

**Wahpeton Comprehensive Plan Update  
Stakeholder Listening Sessions  
November 17 & 18, 2010  
Summary of Stakeholder Input**

As part of updating the Wahpeton Comprehensive Plan, Hoisington Koegler Group (HKGi) planning consultants facilitated stakeholder listening sessions over a two-day period in November 2010. The purpose of these meetings was to gain input upfront from key stakeholder groups regarding the issues and opportunities confronting the community today and in the future. HKGi coordinated with City Staff to organize and schedule these listening sessions. In total, there were 16 stakeholder listening sessions, including small group and individual meetings, involving approximately 70 citizens. Representatives from the following stakeholder groups participated in the listening sessions:

- Economic Development Commission (EDC)
- Community Development Corporation (CDC)
- Wahpeton Breckenridge Area Chamber of Commerce
- Wahpeton Rotary Club
- Three Rivers Arts Council
- Wahpeton Golf Board
- Wahpeton Parks Board & staff
- Wahpeton Library Board & staff
- Wahpeton School District
- North Dakota State College of Science, Alumni/Foundation, AAUW
- Circle of Nations School
- Richland County Board
- Richland County Health Department
- Richland County Social Services Department
- Southeast Senior Services
- St. Catherine's Living Center
- United Way of Richland Wilkin
- Richland County Historical Society
- Bagg Bonanza Farm Historical Preservation Society
- Twin Towns Gardeners' Market
- Churches
- Medical services
- Utility companies
- Manufacturing businesses
- Commercial businesses
- Realtors
- Bankers
- Southside neighborhood

As part of the stakeholder listening sessions, a joint listening session was conducted with the EDC and CDC. In addition to identifying key community issues, this group also discussed and identified priorities. Consequently, this group's input is shown within each topic area in italics and includes the number of people identifying an issue as a priority (shown in parentheses).

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During each listening session, participants were asked the following general questions:

- What do you consider to be Wahpeton's most valuable assets/strengths – those things that make the community a desirable place to live, work, and visit?
- What do you consider to be Wahpeton's most significant issues or challenges that threaten the ability for the City to sustain its quality of life into the future?
- What are the City's roles in improving Wahpeton's future as a desirable place to live, work, and visit?
- What are Wahpeton's needs for infrastructure improvements and expansion?

In addition, more specific questions were developed for each stakeholder group. These questions were intended to get input relating to the topics/sections addressed in the City's Comprehensive Plan, including land use, development, community growth, transportation, housing, neighborhoods, business, parks, recreation, trails, economic development, redevelopment, public facilities and services. In general, the listening sessions were also intended to facilitate discussions about the community's quality of life issues today and into the future.

The input received from these stakeholder listening sessions was shared and discussed with the Wahpeton City Council and Planning Commission at a joint work session on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

The intent is to use the input from these stakeholder listening sessions to guide the updating of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The updated Comprehensive Plan will provide a guide for changes and improvements in the community over the next 20 years with 2030 as the planning horizon. The updated plan is intended to establish a vision, goals and policies that will address the relevant issues and concerns identified during this phase of the updating process. The input from these stakeholder listening sessions will be combined with information from other sources, including previous plans and studies, city staff, City Council, Planning Commission, and the Community Visioning Sessions (January 2011).

The following pages list, organize and summarize the comments and issues identified for these general topic areas relating to the City's Comprehensive Plan:

- Land Use, Development & Growth
- Housing & Neighborhoods
- Business & Employment
- Transportation
- Recreation, Parks & Trails
- Public Facilities – Civic, Educational & Cultural
- Public Utilities

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**Land Use, Development & Growth**

Attracting community growth

Stakeholders identified a number of issues related to community growth. The biggest issue identified was the large number of Wahpeton employees that do not live in the city. The primary reasons for this situation seem to be the lack of desirable jobs for spouses of employees, more desirable community options outside of Wahpeton, and limited housing options in Wahpeton. Other factors limiting community growth that were identified include competing places to live (Lake Country, Fargo, Fergus Falls), seniors moving out of town to be near kids and/or senior services, and quality of life gaps in Wahpeton. Some concerns that Wahpeton lacks some quality of life amenities, such as natural amenities, vibrant downtown, shopping, entertainment, senior services, etc. These quality of life issues may result in people not choosing to move to Wahpeton and residents choosing to move elsewhere.

