



Making Plans: Community-Based Planning's First Two Years

APRIL 1999

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Summary

Major strides have been made in implementing Minnesota's Community-Based Planning Act. Sixteen of the state's 87 counties are participating in community-based planning, along with numerous cities, townships and other local governmental units. Four pilot projects, launched in 1998 to gather practical experience and knowledge of this new approach to comprehensive planning, are halfway through their process and expect to have completed plans by mid-2000. Seven new community-based planning projects are beginning in 1999 and should have completed plans by the spring of 2001.

Minnesota Planning has been providing extensive technical assistance to communities in their planning efforts, as well as endeavoring to inform citizens about community-based planning through mailings, presentations, guidance materials and one-on-one consultations. The agency's Internet web sites and Local Planning Assistance Center have connected thousands of Minnesotans to information about local planning.

The demand for local comprehensive planning assistance continues to grow. Yet the outlook for the program is unclear. Money appropriated for administering the act and providing technical assistance to communities runs out at the end of June 1999. While Minnesota communities requested almost \$4 million in grants in 1998 — more than five times the \$750,000 appropriated — no additional money is available for planning grants. Action by the 1999 Minnesota Legislature will determine the future course of community-based planning.

Introduction

Minnesota's economic growth during the 1990s and lack of up-to-date plans guiding local decisions about development, land use, transportation and environmental impact led the Minnesota Legislature to enact the Community-Based Planning Act in 1997. Until then, state law offered little guidance for local governments on what their comprehensive plans should cover, what planning approaches might best meet local and state needs or how to deal with issues that cross local boundaries. Nor had the state provided any funding since the early 1980s to help communities develop long-range plans.

The Community-Based Planning Act sets forth a framework intended to integrate sustainable development principles into local comprehensive plans. It also provides financial and technical assistance for local planning. Minnesota Planning administers this assistance, as well as reviews and comments on plans prepared by counties and joint planning districts.

This new voluntary approach to local comprehensive planning lays out 11 goals that establish the basic framework for plans and address the long-term interest of the state in responding to growth and change. It stresses giving local residents a stronger voice in planning by involving them in all aspects of the planning process, and it encourages collaboration among neighboring communities and between state and local governments.

The law also created a Community-Based Planning Advisory Council to work out the details of the planning process, develop criteria for state review of local plans and recommend any needed changes to the law. The council had 18 voting

members: four state senators, four state representatives, nine private citizens and the deputy director of Minnesota Planning. It concluded its work in June 1998.

This report, *Making Plans: Community-Based Planning's First Two Years*, summarizes the progress made by Minnesota's community-based planning efforts and the lessons learned after the first two years of the program. It also considers the outlook for the next biennium.

Putting the law into action

Major strides have been taken by Minnesota Planning and the advisory council to implement and refine the act. Thousands of individuals have received information about community-based planning through presentations and mailings. Eleven community-based planning projects involving 16 counties and numerous cities and townships are underway. And dozens of other governments have received consultations and other technical assistance on local planning issues.

Citizens express their ideas

The work began with informing Minnesotans about the Community-Based Planning Act and gathering their thoughts on its implementation. The Local Planning Assistance Team of Minnesota Planning held 24 meetings in 12 communities in the fall of 1997 that generated many ideas for refining the act. About 1,000 people attended these meetings, including county, city and township officials, businesspeople, private citizens and state employees. Discussions were lively, opinions varied and interest high.

Directions for Community-Based Planning, released by Minnesota Planning in December 1997, summarized the discussions at these meetings. Several common, overarching themes emerged:

- Local planning is important.
- Planning should remain voluntary.
- Local ownership of the plan is crucial.
- Goals and processes must be flexible.
- State guidance and assistance are desirable.
- Citizen involvement is essential.
- Cooperation across local boundaries is required for success.

More than 1,000 people continue to receive updates, news releases and notices of publications about community-based planning.

Refinements to the law recommended

Based on ideas from the public meetings and its own discussions, the Community-Based Planning Advisory Council developed recommendations for refining the act. These were published in *Refining the Framework: Recommendations for Community-Based Planning* in January 1998. Although the Legislature did not adopt these suggestions, it did clarify the state's role in reviewing community-based plans.

In June 1998, the council also recommended postponing the elimination of the Municipal Board, slated for December 1999. The Municipal Board handles matters regarding the creation of cities, consolidation of local governments and modifications of municipal boundaries. Letting both the Municipal Board and alternative dispute resolution processes move forward for at least several years, the council reasoned, would allow an honest comparison of the processes.

