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Newsletter of McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Message from the Chairman and Executive Director

The progress of the past year has once again demonstrated the vitality of the McLean County Region and the forward thinking of its leadership.

This annual report highlights some of the significant progress made on a number of exciting area projects and in carrying out strategies outlined in the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan. Much of this progress is made possible through a continued commitment to cooperation by community leaders, which is a central theme of the Regional Comprehensive Plan.

We thank our community leaders and planning partners for their vision and leadership in advancing the quality of life in this region, and for their continued support for long range planning.

On behalf of our commissioners and staff, we extend our best wishes for a happy holiday season and prosperous new year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Don Fernandes *Paul Russell*

Don Fernandes
Chairman

Paul Russell,
Executive Director

2007 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

This annual report summarizes the progress made by the region's planning partners in implementing planning projects designed to enhance the local quality of life. It provides an overview of these projects and describes some of the activities carried out by McLean County Regional Planning Commission as part of its ongoing work program, which is guided in part by the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan. This report also summarizes commission finances of the past year and identifies commission activities scheduled for the coming year.

MAIN STREET CORRIDOR REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

This project is an excellent exam-

ple of regional cooperation. The Main Street Corridor extends for approximately seven miles from Interstate 55 in north Normal to Veterans Parkway in south Bloomington. It extends about one-half block on both sides of Main Street and the one-way coupler system formed by Kingsley and Center Streets. The redevelopment plan for this corridor was spearheaded by the Main Street Commission. This commission includes community leaders representing the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, Illinois State University, Illinois Wesleyan University, and BroMenn Healthcare. McLean County Regional Planning Commission coordinated the project and assisted with selecting the consultant team led by Farr Associates of Chicago.

The consultant's final report on the

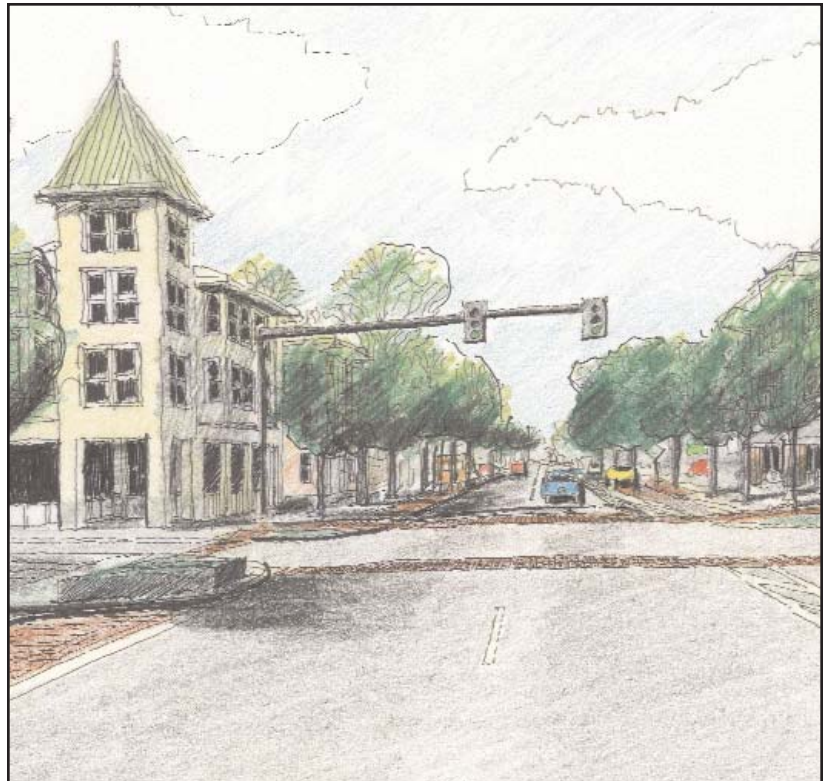


Figure 1. Rendering of an envisioned mixed use development from the Main Street Redevelopment Plan (Farr Associates)

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plan was presented at a public open house held at the Hansen Center on the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University on October 29th. The open house was preceded by seven earlier meetings held to gather public input for developing the plan. The meetings were well attended and produced some excellent ideas, many of which made their way into the plan's recommendations. The results of all the public meetings are summarized in the planning report available at www.mcplan.org.

