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'Find a vision, be passionate,' Slater advises

Focus group talks metro glitz By JESSE HELLING, Messenger staff writer

With the city's close proximity to Des Moines and the Twin Cities, Fort Dodgers are a short hop from metropolitan glitz.

The question is how can Fort Dodge draw big-city residents away from the bright lights and toward Webster County.

The answer to this question was pondered by members of Wednesday morning's Envision 2030 focus group.

During session 16 of the 21-part series, members of the Fort Dodge Young Professionals group discussed the economic future of the region.

"Find a vision and be passionate about it," said Roger Slater, president of The Slater Group.

The Woodstock, Ga.-based firm was hired by the City Council to conduct the series of focus group meetings to assist with a strategic plan for the city's economy.

Slater advised the 26 participants of Wednesday morning's group that there are different types of people in every organization.

"Sometimes, if we don't get these people together, we don't know what their adjective is," said Slater, referring to the focus groups' ice-breaking exercise, in which participants introduce themselves and name an adjective that describes them.

In contemplating the future of Fort Dodge's economy, Slater said that many ideas are of the "Edison" variety.

"The lightbulb was not a revision of the candle, or oil lamp, or gaslight," Slater said. "It was the vision of one person."

Similarly, some economic development initiatives will come from completely new ideas, Slater said.

However, and expansion of existing assets can also be advantageous, said Karna Lowenstein, a consultant with The Slater Group.

"In San Antonio in the 1920s, people thought the river was an unsightly eyesore," she said. "There were plans to concrete over the river so people wouldn't have to look at it."

But some visionary San Antonians decided that the river could be developed into an attractive aspect of the city.

"The San Antonio Riverwalk is now the No. 1 tourist attraction in Texas," Lowenstein said.

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Developing the banks of the Des Moines River was one idea discussed by the group participants, who divided into sections to ponder “big ideas.”

Among other thoughts were developing an interconnected system of recreational trails and a mass-transit system connecting Fort Dodge with Des Moines and Minneapolis.

Lowenstein encouraged members of the Young Professionals to keep discussing and pressing for particular economic development ideas.

According to Lowenstein, with any new development idea, it can be expected that 10 percent of people would be automatically on board and 10 percent would dismiss the idea out of hand.

“It is wasted energy to placate the naysayers,” she said. “Put your energy into the 80 percent of people that can be influenced to pull people over with the ‘yes’ people,” Lowenstein said.

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