Legislature refines planning act

In discussing community-based planning, citizens and local government officials expressed concerns about how the state would review plans and the requirement that local governments would have to return grant dollars if disagreements with the state either were not resolved or not submitted to mediation and arbitration. The Legislature heard these concerns and changed the Community-Based Planning Act in 1998 to:

- Clarify what the state considers when it reviews county or district plans. Minnesota Planning is to review the extent to which plans promote citizen involvement and cooperation among communities and demonstrate consideration of the community-based planning goals.
- Extend county or district response times for addressing state comments to 120 from 60 days for initial comments and to 60 from 30 days for notice of intent to enter dispute resolution
- Relax grant payback provisions so that a county or district that refuses to enter into dispute resolution does not have to return all grant funds but is no longer eligible for future grant disbursements
- Prohibit tying other state grants and spending to participation in community-based planning

Four pilot projects to try new approach

Four pilot projects were launched to gather practical experience and knowledge in this new approach to comprehensive planning that will help other communities develop community-based plans. The Legislature provided \$500,000 for four pilots: \$350,000 for the St. Cloud area and \$50,000 for each of three other pilots. These three

pilots — Dodge County, Carlton County and the Chippewa-Big Stone-Lac qui Parle Upper Minnesota River project — were selected by Minnesota Planning from among 18 applicants. All four pilots began their two-year community-based planning efforts in early 1998. Each has unique approaches that will offer good lessons for other Minnesota communities.

St. Cloud pilot seeks ideas and information

The St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Board called on the Great River Roundtable to help it involve citizens in its planning effort. Citizens from the St. Cloud area offered their input on regional issues and their vision for the region's future at 14 public meetings in the fall of 1998. Four hundred residents contributed nearly 1,200 ideas. Goals based on those ideas were then drafted at three workshops, and strategies for achieving the goals were developed at a regional visioning summit in December.

In addition, the joint planning board has appointed a 23-member Planning Advisory Committee to provide input throughout the project. The committee represents a variety of interests, including agriculture, health care, education, business, labor, townships and cities. It will use the vision, goals and strategies generated from the regional visioning summit as the foundation for the comprehensive plan. It will also review all drafts and make recommendations to the joint planning board on each element of the plan. The joint planning board, which includes representatives from Benton, Stearns and Sherburne counties and the cities of St. Cloud, Waite Park, Sartell, St. Joseph and Sauk Rapids, meets monthly to monitor the progress of the process.

State agencies have been invited to participate in the planning advisory committee and joint planning district board discussions. One state effort that particularly affects the joint board's work is the Department of Natural Resources' revisions to the Mississippi River Management Plan.

"We are making progress. We have put together a very sophisticated citizen participation component to our planning process which we think will greatly benefit the plan once it is completed. And we have had tremendous cooperation from many different levels of government."

— George Rindelaub,
Stearns County administrator

Issue identification, research, mapping and analyses also are nearing completion with assistance from a private consulting firm. Among the issues being researched are:

- Expected trends in the demand for homes, offices, retail space and industrial land
- Transportation, land use and the full cost of various travel options
- Wastewater treatment
- Defining urban growth boundaries

The joint planning board expects to complete a comprehensive plan by December 1999.

