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Individuals who have participated in this process include:

**BCIP/RCAP Steering Committee:** Roman Taffe, Barb Voecks, John Cunningham, Lisa Berkner, Becky Parker, Roger Bird, Terry Gere, Ann Holme, Don Sherman, Marilyn Hanson, Patty Haukos, Shawnda Johnson, Sue Kaercher-Blake, Wallace Rogers, Judy Drewicke, Leonard Johnson, Mary Ann Ulrich, Harold Moore, Matyi Sundheim

**BCLP:** Brent Olson, Deb Barnhart, Gretta Yaeger, Rob Swindt, Terry Kalberg, Michelle Knutson, Jeannie Krueger, Joann Melch, Val Rausch, Joanne Svendsen, Sharon Finke,

**Center for Small Towns:** David Fluegel, Roger McCannon, Heather Huebner, Barb Hesse

**USDA Rural Development:** Michel Hinrichsen

**Others include:** David Dinnel (mayor), Lenore Sellin (council), Mike Dorry (council), James A. Larson, David Ellingson (former mayor), Jason Kleindl (intern from UMM), Diana Anderson (SW MN Foundation)

**Study Team Members and Roles:**

**Center for Rural Design**
Research, maps, programming and design
  - Dewey Thorbeck, architect and principal investigator
  - Melissa Wyatt, research fellow
  - Thora Cartlidge, landscape architect and planner

**Tourism Center**
Resident Survey
  - Lisa Love, research specialist

**Center for Small Towns**
Historic research, investigation, work with Steering Committee
  - Jon Huebner, research assistant

Center for Rural Design - University of Minnesota
277 Coffey Hall – St. Paul Campus
1420 Eckles Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone: 612.624.9273 Fax: 612.624.1704
http://ruraldesign.coafes.umn.edu

Center for Small Towns
University of Minnesota Morris
110 Community Services Building
600 East Fourth Street
Morris, MN 56267
Phone: 320.589.6451
http://www.mrs.umn.edu/services/cst

Tourism Center
University of Minnesota Extension Service
120 BioAgEng Building
1390 Eckles Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108-6005
Phone: 612.624.4947
Fax: 612.624.4264
http://www.tourism.umn.edu/
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A. Background

The Center for Small Towns on the Morris Campus of the University of Minnesota, working with a grant from the Blandin Foundation, organized and conducted a Community Visioning and Leadership Program for the Big Stone Lake Area. As a follow-up to that work, the Blandin Community Improvement Program Steering Committee (BCIP) asked the University of Minnesota Center for Rural Design (CRD) to prepare some architectural sketches to help illustrate how the ideas might impact and be developed at the foot of the lake. Later, BCIP asked the CRD to help answer two community questions that would have the most positive impact on the region:

One: How can the foot of Big Stone Lake be developed (actively or passively), utilized and maintained so as to maximally enhance the economic vitality and quality of life of Ortonville and the region?

Two: What can we provide our children and young adults to improve their quality of life?

In June 2001, Rogers & Associates prepared a parallel feasibility study for the Ortonville Main Street for BCIP. This study was based on previous downtown Ortonville studies and outlined ways similar communities had organized and managed downtown redevelopment efforts. The report made a number of recommendations that were related to the questions that CRD was asked to respond to:

1) Rehabilitation of the historic Columbian Hotel and development at the foot-of-the-lake.

2) Designating most of the Central Business District, from Pacific to Jackson along Second Street, as a designated historic district.

3) Extending a multi-purpose recreation trail from the foot of the lake to the north end of the Central Business District.

4) Seeking federal and state funds to enhance an Ortonville EDA low-interest loan to help property owners do building improvements, particularly to fix facades.

The Rogers study also recommended other foot of the lake development, including a 10-12 unit market rate apartment for elderly independent living; expansion of the grocery store; and creation of a trailhead combined with enhancements to Lakeside Park.

In addition, the City of Ortonville has on several occasions expressed interest in the possibility of constructing a new City Hall and Fire Station as part of any lakefront development.

February 2002 Survey:

Since CRD's Preliminary Report in April 2002 to the BCIP Steering Committee regarding the foot-of-the-lake, the situation regarding the Otter Tail Power property has not yet developed to the point that a viable recommendation can be made regarding its suitability for development. Nevertheless, the February 2002 survey of decision makers and resulting priorities are still viable. The following priorities were identified:

First Priority – Realign CSAH 30 to connect with Monroe Street and clarify private and public development sites and property ownerships.

The City and Committee now feel that the environmental issues regarding the property are too unknown to actively proceed with this effort. In the foreseeable future CSAH 30 will stay in its current alignment.

Second Priority – Construct Marina and marine services, expand Lakeside Park, and develop campground and RV parking.

A safe harbor is still a desirable amenity, however the idea of a marina with boats in the water all summer seems
unlikely. An alternative needs to be developed that doesn’t require any of the Otter Tail Power property and maintains existing lake access. It is highly desirable to have a safe harbor where homeowner who live on the lake can, travel by boat and purchase supplies and services from downtown merchants.

**Third priority – Develop trail connections, community recreational center, and environmental learning center.**

This priority is viable, however, an alternative needs to be designed that will provide for its development without using any of the Otter Tail Power property, yet provide a link between Big Stone Lake and downtown. A concept for the Community Recreational Center is being developed under a second study, but the two efforts are being combined into this final report.

**Existing Conditions:**
The following illustrations show the context within which the planning work was accomplished:

**Regional Context:**
This aerial photo illustrates the relationship between Big Stone City and Ortonville and the built-up area along Big Stone Lake and the Minnesota River Valley at the border between South Dakota and Minnesota. The photo also shows that Big Stone City is mostly constructed on an upper plateau, whereas Ortonville is constructed from the lake on up the hill. The Otter Tail Power Company generating plant dominated the foot of the lake between the historic downtown and the lake along with the railroad tracks and grain elevator – both properties have been cleared and are no longer utilized. It is expected that the Otter Tail property will eventually become under the ownership of the City of Ortonville. It is unclear about the railroad property.