



Current: -2°
2° / 0°

THE Messenger



[HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [OBITUARIES](#) | [CLASSIFIEDS](#) | [VIRTUAL NEWSROOM](#) | [CONTACT US](#)

[Advanced Search](#)

News

- [Home page](#)
- [News](#)
- [News Briefs](#)
- [National](#)
- [International](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Photo Galleries - NEW](#)
- [Announcements](#)
- [Comm. Calendar](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Site Index](#)
- [Submit](#)

Sports

- [Local Sports](#)
- [National](#)
- [Submit](#)

Special Sections

- [2006 Winter Sports](#)
- [40 Under 40](#)
- [All About Fort Dodge](#)
- [All About Home](#)
- [Bridal Guide](#)
- [Buyers Guide](#)
- [Hometown Pride](#)
- [How to Guide](#)
- [Name that Logo](#)
- [Online Coupons](#)
- [Start The New Year](#)
- [Youth Spotlight](#)

Classifieds

- [Local Classifieds](#)
- [State Classifieds](#)
- [National Classifieds](#)
- [Auction Calendar](#)

Local artists weigh in on focus group meetings

By OBAID KHAWAJA, Messenger staff writer

Art-minded residents were called on to use their creativity to provide a “vision” for Fort Dodge Friday during the second day of the Envision 2030 meetings at Best Western Starlite Village Inn & Suites. The session focused on art and culture in Fort Dodge and also included discussions on ways to “clean up” the city.

Close to 20 residents, including artists, musicians and writers, made suggestions ranging from creating a rain forest and developing the river front to revitalizing the downtown area and adding upscale restaurants.

“I came to town in 1975 and there were still some stores (downtown),” said Barb Birkett, a resident. “But it’s gone down steadily since then.”

Fort Dodge needs to attract younger people, Birkett said, and cities that attract a lot of tourists generally have bustling downtown districts.

“One thing that (large cities) all have is a nice downtown area,” she said. “I think it gives people a sense of community, where there are places to go, places to gather, places to have community events.”

The focus group meetings are the first stage of the Envision 2030 process, which will continue with a preliminary five-year strategic plan followed by public review of the proposal and a final revision of the plan.

Although each meeting has a different subject, the format remains the same. Those who attend take part in a number of exercises that provide feedback for the consulting company, the Slater Group LLC, which is working on the project. In one such exercise, for example, three people were chosen at random and asked to put together a jigsaw puzzle.

“It’s the vision that we want to hold on to,” said Roger Slater, president of the Slater Group. “It’s really something that the community will have to wrap its arms around.”

During the meetings, people are divided into groups and told to list what they believe are the assets of the town, what could be improved and what could be developed as a “centerpiece” for the city.

Cliff Burke, a resident, suggested the idea of an indoor rain forest — an idea that was proposed in another part of the state several years ago. But Burke believes that the needs of such a facility could be met by the city’s hydroelectric dam.

“It takes something with a lot of water and a lot of electricity,” Burke said. “Basically, I see the dam generating the electricity.”

Pushing for development along the Des Moines River and capitalizing on existing facilities such

[Happy Ads - NEW](#)

[Auto Dealerships](#)

[Place an ad online](#)

Business

[Local Business](#)

[Business Briefs](#)

[Comm. Showcase](#)

[Submit](#)

Lifestyle

[Local Lifestyle](#)

[Lifestyle Brief](#)

[Lifestyle Column](#)

[Submit](#)

Religion

[Religion Briefs](#)

[Submit](#)

Entertainment

[In Focus](#)

[Area Events](#)

[Crossword](#)

[Game Room - NEW](#)

[Submit](#)

Fort Dodge

[City Map](#)

[Area Schools](#)

[City Website](#)

[Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Webster Co. Dev.](#)

[Convention/Visitors](#)

[Webster County](#)

[FD on the Move](#)

Contact Us

[Staff contacts](#)

[How to subscribe](#)

[Web Marketing Guide](#)

[Display Advertising](#)

[Display Rates](#)

[Tearsheet Request](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

Affiliates

[Farm News](#)

[Messenger Printing](#)

[Mother Earth News](#)

[Twist & Shout - NEW](#)

as the Blanden Memorial Art Museum and Fort Museum were also popular suggestions.

Resident Al Nelson said that Fort Dodge can attract artists from other areas and should continue to promote the city's "frontier heritage."

"There's a national trend right now ... there are a lot of artists leaving big cities and moving to small towns," he said. "I think we have the opportunity to tap into the arts of other communities."

Nelson, who has built a model of what he envisions Fort Dodge could be in the future, also said natural resources like the Des Moines River and the two valleys in town could be used to attract people.

"All that area near the river can be used," he said. "If we're going to bring people here, we're going to (need) something for them to come to."

Contact Obaid Khawaja at (515) 573-2141 or obaid@messengernews.net