PILOT PROJECTS TAKE VARIED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING				
ST. CLOUD				
DECISION-MAKING	JURISDICTIONS INVOLVED	PRIMARY STAFFING	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	SAMPLE ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Joint planning board created through a joint powers agreement ■ Planning Advisory Committee recommends plan to board ■ Joint board adopts plan for three-county district ■ Member communities ratify plan ■ Agreement contains a dispute resolution process 	<p>3 counties: Benton, Sherburne, Stearns</p> <p>5 cities: St. Cloud, Waite Park, Sartell, St. Joseph, Sauk Rapids</p>	<p>Planning consultant and Great River Roundtable</p>	<p>Vision meetings</p> <p>Goal-setting workshops</p> <p>Visioning summit</p> <p>Web page</p>	<p>Growth management</p> <p>Regional transportation</p> <p>Agricultural preservation</p> <p>Intergovernmental cooperation</p> <p>Wastewater treatment</p>
CARLTON				
DECISION-MAKING	JURISDICTIONS INVOLVED	PRIMARY STAFFING	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	SAMPLE ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Joint planning board created through joint powers agreement ■ Joint board develops and recommends plan ■ County board approves plan 	<p>1 county: Carlton</p> <p>1 tribal government: Fond du Lac</p> <p>10 cities: Kettle River, Cromwell, Wrenshall, Scanlon, Cloquet, Barnum, Carlton, Moose Lake, Thomson, Wright</p> <p>Townships: Thomson plus five town board members representing the county's other 18 townships</p>	<p>Arrowhead Regional Development Commission</p>	<p>Citizen survey</p> <p>Public meetings</p> <p>Advertisements</p> <p>Newsletter</p> <p>Web page</p> <p>Media spots</p>	<p>Rural sewer and water</p> <p>Rural lot sizes</p> <p>Land stewardship</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>Transportation</p>
UPPER MINNESOTA RIVER				
DECISION-MAKING	JURISDICTIONS INVOLVED	PRIMARY STAFFING	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	SAMPLE ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Joint planning board created through joint powers agreement ■ Joint board develops and recommends plan ■ Member communities review and approve plan ■ Joint board adopts plan 	<p>3 counties: Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle</p> <p>6 cities: Granite Falls, Milan, Dawson, Hazel Run, Nassau, Graceville</p>	<p>Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission</p>	<p>Initial project meeting</p> <p>Visioning meetings</p> <p>Media spots</p> <p>Web page</p> <p>Newsletter</p> <p>Community workshops</p> <p>Plan review workshops</p>	<p>Feedlots</p> <p>Land use</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>Flood mitigation</p> <p>Economic development</p>
DODGE				
DECISION-MAKING	JURISDICTIONS INVOLVED	PRIMARY STAFFING	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	SAMPLE ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dodge Commission of Governments created through a joint powers agreement ■ Commission prepares and recommends plan ■ Commission member units of government review and approve plan 	<p>1 county: Dodge</p> <p>8 cities: Blooming Prairie, Claremont, Dodge Center, Hayfield, Kasson, Mantorville, Pine Island, West Concord</p> <p>Townships: 6 town board members representing all 12 county townships</p> <p>3 school districts: Hayfield, Triton, Kasson-Mantorville</p>	<p>Southeastern Minnesota Development Corporation</p>	<p>Focus group meetings</p> <p>Public vision and goal-setting session</p> <p>Web page</p> <p>News releases and articles, including in University of Minnesota Extension Service and school newsletters</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Public infrastructure</p> <p>Transportation (Hwy. 14)</p> <p>On-site sewage treatment systems</p> <p>Feedlots</p>

Carlton County project identifies major issues

The Carlton County Joint Powers Planning Board is studying demographic trends in the county and, with help from the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, laying out some of the major issues that a new comprehensive plan should address. The board is made up of representatives of the county, all eight cities in the county, 19 townships and the Fond du Lac tribal government.

The board also is studying how to coordinate local planning with state planning. It has met with staff from the departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Trade and Economic Development, and Transportation, as well as the Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Pollution Control Agency to get state perspectives on local issues.

"It has been a good experience getting a large number of communities together to start talking about future goals of the county. The county board said that it has been necessary for a long time, but we did not have the necessary resources. The money from the state made it possible."

— Bruce Benson, Carlton County zoning administrator

County residents are being encouraged to become involved in the planning effort through newspaper articles, newsletters, information placed in libraries, a web site on the Internet that provides information and solicits comments, a

survey of community attitudes and public meetings. The joint planning board expects to propose a comprehensive plan by July 2000.

Upper Minnesota River project draws on citizens' visions

The Upper Minnesota River Joint Powers Board kicked off its planning process by conducting "Community Visioning" workshops with residents of Big Stone, Lac qui Parle and Chippewa counties. The sessions, held in January 1999 with assistance from the University of Minnesota Extension Service, were aimed at gathering citizens' visions of community character, values and quality of life. Draft goals and policies will be developed to address the issues identified in those meetings.

Along with the 11 goals of community-based planning, the project will consider topics of particular importance in the region, including feedlots, floodplain and wetlands issues, and the aging of the population. A plan is expected to be completed by mid-2000.

The board, formed by three counties and six cities, will use the results of these workshops to develop a community-based plan for the area. The Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission is coordinating the planning process.

The board established a technical team that represents participating communities and the development commission. This team will provide general coordination, give input about the plan's content, assist with facilitating public participation and help to identify local concerns. The technical team has met with state agency representatives to identify planning issues, learn about available state information and data, and discuss how best to coordinate the community-based plan with

ongoing state efforts. Efforts to publicize the planning process and encourage citizen involvement have included a newsletter, radio talk show appearances by joint board members, a barbecue and public notices.

"Looking at the ecological disasters that have occurred in Minnesota due to no planning, it is essential that we have it. It is necessary for the state to survive ecologically, demographically and economically."

— Ron Anderson, mayor of Milan

Dodge County considers a range of issues

Economic development, technology, land use and growth problems and opportunities were among the issues discussed by citizens of Dodge County at focus group meetings in the fall of 1998. The meetings were designed to identify areas that a comprehensive community-based plan should address.

