

Directions for Community-Based Planning

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MINNESOTA PLANNING



Minnesota Planning is charged with developing a long-range plan for the state, stimulating public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinating activities among all levels of government.

Directions for Community-Based Planning is a summary of 24 meetings held in communities across Minnesota in October and November 1997 to gather ideas for the Advisory Council on Community-Based Planning. Opinions expressed in this document are those of meeting participants, not Minnesota Planning or the Advisory Council.

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Upon request, *Directions for Community-Based Planning* will be provided in an alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning.

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About 1,000 Minnesotans attended community-based planning meetings around the state



Summary

About 1,000 Minnesotans attended meetings across the state to learn about and comment on the new state framework for local planning, called community-based planning. Community-based planning integrates sustainable development principles into voluntary local comprehensive planning. The new law provides financial and technical assistance for planning and created an advisory council to help refine the law.

The Advisory Council on Community-Based Planning hosted meetings in 12 cities during October and November 1997 to solicit advice and insight that would help the council make its recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature. The meetings were organized by the Common Ground staff at Minnesota Planning, the state agency that coordinates community-based planning.

This report, *Directions for Community-Based Planning*, summarizes the discussions at those meetings and provides samples of the many comments received. It reports opinions expressed by meeting participants, not those of Minnesota Planning or the advisory council.

In each of the 12 cities, participants voiced unique local and regional concerns. These are summarized in the section “Voices from around the state.” Common themes about community-based planning also emerged, including:

- Local planning is important
- Local planning should remain voluntary
- Local ownership of plans is crucial
- The goals and program must be flexible
- State guidance and assistance for local planning are desirable, but state approval is viewed with concern
- Citizen involvement is essential
- Cooperation across local boundaries is necessary for success
- Membership of the advisory council is not broad enough

Introduction

Twenty-four meetings in 12 communities across Minnesota in fall 1997 generated many ideas for refining the state’s Community-Based Planning Act. Meetings were held in the afternoon and evening in each city. A total of about 1,000 people attended, including county, city and township officials, business people, private citizens and state employees. Discussions were lively, opinions were varied and interest was high.

During each meeting, advisory council members presented an overview of the Community-Based Planning Act. Meeting participants heard about local planning activities and issues from representatives of local governments. The participants then broke into small groups to discuss local concerns and community-based planning. A facilitator worked with each group to keep the discussions going and ensure that everyone had an opportunity to participate, and a note taker recorded the discussion. Each small group focused on one of the following sets of community-based planning goals:

- Citizen participation and cooperation among governments
- Economic development and public investment
- Conservation and sustainable development
- Livable communities, housing and transportation

“Maybe this first go around we won’t get it right, but we will learn a bunch and this will guide us in the future.”

“There’s no person on a white horse who can come in and solve everyone’s problems. Communities should learn how to do it themselves.”

“There’s a need for people to get together and address issues. Diverse interests need to resolve differences and be addressed in the plan. Mutual listening.”

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Small group participants evaluated and rated the 11 statewide goals contained in the Community-Based Planning Act, then discussed the following four questions:

- What issues and concerns confront your community and this part of the state?
- How important are the goals of community-based planning to you and your community, and why? What aspects of the goals are important?
- What do you think a local plan should address or contain with regard to the goals?
- What would it take to motivate your community to get involved in community-based planning and to remain involved? How about you personally, or your neighbors?

Participants reconvened to hear reports from the small groups and deliver additional comments to advisory council members in an open microphone session. During December 1997, the advisory council will discuss the results of these meetings and develop its draft recommendations.

Common themes

Several common, overarching themes emerged at all the meetings. These provide an overall sense of what Minnesotans think about local planning and about how community-based planning should proceed.

Local planning is important. Over and over, planning was mentioned as the best way to address issues ranging from growth to declining and aging populations. All Minnesotans want to preserve the quality of life and unique character of their communities and regions. But there are many ongoing planning efforts. Communities do not want to be told that these plans must be redone.

Planning should remain voluntary. While some called for required planning, most urged that planning remain voluntary with incentives. Many areas want to plan, but lack the resources. Communities want the ability and opportunity to plan.

Local ownership is crucial. If local citizens and governments do not feel as if they own the plan, it will sit on the shelf. Plans must be community-specific and unique, reflecting the visions of the people. Voluntary planning can make local ownership easier to forge.

The goals and process must be flexible. Minnesota is highly varied, with different physical characteristics, economic bases, population density and ethnic heritage from region to region. As a result, issues and needs also can be unique. Goals must be flexible and be able to be adapted to these differences.

State guidance and assistance are desirable, but the need for state approval of local plans is viewed with concern. Repeatedly, people echoed the need for state financial and technical assistance in planning. Most communities would welcome guidance and better integration of state agency efforts. Communities need access to information. However, too much state involvement leads to state-driven plans that can never truly be community-based.

Citizen involvement is essential. The importance of involving citizens in planning was a key point of discussion throughout the state. Communities must embrace and involve all people and ideas to forge local ownership and ensure that plans reflect what people want and need and have the momentum to be implemented.

Cooperation across local boundaries is required for success. Each community has its own strengths, but communities are also interdependent. Many problems cross traditional boundaries and require joint efforts to solve or prevent. Instances of sharing and cooperation are numerous, but more are needed. State agencies must be partners. Other communities and the state must respect community plans.

Membership of the advisory council is not broad enough. The council membership became the focus of many discussions across the state. Representation from northwestern and northeastern Minnesota and from local governments was deemed inadequate.

