



Upper Minnesota Valley  
**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
Helping Communities Prosper

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# The Upper Minnesota Valley Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Annual Performance Report April 2016



Prepared for Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration

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## **Introduction**

This report summarizes the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission's (UMVRDC) economic development activities within the Economic Development District (EDD) of Region 6W (Counties of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine). This report represents the CEDS Annual Performance Report for the current EDA Planning Grant. The required activities of the District follow the "Scope of Work" that was provided with the EDA Planning Grant. All planning staff is in part responsible for implementing planning activities within the region including economic development programs and projects listed in this report.

## **Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC)**

The UMVRDC was created by the RDC Act of 1969 that authorized the establishment of regional development commissions to work with and on behalf of local units of government to develop plans or implement programs to address economic, social, physical, and governmental concerns of each region of the state. The UMVRDC assists with developing and implementing plans and programs for local units of government throughout the five county regional boundaries in western Minnesota. The UMVRDC is one of nine regional development commissions throughout the State of Minnesota.

## **UMVRDC Mission Statement**

*"Enable the region to thrive by assisting local units of government."*

## **UMVRDC EDD & CEDS**

The UMVRDC provides leadership for the preparation and maintenance of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), assist in the implementation strategies identified in the CEDS, and provide technical assistance to economic development organizations in the region as required by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as the designated Economic Development District (EDD). The EDD designation and approved CEDS qualify all counties and municipalities within our region for EDA grant assistance programs. In June of 2013, the UMVRDC approved and submitted our CEDS Update to EDA which we are currently implementing.

The UMVRDC CEDS is the result of a continuous regional economic development planning process in our five-county region. The UMVRDC sees the CEDS as a tool to create and retain jobs, promote a more stable and diversified local and regional economic and improve living conditions and the quality of life of the region.

### **UMVRDC CEDS Vision**

*To Develop and Implement Economic Development Strategies that Promote a  
More Diverse, Vibrant and Competitive Regional Economy that:  
Strengthens our Communities;  
Provides Quality Jobs;  
Offers Opportunities for Residents and Youth to Remain in / Return to the Region  
and  
Improves the Quality of Life*

## **CEDS Strategy Committee**

The UMRDC has a board where membership is outlined in state statute. The UMRDC acts as the governing board for the CEDS. The membership of the UMRDC is county, city, township, tribal and school board elected officials and a smaller number of public interest representatives. The CEDS Strategy Committee is established through appointment by the UMRDC. The CEDS Strategy Committee is responsible for developing and updating the goals and strategies in the CEDS and is the principal facilitator of the economic development planning and implementation process.

As outlined in the Federal guidelines, CEDS Strategy Committee members represent all major interests in the community, both public and private to ensure viewpoints of all segments of the community are considered and to take advantage of local skills and resources in program development and implementation. The CEDS Strategy Committee was updated and approved during the full CEDS update in 2013. There are no changes to the membership at this time.

Members of the CEDS Strategy Committee individually participate in many of the projects identified in this plan with their own vested interest in supporting the region. Their individual and collective participation in CEDS work is instrumental in providing local knowledge that allows the UMRDC to deliver programs and assist with projects that have the greatest impact on the region.

## REGIONAL PROFILE

**Population** – Beginning in 2015 the UMRDC region is expected to start growing its population. Between 2015 and 2035 the region is expecting to net 1,000 new residents and continue to see an increase in the 25-44-year-old age demographic correlating with a slight increase in school aged children. This is an exciting possibility considering the many decades of population loss and outmigration, from 2000 – 2014 the region lost -12.7% of its population. Collaborative efforts around regional recruitment are seeking to enhance the online presence of the region to promote the area as great place to live and work.

**Unemployment / Labor Force** – Unemployment for the region remains a bit high at 6.1% in February 2016 compared to state rate of 4.9% and national rate of 5.2%. A cause for high unemployment is directly related to the regions shirking labor force. Big Stone County with the highest unemployment rate in the region in March 2016 at 7.3% had nearly the exact same number of unemployed individuals as last year at this time but there has been a loss of 200 in the labor force over that same time period. This shift in labor force has caused the unemployment rate to increase significantly. This trend can be seen throughout the region.

