

HISTORIC STUDY OF COMMISSION PUBLISHED

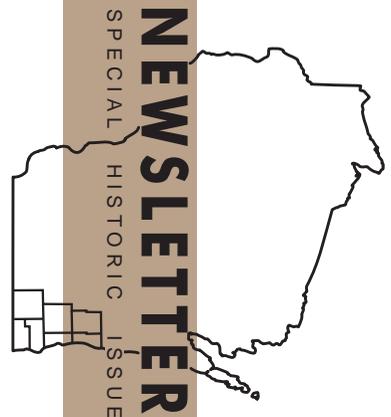
“Master Planners: Fifty Years of Regional Planning in Southeastern Wisconsin: 1960-2010,” a history of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, has been published by Marquette University Press and is available for purchase and distribution. The book traces SEWRPC from its formation in 1960 until mid-2010, including its mission to plan for the physical development of the seven counties of the seven county Region, its philosophy of planning, the plans it made, and the controversies, successes, and setbacks it has experienced.

The history was written by Paul G. Hayes, Cedarburg, who retired from *The Milwaukee Journal* in 1995, after 33 years. As reporter and writer, he was a close observer of the Regional Planning Commission throughout its first ten years when it published its first Land Use and Transportation Plan. That plan's objectives and principles became the basis for all subsequent versions, and it remains in effect, having been approved by member counties and followed by Federal agencies such as the US Department of Transportation.

The book places SEWRPC in the context of the natural and social history of Wisconsin's southeast region centered on Milwaukee from its geological past through first settlement and through the first decade of the 21st Century. Its eleven chapters are devoted to SEWRPC's planning innovations, including a region-wide soil study crucial in identifying prime farmland; the application of the concept of environmental corridors as a strategy to protect natural resources; development of computer-driven land use-transportation, flood flow, and water quality models as tools for planning; the perfection of accurate regional maps, the freeway controversies of the 1970s and 1980s; the Milwaukee city and suburban “sewer wars;” the continuing political stalemate over public transit, and the effort to contain urban sprawl.

Two chapters are devoted to water. One describes the region's comprehensive watershed plans, which formed the basis for improved sewage treatment on major regional streams,

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identified floodplains to be kept in open uses and wetlands to be protected to maintain high water quality. The second describes regional planning efforts to assess, protect and distribute potable water and treat wastewater, ending with the recent Water Supply Plan, a critical component of the overall Regional Plan.

In bringing the story into the 21st Century, Hayes argues that the advisory nature of SEWRPC regional planning, its non-partisan political culture, and its high standards of competence and thoroughness were elements that helped insure SEWRPC's credibility, effectiveness, and even survival in contentious times.

“Master Planners,” is available for \$29.00 from the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission as well as from the Marquette University Press.

This newsletter article has been condensed by the author from the larger history.

BEGINNINGS

In April 1960, Frank P. Zeidler stepped down after 12 years as mayor of Milwaukee. Under his leadership, the city had greatly expanded its area through aggressive annexation. Some affected suburban towns fought Zeidler’s annexations as fiercely as he pursued them. Between these opposing forces the City’s boundaries were fixed permanently by the end of his tenure. Although Milwaukee’s area doubled under Zeidler, when he left office the City was surrounded by what he called an “iron ring” of suburbs, many of which had incorporated in response to threatened annexation.

The resulting political tension between city and suburbs was enduring enough to continue through the administrations of the next two Milwaukee mayors, Henry W. Maier from 1960 through 1988, and John O. Norquist from 1988 to 2003. The administrations of Zeidler, Maier and Norquist totaled more than fifty years of often open city-suburban conflict.

The end of Zeidler’s time as mayor was the first of two events that distinguished 1960 as a year of important transition for southeastern Wisconsin, then as today the most populous area of Wisconsin. The second occurred on August 8, 1960, when Wisconsin Governor Gaylord A. Nelson issued the executive order that created the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). He acted in response to petitions submitted by Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington and Waukesha Counties. At the time, and to this day, the state law allowing for the creation of regional planning commissions assigned them three basic functions: The collecting of information necessary for sound planning, the preparation and adoption of a com-

prehensive plan for the physical development of the region concerned, and the promotion of intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing cross-boundary developmental and environmental conflicts.

From the 1830s when settlement began through 1950, the region of southeastern Wisconsin had divided into more than 150 separate units of government in the form of counties, cities, villages, unincorporated towns and special districts. By 1960 after a decade of unprecedented growth, it was obvious that the region needed an overall governmental mechanism to promote regional cooperation and action, a need that intensified with population growth and development. However, the prospect of metropolitan government was anathema to most citizens. Rural areas feared domination by the city. Many suburbs were created in pursuit of the ideal of local control. For its part, some officials in the City of Milwaukee feared that suburban growth would sap its economic base. Nelson's action fulfilled a long campaign by Milwaukee's Metropolitan Study Commission and a growing number of civic leaders in southeastern Wisconsin to create a vehicle for mitigating city-suburban political conflict, that protected the Region's natural resources, and that fostered the development of efficient and affordable infrastructure systems. Of course, Milwaukee's metropolitan area was not alone in facing problems associated with rapid urbanization. All American urban areas were in the post World War II prosperity. With affordable gasoline and land, many returning veterans and their growing families opted to live in the urban fringe, even if it meant driving long distances to work, shop, and play. Many American cities were experimenting with a variety of approaches to address what was referred to nationally as the "urban crisis." Such approaches included creating metropolitan government, moving many responsibilities from municipalities to counties, creating special-purpose regional districts, and organizing metropolitan councils with limited taxing and enforcement powers. Regional planning was among the options.

Multi-county regional planning for southeastern Wisconsin had been discussed for years. Some civic leaders and public officials began to see the need for it before the 1950s as the community struggled to provide housing, schools, and infrastructure for the returning veterans, who, having delayed their families during the war, were catching up for the time lost from their lives. The baby boom was underway and urban development was leap-frogging into the countryside west and north of Milwaukee in advance of the expansion of some urban services such as public sewerage and water systems. City Club Secretary Leo F. Tiefenthaler; Milwaukee City Planner Elmer C. Krieger; Jacob H. Beuscher, University of Wisconsin professor of law; and Walter H. Bender, attorney and Milwaukee Park Commissioner, were among the citizens who worked for years to perfect regional planning enabling legislation, which was signed into law by Gov. Walter J. Kohler, Jr., in July 1955.

The state regional planning enabling legislation that Gov. Kohler signed called for every local government in the region concerned to be represented by one commissioner, which—for the seven county southeastern Wisconsin area—would have created a body of more than 150 members. Because the vast majority of these would have been from areas outside Milwaukee County, neither Milwaukee County nor the City of Milwaukee would have agreed to join. Without the Region’s most populous county and the State’s largest city there would have been little point in forming the commission.

The Metropolitan Study Commission realized this, especially its Urban Problems Committee chaired by Attorney Richard W. Cutler. Cutler’s committee was influential in having the law amended in 1959 so that it called for three commissioners from each member county, giving the commission 21 voting members. Even so, Milwaukee Mayor Zeidler opposed the change, contending that representation on the Commission should be based on population, which would have given Milwaukee County a majority of commissioners. Zeidler’s proposal also could not succeed because few if any suburbs would have agreed to join a Milwaukee-dominated organization.

