

FOND DU LAC VISION & STRATEGIC PLAN

Young Professional & Student Workshop

Tuesday, April 14, 2015

On Tuesday, April 14, 2015 at 6:00 p.m., an *Envision Fond du Lac* workshop was held at the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac campus with young professionals and students. This workshop was part of the ongoing outreach opportunities for residents and stakeholders to publicly discuss issues facing greater Fond du Lac.

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. Participants were first asked to individually identify important issues and concerns for the region. Then, participants were organized into small groups to discuss possible solutions to solve those issues and concerns. 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.

Young Professional Culture

Overall, issues and concerns raised during the workshop focused on the absence of a young professional “culture” or “scene” in greater Fond du Lac. Participants described various smaller issues which all contributed to restrictions and limitations that discouraged young professionals and recent college graduates from remaining in the area. Many felt that greater Fond du Lac does not offer the amenities or culture that is attractive to the young professional demographic. Those in attendance emphasized that the creation of a culture that supports and benefits young professionals would attract new, diverse residents to the area.

White-Collar Employment Opportunities

The majority of discussion at the workshop focused on employment opportunities within greater Fond du Lac, which was the largest barrier to creating a young professional culture. Participants noted the lack of quality employment opportunities for young professionals and students, particularly the difficulty of finding work that pays well, offers quality benefits, and provides upward mobility or development of an individual’s career. Respondents argued that without high quality jobs available, many professionals have to leave the area for bigger regional centers that can offer better career opportunities. Participants also mentioned a desire to see better integration between education institutions and local professionals and employers, such as internships and meet-ups. Many of those in attendance demonstrated a personal desire to work and remain in the area, but noted that the limitations of employment within greater Fond du Lac made that difficult.

Recreation & Entertainment

According to workshop participants, a contributing factor to creation of a young professional culture is the close proximity and access of a range of recreation and entertainment uses. Respondents felt the area lacks “things to do” which forces residents to leave the area to find activities and places to spend their time or move to other areas. Similar to other outreach events, those in attendance wanted to see greater use of Lake Winnebago and Lakeside property, as well as other recreation opportunities. In addition, the dispersed nature of these kinds of uses ensures auto-reliance.

Small Business Development

A common issue across outreach opportunities, respondents mentioned the prevalence of vacancies within Forest Mall and Downtown Fond du Lac, as well as the difficulties of maintaining a business in the area. Participants argued that new businesses should be better supported by the community and local governments, which would provide increased jobs and diverse options. It was also suggested that residents consistently leave greater Fond du Lac to shop in other communities nearby that offer better options. This was linked to an economic component, as money spent in other regions represents lost dollars for the area.

Housing Diversity & Density

Another missing element is quality housing located within a walkable and vibrant environment. Participants felt that the general auto-centric nature of greater Fond du Lac discouraged young professionals who either cannot afford a car or would prefer to not own one and walk or use public transportation. Respondents argued that most young professionals require or prefer centralized areas or “lifestyle” developments where a resident can live, work, and purchase basic amenities in close proximity. Along similar lines, participants felt that greater Fond du Lac needs affordable or multi-housing options available to young professionals and students.

Crime & Safety

Crime rates and a poor perception of safety were discussed. Participants discussed the high amount of robberies and the prevalence of drugs which create a poor public perception of local safety. Respondents noted that this factor acts as a deterrent not just for young professionals and students, but also for families and individuals looking to move to the area.

Potential Solutions

After identifying a range of issues and concerns, those in attendance were broken into smaller groups and asked to explore solutions to three specific issues: brain drain; lack of culture; and community image. The following is a summary of all potential solutions sorted according to the issue they address:

Brain Drain

- Raise economic diversity in order to raise the likelihood of graduates to stay in the area
- Connect students, including both grade school and college level, with the community through opportunities such as volunteering or job shadowing
- Encourage students to get engaged and invested in the community
- Encourage better benefits and intangibles that will attract graduates, such as nice work environments
- Create better awareness of local opportunities
- Create mentorship programs with business professionals to help local students
- Work to counter the perception that there is “nothing to do here”
- Engage local young professionals for employment and leadership roles

- Work to grow the local job market
- Encourage more traditional companies to look at contemporary benefits and wages that fit the needs of young professionals
- Attract higher quality post-high school institutions
- Partner with larger state schools
- Create the means for students to be more knowledgeable of local jobs and mentorships
- Establish international links between schools
- Utilize more national resources to build education opportunities
- Create developments with retailers on ground floor and condos on top
- Develop more child friendly activities

Lack of Culture

- Explore the potential of colleges to help establish a more clear young professional culture
- Develop free, affordable places for people to gather and spend time
- Attract bigger and more well-known musicians to play at local theaters
- Support and showcase local retail and restaurants, perhaps providing special discounts
- Develop a larger diversity of activities beyond just drinking, such as arts and music, cooking classes, or wine and cheese pairing classes
- Develop more entertainment options that have greater convenience and timing
- Increase efforts to recruit individuals from outside the community
- Create a local experience
- Develop an inviting culture that is not “exclusive”
- Develop drive in movie theaters or outside theaters
- Attract diverse food options for causal or fine dining, including outdoor or patio dining
- Take advantage of Lake Winnebago
- Promote small businesses and chains
- Bring activities to Fond du Lac that people cannot find in larger cities
- Encourage greater community awareness

Community Image

- Advertise Fond du lac both inside and outside the community, focusing on local positives
- Develop an interested “niche” or feature that Fond du Lac can become known for
- Make investment in the Downtown and small business a goal, including development of restaurants, gathering spaces, and other uses that support a unique culture
- Make improvements to the use of Lakeside Park
- Develop more entertainment and recreation activities
- Develop better hospitality options and quality travel amenities
- Attract larger scale entertainment and attractions to show “there is stuff to do in Fond du Lac”
- Encourage community members to become involved in Fond du Lac
- Make improvements to the physical appearance of the area
- Display positive images throughout the area
- Strengthen the local paper
- Display signage in underutilized spaces to highlight community achievements

- Make façade improvements in the Downtown
- Increase accessibility through greater public transportation
- Better utilize Lakeside Park, perhaps bringing food trucks to the area