Growth & Justice has made the news and generated buzz statewide in 2018 with our ambitious new “Thriving by Design” process.

In this unique endeavor, we are collecting exhaustive data and information at rural, suburban and metro community gatherings, at which Minnesotans are answering this basic question: What policies and local practices will work toward erasing our divisions and disparities, whether they be racial, regional, economic, or otherwise?

Our staff is now compiling that wealth of constructive grassroots input into a “One Minnesota Equity Blueprint,” a comprehensive policy agenda and affirmative manifesto that will guide the North Star State to a more equitable and inclusive prosperity.

With our allied organizations, we will present this blueprint to Governor-elect Tim Walz and to our Legislature in 2019. We will make it a document that lives on for years, and that continued on page 6

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Before I took on this humbling role as president of Growth & Justice this past January — following two powerhouses of journalism and public policy in the seat (Joel Kramer & Dane Smith) — I spent just over three years as the first administrator for the Minnesota Border to Border Broadband grants program.

The best part of each year was getting out into the countryside on site visits. I felt the results of state policymaking beneath my feet as fiber plows sliced through ditches against blue sky wheat horizon on our western borders. I marveled at the daring high-wire technicians atop poles in misty bluff country.

I got to talk to people who’ve worked a lifetime to keep us all connected and met people who got connected, thanks to the generosity of their fellow Minnesota taxpayers. I saw kids happy to do homework at home again, seniors who can now live at home longer with telehealth services, and the unveiling of entrepreneurial energy in homes and businesses now equipped to trade worldwide.

We who love policy analysis and policy creation make better policy when we take time to feel the earth underneath our feet, use all our senses, and open our hearts to the realities on the ground. It’s a mind & heart balance I’ve strived for all my life, and a balance I see and love in the Growth & Justice mission.

It’s evident in our work today, on the Thriving by Design – Rural & Urban Together to create the One Minnesota Equity Blueprint. Started in early 2017 as the Minnesota Rural Equity Project and the One Minnesota Policy Blueprint, the project was first described as "an ambitious effort to shine light on persistent socioeconomic and public investment gaps throughout rural and Greater Minnesota…. to counter the antagonistic and factually incorrect rural-urban divide language and attitudes in political conversation and public regard."

And then, from listening to the realities on the ground, the policy approach continued to evolve: creating and implementing an Equity Blueprint into the next decade, tied to fostering shared understanding of the socioeconomic interdependencies of Metro and Greater Minnesota. It’s powered by the Thriving by Design Network of Minnesotans, spanning diverse racial and regional/community lines, to help align resources and connect hearts to diminish the “us versus them” mentality and evolve to WE, all of us working together to eliminate barriers and create conditions necessary to build a “One Minnesota” community.

This multi-year work reflects Growth & Justice’s record developing innovative public policy proposals based on independent research and civic engagement, to spur inclusive prosperity for all Minnesotans. We believe Minnesotans can unite around smart investments and practical solutions that build a decent standard of living and vibrant democracy for all. This persistent push for equity — emphasizing that social justice and greater shareholding by all peoples fosters thriving communities and businesses — inspires us every day.

Since our founding in 2002, we’ve worked strategically across traditional boundaries. We evaluate potential solutions through a nonpartisan equity lens that asks: How will this alternative contribute to overall prosperity? Is it fair - both in who pays and who has access? Is it forward-reaching and sustainable for the future? And, is it based in reality, in the pragmatic challenges and opportunities of the people around us, the sky we breathe, and the earth we feel underneath our feet?

CLOSE YOUR BUSY INTELLECT
FEEL THE EARTH
UNDERNEATH YOUR FEET
USE ALL YOUR SENSES
OPEN YOUR HEART

— MONA SMITH,
DAKOTA MEDIA ARTIST

I received the poem printed within this column as a gift just as I began work with Growth & Justice. It has been my constant companion, reminding me that policy development can busy our intellect at the expense of seeing, hearing, and feeling what is really going on out there. The words remind me to do justice and build equity policy with compassion, with common sense, informed by community wisdom.

As Angela Glover Blackwell of PolicyLink teaches us, “We know that ending inequality isn’t just a matter of morality, it is an economic imperative. Equity is the superior growth model. While the private sector must take the lead in producing inclusive growth, government must establish the right framework of policies, investments, and strategies to guide

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that growth. In short, we need a strategy that ensures that we grow together, not apart.”

