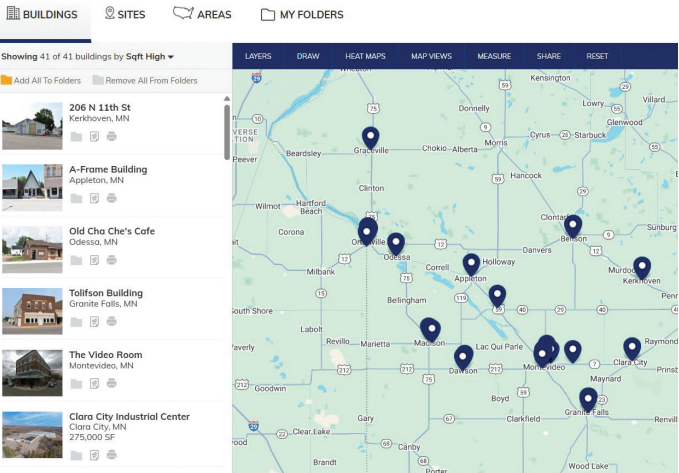
HOUSING INVENTORY

Scan the code to view the regional housing inventory

DEVELOPABLE PROPERTIES

One of the recurring issues in our region is that of vacant and underutilized buildings and sites. These properties can be a public safety hazard, hinder development in their surrounding areas and contribute little to the tax base. The UMRDC continues to look for ways to address this issue and one of the strategies we have implemented is the developable properties inventory.

The UMRDC continues to collect data on available buildings and sites throughout our region and upload it to LOIS (Location One Information System). LOIS is a nationwide interactive database of available sites and buildings that developers and site selectors utilize when searching for potential locations for new development or business relocation and/or expansion.



SITE SELECTOR

Scan the code to view the available properties and buildings

SMALL CITIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide general administration of the federally funded 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.

CLARA CITY: The goal was to rehab 10 owner occupied homes, 8 single-family rental homes and 4 commercial properties. Total funds that impacted the city is:

\$902,209

BENSON: The grant rehabbed 21 owner occupied homes and 7 commercial properties. Total grant impact was:

\$1,194,700

DAWSON: The grant will fund 18 owner occupied homes and 4 commercial properties to be rehabbed. The total impact to the community is:

\$769,300

ORTONVILLE: This grant will rehab 16 owner-occupied homes and 7 commercial properties. The total project will be over:

\$900,000

GRANITE FALLS: The grant and will rehab 40 units in the Riverview apartment building along with 8 commercial properties. The total impact for the community will be:

\$1,245,800

Granite Falls also has received funding for a Streetscape project. The project will be on Prentice Street (main street) and includes sidewalk replacement, multiple ADA ramps and bump

outs, removal and replacement of trees, benches, decorative planters, tree fencing/bike tie ups, and signage. The funding for the Streetscape project is for:

\$600,000

The UMVRDC provided general administration of the SCDP funds and Davis Bacon labor standards for the Gra-Mar Court Multi Family Rental property located in Kerkhoven. The project extensively renovated the 16-unit building. The project utilized funding from the SCDP, USDA Rural Development 515, Minnesota Housing Finance Authority Rental Rehabilitation Deferred Loan Program (RRDL), Federal Home Loan Bank, Swift County and the Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority. The total rehabilitation costs were:

\$1,000,019

Montevideo: Has received funding to rehabilitate 42 multifamily rental units in the city for a total of:

\$600,000

Appleton: Has received funding to rehabilitate 20 Owner-occupied homes and 8 commercial properties for a total of:

\$943,000

In 2025, the UMVRDC submitted an SCDP grant application on behalf of the City of Appleton. The \$1.2 million request would support the rehabilitation of 42 multi-family rental units and critical stormwater improvements to reduce flooding and support sustainability.

The UMVRDC collaborates with Prairie Five Community Action, Swift County HRA, and Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership to implement these grants.



PROMOTING OUR REGIONS ASSETS



ARTS MEANDER

In its 22nd year, the Meander Art Crawl continues to draw art enthusiasts from all over to browse the art of 42 local artists. The UMVRDC continues to serve as the fiscal agent for the Meander. The annual event offers a chance for the public to meet with the region's top artists in their studios nestled among the small towns and family farms found in the Upper Minnesota River Valley. The event has been a huge economic boost for our region over the years.



**ARTS MEANDER
ECONOMIC IMPACT**
Scan the code for the Economic
Impact from the 3-day Event

WESTERN MINNESOTA PRAIRIE WATERS



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.

