

From the CURA Director

Last fall, the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs turned 40 years old. Created as part of the University of Minnesota's response in the late 1960s to political and social upheaval taking place in the Twin Cities and elsewhere, CURA has established itself over the years as the flagship of the University's urban presence. For more than 30 of these years, CURA has benefited from the leadership of Professor Tom Scott. Tom stepped down in June to enjoy a phased retirement from CURA and the University. I have been involved with CURA for two decades and can speak firsthand about Tom's steady and calm leadership, as well as his critical support of community-based research and outreach. Under Tom's leadership, CURA has become a trusted partner for hundreds of community-based organizations and government agencies in the region, and has produced literally thousands of projects by faculty and student researchers focused on and in response to the needs of community members, all the while serving the research interests of faculty members and helping to train graduate and undergraduate students. It is a legacy that Tom can be very proud of and one that reflects the very best of what a land-grant university can be.

We may not have riots in the streets of our central cities as we did in the 1960s when CURA was created, but we do face considerable economic, social, and political challenges today. The economic collapse of the past year threatens the vitality of all of our communities. The most significant challenges we face—the financial crisis, home foreclosures, immigration, poverty, school desegregation, sprawl, and environmental sustainability—all have significant urban dimensions. Our region, the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and the upper Midwest more generally offer the best and the worst in this respect. We benefit from an active civic sector, with energetic and effective neighborhood and community organizations, an extensive and committed foundation and philanthropic community, and good government at the local, regional, and state levels. Minnesota and the Twin Cities lead the way on many public policy issues. At the same time, our region suffers from suburban and exurban sprawl, and significant racial disparities existing with respect to poverty, homeownership, and lending practices. We have a growing achievement gap in our schools, neighborhoods swamped with home foreclosures, and environmental challenges that threaten our lakes and waterways. The need for a vital and engaged CURA, helping to guide the considerable resources of the University of Minnesota in response to these challenges, is as great or greater today than it ever has been.

During the past two years, CURA has completed an extensive self-study as well as a formal external review of its operations. In light of this thorough review of past accomplishments and directions, my first step as director of CURA has been to initiate a strategic planning process. Since July we have been engaging a range of stakeholders in conversations about CURA's on-going role in the University of Minnesota's urban agenda. By the end of September we hope to have a set of strategic objectives to guide our work over the next five to seven years. We look forward to working with you as we continue to set these goals and, more importantly, as we work to deliver on them.



Edward G. Goetz
Professor and Director, CURA



Photo by Steve Schneider, 2006