Project goals are as follows:

- Improve appearances along this important community gateway to create a positive first impression and support the region's positive image
- Improve wayfinding to Downtown Bloomington, Uptown Normal and the institutions along the corridor
- Encourage residential and economic development within the corridor
- Create a more pedestrian-friendly environment
- Maintain efficient movement of vehicular traffic.

The plan presents a vision for the long range redevelopment of the corridor. It makes recommendations for land use, street design, and alternative transportation.

Land use recommendations

include:

- Preserving the character of residential neighborhoods
- Supporting mixed-use development (ground floor commercial with residences above) at a number of street intersections along the corridor (see Figure 1)
- Encouraging green building techniques to enhance the local environment and conserve natural resources
- Updating development regulations to encourage a more attractive and urban-style streetscape.

Recommendations related to street design include:

- Reconfiguring the traffic lanes to make them more bicycle-compatible and provide more on-street parking where space is available
- Adding textured crosswalks to improve safety and appearance
- Adding landscaped medians north of College Avenue
- Adding standardized signage directions to key destinations.

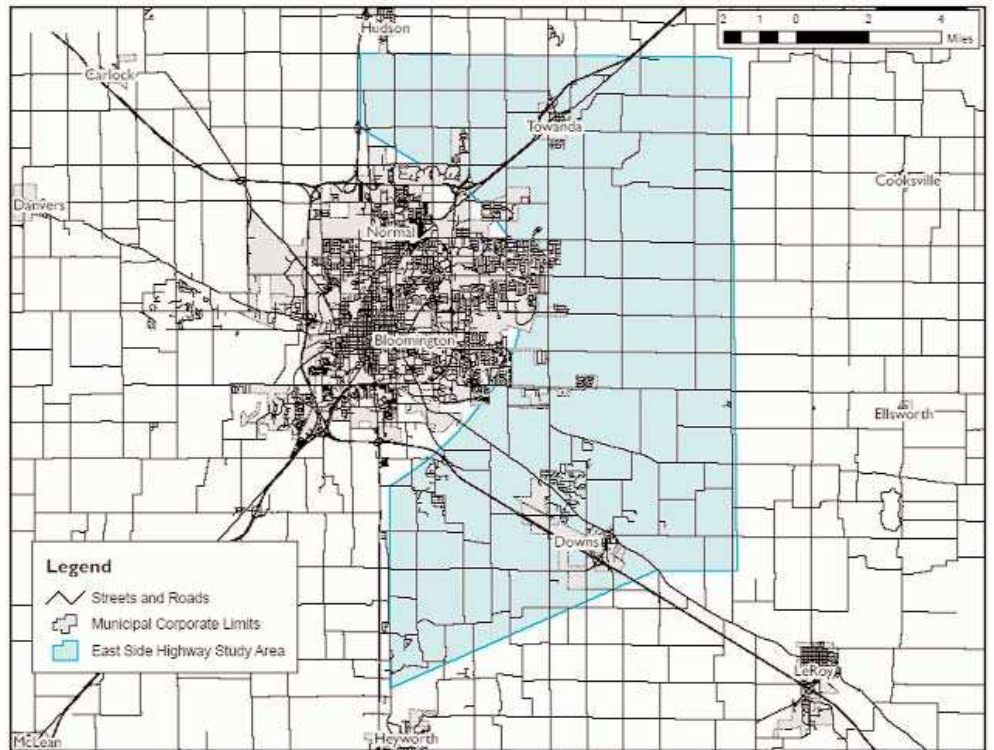


Figure 2. East Side Highway Study Area

A sampling of the recommendations for **alternative transportation** is as follows:

- Developing a community-wide bicycle plan to identify streets for possible bicycle lanes
- Encouraging greater use of transit through increased public investment for a variety of improvements, including more frequent service, sheltered transit stops, and more attractive and pedestrian oriented streetscapes
- Encouraging employers to offer employee incentives to use transit, such as universal transit passes and related measures
- Studying the long range feasibility of a dedicated transit lane or trolley line.

