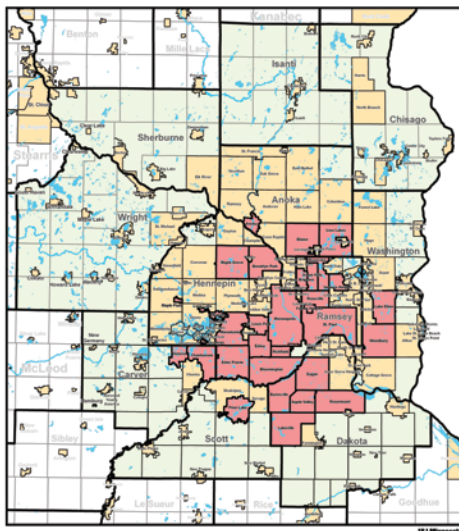


# Promoting Regional Cooperation

## The Minnesota Regional Council of Mayors



**Participating Cities**  
Regional Council of Mayors

Legend:  
■ Participating Cities  
■ Other Cities  
■ RCM Counties  
□ Township Boundary  
■ Lakes  
■ Rivers

Scale: 0 5 10 Miles  
Map Date: May 11, 2009  
Source: Esri, DeLorme, Garmin, etc.



**A LACK OF COLLABORATION** and consensus among regional leaders is one reason many U.S. metropolitan areas have been unable to successfully address the many issues they face today. One of the first efforts to be funded by a ULI Community Action Grant proves that municipal leaders can work together to identify and implement solutions to problems affecting their region's growth and sustainability.

"I am convinced that the dynamic collaboration among our Regional Council of Mayors is having a meaningful impact on creating a better future together," says Burnsville, Minnesota, Mayor Elizabeth Kautz, who cochairs the council. A nationally recognized group founded and supported by ULI Minnesota, the council represents Minneapolis, St. Paul, and 34 other municipalities in the region's developed and developing suburbs. The collaborative partnership provides a nonpartisan platform that engages mayors in candid dialogue and peer-to-peer support with a commitment to build awareness of and action focused on housing, sustainability, transportation, and job growth.

ULI Minnesota established the Minnesota Regional Council of Mayors (RCM) in late 2004 with a \$40,000 ULI Community Action Grant and \$35,000 in matching funds from Target Corporation. The council's purpose, as stated in its strategic plan, is "to provide a forum to strategically engage regional mayors and land use professionals in a nonpartisan process to seek equitable and sustainable regional solutions that will provide learning, tools, networking, and action to align development, design, and policy for maximum human and economic return." The RCM began with a kickoff event in December 2004 at which more than 60 mayors met to learn about and

discuss upcoming legislative issues in the fields of transportation and housing.

Modeled after ULI's Mayors' Forums and the Metropolitan Council's Mayors' Affordable Housing Task Force, the RCM's goals include helping mayors carry out their leadership roles; exposing mayors to high-level intellectual challenges; building the standing of the council as the go-to forum for education, advocacy, and action regarding regional solutions that integrate development practices and implementation by local communities; building consensus for action to change local, regional, and/or state policies and practices; and supporting nonpartisan solutions.

When ULI Minnesota asked the region's mayors what would bring them to and keep them engaged in an effort such as this, the responses included purposeful work; clear outcomes; benefits for their communities; the opportunity to broaden their minds and horizons; the opportunity to learn something new; and the ability to gain access to resources, tools, and networking. Formation of the RCM generated enthusiasm, mayors were eager to participate, and the RCM's executive council grew from 16 to 25 mayors in its first year. One significant benefit of the RCM has been its commitment to bring together leaders from different sectors—people who typically do not spend time with each other. This has led to provocative discussions and a deepening understanding of the complex issues that affect regional growth.

By engaging urban, suburban, and exurban mayors alike, the council played a key role in raising awareness regarding the importance of increasing transportation resources. In addition to its kickoff meeting, the RCM during its first year convened a regional competitiveness forum (in

partnership with ULI Minnesota and the Great North Alliance) and sponsored a Creating Great Cities program, as well as a roundtable discussion of density, tall buildings, and the public realm. It also partnered with BlueCross BlueShield Minnesota on a program covering lessons learned in urban development from Vancouver, British Columbia, and established a conservation design task force. The council closed out its first year with a program of roundtable discussions—attended by mayors, legislators, ULI members, and business leaders—on eminent domain, transportation funding, conservation design, and tax policy.

### **Catalyst for Change**

By the end of its first year, the RCM already had become a catalyst for change, particularly in the areas of transportation resources and conservation design. Since then, it has continued to broaden its reach, credibility, and influence. It has strengthened the collective voice of the region's mayors in Minnesota public affairs; actively supported the successful passage of a constitutional amendment to redirect all state motor vehicle sales tax revenues to transportation; fostered discussion between county and municipal leaders concerning next steps in transportation; and sponsored workshops on a wide range of topics, as well as monthly RCM meetings. It also has provided a forum through which the region's mayors can speak with one voice on important issues, including transportation and housing.

Most recently, ULI Minnesota and the RCM jointly launched the Housing Initiative Opportunity City Program, a comprehensive, centralized, sustainable learning community that provides support and resources—through peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance, and dissemination of best practices—to local municipal officials

who seek to provide a full range of housing choices in their communities.

### **A Model for Leadership**

The council, which has become a model for similar groups in other regions, is now recognized as an important leadership group that brings together the region's most influential mayors. It has received financial support from a variety of sources, including Target, the Family Housing Fund, BlueCross and BlueShield Minnesota, and the McKnight Foundation, and has worked with many groups, including the Center for Housing Policy, the University of Minnesota, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Itasca Project (a business leadership group), and others.

The RCM continues to be supported by ULI Minnesota to carry out its four key strategies: to convene, by bringing mayors and other leaders together around issues of regional significance; to educate, thus equipping mayors to lead and support learning across sectors; to engage, by supporting civic outreach strategies; and to effect change, by seeking solutions that support a better way of engaging in collective regional action.

"The challenges facing our communities simply cannot be adequately addressed by any one sector," comments Nate Garvis, vice president, government affairs, for Target Corporation. "Only through strong public/private partnerships like the Regional Council of Mayors can we see the kind of outcomes that truly make cities successful."

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

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