

THE NEW COMMUNITY  
Dr. James L. Satterlee

Introduction

Following the decade of the 1930's and the Great Depression the State of South Dakota experienced a major decline in population as many South Dakotans' left the State. Drawn away by military service and jobs related to the war effort, the State would not regain what was lost during that decade until 1990. During this period of slow population growth (1940-1990), the state would lose many of its young adults through out-migration. This continued population gain for the state and at the same time out-migration would appear on the surface to be a contradiction and in need of further clarification. To make this somewhat more understandable one might visualize a situation whereby a particular area (community for ex.) had a population according to census counts of 100 persons in the year 1990. The census count a decade later in 2000 resulted in a population count of 110 persons. This would amount to an increase in population of 10 persons (+10%). At the same time the examination of birth and death certificates for the community revealed that there had been 20 babies born to the 100 inhabitants of the community and that 5 persons had died during the decade 1990-2000. If this were the case then one would expect that instead of the 110 counted by the census in 2000 that there should have been 115 persons present. The difference of 5 persons unaccounted for in the 2000 census are then absent from the area and therefore "out-migrants" (-5%). Had the example shown there to be a population count of 120 in the year 2000 this would have resulted in an "in-migration" of 5 persons (+5%).

Putting these two approaches to work in the examination of the State's population during this period 1950 to present we find a similar pattern of population gain according to the census numbers while continued out-migration has been occurring.

Table 1. POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION 1950-2000

Year	Population Change	Population "In & Out" Migration
1950-60	+27,774	-93,962
1960-70	-14,257	-92,560
1970-80	+24,511	-26,384
1980-90	+5,236	-50,486
1990-00*	+58,840*	+20,266*

\*While the State experienced a population gain and in-migration during the 1990's age-specific analysis of those data reveals that approximately 13,000 young adults are unaccounted for in the 2000 census and therefore considered as out-migrants. For more detail for S.D. counties see: "A Graphic Summary of South Dakota, The New Community Project," SDSU, November 2001.

Detailed analysis of the characteristics of those most prone to migrate from the State has revealed a very “age-selective” process underway. Those most prone to leave the State are those in the age groups 20-34 years of age. Of the 27,000 persons migrating from the State in the 1970’s nearly half (13,560) were of this age group. This occurred again in the 1980’s as nearly 34,000 of the 51,000 out-migrants were of these age groups. While the 2000 census reflected an overall “in-migration” to the State, again further analysis revealed a continued “out-migration” of 13,239 young adults 20-34 years of age. Taking their babies or potential babies with them, these young adults in their child-bearing years, have left a void in the population structure of the State and many of its communities. In addition those young adults remaining in the State are having fewer children as the birth rate and average family size has declined over recent years. The overall effect of this age-selective migration has been wide spread throughout the State as the average age of South Dakotans continue to rise and the State finds itself experiencing a much higher proportion of elderly. Schools, churches, government and the local economies are all impacted by both the population losses and the age-selective nature of such losses.

The age-selective nature of this out-migration has not been uniform geographically throughout the State as a number of the larger urban centers have been able to retain many of their young adults, often as recipients of those from the smaller communities. But even then the largest urban centers have not been able to offset the losses from the rural areas. The restructuring of agriculture with fewer farms and ranches and the lack of alternative employment opportunities in many rural communities has made for major changes in the infrastructure of communities. Declining numbers of farms and ranches (1935=85,000 to 1997=32,000) have resulted in a declining population base necessary to maintain enrollments in the schools, support of the churches, government, and the local economy.

It wasn’t until the release of the 1990 Census of Population that people began to realize that population loss and out-migration of young adults was not restricted to just the smaller towns in South Dakota. That census revealed for the first time that a number of the larger communities in the State (Aberdeen, Huron, and Mitchell) were beginning to lose population as well. What had up until this time been thought to be a small town phenomena now was being taken much more seriously. Ten years later the 2000 census has reaffirmed this trend as two of these three larger communities have continued to lose population along with the addition of six more of the State’s twenty-five larger urban communities.

