

# FOND DU LAC VISION & STRATEGIC PLAN

## Community Workshop #2

*Monday, April 13, 2015*

On Monday, April 13, 2015 at 2:00 p.m., an *Envision Fond du Lac* workshop was held with community members from greater Fond du Lac at Marian University. This workshop was one of many opportunities for residents and stakeholders to publicly discuss issues facing the Fond du Lac area.

The community 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*

*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.*

## Issues & Concerns

Attendees were first asked to identify the most important issues facing greater Fond du Lac. Participants voiced their concerns regarding a range of issues; however, many comments centered on key themes, which are summarized by issue categories below.

### *Supporting Diversity*

Workshop attendees raised concern over diversity within the greater Fond du Lac area, with many residents feeling the community needs to develop opportunities for cross-cultural communication. Respondents noted that the lack of communication between different ethnic and social groups discourages acceptance and integration of diverse populations. Many community members emphasized that Fond du Lac's growing diversity was an important and necessary strength for the region, and that steps should be taken to integrate diverse groups into an inclusive Fond du Lac community. It was stressed that efforts should be geared toward both providing programs for growing minority populations, but education should also be provided regarding these populations for community facility providers, employers, and the community as a whole.

### *Becoming a Destination by Leveraging Underutilized Assets*

Participants emphasized the need to turn Greater Fond du Lac into a destination within the larger region and state. Many felt that the lack of local attractions and unique attributes damages the area's perception and discourages visitors from visiting Greater Fond du Lac. Respondents highlighted the underutilized Lake Winnebago and the lakefront as important areas for development to create unique and exciting districts. This included opportunities for water-based recreation and the development of a lakefront boardwalk or area for shops and restaurants. Downtown Fond du Lac was also identified as an area that requires additional investment to create a unique location to attract visitors.

### *Establishing a Clear Community Identity*

The development of a clear and positive community identity was highly stressed by attendees at the workshop. Linked to the establishment of greater Fond du Lac as a destination, discussion centered on the area's lack of a specific identity and poor self-image. Participants hoped for more community events, activities, and festivals to strengthen local connections and establish a sense of local pride and energy. They also believed that new branding or marketing would benefit the community, encourage economic development, and attract new residents to the area.

### *Revitalizing Commercial Areas*

Consistently discussed throughout the workshop was the need to revitalize commercial areas within Fond du Lac, in particular the Forest Mall. Participants highlighted a range of issues regarding the mall, most notably its aged appearance and prevalent vacancies. Similar issues were noted in regards to Downtown Fond du Lac. Respondents felt it is important that new commercial stock be constructed and new uses be attracted to the area to fill existing vacancies. This included a desire for new retail stores and a diverse range of restaurants.

### *Stimulating Economic Growth & Reducing Brain Drain*

Participants discussed the lack of high paying jobs and employment opportunities for residents. Respondents argued that without a diverse range of employment opportunities, the area would be unable to attract younger age groups and families necessary to continued growth. In addition, participants also noted a gap between minority groups and those skills desired by local employers. Skill development and job training were discussed as important steps to ensuring the local employment base can adequately fill existing positions. Some participants also felt that the minimum wage should be raised appropriately.

Education and youth retention was an important element of the discussion. Those in attendance emphasized that higher education students tend to leave Fond du Lac post-graduation in favor of other regions with better jobs and more appeal to young adults. Participants stressed the need to encourage new, higher paying jobs to the area that will keep young adults in Fond du Lac post-graduation and attract young professionals and families to the region. In addition, respondents cited the need for new uses and activities that appeal to young adults, as well as teenagers and families. This included places for youth to congregate as well as entertainment uses.

### *Promoting Connectivity*

A variety of issues and concerns relating to transportation and general connectivity were discussed by residents. This included the maintenance of streets and roadways, the difficulty of parking in various districts, persistence of issues on highways and major transportation corridors, and mobility around town. Participants also mentioned the lack of facilities for pedestrians or cyclists to move within the area, which forces auto-reliance. In particular, a lack of non-motorized connectivity restricts the mobility of teenagers and young adults, which some felt contributes to issues with youth retention.

### *Increasing Public Safety*

Community members discussed the prevalence of crime and drug use within Fond du Lac, particularly the accessibility of drugs. Respondents linked this issue to a decrease in safety or the general perception of safety which can be disruptive to a community's identity and discourage families looking to move to the area.

## Priority Actions & Projects

Workshop participants were asked to list specific projects or actions that could improve the greater Fond du Lac area. All responses are organized by topic area and listed below, but are not listed in any particular order.

