



# CREATIVE PLACEMAKING: CREATING LIVABLE/ LIKEABLE PLACES

## EQUITABLE ECONOMIC ECOSYSTEMS



**REGION FIVE**  
Development Commission

JUNE 2020

[www.regionfive.org](http://www.regionfive.org)



# Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 4** Project Background
- 6** Importance
- 7** Examples of Creative Placemaking
- 8** Welcoming Communities Advocacy Groups
- 9** Creative Placemaking: In the Works
- 10** Concluding Thoughts
- 12** Interrelated Initiatives & Operating Frameworks

# Creative Placemaking in Region 5

Creative Placemaking - Creating Livable/Likeable Places is one of three value chain (VC) focal points in Region Five Development Commission's (R5DC) Equitable Economic Ecosystem (EEE) initiative for regional prosperity. R5DC partners have used Creative Placemaking initiatives over several years to lift up arts and culture to build relationships between diverse partners and to build positive change. Creative placemaking engages stakeholders, including artists, early in the community improvements process, which provides opportunities to look at community challenges and opportunities in an inclusive manner, based on a variety of community perspectives.

This report updates the Creative Placemaking - Creating Livable/Likeable Places and Welcoming Communities Advocacy Group (WCAG) initiatives of the Region's EEE project for regional prosperity. The other two VC and WCAG efforts, updated in separate reports, include Solar Energy and Local Foods.

For this report on current work for the EEE project, we will highlight examples of progress in the creative placemaking value chain development and Welcoming Community Advocacy Groups. And tomorrow? The path is cloudy with the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on health, community, and economy. However, we know that creative placemaking is key to community-based recovery and rebuilding through and after the pandemic we all share. Creative placemaking embodies the value and healing powers of the places we all call home; it's a necessary skill in creating a high quality of life in normal times and is now a lifeline to recovery as we collectively seek to survive and thrive out of the natural and man-made disaster that is COVID-19.

**"The specific challenge for R5DC is finding support that helps us expand programming (for which we are trained and have the capacity to deliver) that benefits marginalized and low-income communities. Much of our traditionally allocated funding supports economic ecosystems that do not consider or incent fair and just systems where all people can prosper. Systems change that builds wealth and multiple forms of wealth - done in ways that authentically and equitably include diverse cultures - is an intentional practice and takes steadfast commitment."**

**Cheryal Hills, Executive Director  
Region Five Development Commission**

## Acknowledgements:

Dawn Espe, Senior Regional Development Planner, Cheryal Hills, Executive Director, Angela Anderson, Marketing Director, Region Five Development Commission (R5DC), Jane Leonard, President, Monica Segura-Schwartz, Policy and Outreach Consultant, Growth & Justice; Stacey J. Stockdill, CEO/Founder, EnSearch, Inc. R5DC EEE project reports can be downloaded at [www.regionfive.org/resources](http://www.regionfive.org/resources).

## Project Background

In 2019, R5DC received funding from the Northwest Area Foundation to begin advancing a sequenced strategy to construct equitable economic ecosystems (EEE) for regional prosperity in their five-county region of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties in Central Minnesota, from the community-level origins and spread across the region. The initiative features Welcoming Community Advocacy Group (WCAG) and Value Chain (VC) development to help support workforce attraction and strengthen cultural agility in R5DC. This report focuses on the Creative Placemaking VC and Creative Placemaking WCAG pilot communities.

These current efforts build on a base of R5DC's long-term work in rural and regional resilience across sectors and municipalities, including those aimed to recover from the Great Recession (2008-2010), which left the regions communities facing the worst economic crash since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Ten years ago, hundreds of citizens from the region met many times to envision and lay groundwork for a brighter future for their children and grandchildren. The initiative was one of the first in R5DC to meaningfully engage marginalized and disadvantaged populations in the region.