## IMPLICATION OF POPULATION LOSS

The impacts of the loss of population will vary from one community to another dependent upon their location in relation to the larger urban centers. Many of those that are adjacent to and within commuting distance of the largest urban centers in the State (Sioux Falls and Rapid City) have experienced phenomenal growth. Those outside a reasonable distance for commuting are facing continued decline of population. In addition, opportunities to supplement farm income through off-farm employment would

appear to be somewhat of a stabilizing factor in the loss of farm and ranch numbers. This of course then favors those areas geographically close to the larger employment centers. Those farmers and ranchers further removed have little choice but to either expand their operations or go out of business and move to find alternative employment.

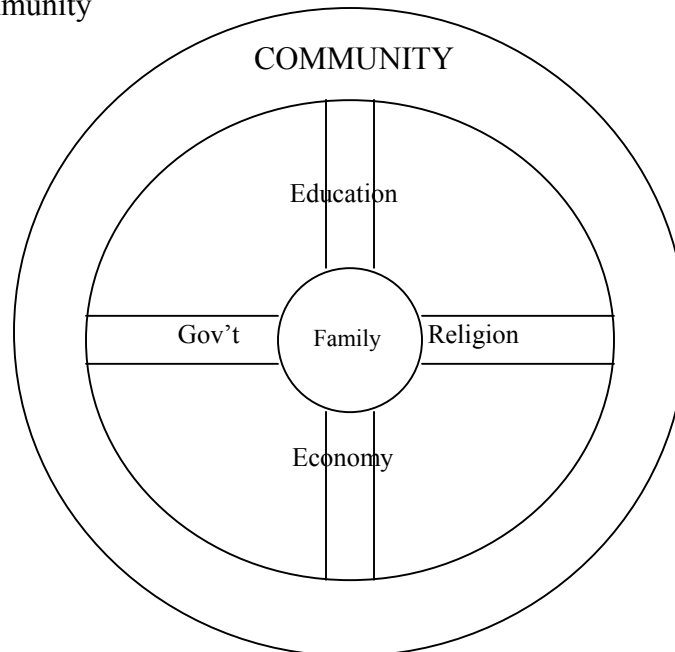
Schools which are dependent upon a young adult population to produce children for enrollment have been significantly impacted as consolidation or reorganization issues continue to be at the forefront of problems facing most communities in the State large and small. Dependent more and more on outside support through state-aid brings with it more strings attached and what many consider loss of local control.

Churches located in rural areas have found it necessary to close their doors or resort to the use of itinerate clergy who often live outside the area and commute to several churches on any given Sunday. Some areas of the State have even found it necessary to recruit seminary students from the Twin Cities to commute to their churches on the weekends in order to maintain Sunday services.

Local governments (City, Township, County) have been impacted the least as one continues to marvel at the fact that many of the communities and counties have a third to a fourth of the population they had 30 years ago and yet have few if any reductions in costs or employees. While the State had nearly 90 counties near the turn of the century (1900) and 66 today, a continued strong resistance to reorganization still exists. Fear of the loss of local control, and jobs if the counties or communities were to reorganize play a major part in the resistance to open up avenues for cooperation with their neighbors.

The most obvious impact of the loss of population has been the economy of local communities. Vacant store fronts, deteriorating roads and streets, abandoned houses and school buildings all speak to a day when thriving communities could be found in all parts of the State and in every county. An improved trunk system along with improvements in vehicle transport have all contributed to the demise of local main streets. While the farm and ranch economy continues to prosper the fact that farms have become larger and fewer in number does little to revitalize the dwindling economy of local communities. When one farmer buys out two or three of his neighbors he does not send then three times the number of children into school or buy three times the amount of groceries off the shelves of the local grocery store. In fact the emphasis on "Economic Development" often works at the expense of the community when one hears about how well the farm economy is doing. "Community Development" on the other hand takes into account the fact that other institutions exist in the community and need not be sacrificed in the name of economics. Figure 1. puts the basic community institutions in a form at which reflects the interdependence necessary for the community to exist. While the "economic" spoke is critical to the operation of the wheel, it by no means can operate on its own without the support of the others and the hub.

