

CHAPTER 2: MILESTONE REPORTS #1 & #2 SUMMARY

Introduction

The chapter provides the reader with a brief synopsis of the Commission's prior efforts in the comprehensive planning process. The contents of this third milestone report was predicated on the conclusions drawn from two previous reports, one which provided a snapshot of the region in its current state and one which used this information (issues and opportunities) to ultimately identify the content for consideration in the third milestone report.

Milestone Report #1 Summary: State of the Region

The *State of the Region* report was produced to provide the baseline information required to enable Commissioners, staff, advisory committee members, interest groups, and citizens to understand the basic make-up of the region. The primary purpose of the first milestone report was to provide a broad description of the current state of the region: before we plan for the future, we needed a benchmark of where we are at the moment. The report provides background information on the following:

- Issues and Opportunities (socio-economic data and projections)
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Facilities
- Agricultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Land Use

A chapter was devoted to each of the topics listed above. Each chapter was divided into five main sections. After a brief introduction, each chapter described the broad policy context for that particular area, and presented a statement on current intergovernmental cooperation. The presentation of background information, the assessment of current and future conditions, was the main focus. Each chapter concluded by summarizing current and future trends and presented a preliminary identification of the issues and opportunities, which the data analysis and public participation process indicated will need to be addressed in the regional plan.

Expected growth and change in the region is identified in the first milestone and many assumptions are established directly from its population and housing projection figures. In summary, based on estimated growth patterns and anticipated higher net migration rates, it is estimated that population in the East Central region may increase by 21.57%, from 609,588 persons 756,877 persons between 2000 and 2030. It is assumed, however, that the largest population gains will occur during the first decade, and that growth for the region as a whole will taper off during the second decade. As the population ages and the rate of natural increase declines, it is expected that most counties and communities will actually see their population peak prior to 2020.

Milestone Report #2 Summary: Issues & Opportunities

The second step in the regional planning process was to develop a vision of our preferred future for the region. This was the focus of *Milestone Report #2: Issues & Opportunities*. The report also explored the impact of current and projected trends on identified issues and, with the guidance of the previously mentioned Technical Advisory Committees, vision and core goal statements were developed that would help us work toward the future we envision for ourselves and the next generation. The purpose of *Issues & Opportunities* was to help us bridge the transition between the envisioned regional future and where the region actually looks likely to be heading, given current and anticipated trends.

The next step in the regional planning process was the development of a vision that illustrated our preferred future for the region. The second milestone report had three objectives:

1. Develop a preferred vision for the future of the region;
2. Explore the impact of current and projected trends on all issues identified to date in the regional planning process, including those presented in the *State of the Region*, and;
3. Identify core goals to help us work toward the future we envision for ourselves and the next generation.

The second milestone report assisted in bridging the transition between the envisioned regional future and where the region actually appears to be headed, given current and anticipated trends. There were four main steps involved in the preparation of this report:

Step 1: Envisioning the future

Working cooperatively, thematic vision statements were developed for each of the substantive smart growth elements. This involved clarifying aspirations of how we want the region to look in the future and were discussed under the context of three specific questions:

- What would you like to be preserved in the region?
- What would you like to be changed in the region?
- What would you like to be created in the region?

The vision statements were developed taking into account: 1) the fourteen state derived 'local land use goals' (see Appendix B); 2) input from the public participation events, specifically the regional focus groups and public information meetings; 3) comments from technical advisory committee members, and; 4) staff and Commissioner input. East Central considered it crucial to offer all stakeholders the opportunity of being involved in clarifying the preferred future.

Step 2: Clarifying the Issues / Opportunities that will be addressed in the regional plan

In terms of the issues and opportunities identified, staff made decisions about what issues were truly 'regional' in nature and how they would be focused upon during the

rest of the planning process. Where decisions were made that some issues are better handled by a state or local agency or organization other than ourselves, we noted how those issues have been handed off. The objective was to ensure that all issues raised receive due respect and consideration.

Step 3: Match / Mismatch between envisioned and likely future

For the remaining issues, identified trends were explored in detail and an assessment of the match / mismatch was given between the likely future (given current and projected trends) and the envisioned future. As staff worked toward producing this report, two primary approaches were used to explore the impact that identified trends may have on the region:

1. First, for the trends that are most likely, for example, an aging population (by 2020, Wisconsin will be one of five states in the country with 20% of its population over 65 years), an increasing number of households and a reduction in household size, we have asked "how do we respond?"
2. Second, for the areas of greatest conflict, we have re-examined our basic assumptions about the issues and asked "are there better ways to address these challenges?" For example:
 - New construction, reconstruction and expansion of highways, at considerable cost, seemed to be the dominant current trend in transportation. How do we rethink dealing with transportation issues associated with sprawl development? How do we promote compact, mixed land use patterns that provide access, reduce social exclusion, and create livable communities while being cost effective?
 - The number of residential units in the region increased by 43% in the 20 years between 1980 and 2000, however the amount of residential land increased by 173%. How do we promote cost-effective redevelopment and development of land with existing or nearby community facilities, while continuing to provide both housing choice and affordability?
 - Approximately 320,000 acres of farmland were lost during between 1980 and 2000, an area larger than the entire jurisdiction of Winnebago County. How do we protect farmland and preserve rural character, while ensuring the continued economic vitality of the region?
 - The region's natural resources, groundwater and surface water, lakes and open spaces are under increasing pressure from both the urbanization of our rural areas and greater than ever recreational use. How do we ensure the protection of our natural resources in the face of competing demands?

Step 4: Identification of Goals

In addressing these questions, the Commission had begun to identify the core goals that would enable us to achieve the envisioned future. To achieve real progress, it was recognized that that goals for the various elements need to be pursued in an integrated and collaborative manner. Consequently, focus was placed on identifying the links and interactions between the different elements of the plan. For example, transportation and land use planning have to be taken forward together as they are not mutually exclusive. There will need to be close links between housing and economic development as it has been shown that strong communities and regions have good housing stock and strong markets. To preserve the environment, farmland, and rural character, there will need to be a good understanding of the interaction of (and disparity between in many cases) both urban and rural goals, etc.

Milestone Report #2 lays out the regional issues, along with their vision and goal statements, in a series of 'fact sheets' similar to the ones contained in this report. This format was chosen so as to more easily convey the information and messages for change to the general public. The information contained in Milestone Report #2 was presented for consideration by the public at three informational meetings in June of 2003 before being considered by the Commission for acceptance. A summary of the written and oral comments received at these meetings is contained in Appendix D.