

# visions

Update & Forecast  
of the Bright Future  
of McLean County



ISSUE 1, SUMMER 2018



## MCRPC Celebrates 50 Years in McLean County

The McLean County Regional Planning Commission has been helping shape Bloomington-Normal and McLean County for the past 50 years, playing a role in virtually every community planning activity since its creation by the McLean County Board of Supervisors in 1968.

Its value as a regional planning arm also has brought federal dollars to help projects happen, first through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and later through the U.S. Department of Transportation.

In the early years, when Bloomington and Normal were smaller and did not have staff planners, MCRPC played a bigger day-to-day role, holding zoning hearings, creating subdivision ordinances and other regulations.

MCRPC was also heavily involved in social services, helping create a human service plan for the county and conducting a variety of studies including those on community needs, the homeless, immigration, and housing.

“ Planning is a technical exercise, but community input puts the heart and soul into a plan. ”

Vasudha Pinnamaraju Gadhiraaju,  
MCRPC Executive Director

—Continued on page 2

Connecting Residents  
with Greenways

page 6

Metropolitan Planning  
Organization

page 3



Regional  
Housing Plan

Page 7



# MCRPC Celebrates 50 Years

*Continued from cover*

Transportation needs have always been a main focus for MCRPC. Community planning impacts all aspects of mobility from walking to driving, helping determine where people live and work.

Commission staff created a short-range development program for the Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System in the 1980s and conducting ridership counts and rider opinion surveys.

As a Metropolitan Planning Organization, MCRPC works with the Illinois Department of Transportation to update the long-range transportation plan every five years. It also has conducted bicycle-pedestrian planning, worked on the East Side Highway feasibility study, and administered the Main Street Feasibility Plan.

As the Twin Cities started growing and Bloomington and Normal hired their own planning staff to take over the day-to-day planning duties, in 1990s the MCRPC board decided to change the commission's role in the community. These changes came as the founding MCRPC director, Herman Dirks, stepped down after decades establishing the Commission's goals and tasks.

Paul Russell was hired as executive director in 1994 and tasked with placing a greater emphasis on long-range planning issues.

Besides working on and updating comprehensive plans for Bloomington and Normal, MCRPC developed or updated plans for area communities including Danvers, LeRoy, Lexington and Chenoa.

Among other things, commission staff also developed a Regional



Greenways Plan and Southwest Bloomington Plan and created a draft regional water needs intergovernmental agreement.

When Russell retired in 2013, the MCRPC board again decided to change the direction of the commission to include more community outreach. Vasudha Pinnamaraju Gadhiraaju was named executive director.

In its work to create new comprehensive plans for Bloomington and Normal, MCRPC staff gathered the thoughts of thousands of residents in each community to create a planning guide addressing the needs and desires of community members. Staff walked neighborhoods and talked to residents, organized small meetings, and hit social media with surveys and videos.

In Bloomington, that feedback focused on the importance of the performance of schools in District 87—a factor that did not drive previous planning efforts in the community. Residents made it clear that economic development, education, and neighborhoods need to be considered together, particularly in Bloomington's core.

As a result, Bloomington's 2035 Comprehensive Plan encourages the city to focus on regeneration of the west side and preservation of the city's historic center along with Downtown re-development.

In Normal, the community outreach showed residents are thrilled with Uptown and want more places like it and want to build on the town's relationship with Illinois State University while still protecting single-family neighborhoods around the campus.



## What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization?

They also showed strong support toward growing as a tech-savvy community. These ideas were used to help shape Normal's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This plan envisions Normal as a Complete, Connected and Compact Community by 2040.

In addition to the increasing community outreach component in comprehensive planning, MCRPC also re-energized its partnerships with public, private, institutional, and not-for-profit agencies in the community.

It completed "BN Home," the first regional housing study since the 1970s, and established a regional housing group to work on affordable and supportive housing issues as well as innovative housing solutions. MCRPC is a key partner in preparing and implementing BN Advantage, a regional economic development strategy.

But the commission's work is far from over. It's faced with helping prepare communities for this world of rapidly changing technology by creating "smart cities" that embrace technology with critical infrastructure and improved sustainability, enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

A key component of that exercise includes educating the residents so they understand how the technology is impacting cities and what they can expect within the next few decades.

MCRPC is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Bloomington Normal Urbanized Area. What does this mean? As the MPO, MCRPC has regional transportation planning responsibilities.

In 1967, when the population of the Bloomington-Normal urban area exceeded 50,000, the state designated the area as qualified to form as an MPO. This began a process of directly coordinated transportation planning between MCRPC, local governments, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and federal transportation agencies.

Federal transportation dollars are MCRPC's primary funding, used for planning over the short and long term. MCRPC also uses state funds, including an annual grant recently used to conduct a freight study, manage the Regional Housing Study and evaluate the feasibility of the adopted Main Street Plan.