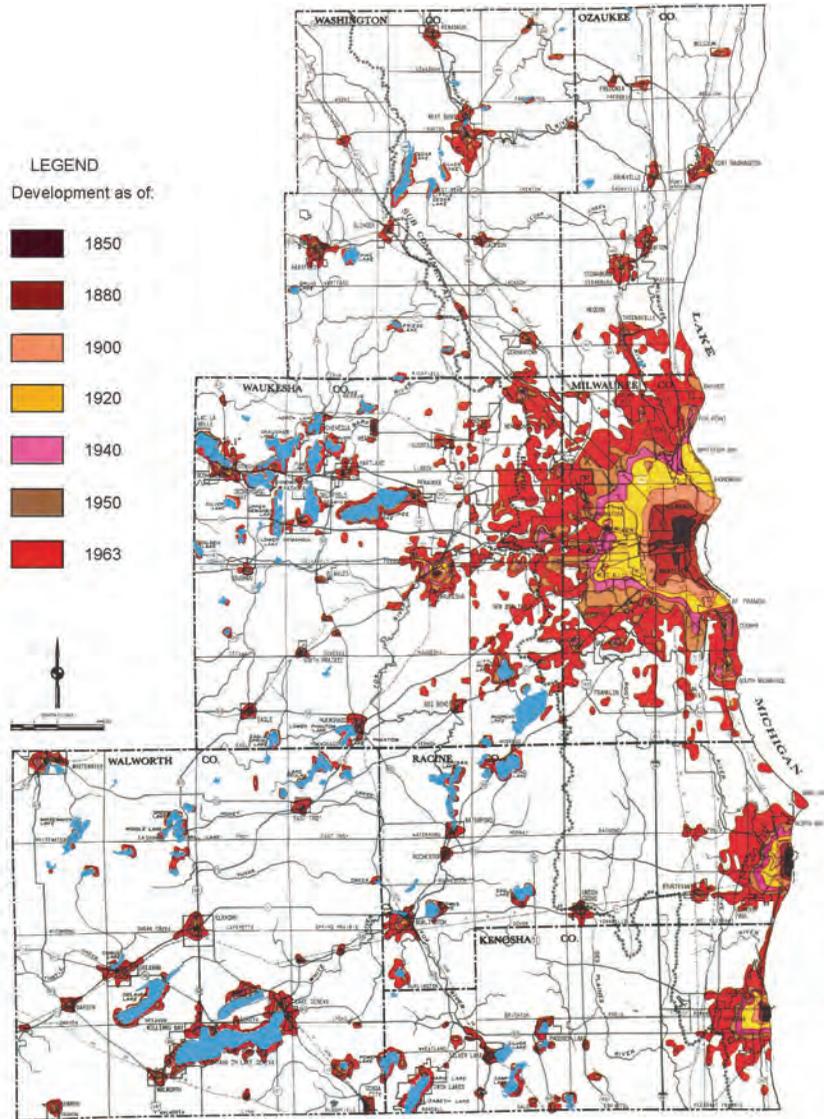
BOUNDARIES

The Southeastern Wisconsin Region as defined by Governor Nelson’s executive order consists of seven counties: Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha. The seven counties have a total area of 2,689 square miles or about 5 percent of the total area of Wisconsin. In 2009, they had a resident population estimated at 1,993,690 persons, or 35 percent of the State’s total. The region holds Wisconsin’s largest city, Milwaukee, as well as 13 of the State’s 25 largest cities. Altogether, the region is composed of 153 general purpose units of government.

Seen from the air at night when incandescent lights reveal the true extent of the urbanized community it becomes obvious that political boundaries are invisible human artifacts that divide geography for political and economic reasons. True human communities are obviously interconnected physically by streets and utilities and socially by commerce, recreation, and shopping and in other ways. Communities generally grow outward from the central business districts of historic cities. The City of Milwaukee began in the 1830s as a settlement on Lake Michigan at the Milwaukee harbor, as did Racine and Kenosha. All were pioneer ports on Lake Michigan, which enabled the most efficient transportation of the day. Today the three metropolitan areas are merging into a single urban zone filling the corridor between Chicago and Milwaukee, westward from the center of Milwaukee to Jefferson County, and northward to mid-Ozaukee County. Smaller but important centers that show up in this night constellation include Burlington, Delavan, Elkhorn, Grafton-Cedarburg, Hartford, Oconomowoc, Port Washington, Waukesha and West Bend, which also began in the mid 19th Century as pioneer settlements.

Map 1

HISTORIC URBAN GROWTH MAP 1963



Like the growth rings of a tree, the historic urban growth rings encircling the communities in the Region reveal many things. The location of natural resources, such as water, woodlands, and fertile soils, has been nearly as important an influence on original settlement patterns and subsequent urban growth as have transportation facilities, such as railroads and highways. Long established independent and isolated communities are “growing together” to form a complex urban region.

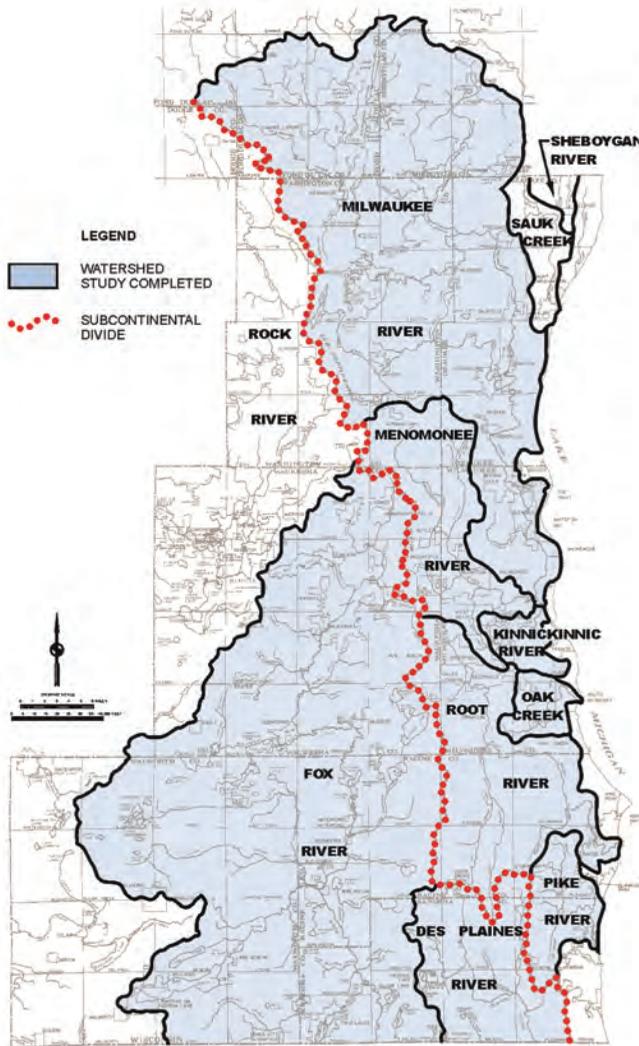
Southeastern Wisconsin's uncommon natural beauty is a striking representation of the geological, biological, and climatological diversity that graces all of Wisconsin. Much of this diversity can be traced directly to the colossal landscaping powers of the Wisconsin Glacier, the most recent advance of a continental ice sheet, which endured from 28,000 to 10,000 years ago and covered all but the southwestern portion of what was to become Wisconsin. The glacier was two miles high in places, literally a mountain range of ice. As the glacier advanced southward it excavated the basins that became Lakes Michigan and Superior, which form a part of the northern and the entire eastern boundary of Wisconsin. The advancing ice sheet formed a pattern of interior moraines, called drumlins. Most of the inland lakes that distinguish southeastern Wisconsin were formed as kettle lakes; that is, they were basins formed as huge blocks of ice fell from the face of the receding glacier and were buried and insulated by glacial debris as the ice sheet melted. As a buried ice mass slowly thawed, the surface slumped, forming a kettle basin.

The most unusual natural feature other than Lake Michigan that is special to southeastern Wisconsin is a complex of ridges that trend northeast from southern Walworth County through Waukesha and Washington Counties and then all the way to Door County. This is the famous Kettle Moraine formation, said to be the world's most vivid example of interlobate moraine. It was formed as two tongues or "lobes" of ice thawed, the Lake Michigan lobe to the east and the Green Bay lobe to the west, washing untold millions of tons of rock, sand, clay and gravel into a complex of ridges between them. Within the ridges are features that helped early scientists interpret the dynamics of continental glaciation, features variously known as kettles, kames, eskers, outwash plains and others.

The region is separated east and west by a subcontinental divide generally along the ridge of the Kettle Moraine. The divide lies as close as 2.8 miles west of Lake Michigan in the Village of Pleasant Prairie, Kenosha County, but is much farther west in Washington County to the north. Rivers on the east side of the divide discharge into Lake Michigan, their waters eventually reaching the North Atlantic by way of Lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Rivers west of the divide eventually drain into the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Fox, Des Plaines, Illinois, Rock and Mississippi Rivers. The notable regional stream on the east side of the divide is the Milwaukee River, which rises just north of the region in the Kettle Moraine area of Fond du Lac County and moves southward roughly parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan until it enters the lake at Milwaukee Harbor. The harbor is formed by the confluence of three rivers, the Kinnickinnic from the southwest, the Menomonee from the west, and the Milwaukee from the north.