Through a joint powers agreement, Dodge County governments created the Dodge County Commission of Governments to carry out its comprehensive planning project. The commission has 18 members representing eight cities, 12 townships, the county and three school districts, and will develop the community-based plan for approval by the Dodge County Board by mid-2000. The Southeastern Minnesota Development Corporation is working with the Dodge County Planning and Zoning Department to facilitate the pilot project's activities. The county also received a grant from the Board of Government Innovation and Cooperation to

supplement its pilot project grant and is seeking a visit from the Minnesota Design Team to help citizens conceptualize solutions to their planning problems.

“Community-based planning is a step in the right direction. It allows us to plan ahead. It is also proactive rather than reactive.”

— Duane Burton,
Kasson City Council member

Seven new projects begin in 1999

Seven new community-based planning projects are beginning in 1999 — four through state community-based planning grants, two through other state funds and one with local funds. Thirty-eight counties submitted applications with requests totaling about \$4 million for the \$750,000 in community-based planning and technology grant funds appropriated by the Legislature for 1998. Minnesota Planning selected four new projects and three of the existing pilot projects to receive grants. Several projects will be exploring ways to incorporate local water plans, solid waste plans and other planning efforts into their community-based comprehensive plans.

Communities receiving state grants for new community-based planning projects are:

- Nobles County, for a collaborative effort with the Southwest Regional Development Commission, the Minnesota Project, 11 cities, 20 townships and three watershed districts
- Crow Wing and Cass counties, for a coordinated set of plans for

the two counties and assistance for nine communities along Highway 371. The community plans will focus on urban development and related pressures along the highway corridor. The Central Minnesota Initiative Fund also will be involved.

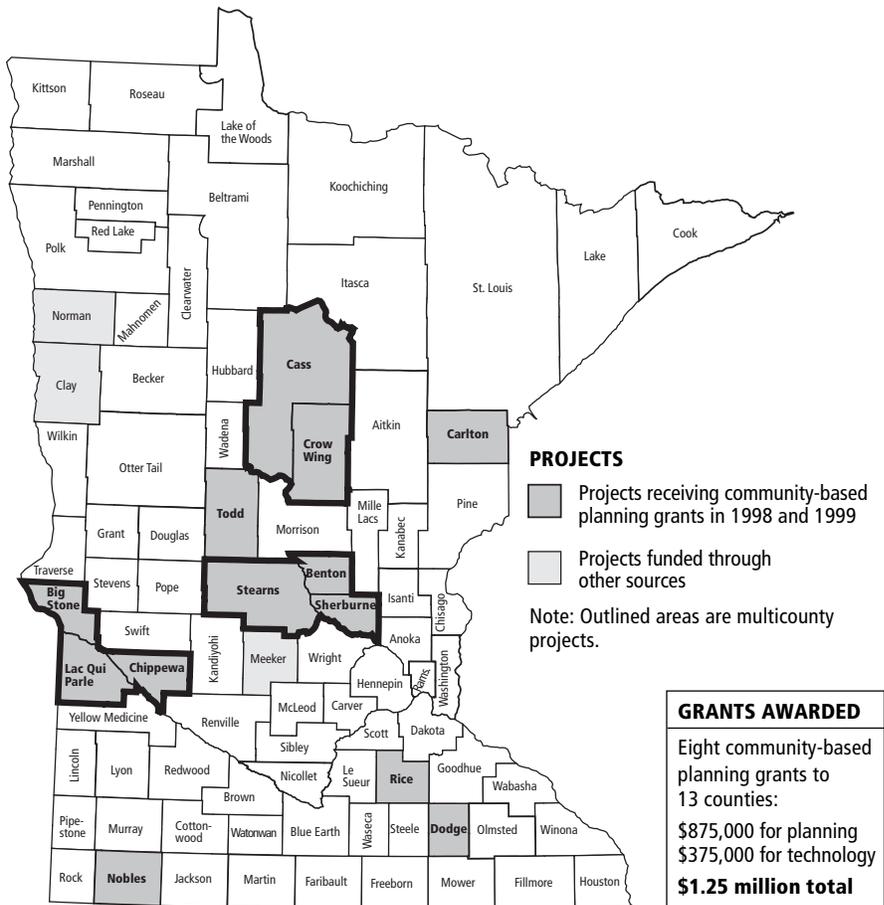
- Rice County, for creating a comprehensive plan with the participation of the county planning commission, 14 townships, eight cities and several school districts. A citizen committee and a steering committee representing local jurisdictions will be formed to advise the county board of commissioners on the planning effort. This project will make extensive use of geographic information systems technology.
- Todd County and the city of Staples, for a joint project to create

comprehensive plans for both the county and the city. Ten cities and townships are expected to participate on a joint planning board to assist with this effort. The Central Minnesota Initiative Fund also will be involved.

