

The Opportunities of Regionalism

In recent years there has been a growing awareness throughout the nation of the need for new levels of public responsibility, crossing the established lines of governmental institutions. More formal ways are needed to coordinate units of government which by themselves cannot adequately meet the growing needs of an urbanizing society. The need is seen in the growing number of single purpose and multi-purpose special districts established at the state and federal levels. The need is seen in the cooperative efforts between cities and suburbs, between small towns, townships and counties, among counties and among states to resolve intergovernmental problems that individually they are unable to resolve.

Most existing units of government in the United States were established well before 1900 in a different era of transportation and communication, when the needs were quite different from what they are now. In the last half century, the rural areas, small towns and large cities have been brought into a complex interdependent network. There are new crises now that we have never faced before – in housing, waste management, health care,

education, recreation, public finance, law enforcement, citizen participation, religion, transportation and communication – brought about by larger numbers of people in greater concentrations, more dependent upon one another and with greater expectations. Our public institutions seem incapable of responding to these new needs. For at least the last 150 years, we have struggled with the question of how the economic advantages and cultural amenities of cities can be com-

bined with the quality and serenity of rural living. But our approaches have been essentially anti-urban. Cities are seen as necessary evils – necessary to our style of life, our material desires – but destructive of the human spirit.

There were movements to build new cities from the ground up with an "ideal" design – combining moderate urban densities with open spaces. These *new towns* were to be self-contained cities
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Around the Riverbend: 'RURBANIA'

By the year 2000 an additional one hundred million people will be living in the United States? Where will they live? Under what conditions will they live? Will cities become even more crowded and rural areas more abandoned? Or, is there an alternative to urban decay and rural decline? Can the future be anticipated with hope?

In Southcentral Minnesota citizens have begun to think about an alternative future which they call "rurbanity" – a merging of the rural countryside with urban technology – a model of design for areas outside large metropolitan centers.

The Riverbend Association is an organization dedicated to comprehensive regional planning for the region around the big bend in the Minnesota River.

Comprehensive because ecology has shown us that everyone is affected by what goes on in a region – what one individual does affects the whole environment. No one can exist responsible to himself alone.

Regional because so many communities have identical problems and needs that can be met more effectively working together.

Planning because in a rapidly changing society attention to the future is a necessity if costly conflicts and crises are to be avoided.

Its existence was given powerful support by WCCO radio when the station became interested in its program and co-sponsored with Gustavus Adolphus College a symposium held in 1968 to explore the theme, "Planning for Rurbania, 1988." In January, 1969, its principles and program were the subject of one of the dialogues held at the center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California. The organization has attracted attention from many organizations and persons, in its own region and other parts of the country.

The Association seems as delicate as grass, as tough as cactus, and as mobile as a scouting party of a wagon train –

like delicate grass because its basic principles are not yet sturdy practices commonly accepted in community development –

as tough as cactus because it survives on a minimum of support from its social environment –

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as mobile as a scouting party because its purpose is always to look into the future, to be ahead of the immediate problem.

Its main function is to explore the alternatives that the future might have in store for the region — environmental, economic, social, educational, political, ideological matters are within its concern. The organization is not primarily concerned about current crises except as these illustrate how urgent attention to

the future is. It seeks members who are imaginative, patient enough not to be worried about immediate results, and who care as much for the fate of the next generation as for their own.

Concern about the future prompted the Association to sponsor a task force called Project Alternative to urge consideration of alternatives to a high dam on the Blue Earth River. It has also sponsored a public discussion of the Regional Development Act in October, 1969.

It has recently launched the Riverbend Roundtable, a series of discussions in different communities in Southcentral Minnesota to explore the matter of "Rural and Urban Balance, Policies for Future Growth".

Information about its agenda and calendar of events is available by writing or calling: Robert Esbjornson, Riverbend Association, Box 2000, St. Peter, Minnesota 56082; phone (507) 931-4643 or 931-4300, Ext. 358.

Planning and Development in the Arrowhead Region

During the summer and fall of 1969 conversations between officials of the newly forming Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) and the University of Minnesota, Duluth led to the application for a Title I Grant by UMD, under provisions of the 1965 *Higher Education Act*. The objective of this application was to use University faculty members in cooperation with ARDC personnel, to explain new Federal and State planning and review requirements to local officials in the seven

county Northeastern Minnesota area. (Region 3 as defined by the *Minnesota Planning and Development Act* of 1969.)