How people rated the goals

At the meetings, participants rated the importance of each of the 11 goals of community-based planning. The goals, which address the long term interests of the state in responding to growth and change, cover the following topics:

- Broad citizen participation in local planning
- Cooperation among governments
- Economic development that links growth throughout the state with long term environmental and community well-being
- Conservation of natural resources and other state assets
- Community design that uses “livable community” principles
- Good, affordable housing for people at all stages of life
- Transportation that focuses on moving people and goods, not just automobiles
- Land use decisions that are based on a publicly supported plan
- Public investment — understanding the full costs of development
- Public awareness of the need to carefully manage growth
- Sustainable development — improving life for all community members today while preserving the ability of future generations to do the same

How meeting participants rated the goals

	Average score	Percent who rated it at 8 or above	Total responses
Citizen participation	8.8	83%	814
Land use	8.6	80%	812
Cooperation among governments	8.5	78%	808
Public awareness	8.3	75%	814
Sustainable development	8.2	70%	795
Conservation	8.1	68%	796
Transportation	7.9	65%	812
Economic development	7.8	61%	809
Livable community design	7.8	61%	795
Housing	7.7	61%	808
Public investment	7.5	55%	798

The survey asked: “How important is each of the 11 goals of community-based planning to you?”
 Scale: 1 = not important 10 = extremely important

Source: Minnesota Planning

Voices from around the state

Although there were some strong common themes, the meetings were also rich with differences. This section highlights some of the unique local and regional issues, perspectives and experiences from each meeting site.

Bemidji

Participants stressed the importance of land use planning and felt that it must balance development and natural resource protection. There were strong sentiments against mandated planning and concern that planning be truly community-based. Many people distrust government and fear that planning will become mandatory. They do not want more inflexible rules, such as those that regulate private septic tanks. They do not want a difficult approval process, such as that for solid waste plans. They do not want to be told how to do things. They criticized the advisory council for lacking rural elected officials and representatives from northern Minnesota.

Additional points:

- Use water plans as a model planning process
- There should be no “boilerplate” plans
- Allow local flexibility and recognize differences across the state
- Judge plans on honest efforts and serious attempts — results could take years
- Cooperation among city, county, township, tribes, state and others is vital
- Establish an agreed-upon mechanism to mediate differences
- Involve all kinds of people in the “community voice,” including the elderly
- Look 100 to 200 years into the future to conserve open space

Local and regional concerns

People expressed concerns with pressure on natural resources, such as lakes and wetlands; and with low incomes and an aging population. They also noted that annexation issues make cooperation on other issues difficult.

- Low wages and a high percentage of retired people lead to transportation and housing affordability problems
- Small communities find it hard to compete with large retailers in regional centers
- Second and third tier development is occurring around lakes and wetlands
- Conversion of seasonal homes to year-round homes is increasing
- People move out from urban areas expecting rural life with urban services
- Growing population and commerce jeopardize fishing, hunting and other amenities
- People are being forced off their land due to rising prices
- Townships want to be equal with cities in planning and annexation discussions

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

All goals do not apply everywhere. Long-term goals should be developed for regional areas. Furthermore, local governments must be able to prioritize state goals to fit local needs.

Still, the vast majority of participants rated all of the goals as eight or higher on a 10-point scale where 10 equals “extremely important.” Citizen participation was viewed as the most important goal, with 83 percent of respondents rating it 10. The sustainable development and livable communities goals were viewed as not well understood and in need of better definition. People thought that education of citizens and officials also must be a goal.

“We know we have to do something, but don’t want the state telling us what to do.”

“Ought not to be doing things to people but with people.”

“Current planning is not community-based, it’s city council and special interest based.”

“Turf battles will kill planning and cooperation.”

“Cities must get ‘annexation’ out of their vocabulary when they talk with townships if this is to work.”

“People expect to have their own plot with no controls, but want controls on others.”

“Submit plans and have them approved before money is made available.”

“We often react and deal with zoning more than planning.”

Motivators and incentives

For people to become involved in local planning, they must have a stake in the plan and must know that they will be heard and make a difference. Also, planners must not use technical or vague language if they want to keep people's interest. Communities need professional help, technical assistance and guides, as well as implementation money. Communities should be reimbursed for successfully completed plans, with perhaps \$2 in state matching funds for every \$1 spent by the community. Grants are helpful but should not come without requiring a product. Funding to make it easy for people to participate via telephone, video, fax, and other methods also would be helpful.

Crookston

Participants recognized the need for local, coordinated planning and stressed that cooperation among local governments is critical. They do not want mandates and fear that the current law is the "thin edge of a wedge" leading to mandatory planning. Planning must be kept flexible, recognizing that one size does not fit all. Many people were concerned that complicated, inflexible rules will follow, even if the legislative intent is to keep the program flexible. The fact that the council has no representative from this area has set things off on the wrong foot.

Additional points:

- Local people should set priorities, such as on a recent local road construction project, where people wanted to save old-growth white pine instead of wetlands
- Some fear that this program could be like shore land regulation — first optional with small incentives, then mandatory
- Get information out to people and let them develop the plans
- Criteria for approving plans must be tailored to population size and place or region
- Communities don't want to be told to redo plans they just completed
- Conservation and economic growth must balance each other

Local and regional concerns

Not every place is growing. Growth controls are not needed here and might hurt. Declining populations, declining profitability of agriculture, affordable housing and related issues are key.

- Youth are drawn to cities for higher wages
- Housing costs are driven up by zoning and regulations, including costly septic rules
- Agricultural changes and difficulties — big farms replacing small ones, repeated failure of wheat and other crops, high transportation costs to get specialty crops to distant markets
- Loss of work ethic, can't get people to do things
- People are abandoning small town housing and moving to Grand Forks
- Private bus transportation to Warroad stopped due to increased state insurance requirements

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Keep definitions simple, participants stressed. We might be in favor of a general goal but not in the way it is defined. Sustainable development and growth are not northwestern Minnesota issues. Livable community design must be very different for Plummer, Minnesota, and White Bear Lake; it applies more to new and big developments. Property rights issues also should be addressed.

"Make local governments and people partners, not subjects."

"Offer a carrot, but use a little stick."

"We are not running out of space, energy or resources in northwestern Minnesota. We are running out of people."

"We can't do it all on our own."

"Planning concept is good, but flexibility needs to be there."

"Why do we need a state group or agency to listen to what we say, decide what we mean and then tell us what we want? Help us plan, but let us decide!"