The high unemployment rate of the region is striking when we consider the many jobs that are available. In February 2015 job vacancies in the region totaled 816 which was a 6% increase over that time the previous year. About half of those openings were part-time and only about one-third required a post-secondary education. Today, the local papers have all sorts of employment opportunities in them from ag processing to engineering to healthcare. Some of the possible explanations for these jobs going unfilled include the overall image of the region (not as appealing as other parts of the state or country), housing availability, daycare availability, wages and skills gaps! These are all priority topics for communities and economic developers. We must work towards public private solutions to fill these positions, grow the region and build resiliency.

**Per Capita Income / Wages** – The region’s per capita income remains low at \$26,107 (2013) as compared to the \$30,913 statewide. Wages were significantly lower in the region than the rest of the state. *Just over half of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 (2013).* Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development have developed a new cost of living tool that estimates the *basic cost of living* in the UMRDC region for an average family size of two adults and one child with one fulltime and one part-time worker was \$50,988 in 2015. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the workers identified in the scenario about they would need to earn \$12.97 per hour.

**Occupations** – Almost one-fourth of the jobs in the region were production occupations, this is nearly three times more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Additional occupations with higher shares of workers include: transportation and material moving; education, training and library; healthcare support; installation, maintenance and repair; construction and extraction; farming, fishing and forestry. The fastest growing industries are expected to be health care and social assistance which may account for over 70% of total project growth in the region from 2012-2022 – this is evidenced in the significance investment we’ve seen in local health care campuses. However, filling available health care positions is still a challenge.

**Source:** All of the information above, unless otherwise stated is supported by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2015 Regional Profile for the Upper Minnesota Valley region, published October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

## 2016 REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN (SWOT)



### OPPORTUNITIES

- There are significant funds throughout the region available for lending. We hope to spur some economic activity in the coming months by working closely with local lenders on upcoming projects in need of gap financing.
- The UMRDC works with local and regional organizations to support strategies and solutions that fill local job openings including regional recruitment efforts. Occupations in-demand include: Home Health Aides, Welders, Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Nurse Practitioners

### STRENGTHS

- The UMRDC has a dedicated staff for the Community Energy Resources Teams (CERTS) – the focus right now is on solar projects. Many of our communities have an interest in exploring solar opportunities. The UMRDC is coordinating through CERTS an upcoming solar workshop to provide example projects and resources for communities, businesses and individuals.
- Regional economic development and chamber professional have solidified a regional tagline to spur: collaboration on regional recruitment, change our negative rural narrative into a positive one and enhance our region’s online presence.
- Healthcare is rapidly expanding. Several communities are adding nursing facilities while others are adding assisted and independent living options.
- Expansions for healthcare/ assisted living and/or nursing homes are being planned or recently completed in: Ortonville | Benson | Appleton | Granite Falls

### WEAKNESSES

- Daycare is becoming more and more an issue. Providers are retiring without new ones coming in. Center based daycare does not cash flow without a subsidy provided. This is a priority topic at our upcoming economic development professionals meeting.
- Lots of planning for boomer exodus and needs of current/future demographics
- Low wages – The UMRDC region is among the lowest in the state.
- Currently there is a significant amount of older housing stock, some of it consider a health and safety issue while other homes have potential for rehabilitation. With little housing actually list on the market it is extremely challenging to find homes that meet today’s buyer demands and expectations. Our proposed pilot projects with USDA and MHFA would help address housing throughout the region.

### THREATS

- Slowed Borrowing – Regional lending has slowed  
A couple of existing loans have experienced delinquencies or default weakening slightly what is otherwise a very strong portfolio.
- Aging infrastructure and lack of flexible funding mechanisms make this an on-going issue. Each year many of our communities seek opportunities to update their utilities. Water and wastewater are huge priorities as are local roads. Finding alternative funding mechanisms for sidewalks is becoming a more frequent conversation with communities.

