



FRAMEWORK ²⁰³⁰

partnering for the future WORK

A Regional Economic and Land Use Strategy

Summer 2021 | The Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership

DRAFT, Version 2.0

WELCOME

There is power in working together. Our region is made up of strong and independent communities who – through their qualities of life, place, and opportunity – have attracted significant growth and investment. Through effective planning and management, our cities and townships have maintained their unique character while also accommodating new investment. But our region is also connected. We share a market, labor force, transportation network, and so much more. These connections are vital to our continued success. The challenges within these systems, however, cannot be solved by one community alone. Networked problems require networked solutions, and certain issues need a collaborative regional response.

With this broader view in mind, we began a process to better understand our regional strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Framework 2030 was an inclusive process to map this complex and interconnected system and identify a path forward. Through significant outreach and community engagement, our process folded in the thoughts and ideas of the broader public. More than 8,000 comments were collected. We also looked closely at the data to better understand our shared conditions and trends. Housing, transportation, land use, economics, and many other topics were all on the table.

This work progressed through the global pandemic and related economic disruptions. Despite these shared difficulties, more than 2,000 people contributed to the process. The regional vision represents their interests and this plan could not have been completed without them.

In the end, we developed a proactive response to our region’s challenges and opportunities that will help guide this Partnership, and the communities we serve, for the next decade. That is this plan. That is Framework 2030.

We look forward to being principal partners in our region’s continued growth and advancement. The future is made brighter together.

Sincerely,

The Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BECKER TOWNSHIP

- » **Brian Kolbinger**
- » Lucinda Messman
- » Brad Wilkening

BIG LAKE TOWNSHIP

- » Larry Alfords
- » **Dean Brenteson**
- » Brenda Kimberly-Maas

CITY OF BECKER

- » **Tracy Bertram**
- » Rick Hendrickson
- » Marie Pflipsen
- » Greg Pruszinske
- » Jacob Sanders

CITY OF BIG LAKE

- » Michael Healy
- » Hanna Klimmek
- » Lucinda Meyers
- » Kim Noding
- » **Paul Seefeld**
- » Clay Wilfahrt

MONTICELLO TOWNSHIP

- » Shannon Bye
- » **Bob Idziorek**

CITY OF MONTICELLO

- » Charlotte Gabler
- » **Lloyd Hilgart**
- » Rachel Leonard
- » Jeff O’Neill
- » Angela Schumann

SHERBURNE COUNTY

- » Raeanne Danielwoski
- » **Tim Dolan**
- » Marc Schneider
- » Dan Weber

WRIGHT COUNTY

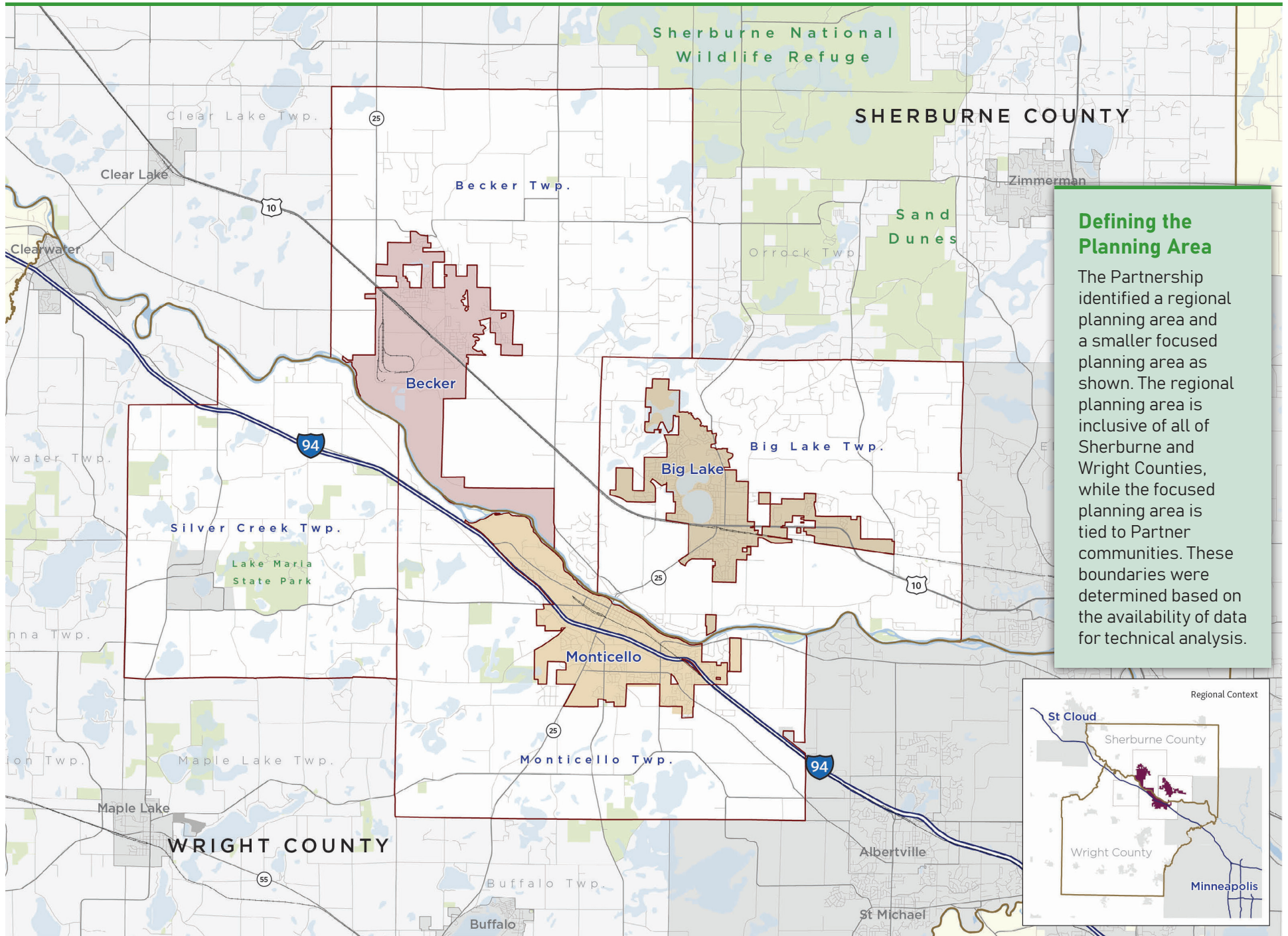
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Bold Indicates Partners



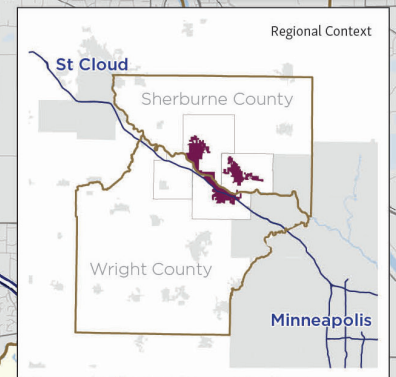
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Defining the Planning Area

The Partnership identified a regional planning area and a smaller focused planning area as shown. The regional planning area is inclusive of all of Sherburne and Wright Counties, while the focused planning area is tied to Partner communities. These boundaries were determined based on the availability of data for technical analysis.



An aerial photograph of a river valley, likely the Central Mississippi River region, with a grid overlay. The river flows through the center, surrounded by agricultural fields and some urban areas. The overall color palette is dark green and blue.

FRAMEWORK 2030

partnering for the future

FRAMEWORK 2030 IS AN INCLUSIVE, TRANSPARENT, AND ONGOING PROCESS TO IDENTIFY THE CENTRAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION. THROUGH CONVERSATION AND ANALYSIS, THE CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING PARTNERSHIP HAS DEVELOPED THIS PLAN TO MOVE THE COMMUNITIES FORWARD, TOGETHER.



1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

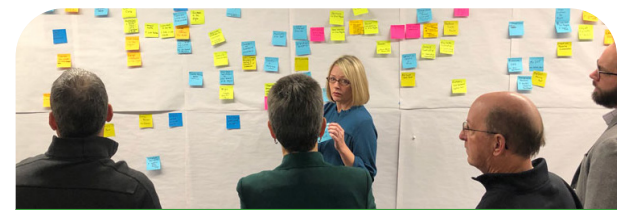
Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the communities of the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership began the region's first collaborative planning and economic development project. Framework 2030 was an inclusive, community-driven process to develop the region's first collective vision. The Partner communities anticipate significant growth and development in the coming decades, and chose to utilize this collaborative approach to regional planning to maintain a high quality of life for area residents, businesses, and visitors.

Working with the community to build a strong and catalytic plan

At the conclusion of the process in summer 2021, more than 2,000 people had contributed 8,000 ideas to the conversation. This, coupled with strong research by the planning team and leadership by the Partners, led to the development of the Framework 2030 Vision and strategies. The plan is the product of that collaborative process and represents the strong spirit and diverse interests from across the region. The communities, like the rest of the world, felt the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and related economic shutdowns. Rather than disrupt the work, these events helped reveal hidden trends and provided an incentive for collective action against future disruptions.

