

## **Shaping our Region's Future (3) January, 2003**

Welcome to the third regular newsletter column, which provides quarterly updates on our regional comprehensive planning process. East Central is currently updating its regional plan to meet new standards established in the Wisconsin Smart Growth legislation (1999). Working together with citizens, local governments, and interest groups, East Central's objective is to develop a policy framework for planning issues.

### **What's New? - Regional Focus Groups Key Issues**

The regional focus groups held throughout the region during September were successful in bringing together a wide range of interests. Participants included representatives from local government, special districts, interest groups, minorities, and Indian tribes, as well as interested citizens. There was an overall participation rate of 50%. Participation rates varied by county. Winnebago (65%), Waushara (54%), and Waupaca (50%), had the highest participation rates while Menominee (26%), Calumet (33%), and Fond du Lac (37%), had lower participation rates.

Some of the key issues identified during the regional focus groups are listed below:

- Economic development in the region is regarded as having been negatively impacted by the global economy. Mergers and takeovers have resulted in the closing and/or exporting of many local businesses, as well as a decline in the manufacturing base. The consequences include job losses, people moving out of the area, reduced tax base, and an increasing proportion of service sector jobs, many of which pay low level wages and lack healthcare benefits.
- There is a perceived lack of affordable housing in both urban and rural communities. One reason for this is the high proportion of residents who are living on low level incomes. In 2001, the proportion of workers earning poverty level wages ranged from 27% in Outagamie to 48% in Waushara County.
- There is concern that transportation improvements are negatively impacting land use, specifically that development of new highways and the widening of existing highways is accommodating and generating urban sprawl.
- With respect to utilities and community facilities the number one concern is access to safe drinking water. There are worries about water quality and quantity.
- There is a widespread desire to preserve rural character. There is apprehension that a change in land use from a blend of agriculture and recreation to one of scattered rural residential may compromise the future of agriculture and recreation in the area.
- There is hope that the current state budget deficit, the potential loss of state shared revenues, dropping revenues due to the downturn in the economy, and the public demand for lower taxes, may act as a catalyst for increased inter-governmental cooperation. There is concern about the lack of cooperation and dialogue between different levels of government, between local government and special districts, between the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, and between tribal and non-tribal governments.

- There is a view that implementation of comprehensive plan policies will require trade-offs that will present many challenges. Regulation vs. private property rights, economic development vs. environmental protection, development vs. costs, residential development vs. preservation of rural character, consolidation vs. local control, etc.

For a full summary of the regional focus groups, including lists of the issues and opportunities identified at each session, check out our web site at [www.eastcentralrpc.org](http://www.eastcentralrpc.org).

### **What's Next? - Regional Advisory Committees**

The first milestone report, The State of the Region, will be available in the New Year. This will provide the baseline information that will enable us all to understand the basic make-up of the east central region and will provide the foundation on which we will begin to plan for the future. This report along with input from the public participation process will enable East Central to take the next step in the regional planning process. That is, to establish Advisory Committees, composed of both technical experts and citizens, that will help guide staff through the next stages of the planning process.

If you are interested in serving on an advisory committee or obtaining more information, contact Denise McShane at 920-751-4770 or by email at [dmcshane@eastcentralrpc.org](mailto:dmcshane@eastcentralrpc.org)