## Annual Update Matrix

Goal Area: Building Communities		Attract and retain residents and workers through building healthy sustainable communities.	
OBJECTIVE:	STRATEGIES	UPDATE	WHO
Encourage local development of proactive economic development initiatives to showcase the region's high quality of life that encompasses assets such as great schools, low crime, low housing costs and no traffic congestion.	a. Develop a communication plan for community information resources (pools, golf courses, community services, government websites, etc.).	Prairie Waters (PW) is updating visitor guides every two years 2016 will have a new addition	UMVRDC/ PW/ Chambers/ Cities and Counties
	b. Develop a regional brand.	Chamber and economic development professionals are actively meeting to work on developing a tag line for the region. As of April 28th the group has decided on: <b>Get Rural! Quietly beautiful. Wildly connected.</b>	This effort was funded by Blandin and is being led by the UMVRDC
	c. Develop and market visitor (tourism) opportunities.	Prairie Waters (PW) is updating visitor guides every two years 2016 will have a new addition.	
	d. Collect positive case studies about people and/or businesses moving into the region.	Ortonville/Big Stone County have created MNBump! Local newspapers have been showcasing businesses and individuals moving into the region. Regional marketing efforts could use some additional coordination and could be enhanced with additional social media promotion. We need to promote each other more often.	All local units of government. (LUGs)
	e. Promote availability and use of broadband technology in the region.	Case studies are being developed from the UMVRDC successful participation in securing funds for broadband deployment in the region. Additional work is anticipated with counties to integrate their broadband availability into their economic development strategy.	UMVRDC/ EDAs/ LUGs
	f. Provide a resource (web portal) that allows potential newcomers to establish a personal connection to the region. (EDA Center Regional Recruitment Strategies, Ben Winchester, 2011 Report).	This is anticipated to be another phase of the regional recruitment process as soon as funds can be secured. There are several efforts related to this throughout the region that need to be connected. Some focus on tourism, some focus on jobs and others focus on attracting and retaining residents (homes/schools/lifestyle). We need all of it and want to see these efforts work together.	UMVRDC / Regional Recruitment Committee

	g. Disseminate a model of regional recruitment to local decision-makers (EDA Center Regional Recruitment Strategies, Ben Winchester, 2011 Report).	This is happening on limited basis. Although the regional recruitment concept is gaining momentum this takes significant staff time for travel. It is an important part of building support and remains a key priority.	UMVRDC/ Regional Recruitment Committee
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b>	<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<b>UPDATE</b>	<b>WHO</b>
Provide coordination, technical assistance and guidance toward potential funding sources to local units of government for projects and initiatives in the region.	a. Encourage arts based opportunities that support long-term community goals and needs.	The UMVRDC has had contracts with a couple of communities this past year to complete arts based community development projects in partnership and with funding from local arts organizations. We see more opportunity in the future to offer these services to more of our communities.	UMVRDC/ LUGs/ SMACH
	b. Develop a list of topics that local units of government could partner on.	The UMVRDC regularly responds to need of LUGs and when appropriate coordinates regional conversations about collaboration opportunities. Recent topics have included: Housing, Daycare, Regional Recruitment.	UMVRDC/LUGs
	c. Support and promote community leadership programs.	There have not been any leadership programs offered in the region this year.	TBD
	d. Support housing development and redevelopment (e.g. affordable housing, transitional housing).	The UMVRDC has been discussing housing with a number of LUGs, and have offered dilapidated housing roundtables that address the demolition needs of the region.  The UMVRDC has applied for funds to develop a pilot housing program to help cities address housing needs and be better prepared to work with consultants and developers. This project proposes to work with regional housing experts to deliver the best resources to our communities and build capacity at the UMVRDC.	MHFA/ USDA

	<p>e. Support and encourage the maintenance, development, funding and proactive planning for infrastructure such as water, sewer, wastewater, broadband, commercial buildings, etc.</p>	<p>The UMRDC has been most active in broadband but have regularly been connect communities to resources such as Public Facilities Authority and USDA who regularly provide funding for infrastructure projects. However, we are encouraging communities who have housing and infrastructure needs to work with us on Small Cities Development Program applications where they can receive grant funds for both projects. The UMRDC has a contract with one community currently to explore this potential.</p>	<p>USDA/PFA/ SCDP/ LUGs/ UMRDC</p>
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Goal Area: Supporting Businesses		Keep and attract quality businesses and jobs in the region.	
OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	UPDATE	WHO
Support the formation, retention and expansion of businesses to create vibrant business communities.	a. Promote and assist in the implementation of Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) best practices both regionally and locally.	The UMRDC continues to successfully manage \$1.7M in revolving loan funds leveraging them with and private investments and other public support. The UMRDC also helped the City of Appleton secure \$149,000 to create their own local revolving loan fund to support new and expanding entrepreneurs and spur economic growth.	UMVRDC/ Local Lenders/ EDAs/ LUGs
	b. Launch a regional marketing campaign for workforce awareness and attraction (SW MN Skills at Work Initiative).	The Southwest Private Industry Council (PIC) has been instrumental in leading this effort with the Skills at Work Initiative and Higher Wire Program connecting people with jobs.	PIC
	c. Create a business leader network.	A few local communities have done this, while other business owners are part of association networks. A regional network has not developed yet.	Business Communities / EDA / Chambers
	d. Improve, coordinate and streamline services to businesses and entrepreneurs.	On-going efforts are made to ensure effective referrals and connections are made between businesses/entrepreneurs and regional resources.	UMVRDC/ Local Lenders/ EDA/ LUGs
	e. Promote and develop financing tools for businesses and entrepreneurs.	We have just started to explore ideas like Agora, Kivazip and other applications for crow-funding to add to the economic development toolbox.	UMVRDC
	f. Integration of business succession planning in recruitment efforts (EDA Center Regional Recruitment Strategies, Ben Winchester, 2011 Report).	Succession planning isn't really happening right now. We are concerned about the number of businesses in the next 10 years that may be for sale. Without a new buyer many may close all together. We need a collaborative effort to focus on succession planning including expertise from SBDC, local EDAs, lenders and local units of government.	UMVRDC/ Local Lenders/ EDA/ LUGs