The grant application, approved in the spring of 1970, provided for a \$16,000 Federal Grant with an \$8,000 local match. The budget provided for the matching funds to reimburse a program director and a part-time associate director, and a small salary from the grant to hire a second part-time associate director. Wayne A Jesswein, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, serves as Program Director. Dale W. Olsen, Associate Professor of Political Science and Coordinator of the Urban Study Program at UMD, serves as Associate Director.

The new program was underway by July 1, 1970. First priority was given to identification of UMD and area junior college faculty members who would be interested in participating. Several weeks were devoted to a complete canvass of the UMD faculty. Letters of invitation to participate in the program were also sent

to the faculties of the State Junior Colleges at International Falls, Hibbing, Virginia, Ely and Grand Rapids, and to the College of St. Scholastica, Duluth.

Expressions of interest were received from some thirty-five persons. Training sessions were planned for those responding. A general session during mid-summer narrowed the number of persons who wished to continue in the program. Plans were formulated for a more extensive training program in early fall for those who planned to remain active. This phase of the overall program was completed in October.

With a cadre of faculty members familiarized with required Federal and State planning and review requirements, the University-Community Program has now moved into the action stage. This stage consists of presentation of information regarding *Project Notification and Review Systems* (PNRS) and *Bureau of the Budget Directive A-95* regulations to local officials, particularly county auditors and city and village clerks, within the region. A meeting on the UMD Campus with more than one-hundred persons in attendance began this series on November 19. University-Community Program directors, other faculty members, and Arrowhead Regional Development and Minnesota State Planning Officials participated in this meeting.

Additional public information sessions at area junior college campuses are planned for the remainder of the 1970-71. At these meetings, it is hoped that a larger number and variety of local officials will be reached.

University-Community program operations at UMD are periodically reviewed by a Steering Committee. Members of this group include the Director and his two Associates, one of whom is the Executive Director of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission. Other members of the nine-member body include three public representatives and three University faculty members.

The UMD Program is unique in the entire nation with respect to the cooperative effort between a Regional Planning and Development Commission and a University Title I Grant program aimed at providing broadly-based community services at a regional level. The ultimate success of this effort remains to be determined, but progress to date is most encouraging.

A new Title I application for 1971-72 has been submitted to continue and expand this inter-institutional, inter-agency, regionally-oriented program.

There is a definite desire on this Campus to eventually combine our existing Urban and Regional program efforts into a continuing program of research, community service and teaching, coordinated by a UMD Urban and Regional Services Center. The Center would serve the region through facilitating interaction and cooperation among the public agencies, educational institutions and private interests in the region for the benefit of all concerned.

West Central Minnesota: Becoming a Region ?

West Central Minnesota is, in many ways, typical of multi-county regional development in the state. Over a period of several years, there have been numerous examples of regional cooperation in this part of Minnesota in order to meet mutual needs more effectively. A number of multi-county districts, councils and organizations have existed in the area for a number of years, such as boy scouts, churches, state governmental agencies, farm organizations, watershed districts, and high school athletic districts. Some businesses and organizations have expanded to serve multi-county areas. The Lakeland Mental Health Center, for example, has expanded from a small office in Fergus Falls serving three counties into a new office building serving the nine counties designated as region four. The Center has had financial support and representation from all the counties served and is viewed locally as a model of multi-county cooperation. The Min-Dak Health Planning Council, which has an office in Moorhead, serves six North Dakota counties and the nine counties of region four in Minnesota. The Region Crime Commission is also headquartered at Moorhead. Five of the nine counties in region four are included in the Souris-Red-Rainy River Basin Commission planning studies. Another five of the nine counties are in the WesMin RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development) Project. Two of the counties are part of the Rural Minne-CEP Program and all nine counties are in some phase of planning.

