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Residents want to capitalize on city's strengths in future

Warden: Development ideas should be locally based
By OBAID KHAWAJA, Messenger staff writer

Capitalizing on Fort Dodge's strengths and using them to come up with a vision for the future of the city was a major topic of discussion during Tuesday's Industry and Agri-business Organizations Focus Group meeting at the Best Western Starlite Village Inn & Suites.

The downtown district, which has plenty of vacant and useable property, and the Des Moines River were targeted as potential sites for development by the seven residents that attended the meeting. Creating more recreational opportunities to draw people to town on the weekends was also a consideration.

Cornell Smith, warden of the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility, attended Tuesday's meeting and said it was important for people to think locally when thinking of development ideas.

"What we tend to do is go to metropolitan areas for ideas and bring them back," Smith said. "We have to look at some of the opportunities that we have here."

Other things that people felt were local assets included Brushy Creek State Recreation Area, the Gypsum City Off-Highway Vehicle Park and other outdoor sites, such as hiking trails. Focusing on development, marketability and improving accessibility for certain sites was also brought up.

The focus group meetings started Thursday and are the first stage of the Envision 2030 process, which will be followed by a preliminary five-year strategic plan and a public review of the consulting company's proposal.

The Slater Group LLC, which is consulting with city officials, will then make a final revision of the plan before it is submitted.

Roger Slater, president of The Slater Group, which is consulting for the project, offered well-known tourist attractions, such as the San Antonio River Walk, as evidence that communities needed to come up with a vision before they can realize the future of their city.

"We'll start developing ideas based on those themes," he said about the visioning process. "(And) how those things work in other communities and how they might work in Fort Dodge."

He added that the consulting group's proposal would be shaped by the topics and themes participants came up with for the surveys.

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 Slater Group, which is working on the project.

One of the questions asked by some of those that attended the meeting was if other towns

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could be used to develop a suitable model for Fort Dodge.

“What makes Fort Dodge unique is its downtown and history,” said Clark Fletcher, president of Fletcher Wood Products. “Most of those businesses will probably continue to be privately owned mom and pop businesses.”

Offering longer business hours and a better night life were also suggestions to attract younger people to the area, especially those from surrounding communities.

Tim Carlson, director of human resources at Fort Dodge Animal Health, said developing the city would require working with communities that surround Fort Dodge.

“We can’t do it alone,” he said. “We need to find a way to connect it all.”

The focus group meetings continue today and Thursday.

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