The plan is divided into four sections: an introduction to the process, contributors, and community; an overview of the region today including key findings related to land use, economics, housing and other topics; the vision, values and strategy statements; and the implementation plan. This final section lays out the action agenda for future work by the Partnership in pursuit of the regional vision. These actions – projects, policies, or programs – were selected based on their potential to move the communities forward. They're wide-ranging, both in terms of impact and topics. In the end, the Partnership elevated 28 initial action recommendations. These are described in detail in the final chapter.



Who is the Partnership?

The Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership currently includes elected representatives: cities of Becker, Big Lake, and Monticello; Becker, Silver Creek, Monticello, and Big Lake townships; and Sherburne and Wright counties. Originally known as the Highway 25 Coalition, some of these communities formed in 2016 to better understand the transportation issues that were affecting the region. This group completed a number of projects that yielded clear, usable data on traffic and service levels. While the initial focus centered around the region's connectivity, it soon became apparent that a more holistic approach would be required to accomplish the goals of each community. In July 2019, the coalition adopted a new name: the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership along with a new joint powers agreement that reflected their expanded scope on regional challenges and opportunities.

Background

The Framework 2030 process took place over a 20-month period, involved thousands of stakeholders, and was guided by two clear process goals.

Why now?

The Central Mississippi River region anticipates significant growth and development in the coming decades. The Minneapolis – St. Paul Metropolitan Area is among the fastest growing in the country, and this development energy has already started to significantly affect the communities in this region. The Partners are collaborating on this regional planning and economic development project to optimize regional and local benefits to maintain and build greater quality of life, place and opportunity. This means development that brings high-paying jobs and other amenities to the region; the range of housing that people need; a robust infrastructure that supports critical transportation, technology, and utility requirements; and access to nature.

Who was involved?

The process was led by the Partnership with assistance from key community staff and a team of consultants. The final vision and strategies are the result of significant contributions by community stakeholders throughout the region.

Goals for Framework 2030

The process was driven by two clear goals. These were developed at the outset of the work.

- 1** Create a unified set of regional goals, policies, and priorities that Partner communities commit to honoring; it is not a regional comprehensive plan
- 2** Include guidance developed with Partner communities on how they can refine their local approaches, policies, plans, projects, and regulations over time to harmonize them with the regional direction

FRAMEWORK 2030: BY THE NUMBERS



1

Regional Vision

“We need to look at a bigger picture of what is possible, not just from government, but from our citizens, and empower them to accomplish their own vision.”
-Community Participant

12

Strategies

Organized into three topics: land use, economic growth, and interconnections

28

Action Proposals

Projects, policies, and programs to lead the Partnership forward and continue regional collaboration

2,151

Community Participants

Two rounds of community engagement to generate and test ideas and direction

8,101

Comments and ideas

Wide range of ideas and comments from community stakeholders

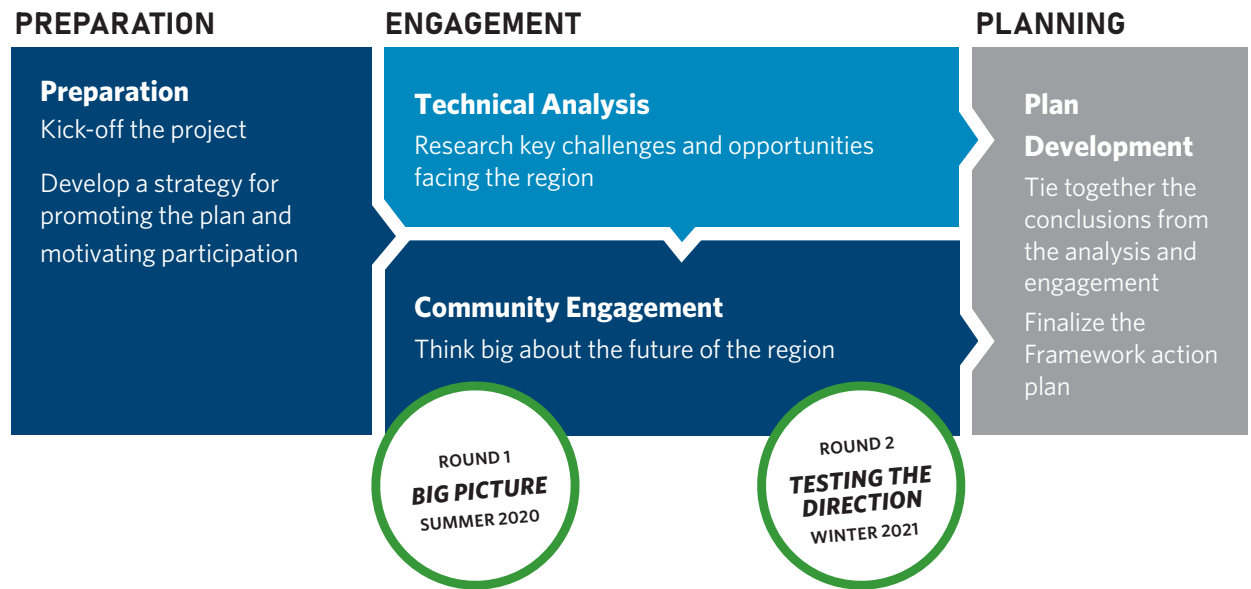
20

Months of work by the Partners

Meetings between the Partners, planning team, and the community and stakeholders

The Process

The Framework 2030 process was designed to help Partner communities establish a common direction for their future and build consensus around realistic actions to guide their collaborative work. To achieve this, the process was organized along two tracks: technical research and analysis, and stakeholder engagement. This section highlights the findings from the two rounds of community engagement.



BIG PICTURE: ENGAGEMENT ROUND 1

Round 1 engagement was conducted using four surveys, with “big-picture” questions tailored to the following stakeholder groups: community members; employees of public, private, and nonprofit organizations; leaders of public, private, and nonprofit organizations; and elected and appointed officials. Outreach and recruitment utilized a network approach, asking direct connections to invite and encourage people in their networks (like the community school districts) to participate and further spread the word. This generated more than 7,000 responses to 18 open-ended questions, ranging from the region’s current condition to ways to improve the region in the future. See major themes to the right.

To learn and read more, read the full report on the website: bit.ly/FW2030_ROUND1REPORT

12-Month period from Spring 2020

2,151
Total
Participants

Stakeholders and community members from across the region

8,101
Total
Comments

Wide range of ideas and comments from community members and stakeholders

Key themes from Stakeholder engagement



Testing the direction: Engagement Round 2

From the Round 1 feedback in summer 2020 and direction from the Partnership, a draft vision and strategies were developed. In late 2020 and early 2021, the Partnership asked key stakeholders for feedback on the draft vision and strategies. During the second round the planning team developed an online survey and facilitated several feedback sessions with partner communities and the Partnership itself. Participants were asked for feedback on the draft regional vision statement and the supportive strategies. During this round more than 1,600 responses were offered showing strong support for the vision and strategies with minor modifications. Respondents also shared 650 action recommendations (project, policy, or program ideas) to help realize the vision.

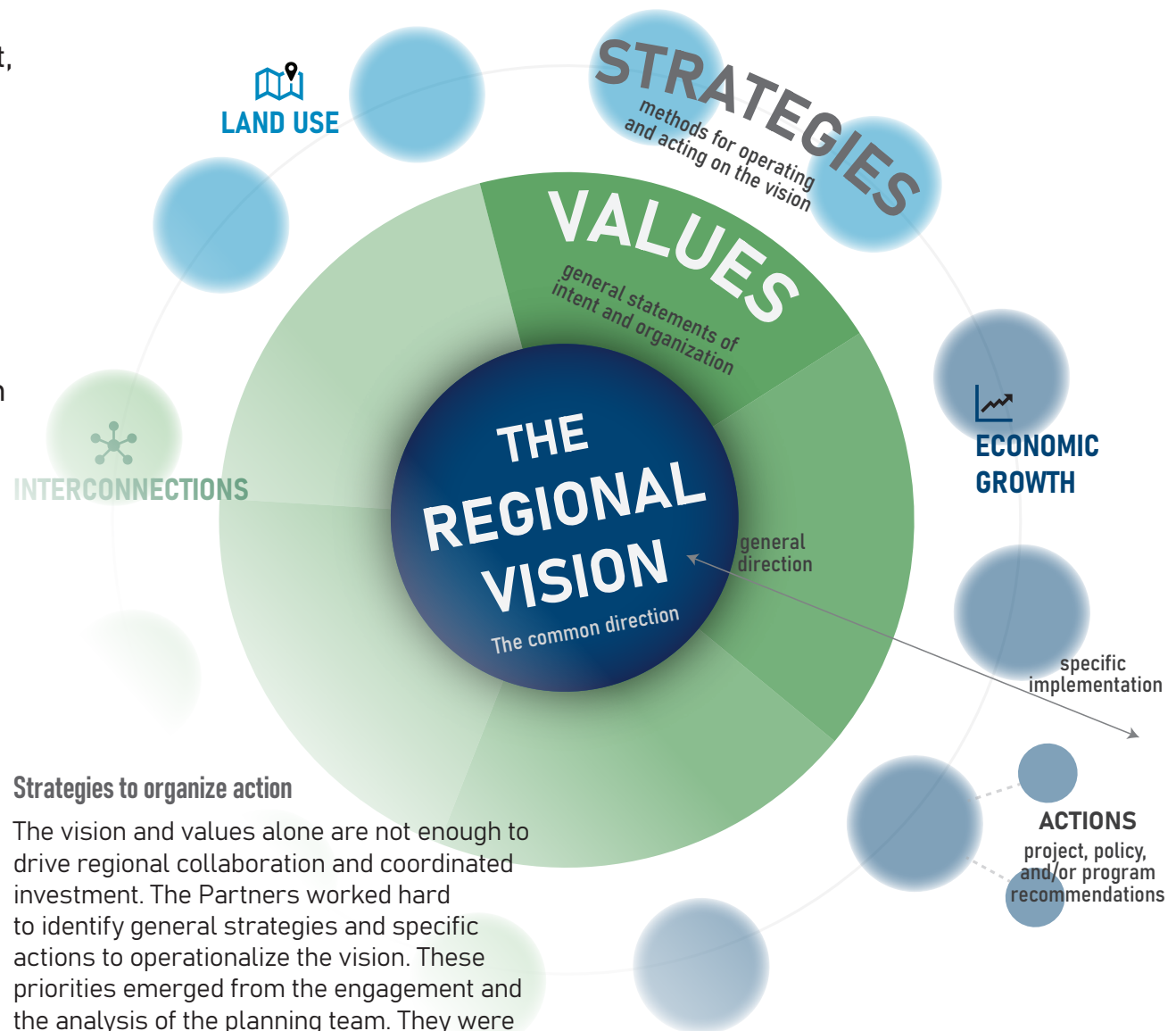
To learn and read more, read the full report on the website: bit.ly/FW2030_ROUND2REPORT