Awards to three existing projects will allow them to broaden and enhance their efforts:

- The Upper Minnesota River pilot project will develop community-based comprehensive plans for three counties and several cities in addition to a regional plan. Expanded investment in geographic information systems technology will help with the analysis of the current situation and future options.
- Carlton County will expand its public participation effort and

COUNTIES INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING PROJECTS



FLOODS TEACH COUNTY THE VALUE OF PLANNING

"We were caught without an overall plan for the county," said Curtis Borchert, district manager of the Norman County Soil and Water District. "We want to make sure that never happens again."

Two years after the Red River floodwaters receded, Norman County still finds itself awash in the aftermath. As its communities, businesses and farms continue to retrench and rebuild, officials are acutely aware of the truism that planning is better than reacting.

To that end, the county and most of the communities within its borders are developing a set of community-based plans with technical assistance from Minnesota Planning. "The assistance has been fantastic," Borchert said. "We can go to the Local Planning Assistance Team with any questions that come up, and they are very responsive." Minnesota Planning awarded a technology grant to help Norman County put up-to-date maps on its web site. The maps will give citizens direct access to information such as land use, parcel ownership and natural resources.

Sixty-nine citizens are directly involved in drafting the community-based plan — fully 1 percent of the county's population. In townships and small cities, residents are gathering around large aerial maps to take stock of their homes, roads, lands and waters. They are talking about things that should change and things they hope never will.

This exercise, had it been done before 1997, would have made many decisions easier during the past two years. "We went from eight to 10 engineering requests in a year to 160 requests," Borchert said. Officials had to make many far-reaching decisions on the fly, choosing which needs to address first and how to address them. By planning now, Norman County will be better equipped to deal with a variety of major issues it faces, such as the faltering farm economy, land use changes, an aging housing stock and changes in the age and size of the population.

"During the flood, local agencies really came together to solve problems and deal with the crisis," Borchert said. "We think this community-based plan will keep us working together to solve important issues we face in our county."

develop a community-based comprehensive plan for an additional community, Moose Lake. It also will improve its capability to use geographic information systems for planning.

■ Dodge County will conduct special transportation and infrastructure studies to better define urban growth boundaries; it also will add two cities from bordering counties to its planning effort.

To prepare their community-based plans, Clay and Norman counties will be using planning assistance funds made available by the Legislature to flooded areas. And Meeker County has announced that it will begin community-based planning with local funds. All three had applied for community-based planning grants.

Technical assistance and outreach enhance efforts

Minnesota Planning has endeavored to inform citizens about community-based planning and provide assistance to local governments through mailings, presentations, guidance materials and one-on-one consultations. Internet tools are being used extensively to distribute reports, promote information exchange about community-based planning and solicit input. The Local Planning Assistance web site at www.mnplan.state.mn.us/commplan had more than 4,500 hits in 1998 and averages nearly 400 hits per month.

In addition to mailing information to the more than 1,000 people on the mailing list, the Local Planning Assistance Team has made more than 30 public presentations on community-based planning. Audiences have ranged in size from 10 to 150, for a total of more than

GRANTS AWARDED FOR PLANNING AND TECHNOLOGY

RECIPIENTS	AMOUNT RECEIVED		
	PLANNING FY 1998	PLANNING FY 1999	TECHNOLOGY FY 1999
Upper Minnesota River	\$ 50,000	\$ 94,000	\$ 95,000
Carlton County	\$ 50,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 76,000
Dodge County	\$ 50,000	\$ 39,000	\$ 6,000
Todd County	\$ 0	\$ 52,000	\$ 46,000
Rice County	\$ 0	\$ 44,000	\$ 106,000
Nobles County	\$ 0	\$ 54,000	\$ 46,000
Crow Wing and Cass counties	\$ 0	\$ 77,000	\$ 0
St. Cloud	\$ 350,000	\$ 0	\$ 0

1,000 people. Meetings attended included the Northern Counties Land Use Coordinating Board's Land Use Leadership Conference and the annual meetings of Association of Minnesota Counties, Minnesota Association of Townships, Minnesota Association of Planning and Zoning Administrators, and Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities. The team also had information booths in both 1997 and 1998 at the annual meetings of the Association of Minnesota Counties, Minnesota Association of Townships, Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association and Minnesota Regional Development Organizations, as well as the Minnesota Rural Summit in 1998.