"The need to plan for the future grows so important as we lose population."

"Rule-making by state agencies is taxation without representation."

"Strongly oppose statewide or regional control of local planning."

The vast majority of participants rated all of the goals at seven or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation, cooperation among governments and public education received the most 10 ratings, with 52 percent, 47 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

Motivators and incentives

Technical assistance from state agencies and grants were seen as necessary incentives for planning. Some communities felt that they could not afford cost-sharing. Tax reductions also were suggested. People could more easily participate by using technology such as the video teleconferencing facilities available at schools.

Fergus Falls

Planning is a potentially effective way to address local needs, noted participants at Fergus Falls. They stressed that grass-roots participation and intergovernmental cooperation are crucial for planning to be successful. Plans must respond to local needs and requirements must be flexible. Some were concerned about more bureaucracy, while others suggested that more controls and assistance are necessary.

Additional points:

- Developments that affect quality of life should be regulated more stringently
- Counties need direction and financial help in planning
- Consolidate and simplify existing laws, rather than adding another layer
- Plan continually, not just during a crisis

Local and regional concerns

Participants discussed environmental quality, agriculture, housing and transportation. They suggested using economic development strategies, including public investments in infrastructure and education, to build on what is already in the community, strengthen small businesses, and give youth a good education and reason to stay.

- Increase family farming, preserve agricultural land
- Agriculture and lakeshore development pose environmental threats
- Affordable housing demand is greater than supply
- Transit and other transportation needs are great
- Property taxes are rising and there is a need for greater efficiency in spending tax money
- Protect environmental quality, especially water quality, and preserve habitats for future generations

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Participants identified conservation as an extremely important goal, but felt that most people are more concerned with their own lives. Citizen participation is seen as very important. Cooperation among governments is also viewed as a relevant goal because while communities should have their own strengths, communities are interdependent.

Most participants rated all of the goals at eight or above on a 10-point scale of importance. Land use planning and cooperation among governments were ranked as most important, receiving “10” ratings from 39 percent and 37 percent of respondents.

“Conflicts are inevitable and all interested parties need a voice.”

“More is done here over coffee shop talk than anywhere else.”

“Land use in one community can affect another community 500 miles away.”

“We should be proactive, not reactive. Plan what we do.”

“The state can’t buy this product. It must be wanted by locals.”

“Our county commissioners tell us that they ‘don’t know how to implement a land use plan county wide.’ They need direction and help ”

“People want open spaces and forests, but they want it in their backyards as private space rather than as public spaces.”

Motivators and incentives

For people to participate in planning, they must believe that it can improve quality of life in specific, tangible ways important to the community, said participants. Public education about planning issues is essential for building interest and community pride. Crises motivate people to be involved but are not essential. Funding is important, and matching grants would lead to local ownership of the process.

Brainerd

Many participants support more planning in the region, though some expressed fear that the state would take over local decisions. Planning could help the region view itself as a “community,” rather than as individual jurisdictions. Plans and enforcement that are integrated and consistent across jurisdictions would encourage this. Others voiced concern about duplication of efforts, protection of individual rights and lack of planning resources.

Additional points:

- Extensive bottom-up citizen participation and public education are essential
- Provide models and a central place for information and technical assistance
- Provide training for facilitation, planning and problem solving
- Give incentives, not mandates or a master plan for the state
- Use quantitative indicators and performance measures to measure success of plans
- Cities and townships must plan together
- The region needs a longer term and broader perspective in decision-making

Local and regional concerns

The competing interests of agricultural production, development and protection of forests and water quality are a big concern in this region. Ultimately, agricultural land and forests must be better conserved, and water quality in the lakes must be preserved.

- Increased development conflicts with preserving a rural character
- The region may not want or be ready for tourism-driven development that is occurring
- Economic development and jobs are emphasized over the cost of development
- Development is outpacing the transportation system, including public transportation
- There is a shortage of affordable housing with transportation access to jobs
- Housing and economic development efforts are poorly coordinated
- There is tension between rural residents and agricultural operations

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Cooperation is crucial but difficult, participants noted. Cities and townships must build trust and operate on a level playing field in order to cooperate more. Citizen participation also is important, because the plan should reflect a shared vision of the region. Sustainable development was viewed as an overriding goal by some. If we undermine local resources, everything else will fall apart, they said.

The majority of respondents rated all the goals at seven or above on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation was rated 10 by 5 percent of respondents.

“Cooperation requires money out of pocket. How will this be reimbursed?”

“It is important to have strong areas in the state besides the Twin Cities.”

“I don’t want state plan review and approval.”

“Aggrieved citizens participate. It’s not the general public.”

“Our area is growing at such a fast pace that we need planning for the future. Hindsight is not good.”

“I would like to see annexation restrictions removed.”

“Communities can make the best decision for themselves.”

“Most counties have plans but they’re outdated. Give dollar incentives to update plans.”

“There is a need to engage people early on in planning and explore new methods for bringing people in.”

“The plan should contain protection of rights of individuals to live without government intervention within the framework of reasonableness.”

Motivators and incentives

People will get involved if they feel that their quality of life is threatened — for example, if they sense a loss of clean air, trees, water quality or agricultural land. Economic self-interest also can motivate, such as a threat of increased property taxes, lower land values, a growth moratorium or an awareness of public subsidies for certain activities. To interest citizens, the plan must be accountable, must change over time, and must be concrete so that people see it as relevant to their lives. The involvement process must be creative, with visits to schools, employers, and citizen groups.

Duluth

Planning legislation is sorely needed in this area, Duluth participants noted, and the Community-Based Planning Act may help. The state should be involved only in providing direction, assistance, encouragement and feedback — not providing dictates and mandates. Participants were interested in finding out more about the new law, but suspected strings attached to grant money. Lack of representation of northern Minnesota on the advisory council was seen as a significant problem.

“‘Community-based’ must be local. State should provide direction, assistance, encouragement and feedback — not dictates.”