Structure and Direction

The communities of the region are distinct, and each approached the Framework 2030 process from multiple angles and with varying perspectives. This diversity of places and people is an asset, but it can make finding consensus a challenge. Through an honest process of discovery and discourse, Partner communities and leadership were able to identify a common path forward. The regional vision statement sets the broad direction with more specific strategies organizing their collective action.

Finding the Regional Vision

Central to the discussion throughout the planning process was a need for better alignment and communication of the region's direction. Tucked between the Twin Cities and St. Cloud Metropolitan Areas, the region's communities are facing new challenges related to growth and change. This places pressure on leadership to make effective decisions that leverage growth energy but also protect the strong character of their communities. The regional vision statement – presented later – is the broadest distillation of the community's goals and ambition. Results from the Partnership's open and inclusive engagement process directly shaped the regional vision statement and the values, strategies, and actions that support it.



Strategies to organize action

The vision and values alone are not enough to drive regional collaboration and coordinated investment. The Partners worked hard to identify general strategies and specific actions to operationalize the vision. These priorities emerged from the engagement and the analysis of the planning team. They were presented back to the community for feedback during Round 2 engagement. With this feedback and permission to proceed, the Partners then assigned specific projects, policies, or programs to each of the final 12 strategy statements. This plan includes 28 action proposals to help move the region forward.

2. THE REGION TODAY

Introduction

Sherburne and Wright County are the second and third fastest growing counties in Minnesota. The energy related to this growth brings distinct advantages for the Partnership communities. This includes a broadening tax base, growing property values, a larger market for goods and services, and others. Expansion also poses challenges to community leaders as they work to maintain the feel and character of their communities and achieve beneficial outcomes for both new and long-time residents. This section provides an overview of the critical conditions and trends revealed through the analysis.

Taking a snapshot; documenting major trends

To better inform this discussion and build relevant and effective recommendations, the Partnership's consultant team first analyzed the region's demographic, economic, market, and place-based conditions and trends. Over a series of presentations linked in the narrative to the right, the team presented these findings to the Partnership for their consideration and feedback. Each of the documents is available for review in the document appendix or through the link provided after each topic.



<p>PEOPLE</p> <p><i>Demographics, population, households, race & ethnicity, etc.</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_PEOPLE</p>	<p>PLACE</p> <p><i>Land use, mobility, housing, community character</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_PLACE</p>
<p>PROSPERITY</p> <p><i>Economy & employment, sector mix, education</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_PROSP</p>	<p>MARKET</p> <p><i>Consumers, commuters, goods & services</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_MARKET</p>
<p>GROWTH</p> <p><i>Potential for development, planned growth analysis</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_GROWTH</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE</p> <p><i>Job change, property values, wages, industries</i></p> <p>Download: bit.ly/FW2030_PERF</p>

Want to find out more?

Each of the major topics and findings introduced on the left is further explored in the Regional Factbook Briefings. These reports explore six major topic areas and collect key data, major trends, and critical findings from the research and analysis. See links under each topic for more.

Growth and change

Population in the region is growing four times the state average, with the region set to exceed 270,000 residents by 2050. This strong growth is coupled with other demographic shifts. The region is aging with its largest and fastest growing cohorts over the age of 45. The communities are also becoming more diverse related to race, ethnicity, and country of origin.

Economic expansion

The two counties are also expanding economically, with a 36% increase in GDP between 2010 and 2018, up to \$8.2B. The region has added more than 10,000 jobs in its major sectors that include health care, manufacturing, and retail trade. Public entities dominate the top ten major employers with seven out of the ten coming from this sector.

+\$2.1B
Regional GDP Growth

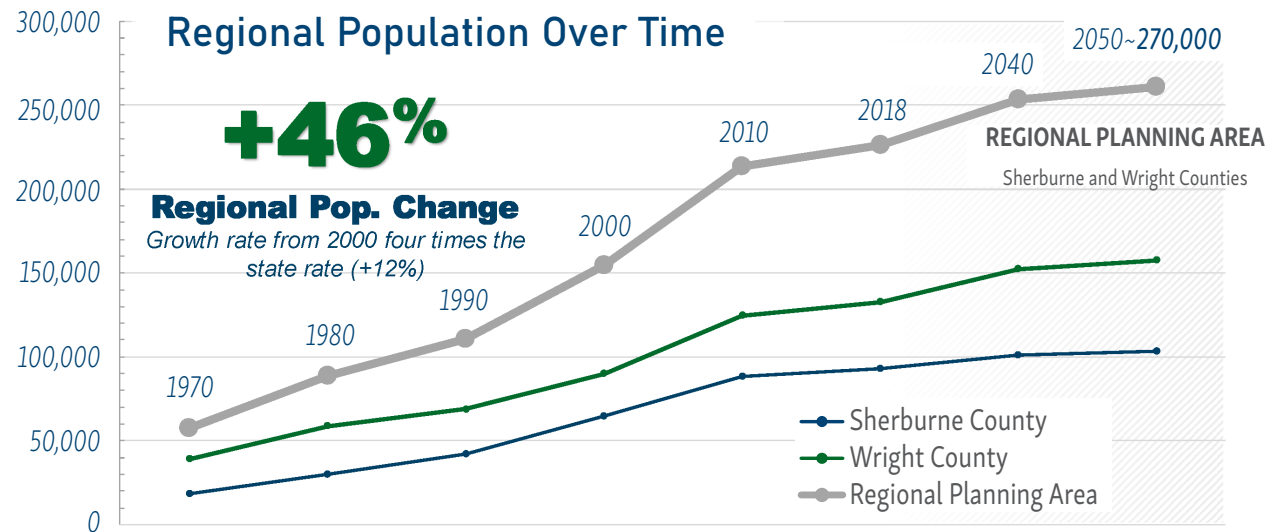
\$8.2 billion in 2018, up \$2.1 billion from 2010 for the region

Strong housing demand; Increasing prices

The housing market saw a marked increase through the pandemic with prices rising quickly and inventory decreasing. Homes in the region are newer than the state average and single-family units are most common, 8 out of every 10 units. Since a low point in 2012, the planning area has

+\$104K
Change in Median Sales Price

From 2012 to 2019, home sales prices have risen sharply, 7% increase



experienced steady growth in median sales price, consistent with the larger seven county region surrounding the metro.

A regional market

Both the labor force and market area are regional. Most regional employees commute in from outside the region, and most regional residents commute to work outside. Job growth – particularly in Sherburne – has been fueled largely by workers from outside the county. Within the consumer market, no individual community within the region has enough population or income to sustain the present levels of economic activity alone.

Strong Wage growth; More business starts

The region saw a 19% increase in business establishment from 2015 to 2019, outpacing the growth in overall employment. Two-thirds of this growth was in one industry, construction. Wages are also rising regionally, up from

15% over the same period or \$87M in total. Wage leaders by sector include construction, manufacturing, and professional services.

Room for additive growth and development

Based on current zoning capacity, the focused planning area could add between 12,000 and 18,000 new residents in its residential districts. The communities are significantly over-zoned for commercial with more than 1,150 acres in this district (equivalent to 52 large format or “Big Box” retail sites). Like commercial, not all industrially zoned parcels are fully utilized: 1,800 acres or 32% of industrial areas are currently vacant or used for agriculture.

