

# Envision 2030... A 20-Year Vision

## Executive Summary

The City of Fort Dodge will be much different in the year 2030 than it is now. It has a choice: to become a dynamic, thriving and vibrant community that is a full partner in a global society and economy or to be like many other communities in Iowa and the United States who chose not to change and who have passed their point of recovery. To be successful communities must proactively make bold changes to reinvent themselves.

The City Council has chosen to provide bold leadership by envisioning a desired future for the city and extended community. No longer waiting to react, city leaders are committed to the development of a strategic vision and plan for direction and implementation. Initial steps of the plan provided citizens an opportunity to change the form of city government to make it more responsive to the citizens. Working together the citizens and city leaders have taken bold steps to formalize and professionalize the management of city government.

ENVISION 2030 has provided the opportunity for citizens of Fort Dodge and extended community to participate in a process that will result in a shared vision for the future City of Fort Dodge. ENVISION 2030 began in fall of 2006 with a situational analysis of major geographic areas: (1) global, (2) national, (3) regional, (4) community, and (5) City of Fort Dodge. Information was reviewed to determine the current impact on the City of Fort Dodge and in the year 2030. Information was obtained through research of public documents and web sites, personal interviews, surveys, and focus groups held throughout the city.

The study gathered input from city residents as well as from county, regional, and state leaders and involved and engaged them in planning the city's future. Residents were asked to share ideas on how to make Fort Dodge the best place in America to live, work, stay and play for the next 20+ years. A vision was developed for Fort Dodge that will position the city as the "ideal" city and enable the community to implement plans as a result of the Envision 2030 process.

**The ENVISION 2030 contains three types of statements to guide decisions.**

**(1) Vision Statements describe a future condition** the way we would like to see it. They are the foundation for Policies and Strategies.

**(2) Policies are officially adopted positions of local government** with regard to preferred or required courses of action. Their primary purpose is to provide guidance to decisions and actions today.

**(3) Strategies are a to-do-list of things that could be done** in support of the implementation of ENVISION 2030 Vision Statements and Policies. Unlike a vision or policy, once a strategy is completed, it goes away; it gets checked off the list and monitored. Strategies offer potential work programs and projects for implementation by the community and/or local government.

**Below is a summary of 15 community indicators that define our community and our future.**

### **COMMUNITY IMAGE: CHANGE THE LOCAL AND STATEWIDE PERCEPTION**

The image of Fort Dodge is not a positive one around the state. It is viewed as rough, unsafe, blue collar community. This must be changed. The city is not viewed as progressive. Most city and community services are rated only fair to good. The appearance hurts the community's image. Investment in community appearance and also an internal and external marketing program is needed.

### **EMPLOYMENT:**

Economic development's key sustainable ingredient is people with a strong work ethic like that demonstrated in Fort Dodge. Iowa Central Community College is viewed as a real asset. There is a sense that current quality of life conditions within the city and extended community are putting existing large business and industry at risk. A reliance only on traditional economic development sectors will limit economic development as Fort Dodge is late entering the economic development competition. For the past 46 years the same economic development strategy has been deployed with marginal success. Professional positions are critical to community balance, survival and sustainability. The majority of new jobs will be created through small business and entrepreneurial efforts of individuals. Alternative economic development strategies will become more important to job and opportunity creation. Existing industries are at risk from global competition automation, relocation, and/or consolidation. The declining population in the region is a serious threat; aggressive steps to reverse outward migration must be implemented. Greater diversify of the economy is important.

### **POPULATION**

The current population of Fort Dodge has a strong sense of community and strong work ethic. The population of the city has grown slightly, but there are significant declines in the region. There appears to be a number of single parents, which increases social challenges. There is also a lack of diversity in the workforce, especially at the professional level. The population includes a large percentage of low income people. The population is also aging. The three ways to increase population include: (1) birth, (2) immigration, (3) relocation. The number one ingredient required for economic and community progress is more people. Continued outward migration of seniors and young families will have a negative economic impact.

### **EDUCATION**

#### **A.1: GLOBAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ORIENTED SCHOOLS**

The number one attraction for families moving to the city and extended community is the quality and reputation of the educational systems and the preparation they provide students for the global economy and society. All the educational organizations, the citizens and the community must work together and implement a unique educational system that begins with Pre-K and extends through college and beyond. Fort Dodge educational systems are negatively impacted by the inability of Fort Dodge to attract and sustain middle and higher income young families. Ongoing reduction in K-12 enrollment over past years has resulted in budgetary challenges within the school systems.

