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2° / 0°

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[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](#)

State-of-the-art health care, cultural center and more part of early vision

By MICHAEL NEARY, Messenger staff writer

Residents who gathered for an education focus group Thursday night envisioned state-of-the-art health care, a cultural center, a minor league baseball team and a completed four-lane U.S. Highway 20.

They also celebrated the city's "emphasis on families," gypsum mines and Frontier Days.

The comments came at the end of the session, as small groups reported long-term goals for the city. One group also envisioned energy independence for the city, imagining it as a hub for experimentation with alternative energy sources.

The session was part of the city's Envision 2030 process, conducted by The Slater Group, a firm the City Council has contracted to help chart out a strategic plan for the city.

Twenty-two people — nearly all with jobs in education — attended the two-hour-long session. About 25 minutes were devoted to discussion, and most of the questions participants answered did not directly address education.

"Some of you might have thought there would be an open forum," said Karna Loewenstein, a consultant with The Slater Group who led much of the session. That was not the case, she said, partly because "I want your honest opinion without any influence from others."

She also said she wanted to hear "what's near and dear to your heart as far as the history of Fort Dodge" is concerned, as well as a vision of the projected "showpiece" in 2030.

After the meeting, Slater said that his firm would process all of the responses and submit a report to the community.

Part of the goal, he told the group, was to generate interest in issues — and in solutions — throughout the city.

"Usually what brings people to City Hall is some issue they don't like," he said, as he encouraged people "to be for something" instead of only voicing objections.

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