



# FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

## Resilient Communities project kicks off with 14 studies in Carver County

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Starting this fall, University of Minnesota students in several different disciplines will begin studying different issues in 14 projects as part of a partnership with Carver County.

The studies, with additional 16 planned for spring, are the development of Resilient Communities Project (RCP) which kicked off with a banquet at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum on Friday, Sept. 11.

Prior to the partnership with Carver County, RCP focused on the individual cities of Minnetonka, North Saint Paul and Rosemount in past years.

With Carver County the project takes another step in taking in a wide variety of projects and studies in the fields of transportation, engagement, economic development, alternative energy, resource preservation and public administration development.

Greco said the diversity of Carver County projects is what made the application, which was accepted last March, appealing for the 2015-16 academic year.

"It's one of the most diverse, in terms of the types of projects identified and diverse in terms of the number of partners who are involved," said Greco. "It's a pleasure to be working with Carver County."

Greco added Carver County was able to identify projects that needed assistance from

students and faculty and prepare them for students to work on them, and later present them.

"Our goal is to leverage the resources of the university to help local communities meet their own self-identified goals," he said.

Carver County Board Chair Randy Maluchnik said the project will be a benefit to Carver County.

"Like any good partnership, everyone benefits," he said. "The county benefits with efficient access to a full range of University of Minnesota departments and resources. It increases local capacity with an infusion of energy and creativity to move projects forward, opportunities to test new ideas and make data-driven decisions. Not decisions based on political rhetoric or sound bites."

Maluchnik added the costs of the program are well worth it.

"Most importantly we get a lot of work done at a very good price for the taxpayers," said Maluchnik. "We are excited to partner with the University and its students and faculty to bring fresh ideas and resources to the community-identified priorities... We are sure that Carver County and our partners will receive a great value and added value to our tax dollars."

At the kickoff banquet, Greco explained that students and faculty have already begun working on the 14 projects slated for the fall.

Among the projects are several related

to Watertown including a residential marketing campaign, implementation of GIS tools, sustainable turf management and a Watertown Whitewater Park exploration.

Watertown City Administrator Shane Fineran said he was initially hesitant in joining the program, but realized soon the benefits of RCP and how it fit with the city's goals for efficiency.

"The City of Watertown, and our leaders, had put a high value on leveraging and creating partnership with other local agencies," he said. "With the continued focus on operating a lean organization and making sure our staff has tools and knowledge to carry out their functions."

Fineran added that while the individual projects are focused on Watertown, they can have wide benefits and can be replicated.

"That's one of the thing I took from initial meetings is it doesn't have to be specifically Watertown but think about your neighbors," he said. "That was one of the focus of mine is how can this be used in Victoria or Norwood Young America or in another community down the road."

Carver County Historical Society Executive Director Wendy Petersen-Bjorn added that another RCP project related to historic preservation will look at the Andrew Peterson Farmstead to maximize the site's potential as a public resource and an historic attraction.

"It continues to grow," said Petersen-Bjorn,

sharing that RCP will help develop studies of the 1917 barn and the house to figure out priorities and ascertain historical information for future grant writing and the master plan for the farm. "It saves us two years and it saves us tens of thousands of dollars. Hopefully, by next spring we will be able to give some tours at the property."

Greco said students in 20 courses in 11 departments at the University of Minnesota will be involved this fall to take a look at the 14 projects.

"There's a lot going on with a lot of students, a lot of faculty and a lot people involved in those projects," he said. "I'm already seeing a lot of excitement about those in the first week of classes."

The remainder of the projects will be matched up with University of MN students and faculty in the spring.

Greco added he hopes the connections created with the University of Minnesota and Carver County will be ongoing after RCP's role is concluded.

"Although our partnership is only a year in length, hopefully the benefits of this project will be something that Carver County will enjoy for many, many years to come," he said. "This is truly a partnership with many long-term impacts and we hope it goes well beyond the formal time of the partnership."

For more information on RCP, visit [rcp.umn.edu](http://rcp.umn.edu) and follow them on Twitter @RCPummn or on Facebook.

FROM LEFT: Carver County Board Chair Randy Maluchnik praises the Resilient Communities project. • Some of University of Minnesota students that are taking part on the project were recognized during the banquet. • Watertown City Administrator Shane Fineran talks about the ways in which the Resilient Communities project can help Watertown and similar communities. (NYA Times staff photos by Adam Gruenewald)