Out of that work, Creative Placemaking was identified as an important community builder and economic engine. According to the American Planning Association, "Creative placemaking is a process where community members, artists, arts and culture organizations, community developers, and other stakeholders use arts and cultural strategies to ....increase vibrancy, improve economic conditions, and build capacity among residents to take ownership of their communities." It's one of three core engines propelling the current EEE project, from both a welcoming (diverse, equitable, inclusive) community perspective, and a value chain economic development perspective.

As noted above, the EEE project focuses on investments in three community and economic value chain community-based pilots -- in local food systems, creative placemaking (arts & culture), and sustainable renewable energy --and the eight forms of wealth (capital) in the central MN rural region based on the WealthWorks model: financial, cultural, intellectual, social, individual, natural, built, and political (see endnotes for more details).

The foundations underpinning such comprehensive systems change are collaboration and intentionality: in welcoming diverse people and ideas, in building social and financial equity by all for all, in inclusion of all those affected by and effecting change, and, in aligning resources and talent across sectors and disciplines to accomplish such systems change. Learning from these community-based EEE pilots, R5DC seeks to modernize rural community and economic development approaches to fit the changing needs and opportunities of 21st Century small towns and rural regions.



The quest for sustainable and shared regional prosperity emerged out of documented and persistent regional needs to address demographics shifts and economic challenges in Greater Minnesota, from workforce development and recruitment to business succession and more, as acknowledged in the 2019 (and ongoing) DevelopMN strategic plan, created by the MN Association of Development Organizations (MADO) to guide regional competitiveness across Greater Minnesota.

The DevelopMN plan echoes the ideas and emerging practices to overcome regional, racial, and environmental inequities and disparities identified across the urban-rural spectrum in Minnesota by the companion (and also living document) 2020 Minnesota Equity Blueprint. R5DC and other MADO members helped create the Blueprint alongside hundreds of Minnesotans and other organizations in the Thriving by Design Network – Rural & Urban Together, via a community engagement, research, analysis, and writing process co-hosted by Growth & Justice and OneMN.org.

The specific factors inspiring the current EEE project, and noted in both the DevelopMN and Blueprint documents, and at play in R5DC (and across much of Minnesota) pre-COVID 19, and now further exacerbated by the pandemic, are the following:

- Dwindling existing economic drivers are inadequate to support existing and emerging economic challenges and opportunities such as workforce and entrepreneurial development for current and potential residents. Region 5's economic development origins were historically rooted in agriculture. Today, tourism, manufacturing and some agribusiness are its primary—and insufficient—economic engines.
- Lack of opportunity and cultural amenities further discourage young workers, families, newcomers, and potential home-comers from coming to raise their families and/or retire/refire to hometowns and seasonal cabins as permanent residents.
- The declining general population – heavily weighted by an aging, mostly white, population-- is shrinking local economies and the tax base while increasing burdens upon current workers for the funding of entitlement programs and local public services and education.
- Systemic barriers to education and workforce credentialing prevent immigrant newcomers and disadvantaged communities of color to help fill the need for skilled workers.

Also a troubling concern: the rise of hate groups in central MN. They have always been present in the shadows, but emerged in recent years more publicly to protest and express hostility towards anyone or anything perceived to be threatening their way of life: immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ persons, and inclusive community planning. The regions community and business leaders welcome talent, ideas, and resources from all corners of the state and the globe. The hate groups increase fear and anxiety about people and cultures seen as unacceptably “different”. This rise in hate is both a moral challenge and a massive barrier to the already difficult efforts to improve community and economic conditions for ALL members of the community.

The Equitable Economic Systems for regional prosperity initiative seeks to dislodge the cultural inertia and increase the public courage to be welcoming. It further seeks to increase welcoming community advocacy groups to help build welcoming communities. These actions lay the necessary social groundwork for a modernized approach to rural community and economic development – an approach based on welcoming diversity and building value chains/interconnections of all kinds to foster economic innovation and equitably grow vibrant, inclusive communities.