- 1997 Comprehensive Plan problem – future population projections were unrealistic, which made the plan meaningless. Current comprehensive plan does not address population decline, only growth, which is a problem.
- Need to be realistic as to what the city's population ceiling is for growth.
- Wahpeton needs to grow, it needs more people in order to sustain more businesses and it needs more businesses to sustain more people. If residential development does not grow, businesses and industry will not grow. People are the key, businesses need people to purchase their goods and services and industry needs people for its workforce.
- Wahpeton is a central location, convenient to Lake Country and Minneapolis.
- Wahpeton is located 13 miles from the interstate highway which is a weakness.
- Wahpeton is known for manufacturing and the zoo. There is potential for the river to become a focus of the community.
- Many residents are retiring to their cabins/homes in the Lakes Area (MN) which is hard for the City to compete with. However, the relocation of these residents means losing long-time community members, volunteers, leadership, etc.
- As people age, their choices of where to live are strongly influenced by where their children and grandchildren are living. People often move to where their kids live.
- Medium size community – not too big and not too small – is a positive.
- Wahpeton lacks natural amenities, like a lake, to attract new residents.
- Lots of people who live and work in Wahpeton move to Lake Country in Minnesota.
- For Wahpeton's industrial businesses, employees are drawn from a large area, but many don't move to Wahpeton.
- Wahpeton businesses recruit employees; however, the city of Wahpeton hasn't done anything to attract new residents.
- Cargill's employee base, in general, is 1/3 from Wahpeton, 1/3 from Fargo & S/SW of Wahpeton, and 1/3 from Fergus Falls.
- Percentage of Wahpeton employees that don't live in Wahpeton is high.
- Walmart employees probably come from a 30-mile radius.
- Sometimes spouses of Wahpeton employees have jobs outside of Wahpeton that cause families not to move to Wahpeton.

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- New employees may not want to downsize their lifestyle from a bigger city to a small/medium size city like Wahpeton.
- Opportunities to attract middle management and lower staff to move to Wahpeton. More challenging to attract upper management to live here when their financial means enable them to consider other places to live.
- For employees of the college, it is often challenging for spouses to find jobs. For this reason, many college employees don't move to Wahpeton.
- Before Walmart, basic retail needs weren't available in Wahpeton. Positive change for keeping and attracting residents.
- Lots of Wahpeton residents were once students at NDSCS.
- Even when people live in rural areas around Wahpeton, they spend lots of time in Wahpeton, which is a strength of the city.
- The City's marketing campaign to surrounding communities could be seen as offensive, since it suggests that Wahpeton is better than the surrounding communities. Instead, the City could look at these surrounding communities as customers of Wahpeton and Wahpeton as the regional hub for all of these communities/Richland County.
- Consider opportunities to market Wahpeton's businesses/amenities to the people who work in Wahpeton.
- Should look at the community's age groups to see which ones are growing.
- Young people and new hires are not going to stay long if the quality of life is not appealing. People will move for good jobs, but if they are not satisfied with their communities, they will eventually leave.
- People want to live where there are things to do. They want to live in a place where they can have fun. They want to see beautiful things and be in beautiful places. They want to be intrigued, inspired and challenged. They want variety and they want quality. People want to live in vibrant communities with distinctive personalities and character. Creating a sense of place is no small matter because economic growth and quality of life go hand in hand.
- One thing that is growing in Wahpeton is our aging population. If we lose them, we will also lose their assets and financial support. The community needs to look at seniors as assets not liabilities. A large group of volunteers will be required in the years ahead to salvage the community's quality of life. Seniors have more time than others, so have a greater capacity for volunteering their time and efforts to the community.
- The City is decreasing in population while city government is increasing. Taxpayers in Wahpeton are getting older and living on fixed incomes and social security, which puts a greater burden on seniors and limits the City's ability to maintain quality services. We need to attract younger people to stay and move to Wahpeton in order to support the City's services and financial needs, and prevent this burden from falling more and more on seniors living in the community.

Appropriate land use balance & patterns

In general, stakeholders were most concerned about ensuring that future land uses enabled adequate job growth. Future land use issues identified were adding

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modern/professional office buildings and ensuring that expansion of industrial businesses is done environmentally.

- Priorities for the community should be: jobs, then housing, then safe/clean/healthy community, then amenities (parks, night life, activities, etc).
- Clarification needed on how airport impacts land use development around it.
- May be a shortage of modern, professional office space in Wahpeton.
- Development near industrial businesses needs to take into consideration the importance of buffers for environmental protection and permitting limitations.
- Breckenridge's recent development includes the hospital, aquatic center, and expansion of John Deere. Railroad jobs in Breckenridge are good paying jobs.
- Expanding the area of the city will require a significant increase in public infrastructure.
- NDSCS – goal is to fill existing residential buildings with students in the future. However, there are three dorms that probably will never be used again for residential purposes.

Quality/character of development

The major concerns about development/redevelopment in the community are the future character of commercial development along Highway 210, the character of recent development in the city, and the perceived City regulation barriers to development.

