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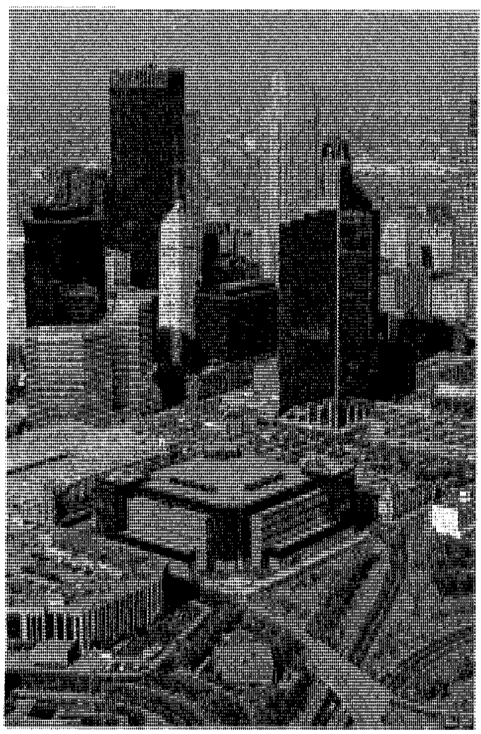
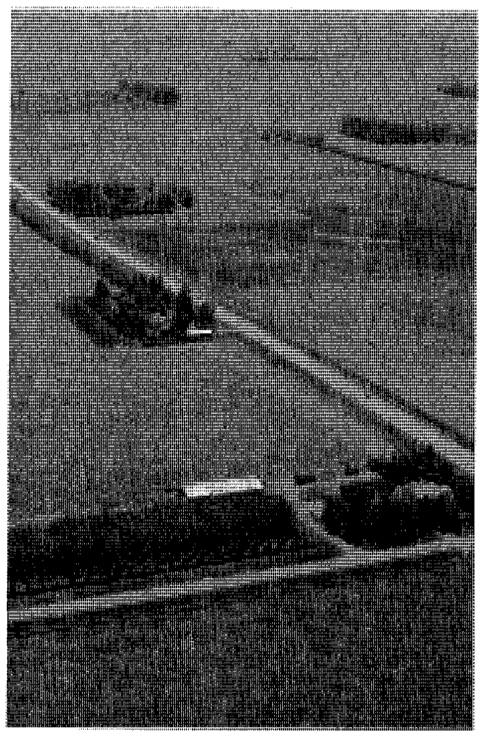
Land and Value in the Heart of the Upper Midwest

by John R. Borchert and William Casey



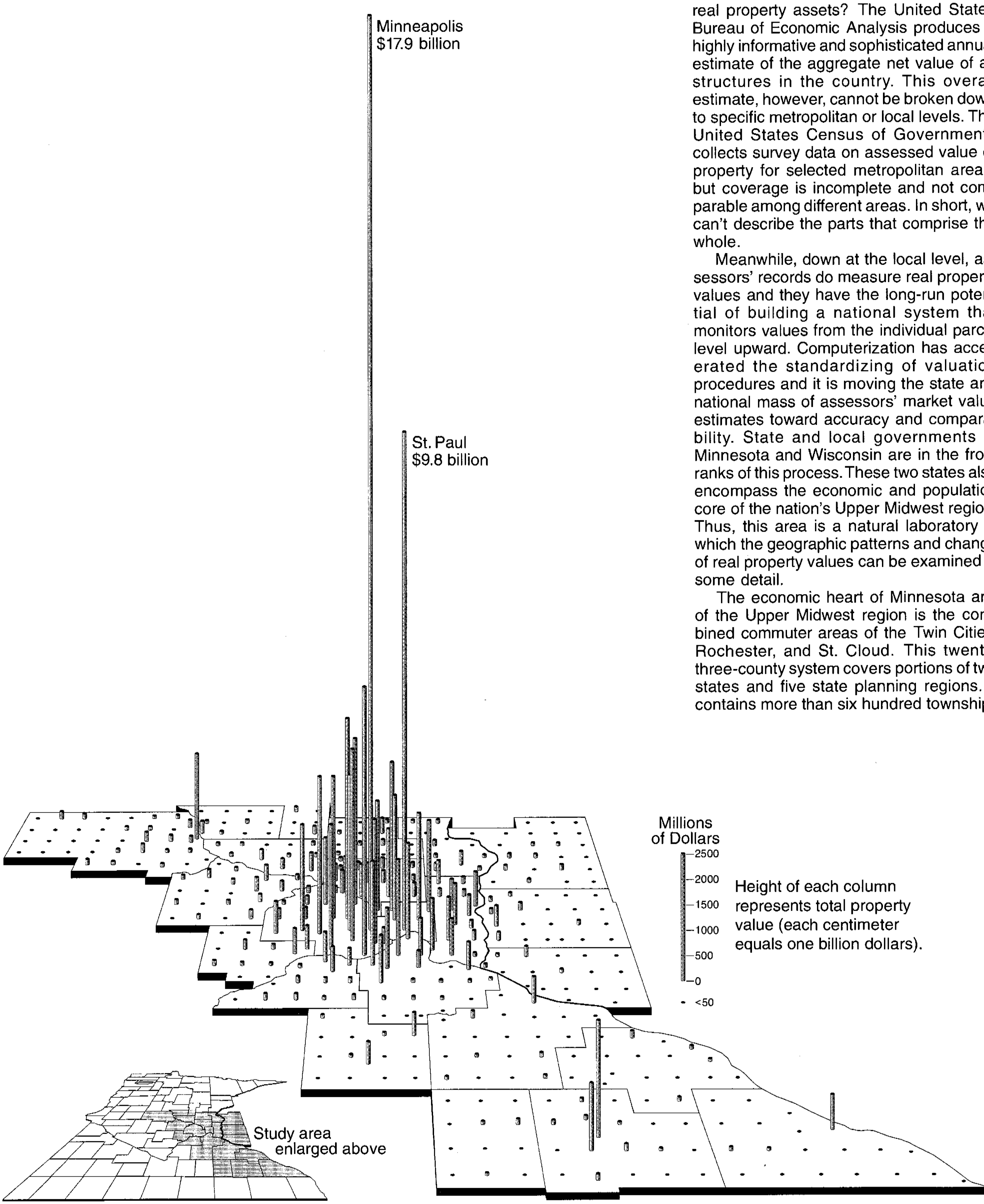


In This Issue

Most of us, most of the time, ignore the built structures in our communities or take them for granted, whether they are in use, under construction, or standing in decay. To be sure, land and buildings get our attention in many piecemeal ways. Taxes on property bring revenue to local governments, so there are often arguments about the assessments of property in the community. Occasionally, structures are the subject of debates, when zoning or preservation become an issue. During planning and construction, each building commands the intense attention of its developers, and it continues to be the object of more or less attention from its occupants. But rarely do most of us contemplate structures and their land collectively as component parts of a vast, fragile device that the human race has built to enable itself to live on the earth.

The value of the structures and land around us has been created by the investment of labor and savings from past and present generations. The investments reflect the pragmatic responses of individuals and communities to their own needs. Consequently, the value of real property assets helps to answer practical questions about management and planning. How much new development is necessary to justify a given level of investment in streets, utilities, or public institutions in the community, the region, or the nation? What is the physical plant of a community worth and what share of the citizens' savings are necessary or justified to create and maintain it? But these investments also reflect dreams and commitments to the future of places and regions. The location patterns of the accumulated value of structures not only provide a record of practical action but also add to our understanding of the larger purposes of human use of the earth.

Figure 1. Density of Property Values in the St. Cloud–Twin Cities–Rochester Corridor, 1988



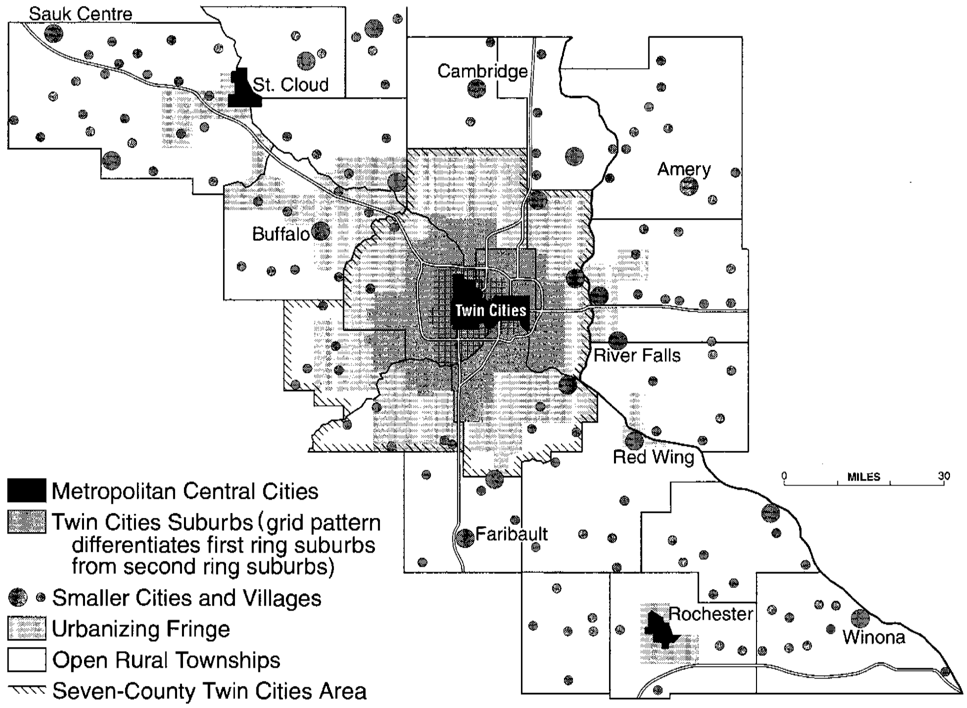
A Regional Profile of Real Property Value

Where does one look to find the value of real property assets? The United States Bureau of Economic Analysis produces a highly informative and sophisticated annual estimate of the aggregate net value of all structures in the country. This overall estimate, however, cannot be broken down to specific metropolitan or local levels. The United States Census of Governments collects survey data on assessed value of property for selected metropolitan areas; but coverage is incomplete and not comparable among different areas. In short, we can't describe the parts that comprise the whole.