18,000
Residential Growth Capacity (residents)
An estimate based on current mix of housing and development density

3. VISION & STRATEGIES

Introduction

The Framework 2030 plan is a response to the collective challenges and opportunities facing each of the partner communities. The data demonstrate that these places are tightly connected through their market, their communities, and their interdependencies. There is a vital opportunity for these partner communities to unlock the shared potential through collaboration and shared investment. This starts by establishing a clear vision to align the work to come. This section presents the regional vision for the communities of the Partnership, the values through which they will operate, and the more specific strategies to operationalize the vision.

Building from general to specific

The process of finding consensus - especially across a region - can be difficult. As the Partnership undertook their work to develop the vision and supportive strategies, they relied heavily on the input and ideas of the community and key stakeholders. The sentiments shared in the initial round of engagement were integral in crafting a statement that fit the identity and diversity of the places within the 201 square mile planning area. With more than 2,000 contributors, and 8,000 contributions, the statements and direction presented in this chapter directly reflect the emergent themes from this feedback.

The Framework 2030 plan is built around a general and encompassing vision statement (see following page). The vision is the broadest expression of the region's aspirations for the future derived through comments and ideas from the community it represents. This is supported by a series of commitments in the form of values (higher-order statements that set the general direction for action) and strategies (more specific declarations of action). Action recommendations (presented in the "Implementation" chapter) represent the most specific proposals and include projects, policies, and programs.

Topics and Priorities

Careful analysis of the feedback from the community and stakeholders revealed three key areas of emphasis within the comments: land use, economic growth, and interconnections. The strategies and action proposals presented in this and the next chapter were organized into these categories to better reflect the emergent consensus from the public.



Land Use

Topics related to physical growth development, housing, and others



Economic Growth

Personal prosperity, business growth and start-ups, indicators and metrics



Interconnections

Regional connectedness, storytelling, marketing, sharing, and collective work

THE VISION

WE – THE COMMUNITIES OF THE CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING PARTNERSHIP – ARE A STRONG AND DYNAMIC REGION.

WE ARE MADE PROSPEROUS THROUGH OUR NETWORK OF ASSETS AND PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP, MADE UNIQUE THROUGH OUR VITAL AND CONNECTED PLACES, AND MADE HOME BY OUR WELCOMING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES.

OUR VALUES HELP US FURTHER ARTICULATE OUR VISION. WE WILL ...

Build a complete region

Fewer residents both live and work in the region and the majority of workers live outside the Partnership communities. This indicates opportunities to improve job quality and expand housing inventory. This trend limits the region's competitiveness related to the workforce and increases the potential long-term tax burden on residents.

Establish our position as a region

With the Partnership being a newly formed organization, the region does not yet have a cohesive identity or common direction. That said, the individual Partner communities have worked hard to establish their own unique brand and supportive strategies. However, there is the potential for misalignment across the region without some common understanding of the region's position and higher-order goals.

Manage through transition

The region is experiencing disruption within formerly stable economic sectors such as energy and retail; this began before COVID-19 and will continue. Some of these are unique to the region like the decommissioning of the SherCo Generating Station and eventually the Xcel Nuclear Generating Station. These all represent shifts in the economic stability of the region that encourage the Partnership to identify and pursue growing industries.

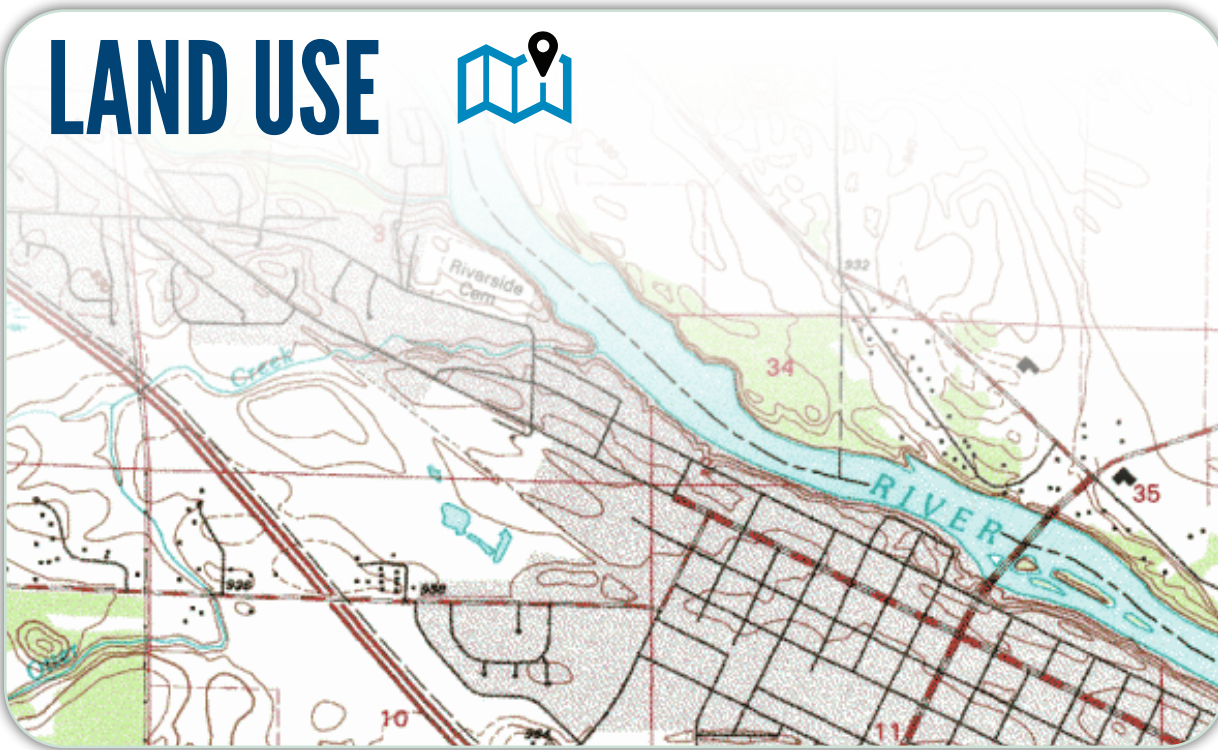
Embrace interdependency

Communities within the region are tightly bound to each other through strong economic relationships. No individual community within the planning area has enough population or income to sustain the present level of economic activity on its own. Despite the current interdependency, there remain untapped opportunities to better network the region's assets, amenities, and opportunities especially in response to key challenges.

Seek deeper collaboration

The historical operating model for the region's jurisdictions focuses inward, on actions that each entity has sovereign ability to affect. The Partnership, however, has demonstrated the benefit of regional collaboration through its planning and ongoing discourse. Nurturing and reinforcing these relationships through measurable actions will help sustain momentum and benefit both the region and individual entities.

LAND USE



L1. LEVERAGE THE REGION'S UNIQUE PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES



Overview

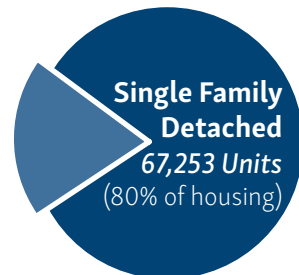
At more than 200 square miles, the Partner region is large and includes a diverse range of places. Each of the communities has strong history of planning and consideration when it comes to managing their land assets and resources. The analysis highlighted several key areas of interest within the topic that were reinforced through the community's comments. Housing, placemaking, parks and natural areas, and land management are several of priorities reflected the strategies and actions.

In addition to serving as a major gateway to recreation opportunities "up North," the region and Partner communities enjoy a wealth of their own natural assets. These include the Mississippi River, multiple lakes, the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and numerous community parks and trails.

201 sq mi
Size of the Focused Planning Area

Almost twice the size of the cities of Minneapolis & St. Paul combined

Other types
17,523 units
(20% of housing)



50+
Miles of multi-use paths

Connecting internally across the region and into the larger network

L2. PROMOTE LIFECYCLE HOUSING



Fewer residents both live and work in the region and the majority of workers live outside the Partnership communities. This suggests opportunities to expand housing options and availability for incoming commuters. Unaddressed, this trend could limit the region's competitiveness related to the workforce and increase tax burden for residents.