The plan is being submitted to the local planning commissions and governing boards of the Main Street Commission for consideration and adoption.

EAST SIDE HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY

The Phase 1 study of the East Side Highway Corridor began in December 2006, and is expected to continue into the first half of 2008. The study is a joint undertaking of the City of

Bloomington, the Town of Normal, and McLean County, with participation from the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Village of Downs, the Village of Towanda, McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC), other local agencies, and interested citizens. MCRPC participates on the Steering Committee and Project Study Group.

The firm of Clark-Dietz heads a team of consultants examining possible alternatives for the corridor (see Figure 2), including the option of relying on extensions of the existing street and road network to satisfy future transportation needs on the developing east side of the urban area. The corridor study is the first local project in Illinois to use the Context Sensitive Solutions approach, which includes extensive public involvement in the process through public meetings, stakeholder and citizen committees, and continuous contact between the consultants and the community regarding issues arising from the study.

As of autumn 2007, the study is exploring alternative locations and facility types for a possible east side highway. Upon completion of the

study, a recommendation to either pursue approval of a selected corridor, or to adopt a no-build recommendation, will be incorporated in the final report.

Completing a highway study for the east side of Bloomington-Normal was a key strategy identified in the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan.

REGIONAL PLAN UPDATE

An update of the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan began during the past year and is well under way. A review committee was formed consisting of approximately 20 members representing a wide range of interests from government, business, agriculture, environment and the general public. Some of these members served on the planning committees that helped produce the most recently published version of the plan and provide valuable expertise to the process. Others are new to this process and

bring new perspectives as well as expertise.

Although the update is not scheduled to be completed until after the results of the East Side Highway Study are known, considerable progress has nevertheless been made to date. The committee has guided and reviewed the update of five of the plan's ten major components, consisting of the Natural Environment, Historic Preservation and Urban Revitalization, Economic Development, Population, and Housing.

The process has focused on the review and update of data, maps, text, and strategies as needed. Data updates include the incorporation of more recent information from the Census, Special Censuses, and other sources of information. Figure 3 illustrates one of the updated maps from the natural environment component of the plan. The array of available strategies has not been significantly altered from the earlier plan, although it has undergone some updating, fine tuning

and rearranging.

Priority strategies will be reviewed and updated later in the process, following updates of the land use, transportation and community facilities components.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

Long Range Transportation Plan

In June, the commission's Transportation Policy Committee approved the latest update of the Long Range Transportation Plan, which extends the planning horizon to 2035. The greatly expanded plan contains new sections dealing with planning for transportation security, operations management, coordinated transit planning and other areas mandated under the current version of the federal transportation bill, known as Safe, Accountable, Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). For the period from the present to 2035, the plan