- Perception that the City can be a barrier to development. Example is liquor license for the new Mexican restaurant.
- Perception that a few individuals have unfair influence on which businesses receive incentives.
- Old part of town is really nice, except downtown used to be nicer.
- Town Center Square was adopted as part of the previous Comprehensive Plan – that's why it happened.
- The City's recent growth/development has been distasteful, especially since the late 1990s, which affects the quality of life of the overall community. The relocation of City Hall is a prime example. New neighborhoods are being designed as car-dependent with no sidewalks.
- Walmart area – some concerns about the potential for lower quality development around Walmart in the future.
- Northwest growth area is a concern – is it trying to be the new "Main Street"? It does not have small town character. It also is using lots of land and could create future water issues.
- Concerns about lots of new development out in the northwest corner of the city, particularly the impacts on downtown and the costs of the new infrastructure. This should be balance with the significant needs for reinvestment in existing infrastructure.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Growth/sustainability of schools***

- *Retention & growth of the young adults/families – growth in the school system*
- *Sustaining enrollment at NDSCS and Wahpeton Public Schools*

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**B. Growth areas**

- *Expanding city limits – expanding infrastructure of city*
- *Where will we grow?*
- *Where's the next housing development? Cemetery land? West of 210 bypass?*
- *Methods to extend roads, utilities, etc. for residential expansion*
- *Build an artificial lake for housing & recreation – similar to Bluemont Lakes neighborhood in Fargo*
- *Where to grow – residential, commercial? (10)*
- *Define housing/commercial real estate areas of expansion – which way do we go?*
- *Development south of Walmart (1)*
- *Plan for infill land-locked properties*
- *Infrastructure plans to any future expansion areas*
- *Future acquisition/development of land for industrial park*
- *Future areas for expansion – who will do it, who will pay, cooperation of private sector and city?*

## **Housing & Neighborhoods**

### Senior housing options

In general, concerns about the availability of good senior housing options as well as essential services for senior residents in the community.

- City isn't a senior-friendly community – there is a need for low maintenance housing options.
- More assisted living units needed.
- Two new senior housing buildings (16 housing units) are located next to Prante's restaurant.
- A basic goal of senior services in Wahpeton is to keep senior residents in their current housing safely.

### Downtown housing options

Stakeholders expressed interest in the City supporting the development of unique and desirable housing options in downtown Wahpeton.

- Need people living downtown, on "Main Street", so development of downtown housing is desirable. Downtown housing (condos and apartments) should have garages, elevators and senior amenities.
- Train noise/whistles are a nuisance issue for living downtown.
- Potential for adding downtown condos and apartments.
- Town Center Square includes 40 apartment units.
- Support downtown housing development.
- Potential for reuse of the 2-3 story buildings on Dakota Avenue, including apartments above retail uses.

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Other housing gaps

In addition to senior housing and downtown housing, the City would benefit from expanding the types of housing options in Wahpeton, including housing that would attract people currently commuting to Wahpeton for jobs to move here, better rental housing, and fixed-up older houses in the heart of town.

- Community would benefit from more housing options. It is important for attracting new residents. Wahpeton's current housing options are limited.
- Not enough rental houses.
- Popularity of pets in households, which is a big business for Walmart, may also be impacting the real estate market, e.g. housing that allows pets.
- Difficult to sell fixer-upper houses. Expensive to fix up and hard to get a loan.
- Many people have a lack of savings, so need a 100% mortgage to buy a house; the younger generations don't appreciate the benefits of having savings in order to invest in a home, just like you would need to save up to invest in buying a business.

Neighborhood challenges

The City has the potential to improve the community's existing neighborhoods including efforts to improve existing older houses and adding neighborhood amenities, such as trails, retail businesses and public gathering places.

- Southside neighborhood is close-knit. Traditionally looked at as the "wrong" side of the tracks. Recent water project helped deal with flooding/back-ups from heavy rainfalls. Levee system not only helped with flood protection but provided recreational asset for this neighborhood.
- Very few houses are being built in the old neighborhoods but there are some.
- Wahpeton continues to struggle with fostering a sense of inclusiveness for those who move to the community rather than grew up in the community.
- City feels more disconnected with just a small core group of people really involved in things.
- Consider the potential for neighborhood retail businesses.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Housing growth areas***

- *Areas for residential housing expansion (4)*
- *Next residential subdivision*
- *Where will we grow geographically?*
- *Identify and obtain land for future housing development – jump the bypass?*
- *Expand housing tax base*
- *Ability to develop quality housing/neighborhoods to forestall/reverse tendency of area workforce to live outside of Wahpeton*

***B. Affordable housing***

- *Affordable housing over 55 – condos (5)*
- *Affordable/quality housing*
- *Expand development of reasonable housing*

***C. Housing options/choices***

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- *Mixed housing developments that encourage young professionals or young families, seniors, and empty nesters to enjoy modern amenities (green space, energy efficient homes, alternative fuels for heating/cooling) (1)*
- *Adequate housing opportunities for Baby Boom generation as they reach retirement (keeping people here!)*
- *Lack of housing – houses for sale in the \$100K to \$500K range*
- *Senior/retirement options*
- *Expand senior citizen housing*

## **Business & Employment**

### Downtown physical environment – quality of buildings & streets

There are many concerns with the continuing deterioration of downtown's physical environment and the inadequate reinvestment in older/historic buildings, storefront facades, streets, and sidewalks. The City is not seen as taking care of its maintenance responsibilities in downtown, including sidewalks and City-owned buildings, most notably the old City Hall building and Town Center Square.