Map 2

WATERSHEDS IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



There are 12 major watersheds in the southeastern Wisconsin Region. Over SEWRPC's 50-year history, comprehensive watershed plans were developed for eight of these watersheds that addressed land use, park and open space, floodland management, and water quality issues and problems. Shown also is the subcontinental divide that traverses southeastern Wisconsin. This divide has significant legal and physical ramifications for water supply planning, since Lake Michigan water cannot readily be used as a source of supply for areas beyond the divide.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

From the beginning of settlement, growth in Southeastern Wisconsin was rapid, fueled by expanding Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha industry and by fertile land available to immigrant farmers. The City of Milwaukee's population roughly doubled every 20 years from the Civil War through 1930, when it reached 578,249 persons. While the rate of population growth slowed greatly in the 1930s during the Great Depression and in the early 1940s during World War II, it resumed after the war. By then the physical impact of the growth was compounded by the popularity of the automobile and an expanding, durable prosperity that enabled almost everyone who wanted a car to buy one. Whereas most of Milwaukee's early development was based on the need for the man of the house to walk to his job or take a short street car or bus ride, new families could live miles from their jobs and reach them by automobile. Thus much new growth in the 1950s, encouraged by cheap gasoline and nostalgia for open space, spread beyond the city limits where land was cheap and property taxes low. Formerly among the densest populated cities in the nation, Milwaukee's density began to diminish greatly.

This was the circumstance that led to Mayor Zeidler's aggressive annexation policy. He believed that the suburbs were intent on undermining Milwaukee's tax base and interested in regional cooperation only to get access to Milwaukee's modern water works that processed Lake Michigan water for drinking and domestic use. In this he was prophetic. For decades, most suburbs could tap ample groundwater and, with some exceptions, they still can. However, the question of diverting Lake Michigan water across the subcontinental divide was to emerge as a contentious issue in the early 21st century when the City of Waukesha sought to tap Lake Michigan water to replace its radium-contaminated deep wells.

By the time Zeidler left office in 1960, the City of Milwaukee's population had reached 741,324, almost 104,000 more than in 1950, the largest 10-year increment of growth in the City's history. Regional population that year stood at 1,573,614. The seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin, comprising 5 percent of Wisconsin's total area in 1960, now held almost 40 percent of Wisconsin's population. The economy of the Milwaukee area was of colossal importance to the State and it was growing and changing.

By 1963, the once extensive Milwaukee-centered electric interurban railway and street car systems had vanished. The transportation system of streets, roads, and highways was hardly a system at all. Transportation planning was uncoordinated and piecemeal, based as much on local political influence as on real needs of motorists, industry, and residents. Thus a major thoroughfare in Milwaukee might abruptly become a narrow city street as it passed a boundary into a suburb. Rush-hour traffic jams were horrible, especially in the inclement weather that frequents Wisconsin during its long winters. The streets of some

Figure 1

TRAFFIC CONGESTION



In the 1950's the urban arterial street system serving greater Milwaukee was subject to costly traffic congestion such as that shown here on the 27th Street viaduct. Street cars, electric trackless trolley coaches, and motor buses operated largely in mixed traffic and were subject to the same delays due to congestion as were motor trucks and automobiles. It was clear to most local observers that the Milwaukee area needed to rebuild its transportation system and that the rebuilding would have to include the construction of a freeway system. The City of Milwaukee initiated freeway planning in the area, transferring that responsibility to the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission and ultimately, in accordance with Federal guidelines, to the SEWRPC.

residential neighborhoods were dangerously packed with bumper-to-bumper rush-hour traffic throughout the workweek.

In the countryside, many of the region's sparkling inland lakes were experiencing the effects of overdevelopment on their shores, development that wholly depended upon the often-unreliable technology of the septic tank to dispose of human wastes. Likewise, rivers were visibly polluted to the extent that the Milwaukee River in downtown Milwaukee was a putrid joke. Prime outdoor recreational sites were threatened by sprawling development, and sewers and sewage treatment plants were outdated and overwhelmed. Farms were being carved up by sprawling subdivisions so that formerly viable agricultural zones became inefficient, isolated, shrinking islands.

No single governmental unit in the region had the jurisdiction, money, will, or talent with which to confront these emerging problems. This was the reality that led to the action taken by Governor Nelson, when he issued his executive order in 1960 that created the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. Within months, the agency became known by its homely acronym, SEWRPC, pronounced "sewer-pack."

GETTING STARTED

Each member county of SEWRPC was represented by three commissioners, one of which was appointed by each of the seven county boards, one by the governor, and the third by the governor from a list provided by each county board. The make-up of the first commission reflected the political pragmatism of both Governor Nelson and the county boards. Nelson, although a committed Democrat, was a realist who could make the compromises necessary for effectiveness. Early commissioners understood from the start that their fledgling organization would not survive in-house partisan wrangling. These were men – and at the time, as in most public institutions, the governing body was composed entirely of men – who took their new assignments seriously and were willing to work together. The law established that basic financial support for the Commission's work program should be provided by a regional tax levy apportioned to each of the seven counties on the basis of equalized valuation. These basic funds were supplemented by State and Federal aids. In many years such aids comprised more than half the annual budget.

Members of the first commission were George L. Schlitz, Erwin W. Lange, and George C. Berteau from Kenosha County; Wilfred Patrick, Milton F. LaPour, and Lynn E. Stahlbaum, Racine County; John P. Murphy, Richard W. Cutler, and Henry J. Schmandt, Milwaukee County; Eugene Hollister, Charles B. Coe, and John D. Voss, Walworth County; Ray F. Blank, E. Stephen Fischer, and James F. Egan, Ozaukee County; Joseph A. Schmitz, James D. Reigle, and Carlton M. Herman, Washington County; and Fortney

Larson, Lyle L. Link, and Maynard W. Meyer, Waukesha County. The first listed from each county was appointed by the county board, the second by the governor, and the third by the governor from lists supplied by the respective county boards.

The commissioners carried impressive credentials. At least seven were county board supervisors. Schmandt was professor of urban affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Berteau an attorney in labor relations for American Motors Corp., Kenosha; Cutler an attorney specializing in municipal law who had advised several Milwaukee suburbs as they incorporated; Link a successful Waukesha County builder. Egan was a businessman who was later to become mayor of Mequon; Fischer, mayor of Cedarburg, had led the effort to preserve his city's historic buildings; Meyer was a prominent architect and city planner; Hollister was a former professional player for the old Chicago Cardinals football team and Walworth County board chairman; LaPour was a mortgage banker and real estate investor in Racine.

The Commission's first meeting was held September 21, 1960, in the board room of the then-new Waukesha County Courthouse. Governor Nelson presided as the Commissioners elected Schmandt chairman, Berteau vice chairman, Coe secretary, and Larson treasurer. The group organized an Executive Committee empowered to act for the full Commission on all matters except formal adoption of plans and an annual work program and budget; a Planning and Research Committee to oversee technical work; an Intergovernmental and Public Relations Committee to address relationships with other units and agencies of government; and an Administrative Committee to perform budgetary and staff oversight and administrative housekeeping.

The first two years were marked by changes in both commission officers and staff before SEWRPC settled into a remarkable stability that endured for many years. Schmandt served as chairman only for a year when Berteau succeeded him. Berteau, who was chairman until 1980, saw his central duty as protecting the professional staff from outside political pressure to fashion plans that would meet parochial agendas. Cutler was elected secretary in 1964 and served until 1984 in two nonconsecutive periods. He was well-connected in the community for a number of reasons other than his serving as attorney for incorporating suburbs, including his leadership role in the Metropolitan Study Committee. His skill in assembling advisory committees whose members represented all sides of an issue, thus achieving consensus among various interests before plans were approved, was to prove useful in defusing controversy before it began.

The gentlemanly Berteau promoted a congenial, collegial culture among the commissioners. The full Commission met four times a year, each time at a different county courthouse. Later commissioners Thomas H. Buestrin of Mequon, SEWRPC

chairman from 1997 through 2008, and William R. Drew, former Milwaukee alderman, both commented as late as 2007 about the distinctive culture of the commission, which has continued throughout its history. For the most part, partisanship was left behind when the commissioners gathered, Buestrin said, and the welfare of the whole region was their focus. Drew, former president of the Milwaukee Common Council and Commissioner of City Development, was impressed that the organization provided a forum for civil discourse between, for example, an alderman from Milwaukee and a town board supervisor from rural Walworth County, people who otherwise might not meet in their private lives.

As part of the Berteau culture, Buestrin said, the Commission adopted a protocol under which it would not send representatives to meetings to which SEWRPC was not invited nor undertake studies that were not requested by member governments. In its half century of service to southeastern Wisconsin, SEWRPC has seldom failed to meet these guidelines, even under intense political or public pressure regarding controversial issues or outcomes. This strict adherence may constitute one of the reasons for the Commission's long survival and its credibility in the face of 50 years of sometimes intense controversy between cities and suburbs or between local governments and state agencies or the legislature.