L3. INVEST IN PLACEMAKING



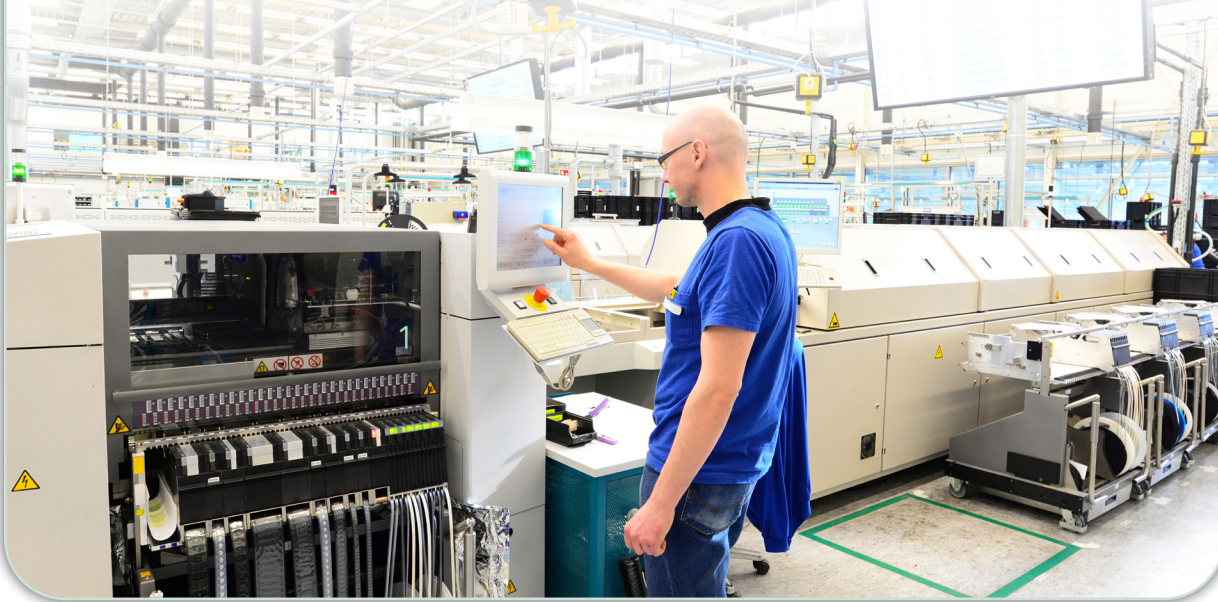
Residents of the region love their communities and see even greater latent potential. Investments in downtowns, neighborhoods, parks and trails, and elsewhere should focus on authentic expressions of the community and cultivate a better sense of place. These initiatives will work best when the ideas and creativity are locally sourced.

L4. PURSUE A COORDINATED APPROACH TO LAND PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT



The “small town feel” is a shared and treasured value across each of the region's diverse communities, and can be attributed to the scale and character of development (or the lack of it) in each place. The multi-year trend of strong growth in jobs and people will continue over the coming decades. To maintain the region's character while enabling the benefits of good growth, communities in the region will need to fashion plans and policies that work in concert.

ECONOMIC GROWTH



E1. EXPAND QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Overview

The region's economy has continued to expand along with its population over the last five years. GDP increased by \$2.1 billion, jobs by 10,000, and business starts by several thousand. While these indicators speak to a strong and expanding local economy, several outlying challenges could disrupt the trend. By continually addressing workforce, jobs diversity, disruptions, and cultivating strong metrics, the region can add resiliency along with raw growth.

The region has the opportunity to expand employment opportunities in emerging industries while strengthening the quality of jobs in the local economy. By investing in small business and private sector job growth, the region builds resiliency through a broader array of employment industries.

+\$2.1B
Regional GDP Growth

\$8.2 billion in 2018, up \$2.1 billion from 2010 for the two-county region

+750
New Jobs added from 2015-2019

An increase of 6% with 12,997 total jobs in the FPA

70,151
Number of Business Establishments*

Within the two-county region

E2. INCREASE THE POOL OF SKILLED LABOR IN THE REGION



As the region transitions from one economic era to the next, there will be an increased need for skilled and adaptable labor. Most regional employees commute in from outside the region, while most regional residents commute out of the region for work — and this gap will continue if unchecked.

E3. NETWORK THE RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS



Economic disruptions are being felt throughout the region; some are unique to this area and others are national. Some of these were spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and related to the economic shutdown; others were well underway, such as decommissioning the two power plants. One of the most effective responses to economic disruptions is regional collaboration and coordination on the region's growing and emerging industries.

E4. MEASURE IMPACTS OF ACTION LOCALLY AND REGIONALLY



Measuring the success of any initiative requires logical measures of progress such as dashboards, which provide leaders with necessary information. This region – through this collaborative Framework 2030 effort — is committed to making progress across a wide range of topics and identifying a set of key metrics to measure community progress critical to long-term success.

INTERCONNECTIONS



11. CREATE A CLEAR REGIONAL IDENTITY TO ADVANCE COLLABORATIVE WORK



Overview

Despite the Mississippi River, the communities of the region are tightly connected to one another. No single community has the population or spending power to support the full suite of amenities, retail, or services that are in the region today. The networked market helps to support this, just as the regional labor force supports small and large businesses alike. Communities are working together – as demonstrated by the Partnership – with greater regularity to better coordinate their investments, amplify their issues with state and federal agencies, and generally share their progress. This is great news for the region and, indeed, the communities as well.

With the Partnership being a relatively new organization, the region doesn't yet have a clear and distinct identity. The Partnership's work on Framework 2030 is a crucial first step, and richer regional collaboration would further build a regional identity and unlock new opportunities for resources, action development, and successful implementation.

KEY FINDING
Partnership communities are the critical sources of trip generation and potential customers

9,203 Residents who commute into the region for work
5,981 Residents who live and work in the region
21,432 Residents who commute outside the region for work

39,000
Average Vehicles
 Cross over the MN Highway 25 bridge daily

12. ENHANCE REGIONAL CONNECTIONS



The physical and non-physical connections across the region play a key enabling role for local and regional economic activity. These corridors are the unifying factor for the region and help to define its character.

13. SHARE TALENT, TIME, AND INFORMATION



The region today is a collection of small cities and smaller townships (based on population). One advantage of this scale is the ability to foster community connections and reinforce the “small town feel” – but this scale also limits capacity. Working collaboratively, communities can enhance their capabilities by sharing time, talent, and information to take advantage of larger-scale opportunities and solve complex challenges.

14. CONTINUALLY ADDRESS REGIONAL VULNERABILITIES



Framework 2030 should result in an ongoing process by the communities in the region to identify areas of weakness or vulnerability. The project was initiated in 2020, a year of profound disruption — and this churning is expected to continue for some time. The region must commit to an ongoing evaluative process.





IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

4. IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The Partnership initiated the Framework 2030 planning process to affect change and drive strong, well-founded projects and policies forward. To operationalize the regional vision and strategies, this chapter introduces an implementation plan. The plan includes an action agenda with 28 discrete proposals that will advance major components or priorities from the community. The action agenda provides a fuller description of the recommendation and initial steps to the work.

Demonstrate value, Build Trust, Grow influence

Plan implementation is an ongoing process that invokes a regular cycle of prioritization, work planning, funding, evaluation, and celebration. This is a management process that should involve multiple organizations around the region, even beyond the Partnership. More broadly, however, long-term implementation of the Framework 2030 plan requires prioritization. As the Partnership grows its influence and capacity, its annual work load can necessarily increase. This is a slow but deliberate process where the group will demonstrate its value and, in turn, build trust and recognition. The 28 proposals included in this chapter emerged through an

iterative process of analysis, conversation, and deliberation. These actions represent an initial offering or “menu” of proposals that, taken together, can help move the region toward its vision. Actions are carefully defined as projects, policies, or programs. They are measurable and discrete. Prioritization will be critical. The action agenda is ambitious and will require coordination between multiple groups. It will take time, sequencing, and a strong response to the community’s primary needs. The two rounds of community engagement helped the Partners better understand these priorities and they will be reflected in future work programs.

Influence or control? Leading the regional conversation

The issues and opportunities that emerged from the Framework 2030 conversations and analysis were wide-ranging. Some of these - like traffic congestion, major infrastructure projects, or economic disruptions - are outside the effective control of a regional group like the Partnership, but can be tackled if the group works together. Others issues are better handled by the strong local communities that make-up the region. For action recommendations in these categories, the Partnership may not have an obvious or appropriate point of control. In such cases, action recommendations are about influencing good decision making, or participating in the conversations that will have an impact on the communities.

ACTION AGENDA



STRATEGY: LEVERAGE THE REGION'S UNIQUE PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

A Promote the expansion of bicycling and walking infrastructure throughout the region

Expanding active transportation facilities and infrastructure would enhance connections between key destinations and improve more mobility and recreation options.

The region is rich in natural beauty and outdoor amenities that are increasingly connected through multi-use trails and paths. There are just over 50 miles of these biking and walking trails within the region, along with 60 miles of the 4,600 mile North Country Scenic Hiking Trail. These connections can also have an economic impact as they attract visitors, encourage small business, and support talent attraction efforts regionally. The Partnership can celebrate, advocate for, and champion projects that enhance the connections between these invaluable assets. While trails exist throughout each of the communities, they are not all connected to one another in a larger, regional network. There is an opportunity to fully network the system and provide connections within and around communities. The identity of the region may be strengthened as these connections increase and natural corridors are enhanced.

FIRST STEPS

- » Integrate active transportation into a regional marketing and identity platform
- » Invite trail supporters and advocates to participate in discussion related to transportation, land use, and economic growth
- » Work with community advocates to develop the regional bikeways map and related online platforms

STRATEGY: LEVERAGE THE REGION'S UNIQUE PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

B Develop a regional parks website

Sharing information about natural amenities would create a greater sense of collaboration and identity.

