

Representation of Rural Communities

Thousands of Minnesotans are moving to urban centers to find jobs, resulting in smaller rural populations, damaged local economies, and less representation within government legislature for those left behind. Some consequences of this are unequal state funding and varied resource distribution, which incentivizes townships to create new policies. In order to ensure robust representation and economic growth within rural Minnesota communities, policies that strengthen rural infrastructure, require zoning, and provide incentives for small businesses should be implemented.

In order to encourage economic development, a policy that requires townships to improve infrastructure is needed. The improvement of roads, buildings, internet, and telecommunications will help connect rural and urban locations, allowing for production efficiency. Modern technology and internet access will allow remote employees to work from home, and a strong transportation system will allow for commuting to urban areas. This infrastructure is the base of all future policies, and without it, rural communities would be disconnected and interdependent.

Another beneficial policy should require zoning and analysis of land development. Creating a balance between residential, commercial, and agricultural plots will encourage diversification and ensure that the land is being used properly. If an area is only agricultural, the town will have a small population and little representation. However, if the same area is zoned and now has land available for residents, schools, and business, the local economy and population will grow. This balance between residential, commercial, and agricultural districts will make townships more appealing to current and potential residents because of the new options created.

Finally, the local economy can be improved by the contributions of small businesses. For this reason, policies should be drafted to help incentivize entrepreneurs to start local businesses by providing loans or other types of financial support. The Minnesota government has already recognized the positive consequences of providing loans and grants for small businesses in rural areas. Featured on the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce website is a rural economic development loan and grant program that is supported by the United States Department of Agriculture. This program features a zero-interest loan and expects businesses to “create and retain employment.” A similar policy, implemented by townships, will help businesses thrive in rural settings, increasing the economy.

Improving the economies of townships is directly connected to increasing the amount of government representation because a strong economy leads to population growth, and a large population leads to more representation. Furthermore, these policies will help improve infrastructure and the local economy, both of which are characteristic of a well-represented and independent community. The purpose of new policies is not to change the township’s identity by supporting urbanization, but rather to further develop its economy and ensure fair representation at all levels of government.