- Physical appearance of downtown is a big challenge/weakness.
- Desire for a better downtown environment.
- Dakota Ave "Main Street" issues include poor building maintenance and building deterioration. City doesn't take care of "Main Street" in that it doesn't take care of the sidewalks.
- Low rent costs for downtown buildings makes it difficult for property owners to maintain their buildings.
- Downtown is not a desirable place to locate a retail business because buildings are run down, no parking, and limited access. Downtown has some nice buildings to locate a professional business but parking is still a problem.
- City's façade grant program offers \$22,500 per business – put in place two years ago.
- Ownership of commercial buildings is relatively stable, low turnover.
- In the past, businesses owned their buildings, which is less true today.
- Issue of a single property owner buying up lots of properties in downtown; unable to adequately maintain the buildings, so the City is trying to rectify this situation
- A lot of downtown properties are city-owned, by the CDC. Buildings and properties are not being well-maintained by the City.
- Town Center Square has building structural issues.
- Concern about vacancies of older historic character buildings, including the Armory and the St. John's School.
- City should stop what's happening downtown, improve situation with downtown properties.
- Reconstruction of Dakota Ave/ND Hwy 13 is not perfect for a downtown environment.
- Downtown is not lacking parking – it needs more dense development.

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Downtown retail – mix of stores

Stakeholders were concerned about the declining mix of retail stores and restaurants downtown and increasing store vacancies. They also expressed their desires for keeping businesses downtown, such as attracting chain stores to redevelopment sites, creating links to the college, and increasing jobs in downtown.

- Decline of downtown has been happening for a long time.
- Lack of retail and restaurants.
- Empty storefronts on Dakota Ave “Main Street”, especially in the last three years.
- Shopping options have been weak in Wahpeton.
- Small towns are great but Wahpeton is losing its small town amenities.
- Keep businesses downtown.
- There are lots of stores between the two downtowns.
- Mugshots building.
- J.C. Penneys is an anchor for downtown. In 2006, the store almost closed. Corporate decision to close the Wahpeton store was made. City intervened and saved the store from closing.
- Ben Franklin store is an asset.
- CT Shoes is a new business.
- PCI (call center) helps bring people downtown and may be an example of another means of revitalizing downtown.
- New Mexican restaurant was popular right away.
- If chain stores are interested in locating in Wahpeton, consider recruiting them to a redevelopment site in downtown.
- The college should be a big opportunity for businesses in the community, for example starting a café in an old house. Potential link between the cooking school at the college and new restaurant businesses.

General retail challenges and opportunities for Wahpeton

Input was mostly positive regarding the recent opening of the Walmart store along Highway 210, which is outside of downtown Wahpeton. Many stakeholders felt that Walmart makes available many basic retail goods that were no longer available within Wahpeton. The major concerns regarding retail in Wahpeton is the challenge of attracting additional desirable retail stores to the city, since it is a smaller city and currently declining in population. Potential competition between downtown retail and the Highway 210 commercial area was not a big concern.

- Walmart has been a good addition and draw for the community’s shopping environment.
- Before Walmart, basic retail needs weren’t available in Wahpeton.
- Desire for Walmart to expand and have more choices such as crafts and outdoor products.
- The Walmart area is the most desirable place to locate a business. It’s new, easy access, and easy parking.
- Make Wahpeton a happening place, be ready for new businesses.

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- Improve the community by adding goods and services – stores to shop in, restaurants to eat in, night clubs for entertainment and dancing (no strip clubs and no adult book stores).
- Fergus Falls' downtown looks nicer in character but there is not much retail there. Retail is primarily focused on the I-94 interchange area.
- Keeping retail in the city will be challenging if 2010 Census will show decreasing population.
- Attracting national chains is a challenge because population of Wahpeton is under threshold. Most national chains will not look at the population of the entire Wahpeton-Breckenridge region when making location decisions.
- Stalmart store wanted to make building improvements. Since they couldn't get a parking variance approved by the City, they sold the property and now the building is vacant.
- City's zoning code is out-of-date, too restrictive.

Employment environment

Stakeholders placed a lot of emphasis on the need for Wahpeton to continue focusing on job growth. Major employers include large industrial businesses and the various schools. The major concerns identified were the necessity of jobs to prevent further declines in the city's population, limited job opportunities for spouses of new employees in Wahpeton, the high level of Wahpeton employees that commute from outside the city, and the challenges of shift work at the large industrial employers.