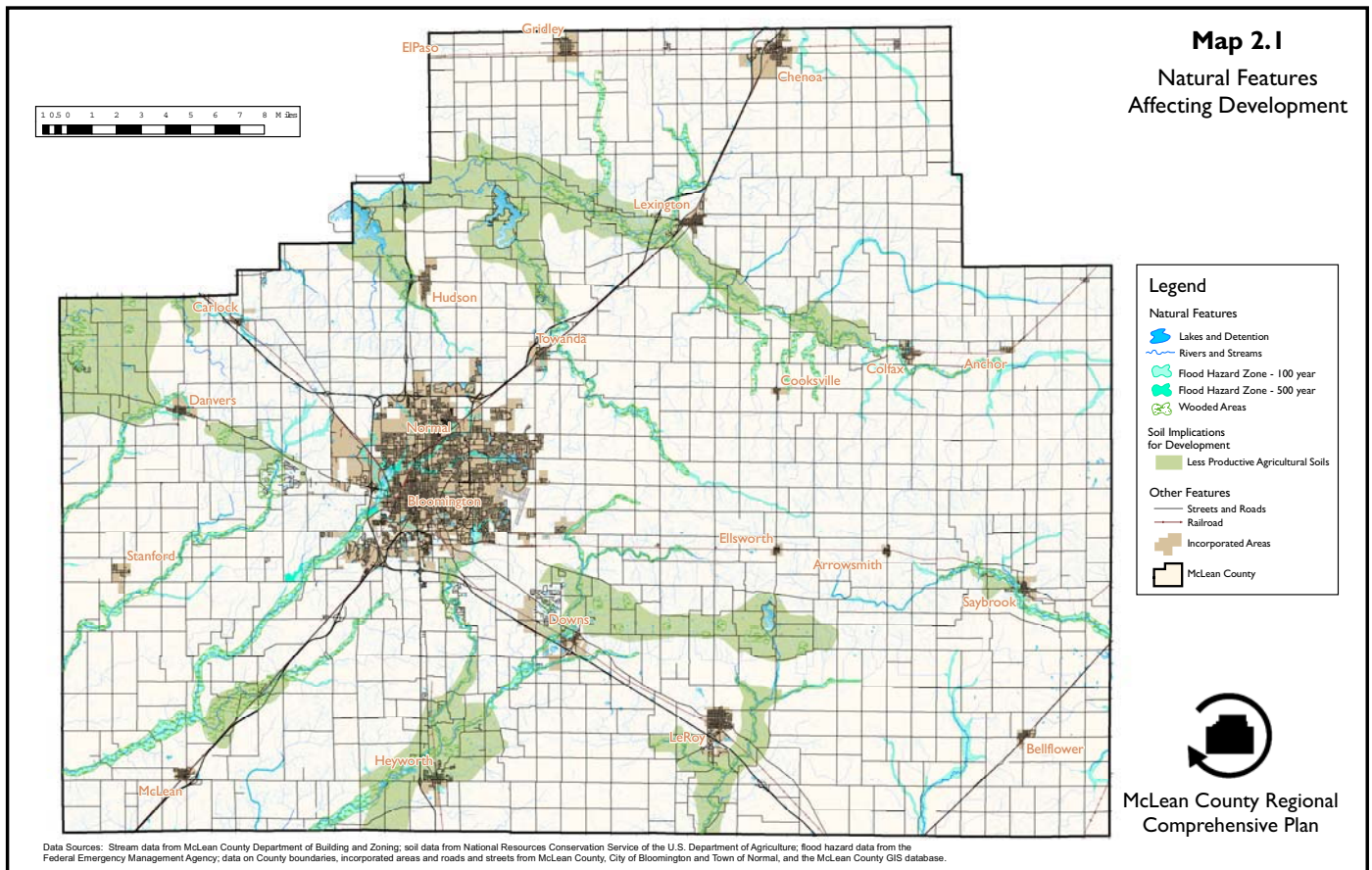


Figure 3. Draft Map 2.1 from McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan in progress

contemplates investment in transportation for the Bloomington - Normal urban area of approximately \$1 billion for street and highway improvements, and approximately \$670 million for transit capital investment and operating costs. The updated plan also reflects the changed status of the East Side Highway Corridor Study since the adoption of the previous plan.

Transportation Improvement Program

In June, the Transportation Policy Committee also adopted the FY 2008 -

2012 Transportation Improvement Program developed by this commission in concert with area governments and the Illinois Department of Transportation. Local, state and federally funded street, road and trail projects totaling nearly \$130 million are planned during the five-year term of the program, as well as \$26 million in operating and capital improvement funds for transit services.

Public Participation Plan

The commission updated its public

participation policy through a new Public Participation Plan adopted in June. Consistent with SAFETEA-LU, the plan provides procedures for involving the public in transportation planning and decision-making at all stages of the planning process.