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	UPDATE	WHO
<p>Advance the competitiveness of individual communities and the region by maintaining and improving social and physical infrastructure that supports economic development and fosters public-private partnerships.</p>	<p>a. Provide strategic planning services to communities to better position them for long-term success/stability.</p>	<p>With over 20 technical assistance contracts from local units of government - the UMRDC is responding to the needs of communities in the region and helping them achieve their goals for sustainability and resiliency.</p>	<p>UMVRDC</p>
	<p>b. Identify best practices for rehabilitation or redevelopment of dilapidated and vacant properties.</p>	<p>The UMRDC held two meetings about housing and dilapidated structures. Two of our five counties have designated programs with funding allocated to assist communities and residents with demolition of dilapidated structures. Two additional counties have assisted communities on a case by case basis.</p>	<p>UMVRDC/ Counties/Cities</p>
	<p>c. Support and provide examples to economic development groups creating economic development marketing packets.</p>	<p>The recent development of a regional tagline will help this effort in the forthcoming year. The UMRDC is working with the University of MN Extension on a regional vacant building inventory. We will use the information to start a regional conversation and brainstorm strategies to address vacant buildings.</p>	<p>UMVRDC/ EDAs/ Property Owners</p>
	<p>d. Invest and advocate for comprehensive infrastructure development and upgrades that support economic development.</p>	<p>The UMRDC regularly provides advocacy and education to help our local units of government look at the interconnectedness of zoning, housing, broadband, business development etc.</p>	<p>UMVRDC</p>
	<p>i. Especially infrastructure that address the region's transportation needs and challenges.</p>	<p>The UMRDC has dedicated staff that are focused on the transportation needs of the region regularly working with MNDOT and local units of government to create local and regional solutions to transportation challenges.</p>	<p>UMVRDC/ MNDOT/ FHWA</p>

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	UPDATE	WHO
Create, attract and maintain a globally competitive workforce to meet the demands of today's employers.	a. Design and implement a regional career academy structure for students and workers (SW MN Skills at Work Initiative).	There is interest in creating programs like CEO Creating Entrepreneurship Opportunities however there is no formal program in the region yet.	Schools, Colleges, Businesses, PIC, EDAs, UMRDC
	b. Develop and promote programs to attract, retain and retrain employees.	Related to our regional recruitment program - we are actively looking at how to integrate the "jobs" piece into this effort. We have many job openings that are going unfilled. So as regional recruitment continues to evolve this will be an important piece of the puzzle. We also have individual counties and cities that have developed strategies to recruit former youth back to the area.	PIC/ UMRDC/ Regional Recruitment
	c. Explore potential for certification of teleworkers and identify businesses that allow teleworking.	We continue to see an increase in telecommuters in the region but have not worked on an effort to certify workers yet. Of 87 counties Big Stone and Lac qui Parle rank in the top five for county percentage of residents that work from home/ telecommute. And four out of our five counties rank in the top fifteen counties! Our region's ability to tele-commute is increasing with additional fiber deployment.	PIC /UofM Extension/ UMRDC
	d. Work with education and workforce services to build and expand training opportunities to meet business labor need	These efforts continue to be coordinated by local workforce experts, great connections between schools, businesses, EDAs and workforce agencies are critical to the success.	PIC/ Schools/ Businesses/ EDAs

## Revolving Loan Fund

From April 1st, 2015 through March 31st, 2016, the UMRDC has committed funds to three loans but have yet to close on that through the Revolving Loan Fund.

