



**Carver County Public Services**  
Government Center Human Services Building  
602 E 4<sup>th</sup> St, Chaska, MN 55318-2102

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**Contact: Planning & Water Dept. Manager Paul Moline**

952-361-1825 or [pmoline@co.carver.mn.us](mailto:pmoline@co.carver.mn.us)

## **County Receives National Award for Resilient Communities Project**

Carver County received the 2016 Outstanding Community Partner Award from the Educational Partnership for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Network for its Resilient Communities Project, a partnership with the University of Minnesota. The award was presented at the Fifth Annual Sustainable City Year Conference in San Diego on March 13-16.

The conference is an annual meeting of universities and communities from across the country designed to develop and promote multi-disciplinary university-community partnerships that apply student learning to community-identified needs. This is the first year a national award was given at the conference. The award recognizes “one exemplary community partner” from among the local government partners that have worked with EPIC Network programs over the last five years.

Planning and Water Management Department Planner Nate Kabat, the County’s program coordinator for the Resilient Communities Project, accepted the award on behalf of the County.

“The Resilient Communities Project partnership has been extremely valuable to Carver County and its partners,” Kabat said in accepting the award. “The success of this project rests on the shoulders of all the dedicated colleagues, faculty members, students, and officials who have teamed up throughout the school year.”

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) is a program of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), which organizes yearlong partnerships to match community-identified project needs with student courses. RCP has been working with Carver County and its partners over the course of the 2015-2016 school year on 30 separate projects related to housing, alternative transportation, community engagement and education, building community identity, effective administration, environmental stewardship and human services.

In nominating Carver County for the award, U of M RCP Director Mike Greco highlighted Carver County’s exceptional effort to assemble, coordinate, and manage the community-university partnership projects that involve more than 20 staff leads from eight different organizations. Community partners on the project include SouthWest Transit, Eastern Carver County Independent School District 112, the Carver County Community Development Agency,

the Carver County Historical Society, the Cities of Victoria, Chaska, and Watertown, and five Carver County units: the Behavioral Health, Parks, Planning and Water Management, and Public Health Departments, and the Public Services Division.

Greco explained how the Carver County projects have stimulated new graduate student research opportunities through course work and individual master's degree thesis projects, and he commended the extraordinary responsiveness of staff to the hundreds of students working on the projects. The award nomination noted the County's commitment to providing opportunities for students to gain professional experience beyond their classroom work through presentations to community organizations and governing bodies.

"The Resilient Communities Project promises to be a win-win for both the community partners and the students working on these projects," said County Board Chair Jim Ische. "It provides a cost-efficient way for the County and its partners to increase capacity and bring in new ideas and creativity to work on these projects. For students, it's a chance to work on real-world issues and come up with solutions that communities can use."

Most of the projects will be completed at the end of the school year, but work on some projects was completed in the first semester. For example, program evaluation students completed work on a survey that will be used this summer to evaluate program impacts and identify improvements to customer services for the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program. In another case, engineering students completed a project that will help the County assess options to improve energy efficiency and decrease utility costs.

The Historic Andrew Peterson Farm east of Waconia has been the focus for a number of student projects. An anthropology student began planning for archeological digs and to locate historic building foundations and will continue working on the project through next year. Students in an architecture course completed a building conditions survey for the barn and the house to help understand priorities for restoration.

The RCP staff will be compiling summaries of the projects when they are completed at the end of the school year. More information on the individual projects is available on the County's website at <http://www.co.carver.mn.us/departments/public-services/planning-water-management/planning/resilient-communities-project> and the University of Minnesota RCP site, <http://rcp.umn.edu>.

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***Carver County Planner Nate Kabat, left, and University of Minnesota Resilient Communities Project Director Mike Greco at the Fifth Annual Sustainable City Year Conference in San Diego where Carver County received the 2016 Outstanding Community Partner Award from the Educational Partnership for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Network.***