Meanwhile, down at the local level, assessors' records do measure real property values and they have the long-run potential of building a national system that monitors values from the individual parcel level upward. Computerization has accelerated the standardizing of valuation procedures and it is moving the state and national mass of assessors' market value estimates toward accuracy and comparability. State and local governments in Minnesota and Wisconsin are in the front ranks of this process. These two states also encompass the economic and population core of the nation's Upper Midwest region. Thus, this area is a natural laboratory in which the geographic patterns and change of real property values can be examined in some detail.

The economic heart of Minnesota and of the Upper Midwest region is the combined commuter areas of the Twin Cities, Rochester, and St. Cloud. This twenty-three-county system covers portions of two states and five state planning regions. It contains more than six hundred townships

Figure 2. Development Density Classes Based on Property Values per Square Mile in 1988



and municipalities (minor civil divisions). Its three million inhabitants equal nearly two-thirds of the population of Minnesota and they number more than one-third of the population of the Twin Cities' primary trade and service area, which sprawls from northwest Wisconsin to eastern Montana, northern Iowa to the Canadian boundary.

Our study was a reconnaissance of the real property value of assets in this twenty-three-county area—their locations, why they are there, and their fickle patterns of change. The study was an outgrowth of a geography seminar at the University of Minnesota. The data we used for mapping property values came primarily from the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Revenue, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Minnesota State Auditor. These numbers were assembled from the reports of individual county assessors' offices to the state. All values given here are expressed in constant 1988 dollars; and all are on the conservative side.

The estimated value of all of the structures and land in these twenty-three counties in 1988 was $142 billion. At that time, the area had 1.2 percent of the population of the United States, 1.3 percent of the personal income, and 1.4 percent of the real property assets.

Distribution of Property Values in 1988

The $142 billion inventory in the study area includes not only buildings of all kinds but also non-building structures—like streets, highways, railroads, airports, and utility lines—and the land associated with these structures. The structures are both privately and publicly owned. They are both old and new. Some have just been built, others are about to be abandoned. The residents of the area enlarge, improve, use, wear out, replace, and abandon all of this in continuing cycles. In 1988, if one stacked the property value within each township and large city into a single column the map would look like Figure 1. This shows a terrain of work, dreams, and power manifested in real property value laid on top of the land. Over the years, this surface will rise with a growing population and economy and, at the same time, undulate with changes in technology, style, and speculation.

Variations in Density of Property Value

To help grasp the geographical variations in property value, we divided the MCDs into five classes, based on the density of property values per square mile. The geographic patterns of the five classes are shown in Figure 2. The classes are a useful way to summarize the thousands of MCD values in our data:

1. The *metropolitan central cities* are Minneapolis and St. Paul, St. Cloud, and Rochester.
2. The *Twin Cities suburbs* include both a first and second ring. The first ring extends northwest from Roseville to Brooklyn Center; southward to Edina, Richfield, and Bloomington, and includes West St. Paul. The second ring extends west from South St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights, through Shakopee; north through the Lake Minnetonka suburbs to Anoka; then curves east through Blaine and White Bear and south to Woodbury.
3. Embedded in the landscape are the *smaller cities and villages*. These are older communities inherited from the railroad settlement era. They developed as farm trade centers in the rail era and they range in size from Winona and Faribault, through Amery and Cambridge, down to the unlabelled hamlets that mark the routes of all the rail lines.
4. Beyond the rings of Twin Cities suburbs we identified an *urbanizing fringe*. It includes not only the moderately-dense to scattered settlements of the outer suburbs of the Twin Cities but also similar urbanizing townships on the fringes of St. Cloud, Rochester, and Red Wing as well as the freeway and lakeshore development corridor from the Twin Cities northwestward through northern Wright and southern Sherburne counties.
5. The remainder of the townships fall into an *open rural class.*

The metropolitan central cities, first and second ring suburbs, and urbanizing fringes in 1988 were the locus of $118 billion in real property value—83 percent of the study area total, with an almost identical percentage of the population. The smaller compact cities—including both the seven-county Twin Cities area's free-standing centers and places in the outlying counties—accounted for $13 billion or 9 percent of the area's property wealth. The remaining 8 percent, or $11 billion, were spread across the predominantly agricultural rural townships, although even there exurban non-farm homes and businesses accounted for a quarter to half of the values.

Variations in Value According to Land Use

Property values can also be examined according to the ways in which land is used. We divided land use into five major classes. The commercial-industrial class includes

Cover photo: The range of investment is strikingly different in familiar landscapes. In 1988 property assets in downtown Minneapolis were worth $1.2 billion per square mile, while in Wasioja township (half-way between Rochester and Owatonna) open farmland was valued at $770 thousand per square mile.

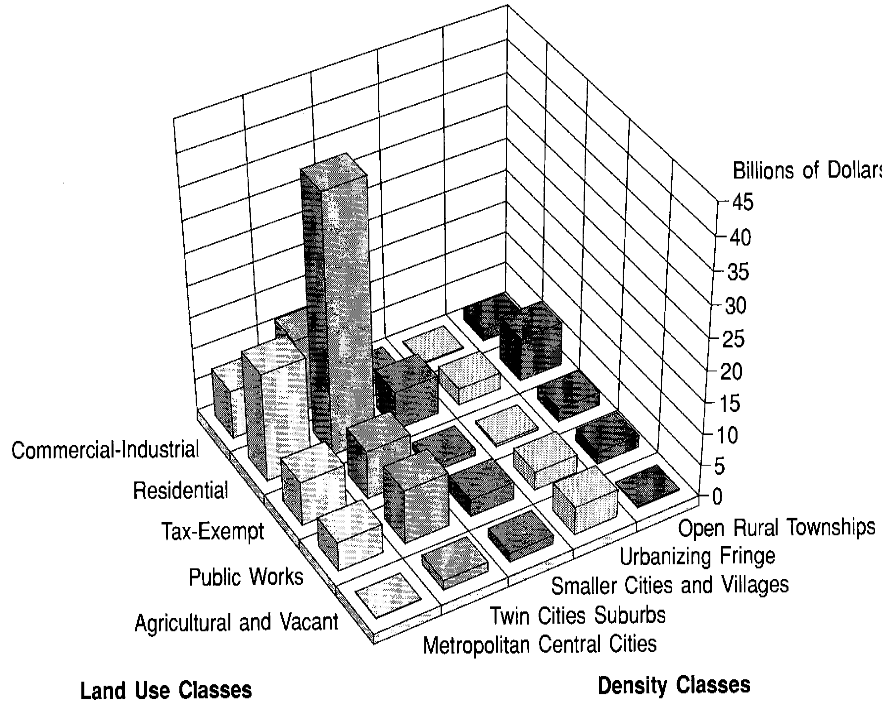
not only the full range of retail, office, and industrial buildings but also taxable, privately-owned electrical utilities, communications, and railroad land and buildings. The residential class includes all dwellings. The tax-exempt class includes both government and non-government property such as schools, civic centers, churches, hospitals, and cemeteries. The public works class is mainly roads and streets, but also includes city water plants and sewers. Vacant and agricultural lands are combined. In the cities and suburbs, this class is entirely in vacant, developable land, often on the fringes, while in the rural townships it is almost entirely in agricultural land.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of real property assets by both density class and land use class. Most striking is the concentration of value in the combined residential and tax-exempt properties. The $74 billion in residential investments provides shelter directly for the area's one million households. The $18 billion in tax-exempt property is used in services for these households—education, health, religion, public protection, parks, and cemeteries. If one excludes public works and vacant and agricultural lands, and considers only the buildings in the area, four-fifths of the total investment is dedicated to the "quality of life" activities of home and community.

Investments in private commercial-industrial properties and public works are about equal—$22 billion and $21 billion, respectively. The large role of public works is explained almost entirely by the high value of the highway and street network. That system accounted for more than nine-tenths of the estimated value of public works, and nearly one-seventh of the total value of all property. The shift since 1920 from transportation by rail to transportation by highway and air moved most transportation assets from the private sector into the public sector.

The highest density areas also have the highest ratios of land and building development to public works investment. The Twin Cities and its developed suburbs average more than $6.5 billion of residential and commercial-industrial development for every $1 billion of public works. In the urbanizing fringe the ratio is $2.4 billion to $1 billion. These data reinforce the idea that, given today's technology, public works investments in high-density areas are the most efficient, while investment in low-density non-farm areas is a relative luxury.

