

# ULI Minnesota

Regional Council of Mayors

## Regional Council of Mayors/ULI Minnesota Advisory Board Joint Meeting

June 8, 2013

### **GREATER MSP AHEAD INITIATIVE NEXT STEPS**

Two regional meetings and a yearlong process with *GreaterMSPAhead* partners, kicked off a regional discussion at the July 8<sup>th</sup> joint Regional Council of Mayors, ULI MN Advisory Board, and ULI MN Young Leaders Executive Committee meeting. The discussion focused on 7 proposed regional priorities. There was no debate about these priorities; in fact, attendees at this special joint meeting seemed itching to get started on making something happen.

#### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Discussion centered mostly on *how* to get started, *what* to do first, and *which* way to proceed.

(The seven regional priorities are:

- Build an identity for the regional “competitive unit”;
- Cultivate an ecosystem adept at fostering and commercializing innovation and entrepreneurship;
- Accelerate job growth, talent attraction, capital investment and exporting;
- Supercharge our education system;
- Improve placemaking and connectivity;
- Develop resilient infrastructure that connects regional job centers; and
- Conserve and leverage our natural resources as a key regional asset. [May 31<sup>st</sup> Event Notes.](#))

#### **How to Get Started**

Creating, promoting and accomplishing a common vision for the region is essential, most said. “We need to focus on a selected few priorities we all agree on that will benefit the region as a whole,” said Brandon Champeau, YLG. But Eagan Mayor Mike Maguire argued that, much as people set priorities together, individual action is needed. “I think we do a lot of coming together and talking as a region, but it inhibits individual action,” he said. “I’m going to commit to visioning in my community. If we insist on saying, ‘What should WE do,’ we don’t do things ourselves.”

Many in the group, and particularly YLG members, pushed for action. “At these sessions, we never really get to the action part,” said Max Musicant. “That’s the missing step.”

Edina Mayor Jim Hovland said it’s critical that cities and—importantly—businesses and legislators talk together about how to move the region forward. “It’s frustrating to move for action when there are other partners we have to work with who aren’t in the same place.”

### ***What to Do First***

Two things—a common vision and identity for the region and a multimodal regional transit system—were proposed most often and most energetically by those in the group, with education close behind.

### ***Regional vision and identity***

Although those in the room were, mostly, agreed on the priorities for the region, they said it’s important to have a common vision that is communicated to others. “We just have to get this simple regional message out there,” said Cathy Polasky.

“We need to reach out to a broader audience as we try to sell this vision,” said Hovland. He encouraged everyone to talk to the “unwilling,” as well as those who already buy into the same regional priorities.

The message about Greater MSP also needs to be communicated nationally, and probably globally. The region has a lot of great assets that are not known much outside Minnesota, people said. It’s a region that’s as good as that of Portland, but it doesn’t have the same *cachet*.

“We have every opportunity to be far less modest about our centrist voice,” said Bake Baker. He pointed to a number of the region’s strengths, including its immigrant communities, its support of entrepreneurial start-ups, its gay rights initiatives. Others talked about the arts, sports, park systems . . . the wealth of amenities in the region that make it not just livable but enjoyable.

Some said that Garrison Keillor’s *Prairie Home Companion* has become the image of the Twin Cities for those in other areas—but it’s an image that was created about 40 years ago and that doesn’t represent what Greater MSP is now. “We’re no longer cold,” said Hovland, “we’re just cool.”

### ***Modern transit system***

“We need a real regional transit system that is part of both the economic and the social eco-system,” said Jay Walljasper. Almost every group listed transit as a key priority for the region.

Several people talked about the frustration of having the 2013 Minnesota Legislature pass only a “lights-on” transportation package, despite considerable lobbying and support from cities, counties and more.

### ***Other priorities and ideas***

Education came up at many tables, although there was less clarity about just what the education priority might be. For some, it's reducing racial disparities. For others, it was making sure the education system is broad enough to include young people headed for college and beyond and those who want and need good vocational training.

One group listed only one priority: taking advantage of diversity and the energy and resiliency it brings to the region.

Making sure younger people—and people from all ethnic and racial groups—are brought not only into the discussions but into the planning is essential and a number of people mentioned it.

John Shardlow said it might be good to bring other elected officials (not just mayors) into the discussions, so that rather than simply being lobbied by mayors, they understand the problems and support the solutions from the beginning.

### ***Which Way to Proceed***

There was nearly universal agreement that it's better to talk about a bigger vision, rather than one priority at a time. "We need a big picture that people can buy into," said Colleen Carey. "We've talked about, 'We need transit,' rather than a big vision.

Priorities need to be related to each other: Instead of identifying the Number 1 transportation priority, as if it exists by itself, ULI Minnesota and RCM should identify the Number 1 transportation priority that works with education, housing and jobs.

One person recommended that the ULI Minnesota initiatives be intertwined, rather than worked on separately.

The bottom line is a dynamic, economically successful, livable community—not simply a community with a great transit system.

### ***Next?***

Caren Dewar asked those attending if they are ready to enter into a "manifesto" on the seven priorities, responding to a call to action made by Josh Olson, YLG Co-Chair. "As far as I know, this is the first time these seven ideas have been put on a list like this," she said. A number have signed on already.

Results of the discussions will be used to inform the ULI Minnesota and Regional Council of Mayors strategic vision and action strategies, with a focus on regional impact —and soon. [Greater MSPahead Initiative Page](#)