### **ENTERTAINMENT**

#### **B.1: EXPANDED PARKS AND RECREATION—THE MIDWEST'S ONLY "BOARD WALK"**

The vision is to become a recreation destination utilizing the development of the Midwest's only "Board Walk" that would become one of the most diverse and expansive system of parks,

events, attractions, recreation, entertainment and cultural venues in the country. The “Board Walk” would be constructed along the east side of the Des Moines River and would host artist galleries, sidewalk cafés coffee shops, restaurants, souvenir shops, game rooms and tourist-focused activities reminiscent of the Atlantic City Board Walk. It would also serve as a venue for a wide variety of music programs to enhance the entertainment environment on the Board Walk.

The City’s extensive park system will offer something for everyone. Harlan Rodgers Park, Oleson Park, Snell-Crawford Park , Loomis Park and other will be connected by a new and expansive trail system that connects all city amenities is very important. This paved trail system offers recreation for walkers, runners and bikers, and can be used by people of all ages. The river trails in our community offer a wide range of activities include canoeing, rafting, kayaking, tube floating, fishing, swimming, and wading.

A new Aquatics Park and Recreation Center would be recreational center-pieces for the community. The Gypsum City Off-Highway Vehicle Park is connected to the “Board Walk” through a network of trails and walking paths. It, along with Mineral City Speedway offers racing enthusiasts a wonderful entertainment venue.

As the City of Fort Dodge and extended community has grown, more green space and park and recreation facilities will be added to meet residents’ need for smaller neighborhood parks close at hand, within walking distance of residential areas. Many new parks include active recreation facilities for youth, such as soccer, softball, and multipurpose fields. Park facilities have addressed the active and passive recreation preferences of active retirees and seniors. Fort Dodge must continue striving to invest in recreation by combining private, public, and philanthropic dollars to raise the necessary funds to invest in first-class recreational venues.

#### **ENTREPRENEURIAL: A MORE DIVERSIFIED LOCAL ECONOMY**

Building an entrepreneurial spirit and culture is essential. New jobs will come from new businesses and local businesses that are growing due to new innovation and expanded production. New business start-ups diversifies the economy, builds economic vitality, and offers young workers in the City of Fort Dodge greater opportunities so they won't ever leave the area. While workers in retail and manufacturing employment continue to be an important part of the local economy, other types of work have expanded, including health care, information services, and professional and technical services. One of the most visible changes to the local economy is the huge impact that tourism, and specifically recreation will have in the community.

High speed, broadband information and technology must be available throughout the city and county. Wireless access, must be available across all geographic sectors of the community. Fort Dodge must develop the reputation for being a state-of-the-art city for high speed telecommunications and technology. Banks must become open for business for entrepreneurial ideas and new business start-ups.

#### **RETAIL CENTER: BECOME A HUB FOR NORTHWEST-CENTRAL IOWA**

Fort Dodge is known as a retail center, but its reputation is declining. Fort Dodge retail addresses need-based shopping but lacks in emotional shopping. It lacks a critical mass of specialty shops. Shopping will continue to be a recreation and emotion activity. Fort Dodge must expand its retail base and diversity of retail businesses to maintain its position as a hub for retail shopping. There needs to be greater diversity of restaurants, as the ambiance of fine dining signature restaurants is missing, which diminishes the dining experience does not happen. Increasing preference and expectation of customers should be addressed.

## **C.2: HEALTH ENVIRONMENT; ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITY APPEARANCE AND IMAGE**

To attract new businesses and much needed knowledge workers, the Fort Dodge community needs an “Extreme Makeover.” Visitors to the City of Fort Dodge must become impressed by the attractive green spaces, trees and floral elements throughout the communities, roadways and major streets serving the area. An “Extreme Makeover” and maintaining and enhancing the beauty of the city is badly needed. Modern garbage pick-up and recycling efforts must be implemented to be proactive in the arena. Dilapidated property must be cleaned up. Strictly rules and regulations on property maintenance must be enactive. Parks and public spaces must be appropriately landscaped and maintained. Historical building renovation/preservation must be encouraged. Community-wide promotions for beautification and clean-up must become an annual event.

## **C.3: VIBRANT DOWNTOWN CENTER**

The Downtown Center must be respected and be a focal point for new development to create new and much needed vitality. Older buildings can be transformed into green spaces, new facilities or rehabilitated and adaptively reused for a wide range of shopping, dining, working, and cultural attractions. The Downtown Center should become host of various community events with the goal of being the social and cultural heart of the community.

