MIDWESTERN SUSTAINABILITY: THE “WRIGHT” FIT

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“Sustainable communities are those in which current generations are able to meet their social, economic, and environmental needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do so as well. Sustainability spans topics that range from social justice to workforce development to ecological health and resiliency.”

-IISC Sustainability Definition
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Strategic Plan

Comprehensive Plan Coordination

Community Assets

Plan Development Process
- Gathering Community Data
- Identify Issues
- STAR Sustainability Assessment
- Case Studies in Comparable and Aspirational Cities
- Develop Draft Plan
- Draft Vision and Goals
- Finalize Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies
- Final Sustainability Plan

Public Input Process
- Community Visit
- Community Kick-off Event and Interviews
- Focus Group Meetings
- Community Survey
- Community Open House
- Community Presentation and Plan Adoption
GREAT RIVER CITY FESTIVAL
64 PERSONAL INTERVIEWS – SEPTEMBER 2016

Best things in Mason City

- Community: 26%
- Parks: 14%
- Culture/Arts: 21%
- Health: 9%
- Shopping: 10%
- Raise Family: 4%
- Jobs: 1%
- Aging: 4%
- Schools: 11%

Small town
Architecture

- Nature center
- Scenery
- Everything
- NIACC
- Cost of living
- Downtown
- Scenery
- NIACC
- Downtown walkability
- Sceney
- NIACC
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- Downtown walkability
- Scenery
NOVEMBER FOCUS GROUPS

43 PARTICIPANTS

- Business & Service Clubs - 6
- Arts & Culture - 6
- Faith Community - 2
- Landlords – Developers & Neighborhood Associations - 3
- Social Service Agencies & Health - 10
- Government & Law Enforcement - 9
- Education - 7
FEBRUARY COMMUNITY SURVEY

VISION STATEMENT

A statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all. The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient and family friendly place.

38% of respondents (578) chose this vision statement

Key Findings:
✓ Coalition
✓ Tax incentives
✓ Environment
✓ Diversity
MARCH PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

Public Open House

- Public Library
- Activities
- Coordination
- Press Release
- Survey
- Posters
SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Exceeding Expectations

- 5.3% walk or bike to work
- EPA air quality report shows 0 days of unhealthy air
- Biological integrity (water) supports aquatic life and fish consumption
- Unemployment rate decreased 2.9% (2010-16)
- Over 75% live within 1 mile of a community venue
- 5 designated historic districts

Doing Well - Almost There

- Pollutants (e. coli) in drinking water declined (2012-15)
- Safe stormwater management permits – (NPDES) compliant
- Median household income increased $1,300 (2010-14)
- Exporting industries: Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation
- Violent crime rates declined (2013-15)
- Emergency preparedness – (NIMS) compliant
- Voter turnout increased to 36% (2010-13)
- AARP Livability Index ranks low in job access, transportation, & environment

Need Improvement

- Housing and employment opportunities downtown
- Transportation costs (27%) are 8% higher than national average
- Drive alone commuting is 5% higher than national average
- Bacteria in water prevents swimming
- Lost 47 business establishments (2009-14)
- Lost 700 jobs (2010-16)
- Post-secondary educational attainment decreased (2009-14)
- Share of creative industries declined (2010-15)
- The poverty rate (15.5%), is 3% higher than the statewide average
- Poverty among vulnerable populations increased (2000-14)
- 3rd grade reading proficiency (65%), is 11.7% below the statewide average (2015-16 school year)
- Overall Graduation Rate (87.6%), is 3.2% below the statewide average
SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS AREAS

Community Engagement

Social Fairness and Inclusion

Built and Natural Environment

A Prospering Local Economy
GOAL - The community will drive sustainability efforts through education and action with citizens and public leadership working together.

91 out of 578 people who responded to a survey said YES, they would participate in a coalition. Focus group results identified a need to work together to make positive changes.

Public private partnership – Sustainability Council is formally adopted by the city.

City Sustainability office.

Coalition becomes a 501c3.
GOAL - The community will collaborate to expand culture and arts, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success.

**Focus Groups**
- Need for collaboration to market assets

**Community Survey**
- 51% support new city sponsored events and festivals
- 49% support having more public art and cultural facilities

**Arts and Culture**
Create an arts and cultural workgroup

**Next Steps**
- A workgroup of the Sustainability Coalition
- Develop an arts and cultural plan
- Coordinated events and activities
GOAL - The community will collaborate to expand culture and arts, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success.