"When we first started talking about doing community-based planning, I told the county commissioners that the grant money would help a lot, but the expertise and assistance that come with it would be worth at least as much."

— Paul Michaelson, director of the Upper Minnesota River Regional Development Commission

In February 1999, Minnesota Planning held the first in a series of community-based planning forums at which pilot and new project participants could share information on their efforts. More than 35 people representing all 11 projects attended this well-received event. The next forum is planned for September 1999 in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association.

The team organized the Local Planning Assistance Center, a specialized library with information about many aspects of local planning, to respond to the high volume of requests for technical assistance. The center's resources include books, videos, audio tapes, periodicals, brochures, samples of comprehensive plans and reports. The growing collection currently contains more than 1,400 different materials, 60 percent of which are not available from any other state agency.

The already high level of requests for technical assistance is expected to increase. Members of the Local Planning Assistance Team have answered more than 1,500 inquiries from local government staff, citizens, local elected officials and state agencies. Through the center, the team has delivered more than 50 information packets, covering topics ranging from geographic information systems to township planning, to local government staff and citizens since September 1998.

Guides answer questions

Minnesota Planning has created two how-to guides to answer questions about community-based planning:

- *Getting Started with Community-Based Planning* offers tips for successful planning, suggestions for addressing the goals of community-based planning and sample resolutions for creating a joint powers agreement.

- "Choosing a Consultant for Local Planning" outlines the services provided by consultants, explains how to issue a request for proposal and suggests a selection process for evaluating the proposals.

In addition, Minnesota Planning is developing a guidebook for local comprehensive planning. The book, to be published in the summer of 1999, will incorporate Minnesota's

principles of sustainable development and the goals of the Community-Based Planning Act. While it will encourage use of the community-based planning framework, the guidebook also will be useful for all local planning in Minnesota.

The guidebook will:

- Provide basic how-to resources such as model processes, documents, case studies and examples with a Minnesota focus
- Encourage communities to plan creatively by considering what is possible rather than just what is required
- Clearly communicate Minnesota's legal framework for local planning

Intended primarily for local elected officials and advisory groups such as planning commissions, parks commissions and economic development authorities, the guidebook will also be useful for citizens, businesses, state agencies and regional development commissions.

Data, web site advice and on-site consulting help projects

Good planning decisions are based on good information. To ensure that the community-based planning projects have the best available information, Minnesota Planning has provided them with compact disks of geographic and other information from dozens of state sources. Projects also have received assistance in interpreting data, advice on hardware and software needs, and other specialized assistance.

Staff members have made more than 100 site visits to the pilot projects and the new projects to help them initiate their efforts, answer questions about community-based planning and provide other technical assistance. Additional visits were

made to counties and townships considering planning efforts.

Minnesota Planning also provides web sites for the pilot projects (www.cbp.state.mn.us) and trains staff from each pilot project to create and maintain the project's site. The sites received more than 500 hits in the first three months of 1999. The projects can use this Internet forum for announcing meetings, updating citizens on progress and distributing draft documents and other information. Web sites will be offered to the new community-based planning projects.

"As a small, rural community without planning professionals, it is hard to do this type of thing. The professionals from the regional development commission and Minnesota Planning have been very beneficial. Without community-based planning, we wouldn't be able to do planning at all."

— Audrey Rahrlie, mayor of Graceville

Technical advisors teams established

The Community-Based Planning Act requires that state agencies be notified when local governments begin planning. The intent is to promote cooperation in developing local comprehensive plans and to ensure that local governments have access to state information and resources. Minnesota Planning has taken on the responsibility of notifying state agencies when local planning begins and ensuring that concerns, ongoing efforts and available resources are identified.

Minnesota Planning established a technical advisors committee made up of representatives from the departments of Agriculture, Health, Natural Resources, Trade and Economic Development, and Transportation, Pollution Control Agency, Office of Environmental Assistance, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Regional Development Organizations, League of Minnesota Cities, Association of Minnesota Counties and Minnesota Association of Townships. This group helps Minnesota Planning implement the act. Groups of state agency staff serving as local technical advisors also have been established by Minnesota Planning in each project area to provide a framework for involvement and easy communications between agencies and local project staff.

Experience provides useful lessons

Community-based planning is beginning to make a difference across Minnesota. Governments are joining together in new ways to discuss issues and the future of their communities. Citizens are becoming more involved. And state agencies are providing expertise and information to assist local efforts. The program's first two years have posed challenges and provided useful lessons for future community-based planning efforts.