SEWRPC sponsored its first public planning conference on December 6, 1961, at the Red Carpet Inn near Gen. Mitchell Field airport on South Howell Avenue in Milwaukee. The choice of Milwaukee was deliberate because the City was the population center of the region. However, the location of the conference on the City's outskirts was in deference to rural attendees who might find city traffic and parking daunting. About 350 people attended, including officials of county, city, village, town and state agencies, representatives of agriculture, industry and business, conservationists, technicians and interested citizens.

Even so not every community sent a representative. The Wisconsin law under which regional planning commissions were created allowed municipalities to withdraw as members within the first 90 days if the municipalities held a public hearing on the matter. After a dozen years of aggressive annexation by the City of Milwaukee, many suburban and rural leaders feared SEWRPC was a prelude to a Milwaukee-dominated metropolitan government. Such fears were exploited by a few influential ideologues who believed that any new governmental agency was a step toward oppressive big government. Altogether 11 units of government initially withdrew, including the Cities of Cudahy, South Milwaukee, Oak Creek, and Franklin in Milwaukee County; the Towns of Norway, Dover, Rochester, Yorkville, and Waterford and the Village of Waterford in Racine

County, and the City of Port Washington in Ozaukee County. By 1968, all had rejoined SEWRPC, influenced by the objective, nonpolitical approach of the commission members and motivated by the quality of practical planning and engineering information that they could acquire cheaply if they were members.

Throughout its half-century history, SEWRPC has seldom existed free of controversy. At first it came from the political right, including members of the John Birch Society, which scorned the concept of public planning. But some controversy was nonpartisan. Infrastructure development is inherently controversial in that it imposes sometimes massive physical change on familiar landscapes. Thus, a highway or freeway can disrupt neighborhoods and change aesthetics. A recommendation to cease building in floodplains can affect land speculation or established housing. Although all SEWRPC plans are advisory and implemented by established governments, SEWRPC often became the target of criticism. Suburban or rural officials often criticized SEWRPC land use recommendations that would limit urban sprawl and therefore, tax-base-expanding development. Urban officials, notably former Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist, objected to urban freeways and blamed SEWRPC for recommending more of them.

At the first conference, Wisconsin's Governor Nelson, the luncheon speaker, emphasized urgency in support of planning in southeastern Wisconsin:

“Wisconsin is very fortunate, for it is only recently that we have started to become an urban state. We still have forests, lakes and streams. We still have the power to preserve pockets of open spaces as our urban areas spread. Despite growth and industrialization, Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha and our other cities remain pleasant places to live.

“But congestion is taking its toll and the signs of decay are present, even in many small villages. To see what might happen in Wisconsin, we must examine the large American cities in other states, where we see tenements, smog, traffic jams, grassless parks, residential sections withering under industrial encroachment, and industrial sections choked by surrounding tenements. ...

“With planning and coordination this (region) could well be the city of the future – decentralized, varying between urban concentrations and open land, and containing some of the finest recreation and vacation areas in the state. Without planning, it could well become just another city of the past – a poor shelter for millions of people amid severe school, traffic, and sanitation problems, self-destroying conflicts in land-uses, and urban sprawl that erodes and destroys the surrounding countryside.”

On August 28, 1961, less than four months before the conference, Nelson had signed the Outdoor Recreation Action Program (ORAP), his initiative to raise \$50 million over 10 years through a penny-a-pack tax on cigarettes to be spent on buying land for recreation and preservation. It was to evolve into the Knowles – Nelson Stewardship Program, an immensely successful measure in which lands are bought for protection or outdoor recreation. ORAP and Stewardship were to prove crucial in carrying out SEWRPC’s recommendations to establish and expand new state and county parks as well as in funding land trust purchases of natural areas in the region.

At the conference, it was reported that two technical advisory committees had been formed, one for transportation and the second for natural resource planning. The Technical Advisory Committee for Transportation Planning, which was to set the pattern for such committees over the years, began meeting in October 1961. Chaired by Douglas F. Haist, chief of long-range planning for the State Highway Commission of Wisconsin (now the Wisconsin Department of Transportation), its members included Thomas R. Clark and Harvey Shebesta, district engineers for the State Highway Commission; Robert H. Paddock and J. H. Groenier, engineers from the US Bureau of Public Roads, Henry T. Wildschut, Director of Public Works for Milwaukee County, and Kurt W. Bauer, then assistant director of SEWRPC. Their first product was a prospectus for SEWRPC’s long range regional development plan, a document that set forth costs, planning strategies, and plan organization.

By April 1962, when the committee published its prospectus, it was clear from its title, “Regional Planning Program Prospectus: Coordinated Urban, Resource and Transportation Planning,” that the committee, although dominated by highway engineers, envisioned a comprehensive plan that included in addition to transportation facilities, land use and natural resource conservation as key components. The project was never again referred to as merely a transportation plan, but as a land use - transportation plan. Like the annual conference and the newsletter, another precedent was established in the writing of a well-considered prospectus. The preparation of a prospectus became SEWRPC’s standard procedure before embarking on any planning program. In order to undertake a practical planning process, the need, financing and time requirements were considered. Of all the prospectuses that followed, none was to prove more important than the first.

Anyone who read it confronted novel planning imperatives: “An individual highway or transit line cannot be planned in isolation. It must be recognized that the total urban transportation network acts as a system....” “Highway and transit systems must be planned together....” “The ... planning must be metropolitan or regional in scope....” “Transportation planning cannot be separated from land use planning....” SEWRPC’s vision of regional planning has remained consistent and clear from the beginning.

The authors of the prospectus also insisted that no plans could be developed without first collecting an immense amount of information. As for the information needed for useful regional planning, southeastern Wisconsin of 1963 almost was a blank slate. There were no good maps; no full inventory of existing transportation facilities; no precise details about land use; sparse data on soils and no detailed understanding of demographic and economic activities and trends. There were only sketchy data about regional population, its size, growth rate, mobility, employment, ethnicity, income, age, gender, desire for housing types and locations, automobile ownership, or need for education. In short, as to information on which to base a regional plan, the planners were starting from scratch.

The Prospectus said that the process from gathering information to recommending a formal plan would require three years and would cost an estimated \$1,987,000. More than three-fourths of the cost was to be paid by grants from the US Housing and Home Finance Agency, the US Bureau of Public Roads and the State Highway Commission of Wisconsin. The seven regional counties would pay a total of \$469,200 over the three years, with each county paying according to its equalized value of land and improvements. Using the 1960 equalized values meant that Milwaukee County's share would be \$309,168, or about 16 percent of the full study cost. The next highest amount, \$50,157 or about 2 percent would be paid by Waukesha County.

Even though most of the cost would be paid by Federal and State grants, persuading the counties to contribute their shares for a time proved to be a challenge. However in October President John F. Kennedy signed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962, which required all metropolitan areas to complete a master plan in order to qualify for federal highway aid. At the second annual planning conference sponsored by SEWRPC in the winter of 1962, again at the Red Carpet Inn, Haist reported that the regional plan would qualify as the required master plan for all of southeastern Wisconsin. It was persuasive. All counties joined the process. Thus the regional plan became a compelling financial incentive for the region's elected bodies to fully support the regional planning process.

SEWRPC began 1963 with the seven counties having approved the land use-transportation plan prospectus and with the planning agency assembling the staff, advisory committees, and resources to undertake the planning. On February 13, a newly-appointed 52-member Technical Coordinating and Advisory Committee held its first meeting. Members included three Federal officials, five State officials, engineers and officials from each regional county as well as representatives of regional municipalities, utilities, railroads and intercity bus lines. The 52-member committee was a compromise between those who favored a dozen or so members for efficiency and those who favored

one member for each unit of government, or more than 150 members. Thus another precedent in planning was forged, the meaningful involvement of advisory committees in each step of planning.

As SEWRPC embarked on its studies, it attracted the attention of the newspapers of the region. At *The Milwaukee Journal*, Wisconsin's largest and most influential daily newspaper at the time, and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, the state's second largest daily, regional planning progress was tracked closely not only by suburban reporters who covered the issues as they were debated by village and town boards and common councils but by in-house reporters who were assigned to provide overall SEWRPC coverage and who attended most Commission and committee meetings. From its start, SEWRPC had editorial support not only from *The Milwaukee Journal* but most other regional dailies.