Figure 3. Real Property Assets, 1988



How Location and Legacy Shape Property Values

Location creates property value. The location of a place is relative to the location of other places, and the value of that location depends upon the ease of reaching it from other places—its accessibility. Investment in buildings is concentrated in the most accessible locations. Investment in roads and streets is greatest in locations with the highest concentrations of buildings. High accessibility encourages investment in buildings, and high investment in buildings encourages investment in transportation.

Accessibility had one meaning in the railway age, up to about 1920, and has had quite a different meaning in the auto-airplane age, since 1920. Before the 1920s virtually all movement of people and goods between cities depended on railroads. Therefore, the growth of most villages and all cities emanated from the railroad station. Local movement to and from the station depended on streetcar (in the larger cities), wagon, and foot. Growth crowded as near as possible to the railroad station. Factories and warehouses depended completely on railroads for linkage to their distant markets and raw materials, but they also needed a local labor force, so they located along the railroad line but also crowded as near as possible to the center of the city. The result was more compact and higher density development than we know today.

Though inexorable, the change from the railway era has been gradual. We find that the mix of land uses in different types of settlement still reflects the past. For example, compared with the suburbs and the urbanizing fringe, the metropolitan central cities have large shares of their property value in high-density commercial and industrial development (Figure 4). The land use mix in the smaller cities and villages closely resembles that of the metropolitan central cities. The pattern of development in all of these places is a legacy from the rail era. They were the most accessible locations on the rail network. Their high densities and mix of development reflect the constraints of horse-drawn, streetcar, and pedestrian movement.

There is an overriding reason why the response to change has been gradual. Structures have long lives—on the average, more than a century. Hence, growth tends to be incremental, in and around places that already exist. Each generation adds structures to accommodate its own growth in numbers and wealth, yet no generation can afford to replace more than a small percent of the billions of dollars worth of structures it inherits in any decade. So each generation must also continue to use most of its legacy of buildings and other structures from earlier times.

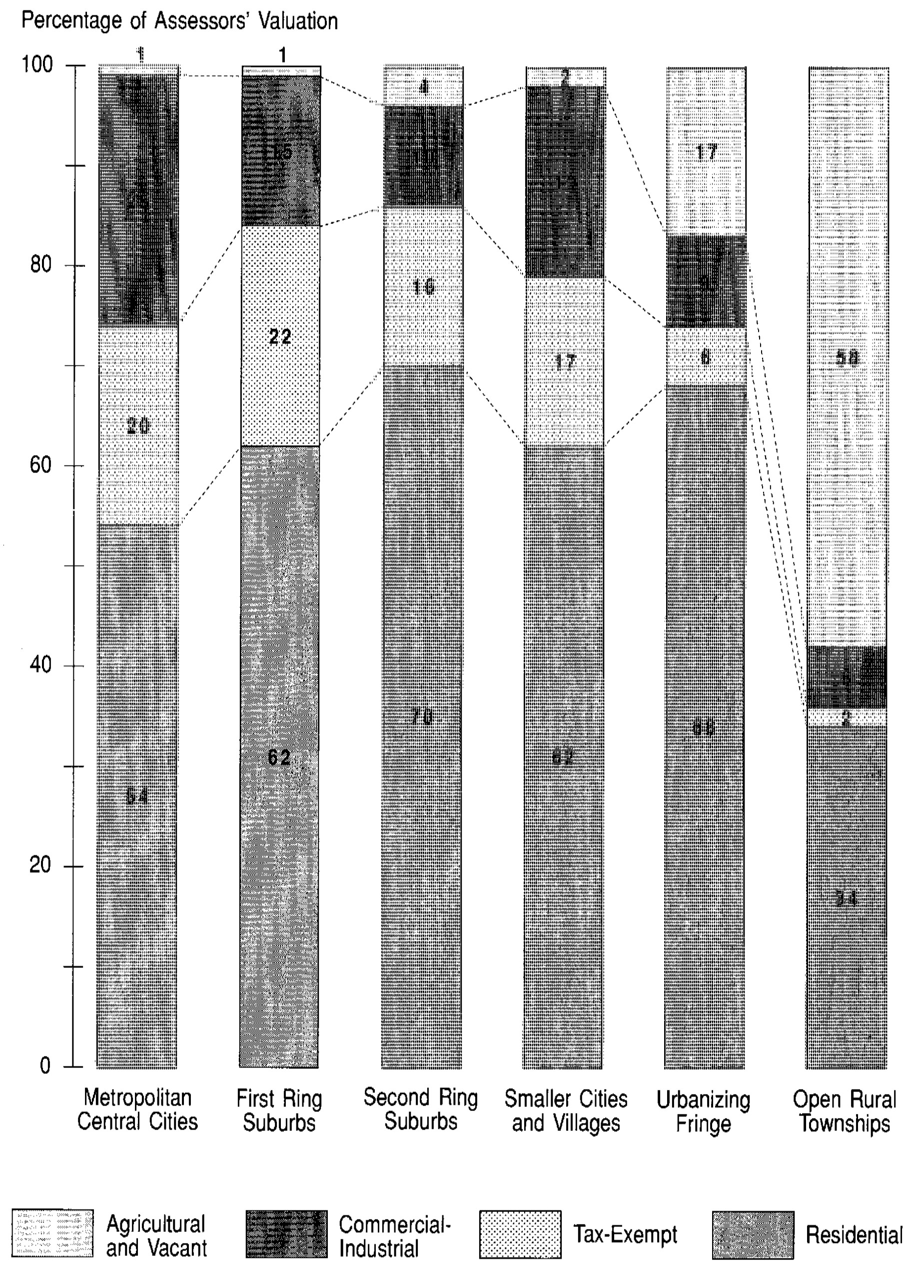
In line with this tendency, investment in the regional highway system has partly reinforced the historic rail pattern. New roads serve the older rail-era cities. As a result, the location and land-use patterns of the rail-era cities, both large and small, are partly anachronistic. Because of the long life of structures, the change from settlement patterns of the rail age to those of the automobile and airplane age is evolving only gradually over several generations. For the most part, the bigger the city, the greater its inertia; and, of course, anything that increases the life expectancy of structures also increases the inertia.

While auto-era growth has continued to concentrate around the historic metropolitan nodes, investment has spread out in successively widening suburban rings. Figure 4 suggests that residential investment has led the outward march. Residential property comprises only a little more than half the total value in the metropolitan central cities, but it rises to more than 60 percent in the first-ring suburbs and more than two-thirds in the second ring and in the urbanizing fringe.

At the same time, the share of nonresidential property value in the suburbs and urbanizing fringe is rising. Tax-exempt and commercial-industrial uses account for only a little more than one-tenth of all value in the urbanizing fringe; yet they have grown to comprise about one-fourth of the total in the second-ring suburbs, and more than one-third of the total in the first ring. Thus, it appears that business developments and tax-exempt schools, churches, and other institutions have followed the outward march, as residential expansion has created new markets and needs.

Beyond the suburban rings, urbanization has reached out farthest and fastest in the highway corridors. Public decisions on freeway timing and location were constrained by the settlement patterns already in place, but the freeways have also influenced the direction of new growth. Development investment has naturally favored highway proximity, though widely dispersed lake shores and cultural community ties have prevented any landslide toward the freeways.

Figure 4. Land Use Mix in Different Development Density Classes, 1988



Development of Value Within the Twin Cities

With more than one-quarter of the value per square mile on only 4 percent of the land, the Twin Cities are at the peak of the property value map in our study area. Overall, they were valued at more than $260 million per square mile in 1988 though at closer observation, of course, we see that values vary greatly within the cities. The map in Figure 5 outlines the one-mile-square sections that make up the central district (C) of each city, along with the four historic directions of growth around each center. Figure 6 presents the average property value per square mile in each of these ten sectors of the Twin Cities in 1988.

The central districts in each city attracted the highest level of investment when they were the nexus of the regional rail network, and they have continued to be the focus of subsequent high levels of rebuilding and expansion. From the beginning, market forces have been reinforced by public decisions. Property values averaged nearly $1.2 billion per square mile in central Minneapolis in 1988, more than half in commercial values and a quarter in tax-exempt institutional buildings. Comparable figures in central St. Paul were more than $860 million, with about 43 percent commercial and 42 percent tax-exempt. These numbers reflect mainly the greater office and retail development of central Minneapolis and the state capitol complex in St. Paul.

The main rail-industry corridor ran through the cities from north Minneapolis to South St. Paul. Within the corridor and northeast of it, development was divided from downtown by the rail lines. Industries brought the most widespread blight to this area, and its historic separation from the rest of the city is still visible.

The highest residential values in Twin Cities neighborhoods are southwest of both downtowns, as well as in the southern quadrant of Minneapolis. During the growth of the cities, these were the directions that offered the fewest barriers for the burgeoning "white-collar" commuter labor force in gaining access to downtown. That locational advantage was reinforced by the natural site advantages of river bluffs, lakes in southwest Minneapolis, rolling lands near Minnehaha Creek in south Minneapolis, and high, rolling land in the Highland Park area of southwestern St. Paul.