Demand for assistance exceeds funding

Grants for community-based planning were offered in 1997 and again in 1998. This marked the first time in more than 15 years that the state had offered funding for local comprehensive planning. Growth, changing demographics, environmental concerns and other challenges led many local

governments across the state to recognize the need to update their plans. With the program less than 2 months old, 18 communities applied to be one of three pilot projects in 1997. By 1998, when the program was better understood, 42 applications for planning and technology grants were received. These represented 38 counties across the state. Almost \$4 million was requested in 1998 — more than five times the \$750,000 available for grants.

Initial funding levels inadequate

In addition to the funding for the St. Cloud project, \$150,000 was appropriated to Minnesota Planning in 1997 for three pilot projects. As they developed their work plans, the pilot projects quickly found that \$50,000 was insufficient to complete their planning efforts, even with a significant commitment of local resources. The community-based planning program's emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation and citizen participation adds to the overall costs of gathering and analyzing data associated with comprehensive planning. Multicounty efforts add further costs and complexities. All three pilots requested and received additional grants in 1998 to supplement their efforts.

"We are seeing good dialogue among the government entities that are taking part in the process. I don't think that the impetus would have been there without the state dollars."

— Jerry Lesse, mayor of Sauk Rapids and chair of the St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Board

Starting multijurisdictional efforts takes time

The Community-Based Planning Act envisioned that community-based comprehensive plans could be prepared within two years. However, the experience of the pilot projects has shown that starting a joint planning effort takes considerably more time than starting a traditional single-government plan. This is particularly the case with multicounty efforts, but it is also true when groups of local governments within a county come together for the first time to plan cooperatively. The mechanics of planning and decision-making must be agreed upon. But, more important, all parties must feel comfortable with each other and develop a shared sense of community and purpose. This takes time and cannot be rushed if groups of governments are to successfully prepare and then implement plans.

“Just the fact that we have this joint powers board is a major accomplishment — all board members working together, not knowing what the outcome will be, is amazing. Just by having these people sit down together, chemistry is starting to develop.”

— Duane Johnson, Dodge County Planning and Zoning Department

Projects offer valuable forums for discussion

Jurisdictions at all levels are coming together as a part of the community-based planning process to sort out issues of concern for their areas. Getting officials and citizens together as part of a decision-making

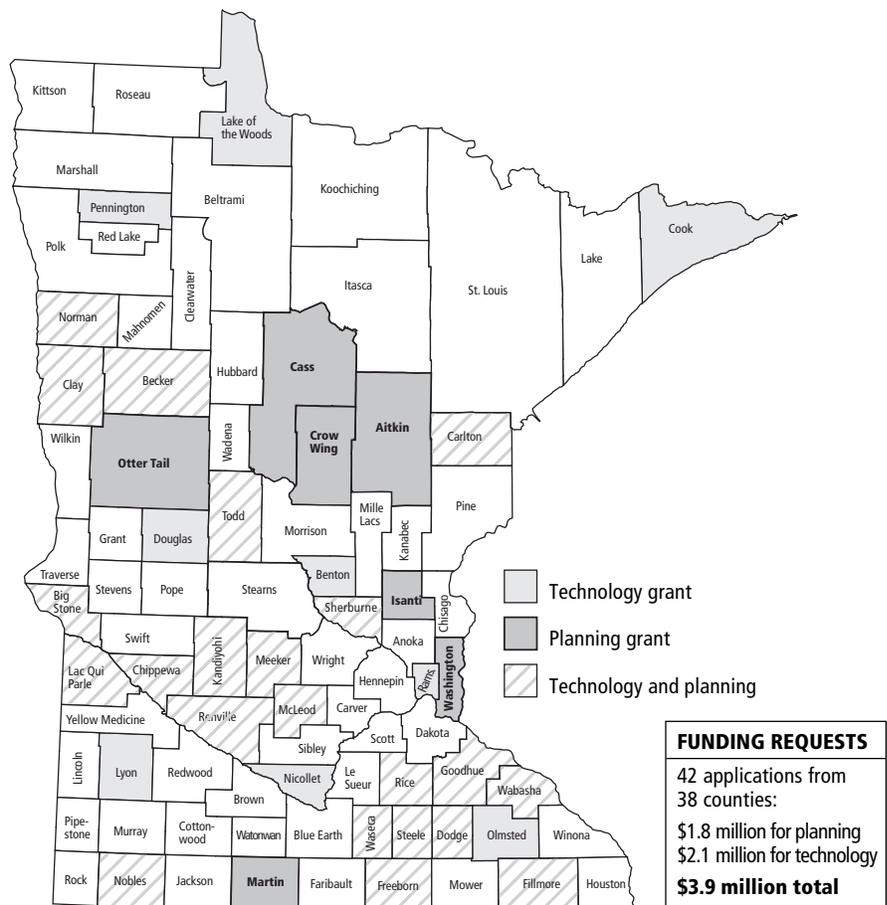
process has taken a lot of effort. However, many involved with the pilot projects are already seeing the value in cooperative planning and joint decision-making. Just getting together to discuss issues has proved valuable to local governments engaged in community-based planning.