- The #1 priority is for a community to have jobs available, otherwise, why would people come/move to Wahpeton.
- If there aren't good jobs, nobody is going to stick around.
- Should increase employment opportunities in Wahpeton.
- Wahpeton does not have excess workforce, which could hinder business growth in the community.
- There is a lack of job opportunities for spouses of employees of manufacturing companies, especially for management level employees.
- Wahpeton businesses are challenged in labor force recruitment as they are competing with Fargo. This can be especially challenging in terms of wages.
- NDSCS is a good employer and provides good job benefits, which makes it a model of a good employer. The college is a major employer with 300 FT and 350 PT employees.
- For employees of the college, it is often challenging for spouses to find jobs. For this reason, many college employees don't move to Wahpeton.
- Circle of Nations school has a staff of 125 including 36 residential staff living on campus 24/7.
- A lot of staff at both the college and the Circle of Nations school commute to Wahpeton for work.
- In spite of significant declines in student enrollment, employment levels at the public schools have not really dropped.
- Red River Human Services (RRHS) is a major employer in Wahpeton. Lots of employees' spouses work in the manufacturing industry.

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- Tri-State Aviation is a unique employer which builds and rebuilds collector airplanes.
- Richland County's Job Development Authority (JDA) is a resource.
- Some Wahpeton residents are underemployed due to challenges of shift work and childcare issues.
- Some people that were chronically unemployed have been successful employees at Walmart.

Industrial environment

The community's large industrial business sector is highly valued by stakeholders. There is a strong relationship between many of the industrial businesses in Wahpeton and NDSCS students and programs. The major concerns regarding the industrial environment in Wahpeton is the decline in local businesses and small entrepreneurial businesses, need for diversification of businesses, limited incentives for expansion, and limited workforce capacity within the community.

- Heartland Precision has a very good relationship with the college.
- WCCO Belting has a strong relationship with the college – lots of its employees got their training at NDSCS and current students work at the firm. Estimated that 50% of employees are probably affiliated with NDSCS.
- It is very important for the City to support NDSCS, including the residential environment of NDSCS students.
- Instrumentation technician program has been dropped at the college. It may be because other technical programs offer more job skills/mobility for students.
- Some manufacturing companies have 24/7 shifts and childcare is a challenge for these employees.
- Need for continuous upgrading of technology is a necessity for many industries.
- There are opportunities for the City to assist with marketing training for incubator industries and retail businesses.
- Wahpeton used to be a more entrepreneurial community with local businesses that were privately owned. ComDel is a rare recent example.
- Companies that are growing nationally or internationally are not actually growing in Wahpeton, e.g. Cargill, Bobcat.
- The history of Wahpeton is dominated by manufacturing businesses due to the presence of NDSCS in the community.
- Wahpeton has a fairly strong industrial-based business community, whereas, Breckenridge has a strong agriculture-based business community.
- There are opportunities to identify who the industrial suppliers are for Wahpeton industries and where they are located, and then explore whether some of these suppliers could be recruited to relocate operations to Wahpeton.
- There are currently no vacant industrial buildings in Wahpeton. In contrast, many other cities have vacant buildings, available expansion space, and/or can offer very attractive incentives for new industries to relocate.
- Industries need a strong employee base to grow their businesses.
- Rotating shift work schedule at many employers can be a challenge for families especially for day care.
- Small companies should be recruited to diversify the city's economy.

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- A Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is located in Wahpeton. It is a partnership organization consisting of UND (College of Business and Public Administration), U.S. Small Business Administration, North Dakota Dept. of Economic Development & Finance, and Dakota Certified Development Corporation.
- Wahpeton CDC still owns former Imation buildings.
- City's strong manufacturing base is an asset.
- Industries are an asset of the community and a good source of community philanthropy.
- Make Wahpeton a happening place, be ready for new businesses, be ready for more industry.
- Businesses do not support each other as much as they could. Look at each other as competition rather than looking at other communities as competition. Need to work together more collaboratively.

Medical services environment

Although Wahpeton residents do have access to some medical services within the community, including Breckenridge, many specialty medical services require travel to Fargo or Fergus Falls. The major concerns were some gaps in essential medical services (such as dialysis) available within the community and the challenges of arranging transportation to Fargo or Fergus Falls for specialty medical services, particularly for seniors.