Recognizing the emergence of regional programs at the local, state, and federal levels, the state legislature passed the Regional Development Act in 1969 which allows for the establishment of ten regional commissions throughout the state. The purpose of the act is to help coordinate regional programs and meet regional needs in an efficient and orderly manner – and, most importantly, to provide the people of each region with control over programs. The State Planning Agency, in an effort to inform people of the provisions of the act, has

met with citizens, business leaders, and local government officials throughout the state, including region four – West Central Minnesota. Also seeing a responsibility to encourage intercounty regional coordination, CURA appointed Mrs. Lois Mann in September 1969, as coordinator for the West Central Region. The regional coordinator's function is to serve as a liaison between the communities, to assist in communication among the citizens, and to bring together the various resources of higher education and state and local government. The coordinator's office serves as a repository for recent studies of communities and resources of the region, which are used by public agencies, community leaders and higher education.

The CURA coordinator along with the staff members of the Agricultural Extension Service at the University of Minnesota felt that resistance to the Regional Development Act in the West Central area resulted from a lack of information and understanding on the part of a large number of citizens. A workshop was planned to provide information and to encourage citizen participation and action in their own communities, and to identify areas for further study. Approximately 100 area leaders attended this regional workshop which was held at Fergus Falls State Junior College on March 26, 1970. As a follow-up to the workshop, and with the assistance of Bud Crewdson, University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service, a questionnaire was prepared and mailed to all persons who had been invited to attend. An evaluation is now under way.

In October 1970, a Minnesota State Planning Agency grant was provided to the tri-college group – Concordia College, Moorhead State College, and North Dakota State University – to conduct two county workshops within region four during December 1970. These meetings were sponsored by local planning committees and aimed at people who have not been directly involved in governmental affairs and have not been partici-

pating in the regional discussions. This program was developed by Mrs. Lois Mann, CURA regional coordinator, Mr. Ronald Kaliszewski of the Minnesota State Planning Agency and Dr. Bryon Schmid, Concordia College, who is the Project Director.

A home management workshop concerned with good nutrition, sanitation, and health for low income families in a seven county area was held at the request of the Ottertail County Welfare Division. Two additional workshops are being offered in Becker and Douglas counties in December to further explore welfare concerns. With the encouragement of Mrs. Mann, a self appraisal of religious institutions has been undertaken by churches in the region to assess their role in community service and to consider possible consolidations in a region described as being "very heavily churched." CURA is also encouraging the development of a group day care center for Fergus Falls, which could serve as a model for the entire region.

A new Junior College extension center at Wadena is operating through the joint efforts of the Brainerd and Fergus Falls State Junior Colleges. The Wadena Extension Center is cooperating with the area vocational school at Wadena and Moorhead State College in providing a training program for law enforcement personnel and encouraging a new thrust for regional law enforcement. The Junior College system and the State Department of Vocational Education will help to improve effectiveness through the joint training of local law enforcement officers.

This growing list of regional activities in West Central Minnesota illustrates the need for a central coordinating agency that is responsible to the public. As yet there is not a sufficient understanding of the need, nor agreement on what local responsibility should be – and the nine counties have as yet not exercised their option to establish a regional commission. In the meantime these regional efforts will no doubt expand – with a determination yet to be made about effective coordination and public responsibility.

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where people could live and work and find all services that they needed in close proximity to one another. The new town movement has had several objectives, but its greatest attraction has been in its physical form — the hope that a beautiful, convenient environment can be created, which is assumed to make a positive contribution to happiness, mental health and efficiency. Models of an ideal physical environment, however, do not exist and there are many who contend that the existing urban environment offers the greatest laboratory for study and experimentation. Perhaps the major error in new town movement has been in its concept of scale. Metropolitan residents today may be farther from — but are much more accessible to — open land than city residents were at the turn of the century. The new town could be considered today not as a confined ideal environment, but as an extensive area of urban-rural interaction with a variety of physical characteristics and a focus on social, economic, cultural, political needs, as well as design.

Another proposal to stabilize populations and improve services in rural areas, and to relieve the congestion, pollution and problems resulting from urban concentration, has been called *urban-rural balance*. This is a concept which would slow or reverse the rural to urban population movement by encouraging growth in rural locations. Some propose that this should involve the development of employment opportunities, even subsidizing of growth in rural locations. But there remain some basic unanswered questions about the need for urban concentrations, the cause of urban problems and the benefits to be gained in dispersal. Altering the settlement pattern of the country without answers to these questions would seem premature, even irreversibly disastrous.