“The state role should be limited. Most of what needs to be accomplished is already in law. State should help improve coordination, provide a checklist of issues to consider, provide contacts at the state.”

“This act is a positive note. There is a need for cooperation among local governments.”

“Two Harbors has some sprawl. But things are turning around — planning is beginning.”

“People buy property and expect to be able to do anything they want to it, ignoring effects on the community.”

“Tax policy drives a lot of decisions. People make decisions based on economics.”

“Community-based planning is absolutely necessary.”

Additional points:

- “Community-based” must mean locally driven and controlled
- Broad and diverse citizen participation is the key to success
- Plans must coordinate transportation, affordable housing, preservation of natural resources and other issues
- Planning loopholes must be eliminated
- No cookie-cutter plans
- Local concerns must drive implementation of the Community-Based Planning Act
- Plans should identify with the community’s vision
- Plans should be simple and straightforward so that all can read and understand them

Local and regional concerns

Maintaining the region’s high quality natural resources was a strong theme. Better forest management, preservation of agricultural land and open space and maintaining a diversity of land uses were all mentioned. Participants also saw needs for alternative forms of transportation and affordable housing.

- Balance preservation and development
- Community demographics and economics are changing
- Cooperation on land use issues is needed among recreation, industry and farm interests
- There is concern about the cumulative environmental effects of development and forest management techniques
- Development of commercial strips affects transportation and public service needs
- There is misuse and overuse of lakes and lake shores

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Many participants felt it was impossible to evaluate single goals, because planning involves all objectives. Others felt that some goals may be more important than others and that some have a “metro spin.” They suggested that the vision of a local community is more important than the statewide goals. Some thought the sustainable development goal was not needed, since it pervades all the goals. The economic

development goal must deal with existing businesses, not just new ones. Several suggested that the goals balance and define public and individual rights. Energy and recreation were suggested as additional topics for statewide goals.

The majority of participants rated all of the goals at seven or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation was seen as the most important goal, with 52 percent of respondents rating it 10.

Motivators and incentives

Communities must feel as if they can make a difference through their plans. A variety of techniques will be needed to interest people and keep them involved. Computer simulations could forecast future problems, without waiting for a crisis to get people's attention. The state could promote local planning by highlighting its benefits, including improved quality of life and increased ability to obtain public funds and private investment. Other state incentives could include assistance in putting a plan together, money, education and mentoring. Incentives need not be extortion-based.

Hibbing

Participants recognized the importance of planning. They discussed many ongoing efforts in the area, problems that result from lack of planning and the desire to preserve their high quality of life. Some participants, including several from townships, felt that community-based planning could benefit them. Others questioned how the new process fits with ongoing efforts. Lack of northern Minnesota representation on the advisory council was a major concern. Some suggested that the Legislature and advisory council need more hands-on knowledge of this region.

Additional points:

- Do not turn this into mandated planning with “purse strings” attached
- Local control is important in local planning
- Give communities independence and flexibility in planning
- Do not create another inflexible, unwieldy act like the wetlands legislation
- Address possible overlap with Iron Range Resources and Redevelopment Board and Northern Counties Land Use Coordinating Board
- Emphasize partnerships among state agencies that have a role in planning

Local and regional concerns

Population loss — particularly youth — development and the economy are major concerns. People are concerned about the region's resources, especially the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and the Superior National Forest.

- Many young people must leave the area for college and do not return
- Rural areas have lost political power in the Minnesota Legislature
- Jobs with livable wages for youth and others are too few
- Infrastructure is aging
- Affordable housing for the elderly as an alternative to nursing homes is in short supply
- Shoreline development is harming lakes
- Mined lands should be redeveloped in an orderly manner
- Future economic stability is in question, partially because of reliance on the mining industry

“We need to change our mindset and think about what to give back for the betterment of society.”

“Lower income and disenfranchised people need to be sought out.”

“Goals of community-based planning have no meaning to me. The needs of my community will drive the goals for planning in my community.”

“Northern Minnesota must plan to preserve its beauty.”

“We think of the taconite relief regions as the community.”

“There are too many one-size-fits-all laws.”

“We need new citizens and organizations involved. The same people are always there and the same groups get the funding.”

“In St. Paul, townships are treated like ‘the little people.’ Township officials need to get involved in planning, get organized, get trained.”

“The state is interested in asking for locals to show more accountability in use of funds. Not a bad thing.”

“The plan needs to touch each person — what makes them a stakeholder in the community?”

“Comprehensive planning is important. I see the effects of an absence of planning.”

“Appoint a local board of people — not elected people — and give them a budget to work with.”

“Don’t tell people what they need to do; empower them to do what they want to do.”

“It’s important for the community to know where it’s going; planning will certainly help.”

“You can hamstring a process by having too much public input — always someone with an agenda that can hamstring the process.”

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

The goals must be flexible to account for each community’s demographics and needs. Some suggested one set of goals and criteria for rural areas and another for urban areas. Several additions to the 11 goals were suggested, including goals addressing rights of property owners, education systems and the issues of tourism, recreation and energy. Some thought that sustainable development should not be a goal, but a natural outcome of community-based planning. Some participants suggested additional elements for specific goals. These included the need to address routes from rural to urban areas under transportation; the need to address heavy industry in the livable communities goal; and under the conservation goal, specific language discouraging land subdivision.

Most participants rated all of the 11 goals at eight or above on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation received the most top ratings, with 68 percent of respondents rating it at 10. Public education was second at 59 percent.

Motivators and incentives

Ways to interest people in planning include raising appropriate questions, personalizing planning issues, letting people know they have been heard and identifying a common project or crisis. School districts could help involve people, because of their role in shaping development and sense of community. Government must allow citizens the freedom to run the process. In order to get broad citizen participation, employers must cooperate and give paid time for participation in community planning and visioning. Communities must forge alliances and cooperate before they can begin planning together. They need both financial and technical assistance. The state could provide local governments with training and information on budgeting and planning.