### Economic Development

- Encourage job creation that provides high paying jobs and opportunities for minority groups and young professionals
- Develop the lakefront for commercial uses, including retail stores, restaurants, and entertainment uses
- Tear down the Forest Mall and replace it with new commercial options, such as a strip mall
- Create a dedicated strategy to address issues with Forest Mall
- Fill businesses at Forest Mall by decreasing rent and making the space smaller
- Attract technology based employers and jobs to the area
- Attract higher end restaurants and bars to the area, such as a wine bar and restaurant at the lakefront
- Encourage growth in the Downtown through the development of a few catalyst sites
- Conduct a market study to determine what businesses are most viable and best to attract to the area
- Recognize businesses that partake in corporate sustainability actions
- Educate and encourage alternative energy, such as solar panels
- Raise awareness about the environment and how it affects the City
- Offer incentives to attract businesses to the area
- Tear down old homes and replace them with newer homes
- Work with young adults and teenagers to identify and attract uses and activities that they would be interested in
- Build a convention center at Lakeside Park
- Encourage entrepreneurship as a way to assure sustainable economic growth
- Create internships, job shadowing, and mentoring to educate youth

### Parks & Recreation

- Develop the lakefront for recreational and related entertainment uses
- Create a beach front at Lake Winnebago with an accompanying boardwalk
- Construct an indoor sports complex
- Construct an indoor kids sports zone
- Establish community gardens in vacant lots
- Preserve natural resources, especially the escarpment
- Place a park where Sharp Clinic used to be
- Plant trees throughout town

### Governmental Services

- Coordinate the community's focus and various efforts over time
- Enforce codes more strictly to maintain high quality of residences and commercial areas
- Create a program to ensure vacant spaces are still well maintained
- Establish a strategic planning committee
- Hire a Fond du Lac staff member at the County level to coordinate events and the community calendar
- Require sensitivity training for local law enforcement so that citizens and officers are not adversarial
- Raise the minimum wage in the city and county to the extent allowed by state and federal law

- Partner with Fond du Lac Police Department to create a youth mentoring program
- Encourage the attraction and retention of minority groups

### Education

- Promote education through programs that incentivize students to be focused in their studies
- Strategically hire several qualified school district staff members from minority groups to encourage cross-cultural education
- Continue to support the public school system

### Transportation

- Increase public transportation options
- Enhance and expand public transportation
- Introduce smaller buses or vans that can transport residents to a wide range of locations
- Create more sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike trails

### Downtown Fond du Lac

- Create a plan for revitalization of the Downtown
- Attract a grocery store to the Downtown, possible using a grant to incentivize development
- Renovate the Retlaw Hotel
- Attract new diverse uses to the Downtown, including restaurants and entertainment options
- Create a riverwalk in the Downtown to capitalize on the river, including live music, restaurants, and activities for all ages
- Construct a large downtown parking garage with free parking
- Construct a mall in the Downtown
- Incentivize small businesses and startups within the Downtown
- Attract more established businesses to the Downtown

### Identity

- Create the opportunity for cross-cultural communication within the community
- Create community events and activities aimed at bring together people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities
- Host more community events, activities, and festivals, particularly at Lakeside Park
- Create spaces for minority groups to gather and host activities
- Establish a festival organization or committee that works year-round to bring the community together
- Create a marketing strategy to improve Fond du Lac's image and capitalize on local assets
- Create a marketing campaign through TV and Radio that highlights positive aspects of Fond du Lac
- Increase the hiring of minorities in the public and private sector
- Construct a civic center or community center geared toward cross-cultural communication
- Invest in the volunteer center and help increase local volunteer hours
- Support local arts and music
- Link fundraising efforts between non-profit foundations and charities within the area
- Feature at least one positive story or event in the Fond du Lac newspaper each day, prominently displayed on the front page.
- Create Fond du lac Pride sweatshirts and t-shirts

- Create “clean-up” events sponsored by local businesses and including post-clean-up cookouts

## Community Strengths & Assets

The workshop concluded with a discussion of the assets that greater Fond du Lac has to build upon and should be preserved moving forward. Workshop participants identified Lake Winnebago, the community’s central location within Wisconsin, its local colleges and universities, and strong work ethic as key assets to greater Fond du Lac. All assets and strengths identified in the workshop are listed below:

### Services & Facilities

- Education system kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Great schools
- Variety of charities and organizations
- 4-H
- Active Chamber of Commerce with important leadership programs
- I-41 and I-45 corridors
- Churches and other related service groups
- Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts
- Healthcare
- 3 colleges and universities
- Library

### Natural Resources

- Lake Winnebago
- Lakeside Park
- Local parks, trails, and recreation facilities
- Natural setting & atmosphere
- Natural beauty of the Downtown

### Economic Development

- Local business ethics
- Professionals and businesses striving to make Fond du Lac a better community
- Entrepreneurial network

### Community

- Community size
- Small town charm
- Small town feel
- Overall safety
- Low crime
- Affordable living
- General community ethics
- Well educated residents
- Enthusiastic people
- Friendly and Kind people
- Local potential

- Tradition
- Arts & music centers
- Growing diversity
- Generations of families choose to stay in the area
- Increasing diversity
- Elected officials and city staff
- Wealth
- Regional location and access