A surprising 31 percent of residential property values lies within the two central sectors of the Twin Cities. The number reflects not only very high-density apartment blocks in both cities, but also portions of Summit Avenue in St. Paul, with its high-value homes. Nonetheless, more than two-thirds of residential property values lie in the outlying neighborhoods, and these values are not uniformly distributed. Values per square mile in the southwestern sectors are typically about twice as high as those in the northeast or northwest. In fact, southwest and south Minneapolis and

Figure 5. Sectors of the Twin Cities Based on Historic Development Patterns

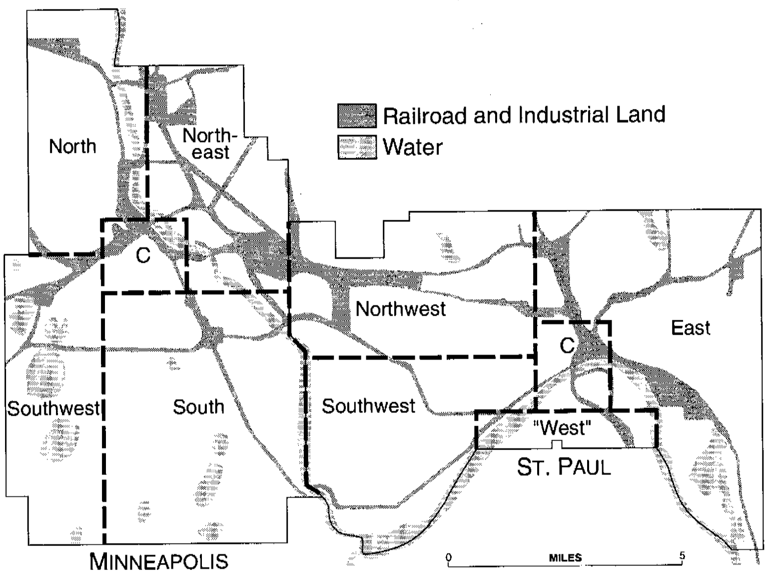
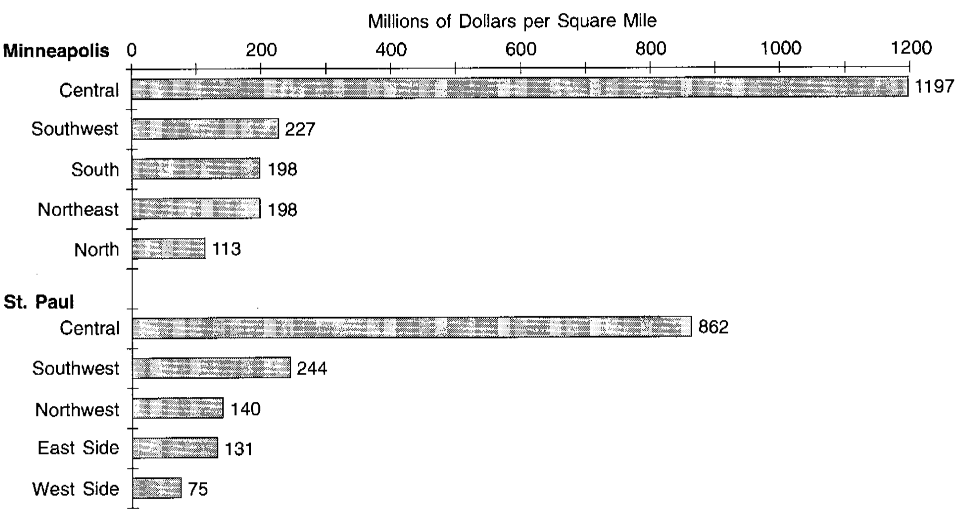


Figure 6. Property Values in the Historic Sectors of the Twin Cities, 1988*



* See Figure 5 for a map of the sectors. Public works are excluded from the values given here.

Table 1. How Property Value Changed in One Composite Urbanizing Township, 1975-1988*

	Residential	Agricultural-Vacant	Commercial-Industrial	Tax-Exempt	Public Works	Total
Property Value in 1975	30	12	1	5	8	56
Increases in Location Value	17	9	0.3			26.3
New Building and Remodeling	32		1.8	2.5	14	50.3
Decreases from Deterioration	-2	-1	-0.1	-0.5	-4	-7.6
Changes Due to Land Transfers		-1		1		0
Increases in Crop Land Value		4				4
Property Value in 1988	77	23	3	8	18	129
Net Change 1975-1988	+47	+11	+2	+3	+10	+73

* In millions of 1988 dollars.

southwestern St. Paul contain nearly 40 percent of the total residential value in the two cities.

The historic northeast-southwest dichotomy in neighborhood property values persists beyond Minneapolis, into the first and second ring suburbs. In the first ring, value per square mile is twice as high in the southwest and south as it is in the north and northeast. In the second ring, the figure is twice as high in the southwest suburbs as it is in all of the others. The historic trend, once based on accessibility to downtown, was reinforced by the suburban terrain. Flattish residential building sites on the sand plain to the north, have generally commanded lower prices than the rolling, lake-studded glacial landscapes to the south and west.

Change in Property Values

The cultural landscape is part of a constant and unavoidable process of change. Each week new buildings, roads, power lines, and pipes are added to the system; but at the same time, the existing stock of structures ages slightly, slipping imperceptibly in value. What appears in principle to be a straightforward transformation actually involves shifts of value that are multi-faceted in their complexity and often puzzling in their detail.

To appreciate some of the factors involved, consider the changing value over time in one minor civil division (MCD), the smallest level for which we collected data. Visualize a township in the urbanizing fringe of the Twin Cities commuting area. Its location is thirty to forty miles from the two downtowns, twenty to twenty-five miles beyond the freeway corridor that circles the metropolitan area. The township boundaries enclose thirty-six square miles of rolling, glacial land. The land is partly built up but mostly field, pasture, and woods, among scattered lakes and wetlands. Numerous arterial highways crisscross the area and tie it to the rest of the region.

This community's population grew from 1,500 to 2,500 between 1975 and 1988. Meanwhile, the estimated value of its real property increased from $56 million at the start of the period to $129 million at its close—with an accompanying transformation of the landscape. Table 1 illustrates the main changes that added up to an increase of $73 million in property values—$60 million in taxable property and $13 million in tax-exempt property and in public works.

The value of virtually all property in the township increased because of the growth of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. This single township was part of a bigger and richer market in 1988 than it had been in 1975. Because of outward expansion, it was effectively nearer the main metropolis than it had been. We refer to the value added by the size and proximity of the metropolitan market as "location value." Increased location value added $17 million to the value of residential property and another $9 million to the value of vacant land in this particular township.

In addition to growth because of location value, new construction added just over $50 million. Contractors built three hundred new homes and remodeled perhaps thirty old ones. Commercial builders added a strip mall and other new stores, restaurants, a self-storage center, and miles of new utility lines, along with the remodeling of an old creamery and lumber yard for light industrial use. In the tax-exempt sector, local governments built a new community center, fire station, and additional schoolrooms. Besides all the newly taxable structures—and partly because of them—state and local governments built and rebuilt more than forty miles of roads.

On the other hand, other changes partly offset these gains. More than $7 million in value disappeared as a result of depreciation. Some old homes suffered from age, obsolescence, and neglect. Many farm outbuildings, no longer needed, fell into ruins. An ill-conceived cluster of seasonal cottages fell victim to mysteriously rising lake levels. A few commercial properties lost value—not only due to age and physical obsolescence, but also because a new highway bypassed them. Storm damage and vandalism took a small toll. Some agricultural and vacant land shifted from private ownership to public ownership. Despite the widespread collapse in farmland value following the speculative boom of the 1970s, agricultural and vacant land in this township showed a net gain because of the potential for urban development.

The township we describe is a composite, and it is only a small part of the twenty-three-county study area, but it illustrates the provocative questions and uncertainties we face in describing and interpreting property value changes. The $60 million growth in taxable property value in this one township accounted for little more than one one-thousandth of the increase for the entire Rochester–Twin Cities–St. Cloud corridor. An impressive $49.5 billion in taxable value was added between 1975 and 1988 in this twenty-three-county area (Figure 7).* The thirteen-year increase exceeded the entire accumulated value up to 1975. More than four-fifths of the growth—$40.5 billion—was concentrated in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Thus the share of property assets in the region's core area continued its 125-year rise.

The dominance of residential property persisted (Figure 8). Residential assets accounted for three-fourths of the total value in 1975 and three-fourths of the 1975-88 growth as well. One can see the phenomenal growth that occurred in the Twin Cities second ring suburbs and the significant spread of residential development to the small cities and villages and to the countryside of the outlying counties. The two main concentrations of agricultural and vacant land value are in the ring of urban land speculation on the edges of the Twin Cities and in the rural, predominantly farming, townships on the edges of the region.

