

DATE: Monday, March 11, 2013
TO: **Committee of the Whole**
FROM: Debra Detrick, Local Planning Assistance, Community Development Division
SUBJECT: Geographic Planning Areas and Input from the Land Use Advisory Committee

Introduction

Geographic planning areas have been an important means of defining and implementing strategies tied to goals in the *Regional Development Framework* and previous Metropolitan Development Guides. This memo briefly explains the significance of the planning areas and then summarizes feedback and ideas from the Council's Land Use Advisory Committee. The objective of bringing information to the Council on geographic planning areas is to help provide structure to policy discussions for thinking about how the Council's goals can be implemented across the range of communities in the region. Specifically, the information is intended to inform the Council's work on Thrive MSP 2040 scenario proposals, to support the Council's upcoming decisions in defining planning areas, and to inform the development of strategies for implementing the Council's goals.

Importance of Geographic Planning Areas

Geographic planning areas have been pivotal in regional planning efforts and in implementing policies and strategies at the local level. Decisions on geographic planning areas will have a significant impact on communities in how they incorporate regional policies into their local plans. The region includes a diversity of communities, and the Council has tailored different strategies for differing areas. Planning areas, as well as regional service areas, are used in planning for the Council's regional systems and setting expectations for investment. Geographic planning areas are a key means of grouping similar communities in order to implement the spectrum of the Council's overarching policies across the region, including guiding development and redevelopment, resource protection, and accommodating growth.

Input from the Land Use Advisory Committee

The Land Use Advisory Committee is authorized by state statute to give advice and assistance to the Council on metropolitan land use, comprehensive planning, system statement hearings, and matters of metropolitan significance as requested by the Council. Members are geographically representative of the region, and half of the committee members are locally elected officials.

Members of the Land Use Advisory Committee were asked to frame ideas and articulate fundamental criteria for thinking about potential changes to geographic planning areas. The Land Use Advisory Committee met on January 17, 2013, to discuss planning areas, and comments by committee members are summarized below. Note that comments appear in no particular order under the following headings.

Main messages

- ***Tying geographic planning areas to the Council's policies is critical.*** Geographic planning areas are likely to continue as an important tool for the Council.
- ***Consider making more distinctions within or across geographic planning areas.*** Overlays could be added to broader geographic planning areas to recognize different conditions within a community, but overlays add complexity. Examples are overlays of centers and corridors and overlays of areas to protect water resources and natural resources.
- ***Use spatial planning to transcend borders.*** Community boundaries do not align with protecting natural resources, such as aquifers, or enhancing the economy and transit ridership.

Water and transit service are tools for seeing how a community is part of a larger system and the entire region.

Themes

- ***Distinguishing between urban and rural areas is losing some relevancy.*** Transit service and county funding mechanisms are busting past distinctions between urban and rural areas. Criteria are weakening for protecting farm land. Urban farming in Saint Paul and Minneapolis pushes past distinctions between urban and rural areas in a new way.
- ***Use specific markets, submarkets or corridors in definitions.*** Define market characteristics and transit corridors using jobs, retail and housing. Identify nodes of commercial activity, nearby forms of density and connections. Submarkets are regionally significant and play different roles.
- ***Group similar communities.*** Reflect the age and lifecycle of communities in geographic planning areas. Communities in the fully developed area share experiences with older infrastructure. Grouping peer cities in a geographic planning area is more appreciated than making distinctions between urban and rural areas.
- ***Frame definitions to reflect socio-economic criteria.*** Another element of geographic planning areas could address concerns over race and poverty.
- ***Consider groundwater and surface water when structuring geographic planning areas.*** Explore different impacts on watersheds, how to manage stormwater and how to create reserves. Foster more collaboration. The region will need more water in the future. What happens with runoff and regulations will be more regionally significant.

Additional points

- ***Explore a transit corridor overlay.*** More housing along transit lines is of interest. Assess interest in overlay tools and then ask how to use overlays in implementation.
- ***Use overlays to understand issues and create incentives.*** Approaches that draw distinctions within communities, such as overlays, can set expectations for growth that do not fit the entire community. This can reduce push back. Create incentives to buy into strategies for getting transit.
- ***Focus more on systems and less on communities.*** Tend to favor a hybrid, overlay approach. Stay away from simplistic density targets, such as five units per acre.
- ***Prepare for push back on density.*** Promoting more density will invite push back. But higher density is needed for transit service in some areas.
- ***Question where polluting industries fit.*** Help communities think of where to locate manufacturing and heavy industries that do not fit in mixed-use areas. Policy could keep heavy industry out of water recharge areas.
- ***Address tradeoffs.*** Acknowledge the tension between increasing density in one area to save green space and cut down on runoff in another area. Increasing density in a subdivision can increase impervious surfaces and lead to more runoff.
- ***Balance jobs and housing to reduce commutes.*** Spread jobs out so roads are used in both directions.
- ***Tie geographic planning areas to the Council's policies.*** Think of how classifications would work for park land preservation, housing, and many other factors. One developing community could be much different than another developing community.
- ***Be clear on the consequences of defining geographic planning areas.*** Include options on how the geographic planning areas will be used.
- ***Align with comprehensive plans.*** When geographic planning areas are defined, understand how they connect to guidance to cities for creating comprehensive plans.
- ***Do not miss the importance of technology.*** Working from home is a growing trend, and fiber optic capacity is an advantage in global competition for employers. Technology will change more than anything else.