



Paul Mattessich, Executive Director, Wilder Research

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

April 9, 2010

Present: Verne Johnson (Chair); David Broden, Janis Clay (phone), Paul Gilje (phone), Jan Hively (phone), Jim Hetland (phone), Dan Loritz, Tim McDonald, Bob White

Key Points: *Wilder Research and Minnesota Compass are devoted to providing the decision-makers of the state with the data necessary to lead in the development and refinement of public sector services. The state is in a position of change, and decisive action is required to keep it from sliding. Minnesota needs more focus on economic development and planning.*

A. Context of the meeting - Wilder Research studies the effectiveness of both state services and those services provided by non-governmental entities. It is among the nation's largest organizations that do this work. It is Minnesota-focused and home to the Minnesota Compass effort that tracks and analyzes social and economic trends.

The Civic Caucus is committed to sharing ideas for redesign of public services as widely as possible and is interested in how the applied research function of Wilder relates to innovative proposals for action.

B. Welcome and introductions- Paul Mattessich is executive director of Wilder Research, and has worked in applied social research since 1973.

In 1982 Mattessich became executive director of Wilder Research and has served as a member of the Wilder Foundation's senior leadership team since then. He has authored or co-authored more than 250 publications. He has also served on a variety of government and nonprofit boards of directors and special task forces.

Mattessich lectures frequently throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, especially on topics of organizational effectiveness, collaboration/partnerships and major social trends that will affect our future. He worked for a year in Belfast, Northern Ireland, with organizations that promote the development of democratic skills to bring communities together and to resolve conflict through nonviolent means. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Minnesota.

He maintains a blog titled *The Executive Summary*, at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycoayfo> .

C. Comments and discussion -During Mattessich's visit with the Civic Caucus, the following points were raised:

1. Minnesota Compass— Minnesota Compass may be found here: <http://www.mncompass.org/index.php> . "We are data gatherers and interpreters," Mattessich said of the project.

A member opened the discussion: As background for questions that come, could you lay out the background of how MN Compass functions and how important it is to informing change in public services?

"Compass is an initiative of Wilder Research, which is committed to identifying trends in society and assessing the effectiveness of policies." Its creation responded in part to state leaders asking Wilder if they could take their research, package it and tie it to community.

Mattessich sees Compass as an information source and initiative that stimulates productive, non-partisan action within the community.

"Minnesota Compass is both funded and governed by a consortium of foundations" in the state. Mattessich is its director. The statewide effort is divided into regions, which Mattessich said are reflective of the geographic areas covered by those that are funding the effort. Focus is mostly at regional levels. The Twin Cities, for example, is a socially and economically interdependent area.

Compass identified 12 key domains, such as: health, housing, early childhood and aging, and then identified three or four key measures for each. These are used for assessment of efforts to determine whether programs are leading to improvement.

"We thought it was very important to have a limited number of measures for each area," for clarity. To come up with the measures they "convened a task force for each topic, worked with them for a few weeks, determined what those indicators are to be. Some said it would be impossible to pick measures; it wasn't."

2. The state of our state— A member asked Mattessich if he could describe, as if he were the Governor, the state of the state of Minnesota:

"I'll break it into two parts: the general context of demographics and concerns that I have."

Demographics: We're growing and continuing to grow. If you look at where we've been over the past 50 years and where we're likely to go, it looks like the following:

There has been a tremendous suburbanization of population centers. The population of Minneapolis and Saint Paul has stayed flat while suburbs skyrocketed. This impacts economic and political power.

Much more growth at the state level has occurred in the area that runs from Rochester up through the Twin Cities into St. Cloud. The other regions of the state have remained pretty much flat or have declined.

The state's population is growing increasingly racially diverse.

Minnesota has an aging population which means more of the good (wealthy, volunteering) and more of the bad (expensive care).

Concerns for the state, looking into the future:

Poor 11th grade math scores worry businesses. A member pushed that there is "a big difference between what you'd call business mathematics and science mathematics." Yes, Mattessich agreed, "but thought processes and logic are honed with math.

Question: is part of this that the job world requires higher-ordered math skills than before because of the increasingly technological skills? "It's our belief that in any field you go into, reading, math and reasoning skills-including proficiency in technology-are more important than ever. It's a life-long issue: from birth, to ages 4/5, to early years in school, through high school, through engagement in adult life."

Minnesota's jobs and economic competitiveness: "Something has taken a toll." Something's off. For example, more people live in poverty in the suburbs v. the central cities. Median incomes have slid in real terms.

