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Envision meeting focuses on public safety, reconciliation

Last focus group held in 1st Ward By OBAID KHAWAJA, Messenger staff writer

Residents attending the last round of focus group meetings raised issues like public safety in certain areas of Fort Dodge, maintaining and building on the city's heritage, cracking down on drugs and reconciling parts of the community.

About 10 people attended the session, which was the 21st the consulting company The Slater Group LLC has had in Fort Dodge. The sessions have been a combination of open and closed meetings with residents and public officials.

Roger Slater, president of The Slater Group, urged people to think of ideas for the city or work with others to come up with a cohesive vision for Fort Dodge.

"Either get a vision or go find someone who has a vision and follow theirs," Slater said.

The meeting was aimed at residents of the 1st Ward, which includes the southern and western portions of town, though anyone was welcome to attend. People attending this meeting said they felt the southern and western areas of town were neglected. Residents of these areas say there is visible criminal activity that is seldom addressed.

Councilman Curt Olson said the community needed to be less divided in order to progress.

"It was a lot worse in the '60s but (it's improved and) we want to keep that going," he said.

Olson added that the city needed to strengthen the police force.

"We still want to get four new officers," he said. "We need the protection."

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 to The Slater Group, which is working on the project.

The focus group meetings started Jan. 18 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.

"We need more kid-oriented youth activities," said Terry Cook, who owns Candies & More on Central Avenue. "We're always going to have younger kids."

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