Local government MPO participation is the path to federal support for transportation investment, through grant and formula funding opportunities. Large scale projects require millions of dollars, a very taxing challenge for local budgets without federal participation. MPO participants are allotted federal funding from formula programs (where funds are usually allocated based on population) for use in major street projects, such as Hamilton Road, Towanda-Barnes Road, Northtown Road and other street and bridge work. Federal dollars are critical to the ongoing Route 66 Historic Bike Trail, and were essential for the redevelopment of Uptown Normal, which received over \$20 million from the highly competitive TIGER infrastructure grant program.

Transit providers are funded through formula grants based on urban or rural population. The MPO conducts cooperative planning with transit providers, including Connect Transit, rural public transit agency SHOW BUS, and social service agencies providing transportation for their clients or the public. Through the Human Service Transportation Plan (HSTP) MCRPC administers coordinated transit services, share resources and develop cooperative practices that improve service for rural residents, people with disabilities or other challenges, and older residents and others who prefer or rely on public transit. Effective in FY 2019, MCRPC and Connect Transit have contracted to provide planning services for Connect Transit to effectively address the broad community goal of transit-supportive development.

These paths to funding are contingent upon our MPO role. MCRPC prepares an annual Unified Work Program showing how these tasks will be carried out, and a Transportation Improvement Program identifying projects and committed funding over the next five years. A Long Range Transportation Plan is developed every five years, most recently in 2017; this plan looks forward 25 years and includes goals and performance measurements to trigger the changes needed to make our transportation system responsive in an uncertain future.

# 50th ANNIVERSARY

## MCRPC IS CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SERVICE IN MCLEAN COUNTY!

### LATE 1960s-1970s

As the HUD designated Areawide Review Agency, MCRPC reviewed all McLean County applications for federal funding for consistency with the adopted comprehensive plans.

 **Administered a law enforcement program for McLean County with funding by the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission.**

Proposed land use controls and development standards for the proposed development of Evergreen Lake.

Developed Comprehensive Development Guide including The Land Use Element and The Housing Element for McLean County.

Assisted the McLean County Board of Health in developing a Human Service Plan for McLean County.



Prepared an application for the provision of 911 service as required by the state.

Prepared Comprehensive Plans and Zoning Ordinances for rural communities including Saybrook and LeRoy.

 **Prepared Sign Ordinance, Beautification Plan, and Tree Planting policies for Bloomington.**

Established Bloomington West Side Development Committee.

Administered many grants including HUD, IDOT, IEPA, DHS.

Completed a Financial Impact Analysis Report for annexations in Bloomington and Normal.

Partnered with area hospitals, Bloomington, and Normal to prepare a study analyzing the need and costs for paramedic service.

Completed a preliminary draft of a Regional Water and Sewer Plan so Bloomington, Normal, and surrounding governmental agencies may be eligible for federal assistance.



### 1980s

Coordinated a study of area flooding problems and managed the federal flood insurance program.

Worked with Bloomington's Department of Urban Development to form a citizens committee to gather public participation for updated recommendations on the Land Use Plan for Bloomington's West Side and creation of the West Side Development Guide.

Acted as a liaison to the Bureau of the Census for the 1980 Census.

Prepared a five-year plan to help with Bloomington's Community Development Program.

 **Provided planning assistance to McLean County Economic Opportunity Corporation.**

Provided population and economic forecasts for the entire county and District 87 student population.

Began a Solid Waste Management Study.



Performed energy audits for major McLean County facilities.

Created Health Care Program recommendations for City of Bloomington in conjunction with City and Township staff.




## 1990s

MCRPC celebrated its 25th anniversary and was reorganized to emphasize long-range planning in light of very rapid growth.

Developed a McLean County Comprehensive Plan.

Spearheaded a joint aerial imagery project.

Served as a driving force in creation of the McLean County GIS Consortium (McGIS).

 **Created a draft regional water needs intergovernmental agreement.**


Developed the Southwest Bloomington Plan in response to rapid growth.

Developed the first Regional Greenways Plan in 1997.

Completed the final report on the Solid Waste Needs Assessment.

Disseminated data from 1990 Census and coordinated 2000 Census efforts.


Conducted a historic building survey for Bloomington.



**McGIS was established. MCRPC served as the lead agency for McGIS. McGIS continued to coordinate regular aerial imagery of the entire County, developed several regional GIS layers, published numerous interactive maps online, and provided GIS training and assistance for public sector staff and members of the community.**

## 2000s

Instituted *VISIONS* Newsletter, an award-winning publication which presents information on planning and development issues that impact the quality of life in the community of McLean County.

 **Instituted Community Information Forum, an annual educational forum which highlighted issues that could affect the future of planning and development in the community.**

Instituted Consistency Review process to evaluate land developments against comprehensive plans.

