

Mille Lacs County Comprehensive Plan Project Second Round of Community Meetings Report



Summer 2012

MILLE LACS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2nd ROUND OF COMMUNITY MEETINGS REPORT SUMMER 2012



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As part of the Mille Lacs County Comprehensive Plan Project, a series of three identically formatted community meetings were held in June, 2012 at the following locations and dates across Mille Lacs County:

Tuesday, June 5th. 7:00 PM at Princeton City Hall
Thursday, June 7th. 7:00 PM at Kathio Township Hall
Saturday, June 9th. 9:00 AM at Historic Mille Lacs County Courthouse

The agenda and meeting format were identical at these meetings:

- 1) Welcome – all were welcomed to the meetings.
- 2) Introductions – all were introduced; facilitators, staff and participants.
- 3) Background – a presentation was made regarding what a comprehensive plan is, and the planned steps for creating a new one of Mille Lacs County. Questions were answered as they arose. A copy of this presentation was handed out for participants to take. Results of the community survey were also reviewed.
- 4) Participants were updated on the progress being made in working on the plan.
- 5) Gathering of input– several questions were asked to participants in an effort to garner input on a variety of topics. A SWOT Analysis was undertaken, and participants were asked to write their answers on provided slips of paper. The facilitator also asked everyone to comment verbally – comments were written down and both written and verbal comments are included in this report. Questions asked of participants include:
 - a SWOT Analysis was undertaken for the following topics:
 - o Recreation and Tourism
 - o Intergovernmental Relations
 - o Social Programs / Public Health / Quality of Life
- 6) Next Steps – the next steps of the project were outlined and participants were asked to volunteer to serve on topic area ad-hoc task forces, attend future meetings, sign up for email updates, and bookmark the Comprehensive Plan section of the County website.
- 7) Questions? – Any final questions participants had were answered.

Agendas handed out that included the email address to send to for enrolling in the project's email list-serve for updates on the projects, as well as Mille Lacs County's website with information on this project.

A SWOT Analysis was also available online on the County's website. Input and comments received there are also included in this report.

This second round of Community Meetings were promoted through the media (newspapers, flyers), as well as emails sent to cities and businesses to forward on to stakeholders. Citizen participation was good overall. Each meeting had approximately 15 - 20 attendees.

Written and verbal input from the meetings have been transcribed and are categorized by topic and meeting location, and are as follows:



Recreation and Tourism

City of Princeton City Hall

Strengths/Opportunities

Brings people in from outside area

Increases dollar flow in community

Lakes and Rivers

Opportunity for County park & trail system

Mille Lacs Lake & Rum River outdoor recreation opportunities

Capitalize of historic resources in County as tourist attraction

Opportunity to promote tourism and small business along 169 Corridor

Rum River / Outdoor

Anoka Arching Park would be good to have

Wave Pool

Horseback riding opportunities

Rivers, lakes – keep clean, limit development

Weakness/Threats

New people may not care about the area and use things incorrectly

Gas prices

Need advertisement in County, state, & federal parks and also prices

Rum River needs to be cleaned up

Parks that draw tourism

Not doing more at state & federal level to combat carp coming up the rivers



Kathio Town Hall

Strengths/Opportunities

State parks preserve forest land and wildlife. Programs educational and active recreation at Kathio

Wildlife areas

Big Lake – too much

State parks

Mille Lacs Lake

Tourist employment

State Parks

Quality of life and recreation is a big part of the local economy

Advertise

Come together and help each other

Lots of lakes & Trails for all types of recreation

Kathio & Father Hennepin parks as well as many others

Mille Lacs Museum and Kathio programs

Weakness/Threats

Tourist on snowmobiles and ATV's trespass – don't respect private property, enforceable late PM, cities have noise ordinances

Dogs off leash escape and injure and kill livestock

Typical tourist – related employment minimum wage, we should focus on better paying employment / business

Tourism – seasonal people who have disposable income

Poor water in lakes and streams

Garbage



Netting of Mille Lacs Lake

Trail Care

Lack of funding for county funded recreational opportunities

Difficult to derive user fees for the trails from non-motorized users

Seasonal – depends on income from others

Respect to other people

Be willing to try new ideas

More stores for shopping or bumming

Protect the albino animals

Transportation hang-ups on weekends

Some feel unsafe due to gang activity

Fishing regulations for Mille Lacs Lake, more and more are not coming due to netting and size limits

