

FOND DU LAC VISION & STRATEGIC PLAN

“Leadership Fond du Lac” Workshop

Wednesday, April 15, 2015

On Wednesday, April 15, 2015 at 10:15 a.m., an *Envision Fond du Lac* workshop was held with the current “Leadership Fond du Lac” class at the Fond du Lac Police Department Headquarters.

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 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.

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.

Employment & Workforce

Workshop participants highlighted a number of issues regarding employment in greater Fond du Lac, particularly pertaining to the local workforce. Respondents discussed the local gap or disconnect between job offerings in the area and the skills of the existing workforce. Some felt that the area has many strong employment opportunities, but argued the local workforce cannot fill these jobs and that Fond du Lac has difficulty attracting white collar professionals from elsewhere to fill these jobs due to a perceived lack of culture and amenities. Others believed greater Fond du Lac does not have enough employment options for young professionals, which is what restricts them from moving to the area. The majority of participants agreed that the lack of both quality job openings and a highly educated workforce was an issue of importance for the community that should be addressed.

Brain Drain

Related to the previous issue of workforce and employment, youth retention was another key issue identified. Participants noted that many younger individuals and students leave the area for college and choose not to return, which reduces the number of young professionals and families in the population. This demographic is important for continued growth and vitality of a community. Respondents listed a number of factors which contribute to young professionals choosing not to locate in greater Fond du Lac. This included the limited number of entertainment and commercial options in the area, the lack of high paying and high quality job opportunities, the perception of crime, and the poor appearance of the area. Many other issues were discussed as necessary to address in order to help make Fond du Lac more appealing to young professionals and recent higher education graduates.

Blight

Members of Leadership Fond du Lac raised concern over the poor appearance and maintenance of many areas of greater Fond du Lac. In particular, respondents noted that many neighborhoods and areas with older housing stock were seeing general decay and poor maintenance, which creates an unfavorable image. Maintenance within the Downtown and along the river was discussed, with participants arguing that infrastructure and buildings in disrepair contribute to a poor outward identity for the area.

Commercial Revitalization

Linked to the poor appearance of greater Fond du Lac, many in attendance noted the high vacancy of commercial areas such as the Forest Mall and Downtown Fond du Lac. Participants discussed the need for revitalization of these areas, including attracting a variety of new businesses to the area. A central concern was the overall appearance of areas with few open businesses that feel “empty” or “abandoned.” In addition, new business growth was linked to a need for greater diversity in employment options and the trend of residents leaving the area to shop elsewhere in the region. In addition, a number of participants discussed a need for increase minority entrepreneurs.

Crime & Safety

The prevalence of crime, drug abuse, and a low perception of safety was identified as a key issue. Workshop participants felt that in general, crime and drug use were on the rise in greater Fond du Lac, while the perception of safety, whether properly matched to reality, was decreasing.

Potential Solutions

Workshop participants were asked to list specific projects or actions that could be solutions to the issues previously identified. Their responses provide a wide range of ideas that span from improving the river and lake fronts, to economic development, to developing and marketing Fond du Lac as a destination. All responses are listed below, grouped into general topics:

Economic Development

- Buy and redevelop Forest Mall, perhaps as an outlet mall or retail space with cheaper rent
- Provide tax breaks or other incentives for new businesses
- Encourage major employers to market their job opportunities and benefits more prominently
- Develop a restaurant or similar uses at the lakefront
- Encourage exterior improvements to the Mercury Marine Global Headquarters to improve its appearance
- Attract new and fresh companies that appeal to younger generations, such as health-based or unique retailers
- Attract new businesses in sectors desired by young professionals and those with degrees, such as business, service, or technology
- Create a program or “pipeline” for bringing educated individuals back to the community for employment
- Match development on the east side of greater Fond du Lac to match the high concentration of education facilities
- Work with organizations for economic development to reach out to minority populations in the interest of business development
- Encourage the development of individual restaurants as opposed to national chains
- Establish a TIF district to incentivize development on Main Street north of Highway 23, including lakefront developments

- Automate some jobs within the area to address workforce imbalance
- Reduce rental units of single family homes
- Educate employers about the benefits and necessity of hiring diverse workers and adapt to a different age or type of local worker
- Encourage gas stations, Walgreens, or similar convenience stores to provide healthy food and produce options
- Create localized job training programs based on employees needs

Parks and Recreation

- Develop the lakefront and Lakeside Park with amenities to draw activity to the area
- Shift some retail and restaurant infrastructure from Main Street to Lakeside Park
- Create and implement a plan for Lakeside Park
- Increase advertisement of park facilities
- Explore the importance of parks and recreation facilities and adjust local budgets to match
- Eliminate the one-way south section of Doty and use that area as a park
- Better utilize Lake Winnebago and the river as enticing areas for activity
- Create a river project to beautify the area, clean the river, and explore the potential use of the river for a recreational amenity

Governmental Services

- Explore ways to aid low income families and individuals in need of assistance
- Clean up homes and vacant buildings that are in disrepair or poorly maintained
- Create the forum for non-profits and other organizations to come together to discuss community issues and solutions
- Research best practices and methods to address issues that were successful in other striving communities
- Develop a communications task force
- Educate the public on actual crime statistics
- Improve communication between local police and the community
- Encourage landlords to purchase and update homes with disrepair and maintenance issues
- Host community information sessions regarding homeownership
- Encourage municipalities and organizations to utilize local companies as suppliers instead of large global corporations

Education

- Educate parents on more of the resources available to high school students
- Develop business-education partnerships to bolster the retention of youth
- Construct a second public high school
- Utilize local technical schools to better plan for back fill of job positions
- Encourage post-secondary education
- Educate youth about the dangers of drugs

Transportation

- Modernize local streets by widening where necessary and removing unnecessary traffic stops
- Better promote and increase awareness of the Transportation Development Plan in Fond du Lac

Downtown Fond du Lac

- Attract more businesses to the Downtown area that will improve its appearance and activity, such as a micro-brewery or small winery
- Enable the development of restaurants with outside seating areas
- Improve storefronts, adding trees and widening main roads
- Invest significantly in Main Street improvements
- Explore ways to bring residents to the Downtown more often

Identity

- Provide incentives for local businesses to participate in the community
- Create an entertainment destination with a variety of bars and restaurants that keep millennials engaged in the community
- Host more events, activities, or festivals
- Improve publicity and advertising of Fond du Lac events, activities, and festivals
- Encourage and attract more local music
- Promote the community itself and work to counter a negative or “complaint” based local image with one based on positive attitudes and optimism.
- Counter poor reputations within greater Fond du Lac with positive stories relating to local leaders and entrepreneurs
- Conduct outreach to seek understanding of negative views and how to bring about solutions to such issues
- Promote and brand the area in other major cities and statewide, including social media outlets
- Promote and educate about daily health-conscious behaviors
- Promote Fond du Lac as a great place to live
- Develop a community-wide effort to welcome newcomers, utilizing social media trends