Economic development agencies in the region have confirmed that they too have seen loan activity slow down. Following a RLF marketing push, winter 2016 has seen an uptick in the applications and inquiries, which has resulted in additional committed funds following the March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016 reporting period.

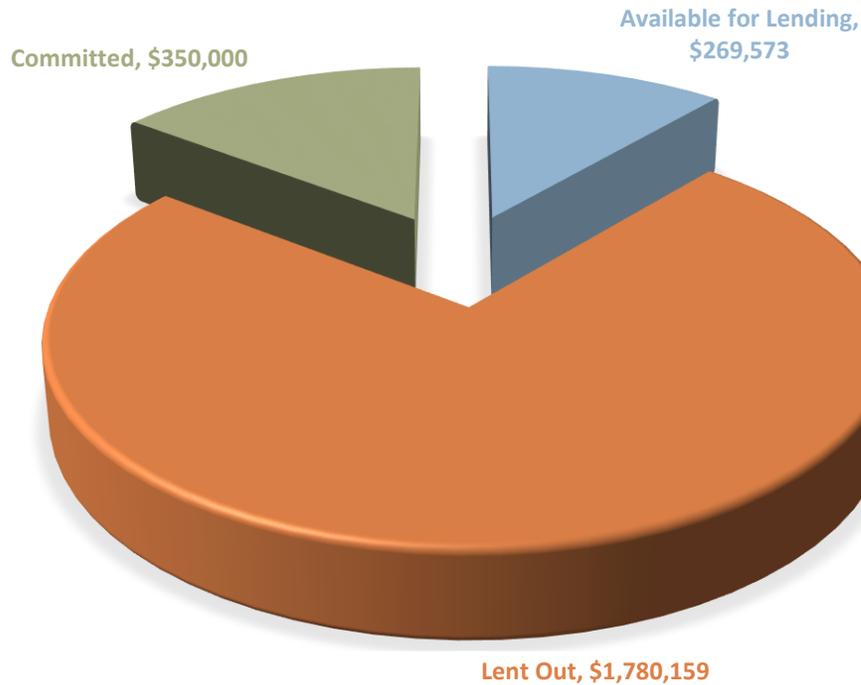
Borrower	Original RLF Loan Amount	Disaster RLF Loan Amount	Interest Rate	Term (years)	Status
Do-Mats Inc.	\$100,000		4.00%	10	Committed
Clara City Foods, Inc.	\$100,000	\$100,000	4.00%	10	Committed
Picht's Auto Body and Glass	\$50,000		4.00%	10	Committed
<b>Total Committed funds from 4/1/15 to 3/31/16</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>			

### **Balance of RLF Bank Accounts as of March 31, 2016**

Total Original RLF Funds           \$1,274,908.12  
**Balance available for lending       \$256,486.88**

Total Disaster RLF Funds           \$505,250.72  
**Balance available for lending       \$13,086.19**

## REVOLVING LOAN FUND PORTFOLIO



### UMVRDC RLF Observations

- The UMVRDC RLF committed funds to three (3) loans, totaling \$350,000 between April 1, 2015 and March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. The committed funds will be leveraged with an estimated \$790,000 in other public financing and \$4,084,916 in private financing and owner equity.
- As a result of our committed participation in the financing of these new and expanding businesses, an estimated twenty-two (22) new jobs are expected to be created and forty-two (42) jobs retained. The ratio of RLF loan dollars to jobs is \$5,468.75, which well below our overall portfolio standard of \$10,000 per job.

- Inquiries and loan requests have been slow. While meeting with banks and other economic development organizations a common remark has been that commercial loan activity have been slow. We have been actively marketing our RLF program which has resulted in new inquiries and loan applications in the quarter of the reporting period.

The RLF was incorporated in August of 1988; since then the Fund has made a significant impact on the economic growth and employment opportunities in Region 6W.

