



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Part 4: Government Options to Support LADA

Battle Lake, MN, May 21, 2008 – This article is the fourth and final article in a series from the Lakes Area Development Association (LADA) to raise community awareness and support for economic development in the region. LADA is a not-for-profit, member association formed to address economic development in the surrounding area. Specifically, the mission of LADA is to:

*“Enable economic development and growth in the lakes area
with business expansion services, new investments, and community enhancements
while preserving our quality of life.”*

In the previous three articles, we described the purpose of LADA, the strategies in motion to foster orderly expansion in the area, and broader initiatives LADA will facilitate in the future. This week, we will discuss a research project designed to enable the highest level of cooperation among our government jurisdictions to support LADA’s plans.

The remainder of this article will attempt to discuss this complex topic in a short space for the benefit of a unified community.

Let’s start at the top. LADA was formed to “enable” economic development across our region. It will do a great job, especially in the areas of cohesive planning, marketing, and being a point-of-contact for business expansion and key initiatives. These are strengths and services most government jurisdictions do not possess.

However, LADA inherently has certain limitations, especially when projects span government boundaries. LADA has no government powers, no taxation capability, no authority to direct city or township infrastructure, and no formal powers to unite government jurisdictions on projects. For example, a bike trail system from the city, through Everts Township, and through Glendalough; or extending city water and sewer into Clitherall Township to serve a new business in the area.

LADA is an important “enabler”; however, its success is integrally dependent on an assumed cooperation between government bodies. The question at hand is, “how do we appropriately support LADA with strong government cooperation?”

There are various ways such government cooperation could be achieved. One option is to simply maintain the current and positive course, which is **“informal government cooperation”**. A disadvantage in this scenario is that townships are VERY limited by Minnesota Statutes in the things they can accomplish related to economic and infrastructure development. Therefore, even if informal cooperation is strong, the lakes area will encounter very real obstacles found in the land, legal, and jurisdictional boundaries of these units.

Another option is a “**joint planning commission**” made up of representatives from the jurisdictions for the purposes of maintaining dialogue, primarily on land use topics. This would be important cooperative planning; however, such a commission is relatively powerless, and any recommendations would be relegated to the same boundary, legal, and decision-making limitations of each independent jurisdiction as mentioned previously. That begs the question “whether another planning group is really that valuable?”

Fortunately, we have seen sustained cooperation among the School District, City of Battle Lake, and officials from the surrounding townships during the past several months. They realize the stakes are high regarding the expansion in the lakes area, and the importance of unified government cooperation to intentionally preserve the quality of life in the area. And they realize that LADA cannot possibly accomplish all they hope to do alone.

The City, School District, and Clitherall and Everts Townships have joined together on a research project to explore various “**joint powers**” options – often used in other parts of the state – that may be conducive to effective and formal cooperation.

Preliminary findings are quite promising. Minnesota Statutes 469.109 – 469.123 allow for independent jurisdictions to join powers; in the case of the lakes area, it would be for “**area redevelopment**” purposes. Rural government jurisdictions often form joint power agreements to address things like shared fire protection, medical response, etc. In the current research, the team has dialogued with the State Auditor’s office about using the statutes to serve our economic development purposes, where a small rural city needs to work with its rural townships and school district effectively. The response has been positive and supportive.

Such a concept doesn’t bring any new legal powers; however in a joint powers agreement, it extends certain powers that are already availed to a city to the governmental units that are part of the agreement. Essentially, a joint powers entity could do things like partner with private sector on projects, employ staff, tax, invoke eminent domain, buy real estate for project purposes, accept gifts and grants, borrow money and issue bonds.

Now although this sounds like a lot of power available to a new entity, we also have learned any of those powers can be limited or excluded at the formation of the entity. The board of this entity would be governed by representatives from the boards of each of the government units, and a member appointed by the governor’s office. So, essentially the residents (the electorate) of the lakes area would determine what this entity looks like at formation, and what powers it does or doesn’t have at its disposal.

As mentioned at the outset, this is a complex, but important topic. Research is still preliminary. A public meeting is being planned for June to present the options to area residents and solicit questions and feedback.

In the meantime, LADA is moving ahead with lots of cooperation from the whole area!

About Lakes Area Development Association

Lakes Area Development Association enables economic development in the lakes area with business expansion services, new investments, and community enhancements while preserving a superb quality of life. The association’s address is P.O. Box 895, Battle Lake, MN 56515.

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