Completed the Lexington

Comprehensive Plan and Subdivision Ordinance in 2004.

Completed an area plan for North Normal in 2000.

Updated Bloomington and Normal's comprehensive plans as well as those for rural communities including Chenoa; and a regional plan for Logan County with plans for Lincoln, Atlanta, Mount Pulaski, and Elkhart.

Developed the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan in 2009.

Disseminated data from 2000 Census and coordinated 2010 Census efforts.

## 2010-PRESENT

Began a partnership with the West Bloomington Revitalization Project.

Updated the natural resource inventory for McLean County.


Produced new comprehensive plans for Bloomington and Normal. Bloomington Comprehensive Plan (a.k.a. BringItOn Bloomington!) won State and National Awards as an outstanding plan in 2015.

Conducted Fiscal Impact Analysis of land development as part of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan.

Completed BN Home, the first regional housing study since the 1970s, in 2017.


**Currently involved with several efforts to promote technology, gather and distribute data and promote the community as a Smart Region.**

MCRPC served as the lead agency for McGIS until 2016. McLean County is currently leading the McGIS efforts.

 **Established Regional Housing Advisory and Staff committees to address a variety of housing issues identified in the BN Home and the Comprehensive plans.**

Completed a neighborhood plan for Bloomington's Dimmitt's Grove Neighborhood.

Revamped the Commission Website. Developed online and social media presence.

 **Actively partnered in BN Advantage, a regional economic development initiative. MCRPC is serving as the lead agency for indicators and metrics task force for BN Advantage and is in the process of publishing BN Vitals, a dashboard with over 200 economic indicators in McLean County. Visit [www.BNAdvantage.com](http://www.BNAdvantage.com) for more information.**

Partnered with area hospitals, McLean County Health Department and others in developing the first regional Health Plan.

# Connecting Residents with Our Greenways

In 1996, the McLean County Regional Planning Commission initiated the Regional Greenways Planning project to preserve linear open spaces to provide a scenic break in urban areas, to bring attention to parks for recreational use, and to protect environmentally sensitive areas. Funded in part by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the project involved the help of countless volunteers and staff members from Bloomington, Normal, and McLean County who formed the McLean County Greenways Coalition. The coalition included a conservation and environment committee, a legal, implementation and management

**Mission: to connect McLean County residents with natural areas and improve their quality of life.**

committee, a recreation committee, and a steering committee.

The initial plan identified 78 priority future greenways for development and divided the county into five areas. Work on the 1997 Regional Greenways Plan was intensive and included identifying endangered and threatened species; conducting an inventory of greenway resources;

prioritizing future greenways; and considering ways of implementation.

Through the years, the effort helped advocate for establishing numerous greenways including: Merwin Preserve, Moraine View, Funks Grove (Sugar Grove), Comlara Park, Constitution Trail, Mackinaw River Area, natural areas around Lake Bloomington, and a variety of parks in Bloomington and Normal.

Today, the effort continues through the Greenways Advisory Committee. This April, the committee determined several goals and suggested establishing three subcommittees to help accomplish the goals.



Greenways are corridors of land and water that connect places and people in McLean County. These open spaces are located within natural or man-made areas and protect habitats, wildlife, and resources. They often contain trails or paths for alternative transportation, offer recreational opportunities, and add to the quality of life in our county.

---

## MCRPC Is the Proud Partner of BN Advantage

MCRPC has been one of the key forces behind the formation of BN Advantage, a regional economic development strategy.

MCRPC along with McLean County Chamber of Commerce, the Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council and the Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and Central Illinois Regional Airport embarked on a Regional Economic Development Study in 2013 which was completed in 2015 and was officially recognized by the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal and McLean County soon after. Connect Transit later joined to move the initiative forward.

BN Advantage is not an organization. It is a strategy aimed at building on the existing great assets of our community while recognizing the declining economic trends and identify ways to diversify and strengthen the region's economy. Many public, business, institution, and non-profit partners embraced it and support it with their time, talent, and financial resources. Implementation of the strategy is distributed among 5 different Task Forces—Workforce, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Indicators and Metrics and Marketing. The Leadership Council comprised of many leaders from

across all sectors of the community serve as the oversight body for implementation BN Advantage.

MCRPC is in charge of the Indicators and Metrics Task Force. This Task Force gathers and tracks several hundred key economic indicators on demographics, talent, employment, businesses, industries, real estate and others to measure the region's economy. The results and an analysis of this work will be available to the public this fall through a dashboard on the MCRPC website.

For comprehensive information about the BN Advantage strategy, please visit [www.bnadvantage.com](http://www.bnadvantage.com).

**D**uring work on **Bloomington's Comprehensive Plan**, MCRPC heard a clear call from the plan participants about a need for addressing housing issues at the regional level. Following the adoption of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan and in conjunction with the Normal Comprehensive Plan, MCRPC teamed up with Bloomington, Normal and the Bloomington Housing Authority in hiring a consultant to conduct a regional housing study.