Transit

The commission regularly provides technical assistance to the Bloomington - Normal Public Transit System (B-NPTS) and other area transit providers. Commission staff is conducting the triennial survey of transit ridership required for submission to the National Transit Database. Staff also assists B-NPTS with other matters, including research regarding the location for a new transit administration and garage facility. Commission staff also convenes and chairs the Transportation Advisory Committee, a continuing effort to foster communication and cooperation among transit providers and social service agencies, and an important tool for maintaining contact with aging, disabled, poor and other underserved populations within the community.

Human Services Transportation Plan

Commission staff has been developing the Human Services Transportation Plan. This is a new document required under SAFETEA-LU, which is intended to enhance cooperation and joint resource management by transit providers. The plan directs the use of federal transportation funds towards serving individuals with special transportation needs. Development of the plan and ongoing transit coordination are managed through the Transportation Advisory Committee.

MCLEAN COUNTY REGIONAL GREENWAYS PLAN

In 1997, the commission published the first McLean County Regional Greenways Plan. The public/private collaboration was a local response to greenways planning that was gaining in popularity not only in regions of Illinois but all across the country. Greenways planning arose from a need to address the nation's

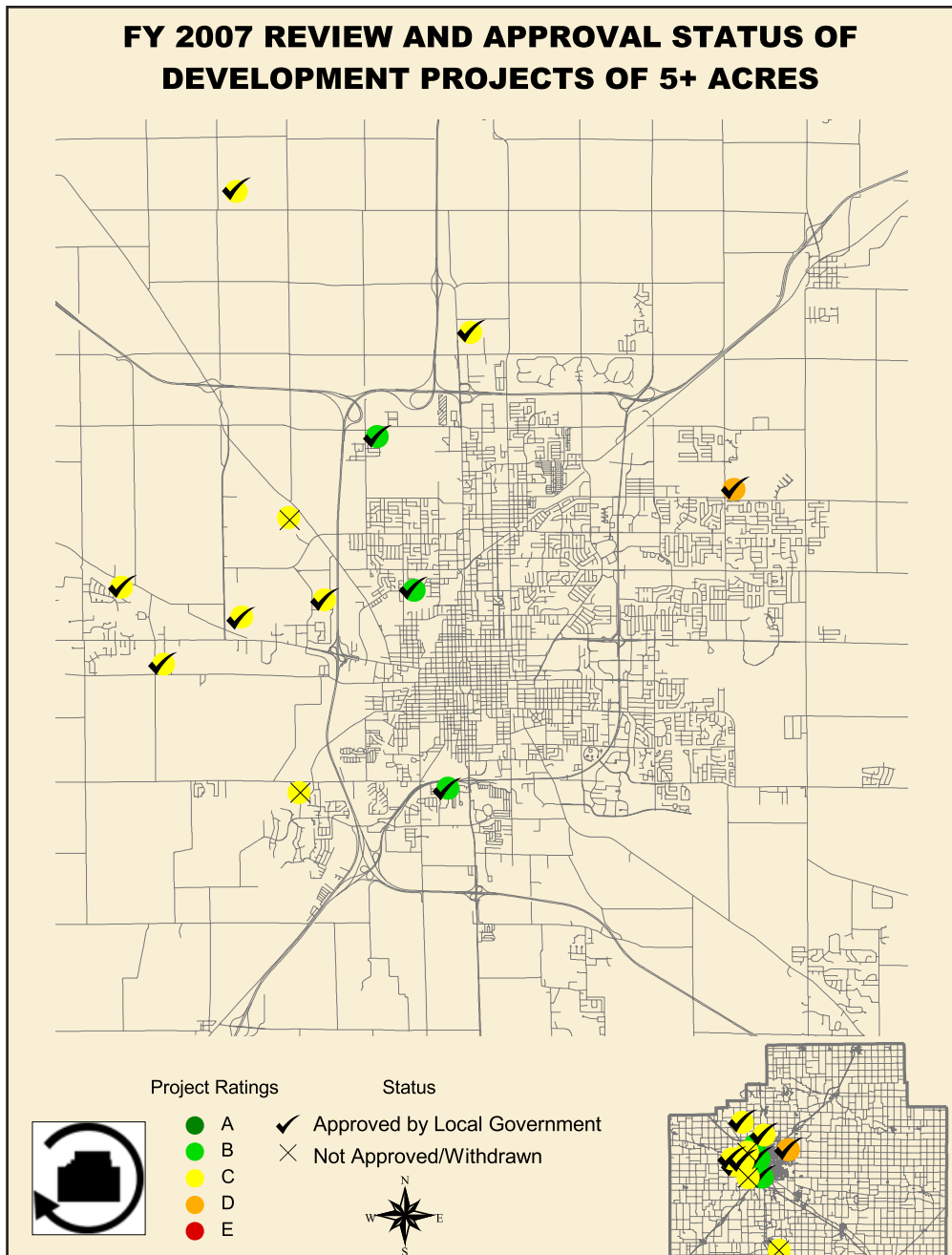


Figure 4. Development review illustrating project locations and ratings

urban and environmental problems and meet the increasing demands for recreation and open space. The plan identified a vision and recommended course of action to achieve a region-wide system of greenways to address these important issues in McLean County.

Since January of 2006, staff of the commission and members of the McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee have met on a regular basis to review and update the plan. The updated document will note accomplishments over the past ten years and review and update goals and priorities for the future. The update of the plan will be finalized in concert with an update of the McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan.

LOGAN COUNTY REGIONAL GREENWAYS PLAN

The Logan County Regional Greenways Plan was completed and delivered to Logan County officials during the past year. The plan was a cooperative effort involving Logan County and the municipalities of Lincoln, Atlanta, Mt. Pulaski, and Elkhart, in addition to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, as well as the staff of this commission. The plan was researched and developed by commission staff with assistance from staff of Logan County and the participating local governments.