Figure 8. Increase in Taxable Property Value by Density Class and Land Use, 1975-1988

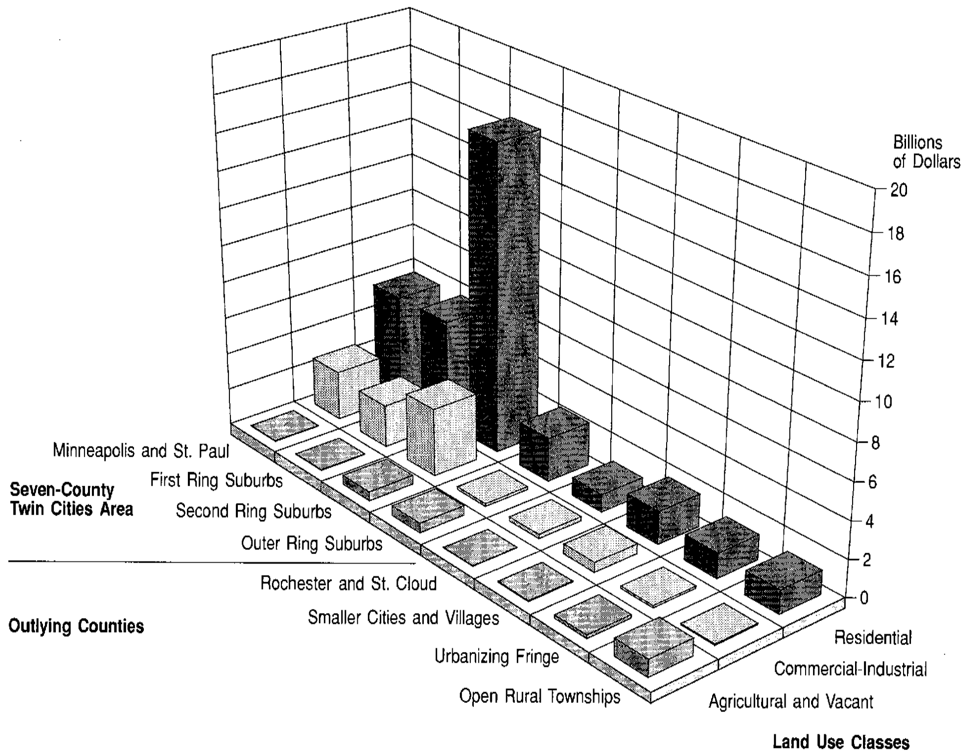
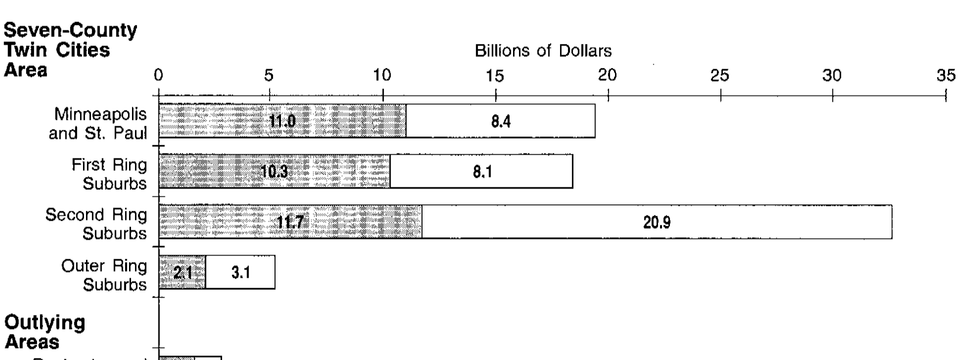


Figure 7. Growth of Taxable Property Values by Density Classes, 1975-1988



* Both density and land use categories had to be changed when we began comparing 1988 data with 1975 data because of discrepancies in reporting. Tax-exempt and public works categories were dropped in the land use classes. We redivided the density classes into those inside the seven-county Twin Cities metorpolitan area and those in counties outside the area because of the uniformity of reporting that was available in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Planning Region. Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the first and second ring suburbs remain the same as on Figure 2. Outer ring suburbs includes the remainder of the seven-county Twin Cities area, including its smaller cities and villages.

Overall, property assets rose much faster than inflation-adjusted income, which increased about 25 percent during this period. Explaining the difference is neither an exact nor a wholly definitive process. Important elements might be the general expansion of credit and the ability of developers to tap national and international capital and concentrate investment in a particular growth center at a particular time.

Change in the Outlying Counties

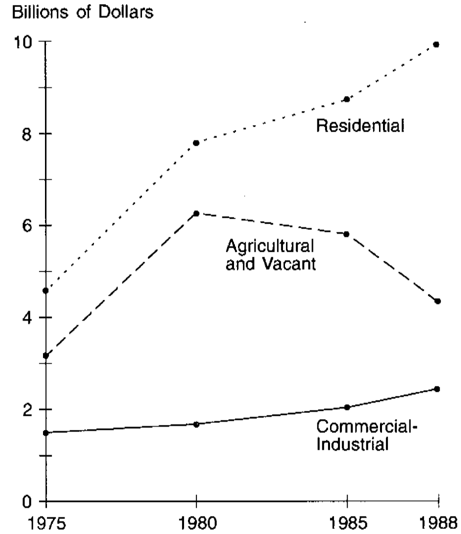
Outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the market value of taxable property grew 81 percent between 1975 and 1988. This compares with a growth of 115 percent in the Twin Cities area. But the overall 81 percent masks disparities depending on how the land was used (Figure 9). Residential property value increased 117 percent, slightly less than the Twin Cities area rate—reflecting partly slower economic growth and partly a smaller average new-home size. Similar to the Twin Cities area, 72 percent of the total increase in property values in the outlying counties was in the residential class. Values for commercial and industrial property in the outlying counties increased by 63 percent, substantially below the rate of similar new investment in the Twin Cities area. This probably reflects the absence of monumental office construction and more modest industrial construction styles.

But the dramatic feature of Figure 9 is the roller-coaster in agricultural land values. They nearly doubled between 1975 and 1980 but had fallen 31 percent by 1988, and subsequently they have lost most of the rest of the earlier gain. Between 1985 and 1988, estimated market value of vacant and agricultural land fell by 25 percent in the outlying counties, while it rose typically between 8 and 15 percent in the Twin Cities area. The rise and fall reflect the wave of speculation that followed the increase in crop prices triggered by the United States–Soviet grain agreement in the early 1970s and the subsequent collapse of that boom a decade later.

The Path Ahead

Assessors records, on which our study was based, have the potential for building a national system for monitoring land and value. Assessors' estimates of the market value of real property are an important part of the data going into geographic information systems (GIS). The ability to map public records and compare patterns, both graphically and statistically, brings with it a profound technological revolution. In the private sector, applications of GIS are well advanced in land development and property management, and particularly in the geographical aspects of marketing and utilities. The automation of both data handling and mapping has already resulted in improvements in the accuracy and availability of the records, and it promises much more on those counts.

Figure 9. Property Value Change in Counties Outside the Seven-County Twin Cities Area, 1975-1988*



To be sure, there is much to be done before the promise can be realized. Some tasks are as elemental as identifying parcels by their location in the original Public Land Survey. For a national system to be usable it is important that the same units of measurement are used in every state. It will be more difficult to generate data on the value of public works. Notwithstanding incredibly large and complex organizational problems, a standardized nation-wide network will inevitably emerge. It will be possible to build national land use and land value data at every level, aggregated from local records. The new technology and the system it produces will help narrow the range of speculation and error in documenting and understanding the complex processes of land development.

Property value records are a remarkable set of data. They record through time and over space the oscillating terrain of land use and value both in public and in private domains. They have great current importance, and potentially greater future importance, for use in property accounting and planning. Moreover, these records are a rare, if not unique, means of describing the nation's settlement system. The records can be aggregated from city lot to woodlot to field to ranch to region to nation. Though it might surprise assessors to hear it, their observations provide a link between architects, builders, and financiers (who create structures with ideas, materials, and money) and planners and politicians (who regulate where buildings will go and how they will be built), occupants (who live in the buildings everyday), and critics (who admire or dislike them).

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Deadlock on Hazardous Waste

by Gregory E. McAvoy

The need to dispose of hazardous waste poses a challenge to public decision-makers and state officials. Waste collection provides a clean and safe environment for the general public but concentrating hazardous wastes increases the risks for those living near the waste disposal sites. Though many attempts were made to site new hazardous waste facilities in the United States during the 1980s, none were successful. Minnesota's experience with this problem illuminates many of the obstacles.

In 1980, the Minnesota legislature passed the Waste Management Act, which authorized the state to assess the hazardous waste problem and the feasibility of establishing a hazardous waste landfill in Minnesota. Hazardous wastes are inorganic wastes, largely heavy metals. In Minnesota they are mostly by-products from chrome plating or ash from 3M's hazardous waste incineration plant. Nuclear waste is not classified as hazardous waste, but is dealt with as a separate issue.

State officials originally planned to choose a site for a hazardous waste landfill based on geological criteria, but by 1984 a moratorium was imposed on the siting process because of public opposition. In 1986, amendments to the Waste Management Act authorized a voluntary siting process for a new stabilization and containment facility. Instead of landfill, the state would build a plant to process and stabilize waste in concrete pellets, which would then be stored in the containment facility. The county chosen for the site would be compensated. Thirteen counties volunteered, but by 1988 all but Red Lake and Koochiching Counties had dropped out.

To learn more about the kind of deadlock that hazardous waste disposal was bringing between citizens and public officials, I interviewed state officials and residents in both Koochiching and Red Lake Counties. I also conducted two random sample surveys of citizens in these counties during 1990. The survey in Koochiching County (spring 1990) was conducted after the county had withdrawn from negotiations to house the new stabilization and containment facility. The survey in Red Lake County (summer 1990) preceded a referendum in November, when citizens voted down the proposal that they house the new facility. No site has yet been found.