Health: There has been a great increase in obesity rates in past 15-20 years. This rate has gone from 15 percent or less in mid-90's to closer to 25 percent presently. We know that it relates to chronic diseases; costs health care system money; that it's preventable and it's something communities could act upon without significant money.

The chair asked how the speaker would peg us as a state, nationally. "There's nothing to say we're a leader, but I don't know if, as a whole, you'd say we're falling behind. We're at a point where we have to take some very deliberate action if we hope not to fall behind."

Do you see any differences across regions in the state? Yes-the growth regions are in Rochester up through St. Cloud, and the suburbs. On aging there are areas in the state-south west and north west-where it will be a heavier challenge.

3. Data and the use of their findings— A member asked Mattessich how the foundation communicates data with decision-makers. "We are out there visiting with relevant groups; website, e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter. There are proposals percolating at the legislature that look at elevating MN Compass into a level of what had been Minnesota Milestones-something that provides situational awareness of the state. But there is no planning commission now. It may go somewhere if the state can get money.

Minnesota needs to "make sure there is someone paying attention to trends over a long-period; comprehensive planning perspective. Our goal is long-term thinking."

a. Education— On education: "I don't think we've done enough work looking at what needs to be done after high school-what is needed as far as advanced degrees. We don't have enough data on what happens to young people after they leave high school. We don't really know what proportion of

kids go on to college after high school, how that differs by race and income. We need more data to know what will help students get through high school; into and through college. We should know from birth through young adulthood who drops off, why and when."

b. Jobs— On Jobs: What does your jobs data say? "Where the jobs are, what kind of jobs they are, how they are expanding." There are people with college degrees, a member observed, having to take jobs that don't require a college-level degree.

"In terms of growth-area jobs, they are all in areas where a college degree is required. It is true that over the next years there will be an oversupply of people with degrees; but when you look at long term trends, it's trending to college degrees."

c. Competitiveness— On international corporations, and the decline in the state's appeal: What is it that these corporations are feeling Minnesota is missing; how are we not competitive? "I personally in, Wilder Research, have not looked at that question. I'm going to write it down because I'm interested in that question of business decisions.

d. Higher education— On higher education: We've got a cost-increase at a time when real incomes are dropping. Have you looked at all about the affordability of higher ed? "I was talking with an administration official at the U of M about the debt load students are having to take on. He pointed out that there are people who are making their own cost-benefit decision and deciding not to go to college. Not seeing that investing that money will have a payoff, they take time off."

4. State leaders should focus on economic development— Any overarching themes for the legislature to work on? "I've always thought that the more we can do to promote economic development the more we'll address these problems across the board."

"Economic development will probably have to occur through productivity increases as much or more than looking at additional industries coming to the state."

A member asked about the wealth-creation part of the equation, which funds public services. In the dialog you have and the studies you do, is the economic side getting as much focus as the social side?

"Some people would flip that, actually," Mattessich said. "They'd say we focus too much on the former. But the point you're making is good. I think we need more research on both sides. In Compass what we've identified as our key measures are essentially outcome measures for the population. If you look at other studies they are process measures. What we didn't want to do was count effort."

5. Getting ideas into the stream— Do you get requests from gubernatorial campaigns and the legislature to be on advisory committees? "Yes, but I tell them that I'll meet with them openly and will tell them all the same thing."

There is a real hunger out there for ideas on actions that people can take, Mattessich said. He spends a lot of time attending meetings around the state. Paul, they ask, could you just give us a list of possibilities for what can be done on the local economy, education, how we care for elders and handle immigrants?

6. Likely legislative action— A member asked Mattessich what going on in the legislature that makes him smile and what makes him frown? "I was never a fan of the no new taxes pledge-not because I want to pay more taxes, I don't want to pay more taxes-but it put the means ahead of what we need. I'm happy that I was asked personally to serve on two commissions (service commission, good government commission) to identify ways that state and local governments could potentially work in smarter fashion and to better link research organizations in the state to decision making organizations.

Do you make recommendations? "We are moving that way, but our main focus is on gathering the data on what is working. We're looking at running task forces to do a little bit of suggesting what might be done saying: We've done research, found these points, suggest this action." The chair expressed concern that when a group begins making recommendations is can lose its objectivity. "Yes, and we're most concerned about objectivity."

D. Closing

To close, Mattessich thanked the Civic Caucus for providing a place where people can come and talk, free of partisanship. "It is what we try to do at Minnesota Compass with research and it is good to see you are doing it in public affairs."

Thanks all around.