Marshall

Marshall participants had a strong interest in planning. They stressed the need for a long range focus, rather than crisis management. They believed the state should provide financial and technical assistance, guidance and information. More coordination among local governments and with state agencies is needed, as is greater public involvement. Minnesota is a diverse state, with many unique areas that must be taken into account. Many felt that the advisory council should include elected officials from cities, towns and counties.

Additional points:

- Encourage more economic development in this part of the state
- Address capital improvements and citizen needs based on sound information
- Keep plan content and review flexible
- The state should not be overly prescriptive
- Avoid unfunded state mandates and funding with too many strings attached

Local and regional concerns

Jobs, housing, transportation, farming, population change and the demands of new rural residents are key concerns in this area. Many feel powerless and do not feel that state officials really listen to their concerns. Local governments are burdened by additional state unfunded mandates, such as additional training for ambulance and fire personnel. The area relies too heavily on local property taxes to fund necessary services; there is a need for other funding sources.

- The transportation system is inadequate to support local industries and an aging population
- There are too few livable-wage jobs or too few jobs — young people leave the area
- Affordable housing is scarce for people in low-wage jobs, including immigrants
- Non-farm rural residents tend to demand urban service levels and complain more about farming operations
- Medical facilities, particularly those for seniors, are inadequate
- There is tension between the needs of corporate farms and family farms
- Large feedlots have the potential for pollution problems
- The region’s communications system is outdated
- Aging, stable or declining populations in many areas create different needs

“Some groups have already done planning. We should not replace these plans or boards.”

“I believe we have to get our ducks in a row. The trouble we are having (loss of family farms) is only a small example what could happen state-wide.”

“Units of government have already been doing many or all of the goals in the community-based planning act.”

“We have trouble filling township board positions.”

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Some of the goals seem to apply more to large urban centers than to southwestern Minnesota, participants stated. Local plans must have a strong statement of vision so everyone knows what the community is expected to look like in the future. Although there was strong support for public involvement, some were concerned that too much public involvement could result in erosion of representative government. Elected officials often have more information than the general public and are in a better position to make decisions for the good of all.

The statewide goals were felt to be important, with most respondents rating all goals at seven or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Sixty percent rated citizen participation at 10, which means “extremely important.” The goals about public investment, livable community design and housing received the lowest number of “10” ratings.

Motivators and incentives

Citizens must be listened to and have a stake in the planning process, otherwise they will lose interest in participating. They must know that plans will be implemented. Listing the benefits of planning might help, as might giving local people more say in planning efforts and more control over local taxes. While a crisis or threat to the current way of life will motivate people, community pride can motivate as well. The state must be a partner in planning and provide funding, information and guidance. Continuing public education also is essential.

Mankato

Participants value planning. Coordinated planning efforts are already underway in the area. The process must be bottom-up and community-based, participants stressed. People expressed some concern that the state would give a top-down mandate and would review plans using inflexible criteria. Some participants felt barred by the state from meaningful involvement in highway and railroad projects, and are concerned that this might happen again.

“We aren’t encouraging local small businesses to succeed, but we ‘give away the farm’ to outside businesses.”

Additional points:

- Citizens must be more involved in the future of their communities
- Long range, big-picture planning is needed to prevent further unplanned, disorganized development
- More cooperation among jurisdictions in planning and service provision is essential
- Planning must reach people who normally aren’t interested, to develop genuine community consensus

“We need to communicate long term needs efficiently, clearly and often to the public.”

“We must stop unorganized growth.”

“Developers set the direction, not the general input of citizens.”

“We cannot try to accommodate everyone’s personal desires if these get in the way of the goal of the total community – local, regional or state.”

“Goals are critical. There has to be a level of consistency between plans.”

I haven’t heard any good reason why a community would want to get involved under the state law ...they should retain their independence.”

“Urban/rural imbalance in legislature led to bias in the act in favor of urban areas.”

“The law is overreacting and will create division in our rural communities.”

“We need some supervision down here to watch over some of these local ‘good-old-boy networks’ that are now running many local governments.”

Local and regional concerns

A major theme was the need for cultivating strong rural communities, including family farms. This requires coordination and good planning.

- Better economic development and education are critical for the revival of rural towns
- Jobs, affordable housing and training for livable-wage jobs are in short supply
- People want to preserve farmland, family farms, and interest in farming among youth
- With schools emptying and infrastructure costs rising, governments need to cooperate
- Failing septic systems and feedlots threaten water quality
- Rural farm and non-farm residents clash over feed lots and other issues
- The population is aging and has changing needs, especially for transportation.

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

All of the goals were deemed important for dealing with the issues of concern in Mankato. Conservation is important for preserving agricultural land and water quality. Economic development is critical to preserving the viability of farms owned and operated by families.

Most respondents rated all goals at seven or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation was rated 10, or “extremely important,” by 49 percent of respondents. Cooperation and land use also were significant, with each being rated eight or above by about 80 percent of respondents.

Motivators and incentives

Focusing on specific issues or crises that engage people’s attention can provide motivation. This should be coupled with public education on important issues. Another incentive is to show successes, models and opportunities, some of which could be implemented quickly. People will get involved if they feel they will be heard, and if they have the opportunity for real communication and interaction with politicians. People need good opportunities to participate and need to hear about them.

Rochester

There already is a great deal of local planning underway in this area, participants noted. Planning processes initiated locally are the most successful. Local planning should be locally controlled, but some expressed a need for a safety net if the local government fails to plan. People stressed the need for coordination at all levels of government and said the state should focus on state-level activities. Some were disappointed that the advisory council does not include township representation.

Additional points:

- Keep the program voluntary; do not create another unfunded mandate
- Townships and small cities do not have planning staff and resources
- The state should concentrate on providing a coherent statewide framework for local planning, then let local governments take it from there
- State and federal agencies must communicate their plans to local governments
- Overlapping planning efforts at state, federal and local levels must be better coordinated

Local and regional concerns

Urban growth outside municipal boundaries, rural-urban land use conflicts, stability of agriculture and ground water contamination were some of the major concerns voiced in the area. The public needs education about the implications of local decisions.