<b><u>ECONOMIC IMPACT</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
Total Number of Loans Closed	<b>113</b>
Total Loan Amounts	\$6,147,160
Private Dollars Leveraged	\$96,804,842
Pubic Dollars Leveraged	\$18,101,869
Owner Equity	\$32,022,490
Jobs Created	1141.5
Jobs Retained	1584.5
Business Type:	
Start-Up	40
Expansion	46
Retention	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>
Classification:	
Industrial	54
Commercial	26
Service	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>

## Past Year's Local Activities & Services

Many of the UMRDC's programs and projects are large in scope and cross multiple calendar, fiscal and EDA reporting periods. During the past year the UMRDC has been involved with the following projects, conferences and meetings in support of economic development in our region and throughout the state. The following list provides an overview of our activities and services since July 1, 2015.

- Entered into a yearlong contract for community development services to the City of Appleton.
  - Secured a SCDP grant for residential and commercial rehabilitation totaling
  - Secured \$149,000 to create a local revolving loan fund for new and expanding businesses
    - Secured \$99,000 from USDA RBDG program
    - Secured \$50,000 from a local foundation
  - Updated the zoning ordinance, current land-use map and developed a future land-use map
  - Completed a local sidewalk plan
- Provide tourism promotion and coordination for the region under the brand Western Minnesota Tourism [www.prairiewaters.com](http://www.prairiewaters.com). This effort is funded by counties and cities in the region.
- Provided grant writing services for Appleton Area Health Services and the Lac qui Parle Health Network
- Facilitated broadband exploration projects in Madison and Appleton
- Contracted with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to provide transportation planning services in the region.
- Contracted to provide marketing, coordination and fiscal services for the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway [www.mnrivervalley.com](http://www.mnrivervalley.com).
- Provided on-going contract services with Granite Falls and Montevideo for place-making type projects that focused on using art to rehabilitated parks, bridges and other community identified assets.
- Finished zoning ordinance updates for Canby and Ortonville (June 2016).
- The UMRDC was contracted to coordinate the Annual Meander: Upper Minnesota River Art Crawl.
- The UMRDC was hired to provide grants administration services to manage state or federal contracts and funds in Granite Falls, Benson, Clara City and Ortonville.
- Applied for grant funds to update hazard mitigation plans for Lac qui Parle and Swift counties.
- Completed hazard mitigation plans for Chippewa, Big Stone, and Yellow Medicine Counties and the Upper Sioux Community.

## Past Year's New or Ongoing Programs & Services

Non-infrastructure projects identified in the CEDS as high priority are listed below. Key priority areas should be worked on and completed when an opportunity presents itself or when funding is available to move a key project forward.

### State Level Partnership with USDA:

In February 2015 the UMRDC region was selected for a state level partnership with USDA. USDA and the UMRDC will work closely to connect communities with available resources and support. This partnership aligns well with the UMRDC mission "Enabling the Region to Thrive by Assisting Local Units of Government". The UMRDC implements their mission statement through SWOT recognition, strategy development and innovative solutions that go beyond traditional boundaries and bring likely and unlikely partners to the table.

In 2016 we continue our partnership with USDA at a partner level capacity, our efforts this year have focused primarily on developing greater awareness in the region about home improvement and rehabilitation resources and siren grants.

*The UMRDC has been selected as the "Community and Economic Development Partner Region" by the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development. The goal of this partnership is to increase awareness of resources available to further economic development within the Upper Minnesota Valley Region, ensuring the sustainability of its communities well into the future... In coordination with USDA staff, UMRDC is working to identify opportunities in support of local and regional projects.*

Colleen Landkamer | State Director  
Rural Development  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

### Telecommunication Infrastructure Development:

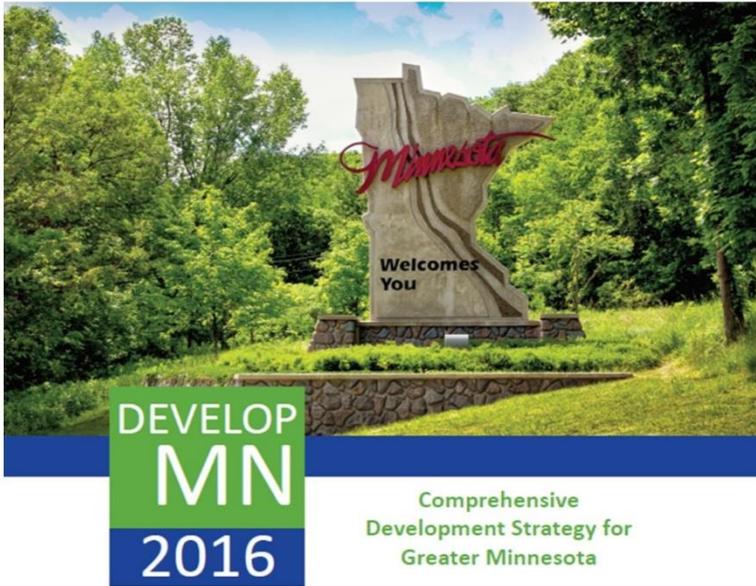
Provided grant writing technical provided grant writing technical assistance for broadband infrastructure for the region. Two public private partnerships between Federated Telephone Cooperative and Big Stone and Swift County respectively were developed to advance fiber optic broadband infrastructure in each county. By 2016 both projects were awarded funds in a very competitive grant rounds for MN Border to Border funding. Both projects are in deployment phases. The amount of investment in broadband infrastructure between 2016 and 2018 totals over