## Why is this important?

---

The first quarter of the 21st century presents a number of challenges and opportunities to rural Minnesota as it charts its economic future. An economy driven by innovation demands that we create an environment that nurtures talent and workforce, supports entrepreneurship, and creates community conditions that welcome and support the innovation powers of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For rural Minnesota to succeed, strong, collective and credible voices need to create and move forward an equitable economic ecosystems agenda at the local, state, and federal level.

The Region Five Development Commission's EEE initiative is developing and propelling those voices – and actions -- for positive and productive change, not only for the region but as a model for small towns and rural areas state and nationwide to follow. Indeed, as we struggle now through the Covid-19 crisis, made worse by pre-existing conditions of regional, racial, and environmental inequities and disparities, can we emerge a more just, equitable, and inclusive society going forward? We say YES! We must do so to save and strengthen our communities.

## Equitable Economic Ecosystems - Creative Placemaking in Region 5

---

Fast forward to 2020: the EEE project for regional prosperity is now buffeted by the health and economic collapse wreaked upon the area (and the world) by the Covid-19 pandemic, topping the Great Recession and Great Depression in its destructive fury. The 2020 pandemic has uncovered fully the social and economic inequities and disparities that pre-dated Covid-19 in the region; EEE initiative efforts are more relevant than ever as all sectors in R5DC attempt to recover and rebuild towards a new normal, this time for more equitable community and economic development going forward.

In the following examples, we highlight the work thus far for the Equitable Economic Ecosystems initiative featuring the Creative Placemaking Value Chain and pilot Welcoming Communities Advocacy Groups.

What is Creative Placemaking? According to Markusen and Gadwa (2010), Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

Creative Placemaking is a relative new concept in the work within central MN. Although inspired in part by those engaged in developing the Resilient Region Plan in 2010 and again in the 2016 DevelopMN plan to more actively engage artists as economic engines for the region, the work in this area has just begun to emerge and has become more visible over the past few years.

The work in Creative Placemaking for central MN is described by Dawn Espe, Sr. Regional Development Planner for R5DC, as places within a community that are social places where community comes together and all feel welcome.

## Creative Placemaking Examples

---

Where are the creative placemaking places in Region Five? Places and gathering spots such as:

**Local breweries:** Breweries do a good job of being connected to the community. In central MN, Jack Pine and Round House are examples of how breweries are connecting to the community. Round House is very involved the Lakes Area Music Festival. They created a brew called Rhapsody in Blues for the festival. The festival became a place where the flannel and beards can enjoy beer and blues with tuxedos and evening gowns. Jack Pine has a community room for public and private events that melts into the rest of the brewery. People come in for a party but at the same time they are connected to the community because of the space arrangements.

**Downtown redevelopment projects:** Creative placemaking techniques engage citizens in vision-setting for things like major road construction that impact all residents. Three towns in central MN are experiencing, with subsequent disruption in commerce and community activities. In Little Falls, a grant helped the town have music on Thursday nights, to help draw folks downtown for shopping later in the evening. In downtown Brainerd, over 30 artists helped residents envision the ways in which people would still come downtown through the construction. They raised \$10,000 to help develop projects that drew people downtown. Having that many artists come together was unheard of 10 years ago. Heritage & Arts Legacy Fund resources (a state funding source) and the Five Wings Arts Council have helped make a difference. Before, proposals would come in and it was always “this person wants to write a book,” or “this person wants to do a painting.” Now the proposals are more like “this person wants to engage the community” through their art. The shift is visible.

**Maker Space:** Sprout MN Marketplace has created a place and a winter market for makers and growers as well as a community place where all can feel welcome through the celebration and learning about the variety of the region’s cultures through food, music, dance, and art. Local and regional organizers transformed this empty industrial facility to a community center with vibrant color, shapes and sounds celebrating the rich cultural heritage of the region. (For a complete story about Sprout MN see [WealthWorks2019 report](#)).