- Availability of two clinics is an asset for the community.
- Important to maintain level of service whereby people can get daily needs met right in the community.
- Access to a hospital in Wahpeton that facilitates childbirth is an asset for families.
- Strong connection between college and health care employers is important, including internships.
- There is an increase in the amount of home health services provided in the County.
- Medical community serves approximately 50 mile radius to the south and west. Service area to the east is limited because of Fergus Falls. Similarly, the proximity of Fargo to the north means that families from Abercrombie south come to Wahpeton and those to the north go to Fargo.
- Nursing home and Sanford Clinic have video teleconference capabilities.
- Wahpeton's proximity to Fargo Hospital is an asset since it is a reasonable drive to major medical services.
- Dialysis services are not available within Wahpeton.
- The City should take some responsibility for medical services for seniors in order to keep seniors living in the community.
- The City should explore opportunities to persuade medical facilities to bring their medical specialists to Wahpeton, instead of patients needing to travel to Fargo.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Industrial growth & value added***

- *Are we "intentionally" communicating our appreciation to local businesses?*

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- *How about establishing a “Wahpeton Manufacturers Association”?*
- *Network, communicate, commiserate, articulate common concerns*
- *Plan industrial corridor (4)*
- *Agriculture-related opportunities*
- *More primary sector businesses*
- B. *Quality jobs*
  - *Where will our workforce come from? (7)*
  - *Workforce development*
  - *Grow/increase living wage jobs*
  - *Work with a greater emphasis on employment via NDSCS*
  - *Endeavor and support higher wage basis (2)*
- C. *Retail growth & development*
  - *More retail businesses (3)*
  - *Appearance/visual appeal of downtown needs improvement*
  - *Downtown business development*
  - *What is future of downtown businesses?*
  - *What is history of other cities when Walmart causes relocation to edges of town?*
  - *Devote greater utilization of Dakota Avenue business opportunities*
  - *Encourage more trendy destination-type businesses – coffee shops, cafes, music & entertainment offerings in town*
- D. *Economic development priorities*
  - *Diversion of economic development resources to other priorities*
  - *See CDC goals & objectives (2009-2011) – do these goals belong in a comprehensive plan?*

## **Transportation**

Input regarding transportation identified the community’s multi-modal assets, including great railroad, airport, and interstate highway access. The major concerns with the community’s transportation system are the need for improved walk/bike access within downtown and to the new Hwy 210 commercial area and improved public transportation options (within Wahpeton and to services in Fargo and Fergus Falls).

### Strengths

- Wahpeton has great railroad access.
- Transportation access, particularly interstate access, should be a selling point for the community.
- No road improvements/expansions are critical for the industrial region.
- Airport is an important asset for the community. Many business jets use the facility. It provides regional service. They are just completing a second runway. There doesn’t seem to be any concerns with current & future capacity of the airport.
- Short commutes in Wahpeton are a benefit of living here.

### Weaknesses

- Wahpeton is located a substantial distance from two interstate highways. May want to explore the potential for improving turns off of the freeways to get to

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Wahpeton – make it just as easy to go toward Wahpeton as to stay on the freeways.

- Road maintenance in Richland County is very poor, not as good as the Fargo metro area, snow removal in particular.
- Concerns about road quality – especially those south of Main Street.
- There is a need for providing safer ways for pedestrians to get to shopping areas in Wahpeton.
  - Lack of affordable transportation
  - Additional wayfinding is needed.
- Public transportation lacking in the community.
- Need to travel to Fargo or Fergus Falls for medical specialists but transportation options are very limited.
- The City should take some responsibility for providing or facilitating transportation for seniors in order to keep seniors living in the community.
- Potential for a public/city bus shuttle service.
- Need for a marketing campaign for the existing bus shuttle service.
- A trail out to Walmart is needed.
- Concern about safety of pedestrian crossings of Dakota Avenue/ND Hwy 13.
- Additional bike lanes are needed.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Airport***

- *Maintain and development of our airport*
- *Keeping regional airlines*

***B. Train***

- *Endeavor to return passenger train service*

***C. Bus***

- *Free or low cost buses for the retail corridor and public places*

***D. Support County in its efforts – farm to market roads in all areas (1)***

**Recreation, Parks & Trails**

Parks, walking & biking trails

The community's parks and recreation facilities are viewed as major community assets, including the new levee trail. The biggest opportunities identified were filling in gaps in the trails network, particularly for biking around the community and connecting to the new commercial area along Highway 210.

- Recreation fund (¼ of the 1.5% city sales tax) was used to build the trail on the new levee.
- The new walking paths on the levee are well used. Lots of dog walkers, bicyclists, skateboarders. It is a nice trail because it is separated from street traffic. Trail is attracting those outside the community as well.
- There are gaps in the trail system that prevent Wahpeton from capitalizing on recreational bicycling tourism.
- Additional bike lanes are needed.
- Desire to see additional development of trails and sidewalks.

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- A trail out to Walmart is needed.
- Parks and recreation facilities and golf course are assets of the community.
- Golf course is a unique feature of the community. There are challenges in its upkeep and maintenance due to the river. Continue to work on additional dikes to protect the golf course.