Figure 1. The Community



As communities find themselves without a sufficient population base to provide the basic amenities to a quality of life a question may be raised as to what have been the impacts on the rural family. As local services become non-existent a question then arises as to how rural families cope with the absence of basic services. Have the larger urban centers been able to replace those services in such a manner as to care for the physical and emotional stresses placed on rural families? Where does a rural family turn when it is in need of help with the impacts of stress (alcohol, mental illness, drug addiction, etc.). How comfortable do they feel sitting down with an itinerate minister or medical personnel outside their community and sharing the woes of life? In addition, many of the elderly have found it necessary to move and relocate near larger urban centers in order to find adequate health care.

## THE FUTURE

Given the dilemma brought about by dwindling numbers of farms and local population one might ask whether there is anything that might be done to salvage what is left and bring back a sense of vitality and viability to rural South Dakota. If any stability or even growth is to be seen in the numbers of farms, school enrollments, local economies and basic services it will demand a repopulation of the area and a “holding power” which will allow young adults to stay and even return to the community. Critical to this are job opportunities. Opportunities afforded through the expansion of local businesses and industries and the opportunity to entice companies and industries into the community. This in turn will demand that the community can provide a large enough labor force to support the business, a quality of education and health care commensurate

with what an employer would expect for their employees and a demonstration of efficiencies in government not unlike that which an employer would expect in his own business. To accomplish this would demand what the experts call a “critical mass” of at least 20,000 persons. At present, the population numbers found in most rural communities are less than several thousand and even rural counties in the State have for the most part less than 5,000 persons. What this means is that rural South Dakotan’s interested in the revitalization of their areas will need to redefine their traditional concept of “community” in order to accomplish this task. This will mean that one must go outside the boundaries of what we have traditionally called “our community” and look to our neighbors in surrounding communities in providing a population base which would have any chance at survival. It would mean that not only will communities within the same county need look to their neighbors but that entire counties may need look to neighboring counties for help.

## STRATEGIES FOR MULTI-COUNTY/COMMUNITY INTERACTION

### THE NEW COMMUNITY

As the 2000 Census of Population data have brought about an increased awareness of the continued crises in rural South Dakota, communities may want to examine ways in which they might bring about a sense of stability and even rebuild that which has been lost through continued loss of their population base. Through a number of strategies, communities may find ways to join their neighbors in being able to provide the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of those residing in their communities and those that might join them in the rebuilding of viable communities. Through these efforts may come opportunities to provide a holding power necessary for couples to remain in agriculture, for schools to continue to exist, for the elderly to remain close to home, and for communities to survive.

#### 1. NETWORKING

One strategy being used by some communities in the State is what might be called “networking.” Utilizing this approach simply means setting aside those rivalries which have often separated communities due to differences in ethnic background, local politics, athletics, etc. Through gestures of willingness to share ideas communities can open up communication channels without the fear of loss of local control. Periodic informal meetings of local governing officials, community leaders, church and education groups with their counterparts in neighboring communities and even counties would go a long way in opening up avenues to things that might be accomplished together in a more efficient manner. To accomplish this may require that an organization or persons outside the area be responsible for the initial gatherings. This may be necessary to offset any suspicions and questions of motive brought on by one or the other group extending the invitation to meet.

## 2. COOPERATION

This strategy again does not erode any of the authority rendered a governing body but does provide for the opportunity for joint planning on a regular basis with counterparts in surrounding communities and counties. This strategy differs from that of “networking” in that the bodies involved (government, education, healthcare, religious) agree to work together to bring about benefits which they alone would be unable to accomplish. Such efforts as hiring of specialized teaching faculty between two school districts, purchasing and sharing of equipment by several county highway departments, reduction in the duplication of efforts by neighboring law enforcement agencies, building and maintenance of joint facilities are but a few of the areas that could be investigated for cooperation.

