



THE WESTERLY VIEW

NEWS & HAPPENINGS FROM THE WESTERN REGION

WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Volume 2, Issue 3 ... *A Letter From the Chair...* Spring, 2009

In January, I began my tenure as WUPPDR Commission Chair, and I am honored to serve the region in this capacity. I look forward to the road ahead of us, especially in this tough economic climate. I know the Western Upper Peninsula is not a stranger to hard times. The rise and decline of industry, the advance of technology, and the perseverance of our people have all impacted our economy in one way or another, for better or worse. While we watch our nation struggle we face our own struggles as well; unemployment rates in our region range from 9.9% in Houghton County to 20.6% in Baraga County (the second highest in the State).

I am hopeful that we will face our challenges together and cooperate to find the best solutions to improve our economy. Details of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act become clearer every day and we will soon realize the benefits of this stimulus bill. Additionally, WUPPDR is facilitating the process for a Regional Innovation Grant that will prove beneficial for the economy of the entire Upper Peninsula and Northern Wisconsin as a whole (see p. 3 for full article). WUPPDR staff is busy working on numerous projects to benefit the region ranging from transportation to recreation to housing and they are always willing to talk with you about your ideas, projects, and concerns. Contributing to the stabilization of our economy is at the forefront of all our minds.

These tough times will encourage all of us to develop innovative and creative solutions to ensure future success, and I am excited to see what we can accomplish together. The tenacity of our region is immeasurable and I am confident that WUPPDR will go above and beyond to further the goals of our regional economy.

Sincerely,
Bob Rotundo
Chairman, WUPPDR Commission

WUPPDR STAFF

KIM STOKER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LORI HAUSWIRTH
ASSOCIATE PLANNER

MEG PACHMAYER
PLANNER

JIM LAMUTH
PLANNER/
TRANSPORTATION
COORDINATOR

COURTNEY ARCHAMBEAU
HOUSING SPECIALIST

NELS ANDERSON
GIS SPECIALIST/ASSISTANT
PLANNER

STEVE ROUSER
GIS TECHNICIAN

MARY TADDEUCCI
ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT

SUE HARTER
FINANCIAL SECRETARY

AMY SPAHN
FINANCIAL AIDE

WUPPDR Commission Meeting Schedule

March	16	2009	Full Commission
April	20	2009	Executive Committee
May	18	2009	Executive Committee
June	15	2009	Full Commission
July	20	2009	Executive Committee
August	17	2009	Executive Committee
September	21	2009	Full Commission (Annual Meeting—Iron County)
October	19	2009	Executive Committee
November	TBD	2009	Executive Committee
December	21	2009	Full Commission
January	18	2010	Executive Committee
February	15	2010	Executive Committee

ALL MEETINGS WILL BE HELD AT TULPPO'S RESTAURANT IN BRUCE CROSSING, MI EXCEPT THE SEPTEMBER ANNUAL MEETING. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND FULL COMMISSION MEET AT 5:00 PM (ET) EXCEPT ANNUAL MEETS AT 4:30 PM (CT). MINUTES & RECORDS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION AT THE WUPPDR OFFICE.

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Michigan DOT—Funding Crisis



A potential lack of funding could present several challenges to MDOT in maintaining and improving our State transportation system. Declining revenues coupled with an increase in costs for materials and labor may prove to be crisis time.

Currently, MDOT is funded by transportation dollars from the Federal Government and dollars generated within the State. Federal dollars must be matched 20% by State dollars. MDOT's matching funds are primarily raised through the 19 cent-per-gallon gas tax and vehicle registration fees. The gas tax was last raised in 1997 when gas cost about \$1.27 a gallon, in 2008 that same gallon of gas averaged \$3.20. Over the last 5

years, gas tax revenues have decreased by \$100 million. Increases at the pump have decreased the demand for fuel, reducing MDOT's ability to leverage federal funds.

2009 is the last year that MDOT will be able to fully match its designated federal funds. The inability to match federal funds will lead to a decrease in services statewide, and would impact everything from freight services to winter plowing.

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In 2007, the Transportation Task Force (TF2) was created

to "review the adequacy of surface transportation and aeronautics service provision and finance" in Michigan. In November, 2008, TF2 sent its recommendations to the Governor, Legislature and Transportation Commission, offering both short and long-term recommendations including: raising the gas tax, toll financed construction, or the redirection of sales tax on fuel to MDOT. View the complete report at www.michigan.gov/tf2.

The interstate and highway system keeps our economy moving—without it goods cannot move, tourists cannot visit, and new investment will look elsewhere. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the challenges facing our transportation system and the choices Legislature will have to make to maintain it.