Citizen participation poses challenges

The community-based planning projects are committed to involving all people and ideas to forge local ownership and ensure that plans reflect what people want and need. Getting and keeping people involved, however, remains a challenge. The pilot projects are

trying many different approaches. Carlton County has sent a questionnaire to all households in the county — more than 12,000 — to get their ideas on issues and goals and ensure that everyone has a say in the county’s future. The Upper Minnesota River project held three successful visioning forums involving more than 200 people and is working with nine area newspapers to ensure that people are kept abreast of the plan’s development. The St. Cloud area project held 14 visioning sessions followed by three goal setting workshops to forge a consensus foundation for its community-based plan. These and other methods will help other communities as they

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING GRANT APPLICANTS FISCAL YEAR 1999



design their public participation efforts. The availability of a public participation resource kit that draws on these experiences and other public involvement efforts would help all communities develop more effective processes.

"The good thing for Carlton County is that it is bringing a lot of people together who would not have gotten together otherwise, from rural and urban centers. Some of these issues that are in conflict we hope will get resolved."

— Bill Schlenvogt, Cloquet planning director and a member of the Carlton County Joint Powers Planning Board

Involvement of state personnel proves positive

State agency representatives from appropriate district and regional offices participate in the community-based planning process by acting as resources for the joint boards and local administrative staff. Implementing community-based planning takes a lot of resources. These local technical advisors provide the knowledge and expertise necessary to help make community-based planning successful. They also ensure that local governments are aware of and have access to the applicable state data, studies and plans regarding the planning area.

Outlook remains unclear

The outlook for the community-based planning program is unclear. The 1997 Legislature appropriated \$330,000 to Minnesota Planning for the biennium ending in June 1999 to administer the Community-Based Planning Act and provide technical assistance to communities as they prepare their plans. No funding exists to continue these efforts into the next biennium. The agency redirected a portion of its fiscal year 1998-1999 General Fund appropriation to local planning assistance; the agency's resources are not sufficient, however, to support the level of technical assistance communities desire.

Local planning tool kit will assist community efforts

The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources has recommended a grant for Minnesota Planning to develop a geographic information tool kit for local planning that would help meet communities' technical assistance needs.

Through this grant, Minnesota Planning would work with local governments to develop a package of geographic information software and data for local planning. Free to local governments, the tool kit would help communities evaluate the possible effects of different land use plans. If funding is approved, development of the tool kit would begin in July 1999; the tool kit and training in how to use it would be available in the second half of 2000.

Minnesota Planning currently supplies each pilot project with geographic data and offers free software and training. The new tool kit, however, would be a custom package for local planning, allowing users with limited geographic

information systems experience to visualize different models and scenarios for land use, growth management, natural resources and other planning challenges.

Administrative and assistance needs extend through at least 2001

Assistance in such areas as work plan development, data acquisition and interpretation, web site maintenance, geographic information systems and staff development has helped the pilot projects get their efforts underway and is expected by the new projects as well. Valuable lessons can be learned by communities throughout the state from the experiences of these pioneering projects, if the resources to communicate them are available. And the ability of these projects to be successful is enhanced through continued assistance from and coordination with state agencies.

The four community-based planning pilot projects and seven new projects will need administrative and technical assistance until at least July 31, 2001. The first pilot to finish its plan will be the St. Cloud project, in January 2000. The other pilot projects' plans are expected to be completed in the summer of 2000 and those of the seven new projects in the spring of 2001.

In addition, Minnesota Planning expects the number of communities interested in community-based planning and the number of requests for technical assistance on planning-related issues to grow in the years to come.

The **Local Planning Assistance** team at Minnesota Planning administers the Community-Based Planning Act and helps local governments with comprehensive planning. For more information or to be added to the mailing list, call 651-296-6550, visit the Minnesota Planning web site, or e-mail local.planning@mnplan.state.mn.us.

Minnesota Planning develops long-range plans for the state, stimulates public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinates activities among state agencies, the Minnesota Legislature and other units of government.

Upon request, this document will be made available in an alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audiotape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning.

April 1999



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