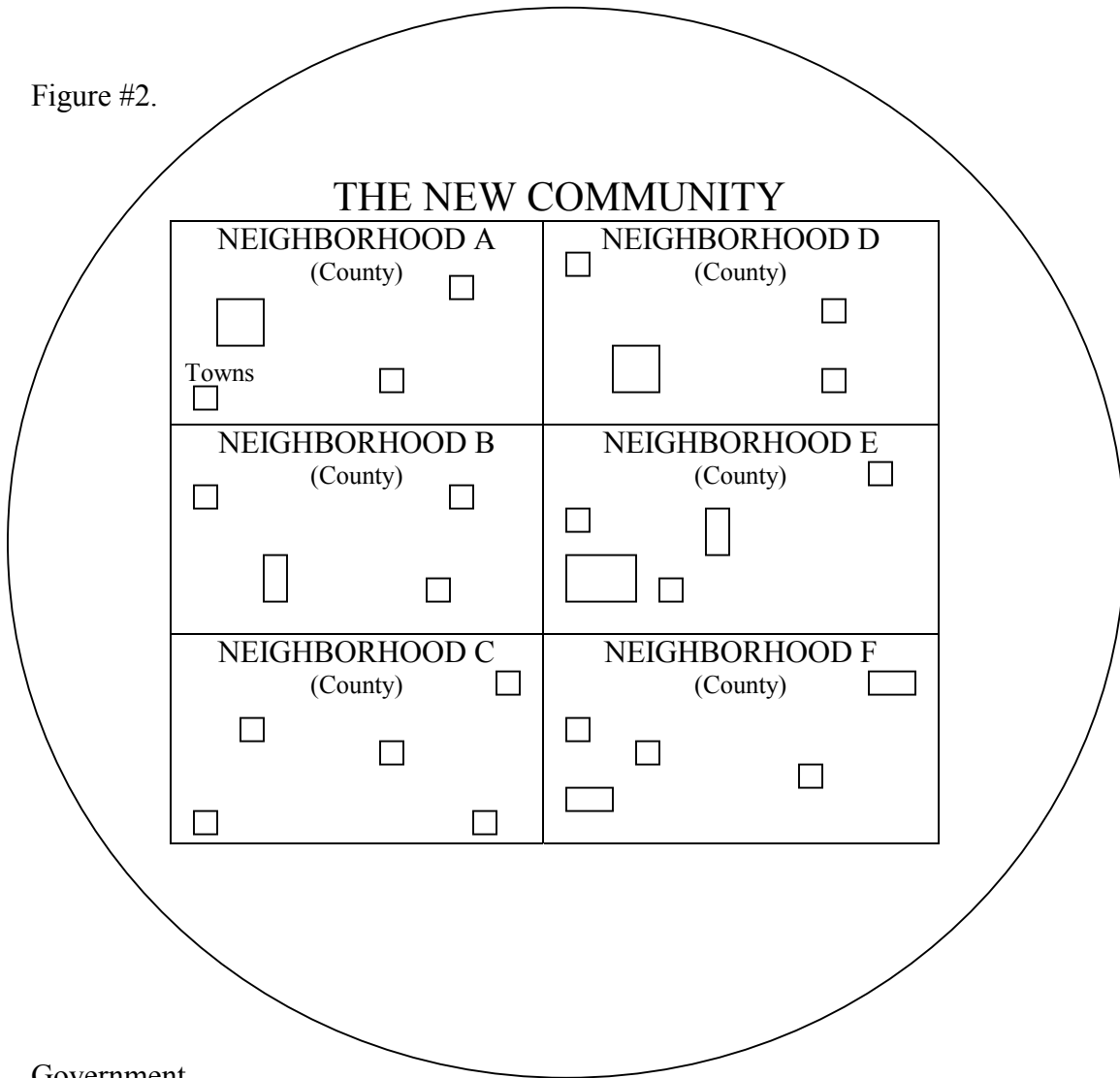
## 3. COLLABORATION

This approach would demand the relinquishing of some authority by the participating parties. Similar to the two previous strategies this approach would allow for the two principal parties to establish a joint committee/board responsible to represent them in specific arenas of mutual interest. This might be a medical services board which crosses community and county lines. It may be a subcommittee of several school boards which crosses any number of school districts. The idea behind this strategy is that it would allow for parent boards and governing bodies to select professionals or experts in their area to represent them on issues which they may find too demanding of their time. It would also allow the individual bodies to benefit from the breadth of experience and the economies of scale represented by larger areas.

## 4. CONSOLIDATION

In this model a number of our present counties would join together into a multi-county “community.” The original counties would then be considered as identifiable “neighborhoods” retaining much of their social autonomy (Figure 2). It would demand however that residents of these neighborhoods (counties) make a commitment to a larger entity, “The New Community,” for much of their community infrastructure. This “New Community” could be structured by the consolidation of any number of present counties dependent upon such factors as population numbers, geographic proximity, trade center analysis etc. For purposes of this ex., six counties will be used assuming each have population base of 3,000-4,000 persons each.

Figure #2.