- The state lacks an effective agricultural land preservation program
- High-grade farmland is being lost to urban development
- Growth areas have conflicts between urban and rural land uses
- Low commodity prices, suburban development and inflated land values threaten farming
- Septic systems and feed lots are contaminating ground water
- Cities have insufficient power to protect growth areas outside their boundaries
- Tax increment financing should be reserved for small towns and rural areas

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Overall, participants thought the goals were too general. They suggested adopting good goals and standards that already exist, rather than reinventing. Goals should be prioritized so that when two goals conflict, one takes precedence. Local plans must consider the capacity of natural systems. True-cost accounting should be required in analyzing the cost of development, particularly the impact of residential development on private utilities within a city's urban growth boundary. Some participants suggested that conflict resolution among units of government should be a required goal.

Most people rated the goals as seven or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Forty-nine percent of respondents rated citizen participation at 10. Close behind were land use and conservation. Livable communities and housing were rated eight or below by about two-thirds of respondents.

Motivators and incentives

Funding and technical assistance for planning are both viewed as important. Participants suggested funding for implementation rather than for planning, with planning a prerequisite. Information and tools are needed — maps are outdated and data is expensive to collect. A state-funded conservation easement program to preserve farmland would be useful, especially in urbanizing areas.

Some suggested that a controversy or implied threat is needed to increase citizen participation. Others note that elected officials must be open to citizen participation. Too often citizens feel that they are resented and that their participation does not change outcomes. Participation techniques should be diverse and should reach a representative sample of the entire community, not just the naysayers or the people who have high financial stakes.

“Suggestions and ideas are okay, but let counties and local governments have the final say.”

“The goals are too general and ‘apple pie-ish’— growth and development are more complex and full of value conflicts.”

“Rescind the act and provide incentives to planning which do not contain mandates and a State ‘check off’ for a local plan.”

“...these goals should have guidelines that could be used as a template for governing bodies to establish their comprehensive plans.”

“Let the plans from the communities take priority over all other plans.”

“Planning needs to be tied to financial incentives, especially if it is voluntary.”

“The ‘biggest bang for the buck’ will come from empowering people up-front.”

“Tools of implementation are critical to not having a plan ‘shelved.’”

“Communities should have the ability to set housing goals on a percentage ratio. There is no cookie cutter formula that can work for all communities.”

“Most newer developments seem to be based on economic strategies which overlook the social impacts. By creating a ‘livable community’ most of the other goals will come naturally.”

“Transit will not be attractive until we stop building roads and congestion increases.”

“I see community-based planning to be a big challenge, but I also see it as a necessity for our future survival.”

Bloomington

Participants supported the concept of statewide local planning. The state should provide a framework similar to the regional plan provided by the Metropolitan Council. Many thought that planning should be more actively encouraged outside the seven-county metropolitan area. However, there was also a concern that community-based planning would add another level of review to an already cumbersome approval process in the Twin Cities area. Communities need tools to implement regional policies, including funding resources and incentives that they can pass on to developers.

Additional points:

- Define how community-based planning fits into the Metropolitan Planning Act
- Intergovernmental coordination is essential
- Monitor planning with checkpoints that link funding to reporting
- Implementation funding will be needed, particularly for affordable housing
- The law requiring 60-day local government decisions on development applications results in premature decisions
- Local governments need better tools to require development to pay for itself

Local and regional concerns

In this primarily urban and suburban area, many concerns centered on issues associated with population growth and development.

- Transportation and public transit are critical in light of regional growth
- Low prices for farm products and cheap fuel are supporting urban sprawl
- Affordable housing is needed, but “not in my backyard”
- Neighbors often don’t know each other in urban and suburban areas
- Natural open spaces are in short supply in urban areas
- Fully developed communities face the need to maintain and renew infrastructure
- Crime remains an ongoing concern for the public

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Some of the goals, such as transportation, housing and livable communities, run contrary to market forces and the life cycle of communities. An educational effort at all levels is necessary to change 30 years of private marketing and public planning that contradicts livable community design, said participants. The goal of requiring development to pay for itself will need to be balanced with other goals such as affordable housing.

Still, most respondents rated all of the goals as eight or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Sixty-three percent rated citizen participation at 10, and about 50 percent rated sustainable development, land use, livable communities and conservation at 10.

Motivators and incentives

The key to encouraging citizen participation is to start early in the process and demonstrate to people that they are being heard. They must know that they can make a difference. Perceived threats to local control or life-style motivate citizens and communities to plan. Serving food also is a draw for public involvement but it is becoming less effective. Local communities must be able to provide incentives to developers to implement planning. Target funding to only those areas designated for development, similar to Maryland’s Smart Growth Initiative. Broadcast the successes and failures.

White Bear Lake

Participants believed strongly in local planning. Many noted a long tradition of planning in their communities. They viewed planning as a means for improving the quality of life. Cooperation with adjacent communities, broad community input and technical assistance were mentioned as needs. While some questioned how a voluntary approach could work to enforce statewide goals, others felt that goals should be the responsibility of local communities.

Additional points:

- Allow for innovation
- Promote statewide planning goals and a strong central planning group
- Citizens must participate in plan development and implementation
- The planning process must draw out people's values and then incorporate them
- Recognize each community's identity
- Population growth spills beyond city limits
- Preserve property rights

Local and regional concerns

Development in the region is sprawling, participants said, which creates tremendous costs. Lack of investment in the inner cities leads to greater problems for poor and vulnerable populations. Development is spilling into the countryside while polluted sites are waiting to be cleaned up.

- People move to the country but don't want the downsides of rural living
- The region is losing natural habitat, agricultural land and open space
- Much housing needs rehabilitation, and affordable housing is insufficient
- A growing elderly population has changing needs, including more affordable housing
- Improved public transit and more transportation choices are needed

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

All the goals depend on public awareness, participants said. Sustainable development is a hope for turning around the trend of sprawling development. Economic development and public investment goals are important but must be coordinated with transportation planning and urban design.