SEWRPC was an early user of advanced centralized computers. Its computer room was a showplace of heavy floor models that whizzed through punch cards and produced maps, charts, tables and text in ways that amazed curious onlookers whose technological savvy at the time stopped at the manual typewriter and the dial telephone. "Space Age," not yet a cliché, was applied to SEWRPC's use of new technology. As the computer models were being developed, SEWRPC's engineers and planners wrote peer-reviewed articles for publications of such organizations as the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Highway Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences. The modeling concept attracted attention and approval from other professionals. Other communities including Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester, England, studied and applied procedures designed in southeastern Wisconsin.

KNEE DEEP IN WATER

As 1963 ended, SEWRPC was working on two other major projects, both involving water. The first had its origin in the spring of 1960, when the Root River, normally a small, quiet stream that flows into Lake Michigan, spilled out of its banks and rushed through the City of Racine, flooding twelve contiguous blocks of 60 homes near downtown. The flood alerted Racine to the reality that new development upstream in southern Milwaukee County was causing increased runoff and would aggravate future flooding. Racine's officials, responding to angry citizens, invited SEWRPC engineers to visit the city and provide advice. In March 1962, the city formally requested SEWRPC to prepare a long-range Root River Watershed Plan. Other communities in the watershed followed suit and a 19-member Root River Watershed Committee was created.

Figure 2

MILWAUKEE DEEP TUNNEL



When SEWRPC was organized there were 536 Milwaukee area flow-relief devices discharging raw sanitary sewage from combined sewers and from overloaded sewers directly to surface waters. The Commission's plans included recommendations to construct a deep tunnel storage system to significantly abate both combined and separate sanitary sewer overflows. Work on the tunnels began in 1985, the system was brought into service in 1994, and it was completed in 2010. The tunnels—such as the one shown here while under construction—reduced the number of combined sewage overflow events from an average of about 52 times a year to less than 2 times a year, and reduced the volume of all sewer overflows from about 9 billion gallons a year to about 773 million gallons, a 92 percent reduction.

Watersheds are defined by natural boundaries but often are divided by political boundaries. Only agencies with region-wide purview can undertake to prepare such plans. The Root was the first of eight SEWRPC watershed plans. Of the eight, the Milwaukee River Watershed Plan attracted the most attention and the most controversy. The river carried human, animal, and industrial wastes of both urban and agricultural areas from southern Fond du Lac and Sheboygan Counties through Washington, Ozaukee, and Milwaukee Counties before discharging into Lake Michigan at Milwaukee Harbor. The watershed plan, which was completed in 1971, led to the improvement or consolidation of sewage treatment plants upstream to the extent that much of the river's game fishery was restored. The plan also included the first proposal for a deep tunnel system to be excavated in bedrock under Milwaukee to receive the polluted overflow of Milwaukee's and Shorewood's combined sanitary and storm sewers. The Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District completed work on the full system of tunnels in the spring of 2010. They receive the overflow and store it until it is pumped to Milwaukee's sewage treatment plants as capacity develops. The tunnels built prior to 2010 reduced the average annual polluted overflow to Lake Michigan by 92 percent.

Later in 1963, SEWRPC hired hydrologist Roy W. Ryling to test water quality and stream flow in the region's rivers and streams in 12 watersheds including the Fox, Rock, Des Plaines, Milwaukee, Kinnickinnic, Menomonee, Pike, Root and Sheboygan Rivers, Oak and Sauk Creeks as well as minor streams that flow into Lake Michigan. Heretofore, such information was sketchy if not nonexistent, even though it held obvious value for planning for public water supply, agriculture, fish and wildlife, recreation, industry, sewage treatment, drainage and navigation, industrial cooling, and aesthetics.

Ryling and his crew collected samples of water each month from January 1964 through February 1965 from each of 87 stations set up at bridges and culverts. The samples were tested for biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), coliform bacteria count, dissolved oxygen, all measures of organic pollution. Ryling's findings, presented in the report *Water Quality and Stream Flow in Southeastern Wisconsin* in April, 1967, made banner headlines in southeastern Wisconsin. In essence, Ryling's message was that southeastern Wisconsin had all but converted its 745 linear miles of rivers and streams into open sewers and, if trends continued, would finish the job by 1990. Not one of the region's 12 major rivers was fully fit for even partial body contact, ruling out activities such as fishing or wading, to say nothing of swimming. It has provided a framework for water resource and sewerage planning since.

LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

SEWRPC's central focus, then and now, was on its land use and transportation plan. The first version, completed in 1967 after four years of work, was contained in a three-volume report. Its recommendations were to be used to guide development in the region through 1990. It was an impressive, fully-documented presentation and the region's leaders and citizens took notice.

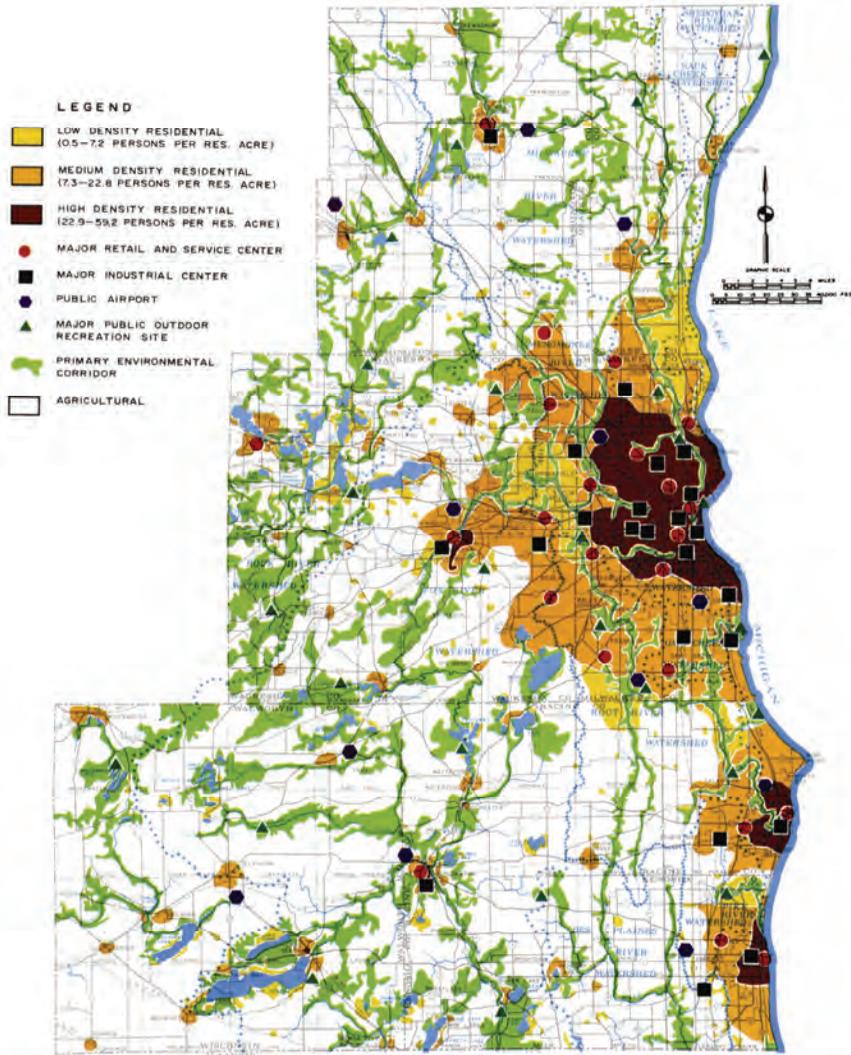
SEWRPC found that urbanization was occurring in southeastern Wisconsin faster than anticipated. The report said that, while regional population grew by 35 percent between 1950 and 1963, that population growth was accompanied by a 143 percent increase in the amount of land converted from agriculture or natural areas to urban uses. The finding was the result of an inventory of how the 1,674,289 southeastern Wisconsin residents used their 1,721,006 acres. Clearly, they were spreading out. In 1920, when Milwaukee was a city of narrow lots with duplexes in front of single family cottages on the northside and Polish flats on the southside, there were 11,346 persons to the square mile in a total of 56 square miles of urban land. Such high density supported an advanced mass transit system, based on streetcars and interurban rail systems. But by 1963, the urban area density had fallen to an average of 4,800 persons to the square mile in a total of 340 square miles of urban land, and mass transit, now based wholly on busses, was declining.

The planners settled on a land use plan that they called "controlled existing trends" in which most new housing would be guided into medium density areas contiguous to established urban areas where it could be served by centralized sewerage and water systems. This would reduce urban sprawl, the kind of leap-frog, low-density, development that was producing mixed urban-rural landscapes and that was enabled by an unrestrained land market, lower taxes in outlying towns, cheap gasoline and above all the septic tank. At that time, the septic tank was a crude, unreliable technology but it permitted the installation of flush toilets inside rural and suburban houses. Without flush toilets, urban sprawl would not occur. Americans will endure much to maintain homes in the country, including commuting long distances on congested highways, mowing huge lawns, spending countless hours maintaining swimming pools and plowing snow from long driveways. The one thing they won't tolerate is an outhouse. By the 1960s indoor plumbing was an essential aspect of the American dream.