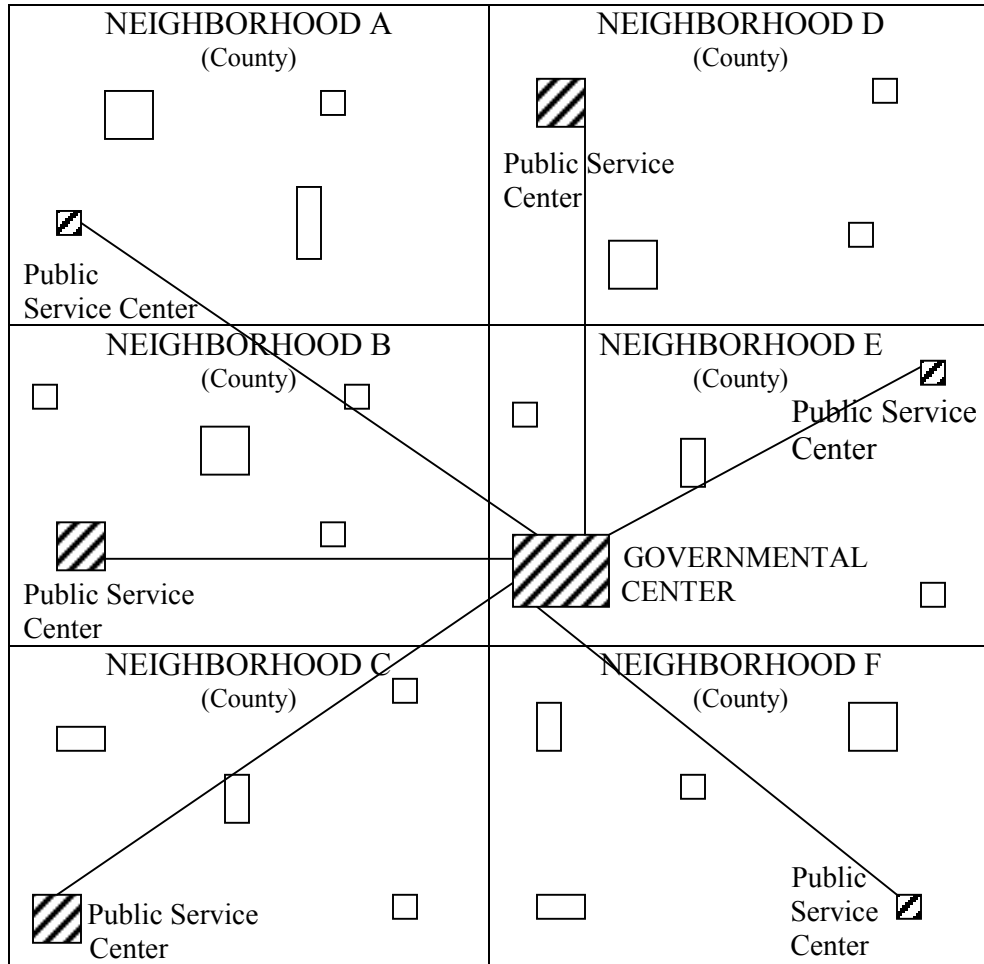


Government

This multi-county “New Community” could be characterized by the consolidation of services which in many cases could provide equal if not better services at less cost/capita. Numerous county government offices could be centralized in a “Community Government Center” located conveniently somewhere within the multi-county area (see Figure 3). The Community Governmental Center could house the consolidated county, state and federal program offices as well as law enforcement programs. Each neighborhood would continue to be served through satellite “Public Service Centers” located in each neighborhood and where representatives of the various government offices would be present at least on a weekly