Most respondents ranked all the goals at eight or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Sustainable development and land use received the most "10" ratings, with 59 percent of respondents giving both goals a 10 ("extremely important").

Motivators and incentives

Technical assistance and education of the public will get governments and citizens involved. Provide long term funding for planning and implementation. Giving citizens relevant information on topics such as performance standards or the full public costs of development will generate interest. Citizens will be more willing to help if the time frame for the planning process is short. Public awareness of the risks of not planning may also be useful.

"We need to treat landowners fairly, protect open spaces, and encourage good growth if we want to preserve quality of life long-term."

"The goals are broad enough to avoid or deflect criticism. Resistance rears its ugly head when application and funding enter the discussion."

"It is important to understand that to plan or not to plan is not the question. In particular, sprawl is a result of very bad planning."

"Make elected officials accountable and have measurable milestones to mark progress or lack of it."

"Don't have more regulations than necessary to meet goals."

"Taxes and subsidies are going to fringe areas, which encourages people to move farther out and causes decay in the central cities."

"We need economic development that preserves the environment."

"Coon Rapids and Blaine have gone from 90 percent open space to 70 percent asphalt in my lifetime."

“Make your plans as if you need to live with the results for the next 300 years.”

“We need to look at things as a community — NOT as ‘every man for himself.’”

“The value of a community working together is probably the most valuable thing about this act.”

“Too many extremists control the local planning process.”

“We want to maintain local control — guidelines are okay, mandates are not.”

“Planning ‘doesn’t work’ because people get too anxious and start offering solutions before problems are outlined, defined, and prioritized.”

“Plans must have an ongoing planning process and structure in place, supported by local people and politicians with adequate resources, trained staff and budget or all plans are a waste of money.”

“Leaders need to lead based on information and data, not politics.”

St. Cloud

Planning is necessary, but should be done at the local level, participants said. The state should provide assistance, especially technical assistance. Planning requires true participation by citizens who understand the issues and feel that they have a role in decision-making. Intergovernmental cooperation also is important. Planning must balance competing and sometimes conflicting community needs. Some participants were concerned that the advisory council contained no representatives of county or township governments.

Additional points:

- Economic development should combine liveable wages and environmental protection
- Consider community goals and values
- Consider the rights of individual property owners
- Maintain local control of planning
- Resist state mandates
- State agencies should comply with community-based planning
- Communities need good data to develop good plans
- Citizens need to be engaged and involved in decision-making
- Disincentives for high-impact projects as well as incentives for low-impact ones should be included in local plans.

Local and regional concerns

Participants emphasized issues surrounding rapid growth, the way development is occurring, and changes in the character of rural areas.

- Feed lots affect water quality, human health and aesthetics
- Maintaining small town character is important
- There are rural-urban conflicts over odors, farm vehicles on roads, and so on
- Agricultural lands, open spaces and forests should be preserved
- Lakeshore development raises concerns including impact on water quality
- The need for affordable housing is great
- The elderly population needs transportation services
- There is a need for livable wages and economic diversity
- The downtown area needs to maintain a strong economic base
- Sprawling development shows need for growth boundaries and farmland preservation
- Family farms should remain viable and local agriculture should be supported
- Newer housing developments are not pedestrian- or child-friendly

Concerns about the goals of community-based planning

Participants called for a long-term view on goals and issues. Community rights and values must be balanced against individual property rights, such as the right of farmers to sell land for retirement income, some suggested. A participant noted that goals should address protection of animals and plants, not just people. Economic development must focus on local businesses first before recruiting new ones. If development is not sustainable it should not take place.

Most respondents rated all 11 goals at eight or higher on a 10-point scale of importance. Citizen participation got the most 10 ratings, with 52 percent of respondents. More than 80 percent rated the land use goal at eight or higher.

Motivators and incentives

State funding for grants and technical assistance were viewed as necessary, especially if the state imposes mandates. All types of people, not just government officials and people with money, should be encouraged to participate. All ideas should be included in plan preparation and implementation. Publicity, convenient meetings and offering child care and refreshments are good ways to increase participation.

Meeting attendance

The meetings were open to the public. Local city, township and county officials received mailed invitations, and the meetings were publicized through local news media. Attendees included local officials, representatives of local organizations, private citizens and members of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Planning. The following section reports on attendance of each meeting.

Bemidji

Oct. 28 at Bemidji State University

Attendance: 38

Forty-seven percent were representatives of cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public, state agencies and the Leech Lake Tribal Council.

Local government presenters:

Paul Fairbanks, Cass County; Carol Engebretson, Becker County; Bill Bliss, Cass Lake Township; Dale Hoosier, Northern Township; Phil Shealy, Bemidji

Advisory council members:

Lee Ronning, Ray Hitchcock, Randy Jorgenson

Crookston

Oct. 29 at the Northland Inn

Attendance: 82

Sixty-four percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies.

Local government presenters:

Carol Engebretson, Becker County; Gene DeFault, County Township Association; Arvid Clementson, Fosston; Ray Ecklund, Crookston

Advisory council members:

Senator Steve Morse, Lee Ronning

Fergus Falls

Oct. 30 at Ottertail Power Company and Fergus Falls Community College

Attendance: 70

Forty-one percent were representatives of cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies.

Local government presenters:

Mike Howe, Pope County; Gordon Hydukovich, Fergus Falls; Matt Glaesman, Moorhead

Advisory council members:

Senator Steve Morse, Chris Hagelie, Jim Erkel, Lee Ronning, Terry Kuhlman, Randy Halvorson

Brainerd

Nov. 3 at the Brainerd Public Library and the Holiday Inn

Attendance: 84

Thirty-seven percent were representatives of cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies. Also in attendance was Representative David Ten Eyck.