While each local government operates its own parks system, community members and visitors often benefit from the assets located outside their particular place of residence. There are currently 61 parks in the three cities alone. By creating a centralized website to share information about programming, places, and events, the Partnership could magnify the efforts of each community and establish a stronger regional identity based on its natural features. This will help residents and regional leaders associate with amenities outside of their immediate communities. Additionally, the communities of the Partnership all share a connection (directly or indirectly) with the Mississippi River. There is an opportunity, through this platform, to better highlight the ecological and recreational amenity the river provides. This physical connection can be better leveraged in future investments.

FIRST STEPS

- » Aggregate and organize data from each municipality's parks department
- » Create a web page on the Partner's site to host and promote the information
- » Use the forum to collect comments and ideas on "what's missing?" and "what's next?" with parks across the region
- » Integrate a community parks calendar to share upcoming events, opportunities, and programs

STRATEGY: LEVERAGE THE REGION'S UNIQUE PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES**C Commission a regional trails and greenways map and plan**

A digital map of city, county, regional, and state parks, trails and greenways for use by residents, visitors, and to inform future planning.

The region is bisected by more than 60 miles of mixed-use trails. These are major assets for the region and can be better organized and shared. A comprehensive and dynamic regional greenways map would inventory and map key trails based on location, size, and amenities, etc. The map would be hosted on the CMRP and individual community websites. Each jurisdiction has existing maps already; consolidating them into a single map would provide a clearer picture of the assets in the region as a whole. While this tool would begin as a presentation of existing conditions, it would also become useful in identifying strategic or desirable areas for future trail connections and developments. Over time the Partnership should convene discussions around connections of particular importance like those connections between communities, along key natural features, or others.

FIRST STEPS

- » Assemble data on existing and planned trails in the region
- » Build a GIS mapping system for the region with collaborative access
- » Integrate map system into existing website
- » Convene discussions on “missing links”
- » Develop printed maps for sharing with local communities, businesses, and new residents

STRATEGY: PROMOTE LIFECYCLE HOUSING**A Present an annual report and presentation on housing trends and development**

Communities may benefit from sharing information about the housing conditions and trends in the region.

Up to, and accelerated through 2020, the communities of the region have experienced significant increases in housing costs and average sales price. There is strong development pressure moving from the Twin Cities northward. The partnership has an opportunity to collect and share key lessons learned around housing development and growth pressure. Because the communities in the region share many of the same great conditions and qualities, the housing market is expressed on a regional scale rather than bound by jurisdictional lines. The Partnership has an opportunity to lead a conversation about the most regional issue facing the region. With rising demand and dynamism in the market, a regular study and report on key housing trends would benefit the communities individually and the region as a whole.

FIRST STEPS

- » Launch a subcommittee focused on housing
- » Integrate dashboard information with series of stakeholder interviews
- » Identify appropriate programs that address regional issues from best or emerging practices
- » Facilitate ongoing discussion related to regional housing issues and opportunities

STRATEGY: PROMOTE LIFECYCLE HOUSING

B Create a regional housing market dashboard

Access to up-to-date information on the housing market in the region would be a valuable asset to the partner communities.

In a dynamic housing and regional housing market, up-to-date data and information is critical for policy development and decision making. Data such as rent prices, home sale prices, cost burdening for renters and homeowners, affordable housing unit availability, and others helps provide an understanding of the opportunities and challenges in the region. Tracking this data over time will also give valuable insights and can inform future planning since housing is so closely connected to other topics. Employment, education, land use, transportation, infrastructure, and others are all influenced and affected by housing. Furthermore, various effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the real estate market have been identified but not yet fully realized. With buyers looking for lower density, quieter neighborhoods, and more access to nature, it is likely that the region will continue to see an increase in demand comparable to nationwide trends.

FIRST STEPS

- » Identify critical data points for ongoing tracking and measurement
- » Develop an online portal to collect and display critical data
- » Assign tracking responsibility
- » Work with partner communities to identify new data points in an ongoing way

STRATEGY: PROMOTE LIFECYCLE HOUSING

C Facilitate community conversations around strategic growth areas

Involve the community and leadership in identifying and influencing key growth corridors or nodes. Facilitate an ongoing discussion around areas of particular opportunity.

The two county region can expect increased development pressure over the next decade. This pressure has already transformed communities to the south of the region in significant ways. Housing development, commercial growth, and major investments in transportation infrastructure have drastically changed the character and scale of these places. For many years the region sat just beyond the commute horizon for the Twin Cities, but with an increase in work-from-home options and fewer large tract development opportunities along I-94, the pressure for development in the region will only intensify. There is a need to engage communities in an ongoing discussion around key development corridors and nodes. This is a proactive measure that will ensure growth that occurs in the region enhances the quality of place, quality of life, and the quality of opportunity. This conversation will enhance the understanding of specific development opportunities or threats, and lead to a more coordinated approach to land management, especially along corridors.

FIRST STEPS

- » Engage southern neighbor communities in a discussion around their experiences with growth and development
- » Identify major corridors and nodes of interest
- » Convene a stakeholder discussion regularly, focused on corridor development
- » Integrate the results from the work into annual reporting

STRATEGY: PROMOTE LIFECYCLE HOUSING**D Develop a regional housing strategy**

Based on data, trends, and input from local partners, a regional strategy would provide high-level guidance for accommodating housing growth while respecting the character and priorities of the region.

This strategy is a logical outgrowth of the meetings, collaboration, and data collection facilitated by the Partnership. It will reflect on changing demand, share ideas about how to respond to growth from the south, and define the market area and various housing products. The strategy may also address topics such as workforce housing, housing needs and opportunities post-pandemic, and housing incentive tools. Developing socially sustainable housing allows residents to thrive through the course of their life stages and may attract newcomers to the region. The communities will collaborate to determine the level of specificity within recommendations. Additionally, mapping and location-specific recommendations should be determined by the communities themselves. The interpretation or implementation of the strategy would be left up to partner communities.

FIRST STEPS

- » Convene a task force to develop an appropriate work program for the study
- » Through competitive proposals, identify a competent firm to complete the strategy in collaboration with the Partnership
- » Convene an advisory committee made up of Partner and non-Partner actors to guide and inform the process
- » Publish results of the strategy on the website and communicate during major updates

STRATEGY: INVEST IN PLACEMAKING**A Host a regional placemaking committee**

A dedicated group of individuals is needed to plan, champion, and guide regional placemaking initiatives.

Placemaking is a creative and proactive approach to connecting people with the public places they share. This was a major priority for respondents into the Framework 2030 Community Survey. Participants described numerous examples of the ways in which local placemaking initiatives had greatly enhanced their sense of pride in place. They took a further step in identifying specific areas where these types of projects could be beneficial. Examples of placemaking range from public art and wayfinding signs to repurposing alleys into gathering spaces and hosting community events. Responsibilities of the committee would include: inventory and seek grant funding for placemaking projects; support or sponsor community events; develop a regional public art plan; create a regional public art map; administer the micro-grant program; and more as the group matures. This committee will be essential in guiding placemaking across the region and administering Partnership-sponsored programs or initiatives.

FIRST STEPS

- » Identify and appoint a committee chair to guide and help seat the committee
- » Convenes quarterly with ongoing reporting during regular monthly Partnership meetings
- » Develop a work plan and funding requests
- » Prioritize projects and programs
- » Develop an accountability metric for the group (i.e. dollars spent, projects completed, stories shared, etc.)

STRATEGY: INVEST IN PLACEMAKING

B Commission local public art in regional gateway and wayfinding signage

Local art in regional gateways can beautify, unify, and connect our communities through a common aesthetic.

Arts-based placemaking is an effective way to promote a sense of place in the communities as well as increase cultural diversity and civic engagement. Physical art projects make a tangible impact in all the communities and signal to residents and visitors that they are in a place with a unique identity. It will be important that funded projects maintain a consistent visual relationship and display the regional brand. The works and the artists should be local, and the decision around placement and content will be left up to the individual communities. Involving local artists also gives each community the opportunity to provide its signature on the region at large. There should, however, be some marker that connects these projects to one another, whether the regional brand or some other indicator. When completed, each piece will be unique but also recognizable as part of a larger set.

FIRST STEPS

- » Identify priority gateways and locations for art / signage
- » Develop a master list of local artists / artisans
- » Initiate conversations with communities on the commission and their interpretation
- » Engage the placemaking committee
- » Set a budget and secure funding
- » Establish goals and standards for the project
- » Create and issue a call for artists

STRATEGY: INVEST IN PLACEMAKING

C Launch a placemaking micro-grant program

By providing small scale grants, the Partnership can encourage creative placemaking efforts across the region.

With oversight from the placemaking committee, the micro-grant program would invite non-government actors to apply for \$500-\$1000 grants to support small placemaking projects in their communities. Rather than a single, centralized, and large scale project, this program promotes neighborhood scale efforts all across the region. The project would emphasize visibility. The placemaking committee will clearly define the criteria for grant awards and publish a grant application. Individuals and groups from across the region may submit their ideas to the committee for approval, and a number of grants will be awarded based on the funding available. Grantees will then be given guidelines for implementation and reporting. The Partnership can celebrate the completion of these placemaking projects through features on the website and community events. The grant cycle may take place on an annual or bi-annual basis.