SEWRPC also considered the consequences of doing nothing; that is, of relying upon the uncontrolled land market, local governments acting without reference to one another and unrealistic local planning to determine future development. If trends underway in 1963 continued through 1990, another 653 square miles of land would become largely urban, or

Map 3

RECOMMENDED REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN: 1990



This map portrays the Commission's land use recommendations set forth in the original regional land use plan adopted by SEWRPC in 1966. These recommendations focus on three important proposals: the location of new urban development in areas which are or can be efficiently served by sanitary sewer, public water supply and transit facilities; preservation of the best remaining elements of the natural resource base by keeping environmental corridors in natural, open uses; and the preservation of prime agricultural lands for farming. These three proposals have been carried forward in all succeeding regional land use plans.

an area more than twice as large as would occur under the recommended plan. Providing services such as water, sewers, highways, schools and utilities to such rapid and scattered growth would be hugely and unnecessarily costly. Increased reliance upon the septic tank would ensure that human wastes would increasingly contaminate groundwater, lakes, streams and wetlands and the land use patterns would require that far more highways be built than otherwise. In addition, the unplanned growth pattern would result in 15 percent more traffic and double the daily traffic congestion.

ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDORS

SEWRPC's strategies for controlling sprawl included pioneering recommendations in land use planning. None was more inspirational or successful as a tool to protect the region's best remaining natural resources than the concept of the environmental corridor. The very phrase "environmental corridor" was introduced to southeastern Wisconsin by SEWRPC's regional plan. It remains popular and useful as a concept among planners and environmentalists today

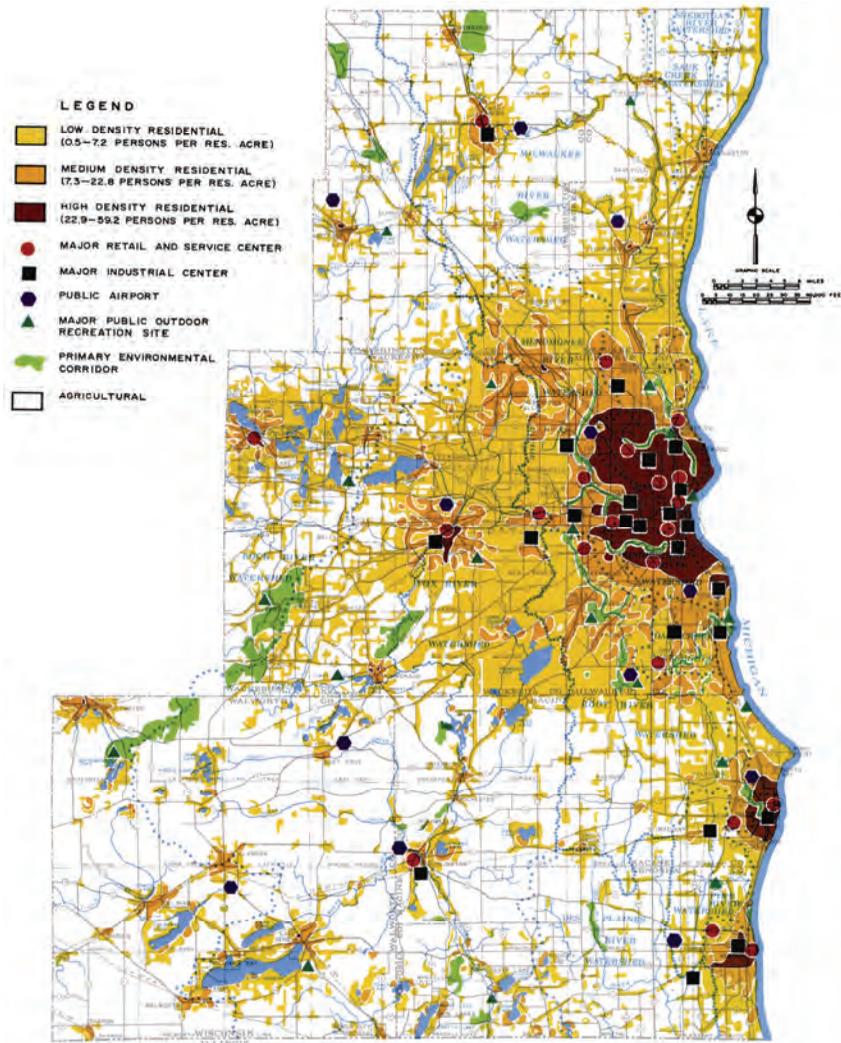
The concept of "environmental corridor" came to Philip H. Lewis Jr., a Harvard-trained landscape architect, while he was identifying potential park land in the 1950s in Illinois and in the 1960s in Wisconsin, where he had been hired by Governor Nelson. Lewis realized that the best recreation lands were characterized by river and stream valleys, wetlands, lakes, woodlands and steep slopes of 12.5 percent or more and that these often occurred as linear landscapes or corridors. Their protection by purchase, conservation easement, zoning or other means would conserve not only specific features such as lakes and rivers, but their interrelationships and the diversity of life they supported.

SEWRPC staff saw immediately that the concept could be applied to regional land use planning. Such corridors in southeastern Wisconsin are ranked each according to its size and the number and importance of its natural features. "Primary environmental corridors" of at least 400 acres in area, two miles long and 200 feet wide, were deemed to be of regional importance and should be protected by the State or Counties. "Secondary environmental corridors" were 100 acres or more, at least a mile long and contained a number of key features that made them important locally and they should be protected by local governments. The corridors appeared on planning maps as delicate green lace gracefully spread over the entire region.

The mere act of mapping the corridors, thereby enabling concerned individuals and organizations to visualize their outlines, often was a factor in their protection. Much of the Kettle Moraine area fell into such corridors. The Ice Age Trail Alliance, and several

Map 4

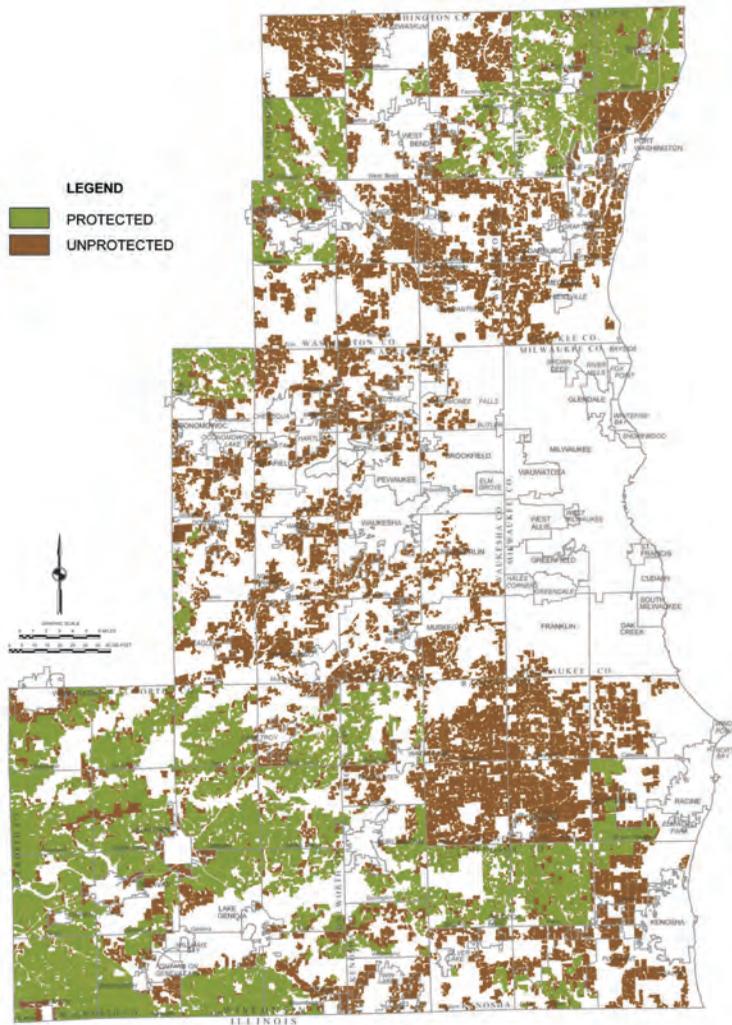
THE UNPLANNED REGIONAL LAND USE ALTERNATIVE: 1990



One of many possible land use patterns that could have been expected to evolve in the Region in the absence of professional planning is depicted on this map produced by SEWRPC in 1966. Under this scenario, increasing amounts of lower density urban development would require greater reliance on shallow private wells and on-site sewage disposal systems. Such a sprawling development pattern would accelerate the deterioration and destruction of the Region's natural resource base, and make the provision of urban services such as police and fire protection and transit difficult and costly.

