

FOND DU LAC VISION & STRATEGIC PLAN

ADVOCAP Workshop
Thursday, August 20, 2015

On Thursday, August 2, 2015 at 1:00pm, an *Envision Fond du Lac* workshop was hosted by ADVOCAP in Downtown Fond du Lac with members of the community who utilize ADVOCAP's programming and services.

The workshop began with a brief overview of the planning process and concluded with a community discussion of issues, concerns, and ideas. The workshop included a questionnaire exercise, from which participants shared their written comments with the overall group. The following is an issue-based summary of the input received during the workshop.

Note on Summary Context

The following is a summary of the thoughts, comments, and opinions received in response to these four questions. Some comments were shared with the entire group, while others were recorded privately on worksheets. It is important to note that the items identified in this summary are not recommendations or observations of the consultant, but rather feedback and comments received from those who participated in the workshop.

Assets

Participants were first asked to identify the things that they liked the most about living and working in greater Fond du Lac. Participants voiced their ideas on a range of items; however, many comments centered on key themes, which are summarized by issue categories below.

Sense of Community & Civic Involvement

Participants enjoyed Fond du Lac's clear sense of community and the ability to know one's neighbors. It was noted that this allows the community "pulls together in crisis" and that people are genuine and caring. It is a "good place to raise a family."

Small Town Feel w/ Big City Amenities

Participants noted that they enjoyed Fond du Lac's "small town" feel and charm, but at the same time, appreciated it had many activities, assets, and opportunities that other cities of similar size do not have. Examples given included the quality public library, farmer's market, Lakeside Park, colleges/universities, and good shopping and services. One participant stated that "there's always something going on."

Services & Resources for Low Income Families & Individuals

Fond du Lac has many services and resources for the low-income community, such as low income housing, "wonderful" social services, and the ability to use FoodShare at the farmer's market. Police officers are seen as being helpful and "open minded."

Growth Potential

Participants expressed optimism about Fond du Lac, noting its potential to grow economically, culturally, and socially. The community was described as "innovative," the "center of other cities," and possessing residents with a good work ethic. Its strategic location at the foot of a lake was also noted.

Diversity

Although participants noted Fond du Lac may not be as diverse as other cities, it has a variety of people from different backgrounds and many different religious institutions serving different populations. Organizations such as United for Diversity were cited as examples of groups working to foster a sense of diversity in the community.

Other

Other assets that do not fit in any particular category included:

- Natural beauty
- An accountable local government
- Support for agriculture
- No blighted areas

Challenges

Participants were asked what they saw as the greatest challenges facing the community and what they did not like about living or working in Fond du Lac. As with the previous section, participants voiced their concerns regarding a range of items; however, many comments centered on key themes, which are summarized by issue categories below.

Gaps & Threats to Social Services

Participants identified several gaps in social service programming, including mental healthcare services, changes in benefits that discourage marriage, and too much of a focus on children's healthcare and not enough on adult healthcare. Additionally, participants expressed concern about potential cuts to senior housing and Planned Parenthood.

Challenging Environment for Retail & Restaurants

Retail businesses and restaurants are facing a challenging market environment according to workshop attendees. It was noted that many stores are closing or moving out of town and that restaurants are closing. Downtown has been particularly hard hit. It was suggested that high rents may be contributing to the trend.

Public Transportation

Two public transportation challenges were identified by participants. First, development has sprawled in recent decades, creating greater land distances between neighborhoods, jobs, and services. This presents many challenges for bus routes and promoting walkability. Secondly, bus service is not available on weekends, late nights, and holidays. For those who do not have cars or cannot drive, this can make it difficult to access services or commute to work.

Dependency

Workshop participants expressed concern over individuals who lack a good work ethic and abuse government programs and resources, giving low income individuals a bad reputation.

Racism

The lack of diversity in Fond du Lac has led to elements of racism in the community. One multi-lingual participant shared a story where she was told to "speak in English" when in public. Additionally, recent misperceptions regarding affordable housing development in Fond du Lac were cited as examples of racist attitudes.

Workforce Development & Support

The quality, access to, and pay of jobs available to low income individuals was a concern of participants. Many jobs, particularly in the retail industry, were seen as paying low wages. Other challenges included the spatial mismatch between employees and employers, access and affordability of childcare, and stigmas associated with having a criminal record.

Other

Other challenges that do not fit in any particular category included:

- Too much focus on arresting drug dealers (“supply”) and not reducing drug addiction (“demand”)
- Landlord or “slumlord” issues
- Lack of a local newspaper that represents Fond du Lac
- Demolition of historic buildings and renovations that change the character of historic buildings
- Lack of wintertime activities

Ideas

Lastly, participants were asked to share ideas that they felt would make Fond du Lac a better place to live and work. The ideas shared by participants were:

- Host more community events
- Job-train unmotivated individuals
- Attract more artists and creativity
- Implement improvements in blighted areas
- Recruit a grocery store to Downtown Fond du Lac
- Host more programs and activities targeted towards families
- Volunteer
- Separate affordable housing for seniors from affordable housing for young people and families
- Eliminate disincentives to work
- Extend bus service to include the weekends
- Provide mentors for workforce training in schools
- Get to know your neighbors
- Get bus drivers or technology in buses to announce bus stops
- Foster a sense of community vs. “this is mine”
- Clamp down on drug usage
- More homeless shelters
- Create better programs to help small businesses
- Host more United for Diversity events
- Better public transportation
- Better assistance for families unable to get FoodShare
- Have more activities for teens to do so they are not getting into trouble
- Need more programs to help with certain mental health conditions