

REPORT

REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS IN KANSAS  
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## REPORT:

### REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS IN KANSAS

#### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide background information on Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) in Kansas in order to understand the role that they play in economic development. The history of RPC's, as well as current activities and relationships with other economic development groups will be examined.

#### HISTORY

##### Foundations

Beginning in 1966 studies were made by several agencies as a coordinated effort in order to find boundaries which could help in the coordination of Federal, State and local programs. During the next three years public education and information programs were held to educate public officials and the general public to these proposed designations. Three regional advisory committees on regional planning were established by the Governor to study more closely the possibilities of regional planning in their respective areas (Southeast, South Central and the Flint Hills).

In 1968, the Intergovernmental Act of 1968 was passed which enabled governors of states to designate substate regions in their states for purposes of coordination between Federal, State and local plans and projects. In line with this act, Governor Docking issued an executive order on February 15, 1971 which officially designated eleven substate regions in Kansas. Map 1 shows the original delineation of these regions.

These substate regions were not legally binding but were strongly suggested to be used by each Federal and State agency which have regional programs. A-95, a circular of the Office of Management and Budget provided for regional clearinghouses to review all projects requesting federal assistance. Official designation of such agencies was made by the Governor. Many RPCs received A-95 review authority. The rationale was to develop better coordination of programs for the benefit of local people.

In its origins, there were three approaches to regionalism in Kansas. These are regional councils, regional planning commissions, and special districts. K.S.A. 12-716 through 12-721 and 12-2901 through 12-2904 provide for the establishment and operation of regional planning organizations in Kansas. Multi-county special districts are legally authorized under either specific creating legislation or statutes referring to the state department or agency under which they operate.

A multi-county Council of Governments is a voluntary organization of locally elected officials who, rather than creating a new level of government, merely meet to discuss inter-related problems and implement plans to solve those problems.

Multi-county regional planning commissions are another form of regional councils in that they are also a multi-county, voluntary organization. Rather than being mandatory they are organized as a cooperative organization to achieve governmental coordination and are not intended to create another level of government.

Funding of these two forms of regional organizations was originally handled through local contributions by member counties and cities, federal grants and funds, state funds in some cases, and some private donations. Most received HUD 701 planning grants, and a small amount of state funding.

Multi-county special districts are Federal or State agencies which use a multi-county regional delineation for the administration of their programs. Among these special districts are two private, non-profit organizations: Greater Northwest Kansas, Inc. (which founded the NW Kansas regional planning and Development Commission), and Mid-America, Inc.

#### Implementation in Kansas

By 1974, there were 14 RPCs in Kansas. Three operated through a joint staff headquartered in Pratt (Chikaskia, Golden Belt, and Indian Hills). Two were bi-state regions, including out of state counties (MO-KAN and Mid America) which continue to be headquartered in Missouri. As you can see in Map 2, the delineation of these RPCs do not always match those regions originally listed in the Governor's executive order.

Most of the 14 organized as Regional Planning Commissions. Mid-America and Mo-Kan formed as Regional Councils. The Central Plains Tri-County Planning Committee decided to form a group which met to discuss the coordination of related county programs and plans. Each county in Tri-County remained responsible for its own planning and implementation. All but Bluestem, Midstate and Tri-County received A-95 review Authority.

The RPCs, even in their early years, undertook a variety of programs. Program activity seems to have been driven by the availability of funding, and by local needs. A sample of RPC program activities were:

- Sanitary Landfills
- Emergency Services
- Manpower Planning
- Water Quality Management
- Transportation Planning
- Land Use Planning

Population Projections  
Open Space Planning  
Communications  
Housing  
Industry and Economic Development  
Government Reorganization  
Intergovernmental Relations  
Protective Services/Law Enforcement  
Housing  
Water and Sewer Planning  
Solid Waste Management  
Recreation Planning  
Juvenile Delinquency  
Natural and Mineral Resources  
Services for Aged  
Code Development and Enforcement  
Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

#### Role in Economic Development

Several of the RPCs played a role in economic development in their early years. Southeast Kansas functioned as an Economic Development District. Northwest Kansas was founded by Greater Northwest Kansas Development, Inc., and continued to have a close working relationship with the development group. Mo-Kan and the trio of Chikaskia, Golden Belt and Indian Hills listed industrial and economic development as part of their program activities. Because of turnover in RPC staff and lack of time, detailed information on early economic development programs by these groups is not available.