The study, completed in 2017, noted that the Twin Cities lost population between 2010 and 2015 reducing the demand for housing. While McLean County was generally overbuilt, there was a mismatch between the type of housing available and the type of housing needed.

While the County is relatively affordable with a median home value of \$160,000 it fell short in its offerings for low-income families, the elderly, disabled, and the homeless. Pointing to the changing demographic makeup of the community, the study identified the need for a variety of housing options for young professionals and seniors.

The study led to the creation of three distinct but interrelated advisory groups addressing different housing-related areas: Innovative Housing Solutions, Affordable and Supportive Housing, and an inter-governmental staff committee. The purpose of these groups is to advocate for affordable, supportive, and safe housing for all people in the county; promote housing that responds to the changing demographics; prompt discussions on the housing gaps and solutions; support preserving existing housing; give support to existing agencies trying to implement new housing strategies; and gather housing-related data and track progress.



## MCRPC Addresses Housing Issues

*New committee focuses on tracking information to address affordable housing issues*

The Staff Committee is scheduled to meet every other month to determine the priorities and policies of the Regional Housing Advisory Committee and act as the conduit between local housing efforts and state and federal housing agencies. Under MCRPC leadership, the staff committee will prepare a regional Consolidated Plan for the Bloomington and Normal CDBG programs.

Recently, the Affordable and Supportive Housing group had its first meeting. The group consists of representatives from MCRPC, Bloomington Housing Authority, City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, McLean County, the Continuum of Care through PATH, the Baby Fold, Chestnut Health Systems, MarcFirst, Mid Central Community Action, Habitat for Humanity of McLean County, Normal Township, Prairie State Legal Services, and Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Greater Peoria.

Members suggested a master list of available services be available to

all social service and government agencies that work with those in need so clients don't get bounced around in the system. They also identified a need for more services, including expanded supportive housing, that help people in danger of homelessness before they become homeless.


They reiterated that Affordable housing options need to be near services, such as the transit system, health care and groceries. While there are agencies that offer services that go to those in need, such as the health mobile, there is a need for more.

The group set two goals to reach within the next three years: to use tracking information—to be gathered by MCRPC—to determine the outcome of existing affordable housing programs and any gaps that exist; and to create technical documents and advocacy statements that can be passed on to government bodies for consideration.





115 E. Washington Street, #M103  
Bloomington, Illinois 61701  
(309) 828-4331  
[www.mcplan.org](http://www.mcplan.org)




## MCRPC Debuts New Website

The McLean County Regional Planning Commission will soon debut a new, more user-friendly website (at [mcplan.org](http://mcplan.org)) that will allow users to get the information they want with minimal clicks of the mouse. The new version also will be mobile friendly and complies with the American with Disabilities Act.

Designed by Cybernautic Design of the Twin Cities, the website will have three main subject sections: **Plans and Studies**, which includes all the plans created by MCRPC such as comprehensive plans, transportation plans, regional studies and the Human Services Transportation Plan; **Projects and Programs**, which includes the Greenways initiative, regional housing initiative and sustainable transportation projects; and **Data and Maps**, including BN Vitals, Housing, Transportation and Demographics dashboards.

As part of its 50-year anniversary, MCRPC is scanning decades worth of old documents. All these documents will be made available to the public on the new website under the document center. Besides being more visually appealing and easier to navigate, the website will contain more and the most up-to-date information.

[Visit mcplan.org to see new site!](http://mcplan.org) 

### STAFF

**Vasudha P. Gadhiraaju, AICP**  
Executive Director  
**Jennifer Sicks, AICP**  
Senior Transportation Planner  
**Lauren Gibson**  
Community Planner  
**Alyssa Cooper**  
Community Planner  
**Teresa Anderson**  
Assistant Planner

**Jordan Brown**  
Office Manager  
**Katherine Sawyer**  
Intern/Part Time  
**Loretta Santejka**  
Intern/Part Time  
**Timothy Riley**  
Intern/Part Time  
**Rachel Pritts**  
Intern/Part Time

### COMMISSIONERS

**Mary Jefferson**  
Chairperson, Town of Normal  
**Michael Buragas**  
Vice-Chairperson,  
City of Bloomington  
**Michael Gorman**  
Executive Committee  
Representative,  
City of Bloomington

**John Burrill**  
Bloomington/Normal Water  
Reclamation District  
**Joseph Cleary**  
Unit 5  
**Jim Fruin**  
McLean County  
**Mary Kramp**  
McLean County

**Carl Olson**  
Airport Authority  
**Linda Olson**  
McLean County  
**Carl Teichman**  
Town of Normal  
**Mark Wylie**  
District 87