Access to the river for recreation

Opportunities were identified for improving access to the Red River for recreational uses, including canoeing, camping, and birdwatching. Although the new levee is definitely a major asset, opportunities for making the levee easier to cross between the community and the river should be explored.

- There is a desire for improving access to the river, crossings of the levee.
- Circle of Nations school uses the river for its canoe trips.
- There is some consideration for creating a canoe route on the Ottertail River with launch points, campsites, etc.
- There is potential for Wahpeton to be a launch point for a canoe route extending to Drayton dam-free. However, there needs to be better access to the river.
- Red River greenway management and funding needs to be discussed.
- Wahpeton is on the flyway for migration and can be a destination for birdwatchers.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Trail completion (1)***

- *Expanded footpaths in city*
- *More walking/biking paths*
- *Recreation – expand walking & biking trails*
- *Finish trail system*
- *Walkways to get west of bypass when expansion continues*
- *Extend walking trail from R.J. Hughes Drive through golf course/archery range to 17<sup>th</sup> Ave North (1)*
- *Trail to Walmart*

***B. Organization***

- *Golf course to become a City department (similar to Library Board) with directors appointed by Mayor/City Council (4)*

***C. Large comprehensive recreation facilities***

- *Large recreation center*
- *Build or develop a multi-use indoor recreation facility for all ages, but with an emphasis on youth tennis, batting cage, basketball, etc. – expanding Science of Leisure*
- *Recreation development in all areas of city*

***D. Funding Concerns (1)***

- *Maintain what we have, slow growth without funding in place*
- *Parks must be adequate funding*

***E. Dog Parks***

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**Public Facilities - Civic, Educational & Cultural**

Library

The City's library was identified as a highly valued community asset that has significant potential to be expanded and improved. The library's assets include its historic building, outdoor lawn "village green", technology resources, event programming, public gathering place function, partnership with college's library, and building expansion potential.

- Library is a community asset.
- Library is an educational resource.
- Two public libraries in Wahpeton – municipal library versus state college library (which is more technical).
- The city's library is growing in usage, increasing number of visits.
- City library is the last Carnegie-style architecture library left in the state.
- City library is the only place with free computer access.
- City library has needs for expansion space. Potential library expansion should be on the City's radar, but it isn't currently.
- Library has a good working relationship with City depts and the college's library.
- Library is on the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) – historic designation requires higher costs for any building expansion.
- Library is increasing its technology/computer area but there is not enough physical space in the building to expand adequately.
- Library has worked with NDSCS architectural students on projects to improve interior of building.
- City owns the library property and there is space for expansion on the site.
- Is there potential for a library expansion to use Town Center Square?
- Library's strengths are children's programming, young families, free internet access (attractive to people who don't have home computers), older residents.
- Library serves as a social gathering place, even has coffee available that is supported through "free will offerings".
- The library's lawn functions as the "village green".
- Since the library is an old building, its utilities are also old, requiring significant repairs and expenses.
- The library has lots of programs that bring in lots of people.
- Recreation fund is ¼ of the 1.5% city sales tax – could this funding be used for art galleries or the library?
- Seniors are being overlooked by the uses of the recreation fund – money is being spent only on active, physical projects rather than cultural recreation projects like the library and art facilities.
- Breckenridge also has its own library, which is only about 30 years old. Probably don't need two separate libraries between the two small cities. Similar to many other aspects of the two communities, there is redundancy. In many cases, Wahpeton and Breckinridge have the same things. There are opportunities for more consolidation and collaboration. Some shared efforts already exist, such as Twin Town sports (football, baseball), the Three Rivers Arts Council.
- City library is woefully underused.

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Public gathering places

A number of public gathering places were identified in the community, including both indoor and outdoor facilities. Many of them are indoor at the college or the community schools. There appears to be an opportunity to create more outdoor public gathering places within the community, particularly in the downtown area. The new Twin Towns Gardeners' Market held on the library's lawn once a week created a new public gathering place/event.

- NDSCS Activities Center provides opportunities for indoor walking and a fitness center. Other recreational gathering places include the Community Center, Middle School gym, and levee trail/loop trail.
- Farmers Market is great. People have been very receptive to it. People will take advantage of new things, if you reach out to them.
- Town Center Square courtyard
- Community Center
- Need for indoor play places for kids, especially in the winter.
- Need for places for parents to hang out with other parents and their kids.

Civic center

Downtown Wahpeton was originally designed with a traditional civic center and County seat that includes the County Courthouse, City Hall, and City Library organized around a central lawn. This civic center has been weakened by the vacant & deteriorating City Hall building to the east, the surface parking lot to the west, and the closing off of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The 2006 downtown plan recommended that downtown Wahpeton-Breckenridge be positioned as the social gathering place and hub of the Twin Towns region. Retaining the historic civic center as a functioning and beautiful place would strengthen the historic character of the community and the vibrancy of downtown Wahpeton.