## Welcoming Communities Advocacy Groups

WCAGs are an 18-month program within the Equitable Economic Ecosystems initiative designed to help community residents increase their intercultural agility and strengthen their ability to bridge differences while building on the community's assets. The purpose is to help communities become more welcoming because.... We know that people want to live, work and raise their children in communities that are welcoming to ALL people. The groups are made up of people from all of the sectors – public, private, nonprofit – and others who are passionate about community and economic prosperity for ALL people.

Members of the WCAG teams in each of the EEE Value Chain initiatives strengthen their own individual and community intercultural competence by taking and receiving coaching based on their Intercultural Development Inventory, reading and discussing articles such as Unconsciousness Bias, and using other techniques to help their community recognize where and how they may be unwelcoming to others. They learn and implement projects that will help the community become more welcoming. In this regard – the WCAGs can become the foundation of a successful creative placemaking endeavor. (For more information, visit [www.regionfive.org/welcoming-communities](http://www.regionfive.org/welcoming-communities).) Students engaged in Pine River, for example, are creatively thinking about ways their community can be more welcoming. Students in Long Prairie take photographs of where they feel welcome and describe why and how, such as, "This photo was also taken at Lake Charlotte. In addition to the location, the colors and images really draw me in as I drive by."





## Creative Placemaking: In the Works

COVID-19 has suspended many of the ideas because of the need and state directives to social distance. Once past this pandemic, ideas on the back burner will be ready to move forward. One is the **Bluegrass Festival in Pine River**, where there are plans to take the old Pine River Golf Course and make it a music destination. The dream is with future funding to include camp sites, expanded facilities, and a vendor area. The group has been hosting Bluegrass Festivals for a number of years.

**Wadena** was scheduled to start their community highway construction project in Summer 2020. They are planning to use creative placemaking to help the community develop a vision for the major intersection. Ken Sheres is heading that up. He created an awesome diorama of the downtown area. He had all these pieces and clay and things so that people could create what they would like to see downtown in miniature. So people would say things like, "I would like a park bench here and I want a swimming pool there!" They could do anything and then he would take a picture of each one. He collected all these pictures so that they could be used as part of planning. That community has a history of not working together very well. So this is a new avenue for them.

**The Brainerd Lakes Pride Group** was awarded a creative placemaking grant by the Five Wings Arts Council. It will use a local artist to create an interactive arts experience to help hear from members of the LGBTQIA community who have not been heard from in the past. The input was planned to be shared at the annual Pride Picnic, but that may be on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Children's Museum:** Placemaking Value Chain. The Children's Museum received a Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant to engage community members in new ways to identify a vision for the future for the Children's Museum. What is unique is that it is using artists to help gather information in new and innovative ways – so improving the livelihoods of a few artists in the region. In addition, the project will gather information from populations traditionally under-served in planning and visioning efforts. These include the Amish Community, LGBTQ, Tribal, Military – and two others.

During Covid-19, hearts of all shapes and sizes are seen in the windows of homes and businesses as a spontaneous expression of unity during social isolation.



## Concluding Thoughts - Dreams for the Future

---

The work of the future creative placemaking work for rural regions of Minnesota are informed by the DevelopMN Plan, described in more detail in the Attachment below. Arts and Culture is one of the community resource cornerstones of the DevelopMN plan. The call to action guides R5DC and its partners to continue to focus on placemaking as a priority for future work and evaluation:

Arts, culture and placemaking contribute to the vibrancy of Minnesota's economy and quality of life. These approaches are also key in creating connections and providing opportunities for conversations to occur across culturally-diverse populations. Context Arts, entertainment and recreation employed 53,023 people in 2018 throughout Minnesota according to DEED.