Not in My Back Yard

Typically, the impasse between public officials advocating siting and citizens challenging their efforts is portrayed as a consequence of the NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) syndrome. Minnesota's case illustrates that invoking the NIMBY syndrome obscures the nature of the conflict. The impasse is not simply one of self-interest, although this does play a role, it is also the result of different assessments of the risk and who should bear it. My research in Koochiching and Red Lake Counties showed that despite the interest in a hazardous waste facility among county officials in both counties, opposition among county residents was quite strong and highly visible. In Red Lake County the survey showed 25 percent wanted the facility while 60 percent opposed it. In Koochiching County, 17 percent said they had favored the facility and 70 percent said they had opposed it.

Perceptions of Risk

Despite the perception among state officials that the facility was safe and their attempts to convey this to local citizens, the citizens in both counties were generally suspicious of state claims regarding safety. The key issues were groundwater contamination, transportation of the materials, and declining property values.

The belief that the facility would threaten the groundwater was widely held. As Velma Oakland, an elementary school teacher in Red Lake County and one of the founders of the Concerned Citizens Against Hazardous Waste, explained:

> "I chose to live up here for the clean water and the clean air, and I guess that is what we have going for us in Northern Minnesota. We've got the environmental, the health, all these different things going for us. If they bring a site like this in, what could happen as far as ground water contamination?"

In the survey, citizens were asked if they believed "the chances of the hazardous waste facility polluting the groundwater were high." In both counties, about two-thirds of those surveyed agreed with this statement.

In both counties, if the facility had been built, untreated waste would have been trucked approximately 250 miles. The traffic was estimated at four or five truck loads per day. As one citizen put it:

> "Knowing the accident rates of commercial trucking and the quality of the roads to be travelled and the condition of the roads in the winter, I would have expected to see a spill of the untreated waste in a lake, river, or water-filled ditch along the way."

Neighboring counties were equally concerned. Beltrami County, just south of Koochiching, passed a resolution asking the Koochiching board to allow it input in the decision-making process. They argued that they had a stake in the process because the waste would be transported across most of their county.

Asked if they agreed that the chance of hazardous waste accidentally spilling during transport to the treatment facility was small, citizens in the two counties were divided. In Red Lake County, 50 percent disagreed while 35 percent agreed. In Koochiching County, 61 percent disagreed and 26 percent agreed.

Citizens' assessments of risk differed starkly from assessments by decision-makers at the Waste Management Board. State officials were confident that the facility posed little threat to the groundwater and that the risks of an accident threatening the population were minimal. In the minds of policy-makers, the citizens' fears about groundwater contamination were considerably inflated. And, they argued, transportation of the waste constituted less of a threat than transportation of other chemicals. One of the strong proponents of the facility, Gene Ulring, the Red Lake County engineer, said:

> "Local farmers are a much, much greater threat—pesticide spills or gasoline spills. This waste is not that volatile, and the fumes won't kill you. Some of this stuff hauled up and down the freeway everyday will."

Who Benefits?

An issue related to risk assessment is the evaluation of who will benefit and who will potentially be hurt by a hazardous waste facility. State officials clearly believed that the counties would benefit from the compensation package they were offering, as did many county commissioners. In addition, they believed that the facility would contribute to the general welfare of Minnesota through the safe disposal of some of the hazardous waste produced in the state. They assumed that Minnesota industry would benefit from a disposal facility within the state, since it would reduce shipping costs for some and provide a measure of insurance against future liability for others.

State officials also tried to push for some compensation for those directly adjacent to the facility site. They were sensitive to the fact that some people were at greater risk from the facility. But state officials thought the facility would benefit future generations of Minnesotans. The survey showed, on the other hand, that a majority of citizens in Red Lake County thought a hazardous waste facility might harm future generations. They were asked, "Who do you think will be hurt most" if a hazardous waste facility is built? Fifty-three percent said "future generations of Minnesotans," 51 percent said "county residents," 21 percent said "no one," 20 percent said "residents of nearby counties," and 10 percent said "residents of the state as a whole."*

Trust

On some public policy issues, citizens are willing to put their trust in public officials and delegate decision-making to them. However, this kind of trust is notably absent from decision about hazardous waste. The survey suggests that public officials were not successful in overcoming citizens' initial suspicions. The survey asked people to respond to the statement, "On technical issues like the disposal of hazardous waste, I trust the state government to look out for my best interest and the interest of Minnesota." In Koochiching County 45 percent disagreed while 41 percent agreed with the statement. In Red Lake County, 46 percent disagreed and 36 percent agreed.

Not unexpectedly, people who supported the facility seemed more willing to accept the state's claims about its safety. Ron Linder of Concerned Citizens for a Clean Environment said:

> "We're living in a high-tech society. We've got to have faith in these people whether we want to or not, because the average person just doesn't understand these things."

Dan Joyce, a member of the Koochiching advisory council, echoed these sentiments. He felt that the state could be trusted and that the benefits it was offering made the facility attractive.

Location of the Facility

Many people felt that the facility should be located closer to the Twin Cities. Citizens argued that it was unfair to put the burden of risk on communities that produced very little hazardous waste. Since most of the waste is produced in the Twin Cities, metro area residents should assume the risk. The jobs and income that are generated from industrial production are the benefits that come with hazardous waste and those that receive such benefits should bear the majority of the risk.

This belief was echoed in responses to the survey questions as well. Citizens were asked about alternatives for coping with hazardous waste. In Koochiching County, 76 percent of the respondents agreed that the facility should be built closer to the Twin Cities. In Red Lake County, 66 percent of the respondents agreed that the facility should be located nearer the metropolitan area.

Most state officials, on the other hand, felt that Minnesota's moral obligation to ensure long-term protection of the environment justified having the facility anywhere in the state. All Minnesotans, they argued, must assume responsibility for disposing of hazardous waste. Similarly, supporters of the facility in the counties argued that this was an issue in which all citizens must work together to protect the environment. Both state officials and county supporters insisted that citizens in remote areas are beneficiaries of industrial production, such as computer chips, and therefore were contributors to the hazardous waste problem. The facility was necessary to protect the environment from the degradation that could be caused by improper storage of hazardous waste.

Conclusion

One of the key issues in this debate is the NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) syndrome. In academic writing, in debates about hazardous waste facilities across the country, and in the conflict over Minnesota's hazardous waste facility, the language of NIMBY is frequently invoked. State officials and academic observers consistently see citizen opposition as emanating from parochial, uninformed, and overly emotional thinking. Despite the pervasiveness of the NIMBY syndrome, it should, in fact, be viewed with caution. The danger of invoking NIMBY arguments is that legitimate objections may too easily be dismissed.

As this case demonstrates, citizens often have important objections to the way state officials implement policy. Citizens in the counties were generally in agreement that the facility should be built closer to the Twin Cities where most of the hazardous waste is produced. Building it there would reduce transportation costs, making it more attractive to Minnesota businesses as well as reducing the risk of a spill. In this case, citizens' objections were shared by important players in the hazardous waste arena. Some of the major waste producers, like 3M, and some legislators expressed similar complaints about the remote siting.

The quandary remains, however. Citizens everywhere view hazardous waste disposal facilities as too risky to have in their communities, but we have vast quantities of hazardous waste materials already produced that need to be safely disposed of and we are producing much more on a daily basis. Can the deadlock between citizens and experts be overcome?

A strategy attempted in California may provide an alternative. The strategy was intended to redirect the responsibility for safe treatment of waste from the state to county level. This approach, known as YIMBY (Yes-In-Many-Back-Yards), makes each county cope with its own hazardous wastes. Six counties in southern California tried the approach recently, but with mixed results.

In the California approach, each county agreed that it was part of the problem and that it would take steps to manage the waste it produced. Hazardous waste was to move across county lines so that the hazardous waste facilities would be fully used. The location of the facilities were to be determined by private contractors who would manage and operate them. The

* Those surveyed could give more than one answer.

project broke down when it came to agreeing on the number and types of facilities needed in the six county area. Before the impasse could be resolved, the state passed new rules for hazardous waste planning that made the six county effort obsolete.

The advantage of the YIMBY strategy is that communities with the greatest problems are forced to put the most effort and resources into finding a solution. By localizing the decision and promoting citizen involvement, communities can learn about the need to protect their environment from damage. After assessing the problems in their area, citizens will develop a clearer sense of the immediate need and solutions can be developed. By pushing the siting to the local level, citizens get more of a sense that everyone is doing their part, rather than some communities assuming all or most of the burden. The disparity in perceptions of risk between experts who would guide decision-making and residents may still persist, but creative solutions like YIMBY may be the best hope for safely and equitably resolving the deadlock that persists in Minnesota and across the country.

Gregory McAvoy recently received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in political science. CURA provided a grant for him to survey citizens in Koochiching and Red Lake counties. This article represents a capsule version of his Ph.D. thesis. McAvoy is now working as a program evaluator with the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

Project Awards

In an attempt to keep our readers more up to date about CURA projects, we are featuring a few capsule descriptions of projects currently underway in each issue of the ***CURA Reporter.***

Chicano-Latino Projects

CURA has for a number of years supported a variety of projects with the Chicano-Latino community in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The most recent projects have focused on a number of areas:

Research. For three years now, CURA has shared expenses for a half-time graduate research assistant working with a collaborative involving Ramsey County's Community Human Services Department, Metropolitan State University, and Chicanos Latinos Unidos en Servicio (CLUES). The collaboration provides community-based research on issues of importance to the local Hispanic community. Results of the collaboration include the formation of HACER (Hispanic Advocacy for Community Empowerment through Research), which recently hired its first director, and the organization of the Hispanic Child Care Council, a parents' organization pressing for more adequate and culturally appropriate child care for the Hispanic community.

