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HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Plan Update #2

In the fall of 2010 the Region Five Development Commission received a HUD grant. The grant supports a multi-jurisdictional planning effort and will be used to build economic competitiveness throughout the region. The areas of focus are housing, transportation, economic development and land use. A series of updates will follow the accomplishments of this planning effort and let you know about the exciting things that are happening in the region.

The issues and opportunities faced by businesses, local governments and citizens are commonly shared throughout the region. Twenty-six activities in the focus areas are being addressed. This is the first in a series of updates to the citizens in the region. The following activity is being fulfilled by, Phil Hunsicker, Envision MN, formerly known as 1000 Friends of MN, a partner in this effort.

HEALTHY LAKES EQUALS A HEALTHY ECONOMY

Discussions about land use are guaranteed to be passionate. And for good reason, since they are about things that make people have strong opinions: the environment, private property rights, the role of government, and how to balance public benefit versus the desires of an individual landowner. In Central Minnesota, the one thing we can all agree on is that we need to protect our public waters. There are thousands of lakes in the five-county region, which drive a tourism-based economy that circulates hundreds of millions of dollars into local communities every year. In addition, the higher lakeshore property taxes support local governments with enough funds to provide services to all who live in the region – not just those who are fortunate enough to live on lakeshore. How we choose to protect our water will have a direct impact on our future economic vitality.

The State of Minnesota is in the process of revising their outdated shoreland rules, which set minimum standards for the kinds of development that can happen along lakes and streams. That process has become highly politicized, so some local governments like Crow

Wing County, which has over 400 lakes, have moved forward on their own to make sure their public waters are better protected. They have called for better stormwater management, the promotion of conservation design developments, and have created performance-based or outcome-based standards, which give landowners additional flexibility, but the standards also provide necessary protections for public waters. The efforts of Crow Wing County have been recognized by local conservation organizations – not just for what the new standards can do for Crow Wing County waters, but for the example their revised standards set for neighboring counties.

This has been an update on the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Plan, Planning for the future and working to improve the quality of life in Region Five.

Stay Tuned More to Come!

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