The concept of *regionalism* is the current expression of these same concerns. Rural areas have not usually been able to provide equal opportunities in education, health care and law enforcement. Through regional cooperation and action there is the possibility that opportunities can be equalized. People who wish to remain in rural areas or live in rural areas will then have a quality of services comparable to those in urban areas. This should encourage the retention of leadership and capital in small towns and rural areas — providing a real

choice and reducing the gravitation towards cities.

Multi-county cooperation in Minnesota has a long history — with inter-governmental cooperation in sewage, airports and planning in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, recreation and economic development in Northeastern Minnesota. Various state agencies have for years subdivided the state into administrative districts — but with little coordination among them. In 1967, the first region in the state was formally established — with the *Metropolitan Council* covering the 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. First responsibilities for the Metropolitan Council included sewage, transportation and open space — functional problems of the metropolitan area that could not be resolved by the three hundred separate political units individually and independently. In 1969, the state legislature extended the opportunity for regional development to the rest of the state by proposing 10 additional multi-county regions. The bill provided that each region could set up its own commission which would make decisions regarding education, waste management, health care, law enforcement, road maintenance — and other mutual needs. Up to this time only one commission has been established outside the Twin Cities, that in Region 3 — the Arrowhead Region of Northeastern Minnesota.

Under the *Regional Development Act* the duties and powers of a regional commission do not change the existing powers of local government, municipalities, counties, and townships. The regional commissions have the responsibility to renew and comment on local application for state and federal grants and can assume new responsibilities only for those functions which require multi-government action. The fundamental intent of the regional commission is to place planning decision-making in the hands of local people. The region is really a confederation of county, municipal, and township governments to carry out programs that they cannot accomplish individually. A variety of regional programs have been under way for some time, but now state and federal departments are adjusting their programming to the regions designated by the governor's executive order of June 12, 1970. The choice now is up to the citizens of the state whether they wish

to control these programs by formation of regional commissions or have their decisions made at the state and federal levels. The opportunities for initiating local programs and generally improving the quality of life through regional cooperation are almost limitless. Equality of public services is not now available throughout the state. Through regional effort there is the real possibility that opportunity can be equalized, offering all citizens a real choice — to live in rural areas and smaller towns or to live in larger centers.

This issue of the Reporter draws on some of the experiences in regional development in the state and relates how the institutions of higher education have been involved. The University of Minnesota at Duluth has worked closely with officials in Northeastern Minnesota to develop programs for the Arrowhead Region — the first region established under the 1969 Act. Faculty members at Gustavus Adolphus College have been active in bringing regional issues to public attention in the Riverbend Region — Region 9 in south central Minnesota. Another article in this issue discusses the evolution of regional health care, in particular the pilot project at Austin and Albert Lea, Minnesota — which can become a prototype in helping other non-metropolitan communities in the state upgrade their health services through cooperative efforts. In West Central Minnesota, CURA has established a coordinator located in Fergus Falls to work with businessmen, farmers, governmental officials and citizens — helping to make them more aware of their mutual needs and helping to find solutions to their problems. This is not so much an effort to establish a formal regional organization but more to make people within the region aware of their common problems and possibilities for solution.

Revitalizing government — helping to make government responsible and responsive to people, and a vehicle through which people can actively participate in resolving their mutual problems and achieving their mutual aspirations — is a continuing need. Regions offer a real hope for providing a more flexible, adaptable, evolutionary governmental framework. Its success will in large measure depend upon its acceptance by the people of the state — and there continue to be numerous efforts to acquaint people with the opportunities regionalism can offer. In this effort to inform the public, the institutions of higher education are assuming a share of the responsibility.

An Experiment in Regional Comprehensive Health Care

Austin and Albert Lea are two thriving, prosperous trade and processing centers in southern Minnesota, but despite being only 18 miles apart, the two communities have had little history of cooperation. In providing health care, for example, each community built and maintained its own hospital facility in the typical pattern of most Minnesota cities of their size. Each hospital was owned and operated by a private non-profit association which was controlled by community leadership. The medical staff serving these hospitals and the nursing programs which evolved under each of the hospitals were self contained. Medical problems which could not be handled by the medical or hospital personnel in that particular community, were referred to the large medical centers in Rochester and the Twin Cities.