Education. This is the second year of support for a graduate research assistant working with the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership on a variety of research projects. A major accomplishment the first year was a report analyzing the low participation rate of Chicano and Latino young people in summer enrichment programs. This year, research is focusing on the transition from high school to college for students of color and how this compares to the experience of white students.

Equity. Two graduate research assistants have worked this past summer and now for the academic year with the new La Raza Federation. La Raza seeks "to empower the Hispanic community in Minnesota to achieve socio-economic equity through research and advocacy." The students have staffed several of La Raza's committees and are working with HACER and the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council on a major project concerning Hispanic children in poverty.

Careers and Abuse. In the latest round of Communiversity grants, CURA supported students working with the Minnesota Hispanic Education Program. They are helping to conduct its twelfth annual Career Education Fair, and with Casa de Esperanza to develop a resource book on domestic abuse from the experiences of Chicana/Latina women.

Planning Internships in Local Government

This CURA program offers help to local government planning administrators while providing hands-on learning experiences for graduate students in the Humphrey Institute's Master of Planning in Public Affairs Program. Local communities needing help on specific issues apply to CURA and compete for the assistance of a graduate intern. Four communities are involved this year, in the fourth year of the internship's operation.

City of Shakopee. A graduate student is involved in current planning—researching and writing staff reports for a variety of departmental procedures, including some reports to the City Council. The student has been included in many meetings with the Planning Commission and developers on topics such as wetland preservation. The student is also revising application forms and clarifying their use with the new regulations for zoning and wetlands.

Washington County. The county is updating its comprehensive plan for land use, transportation, and other physical development. A graduate student is working on data for the update, in particular, mapping information from the census that applies to the county regarding its socioeconomic profile, land use, development, housing, recreation, and other relevant issues.

City of Crystal. A graduate student is helping the city meet all the state requirements for being designated as a Minnesota Star City. In addition, the student is working with staff to encourage neighborhood-based organizations to become more active in city affairs.

City of Robbinsdale. The city is going through a total review of its comprehensive plan and a graduate student is working with it through this process. The student is also working on a revision of the city's sign codes and will be making recommendations to the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Food Shelves in Minnesota

by Janine A. Laird

In 1989 and again in 1993 CURA funded an operations survey of Minnesota food shelves. Half of the shelves in the state were mailed questionnaires. Eighty-one percent responded. This article reports some of the results of those surveys.
—the Editor

There are about 330 food shelves in Minnesota—places where people can go for free groceries. Unlike congregate dining sites, where hot meals are served, food shelves allow people to take food home and prepare it themselves. The first food shelf was opened by the Salvation Army in Duluth in 1886, but over half of today's food shelves began in the early 1980s, between 1981 and 1985. Today's food shelves are located in churches, in community centers, in city halls, and in store fronts. There are about one hundred in a nine-county area of the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The rest are scattered across the state.

Food shelves serve people within defined geographic boundaries. In Minneapolis and St. Paul, the service areas are described by streets. In other parts of the state, service areas may include entire city limits, county limits, or school districts. However boundaries are defined, food shelves work with their neighboring food shelves to ensure that there are no gaps in service, and that there is no duplication of service.

At first, food shelves viewed themselves as meeting only emergency needs for food, but over time, the gap between people's needs for food and their ability to provide it themselves has widened. Today, only about a quarter of the food shelves define themselves as for emergencies only. Close to another quarter define themselves as sustaining food shelves. They supply food to fill the ongoing gaps. The rest combine both roles, serving in emergencies and as sustaining food shelves.

Food shelves serve hungry families in other ways beside the distribution of food. Nearly 80 percent of food shelves routinely refer people to a variety of other programs, including legal assistance, jobs and training programs, parenting support, counseling services, and government support programs. Many food shelves take a "case management" approach to serving their clients and require them to participate in government benefit programs like food stamps and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) as well as attend classes on nutrition, stretching food budget dollars, or general financial management.

Use of food shelves has skyrocked in the last ten years. At the Senior Shelf in Northeast Minneapolis there were 19 and 20 percent increases in clients in 1991 and 1992.

Who Uses Food Shelves?*

Most food shelves do not require a financial needs test. They believe that those who come for food must need it because asking for charity is not an easy thing for most people to do. Nearly 90 percent of the households served at Minnesota food shelves have incomes below the official poverty level. For households reporting some income, the average was $578 a month in 1990. The largest major source of income was Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) for two-fifths of the households. Yet one in four households received their major income from paid employment. In fact, in greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities suburbs work was the most common source of income—for 33 percent in greater Minnesota and 44 percent in the Twin Cities suburbs. Work does not pay enough to bring many families above the poverty line.

Nearly two-thirds of the households using food shelves in 1990 included children. People of all races and ethnic backgrounds come to Minnesota food shelves. Most are white (57 percent), but ratios vary from region to region. In the Twin Cities 35 percent are white and 35 percent African American, in the suburbs 84 percent are white, and in greater Minnesota 82 percent are white. In southwest Minnesota 25 percent are Mexicano or Latino and in northwest Minnesota 20 percent are American Indian.

Food shelf use has skyrocketed in the last ten years. In 1982, the year that data were first collected, there were approximately 180,000 visits to food shelves. By 1992 visits had reached 1,400,000. On average, an individual or a family visits a food shelf five times a year. Using this average, approximately 280,000 people were served at food shelves in 1992, or one out of every sixteen Minnesotans.

But while food shelf use has increased, there is still a surprising turnover in clients. In January of 1990, more than one-fourth of households had been using food shelves for more than two years, but nearly 40 percent had used food shelves for six months or less.

How Do Food Shelves Operate?

No two food shelves are alike and how they operate depends on who is running the food shelf and what the community needs are in each area. When food shelves first started, they were operated almost exclusively by volunteers and many were housed

* Most of the data in this section come from *Hunger Hurts: How Government and the Economy are Failing Minnesota Families*. Urban Coalition and Minnesota Food Bank Network, February, 1991.

in the corner of a church basement. Now, as demand has increased, more and more food shelves pay rent, utilities, salaries, and office expenses.

In 1989 over 70 percent of food shelves did not have even one part-time paid employee. By 1993 that number had changed dramatically. Fifteen percent of food shelves now have at least one full-time paid staff person and 24 percent have a least one part-time paid staff person. But all food shelves still rely on a large army of volunteers. Eighty-five percent of food shelves report that they usually or always have enough volunteers.

Hours of service at food shelves vary. Many shelves in the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Cloud, Duluth, and Rochester are open every day, while shelves in smaller communities may be open only one morning or afternoon a week. Forty percent are also available for "on call" service in addition to their regular hours.

How frequently will a food shelf supply food for an individual or a family? Nearly half (47 percent) serve their clients once a month. Others (11 percent) supply them once every three months, or four times a year. In 1989 nearly 20 percent of food shelves allowed clients to come in as often as needed, but in 1993 only 8 percent placed no restrictions on frequency. The change reflects increasing use and increasing difficulty in acquiring food.

What Kind of Food is Available?

Food shelves, generally, provide a family with three to five days of food. A standard food order for a family of one adult and two children averages 53 pounds.

The food shelves try to provide a nutritious, well-balanced food order. Many have received advice from extension offices, nutritionists, and dietitians in planning their food packages. There is, however, often a difference between what is planned and what is delivered. We asked food shelves to what extent they had been able to supply people with different kinds of food in 1992.

Some foods were products that most shelves could supply fairly well or completely throughout the year:

- canned vegetables could be supplied by 94 percent of the shelves;
- bread, cereal, and pasta by 93 percent;
- canned fruit by 66 percent; and
- meat and other proteins by 60 percent.