#### CURRENT

Most of the information in this portion of the report was obtained by interview with RPC directors. All existing RPCs were interviewed.

There are currently 8 organizations existing which are commonly recognized as Regional Planning Commissions or Councils. The State and Federal financing, and the A-95 review authority which designated these groups as "RPCs" has elapsed. The focus of each group has since then been directed by local demand. Therefore, the common bonds between Kansas RPCs now lie in their history, and in their continuing characteristic as regional groups who respond to local needs and work toward coordinating the plans of their local governments. Map 3 shows the current status of RPCs. Since 1974, 3 have become inactive. The Bluestem region, listed in 1974 as organized but not yet active, was disbanded before any activity occurred.

Current RPCs Include:

RPC

North Central Regional Planning  
Commission  
John Cyr, Exec. Director  
Municipal Building  
Beloit, Kansas 67420

Southeast Kansas Regional Planning  
Commission  
Ethan Kaplan, Exec. Director  
P.O. Box 664  
Chanute, Kansas 66720

Northwest Kansas Planning and  
Development Commission  
Ned Webb, Exec. Director  
P.O. Box 248  
Hill City, Kansas 67642

Mid-America Regional Council  
Peter S. Levi, Exec. Director  
20 W. 9th St., 3rd Floor  
Kansas City, MO 64105

Big Lakes Regional Planning Council  
Ronald Radil, Exec. Director  
1006 Poyntz  
Manhattan, Kansas 66502

Rural Kansas Association of  
Governments  
Jerry Keene, Exec. Director  
P.O. Box 906  
Pratt, Kansas 67124

Central Plains Tri-County Planning  
Committee  
Willard Stockwell, Secretary  
455 N. Main, 10th Floor  
Wichita, Kansas 67202

MO-KAN Regional Council  
Jean Waltemath, Exec. Director  
1302 Faraon  
St. Joseph, MO 64501

Counties Included:

Jewell, Republic, Cloud,  
Washington, Mitchell,  
Lincoln, Ottawa, Saline,  
Ellsworth

Cherokee, Labette, Allen,  
Montgomery, Crawford,  
Neosho, Wilson, Woodson,  
Bourbon, Linn, Anderson

Cheyenne, Sherman, Gove,  
Wallace, Rawlins, Trego,  
Thomas, Logan, Decatur,  
Sheridan, Norton, Ellis,  
Graham, Phillips, Rooks,  
Smith, Osborne, Russell

Leavenworth, Atchison,  
Johnson (plus Missouri  
counties in KC SMSA)

Marshall, Clay, Riley,  
Geary, Pottawatomie

Rush, Barton, Pawnee,  
Edwards, Stafford, Pratt,  
Kiowa, Comanche, Barber,  
Kingman, Harper, Sumner

Sedgwick, Butler, Harvey

Doniphan, Atchison (and  
the cities of Holton,  
Hiawatha and Morrill and  
Missouri counties)

## Activities

Staff size in RPCs range from a low of 1 to a high of 26. The range of activities each is involved in is similarly broad. For example, the Central Plains Tri-County group has retained its original focus of purpose. Tri-County meets quarterly to discuss current projects, network, and explore possibilities for cooperation. On the other side, Northwest Kansas has become very oriented towards economic development activities, originally the function of Greater Northwest, Inc. Greater Northwest was dissolved, and its functions absorbed by the CDC function of the Northwest Kansas RPC.

RPCs have become, in many cases, an "umbrella" which covers other regional programs (in keeping with the original concept). Four (Northwest, Big Lakes, North Central, and MO-KAN) house Certified Development Companies within their offices. According to those interviewed, this will keep the CDC's viable, because the RPC can absorb the overhead costs. Those asked indicated it would be a number of years before CDCs were self-sufficient.

Three RPCs are also Federally designated Economic Development Districts. Two are in various stages of applying for designation. One RPC houses a satellite SBDC office, one a KDOC regional field office. The Missouri Councils house a Missouri regional office on aging and employment and training programs. One RPC also houses a regional tourism council.