The Equity Blueprint is that framework for Minnesotans coming together in a shared vision, aligning resources and actions through an equity lens for the betterment of all, for inclusive growth and shared sustainable prosperity.

Please unite with us to support creating this first-ever statewide socioeconomic contract fully integrating equity as the superior growth model, honoring the strength of our diversity and interdependence. It’s a long, costly journey; we need your time and financial help to do it. We’ve seen increased attention and policy investment in narrower and often competing ends — out of fear, anger, and a false sense of scarcity. The need for robust, comprehensive policymaking from a whole community perspective of abundant and welcoming hearts, ideas, and resources has never been greater.

Jane Leonard
JANE LEONARD

Jane Leonard truly has been brightening our corner of the policy landscape in Minnesota, especially since she took the reins of Growth & Justice in January. (Our former president, Dane Smith, continues as a Senior Fellow, working with Jane and a talented new crew, featured on page 7).

Among many contributions, Leonard has been instrumental in broadening our expertise and knowledge of Greater Minnesota, and has simultaneously reinforced our emphasis on diversity and inclusion and racial equity. Jane often says that her whole life has prepared her for this role at Growth & Justice. A look at her resume shows exactly how.

Equipped with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in mass communications and journalism from the University of Minnesota, Leonard worked as a journalist in rural northwestern Minnesota, then for the Metropolitan Council, and for major agribusiness cooperatives.

From 1984 to 1998, she held a wide variety of leadership positions in community development for the State of Minnesota (she has served under DFL, Republican, and Independence Party governors). From 1998 to 2007, Leonard served with and led a variety of non-profit enterprises focused on technology and community development. From 2007 to 2009, she was the Executive Director of the Minnesota Statehood Sesquicentennial Commission. From 2009 to 2014, Leonard served in succession as Strategic Collaboration Manager for the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, senior manager for the Bush Foundation, and as the principal in her own consulting firm. Since 2014 she has served as the Broadband Grants Administrator for the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development, where she received a 2017 Achievement Award.

Leonard and her spouse, Lori Lippert, also have been personally active for a generation in LGBTQ community advocacy efforts, and Jane and Lori were thrilled to be legally married in Minnesota after 32 years in partnership.

With this remarkable breadth of experience, familiarity with people and places in every corner of our state and all its amazing diversity, Leonard truly knows the trees and understands the forest too.

“Everything is related,” she told the Minnesota Women’s Press. “There is a narrative foisted upon us to divide us — the urban and racial divide — yet I can point to policy reports that [state] equity is the smart growth strategy. We need everyone we can get. To keep certain people out of power and wealth is crazy.”

BRETTS BUCKNER

research and data on the economic contributions of ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) communities as entrepreneurs, consumers, workers, taxpayers, and as sources of civic capital and human capital. OneMN.org has also worked successfully across party lines on minority contracting and hiring, small business and entrepreneurial strategies, and civic engagement and voter participation.

Buckner’s ancestors included a railroad porter who moved to Minnesota from Texas in 1919, and his career path has been all about the challenges Minnesota faces because of its history of exclusion and neglect of racial minorities. As the African American community in north Minneapolis gradually grew and persevered against the odds, Buckner recalls, his family members were among the first to own a home north of Golden Valley Road, in a neighborhood where blacks had been excluded by deed covenants.

Buckner left the state to attend Hampton University, a black college in Virginia, where he started toward a degree in engineering. He changed his direction, he said, when he saw that the black community in Minnesota really needed to step into leadership roles. He eventually acquired both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in Advocacy and Political Leadership from Metropolitan State University.

“There were a bunch of gaps, not just ideological but logistical, that were preventing us from succeeding,” Buckner said. “Equity was not a big word back then but it was all about access, opportunity and fairness. And I became interested and passionate about community coordination, moving people of color into power and leadership roles and connecting the dots.”

In 2003 Buckner became one of the youngest presidents of the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP. In chronological order since then, he served as a partnership specialist for the 2010 Census in Minnesota, director of Color the Vote, a candidate for the Minneapolis City Council, owner of his own consulting group (Base Network & Power), and since 2016, managing director OneMN.org.

Buckner says he draws guiding inspiration from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s memorable quote to the effect that “we all came on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.” Another favorite is Nelson Mandela’s quote about poverty and inequality being “a choice that can be undone.”