## **D.4: INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS WELL MANAGED GROWTH**

Infrastructure projects are not exciting investments and they are expensive, but they are foundational to every progressive city. Without modern infrastructure, a city’s ability to grow and meet expanding needs is greatly challenged. Street renovation and maintenance must be well funded and sustained. Storm sewers must be updated to meet expanding community needs, and power lines need to be buried. Inadequate infrastructure is a blight on any community.

## **HEALTH CARE:**

Friendship Haven and Trinity Regional Medical Center are generally seen as positive assets although there are concerns about the potential for the hospital to meet future needs. Due to increasing healthcare costs, the use of healthcare services by some elderly and financially stressed persons is diminished. There is also concern about a shortage of doctors and healthcare workers and that Trinity does not currently offer many of the amenities desired by health care and other knowledge workers.

## **D.5: A FRIENDLY AND BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

The City of Fort Dodge must work proactively with Webster County, Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS), and the Iowa State Department of Transportation toward a balanced, multi-modal and citizen-friendly transportation system. An efficient system of streets and roads, improved mass transit services, as well as more sidewalks, trails and bicycling facilities are critical components of the quality of community life and economic development.

The public transportation system must serve the needs of senior citizens and others who cannot or choose not to drive a car. All roads must be well maintained. The important connectors to major transportation routes must be priorities because they serve as a positive draw to the city. The city must grow as a hub for commercial transportation. The design of and expansion of streets and roads must be able to accommodate growth.

#### **D.6: QUALITY HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

To attract knowledge workers and younger families, the City of Fort Dodge must be able to offer a multitude of quality housing choices, including a predominance of single-family homes, but also truly urban housing forms such as townhouses, condominiums, lofts and apartments. Housing also must be able to meet the different preferences of active retirees and seniors. Affordable housing needs must be met in greater measure by smaller accessory garage apartments, granny flats, lofts and apartments over shops or small clusters of multifamily housing. Older existing neighborhoods need to be updated with an extreme makeover. All neighborhoods, schools, recreation venues, parks, Friendship Haven, and “Downtown Center” have been connected to the Des Moines River Trail Network and its tributary walkways, bikeways, and green spaces.

#### **D.7: INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION AND EFFICIENCY**

Developing a culture of inclusion, collaboration and sharing rather than exclusion when it comes to community and economic development is critical. A sincere and continued effort to work with and assist other communities in accomplishing their vision and plans for growth is also important. City leaders must effectively reach out to county governments and other community leaders throughout the region. Working closely with Webster County and the Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS) is essential for successful community and economic development.

The collective growth within the county and region will benefit everyone. Local communities, regional governments and organizations and the City of Fort Dodge should join forces on many fronts to address matters of common interest. These matters include, for example: economic development, growth management, transportation, water and sewer services, open space preservation, and environmental quality, among others.

#### **D.8: SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR ALL**

The issue of personal safety and security has become very important to people of all ages, no matter where they live in the Fort Dodge community can be victims of crime. The perception of Fort Dodge being a rough-tough community must be addressed. Improved crime statistics can help change this perception. In addition, enhance emergency response services should be a priority. The perception is that crime is not being reduced. Many factors impact a person’s perception of being safe and secure and the perception of a crime problem does not diminish in direct correlation to the elimination of crime. Crime data for Fort Dodge does not look good even though the method for recording the data may not be the same across all communities.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The successful implementation of the ENVISION 2030 vision rests with the entire community’s ability to work both independently and together. Each person, non-profit organization, governmental agency, business, and industry must take the initiative to explore their own resources and then, working with others, focus on a part of the vision they can legitimately impact. Individuals and organizations have a variety of funding sources available. By teaming with others as well as providing a part of the needed resources, the financial burden is shared and much can be accomplished.

Critical to the implementation of the vision will be support and financing from the three Ps (Private Enterprise, Philanthropic Funding and Public Funding). Specific strategies for funding the projects should include the following:

- Sustain the current tax base
- Increase the tax base by policy
- Increase retail traffic within the city
- Invest in preplanned infrastructure
- Collaborate with others
- Implement policy that encourages and sustains private investment
- Apply for targeted grants and appropriations
- Exercise bonding capacity
- Private giving campaigns

Each organization and business in the community should look for opportunities to contribute to the implementation by seeking funding through grants and appropriations in addition to the annual budgeting processes. Representative business and industry sectors should collaborate by addressing those parts of the plan with which they can assist in implementation. City, county and adjoining government agencies should place development and implementation of the ENVISION 2030 vision as a vital community and economic development strategy for sustaining existing and creating new community and economic development.

The most important ingredient that will determine the success or failure of development and implementation of the ENVISION 2030 vision is visionary leadership provided by caring and engaged citizens—individuals who have decided to make a difference and use their skills, talents and abilities in an aggressive manner.