FIRST STEPS

- » Develop a sub-brand for the initiative that works with the regional brand
- » Determine a funding source and establish a budget for the program
- » Establish award criteria
- » Define a program calendar / grant life-cycle
- » Create and publish a grant application

STRATEGY: PURSUE A COORDINATED APPROACH TO LAND PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**A Identify key regional corridors for coordinated planning**

As a network of connected places, partner communities would benefit from coordinated planning of the regional corridors.

Corridors in the region present an opportunity to collaborate on land use decisions, transportation considerations, and placemaking strategies. Although multi-jurisdictional planning is complex, it is also an effective way to build a collaborative spirit, facilitate smart growth, and promote positive economic outcomes. Decision-making along corridors affects multiple parties, both upstream and downstream. The region is bisected by several key transportation corridors. These have a multi-jurisdictional impact in terms of transportation efficiency and land use decision-making. Additionally, the region's single river crossing has been both a challenge and an ongoing point of discussion. Corridor planning can help lay the groundwork for significant future investments, whether they're infrastructural or economic.

FIRST STEPS

- » Identify the major strategic corridors within the region
- » Host discussions among the municipalities connected to each corridor
- » Fund a pilot corridor study
- » Examine past transportation plans to gain perspective of the need and work that has been done

STRATEGY: PURSUE A COORDINATED APPROACH TO LAND PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**B Develop a regional conceptual development strategy**

Integrating the Comprehensive Plans and land use policies of the individual communities into a cohesive regional map would provide significant insights for future development.

This is a dynamic and growing region that has experienced significant land use, demographic, and economic change just in the last decade. The aggregation of relevant existing plans in the region would help to identify points of friction and areas of redundancy, unnecessary competition, or gaps in planning. The communities of the partnership could then discuss how to address some of these findings in a regional strategy. As communities continue to update their own plans, the composite map could also be updated to reflect these changes. The work should be inclusive of local and regional plans, including corridor studies, comprehensive plans, area analyses, and economic work.

FIRST STEPS

- » Work with partner communities to assimilate Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use maps into a single, regional picture
- » Integrate additional dynamic elements, like major private investment/disinvestment, businesses and other regional work
- » Regularly share the map and strategy in regular Partner sessions and annual reporting



ECONOMIC GROWTH

STRATEGY: EXPAND QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A Facilitate expansion of high-speed internet access across the region

Broadband Internet is necessary to support business growth and will be essential to improving and increasing employment opportunities in the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the necessity of internet access for attending online school, working remotely, and obtaining important health and community information. In response to these needs, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 released more than \$7 billion for the Emergency Connectivity Fund to support schools and libraries that provide free broadband service and devices. The American Jobs Plan also proposes to invest \$100 billion in broadband infrastructure to provide affordable high-speed internet to all Americans. The Partnership can help the region capitalize on this opportunity to expand the reach of broadband across the planning area by collecting and sharing key information on the expected roll-out of state and federal programs and by mapping focus areas or areas with limited or no high-speed coverage. Broadband availability across the counties can be mapped using FCC Form 477 as a starting point. It is updated twice a year but lags by approximately one year.

FIRST STEPS

- » Map current service coverage
- » Identify federal programs for support and funding
- » Build a “how to fund” guide for partner communities based on programs
- » Convene discussions among the Partners on the map and program roll-out

STRATEGY: EXPAND QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

B Maintain a regional industrial land inventory

A collaborative approach to industrial land marketing and management could mitigate vacancies and promote economic synergy among the Partnership communities.

Industrial zoned land currently makes up four percent of the Focused Planning Area (FPA). About 32% of industrially zoned parcels are currently vacant or used for agriculture, and combined community plans show a planned increase of 92% in industrial land by 2040. Furthermore, decommissioning of significant energy plants will likely be completed by 2030, leaving legacy infrastructure that would enable future investments in renewable energy production and/or energy intensive industrial uses.

A regional industrial land inventory would build on this existing knowledge and provide relevant data to the partner communities. Combined with an understanding of the different employment sectors in terms of their land, transportation, and service needs, the Partnership could identify the most strategic locations for new industrial clusters based on types of activity. Creating and sharing a regional map of those clusters would facilitate a cooperative approach to marketing and sharing leads, protecting industrial lands, and supporting intensification efforts.

FIRST STEPS

- » Build an interactive regional map of all industrial land uses
- » Create a database of industrial lots, including current use, vacancy information, and other critical / relevant data such as availability of water and sewer, electrical capacity
- » Monitor market movement and share key trends regularly
- » Share updates in the sector as part of regular communication



ECONOMIC GROWTH

STRATEGY: INCREASE THE POOL OF SKILLED LABOR IN THE REGION

A Initiate discussions with higher-education institutions to better integrate economic development with workforce development

Increasing and strengthening the workforce requires strong relationships between communities and a wide variety of educational institutions.

With high school graduation rates above 90%, the region has a higher percentage of high school graduates than the state average. After high school, however, residents of the planning area are less likely to obtain bachelor's, graduate, or professional degrees than their peers. The Partnership may play a significant role in aggregating information about and facilitating discussions with the various institutions that already provide post-secondary education, adult learning, and technical, vocational, and high-skill training. Building stronger connections between the secondary and post-secondary opportunities in the region can enhance opportunities for students and produce a stronger, more competitive workforce. In turn, this strategy could support and attract new employers and generally provide better opportunities for residents overall.

FIRST STEPS

- » Map the regional dispersal for high school graduates (post-secondary, technical, vocational, etc.)
- » Identify the major higher-education institutions in and around the region and understand their degree recipient mix
- » Convene regional discussions on higher-education involving relevant stakeholders

STRATEGY: INCREASE THE POOL OF SKILLED LABOR IN THE REGION

B Facilitate partnerships between businesses and schools

Experience is often the best teacher. Promoting and facilitating opportunities for students to gain “real life” work experience would bolster the workforce in the region.

The region is home to just over 14,000 primary jobs, but less than half are held by residents. Skills are a primary driver for hiring in the region and local employers are casting a wider net each year to fill job vacancies. The Partnership can leverage the connections of its members to convene conversations among major employers and secondary education. The group owns a unique position and perspective on regional issues related to workforce and employment and can bring a broad group of stakeholders together to discuss current issues and opportunities. Further, the group can work with these stakeholders to build mutually-beneficial relationships. Through stronger connections between businesses and students, there is an opportunity to forge lasting partnerships that encourage students to continue working in the region beyond graduation.

FIRST STEPS

- » Build out major employers database
- » Conduct a regional skills audit through a survey
- » Convene a conference on skill building and community engagement
- » Identify regional partners involved in work skill / force development

STRATEGY: NETWORK THE RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS

A Commission a regional fiscal analysis of land use

Understanding the fiscal impacts of different types of land use clusters is essential for good decision-making and future planning.

The fiscal productivity – or the net community benefit – varies across the region based on the land use. At present, 84% of land within the region is zoned Agricultural / Rural, six percent is zoned Residential, four percent Industrial, two percent Riverfront, and less than one percent Commercial. Each of these uses generates different levels of revenue based on various forms of local and property taxes. Each is also associated with different costs due to infrastructure needs and school service requirements. Understanding the net impact of these costs and revenues on government finances can help decision-makers identify which types of land use to encourage and those to approach with caution. Beyond a point-in-time study, regularly tracking the net fiscal effects of land use could become a valuable tool for evaluating decisions made at a regional scale.

FIRST STEPS

- » Discuss critical outcomes and audiences for the study
- » Study similar projects from around the state and country
- » Develop a work program / scope of work and related budget that reflects priorities
- » Create and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for capable firms
- » Work with a firm to build a summary report and dynamic model for use by partner communities in land planning and use evaluation

STRATEGY: NETWORK THE RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS

B Create and manage a regional commercial property vacancy database

Providing accessible and centralized commercial vacancy information may reduce barriers to filling these holes and avoiding long-term blight and disinvestment.

The pandemic and related economic shutdowns accelerated the use of e-commerce platforms for basic goods fulfillment, and communities (including those in the region) are struggling to address the resulting commercial vacancy and redundancy. The move to remote-work has also had an impact on office spaces around the country. An aggregate of community future land use plans reveals a 163% planned increase in commercial land across the Focused Planning Area. A centralized database of commercial vacancies would provide easy access to information for potential new tenants, and it may influence the communities' understanding of the need for additional commercial land. Furthermore, creative and adaptive reuse of vacant commercial spaces may help address other challenges in the region, such as housing.

FIRST STEPS

- » Develop a data sharing platform to collect real estate, land use, and other related information – work with real estate brokers to understand vacancy and pricing
- » Organize this data and associate with GIS mapping to identify 'hot spots' of commercial vacancy and worsening areas based on current conditions
- » Inform discussions around redevelopment strategies through identification of investment nodes, model property rezonings, financial incentives, improvement programs, and other initiatives encouraging commercial corridor rehabilitation



ECONOMIC GROWTH

STRATEGY: MEASURE IMPACTS OF ACTION LOCALLY AND REGIONALLY

A Establish and update regional indicators dashboard

Measuring, tracking, and publishing economic data over time will enable evaluation of progress and inform future strategies.