New Staff in the GIS Department

WUPPDR is pleased to welcome Nels Anderson, *GIS Specialist & Assistant Planner* to our staff. Nels, originally from Wild Rose, WI, comes to us most recently from Northern Minnesota and Northern Idaho where he split his time between work and education.

Nels holds his *A.S.* in *Wilderness Management* and *A.A.* in *Liberal Arts* from Vermilion Community College, and his *B.A.S.* in *Geography: Natural Resource Management & Planning* from Bemidji State University where he was awarded the Bemidji State University Outstanding Graduate of Ge-

ography in the spring of 2007. Nels spent several seasons, in both Minnesota and Idaho, with the US Forest Service as a Wilderness & Backcountry Ranger, Visitor Center Liaison, Wildland Firefighter, and Forest Protection Officer.

Nels enjoys the natural and cultural beauty of the U.P. and looks forward to living, exploring and settling down here. He is eager to share his experiences, training and education in furthering the efforts of the region....and he is anxious to explore our waters to keep up with his demanding fishing obsession! Nels will be the main point of contact in our GIS Department. Nels *can be reached at* 906.482.7205 ext 318 or at nanderson@wuppdr.org.



Nels Anderson, new WUPPDR GIS Specialist & Assistant Planner

Facilitating the Regional Innovation Grant

In [MONTH] 2008, the *Upper Peninsula Economic Development Alliance* (UPEDA) and the *Work Force Board* requested that WUPPDR Executive Director, Kim Stoker, facilitate a **Regional Innovation Grant (RIG)** funded by the Department of Labor. The purpose of the RIG is to formulate a strategic economic plan for the Upper Peninsula Michigan/Wisconsin border region including all fifteen U.P. counties, and Marquette and Florence counties in Wisconsin.

The RIG process began by exploring the economic assets and challenges in each county in the 17-county region, as well as the region as a whole. Once completed, the year-long study will provide several useful outcomes to both economic development organizations in the region, and the private sector as well. First, the study will provide a measure of the current business climate, workforce issues, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the region. In addition, the study will help guide economic development organizations in future planning efforts and facilitate economic development in the region. Finally, the study will cul-



minate in an action plan designed to stimulate the regional economy. As economic activity in the region increases, the economic impact of that activity will benefit everyone in both the public and private sectors.

NorthStar Economics of Madison, Wisconsin was hired in October, 2008 to conduct the study. A series of focus groups, one hosted by each county, were held between

December, 2008 and January, 2009. Up to fifteen stakeholders were invited to participate including both the public and private sectors to help provide local information needed to understand the economy of the region. In order to reach as many people as possible, an on-line survey was developed to reach anyone interested in commenting about the economy of the region. The survey is intended for any and all stakeholders throughout the study area, and we are asking for your help to tell others about the survey.

We will keep you updated on the progress of the RIG study. For more information: *please contact Kim Stoker at 906.482.7205 ext 316.*

The survey is available at:
www.northstareconomics.com
www.upeda.org
www.jobforce.org

Rental Assistance Update



Authority (MSHDA) contracts WUPPDR as its local Housing Agent for the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Homeless Assistance Recovery Program

(HARP). HCV and HARP are two programs that offer rental assistance to area residents in need. Currently, WUPPDR assists over 300 low-income households in Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties. In September, 2008, after taking 125 additional vouchers in Houghton, Keweenaw and Baraga counties, WUPPDR was

released of its housing agent obligations in both Gogebic and Ontonagon Counties. Gogebic/Ontonagon County Rental Assistance Inc., located in Ironwood, MI, is now serving families previously assisted by WUPPDR. For more information regarding these programs or the changes, *please contact Courtney at 906.482.7205 ext 313.*



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WUPPDR Commission Changes

The Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development (WUPPDR) Executive Director, Kim J. Stoker, presented an award of appreciation to Edward D. Jenich, Jr. (Houghton County) at the WUPPDR Full Commission meeting held on Thursday, December 18, 2008. The award was given to Jenich for his two years of public service as the WUPPDR Commission Chairman.

The board also elected the following officers for a two-year term beginning January 1, 2009:

- Bob Rotundo, Chairman (Ontonagon County)
- Jim Oliver, 1st Vice Chairman (Gogebic County)
- Rosalie King, 2nd Vice Chairman (Iron County)
- Mike Koskinen, Treasurer (Baraga County)
- Joe Langdon, Secretary (Keweenaw County)



Kim Stoker (Right), WUPPDR Executive Director, presents Edward D. Jenich Jr. (Left) an award of appreciation for his two years of service as WUPPDR Commission Chair.