Map 6

PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND



SEWRPC plan recommendations to preserve and protect prime agricultural lands through appropriate public use regulation and tax relief have had mixed acceptance in the Region since they were first made in 1966. The recommendations attained widespread support throughout Walworth County and in portions of northern Ozaukee, west central Washington, and north central Kenosha Counties. Of the 1,047 square miles of prime agricultural lands in the Region identified in the SEWRPC plans, and in followup county and local planning efforts, for protection and preservation in farming uses, about 486 square miles, or 46 percent, had been subjected to appropriate use restrictions by 2010.

Figure 3

ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDOR IN URBAN AREA



This photograph shows an environmental corridor along the Menomonee River in an urban area of western Milwaukee County. Keeping these corridors in natural, open uses not only preserves and protects the natural resource base of an area, but lends form and structure to urban development while providing convenient access by urban residents to parkways, bikeways, and pedestrian paths.

land trusts in both Waukesha and Washington Counties are keenly aware of the corridors and concentrate land protection efforts within them. So do State, County and municipal governments. The plan recommended the preservation of all 311,000 acres of primary environmental corridors. Preserving the corridors may be considered the most important measure in the regional land use plan.

BIG NEW PARKS

In 1965 only three State parks served southeastern Wisconsin, Big Foot Beach, literally in downtown Lake Geneva; Lizard Mound, a dense collection of effigy mounds northeast of West Bend, and the 9-acre Cushing Memorial Park in Delafield. Eventually two of the three were judged to be far too small for the State park status. Today Lizard Mound is a Washington County Park and Cushing is a City of Delafield Park.

As the regional land use plan was taking form, SEWRPC assigned Karl Holzwarth, a landscape architect on loan from the old Wisconsin Conservation Department, (now the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources), to comb the region for potential park sites. Holzwarth and his team found 609 sites of local, county, regional or state importance of which 13 were deemed worthy of state or regional attention. Some of these, such as Naga-Waukee, a Waukesha County park, already were preserved and functioning and their listing in the plan was intended to elevate their status. Others were undeveloped and unprotected prime sites, including Pike Lake, 1,500 acres east of Hartford in Washington County; Paradise Valley, 800 acres southwest of West Bend; which included Lucas Lake; Cedar Valley, 960 acres along Cedar Creek between Big and Little Cedar Lakes in Washington County; Sugar Creek, 640 acres along the creek of that name in the town of Lafayette, Walworth County; Harrington Beach, 850 acres on Lake Michigan in the town of Belgium, Ozaukee County; Rainbow Springs, 422 acres on the Mukwonago River west of Mukwonago, Waukesha County; Monches, 560 acres of moraines along the Oconomowoc River where it enters Waukesha County from the north; Cliffside, 400 acres dominated by high bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan in the northeastern corner of Racine County, and the abandoned Bong Air Force Base in Kenosha County.

In all, of nine sites identified by SEWRPC to be preserved as important parks, eight were recommended by the commission; all eight were protected and developed as popular regional destinations by State or County agencies. Each lies within a primary environmental corridor. Some, such as Pike Lake, already were being considered by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission as a park before the regional plan was published, so a fraction of the outcome would have occurred without the plan. But the full result came about because of SEWRPC. Regarding parks, the plan brought lasting benefit to the region.

THE POWER OF PLANNING

The regional land use plan for southeastern Wisconsin was published in a changing society hungry for the plan's brand of information. This was partly due to the appearance on the political scene of the national environmental protection movement, which was to become a permanent aspect of American political life as evidenced by Earth Day, celebrated each year since 1970, when Wisconsin's US Senator Gaylord Nelson founded it. The environmental movement's origins were complex and probably never will be fully explained but it involved many elements, not least of which was that it flourished at the grass-roots level of the typical voter.

Figure 4

PARK SITES



An inventory of the remaining potential park sites within the Region was incorporated into the SEWRPC's first land use plan adopted in 1966. The plan proposed 20 major new park sites of which 14 have been acquired and developed, including Harrington Beach, shown here, an 850-acre site containing a flooded quarry, rich woodlands, and over a mile of undeveloped Lake Michigan Beach in Ozaukee County.

Anyone in Milwaukee who walked over a bridge downtown could see the disgusting and dangerous condition of the Milwaukee River and could sense in the air substances other than life-giving oxygen. Industrial air pollution at that time was visible; the stacks of many industries were belching particles of pollution. A south side Milwaukee brass foundry's emissions were turning the neighborhood snow green with oxidized copper in winter and the neighborhood grass brown in summer with its toxicity. Inland lakes were

choked in summer with algae and aquatic weeds, rendering them unfit for fishing and boating to say nothing of swimming. The speed with which urbanization was transforming cherished vistas and valuable resources distressed established residents.

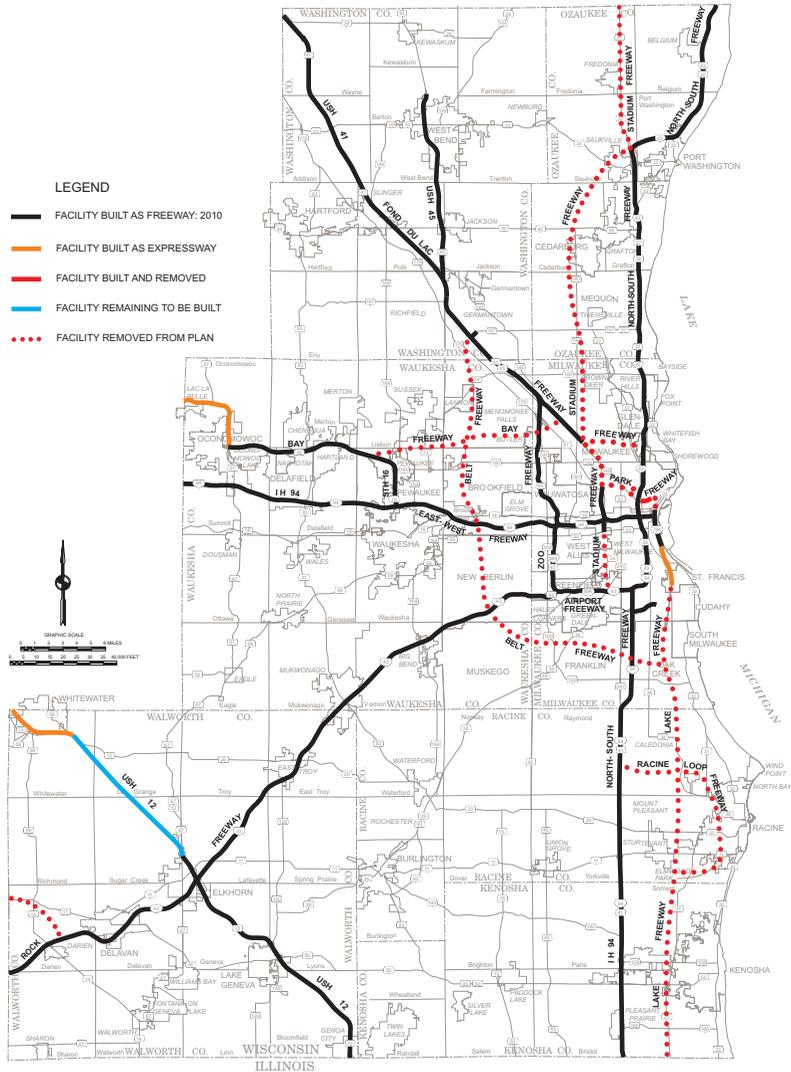
These were the environmental problems that SEWRPC was formed to address. Not all aspects of the plan met with success. SEWRPC can only recommend, not implement; it can only advise, not dictate. The transportation element of the plan recommended an additional 205 miles of new freeways to be added to those that were already built or underway by the State of Wisconsin and Milwaukee County. As it happens, the land use and transportation plan was published at the very time that anti-freeway sentiment in the region was at its peak. The only SEWRPC-recommended segment to be built in Milwaukee County was the Lake Parkway, extending from the Daniel W. Hoan bridge over the Milwaukee Harbor south to the East Layton Avenue. SEWRPC also proposed to revive mass transit in Milwaukee by expanding the use of high-speed busses on freeways and on dedicated busway lanes in the East-West freeway corridor. It was the first of 40 years of SEWRPC transit plans that eventually included light rail and a Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail system. But public transit became mired in a partisan political battle that has kept it in stalemate for two generations.