Greater Minnesota reported 15,494 arts-related jobs, comprising 1.5% of total employment; compared to 31,216 jobs in the Twin Cities, which is 1.8% of total jobs. SMART Goal Increase employment in arts, entertainment and recreation in Greater Minnesota by 5% to 16,270 by 2021. Strategies

1. Utilize arts-based placemaking to improve downtowns and publicspaces.
2. Connect artists with resources they need to make a living in Greater Minnesota.
3. Expand existing and create new artist-in-residence programs.
4. Support and enhance arts and culture efforts through an increase of Legacy Act Investments in Greater Minnesota.

The dreams for the future regarding creative placemaking for the region – as well as the state of Minnesota as a whole – is also inspired by the Minnesota Equity Blueprint: Thriving by Design Rural & Urban Together, further described in the Attachment below.

### Challenges

Since Minnesotans overwhelmingly voted for the Clear Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008, state investment in the outdoors, arts and culture has been bringing benefits to communities across the state. Today, Minnesota ranks first in the nation for state investment in the arts. Many studies show that arts and cultural assets, in their many forms, contribute to economic development, community building, cultural understanding, and racial equity. But are these investments shared fairly across the state?

Among the most challenging placemaking realities is the disparity between metropolitan and rural areas in arts and cultural amenities. Evidence is overwhelming that Minnesota's overall investment in arts and amenities have favored the Twin Cities, posing a further competitive disadvantage to the small towns and less densely populated areas in Greater Minnesota.

Racial disparities in placemaking investments are a significant challenge as well. Cultural and placemaking investments have historically favored white artists, European culture, and affluent institutions and places.

## Solutions

Economic development professionals and business leaders understand that in today's economy and into the future, a location's attractiveness to people and workers has become as important as attracting employers, because the future will be less reliant on natural resources and traditional location and more dependent on human brainpower and talent. TBDN stakeholders recommend the following strategies to achieve greater equity in placemaking across Minnesota:

- Expand existing and create new artist-in-residence programs and consider increasing the share of Legacy Amendment proceeds for the arts in Greater Minnesota. Protect existing Legacy Amendment funding.
- Exert maximum effort in state bonding bills for local projects, often the source of start-up or matching funding.
- Ensure that local school districts and other educational institutions are complying with state mandated requirements to offer arts education at each grade level. The 2019 Creative MN Report disclosed that many high schools are not complying with state laws to submit data on arts education offerings.
- Invest in eliminating disparities in placemaking by: Supporting the DevelopMN "SMART Goal" of increased employment in the arts industry across Greater Minnesota by 5 percent by 2021. Ensuring that investments in arts and cultural amenities flow more fairly to underserved populations, including communities of color and rural regions.
- Expanding and improving measurements of the economic impact and return on investment of investments in placemaking by region and statewide.
- Creative Placemaking is increasing in the R5DC five counties and the artifacts of its work help bring community together. Current and future efforts in Creative Placemaking will help communities create places that are more welcoming to all residents and visitors alike, including the increasingly diverse cultures that foster vibrant and sustainable regional prosperity.



## Attachment on Interrelated Initiatives & Operating Frameworks

Two major community and economic development strategy plans – DevelopMN for Greater Minnesota, and the Minnesota Equity Blueprint for the state as a whole, across the rural urban spectrum – form the contextual and operational guidance system for the R5DC EEE initiative. Here is a brief description of each and links for more information:

**DevelopMN (2019)** <http://www.mnado.org/developmn/>

This plan represents a collaborative effort of the members of the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) to align strategic economic development efforts throughout Greater Minnesota, and leverage resources at all levels for a greater overall development impact.

Two decades into the 21st century, communities in rural Minnesota continue to face unique challenges and opportunities as they chart their economic future.

Minnesotans live in an economy driven by innovation demands. Responsive regions nurture their workforce, support a culture of entrepreneurship and encourage strong and diverse communities.