\$20M. The addition of fiber broadband to areas currently identified as unserved by broadband will be a critical to the marketing strategy to develop business opportunities and attract and retain residents.



### Regional Public Fiber Ring Feasibility:

The UMRDC submitted an application to the Blandin Foundation on behalf of the five county region to explore connection between all public sector buildings. Funds were awarded by Blandin in the amount of \$25,000 and this was matched with \$25,000 provided by the counties. The goal of the study is to determine the feasibility of a fiber ring that would create redundancy, allow for more off site data storage, shared resources and expertise of staff, reduce costs, and create other opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. The feasibility study will be developed over the next 12-18 months.



## Greater MN Development Strategy – Develop MN

The DevelopMN document has been completed and can be found on the UMVRDC’s website at [www.umvrdc.org](http://www.umvrdc.org) The cornerstone pillars that create the foundation of the document include:

- Human Capital
- Economic Competitiveness
- Community Resources
- Foundational Assets

We developed subcommittees and have identified some initial projects that we could collaborate on in the future. We are beginning to inventory the programs and initiatives that we work on that contribute to the statewide goals and implement identified strategies. The next steps include work on a visual tool to show goal progress using readily available analytics for greater MN.

The DevelopMN effort has strengthened our approach to our local CEDS as we are implementing a comprehensive CEDS update process with a new plan to be submitted to EDA in December 2016.

### Regional Recruitment

With the help of the EDA University Center, a group of regional economic development professionals (ED Pro’s) along with the help of University of Minnesota Extension Fellow Researcher Ben Winchester, we have completed our local research on newcomers. As a part of the groups “attraction efforts” to the region our local ED Pro’s are working on completing community audits and updating online business and community information on major search engines such as Google, MapQuest, Bing, etc. Ben has been sharing the research from our region all over the country, many are wondering what we will do next. Developing an online portal will be essential in developing awareness about community assets and businesses in the areas. Overall the region needs more cohesive visibility online to create greater awareness of the region. A marketing plan is also in the works to attract newcomers to the area. To learn more about our research and this issue go to <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/community/brain-gain/> The new tagline agreed upon by local economic development and chamber professional is: **Get Rural! Quietly beautiful. Wildly connected.** The development of this tagline was the result of significant work in bringing professionals together and collectively determine a marketing tagline that unites the region and starts building a collaborative marketing effort based on the regional recruitment strategies developed in past year’s work.



### **Western Minnesota Prairie Waters**

**Tourism Development:** Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Convention and Visitors Bureau is a program of the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC). It started in the early 1980's as a small coalition of partners in the region who saw the benefits of collaborating marketing efforts.

Today, Prairie Waters pools resources and works collaboratively on projects for the region. Pooling funds allows us to place advertisements in state and national publications, coordinate regional events, create and maintain a regional website, provide a toll-free hotline for requests, attend trade/travel shows to promote the region and produce regional marketing brochures and direct mail pieces. If individual communities

would perform these same functions it would mean spending funds on design software along with a computer system large enough to handle design programs and quality printing, dedicated staff time, travel expenses for trade shows, ad placement, website development and maintenance, toll-free access and charges, publishing and direct mailing expenses. Communities can have a presence in all of these areas while sharing the total expenses stretching those marketing dollars.

We had another successful year promoting our region as a whole with the help of eight cities and four counties. Our main project this year was updating our region's Local Shops Guide. The guide has a listing for all dining, lodging, and shopping that can be found within our region. The printed guide is also available online and can be found at [www.Prairiewaters.com](http://www.Prairiewaters.com). Check it out!