Specific activities of RPCs include:

- Advisory/referral Services
- Mapping
- Printing
- Grant Application Preparation and Administration
- Code/Ordinance Preparation
- Historic Preservation
- Data Collection/Analysis
- Industrial/Economic Development
- Coordinating
- Ombudsman
- Comprehensive planning
- Zoning
- Small Business Assistance
- Enterprise Zone Application Preparation
- Population forecasting
- Infrastructure planning
- Transportation Planning
- Emergency Services
- Air/water Quality Planning
- Law Enforcement Training
- Business, Consumer, Labor Force Surveys

In general, RPC activities have moved away from the quantity of planning activities they used to engage in and are now more heavily involved in economic development. Early planning activities appear to have been done more because available federal funding was tied to such planning. Current activities seem to be tied more to local demand, although available State and Federal programs (CDCs are an example) are also a factor. Many also continue an informal review of project applications for Federal or State funding. Keep in mind however, that several exceptions will be found each time a "general" statement is made about RPCs because of their nature.

### Future Direction of Activities

With one exception (Tri-County, whose functions are limited) the RPCs indicated that they see themselves becoming increasingly responsive to local demands, rather than being driven by the availability of State or Federal funds for specific activities. Most also indicated that working toward greater unification of the local governments to create a single voice is a continuing priority. New program activities, such as assistance in receiving government contracts and developing comprehensive data bases were mentioned.

*wrong  
choice  
of words*

### Funding

RPCs receive their funding from a variety of sources. All receive monies from their member counties, although different methods of assessing fees are used. Most use a formula based on population. One assesses a one-tenth mill levy. Tri-Counties charges a flat fee to two of its members, the third provides staff support. The total amount of fees received range from \$1,250 for Tri-Counties to \$210,000 for Mid-America. Total budgets range from a low of \$3,000 to \$7,000,000. Local monies make up between 10% and 100% of total funding.

Non-local funding comes from a variety of sources. Many administer local grant projects, including CDBG, UDAG, historic preservation and transportation. The Missouri groups receive some funding from that state. Since most grant funding sources are not secure, the RPCs find it difficult to make long range plans.

### Interaction With Other Economic Development Groups

Other economic development groups were defined as Certified Development Companies, Small Business Development Centers, Extension Service, KDOC, local development groups and Chambers of Commerce. Generally, the level of involvement with other economic development groups was correlated to the degree which the RPC is already involved with economic development.

Those who still confine their activities to planning, date

collection and disbursement, or infrastructure planning and implementation have limited contact with ED groups. Examples of such contact includes providing labor force or market data and planning infrastructure improvements to business development areas.

Those RPCs more heavily involved in ED usually have fairly well but informally structured relationships with other ED organizations. Combination RPC and CDCs split work according to what the CDC can do. Staff persons often work under both programs, with work being charged to the appropriate agency.

Unwritten agreements to SBDCs also exist. Usually, the RPC and SBDC try to split work so that the best resources are made available to the business. For example, one RPC will provide financial packaging assistance, while the SBDC will work on marketing studies for the businesses.

Contact with local development groups and chambers is frequent. Roles that the RPC takes with these groups range from providing referrals and organizational assistance to participating fully in development efforts. Only one RPC, however, indicated that they interacted on a regular basis with the Extension service.

Because of the CDBG program, many RPCs communicate regularly with KDOC. Other ties with KDOC are created through RPC preparation of Enterprise Zone applications and contact with Existing Industry and Industrial Development Divisions.

One RPC mentioned an economic development resource previously overlooked in the Department of Agriculture. Northwest Kansas relies heavily upon this department for marketing assistance.

#### Offerings unique to Regional Planning Commissions

There are two characteristics of RPCs which distinguish them from most other organizations in Kansas. They are not function-specific, they are instead demand driven. RPCs also have the "umbrella" capacity to administer a variety of programs (aging, weatherization and economic development are examples). The tenure of these organizations, coupled with their flexibility, and mandate to coordinate local efforts remain their strongest characteristics.

#### Needs

Most RPCs indicated that an additional, stable funding source would be desirable. Current funding sources can fluctuate greatly, making long range planning difficult. Others indicated they would like to see better relationships developed with the state.