SEWRPC's efforts to curb urban sprawl also had mixed results. Waukesha County's communities did little to contain sprawl over the years and scattered development now exists all the way to its western border, development that reduced the county's once vaunted dairy farm economy to a vestige. By contrast, Walworth County led by the late County Board Chairman and SEWRPC Commissioner Eugene Hollister, adopted a county-wide zoning ordinance that blocked all residential development on parcels of land less than 35 acres unless it was served by a centralized sewer system. Thus, while Walworth County continued to grow in population, virtually all new residential construction occurred contiguously to established cities and villages. The results are visually obvious. Walworth County remains an appealing vista of flourishing farms, Kettle Moraine and tidy, functioning urban centers.

In SEWRPC's half century, it has provided assistance, services, data, accurate maps to local governments and utilities. It has completed a library of studies and plans, including plans to preserve natural and high-value geological sites; to stabilize Lake Michigan's eroding bluffs, plans for local highways and roads, specific neighborhood plans, areawide sewerage and sewage treatment plants, water quality plans, special district plans for the Racine and Kenosha areas air quality plans, airport plans, housing plans and library system plans. In 2010, the agency was preparing a new regional housing plan and completing a domestic water supply plan.

Map 7

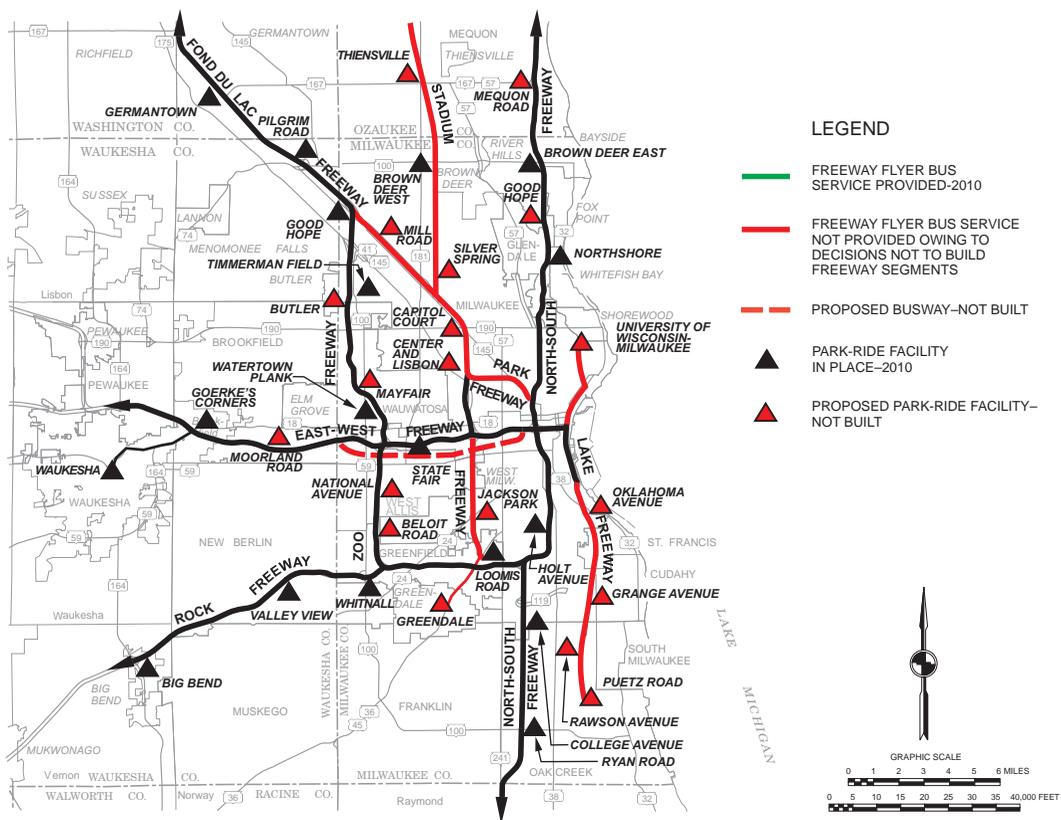
RECOMMENDED REGIONAL FREEWAY SYSTEM: 1990



The regional transportation plan adopted by SEWRPC in 1966 envisioned a 441 mile regional freeway system. The fate and status of that system in 2010 is shown on this map. Nearly 270 miles were built as freeways and remain in service. About 13 miles have been built as expressways with limited arterial street grade crossings. Less than one mile – the Park East in downtown Milwaukee – was built and has since been removed. About 12 miles remain to be built consisting of the USH 12 freeway in Walworth County. The remaining 145 miles were never built and have been removed from the regional plan.

Map 8

RECOMMENDED REGIONAL RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM: 1990



The original 1990 regional transportation plan recommended a motor bus-based rapid transit system to provide a high level of efficient, economical transit service within the most heavily urbanized portions of the Region. Buses operating in mixed traffic over a completed regional freeway system were expected to provide fast and regular service throughout the Milwaukee urbanized area. Within the East-West travel corridor in Milwaukee County, the plan proposed an exclusive busway that would parallel the East-West Freeway and avoid anticipated congestion on that freeway. While that busway was taken to preliminary engineering by the Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, it was never built. That busway facility, however, became part of the originally approved national Interstate Highway System and, with the closeout of that system in the early 1990's, became the basis for an award of \$291 million in Federal transportation funds to the Milwaukee area. Over the years, that money has been used to retain consultants to study the development of light rail and other guideway transit technologies, to rebuild the Marquette Interchange, to remove the Park East Freeway, and to rebuild the 6th Street viaduct. The approximately \$91 million remaining in 2010 were being programmed by Milwaukee County for the purchase of new buses, and by the City of Milwaukee for a proposed central area streetcar facility. The 1990 plan also proposed a supporting system of outlying park-ride facilities. By 2010, 18 of those facilities were in place.

Its core plan remains the land use and transportation plan. Periodically, SEWRPC revisits the plan and recasts it to reflect changes in development, the economy, and technology. The present land use and transportation plan is the fifth iteration of the first and looks toward the year 2035. Nonetheless, it retains the basic principles of the first plan, including the protection of environmental corridors and agricultural lands, the preservation and development of parks and neighborhoods and the orderly, contiguous growth of established urban areas.

In its half century of history, SEWRPC seldom has functioned in an political environment free of conflict. Sometimes it has become enmeshed in it. Over the years it has been criticized for standing in the way of development with its anti-sprawl plans, for failure to control urban sprawl, for proposing freeway expansions, for failing to recommend specific freeways, for planning transit expansions, for not planning enough transit expansions. Usually the critics overlook the reality that SEWRPC is limited to an advisory capacity and can neither carry out its plans nor make public policy. Notwithstanding the criticism, SEWRPC anticipated future population growth and new development, documented the damage done by the rapid growth from 1945 through 1963, and fashioned specific strategies for identifying, protecting, even improving the quality of natural resources in the face of growth. Local environmental organizations who actually buy and protect land have found its data compelling and reliable. Much of the environmental dialogue in southeastern Wisconsin would not have achieved its sophistication without the regional plan. From an environmental point of view, the land use plan remains a masterpiece whose provisions are no less pertinent to the region in 2010 than they were in 1967.

Copies of “Master Planners: Fifty Years of Regional Planning in Southeastern Wisconsin” may be obtained from:

1. Over the counter at SEWRPC headquarters
W239 N1812 Rockwood Drive
Waukesha, Wisconsin, 53188;
Cost: \$29.00
2. Telephone SEWRPC at: 262-547-6721,
Cost: \$29.00 & shipping
3. Email SEWRPC at: historybook@sewrpc.org
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Kenneth R. Yunker, PE
Executive Director

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QUOTABLE QUOTE....

“Planning, a thankless job, produces criticism and resentment among many directly affected. Yet it is undoubtedly one of the most important tasks of government. It may well be the most important domestic function. If America is spared the ravages of war, the kind of life that future citizens enjoy will depend to a great extent upon the efforts of planners.”

Governor Gaylord Nelson
“A Regional Planning Agency for
Southeastern Wisconsin Area”
Traffic Quarterly
July 1960