“Thriiving by Design and the One Minnesota Equity Blueprint,” Buckner promises, “will show that we can undo those choices. We can work together across the state and build that beloved society envisioned by King and Mandela.”
In a recent weekly e-news, Growth & Justice observed that despite obstacles to renewable energy policy imposed by President Trump and Congress, Minnesota is forging ahead with strong statewide business support and even from a strong new conservative voice, the Minnesota Conservative Energy Forum.

We took note of the reopening of a major new solar panel factory on the Iron Range, and cited a Minnesota Public Radio report to the effect that “Minnesota alone is expected to account for more than half of all community solar development in the country in 2018.”

This is hugely important and encouraging. For decades there has been agreement, among both opponents and proponents of mining, that northeastern Minnesota needs to diversify its economy and depend less on a single sector with absentee owners and that can pose a major threat to the water quality in our precious wilderness areas.

Cheaper homegrown energy now shows greater promise than ever before for reducing utility costs and providing quality employment for middle- and low-income households, and for our increasingly diverse workforce.

Much of our commentary, social media, and behind-the-scenes work over the last two years has been focused on the tremendous potential of renewable energy conversion, and energy conservation, as a driver of economic growth that is both locally owned and more equitable.

On the “justice” side, we unequivocally agree with philanthropic and business leaders who are declaring that climate change and inequality are existential threats that are inter-related, and that environmental and equity policy must be more closely integrated.

Led by Senior Fellow Dane Smith, Growth & Justice has been working closely with the state’s leading climate action research and advocacy organizations, and we have been funded for this effort by both the McKnight Foundation and the RE-AMP network. Among the groups: Clean Energy Resource Teams, Take Action Minnesota, Fresh Energy, Climate Generation, Interfaith Power & Light, and many others.

We also have been among the strongest and clearest voices pointing to an emerging bipartisan consensus — and agreement across the left-right divide — on the potential in renewables for both business growth, more and better jobs for underemployed workers, and of course, a reduction in climate-changing carbon emissions.

In another recent e-news, we noted that a flurry of reports are documenting how a surge in the renewable energy sector is driving job growth across the state. And in an op-ed we co-authored for the Morrison County Record, in central Minnesota, we challenged a group of local climate change deniers who blocked a proposed solar project for the Little Falls schools. And we made this crucially important point: “Bi-partisan and mainstream liberal-conservative consensus is building for renewables…When the debates over solar energy and other energy changes are framed as issues of choice for consumers — and market competition for utility monopolies — many responsible conservatives actually have come down on the side of solar energy and the rights of local individuals and entities to generate their own energy if they can.”

Our stronger voice on renewables has been made possible with funding from partnerships with the McKnight Foundation and the RE-AMP network. McKnight has become a leading international voice for climate action, and among its program funding goals is to “foster and support Midwest climate and energy leadership, making the region a national and international leader in addressing climate change.”

This effort will be closely integrated with our “One Minnesota Equity Blueprint” for our new governor and Legislature to begin implementing in 2019. Growth & Justice will play a strong role not only in pushing for accelerating this conversion, but making sure that economic and racial equity is served. This means policy that maximizes renewable energy’s benefit for our state’s people of color, women, the unemployed and underemployed, and households in the middle and lower-income brackets.
informs all Minnesotans around the idea that we all do better, when we ALL do better.

Our effort has even attracted national attention. Kate Searls, our Director of Policy and Research, was featured in a recent newsletter for the National League of Cities, which has picked up on our recurring theme of “Rural and Urban Together.” In the newsletter, Searls said: “The hope is that the Blueprint can serve as a template for constructive, nonpartisan cooperation over the next decade, featuring strategies that welcome newcomers, invest in residents and places, and reduce regional and racial and economic disparities.”

Special attention and inflection on problems and discontent in rural and Greater Minnesota — recognizing differences but also commonalities with the Twin Cities Metro region — is a distinctive feature of Thriving by Design. Our partners at the Blandin Foundation, Minnesota’s leading philanthropy serving rural communities, has been invaluable in shaping the process.

The signature event in this initiative was a kick-off meeting at Granite Falls in western Minnesota, at the Upper Sioux Community’s Conference Center. Despite our location in a small town near the South Dakota border, we attracted a diverse statewide crowd of more than 150 and earned front-page coverage in the West Central Tribune (based in Willmar) on June 29. It also was featured in MinnPost and other mainstream and social media.