Project highlights listed below:

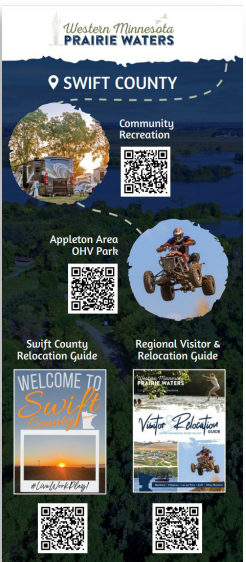
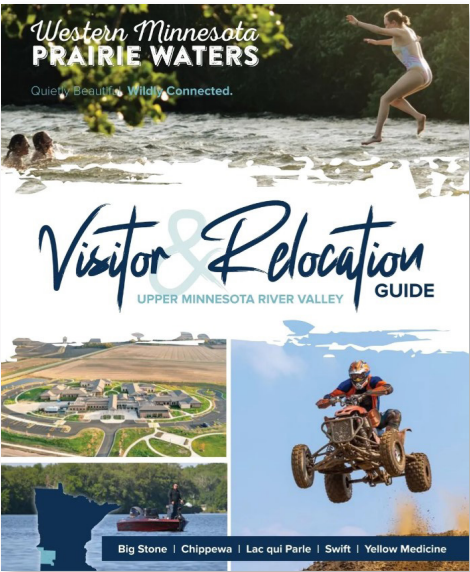
REGIONAL WEBSITE: www.prairiewaters.com The website is a one-stop-shop that includes information on employment opportunities, housing, education, healthcare, child care, things to do, etc.

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.

VISITOR/RELOCATION GUIDES: 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.

Visitor & Relocation Guide



Customized Community Rack Cards

The 2025 Prairie Waters Members include:

Big Stone County, Graceville, Ortonville, Chippewa County, Montevideo/CVB, Swift County, Benson, Kerkhoven, Appleton, Lac qui Parle County, Dawson, Madison, Yellow Medicine County, Clarkfield, and Granite Falls/EDA.

Learn more about the region at
WWW.PRAIRIEWATERS.COM



MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY SCENIC BYWAY

Since 1996, the UMRDC has provided staffing and fiscal services for the 300-mile Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway. This partnership includes chambers, attractions, parks, government entities, and individuals dedicated to preserving and promoting the region’s history and culture.

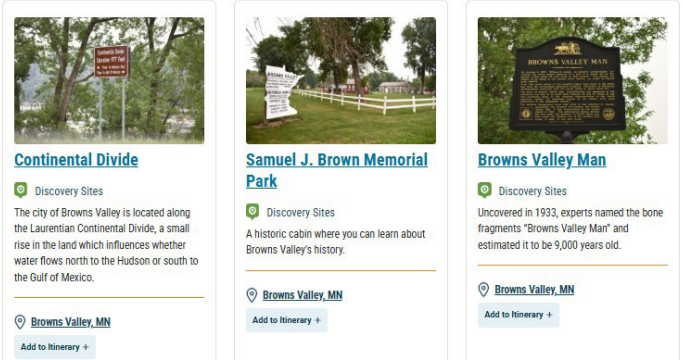
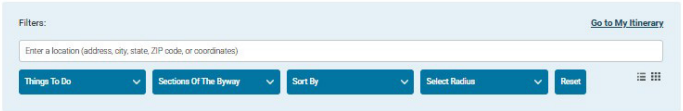
In 2024, the Byway completed an updated Corridor Management Plan, refining its goals and strategies. A \$75,000 grant from the Minnesota Historical Society—managed with the City of Appleton as fiscal agent—will support the development of a new website and visitor guide. The updated website will feature improved security, user experience, accessibility, and interactive tools like a custom itinerary builder.

These enhancements aim to make the region’s historic and cultural assets more accessible and engaging for visitors.



BUILD YOUR OWN ITINERARY!

Scan the code to build your own itinerary along the MN River Valley



Thank you!

We want to extend a sincere thank you to the elected officials across our region who continue to support the work of the UMRDC. Your leadership, partnership, and commitment to strengthening our communities help make our work possible. Together, we’re building a stronger, more vibrant region—one project at a time.



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

PRST STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 63
APPLETON, MN

323 W. Schlieman Ave, Appleton, MN 56208



**SERVING
THE REGION
SINCE 1974**