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Envision groups find much to celebrate

Focus group: Pro-family atmosphere needs to be preserved in Fort Dodge
By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

A small group making the first public foray into a city visioning process concluded Thursday that Fort Dodge has a family-oriented atmosphere that should be preserved long into the future.

About 15 people spent much of their afternoon filling out surveys, jotting ideas on notecards and talking in small groups to start the Envision 2030 effort.

When the session at the Best Western Starlite Village Inn & Suites wrapped up, the common theme of Fort Dodge as a family-friendly place emerged again and again.

Speaking on behalf of one of the small discussion groups, Doug Sanders summed it up this way: "People in Fort Dodge look out for each other."

Other things deemed worthy of preserving for the future included:

- ? the education system, including Iowa Central Community College and the public and private schools,

- ? city parks and other natural areas,

- ? historic downtown buildings, and

- ? the pioneer heritage, including the Fort Museum and Frontier Village.

Staffers from The Slater Group, a Woodstock, Ga., firm hired by the City Council to manage the planning and visioning process, will file all the ideas generated during the session. Those ideas will be combined with information to be received at nearly a week's worth of similar meetings. Eventually, the firm will identify trends and common themes from the mountain of ideas that will be used to create a vision for the city 20 years into the future.

A final vision plan from the firm is expected in late March or early April.

Thursday's session was billed as an opportunity to talk about government and economic development. But Roger Slater, the president of the firm that bears his name, has said repeatedly that the future vision is for the whole community, not just local government offices.

"This is not a city project," he said Thursday. "It's a community project."

Rebecca Dale, who participated in the session, said it prompted people to think and focus.

"The vision is for Fort Dodge, but how does it start? It starts with one person talking to another person," she said.

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