Community Survey
32% support more minority representation on local boards

Demographics
9.3% Mason City minority population
18.9% District minority enrollment

Diversity
Increase diverse representation in business and community leadership

Next Steps
✓ Boards and organizations have at least one minority member
✓ A community with a sense of inclusiveness
GOAL - The community will collaborate to expand culture and arts, celebrate diversity, and increase **educational success**.

**Focus Groups**
- Lack of childcare – waiting lists
- Desire to attract young professionals

**Community Survey**
32% support increased community resources for English Language Learners

**Next Steps**
- Childcare feasibility study
- Parent - school partnerships
- Policy changes – reduce barriers for childcare entrepreneurs
- Increased childcare slots

**Education**
Increase educational opportunities and student success

**Percent Proficient - 3rd Grade Reading**
Source: Iowa Department of Education

- 2011-12: 71.1%
- 2012-13: 72.9%
- 2013-14: 73.4%
- 2014-15: 67.1%
- 2015-16: 65.1%
GOAL - The community will promote environmental awareness and promote protection of ecosystems and natural areas.

Community Outreach
Environment was not a major issue during community outreach events.

Environmental Awareness
Expand understanding and awareness of natural systems.

Next steps:
✓ Create an awareness and education campaign to increase ecological literacy.
GOAL - The community will promote environmental awareness and promote **protection of ecosystems and natural areas**

**Protection of Natural Resources**
- Water Quality
- Flooding

**Next steps:**
- Expand cooperation beyond municipal boundaries to form WMA
- Target sensitive areas along waterways for natural vegetation and stormwater best management practices
- Encourage private landowners to implement stormwater management practices on their property

**STARS**

- **Bacteria outbreaks** (such as E.coli.) prevent the use of public waters for recreation.
- 2008 floods and property buyouts
GOAL - The community will promote environmental awareness and promote protection of ecosystems and natural areas

Community Survey
“More natural prairie areas in parks where there are large green spaces, instead of mowing.”

Green Space and Parks
Biodiversity
Promote biodiversity through expansion of wildlife habitat

Next steps:
✓ Increase in biodiversity
✓ More resilient, functional green spaces
GOAL - The community will have a **thriving local economy** with livable wages for all

**STARS**

Lost 47 business establishments (2009-14)

**Focus Groups**

- Desire for **locally owned** businesses

**Local Businesses**

Grow small, locally owned businesses in nodes identified by the Comprehensive Plan

**Next steps:**

- Study the use of local hiring and purchasing agreements
- Identify local loss of money
- Locally owned businesses are used for city contracts
**GOAL** - The community will have a thriving local economy with **livable wages** for all

**STARS**
Median household income increased slower than rate of inflation

The poverty rate is **3% higher** than the statewide average

**Livable Wages**
Use tax incentives to support businesses that increase the number of livable wage jobs

**Community Survey** willingness to support tax incentives

- Not Willing, 7%
- Somewhat Willing, 44%
- Very Willing, 49%

**Next steps:**
- Study to determine local livable wage
- Develop and implement guidelines for tax incentives supporting livable wage jobs
- Use livable wage requirements for employees and contractors
A Prospering Local Economy

**GOAL** - The community will have a **thriving local economy** with livable wages for all

**STARS**
Lost over **700 jobs** (2010-16)

Exporting industries: Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation are doing well

**September Interviews**
Revealed community tensions resulting from recent economic development decisions

**Industries that work for Mason City**
Support businesses that align with the current economic base and community identity, yet diversify and expand products and services

**Next steps:**
- Develop an economic and workforce development plan
  - Identify labor shortages
  - Establish target industries and desired business attributes
GOAL - The community will have a **thriving local economy** with livable wages for all

**STARS**
Between 2009 and 2014, the population with a bachelor’s degree decreased

**Focus groups**
- Need for short term, high quality rental options
- Childcare waiting lists

**Opportunities for Young Professionals**
Attract and keep young professionals

**Next steps:**
- A housing study identifies needs for young professionals
- Ensure adequate childcare is available
A Sustainable Future

Community Assets and Identity

Efficiencies and Costs Savings

Public Involvement

Communication

Educate and Excite

Resiliency