The plan document was the first greenways plan to be developed for Logan County and the first recreation plan developed since the 1970's. Besides developing a vision and recommending a course of action to achieve a county-wide system of greenways, the plan also highlights county greenway resources and how to take advantage of those resources.

LOGAN COUNTY REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Logan County Regional Comprehensive Plan was delivered to the Logan County Regional Planning Commission in July, following its final review during the spring. A condensed version of the plan in brochure form was also delivered to facilitate broad dissemination of the plan.



Figure 5. The McLean County Regional GIS Consortium held its annual GIS Day event on November 14th. The well-attended event featured continuous training sessions as well as about a dozen separate booths, which displayed work of individual departments from several local government consortium members.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

An intergovernmental development committee consisting of local and regional planners and engineers evaluates projects of five acres or more for consistency with adopted comprehensive plans. The results of these project reviews are reported to the commission and respective government entities for consideration in the local approval process.

Each proposed development is reviewed for consistency with the appropriate comprehensive plan. Examined are minimal features such as consistency with land use and transportation plans, and compliance with development ordinances. Optional features are additional amenities that are not specifically required but contribute to the local quality of life and support the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan. Projects are rated on a scale of "A" through "E" with an "A" rating being the highest, based on the features of the project. Modifications to enhance the projects are recommended by the committee as appropriate.

During Fiscal Year 2007, fourteen projects of five acres or more were reviewed and evaluated. Of these, eleven were eventually approved by

local governments, two were withdrawn by the petitioners, and approval of one was denied by the governing body. Regional planning staff in concert with the intergovernmental development committee continue to refine the review process to enhance its use as a decision-making tool for local governments. Of the eleven approved projects: three received "B" ratings, seven "C" ratings and one a "D" rating (see Figure 4).

The review records of the past two years suggest an improvement in the quality of development projects being approved. Fourteen projects were also reviewed during the previous year, all of which were approved by the appropriate governing bodies. However, the FY 2006 projects included six "D" ratings and none above a "C."