Local government presenters:

Duane Konewko, Aitkin County; Scott Hanson, Crow Wing County; Jim Demjen, Cass County; Dave Miller, Cuyuna Range Economic Development Inc.; Dan Vogt, Brainerd

Advisory council members:

Randy Jorgenson, Representative Dee Long, Chris Hagelie, Marcia Farinacci, Lee Ronning, Randy Halvorson

Duluth

Nov. 5 at the Radisson Hotel

Attendance: 63

Forty-eight percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies. Representative Mary Murphy also attended.

Local government presenters:

Tim Kennedy, Cook County; Dick Segal, Lake County; Dennis Fink, St. Louis County; Russ Georgeson, Canosia Township; Paul Iverson, Two Harbors

Advisory council members:

Randy Jorgenson, Representative Dee Long, Marcia Farinacci, Amy Janke, Lee Ronning, Virginia Harris, Gary Laurent, Alden Lind, Terry Kuhlman

Hibbing

Nov. 6 at Hibbing Community College

Attendance: 48

Twenty-five percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies. Representatives Dave Tomassoni, Tom Rukavina and Loren Solberg also attended.

Local government presenters:

Terry Greenside, Itasca County; Steve Raukar, St. Louis County; Frank Ongaro, St. Louis County; Cheryl Sharp, Cotton Township; Ray Battaglia, Buhl

Advisory council members:

Randy Jorgenson, Amy Janke, Representative Dee Long, Terry Kuhlman

Marshall

Oct. 10 at Southwest State University

Attendance: 148

Sixty-three percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public, and state agencies. Representatives Elaine Harder, Marty Seifert and Ted Winter also attended.

Local government presenters:

Larry Gasow, Nobles County; Gene Short, Redwood County; Jon Mitchell, Redwood County; Greg Isaackson, Cottonwood

Advisory council members:

Senator Steve Morse, Randy Jorgenson, James Erkel, Lee Ronning, Terry Kuhlman, Randy Halvorson, Marcia Farinacci

Mankato

Nov. 12 at Mankato State University

Attendance: 98

Forty-nine percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups and the general public. Representatives Howard Swenson and Ruth Johnson also attended.

Local government presenters:

Tina Rosenstein, Nicollet County; Tony Phillipovitch, Mankato Growth Management and Planning Study; Keith Metzel, St. James; Pat Hentges, Mankato

Advisory council members:

Randy Jorgenson, Senator John Hottinger, James Erkel, Lee Ronning, Gary Laurent

Rochester

Nov. 13 at Rochester Community and Technical College

Attendance: 107

Fifty-three percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from interest groups, the general public and state agencies.

Local government presenters:

Kevin Kelliher, Houston County; Phil Wheeler, Rochester and Olmsted County; Gary Neumann, Rochester; John Hunziker, Rochester

Advisory council members:

Randy Jorgenson, Virginia Harris, Ray Hitchcock

Bloomington

Nov. 17 at Normandale Community College

Attendance: 61

Eighteen percent were representatives from cities, counties and townships. The rest were from state agencies, interest groups and the general public. Representatives Peggy Leppik and Barb Sykora also attended.

Local government presenters:

Larry Lee, Bloomington

Advisory council members:

Senator Steve Morse, Lee Ronning, Curt Johnson, Virginia Harris, Christine Rice, Representative Dee Long, Randy Jorgenson

White Bear Lake

Nov. 18 at Century Community College

Attendance: 71

Twenty-five percent were representatives of cities, counties and townships. The rest were from state agencies, interest groups and the general public. Several attendees came from Isanti, Chisago and Pine Counties. Representative Satveer Chaudhary also attended.

Local government presenters:

Robert Lockyear, Washington County

Advisory council members:

Representative Dee Long, Representative Bill Kuisle, Curt Johnson, Marcia Farinacci, Amy Janke, Lee Ronning, Virginia Harris, Christine Rice, Senator Steve Morse

St. Cloud

Nov. 19 at City Council Chambers

Attendance: 180

Thirty-seven percent were representatives of cities, counties and townships. The rest were from state agencies, interest groups and the general public. Representatives Kathy Tingelstad, Leslie Schumacher, Doug Stang and Mark Olson also attended.

Local government presenters:

George Rindelaub, Stearns County; Franklin Denn, Monticello Township; Johnny Olson, Paynesville Township; Nelda Remus, Zimmerman; Patti Gartland, St. Cloud

Advisory council members:

Representative Dee Long, Representative Joe Opatz, Representative Bruce Anderson, Marcia Farinacci, Randy Halvorson, Terry Kuhlman, Lee Ronning, Senator Steve Dille

Members of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Planning

Randy Jorgenson

Co-chair
Southwest Regional
Development Commission
Slayton

Senator Steve Morse

Co-chair
Home: Dakota

Representative Bruce Anderson

Buffalo Township

Caren Dewar

Dewar and Associates, Inc.
Minneapolis

Senator Steve Dille

Home: Dassel

James Erkel

The Nature Conservancy
Minneapolis

Marcia Farinacci

Deputy Director
Minnesota Planning

Chris Hagelie

City Administrator
St. Cloud

Ginny Harris

St. Paul

Senator John Hottinger

Home: Mankato

Representative Bill Kuisle

Home: Rochester

Gary Laurent

Laurent Builders, Inc.
Shakopee

Alden Lind

Duluth

Representative Dee Long

Home: Minneapolis

Representative Joe Opatz

Home: St. Cloud

Senator Pat Pariseau

Home: Farmington

Christine Rice

Woodbury

Lee Ronning

Land Stewardship Project
1,000 Friends of Minnesota
White Bear Lake

Ex-officio members

Randy Halvorson

Assistant Director
Minnesota Department of
Transportation

Ray Hitchcock

Assistant Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural
Resources

Amy Janke

Assistant to the Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Curtis Johnson

Chair, Metropolitan Council

Terry Kuhlman

Executive Director, Public Facilities
Authority
Minnesota Department of Trade and
Economic Development