In 1968, each hospital board independently arrived at an assessment of its existing physical facility, believing it to be inadequate to meet current needs. At this point, the two hospital boards began exploring the possibility of building a joint hospital facility. This cooperative venture was first suggested in the course of an earlier inter-county effort to study the feasibility of a joint airport. The hospital boards sought the advice of the Northlands Regional Medical Program and from that request emerged one of the most exhaustive studies of rural health care ever undertaken in Minnesota.

Professor Bright Dornblaser, Director of the Hospital Administration Program at the University of Minnesota, accepted the responsibility as principal investigator, with Robert Wilkins, Associate Director of Northlands Regional Medical Program as co-principal investigator. Warren Eustis, of the Upper Midwest Research and Development Council, served as general counsel to the project to determine the organizational alternatives in health care delivery for the two-county area.

To provide for direct community participation and to express consumer needs and priorities for a health service system, a local advisory group was established which consisted of city and county officers, hospital administrators, and spokesmen for the medical profession from throughout Freeborn and Mower counties.

The leadership of the two communities quickly and firmly agreed that their general goal was to maintain and improve the quality of health care in their areas, and to provide for easier citizen access to medical facilities. The communities raised a sum of money to match that provided by the Northlands Regional Medical Program to conduct and coordinate technical feasibility studies. The studies included an inventory of all existing health care services; an analysis of population characteristics with projections of future growth; a poll of residents to determine their satisfaction with the existing systems and their aspirations for improvement; and an evaluation of the capabilities of the two-county area to provide better medical service and what medical services could be more effectively provided from other centers. Consultants were hired to evaluate the potential for a joint hospital structure — a concept which became known as the "cornfield hospital" between the two communities. Monthly consultations were held with the local advisory group and there were many additional meetings in the Twin Cities and in Austin and Albert Lea among the various specialists. Many of these specialists donated their time and undertook to describe in detail and evaluate with care the health delivery system in the two-county area.

The local advisory group showed an early interest in the creation of a private non-profit health delivery service corporation, which would be capable of developing health services in the broadest sense — from the management and operation of hospitals to prepaid financing and environmental control. The investigators and the local advisory committee found that the communities fully supported this concept of comprehensive health care and organization. At a meeting on November 24, 1970, representatives of both communities approved the establishment of a corporation which would be competent to handle almost all medical programs now in existence or contemplated in pending federal legislation, including preventive health and health maintenance organizations. The directors of the corporation are to be elected by both providers and consumers of medical services. It is the hope of the advisory group and both communities that the broad representa-

tion in the corporation can provide solid support for building and funding extended care units, nursing homes, and rural public health services, which heretofore have not been available.

Evaluation of the consultants' technical studies and of the organization alternatives, convinced the local advisory committee that the building of a joint hospital facility would not be the most effective way to provide access to quality medical care. Instead, realistic steps have already been taken between the two hospital boards to achieve greater efficiencies. Hospital management has been coordinated and the local group is undertaking exploration of joint laundry services, expansion and coordination of home health care services, consolidation of public health functions and coordination of specialized medical services such as kidney dialysis and computer sharing. Programs for drug abuse, counseling, and psychological testing, as well as emergency ambulance services are under active consideration. The Freeborn-Mower Regional Health Service Cooperative, as it is now known, is designed to serve all 80,000 people of the two-county area, but determination of the specific goals will of course rest with the board of directors.

The present vitality, accomplishments, and prospects for this inter-county effort would appear to have important implications for the potential of rural and non-metropolitan communities to organize comprehensive health care systems. The Austin-Albert Lea experience can help determine and strengthen those health functions which can be effectively handled at the local level, while improving and assuring access to more specialized health services which are better served from large centers. The enormous amount of time spent and dedication expressed by national, state, and local experts on this project, as well as the encouragement from local leadership, demonstrates both the need and the favorable prospects for developing more cooperative health care delivery systems. And it clearly illustrates the profound desire on the part of non-metropolitan communities to effectively provide areas of limited population with access to a full range of modern health care.

reporter



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