An indicator dashboard or regional scorecard are a method for tracking progress toward the regional vision and strategies over time. Successful dashboards collect and monitor the pertinent data points over time and present the information in a clear and compelling way. Information such as job growth, population change, graduation rates, and housing starts provides important insights into the trajectory of the region and will be regularly made available to the public. Though each partner community might track these statistics individually, an aggregate and collective understanding of these topics within the region could help the communities identify broader trends. The selected indicators for the dashboard will then become the benchmarks to evaluate the Partnership's success in achieving its vision, and progress in key areas may increase the region's competitiveness.

FIRST STEPS

- » Select and define the key indicators
- » Collect baseline data for each indicator and establish goals for improvement
- » Create a web-based platform for sharing and updating the information
- » Establish a work program / cycle for regular evaluation and updates

STRATEGY: MEASURE IMPACTS OF ACTION LOCALLY AND REGIONALLY

B Establish and monitor progress criteria for all Framework actions

Effective implementation of this plan will depend on benchmarking and monitoring the advancement of each of the actions.

For internal accountability, the Partnership will need to develop a set of criteria to gauge the progress toward its commitments. For each action item within this agenda, the Partnership will set specific, measurable, and attainable goals to guide implementation. Individuals and groups may be assigned to complete particular tasks within an action or to take responsibility for the action itself. While implementation is a collective effort with many involved parties among the communities, the Partnership will be responsible to ensure that the actions advance as intended. Regular and ongoing check-ins will promote follow-through and ensure that the action ideas become realities across the region. The group may use this reporting as a prompt for ongoing action evaluation and prioritization of action items. Benchmarking progress will be key to the Partnership's value proposition.

FIRST STEPS

- » Determine progress criteria for each action
- » Establish a timeline for completing each action or sub-action
- » Monitor progress and update reporting at regular intervals

STRATEGY: CREATE A CLEAR REGIONAL IDENTITY TO ADVANCE COLLABORATIVE WORK

A Develop a regional brand and identity

Creating a brand that embraces the distinctive characteristics and visions of the communities will give a sense of unity and identity to the region.

Branding and identity can be useful as the Partnership applies for grant funding, supports placemaking projects, and generally promotes the region. A recognizable brand can leave a memorable impression on visitors and connect or associate places with one another. Branding can be applied to the website, events, publications, wayfinding signs, and many other features of the region to signify a collaborative spirit and broad cooperation. The region's communities already maintain unique and authentic identities. The regional brand should seek to celebrate that individuality while also collecting those places into the demonstrated regional market area. While each community is unique, they also rely on one another for jobs, housing, or retail and amenities. The regional brand is about recognition and simple association. It provides leaders with an object to reference and celebrate.

FIRST STEPS

- » Draft and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a brand consultant
- » Work with the consultant to establish a regional brand and identity
- » Update the website to reflect brand and identity changes

STRATEGY: CREATE A CLEAR REGIONAL IDENTITY TO ADVANCE COLLABORATIVE WORK

B Integrate branding with placemaking initiatives

Applying the regional brand to local placemaking initiatives will provide a common thread that links the efforts of each community.

While every placemaking project or event should be unique, attaching the regional brand to each of them displays how the communities are part of something larger than themselves. By working with local artists, the communities may also create physical markers that both identify their particular location and their place within the larger region. As the role and influence of the Partnership expands, it will be important to credit the group when projects are completed because of its involvement; applying the branding is one way to ensure this happens.

FIRST STEPS

- » Apply the new logo / branding to regional wayfinding signs
- » Promote placemaking initiatives on the new website
- » Identify appropriate locations for gateway signage into the region



STRATEGY: ENHANCE REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

A Continue ongoing conversations with MnDOT and the counties regarding special projects

Regular and ongoing communication across various agencies will be essential for understanding projects of special interest to the region.

Major transportation and infrastructure investment into the region has, in most cases, been the result of a collaborative process between communities, counties, and the state. The complexity, cost, and multi-jurisdictional coordination of these projects will exceed the capacity for any individual community to complete. As the region continues to grapple with challenges related to growth and related congestion it will be essential to be “at the table” as major investments are considered and prioritized. The Partnership can play an increasingly effective role as a liaison for the region’s communities as these projects are debated. Further, the delineation of the region will help partners speak with a more collective and unified voice during these negotiations. MnDOT is currently projecting an \$18 billion gap in its revenue versus needs projections through 2037. Major roads and infrastructure funding will be evermore competitive in the decades to come. The Partners can help increase the volume of regional needs in the discussion and elevate major projects in the process.

FIRST STEPS

- » Schedule an annual meeting with MnDOT District 3 as part of an ongoing conversation related to regional needs and opportunities
- » Pursue major corridor plans and continually update the Transportation Study
- » Convene ongoing discussions with partner communities around transportation and infrastructure needs
- » Develop a regional investment strategy that indicates major priorities

STRATEGY: SHARE TALENT, TIME, AND INFORMATION

A Establish an annual “State of the Region” forum

An annual meeting to present findings and facilitate conversation is a logical outcome of the Partnership’s growing role in data collection and analysis, reporting, and convening.

As the Partnership studies housing, growth and development trends, employer incentive packaging, and other topics of particular interest to the region, the communities will benefit from coming together to discuss the findings. The role of the Partnership is not to determine the future actions based on their research, but instead to present the information and invite the relevant parties to sit at a common table. With time and maturity, the group will continue to grow its perspective and understanding of regional issues. As major “holders of the information” it will be important to establish a regular sharing opportunity with partner and non-partner communities alike. The State of the Region event should convene government and non-government actors from around Sherburne and Wright Counties. During the annual event, leadership from Partnership could introduce a critical focus topic (i.e. Housing, transportation, etc.) and present the regional perspective and forecast. The group should prioritize engagement during the event and allow participants to share their perspective and ideas.

FIRST STEPS

- » Identify key topics for research, presentation, and discussion
- » Prepare an inaugural program
- » Invite local and regional leaders / experts to present relevant findings
- » Collect feedback from the event and continue to refine annually

STRATEGY: SHARE TALENT, TIME, AND INFORMATION

B Hire staff or consultants to support actions

For the ideas of the Partnership and Framework 2030 to materialize, a dedicated director is needed to orchestrate actions, manage priorities, and guide the ongoing work.

As Partnership considers its initial priorities for action, the group will need to quickly address the challenge around capacity. The Framework 2030 plan is ambitious and the group is limited by time and availability. A staff person can help the group extend its effort and take on daily tasks building regular progress from month-to-month. This organization will be essential to the initiation of implementation of the plan, especially in the initial years of work. The Managing Director / Implementer can also be a principal facilitator for the Partnership and help the group reach greater consensus and manage it’s work internally. This individual(s) would not make major decisions for the group but initiate action and help “set-the-table” for decision making. An ideal candidate would have a range of skills and keen understanding of the Partnership’s mission and goals. An effective director would be an initiator, communicator, convener, and advocate for the Framework 2030 plan.

FIRST STEPS

- » Enable a sub-committee to handle job search tasks and make a recommendation to the full Partnership
- » Develop a job description that includes major roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- » Establish a salary range based on survey of similar positions around the country
- » Issue listing and interview candidates



STRATEGY: SHARE TALENT, TIME, AND INFORMATION

C Pursue a regional lobbying effort, “Our fair share”

A primary role of the Partnership is to advocate for the communities and the region at the state and federal levels.

The Partnership can elevate the region’s needs and highlight the community’s potential to ensure that priority projects are considered and/or funded. The group sits at the center of discussion occurring around the region. This position helps build perspective around needs and opportunities for collaboration. State and Federal funding for transportation, infrastructure, housing, and other major investments, is increasingly tied to regional collaboration and data-driven analysis. The Partnership can work on both sides of the challenge. Through its ongoing regional convening it can develop strong priority investment targets, and as a principal advocate, it can communicate to state and federal agencies on behalf of its communities. With major tranches of funding being released through the American Rescue Plan and the potential for increased federal infrastructure spending the next decade, the region must ensure it receives its “fair share” of this investment. As a unified region, the Partnership can leverage its size and perspective in a way that the individual communities can not.

FIRST STEPS

- » Study the American Rescue Plan and any other forthcoming federal or state programs for relevance around community or regional priorities
- » Select delegates / champions to take up key issues
- » Develop a branded campaign as a roll-out of the regional identity
- » Communicate with and invite community members to participate in the effort

STRATEGY: CONTINUALLY ADDRESS REGIONAL VULNERABILITIES

A Study social service opportunities that may benefit from regional coordination

Services like food banks and ridesharing may better serve our communities if they operate at a regional level.

A full inventory of existing social services in the region would provide a clearer understanding of the coverages, gaps, and redundancies in the network. The region has hundreds of mission-minded organizations. Some of these could benefit from an “economies of scale” approach. Then the Partnership and communities can work together to identify if certain services would be more effective if coordinated regionally rather than in each of the individual jurisdictions and convene discussions to initiate this collaboration. Furthermore, this study may expose gaps in regional services that the Partnership could then consider how to address in future work.

FIRST STEPS

- » Create an inventory of existing social service agencies and locations within the planning area
- » Convene discussions among agencies providing similar or related services
- » Identify gaps in services and seeks ways to bridge those gaps through existing or new organizations