basis. Each neighborhood would have at least one full-time deputy law enforcement officer and fire control officer located in the neighborhood Public Service Centers and responsible for law enforcement and organization of fire control in the area. This would preclude the need for maintaining separate radio dispatchers and incarceration facilities in each of the individual counties. Persons in need of immediate government services could travel to the central “Community Governmental Center” which would be at the most within one hour driving distance from any corner of the area now within the “New Community.” (See Figure 3)

Figure 3.

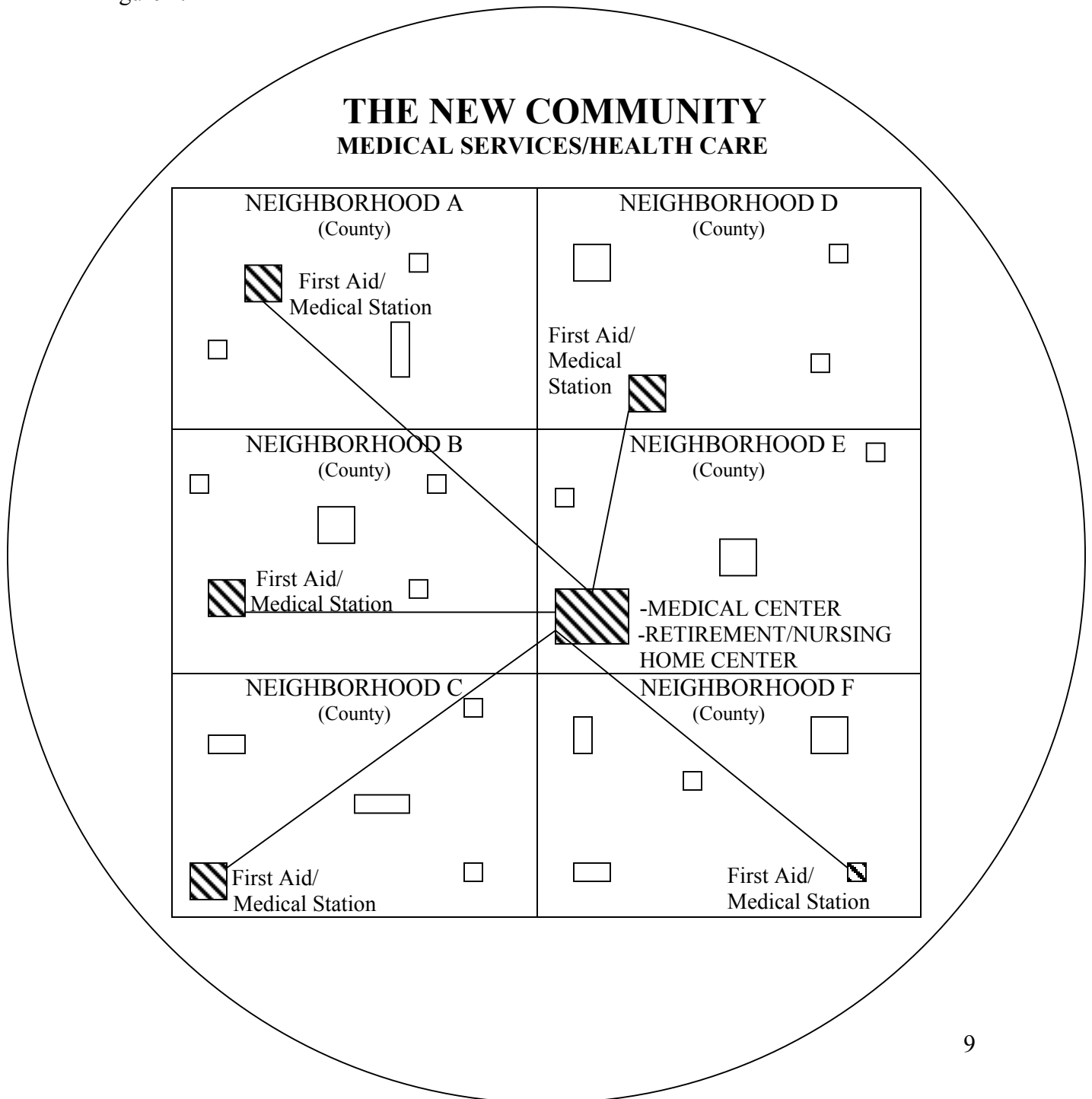
## THE NEW COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT



Health Services

Similarly, health services might also be planned in such a way as to provide a major medical center to be centrally located in the multi-county area (community) with satellite “Health Services Centers” located in the neighborhoods and staffed with nurse practitioners/paramedics. Given the availability of telecommunications and mobile support systems one might speculate that a neighborhood could actually experience improved services given the network and availability of major services within a very short distance. (See Figure 4)

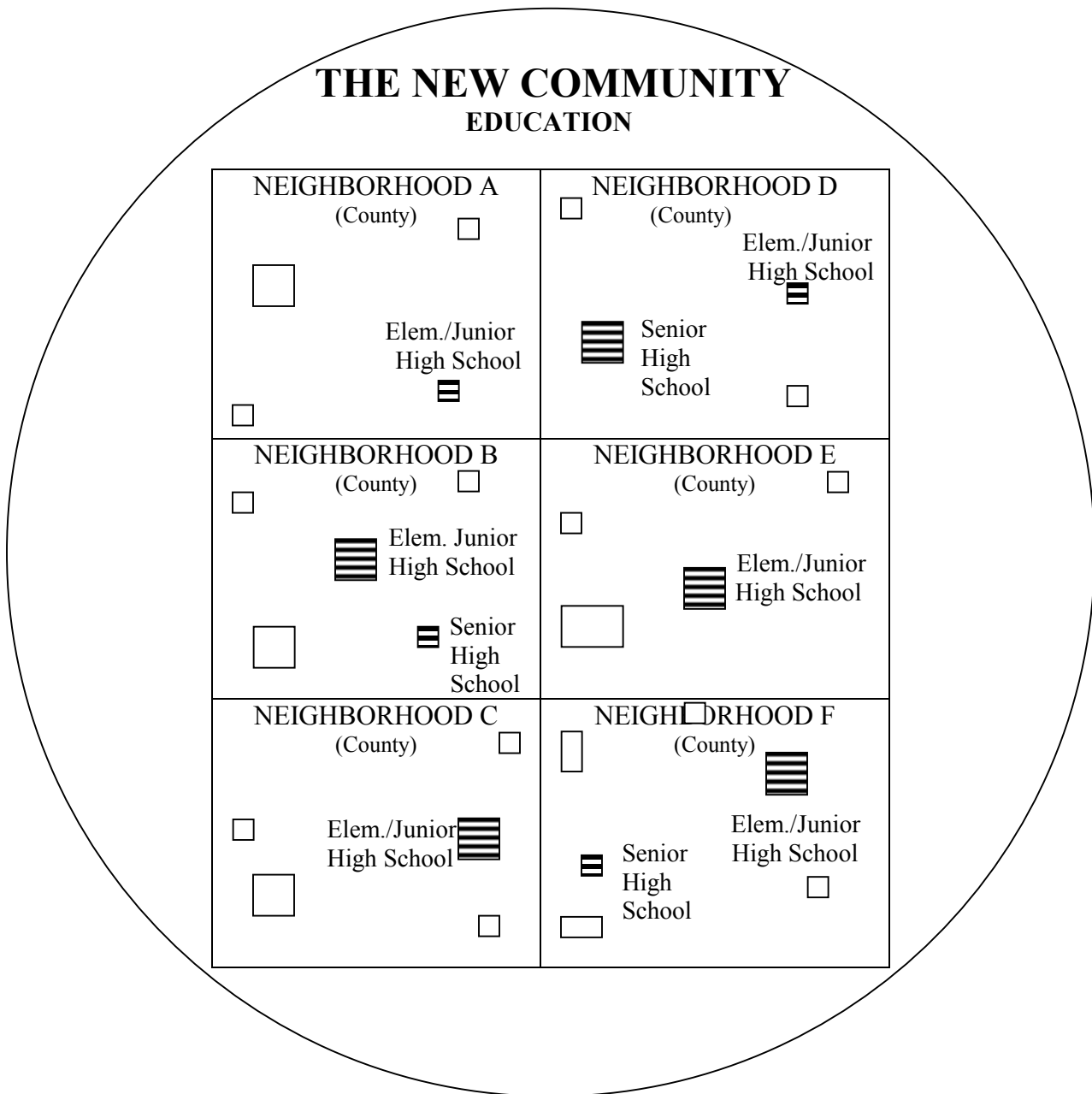
Figure 4.



Education

Schools which have already experienced the consolidation phenomena any number of times may well have to reconsider their present status given continued out-migration of young adults in their child bearing years and the lower birth rate being experienced by those who remain. The “New Community” may well end up with only one high school in each neighborhood (county) and in more sparsely populated areas even fewer. Each neighborhood would be assured of local elementary and junior high schools to minimize travel time for the younger children (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.



These are but a few examples of how counties and the communities within might better consolidate efforts and resources in the name of survival. Churches, most dependent upon local citizenry for support, have already faced the realities of continuously shrinking populations. Adaptation to dwindling population has resulted in consolidation of congregations and return of the itinerant circuit-rider ministries serving local churches in the smaller communities.

The economic institution which is at the core and critical to survival, will benefit by this new sense of “community” as residents form a commitment to the area businesses. Realizing that bypassing local businesses to “save” in the long run contributes to the loss of critical services when most needed. On the other hand, local ag/business services may resort to establishing a major service center within the new community with satellite outlets located out in the neighborhoods. While the availability of a machinery part or services may not be as readily available as in the past, they at least will be available but maybe at a slightly further distance.

The model serves to raise some important questions about the future of rural South Dakota. If there is a desire to retain a sense of rurality with some measure of vitality it will come only through people setting aside those long held rivalries and working toward regional cooperation. Only through such efforts will we be in a position to entice those jobs necessary to retain the young and provide support for agriculture by providing opportunities for off-farm employment. At the same time it might be anticipated that such change will be mandated by outside forces, i.e. government requirements for solid waste disposal, minimum school enrollments for state-aid to education, etc. To join together would allow for participation in those decision which will eventually impact on our destinies.

Not all communities will survive given this continued out-migration. One will note by the examination of Figure 6 that many more communities could and would benefit through the consolidation effort than if nothing is done to curb the loss through community development.

Figure 6.