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)

Project management, coordination, and continuous enhancement of the McLean County GIS (MCGIS) is an ongoing activity of the Commission. In addition to McLean County Regional Planning Commission, the MCGIS membership includes the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, McLean County, Emergency Telephone Systems



Figure 6. Image from MCGIS database showing orthophotography, parcels, street centerlines, parcel identification numbers and addresses

Board (ETSB), and City of Bloomington Township. Over the past year, considerable progress has been made in integrating GIS and related technologies and applications into the day to day operations of MCGIS members. The general public and employees have been provided training to maximize the return on investment in this technology and data and make it easier to use by everyone.

Coordination and quality control continues for ortho-photo, topographic and base mapping updates with the vendor, Pinnacle Mapping Technologies, Inc. These updated data have been published on the public and intranet GIS websites and have also been distributed to consortium members and is proving to be of great value (see Figure 6). Considerable field and office work has been undertaken recently to improve the reliability and quality of rural addressing data for emergency response and other government needs.

Professional IT support is also in place to create the necessary infrastructure for managing continuously evolving technology and growing GIS needs.

A mission, vision, goals and objectives statement and measures of success draft has been adopted by the GIS Management Committee for determining longer term strategic guidelines and priorities for the GIS partnership.

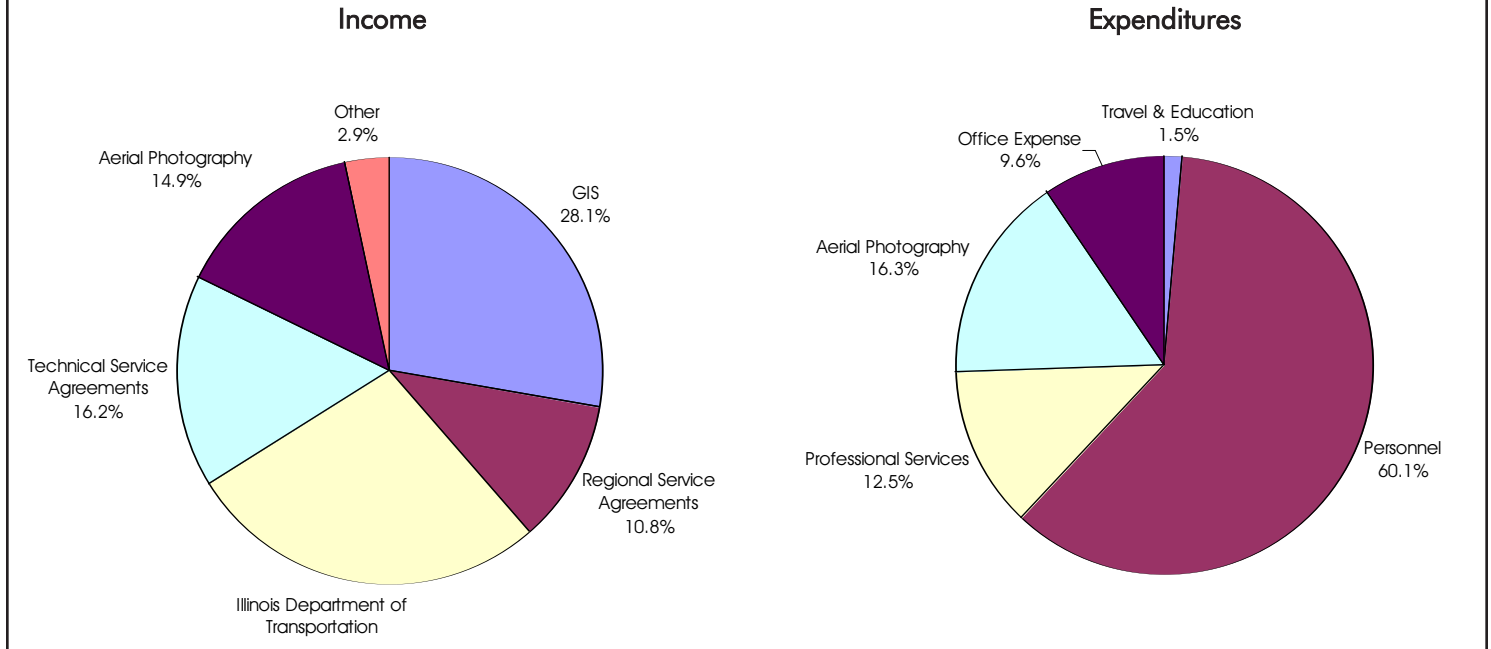
FINANCES

The Commission's revenue of \$1,003,597.47 was obtained from various sources as illustrated in Figure 7. Funding is provided by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), regional service agreements, GIS, and technical service agreements. IDOT funds support transportation related programs. Regional service agreements with Bloomington, Normal and McLean County support Commission activities and provide matching shares for local,

state and federal planning funds. GIS funds include recorder's fee funding to support the regional GIS program. Technical service agreements include funds provided by local governments to complete projects such as local comprehensive plans. Fiscal Year 2007 technical service agreements included funds from Logan County for technical planning assistance, Chenoa, Carlock, Lexington, and the Main Street Commission for disbursement to the consultant. Income was also received from GIS committee members to update the regional aerial orthophotography.

Total disbursements of \$814,632.43 included personnel expenses, office expenses, professional services, aerial photography, and travel and education as shown in Figure 7. Additional disbursements to contractors for professional services will be made in the current fiscal year as the services are completed.

Figure 7
FY 2007 INCOME AND EXPENDITURES
McLean County Regional Planning Commission



THE YEAR AHEAD