Mille Lacs County Historic Courthouse – Milaca, MN

Strengths/Opportunities

That Milaca is not a tourist location

The County doesn't have to be a tourist destination than Mille Lacs Lake

Community has to pay to use the school of Milaca for non-profit groups

Don't want Milaca to be a tourist destination

God's beautiful landscape

Lakes, streams, Rivers, forests

Water and wildlife resources

Historical resources (national register buildings & sites, local assets)

Decent transportation to get to resources



Active groups, organizations within the County

Amazing natural beauty

We have a very beautiful County

State parks

Mille Lacs Lake

Rum River

Libraries / Museums

City Parks

Plenty of lakes, rivers, swamps, etc in Mille Lacs County

People bring in \$ (dollars)

Opportunity for local people to sell their products

Good resources – state parks, state forest, Mille Lacs Lake, Mille Lacs Wildlife Management Area

Open Space / State Land

Lots of water resources – lakes, rivers, fishing

State Parks

Distance from population centers

4-lane road limited access

Lake and Rum River use

Develop users for Horse trails

Mille Lacs Lake & Rum River

Weakness/Threats

Community education programs that involve teens during the summer

County involvement in crime

Develop a way for people to canoe the rum; camp sites, clearing down trees, natural waterways



Need more community events to bring the community together more

Need more positive things to do with the community; i.e. the teenagers have nowhere to hang out in Milaca, thus teens get into trouble

Couldn't care less

Overreach of government control of existing resources

Poor stewardship by user

People not respecting the nature and littering; not checking their boats

Lack of community unity

Overuse in season (crowding of fishing and netting destroying)

Lack of promotion of lesser known resources

Bad press caused by friction between Band and County

Overharvest of Timber Resources – Rum River State Forest

Lack of non-state park camping facilities

Under use of Rum River as recreational draw

Lack of County parks

Limited facilities

May bring in undesirable people

Development on lakes impacting water quality

Invasive Species

More people in area means more law enforcement

More drugs, etc, being brought into our “rural” community

Invasive Species

Governmental restrictions of resources

Perception: people want more protection but less regulation

Regulations for land use



Road surfaces

Land owner determination of use

Enforcement of ATV/Snowmobile regulations (require license on trail)

County does little to develop assets for recreation

Keep people from trespassing on others property – ATV, snowmobile, etc

Online Responses

Strengths/Opportunities

Mille Lacs Lake and the 169 corridor

Mille Lacs Lake and the recreation it provides for fishing, boating and snowmobiling.

Mille Lacs Lake has potential to bring in more tourism

Mille Lacs Lake

Lac Mille Lacs, Rum River for fishing and or boating

Mille Lacs County shares the premier walleye lake with other county, northern part of county is a vacation destination that has the potential to draw in a large number of tourists.

169 is corridor to Mille Lacs and Brainerd - we need to capitalize on that

We have Mille Lacs Lake and the Rum River....we need to find a way to coax the affiliated tourist dollars out of our visitor's pockets.

2 state parks located in the county.

There are many farms here which should be highlighted as contributing to our local Minnesota food economy

The Great Northern Train Depot and Museum and Mark Park in Princeton

Casinos



County has a good road infrastructure to handle large numbers of tourists.

We need a diversity of business to capture the benefits, economically, of our natural and geographical strengths. Just more tourism businesses, like casino's or fishing tours is not enough, we need more locally owned businesses of all kinds so that the people travelling through our county on the way to their tourism destination will stop and spend money here.

County needs to push their state and federal congressional representatives to deal with the treaty issues on Mille Lacs Lake. If it keeps up the way it is, soon there won't be many people coming up to fish the lake and use local businesses. Too many people are going elsewhere as they don't want to deal with issues such as "slot limits" and other special regulations

Rum River, Mille Lacs Lake, Casino, biking, trails, hunting, fishing, resorts

The states promotion of tourism outside of Minnesota.

