

OUR VIEW

## **DON'T TALK MERGER; TALK COOPERATION**

Unfortunately, the way the Mankato/North Mankato "merger" talk has been framed threatens to further polarize residents of the "Other Twin Cities" in a way that may halt discussions that would otherwise benefit taxpayers.

First, leaders of both cities must realize they have common goals. Both want to provide quality service at a price that is a value to taxpayers.

Leaders want to maintain the identities and unique characteristics of both cities. Leaders want to be responsive to all residents, no matter where they live. Leaders of both cities have an eye on the future and potential economic risks to outstate Minnesota.

Both cities face common problems. Mankato and North Mankato face declining revenues from the state of Minnesota in cuts to local government aid. Road funding is declining as well. Wastewater grants may be at risk.

Current trends suggest outstate Minnesota will continue to lose population and that affects everything from school funding to federal matching grants. Outstate Minnesota businesses have more challenges with cities that must raise their tax levies more than their suburban or metro counterparts.

So, we have common goals, and we're in the same boat when it comes to dark clouds on the horizon. Why wouldn't we talk about ways to join together to be stronger to face those common problems?

We also don't have to start from ground zero. Both cities, and surrounding cities for that matter, already cooperate in a number of areas. Mankato's wastewater treatment plant serves North Mankato, Skyline, South Bend Township and Eagle Lake and the Lake Washington sewer district. It will soon begin serving Madison Lake.

Mankato-based hazardous materials firefighting teams serve the region. Up until about a year ago, Mankato and North Mankato cooperated on economic development and tourism, both important areas for regional growth. While North Mankato has pulled from that partnership, several other regional cities including Le Sueur and Lake Crystal have joined the effort.

There is one public transit system that serves both towns. Public safety in each of the cities can be called for mutual assistance in many circumstances.

So, perhaps North Mankato cannot be blamed for rejecting the "merger" idea. It's not about merging. It's about talking, cooperating, discussing. Can North Mankato reject the "dialogue" idea? Its taxpayers, we believe, would say no. In these tough economic times for cities and governments in general, an unwillingness to even discuss joint solutions to common problems is not a position that serves taxpayers.