

Remarks offered by James Rowen to Steering and Rules, 10/27/08, regarding a recommendation to Milwaukee County to withdraw from the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written remarks to the committee on this very important matter. I regret that I am unable to attend in person.

I support the resolution, and favor Milwaukee County's withdrawal from SEWRPC - - with the caveat that a more urban-focused planning body be created to meet the needs of Milwaukee city and county residents, and perhaps others, should they choose - - for the following reasons:

**1. Discriminatory Funding.** Milwaukee County residents, with City of Milwaukee residents paying 49 cents of each county dollar, provide the largest of the seven SEWRPC counties' annual property tax transfers to the agency, with little in value received.

In the decade 2000-2009, according to SEWRPC budget figures, the Milwaukee County total paid to SEWRPC will be \$8 million, with Milwaukee city residents paying about half that, or about \$4 million. *The City of Milwaukee's annual contribution* of more than \$400,000 annually to the SEWRPC operating budget exceeds *the county* contributions by each of these five of seven SEWRPC counties - - Ozaukee, Walworth, Racine, Kenosha and Washington.

The Milwaukee city and county shares could be put to better use supporting a planning agency at which an urban agenda and annual work plan are debated, discussed, adopted, funded and evaluated. Right now, that process does not occur.

**2. Discriminatory Representation.** SEWRPC has 21 commissioners, three per county, selected by the Governor and the county boards in the seven SEWRPC counties. Population is not a consideration in board representation.

This means that the city of Milwaukee, with a population exceeding each of the non-Milwaukee Counties in the SEWRPC region - - Ozaukee, Washington, Walworth, Kenosha, Racine and Waukesha - - has no representation on the commission's board.

**3. Disregard for City of Milwaukee Residents:** Though Milwaukee County pays the largest share of the SEWRPC annual operating budget, and the City of Milwaukee's contribution exceeds those of five of the seven counties, SEWRPC has ignored Milwaukee residents and minorities when hiring staff.

SEWRPC's core staff of eleven senior administrators has no person with a Milwaukee address; SEWRPC's professional staff of 49 has only three non-white employees; SEWRPC moved further west from downtown Waukesha to Pewaukee knowing that the Pewaukee location was not on a bus line; SEWRPC's annual affirmative action reports consistently said (the language was eliminated in the 2008-'09 report following the

reports' wide disclosure) the Waukesha SEWRPC office locations presented transportation and employment barriers to persons living in the urbanized area to the east.

Without a Milwaukee headquarters location, SEWRPC has not affirmatively sought out minority and city residents for employment, and has failed to leverage itself as an economic or employment asset for Milwaukee.

SEWRPC's key advisory committees often have no minority representation. The 32-member water supply study committee had one Hispanic member and no African-American members.

**4. Disregard For Urban Priorities:** SEWRPC has not produced a regional housing study for 33 years. It wrote - - with \$260,000 in Milwaukee County funds again providing the lion's share - - a water supply study that does not take into consideration the impact of water transfers on key urban issues - - housing, transportation, air quality or economic development. It produced a \$6.5 billion freeway expansion and reconstruction plan that did not take into account the impacts on housing or water demand.

This is because SEWRPC is still validating its original land use plan, a document that has been in place as the region has sprawled away from Milwaukee. SEWRPC has no strategy for mitigating sprawl or poverty, and continues to use a piecemeal study approach to issues - - urban issues - - like water, housing and transportation that ignore and diminish Milwaukee.

Management decisions on what issues to study, whom to hire, whom to name to key advisory committees and where to locate a headquarters are all less friendly to Milwaukee because the city is not represented on SEWRPC's board and in the daily decision-making processes there.

It's a destructive cycle, made even more intolerable by the big annual contribution of property tax dollars to SEWRPC by both Milwaukee County and city residents through the county budget process.

A new, urban-focused planning commission could take fuller advantage of existing public Milwaukee city and county resources. As needed, SEWRPC services and studies could be purchased under contracts that openly defined standards, goals and outcomes.

SEWRPC has half a century to get it right. Now is the time to begin a process to make planning more cost-effective for urban taxpayers, sensitive to their input, and relevant to their needs.