The Princeton Speedway and Grass Drags in the fall.

Lots of parks

Cities are willing to work to increase number of tourists coming to the area

Weakness/Threats

Adult establishments will weaken our image, raise crime, cheapen property values. They should be banned!

Other than Mille Lacs and the Rum River what entices people to come here and spend some time?

There are not very many interesting or different types of eating establishments. A lot of fast food places

We are losing too many small resorts and businesses to high taxes, cutting down the number of opportunities to draw tourists to our county.

Soo Line bicycle trail -- needs ongoing upkeep

We desperately need more restaurants/resorts in the Mille Lacs Lake area

Threat of special interest groups wanting favors - frisbee golf, bike trails benefit few people other than the granola vendors and participants.



Local cities need to work together to develop opportunities to draw in tourists
Fishing regulations - "slotting of Walleye", removal of dams on the Rum River, higher prices for hunting/fishing licenses.

Mille Lacs county's failure to deal with tough issues such as vacation rental housing creates problems for small resorts. Rather than being wishy-washy about enforcement of regulations dealing with vacation rentals they have stuck their heads in the sand and are afraid of making someone mad.



Intergovernmental Relations

City of Princeton

Strengths/Opportunities

Not duplicating services or energy on issues of County

More efficient in getting things done

Broadened view of issues

Have more local control

County seems to try to work with everyone

Most are rural enough to be friendly to all

Can count on county and most townships to do what they can to work together

Meeting with all units together – communication

4R Board (Rum River Recreation & Resources Board) brings together townships & city & school district in Princeton area

Weakness/Threats

Federal government Indian policy

Such a long county – very different from one end to the other

Always new mandates (unfunded) and regulations

Band issues that remain unsolved

Too much regulation

Rick Johnson – too many regulations in this County and City



Kathio Town Hall

Strengths/Opportunities

County and reservation

Township to township

Township to county

Cooperation at staff level, staff commitment

Taxes too high

Better jobs

Stick together

Fire department

Support system

Common sense

Too much taxes paid out to Congress

Welfare is used to much

Sheriff response

To many people coming n from other counties too much money spent

Weakness/Threats

Not enough employment

Police patrol

Losing our young people

Drugs

Drugs / schools

Trust – some township officials don't trust what others are doing

Diversity



Too much trust land – rest of us pay higher taxes

Lower taxes

Empty / abandoned property / lots

Start teaching basics in school

Need help for our own people

Crime

Mille Lacs County Historic Courthouse – Milaca, MN

Strengths/Opportunities

Improved communication

Better efficiency in dollars spent for communication

Continue open to citizen participation – gov't by the people for the people

Working together works when it happens

Citizens can (and should) participate on ongoing basis

Lack of high speed internet county wide to assist in keeping people informed

Desire by county to want high participation in the plan for input

Lack of funds create innovation, may cause government units to work together

4-H programs

Jobs created by casino and band related businesses

Services provided by state agencies – state parks, state forest bring dollars to our area

Approachable – we are able to visit our government

Government is largely responsive to constituents

Mille Lacs county has good youth opportunities such as 4-H

Mille Lacs County has many volunteer opportunities

Can't see any as taxpayer



Weakness/Threats

Poor communication

Little or no “action”

Do all the gov’t units know what each other are doing? Keeping each other informed?

No need to increase organizations to facilitate communication – use peer to peer input

Different levels blaming each other for problems

Combative relationships

Split community; RE: services desired and willingness to pay

Information overload – we all get so much information every day

Lack of coordination in some areas

Lack of understanding of citizens of how it (county) works

Lack of funds means overworked staff doing so much that talking to each other can be put on the back burner in order to accomplish goals

Government is getting too micromanaged, to the point where the people are held down

Need to make county administrator an elected position

Sometimes difficult to get good adult leadership

County / Band relationship

Too many government employees – should be figured actual cost of gov’t and bid against private co.’s

Excess regulations

Social Programs, Public Health and Quality of Life

Online Responses

Strengths/Opportunities

Willingness of certain entities within county to work collaboratively



Governmental Agencies are aware of each others fiscal resources and needs..

Good fire departments.

I would hope that Mille Lacs County always looks to be independent and not follow other counties just to get along.