Minnesota Regional Development Organizations are working collectively to accomplish the following:

- Create a common framework for regional economic plans, including a template for data collection, assessment, strategies, and measures of success
- Develop regional strategies that address the special challenges and opportunities of each part of the state
- Create a framework for state action that will enhance and support economic development efforts at the local and regional level
- Develop and implement an approach that effectively engages state partners
- Raise the bar on what constitutes effective rural economic development in Minnesota

For rural Minnesota to succeed there is a need for a credible collective voice that can create and propel an economic agenda at the local, state and federal levels. Develop MN advances a common framework for regional economic development. It identifies **four cornerstone strategies for strong regions and communities: Human Capital, Economic Competitiveness, Community Resources, and Foundational Assets.**

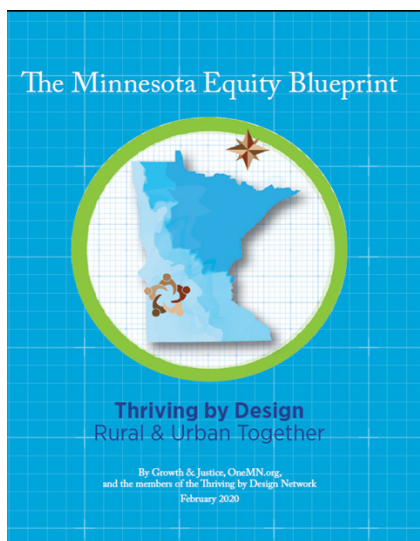
These strategies address the special challenges and opportunities of Greater Minnesota and enhance and support economic development efforts on all levels and engage local, regional, state and federal partners. Collectively, MADO and its partners will set a higher standard for what constitutes effective rural economic development in Minnesota. <http://www.mnado.org>



## The Minnesota Equity Blueprint: Thriving by Design Rural & Urban Together (Feb. 2020)

<https://growthandjustice.org/facts.fixes>

Widening inequalities and climate change pose the most important and immediate challenges to Minnesota's long-term economic prosperity and quality-of-life. The Minnesota Equity Blueprint serves as a comprehensive policy guidebook for the next decade, to address these demographic and geographic disparities, to build a more inclusive economy, to find more common cause between rural and urban Minnesotans and to restore our natural environment.



The Blueprint is a comprehensive, non-partisan, long-term plan for shared prosperity in a healthier environment. It's designed to reflect the interconnectedness of our state's people and regions, as well as interconnectedness between the disparities, challenges, and solutions that shape our future.

The "open source" document was co-facilitated by [Growth & Justice](#) and [OneMN.org](#) and created with the members of the [Thriving by Design Network](#) — Rural & Urban Together (TBDN).

Four chapters and multiple sections encompass challenges and emerging and recommended solutions across four key interconnected areas of community and economic development: Human Capital, Economic Development, Infrastructure, and Environmental Resilience.

The Blueprint has been designed not just for the Legislature or governmental decision-makers, but as a resource for individual and local community action. Story boxes throughout chronicle regional best practices and inspiring efforts to build a more equitable and inclusive economy.

## Wealthworks Value Chain & the Eight Forms of Wealth

<https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/construct-wealthworks-value-chain>  
<https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/explore-regional-wealth-building>

**A WealthWorks value chain** is a network of people, businesses, organizations and agencies addressing a market opportunity to meet demand for specific products or services—advancing self-interest while building rooted local and regional wealth.

### The Wealthworks Eight Forms of Wealth are:

- **Built Capital** is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
- **Financial capital** is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.
- **Individual capital** is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in region
- **Intellectual capital** is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region
- **Natural capital** is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region.
- **Political capital** is the stock of power and goodwill held by individuals, groups, and/or organizations that can be held, spent or shared to achieve desired ends.
- **Social capital** is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society.
- **Cultural capital** is the stock of practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity



[info@regionfive.org](mailto:info@regionfive.org)



[www.regionfive.org](http://www.regionfive.org)



218 894 3233