



## **The Dane County Regional Planning Commission: Role and Authority**

*August 10, 1997*

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The Dane County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) was formed in 1968 through an intergovernmental agreement between Dane County and the County's local units of government. The RPC, therefore, is not a county agency, but an independent agency created by state statute and by agreement of Dane County communities. The RPC was originally established to carry out comprehensive, intergovernmental planning; to have jurisdiction throughout Dane County, including incorporated and unincorporated areas; to meet areawide requirements so local jurisdictions could receive federal grants; and to provide an organization to receive federal planning grants.

The Commission consists of 11 people who represent the interests of the County, towns, villages, and cities. Under the agreement establishing the RPC, at least five of the 11 commissioners must be County Board supervisors. In addition, two are selected by the Mayor of Madison, one represents third and fourth class cities, one represents villages, and two represent the towns. A staff of 19, with a 1997 budget of almost \$1.3 million, serves the Commission.

Section 66.945 of the Wisconsin Statutes governs the activities of the RPC. While the RPC's planning authority is advisory and does not carry regulatory force, it does play a major role in the distribution of federal transportation dollars and the revision and approval of urban service areas.

The State Statutes require the RPC to perform three major functions:

1. Make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the region.
2. If requested by a local unit, report recommendations to that local unit on the location of or acquisition of land for any of the items or facilities which are included in the adopted regional master plan.
3. Make an annual report of its activities to the legislative bodies of the local governmental units within the region.

The RPC is also authorized to perform several other functions and chooses to perform additional activities under federal and state contracts and agreements. In fact, such functions as transportation planning and programming and water quality planning make up a major portion of the RPC's work.

The following description of the RPC's anticipated primary functions for 1997 is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather provide an overview of the nature of the RPC's work. The description of general tasks follows the RPC's staff's organizational structure of three main divisions: regional and community development, environmental and natural resources, and transportation. In carrying out these planning functions, the RPC works with many units of government, including the County, towns, villages, cities, as well as state and federal government.

### **Regional and Community Development:**

The work of the Regional and Community Development Division includes development and implementation of the transportation and land use plan, county planning and assistance, local planning assistance, and work to maintain basic data programs.

*Dane County Land Use and Transportation Plan:* This plan was developed through the Vision 2020 process and will be the basic areawide planning document for the Regional Planning Commission. Over the next year the RPC will work to implement this plan.

*County Planning Assistance:* The RPC staff provides comments to the County Zoning and Natural Resources Committee on all zoning change petitions and conditional use applications and amendments. Staff review the consistency of zoning petitions with town plans which have been adopted by Dane County. The RPC's assistance to County government is provided for under an annual services contract between the RPC and Dane County.

*Local Planning Assistance:* The goal of the RPC's work in local planning assistance is to assist local units of government (towns, cities, and villages) in meeting local objectives which also help implement regional plans and programs. The RPC did considerable work writing the initial town plans in the 1970s and 1980s under the farmland preservation planning program, and now works with some towns in updating these plans.

The RPC also provides specific planning assistance to villages and cities under contract. In recent years the RPC has developed both zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans for cities and villages.

*Basic Data Programs:* The RPC maintains land use inventories and maps, and evaluates and distributes census and economic data.

### **Environmental and Natural Resources:**

The work conducted by the Environmental and Natural Resources Division focuses on water resources management planning. The RPC is designated by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as the water quality management planning agency for the County. The division also offers limited technical assistance to local governments in the area of solid waste

management and conducts special studies in air quality planning, energy management planning, and environmental impact reviews.

*Wastewater Systems Planning and Service:* The RPC provides general assistance, data, and population and flow forecasts for the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) and other agencies engaged in facilities planning or special wastewater studies. MMSD has a statutory relationship with the RPC which requires MMSD plans be consistent with RPC plans. The RPC also reviews an estimated 150 sanitary sewer main extensions each year for consistency with plans and urban service areas. State agencies approving sewer extensions require a letter from the RPC indicating consistency with the Water Quality Plan.

*Urban Service Area and Environmental Corridor Delineation:* As the designated water quality agency, the RPC develops the Water Quality Plan for Dane County. This plan is submitted to DNR for approval. As part of this plan, communities designate urban service areas (USAs), the area in which municipalities can provide services, including but not only sanitary sewer. If a sewer extension is within the current USA, then the process for approval is pro forma. If not, then the community must seek expansion of the USA. This process involves notification of adjacent local governments, a hearing before the RPC, a report, action by the RPC, and DNR approval.

*Urban and Rural Nonpoint Pollution Source Management:* The RPC assists municipalities and the County in developing and implementing watershed plans in priority watersheds. Staff also provide assistance to communities implementing urban nonpoint source recommendations in the Dane County Water Quality Plan.

### **Transportation Planning:**

The RPC plays an important role in transportation planning in the County. The RPC is the federally-designated areawide transportation planning policy body, called the metropolitan planning organization (MPO), for the Madison urbanizing area. This area contains two-thirds of the population of the County and 15 units of government.

In its role as the MPO, the RPC develops two main documents: the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Long Range Transportation Plan, which is updated every five years, must include all projects for which the RPC anticipates requests for federal funding in subsequent TIPs. The Dane County Land Use and Transportation Plan will serve as the Long Range Transportation Plan and addresses transportation issues throughout Dane County.

The U.S. Department of Transportation requires the development and annual endorsement of the TIP, which is a comprehensive listing of transportation improvement projects proposed to be implemented over the next five years. The TIP focuses on projects within the Madison urban area, but includes a listing of outer County projects for information purposes. No project can be listed in the TIP unless it is first in the Long Range Transportation Plan. The federal government provides between \$3 and \$4 million each year for the MPO for major transportation projects. Projects must be listed in the TIP to be eligible for federal funding.

The RPC conducts transportation planning activities in addition to the Long Range Transportation Plan and the TIP including:

- Transit planning in the Madison area,
- Serve as the clearinghouse for project notification and review under the Wisconsin Federal Grant Development and Review Process,
- Assistance with the commuter rail feasibility study,
- Calibration of the forecasting model, TRANPLAN,
- Bikeway and ridesharing planning,
- Development of the Transportation System Management Plan elements,
- Assistance with the Elderly/Disabled/ADA plan, and
- Development of corridor studies.

**Other Resources:**

*Section 66.945, Wis. Stats. “Creation, organization, powers and duties of regional planning commissions”.*

*Profile: Wisconsin’s Regional Planning Commissions*, prepared by the Wisconsin Council of Regional Planning Organizations, December 1992.

*Dane County Regional Planning Commission: A Profile in Brief*, prepared by the Dane County Regional Planning Commission, May, 1994.

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