City Councils are willing to work with each other to solve county problems

Residents and government leaders who truly care about the future of the county

Better cooperation between levels of government

Good police departments

Mille Lacs County has citizen's who are concerned with the overreach of government - both seen and un-seen intrusions on liberty including property rights.

Some of the commissioners understand the role of government is to preserve private property rights and not fall for regionalism

Weakness/Threats

Leaders of various entities may not be most objectives parties to enter into such discussions

Different goals & objectives.

Agenda 21

Relations with the tribal police the gang problems.

The biggest threat is government ruining our lives by dictating what we can eat,drink, think, and where we can live

Great differences in tax basis between south vs north parts of the county

Lack of a legal power as a intergovernmental unit.

Mille Lacs County looks to regional boards for comprehensive planning without knowing the interior goals of the people and the organization. Just because appointed bureaucrats are "intergovernmental" does not prove good or bad intent.

Residents of southern part of county do not understand problems northern part of count has especially when dealing with the Native American issue.

Reservation is a huge financial drain on the county, especially dealing with such issues as welfare and other social issues and law enforcement. Reservation needs their own detention system and needs to be



willing to deal with their own issues of alcoholism, drugs and gangs instead of expecting the county to take care of them.

General Comments - Intergovernmental

Through intergovernmental relations the county, cities, townships and school districts are better aware of each others needs and concerns and can work together on projects and community needs.

The words "Intergovernmental Relations" mean nothing without context. Yes people within governmental organizations should have good relations when protecting our freedom and liberty but not when trying to cram down something under the guise of going along to get along. It would be helpful to state some instances with details such as law enforcement, highway matters and the like.

This is a slippery slope. I think that the less involvement we have with government the better. We know how to run our lives and our communities, we do not need Big Brother!!

As long as the Native Americans expect the county to fund and deal with issues such as drugs, alcoholism and gangs on the reservation there will be little incentive for intergovernmental cooperation. The reservation has a seemingly unlimited number of agencies that provide funding to the reservation but nothing seems to be done with monies available to them or received by them except to buy back land and businesses and provide cash payments to reservation members. In order to make the playing field even, they need to show that they are willing to tackle some of their own problems with their own monies instead of sucking the city and county government dry with their problems.

A wise man once said, "We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools". The various governmental entities within Mille Lacs County have an ongoing opportunity to work together to provide jobs, additional tax base and make Mille Lacs County a better place to live. With that in mind, it's frustrating when the County Board refuses to issue a Conditional Use Permit to the city of Princeton that would allow the city to field apply sludge - knowing that the sludge has been tested and determined that it would have no harmful effects on the land or nearby residents. The City of Princeton is one of the major economic drivers for jobs and tax base in Mille Lacs County...the County REALLY needs to work with the city...not against the city. It's also disheartening that the County, apparently, has no interest in supporting the local organizations that are trying to preserve the historical artifacts of Mille Lacs County and its residents. I am a strong proponent of fiscal conservatism, but I'm appalled that the County doesn't see fit to give some financial support to the volunteers that are working hard to preserve our history. Thanks for asking



Social Program/Public Health/Quality of Life

City of Princeton

Strengths/Opportunities

Rum river health services (social programs)

Makes for a stronger community

Brings teaching on social issues; parenting, health, etc

Cooperation with other counties

Very good health system available

For a rural area we have an excellent amount of dr's and other health care people here

For the most part we seem to do well with what we have and are happy

Public health and hospital are good, quality of life goes with it

Weakness/Threats

Produces a dependence rather than taking responsibility

Not enough dollars to fund programs

We do not have a lot of cultural events available

Not good information or none from media

Abuse – domestic – drugs, etc. Many need to realize that it does exist

Too much regulation, a person needs to be responsible for there own life



Kathio Town Hall

Strengths/Opportunities

Good hospital

Good schools

Retirement homes

Good exercise opportunities

Clean air and clean water

Better health care

Sheriff does good job considering work load at the north end of the county

Natural resources and recreational opportunities

Hospital is way too high

Weakness/Threats

Poor school attendance

Drugs

Crime

Things for younger kids

Better library

More info for seniors on programs available at senior center

Be more friendly

Increase trail system

Stop light end of town

Not enough jobs

Too much demand for social services and law enforcement near Vineland/Onamia



Mille Lacs County Historic Courthouse – Milaca, MN

Strengths/Opportunities

Rum river health services

Quality of life is good compared to cities

Promote better health by education in schools

Libraries / museums

Good vets program

Mille Lacs county has a strong social services program

Good general environment

Good health care systems

Good support through private groups, dedicated volunteers, generous local donors that support