In addition to continuing the Commission’s ongoing programs and completing projects currently in progress, new projects to be carried out during the coming year include the City of Chenoa Comprehensive Plan and Subdivision Ordinance as well as the third annual information forum. This year’s forum will feature North Las Vegas Mayor, Michael Montandon, speaking on the topic of “Workforce Housing for Growing Economies.” It is scheduled for April 9 at 7:00 a.m. at the Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center in Bloomington. Other likely activities in the coming year include coordinating the development of a community-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan for the Bloomington-Normal urban area and a form-based zoning code for the Main Street Corridor.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU NEWS

Industry Data Crucial as 2007 Economic Census Nears

In December, more than 4 million American businesses will receive 2007 economic census forms, including 2,500 businesses in McLean County, underscoring the importance of their

participation in the nation’s most comprehensive measure of business and industry taken every five years.

“Economic census forms that businesses receive in December will tell us how we are changing as a nation,” said Thomas Mesenbourg Jr., the Census Bureau’s associate director for economic programs. “Important economic indicators, such as gross domestic product, are directly related to the quality of the data we get from businesses in every industry and every locality.”

The Census Bureau has launched a new Web site - business.census.gov - to help businesses understand the economic census and how it benefits them. The site includes economic snapshots of selected industries and significant facts about every industry.

Economic census data provide the hard figures that businesses need when they consider expanding into new regions or markets.

“I’m constantly advising entrepreneurs to consult economic census information before making decisions,” said Rhonda Abrams, small business adviser and syndicated columnist. “It helps business people make informed decisions.”

Businesses can look at benchmark values from the economic census to

assess where they stand in the marketplace and to research market shares, salaries, product and sales trends, and site locations.

Firms in more than 1,000 industries will receive forms in December. They will be asked to report information such as employment, payroll and the value of goods and services sold. Forms must be returned to the U.S. Census Bureau by February 12, 2008. Businesses that receive forms are required by federal law to respond. Information about individual firms is kept confidential, and only aggregate industry data are published.

For businesses that would like to get a head start on preparing for the census, the new web site - www.business.census.gov - provides links to sample forms, answers to frequently asked questions and a secure way to communicate directly with the Census Bureau. The site also has tips to help businesses use the data.

This publication presents information on planning and development issues that impact the quality of life in the Community of McLean County. We can be reached by mail at 115 E. Washington St. #M103, Bloomington, IL 61701, by phone at (309) 828-4331, by fax at (309) 827-4773, or by e-mail at visions@mcplan.org.

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Season's Greetings



from the Members and Staff of the
McLean County Regional Planning Commission