Rigor around diversity was a crucially important aspect of the conference. Most of the first afternoon and evening we delved deeply into the Intercultural Development Inventory, a premier assessment tool for building cultural competence in schools and other organizations. Many attendees took the assessment beforehand, and were shown a composite result that indicated many of us were not as far along toward adaptation and acceptance — and were closer to denial and defensiveness than we thought — when it comes to people of different cultures and races.

As a follow-up to ensure broadest possible input, other smaller sessions, organized by Growth & Justice Policy & Outreach Manager Sarah Leistico, were held in Marshall, Bemidji, Little Falls, White Bear Lake, Inver Grove Heights, north Minneapolis and other locations in Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities. A second large gathering, to gather input and response to a draft of our blueprint, has been scheduled for December 10 & 11 at the Ojibwe Community Conference Center in Hinckley.

The MinnPost article about the Granite Falls gathering summarized it thusly: “All these imperatives emerged during the unique three-day conference: inclusiveness and embracing our diversity, welcoming newcomers and investing more in ALL our people and places, reducing regional and racial and economic disparities, redoubling efforts on climate action and environmental protection, and upgrading our physical infrastructure statewide.”

Other spheres for improvement and investment included: improving health-care affordability and access, building or restoring more affordable housing, enacting criminal justice reforms that rehabilitate rather than disable our workforce, encouraging sustainable agriculture initiatives, upgrading arts and culture as a primary economic development strategy, and fostering more and better civic engagement.

A particularly encouraging welcoming address in Granite Falls was delivered by Diana Anderson, president/CEO of the Southwest Initiative Foundation, which fosters community development in the 18 counties in our southwestern corner.

Anderson described growth and progress in the region and “hidden gems” in every community, including “gift shops, restaurants, museums, wineries and breweries, parks and world-class companies.”

Anderson also was emphatic about the “equity” imperative: “Immigrants are already making a significant contribution to our region. Without these new families, many communities would be feeling the impact of outmigration. Instead, Main Streets are being revitalized, jobs are being filled, and new businesses are sprouting up. Our rural communities benefit from the entrepreneurial spirit, rich cultural traditions and strong work ethic of our newest residents.”

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**STAFF UPDATE**

Growth & Justice welcomed new staff / board members in 2018.

**Katie Jeddeloh**, Grants Writer & Public Policy Communicator, is a graduate of St. Olaf College with a B.A. in English and Women’s and Gender Studies. She has previously worked in the nonprofit sector in media arts, publishing, and agriculture. She hopes to use writing and narrative as a tool to further systemic change in a way that honors and cultivates communities – in her own neighborhood and throughout the region. Katie enjoys reading, cooking, and a good cup of coffee.

**Sarah Leistico** Policy & Outreach Manager, previously worked in several community engagement roles, organizing community participation in policy and civic processes throughout the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Sarah earned her B.A. of Individualized Studies with an emphasis in Community Environment and Policy from Metropolitan State University and is passionate about connecting others to opportunities and tools that empower their voice and ability to impact systemic change in their communities.

**Elliot Mohler** is a Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) Specialist at Growth & Justice where he supports research and communication efforts, producing maps to illustrate some of Minnesota’s greatest challenges (e.g. demographic and economic changes, infrastructure, housing). Mohler is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus with a bachelor’s degree in Geography and Environmental Studies and he is currently pursuing his master’s degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

**Kate Searls** is Director of Policy Research at Growth and Justice. For the past three decades Kate has been managing research, evaluation and policy analysis initiatives on behalf of for-profit, non-profit, government and academic organizations. Kate’s research projects have appeared in such diverse settings as: YouTube, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Institute for the Study of Business Markets, the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, the Conference Board and the Minnesota State Legislature.

**Mónica Segura-Schwartz**, Community Outreach & Public Policy Advisor, has more than 10 years of experience in program development, community outreach, integration and diversity and was an electrical engineer in Colombia and Latin America. She serves her community in elected, appointed and volunteer positions, including the St. Cloud Board of Education, the MN Council on Latino Affairs, and several non-profits while completing a Masters in Advocacy and Political Leadership at Metropolitan State University.

**Laura Ziegler**, board member, proudly touts her upbringing in Sleepy Eye. It influences her approach in the legislative and regulatory arena and led her to join the important work of Growth & Justice. As Director of Highway and Government Affairs with Associated General Contractors of MN, she advocates on transportation, transit and infrastructure. Previously, with the League of MN Cities, Laura worked on broadband development, telecommunications, right-of-way management, and economic development. She has a Master’s from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.