Good support for food shelf, church programs, rum river health services, library – free services

Rural area gives opportunity for land rights

Takes care of people who most need help

Mille Lacs residents try to help each other out – many benefits, non-profits, we work together

Many natural amenities for families

Lots of opportunities to get involved

Long term commitment to safety net

Plenty of programs

Easy to access the programs

Good drinking water in Milaca city

I enjoy the quarterly newsletter that comes out in Milaca in the city office/water/sewer department

Choice of programs, etc



Weakness/Threats

More youth programs

Pricing ourselves out of health care

Employees spread too thin

A lot of need- high unemployment rate

High demand for services

Empty properties caused by economic stress

Need less programs. Too many able body people are receiving handouts

Help people create jobs in county. Put people to work rather than keeping them on the dole

Need more living wage jobs

High level of kids receiving free or reduced lunches

Need broad band internet

Need more people to get involved

Lack of coordination

Sometimes rules and parameters from above not responsive to local needs

Healthcare dysfunctional – unaffordable for many

Social programs in this county are a huge burden on small tax base. This combined with increase foreclosure rates death sentence for county land owners

Lack of non-profits to aid in social programs

Has county made use of existing churches? Let churches know what needs are

Social programs don't lend to people getting off the welfare roles

Cost of implementing programs

Jobs in town with industry, higher paying jobs, living wage jobs

County and non-profits working together

Need more programs for couples and empty nesters



Too much concern over “easier life”

No funding required – want programs but no cost

Online Responses

Strengths/Opportunities

Many entities feel very strongly about providing such programs

not sure

County has seasoned staff operating county social program.

Public transportation

If you are a freeloader Mille Lacs County seems to welcome you with open arms.

I don't know much about Public Health, so I guess no comment there. I guess that I would have to say it is fine.

Rural Area provides a better quality of life.

I have never used any social programs so I do not know much about them either. I would have to say that lets have as few of these Social Programs as possible.

County has strong history of developing and using social programming to help all residents

I love living in Mille Lacs county. Wish the taxes were lower but over all it is a great place to live

Weakness/Threats

Hard to get past historic ways of offering services - too easy to shoot down ideas out of fear of the unknown

I'm not a participant in any of the social programs, but it feels like we have a lot of people on the public dole in this community, and that is not a good quality of life.

Increase demand for services.

Drug use

Growth of programs with no plans to undermine the causes of the growth.



A huge weakness of Mille Lacs county is the reservation issues/problems using up all of our resources and taxes. It is a HUGE problem

Social problems generated by reservation are a total county issue, not a northern vs southern issue,

Too much emphasis on government responsibility, not enough n personal responsibility

People expect the government to provide them with transportation because they failed to properly prepare financially for their retirement.

Government regulations and intrusions into the private lives of citizens. Most notorious EPA.

Native America social problems (drugs, alcoholism, gangs, etc.) continue to drain county funds

There is no push back from county government when people demand more and more.

The UN intruding on the very sovereignty of our nation. It starts at the local level of government.

General Comments – Social Programs

I'm not a participant in any of the social programs, but it feels like we have a lot of people on the public dole in this community, and that is not a good quality of life

What social programs work? Is there an audit of each and every one of the programs and if so where is the data? The government is not supposed to be the provider of things people can't afford or fail to save for. When the government does that it has to take from others. Taking ones property for the benefit of others is theft.

We, Mille Lacs county, as well as the rest of the nation will not have any quality of life if we do not slow down this big government!

Reservation needs to step up to the plate and deal with their social issues rather than expecting county residents to fund and deal with them. The reservation has the largest police force in the county with the most resources available to them - what are they doing to fight crime and deal with their social issues?