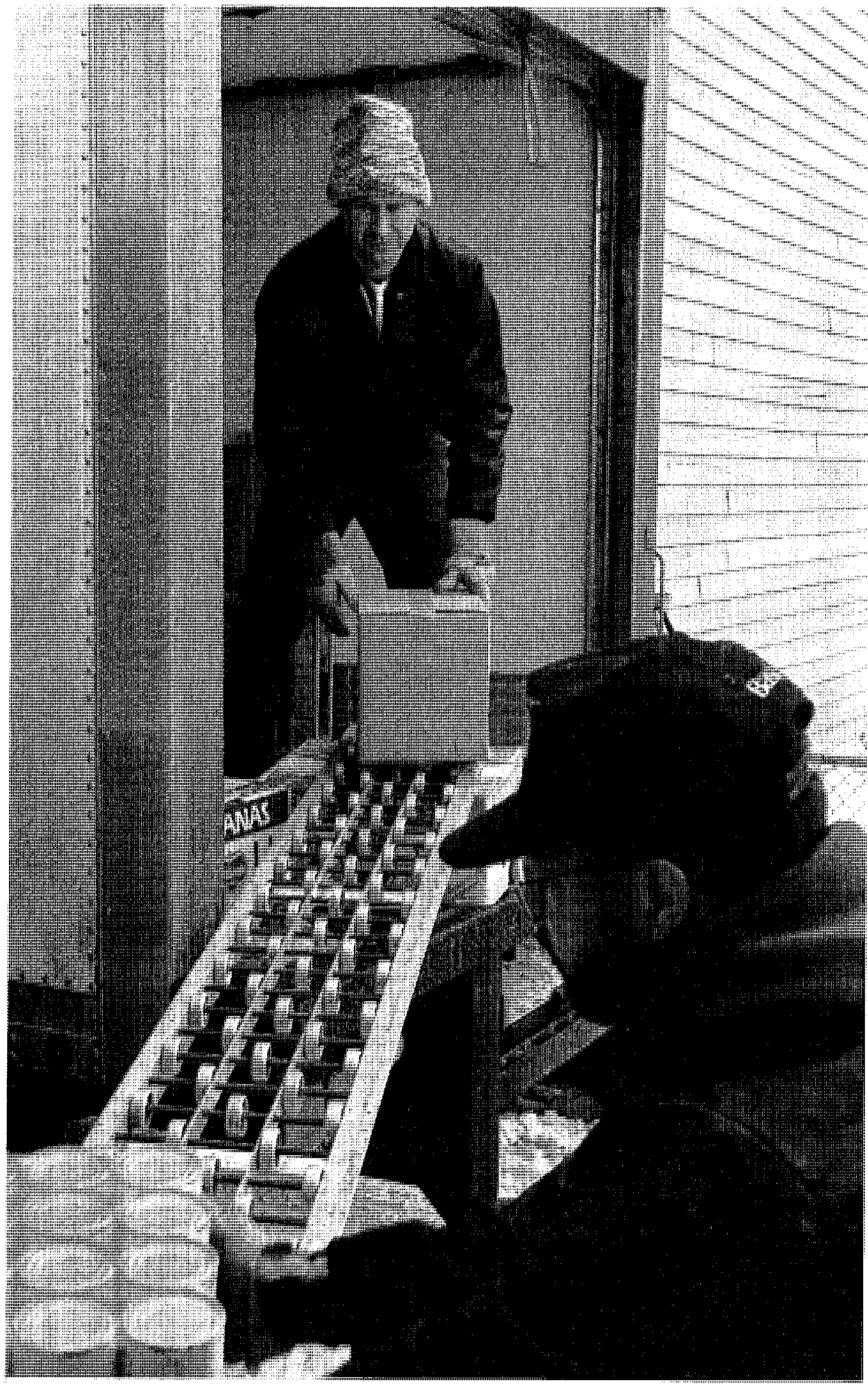
Other foods most shelves found they could not supply or could supply very little of:

- fresh fruit was generally not available at 73 percent of the shelves;
- fresh vegetables at 67 percent; and
- dairy products at 40 percent, although 20 percent of the shelves said they could supply the need for dairy products completely during the year.

Food shelves need to educate the public that donations of fresh and frozen foods are needed and can be handled. Nearly all food shelves have freezers (89 percent) and refrigerators (82 percent).

Some people ask for special foods when they come to food shelves. Baby formula was always available at a quarter of the shelves, but rarely or never available at another quarter. Food shelves were even less able to supply low-salt and low-sugar foods. Non-food items (such as personal care products and paper products) were available fairly often or moderately often at 62 percent of the shelves.

What food runs out first? Most shelves said meat. What remains in stock for more than a month? Canned vegetables, and,



Food from Second Harvest food bank is delivered on Monday mornings in Northeast Minneapolis.

then, cereal were most frequently mentioned.

We asked food shelves to compare their distribution in 1992 with their distribution in 1990. Nearly all said it was about the same or slightly more in all food categories.

How often did they have to cut back on service in 1992 because they were low on food? Fifty-five percent said never, 23 percent said rarely, and 31 percent said sometimes. When food shelves were asked this same question in 1989, 63 percent said never, 19 percent said rarely, and 16 percent said sometimes.

Religious communities continue to give strong support to local food shelves. House of Faith houses Northeast Emergency Depot on weekdays in its sanctuary.

Where Does the Food Come From?

Many food shelves have their origins in a religious community's mission to serve the less fortunate. The link between food shelves and religious communities continues to be a strong one. Minnesota FoodShare is sponsored by the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Minnesota Rabbinical Association, the Minnesota Catholic Conference, and other local religious councils. Every March since 1982, it has conducted a food drive throughout the state to raise food and dollars for food shelves. In 1982 the drive was confined to the Twin Cities, but the following year it expanded to the entire state.

Minnesota FoodShare commits itself to raising 20 percent to 25 percent of all Minnesota food shelf needs each year. This goal is achieved through the efforts of 2,800 churches and synagogues working closely with food shelves throughout the state. In March of 1993, Minnesota FoodShare raised 4.7 million dollars and pounds of food.*

Another partner in supplying food for food shelves is the Minnesota Food Bank Network, a consortium of seven regional food banks that are affiliated with Second Harvest, a nation-wide food bank network headquartered in Chicago. Second Harvest is one of the largest charities in the country—185 food banks in forty-six states. Because of its nation-wide membership, Minnesota receives food from across the country and distributes food across the country.

Food banks solicit large donations of food from food industries and make it available to nonprofit feeding programs such as food shelves, senior dining centers, group homes, and other on-site feeding programs. The donated food is food that might otherwise have gone to waste because of a flaw in packaging or an over-run, or other reasons unrelated to quality.

In 1992, Minnesota's food banks distributed 13 million pounds of food. Approximately 6.4 million pounds went to food shelves at a cost of 12 to 16 cents a pound to cover storage and transportation. Bread, cereal, and pasta are the foods most often bought through the food banks.

Community food drives also make substantial contributions to foods shelves. The Lyons, Elks, Boy Scouts, Jaycees, Girl Scouts, grade schools, and others work hard to raise food and public awareness. In 1992, they raised approximately 8.5 million pounds of food and over $5 million. Canned vegetables and fruits are most often obtained from community food drives.

Additional financial resources come to food shelves from corporations and businesses, from foundations, and from government. In 1992 government support amounted to more than $1.3 million.

The money received by food shelves goes toward buying more food as well as toward office expenses. Food shelves must

...continued on page 16

* Minnesota FoodShare counts dollars and pounds together, assuming that one dollar is the same as one pound of food.

Food in a Time of Floods

This past summer saw a tremendous increase in food shelf demand as rain, floods, and cool weather took their toll on rural and urban communities alike. Many migrant farm workers were unable to work in the fields and turned to food shelves for assistance. By last June, the food shelf in Marshall had spent as much money for food as it had spent in the entire previous year. Many shelves were hard pressed to keep up with demand and several, including one in Crookston, were forced to close periodically for lack of food.

State of Minnesota employees and the Governor's office sponsored a food and cash drive for flood areas which raised $13,000, and 18,000 pounds of food. Simultaneously, Pillsbury, General Mills and Second Harvest Food Banks brought in an additional 113,000 pounds of food. The National Guard and the Minnesota Trucking Association helped with collection and distribution. Last fall the government of Taiwan gave the Minnesota Department of Agriculture $100,000 for flood relief. Half went to food shelves and was a welcome addition to strained budgets.

As generous and gracious as these efforts were, they were not enough. The Hennepin County network of twenty-six food shelves was short $100,000 in contributions from individuals last year. Many believe that the worst is yet to come in the rural communities where the loss of farm income will have an impact on rural main street businesses as well. Farmers, who view themselves as providing food for the world, have been reluctant to turn to food shelves to feed their families. Food shelves have worked with the Farm Advocates Program to reach out to the farming community.

The continued ability to feed increasing numbers of hungry Minnesotans depends on the continued ability of communities to support their local food shelves. Fifty-seven counties were declared disaster areas last summer. Those devastated communities many need extra help to support their food shelves this year.

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continued from page 14...

go beyond the free and very inexpensive foods provided by community food drives and the food banks in order to provide people with healthy, well-balanced food orders. In 1992, food shelves in Minnesota spent $3.3 million at local retail grocery stores.

They spent an additional $691,000 on grocery store vouchers so that their clients could purchase supplemental foods, special diet foods, or holiday foods at local retail grocery stores. Retail purchases are expensive, but necessary, and the return of local dollars to local businesses enhances food shelf–community relations.

Some food shelves are purchasing food cooperatively at wholesale prices. The twenty-six shelves in Hennepin County's Emergency FoodShelf Network and shelves in southeastern Minnesota are the outstanding examples. A few food shelves are also purchasing produce from local farmers.

Conclusions

Food shelves continue to be a unique volunteer, and primarily private, response to hunger. Minnesota's 330 food shelves provide free food to families who have nowhere else to turn. Through the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and a growing number of paid staff, food shelves have kept pace with the steadily climbing need for free food in their community. They could not have done this without the increasing contributions of their communities, churches, synagogues, civic organizations, clubs, and food banks.

Food shelves strive to reduce people's dependency on free food by offering community gardening, nutrition, menu planning, and financial planning classes as well as by connecting people with other social service programs. The future of food shelves depends on the condition of our state and national economy. Until the underlying causes of poverty are addressed and solved, it is certain that Minnesotans will continue to need the services provided by their local food shelves.

Janine Laird is the executive director of the Minnesota Food Shelf Association. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and of William Mitchell College of Law. She has a background of skills in mediation and arbitration.

CURA
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The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs was established to help make the University of Minnesota more responsive to the needs of the larger community and to increase the constructive interaction between faculty and students, on the one hand, and those dealing directly with major public problems, on the other.

The **CURA Reporter** is published four or five times a year to provide information about what CURA projects are doing.

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