- City Hall, County Courthouse and City Library were all built next to each other – good idea of city's founding fathers.
- Old City Hall building was sold for \$1.00. City has granted multiple extensions on the agreement with the purchaser for more than five years. Purchaser was a non-profit organization that planned to establish a teen center in the building.
- Wahpeton is the county seat of Richland County. Downtown contains two County buildings – Richland County Courthouse and Richland County Law Enforcement Center.

Arts

A number of arts assets were identified by stakeholders. The sum of these individual entities does not seem to add up to a strong arts community or center in Wahpeton. The arts initiatives involve Wahpeton and Breckenridge, as well as NDSCS. The 2006 downtown plan recommended that the City should work with the Three Rivers Art Council to create an arts center in downtown Wahpeton. The future art gallery which is planned for the old National Bank building on Dakota Avenue is an opportunity to

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begin creating an arts district in downtown Wahpeton. This downtown arts district should be coordinated with Breckenridge and NDSCS as well.

- Three Rivers Art Council bought the old National Bank building on Dakota Ave for a new art gallery – purchase price was \$25,000. Their plan is to renovate this potential historic building. Art gallery will be an asset.
- Recreation fund is ¼ of the 1.5% city sales tax – could this funding be used for art galleries or the library?
- Seniors are being overlooked by the uses of the recreation fund – money is being spent only on active, physical projects rather than cultural recreation projects like the library and art facilities.
- Arts include the two libraries, historical museum, Twin Town Artist Series (at the NDSCS Cultural Center), future art gallery, Community Center (lots of activities take place in the Community Room).
- Twin Town Artist Series is facilitated by a non-profit organization, funded by the organization’s members. Twin Town Artist Series takes place on the NDSCS campus.
- Three Rivers Arts Council focuses on visual arts primarily and is in the process of creating a home for the arts in the National Bank building, which has the potential for historic designation. The arts council includes both the Wahpeton and Breckenridge areas.
- The future art gallery will help solve the issue of downtown lacking art and cultural activities as identified in the 2006 downtown plan.
- The future art gallery will also be a viable downtown business selling all kinds of art on consignment.
- The future art gallery could serve as a venue that could be rented out for small gatherings and social events.
- The future art gallery, due to its location and visibility on “Main Street”, could serve as the home for the Wahpeton Visitor’s Bureau attracting visitors to the downtown area and helping promote the economic viability of the downtown business district.
- “Head of the Red” performing arts.
- Community Center displays local art. Potential for businesses to also help support local artists.
- There really aren’t any arts or sporting events in Wahpeton, so residents have to go to Fargo.
- The City needs to demonstrate their support by taking a stand in favor of the arts and humanities with related action and legislation.

Cultural

A number of assets that define the community’s culture were identified by stakeholders. These assets are not managed by a single entity, so preserving and enhancing them requires coordination across agencies (county, city, park board, college, seniors, etc.) and community grassroots efforts.

- Assets: the people, small town community, quality of life, great place to raise a family, safety, work ethic, strong volunteer base, neat and clean community, parks and recreation, city’s upkeep/maintenance is great, friendly.

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- A lot to offer for this size of town – almost everything you would want culturally is here, e.g. college, college’s library, zoo, etc.
- Historic buildings are assets.
- Historic museum is underused.
- Existing senior center has building maintenance issues (when it rains) that need to be addressed.
- The college provides cultural enhancements for the community, such as the Wildcat Wellness Center and Stern Cultural Center.
- In general, faith-based organizations have not really taken on initiatives and implemented them.
- Wahpeton foundations include Breckenridge-Wahpeton Community Foundation, NDSCS Alumni/Foundation, St. Francis Healthcare and Wellness Foundation, Breckenridge Education Foundation, Leave A Legacy of Richland/Wilkin County.
- People often assume that others will do things, so frequently don’t get involved. Sometimes you just need to ask.
- There seems to be a leadership vacuum in comparison to the past. Challenge when business leaders do not live in the community. May not be as much employer support or promotion of community involvement.
- Lots of work commuters today – does that result in less involvement in the community?
- One way to look at current technology’s impacts on the community’s culture is as follows: “technology immigrants” = current adults; “technology natives” = young people; “technology foreigners” = people that decide not to learn technology.

Education

Stakeholders identified the community’s educational assets, including the state college, county vo-tech center, public K-12 school system, and private schools. The biggest issues identified were declining students, both at the college and K-12 public schools, building vacancies & reinvestment needs, and continued sharing of facilities between the schools and the general public.

- Suggestion to add education as a Comprehensive Plan element.
- Advertising about NDSCS is really positive for the community of Wahpeton.
- Lots of people go to school at NDSCS in Wahpeton and end up staying in ND.
- The high school is able to use the NDSCS facilities, which is beneficial for students.
- Twin Town Artist Series takes place on the NDSCS campus.
- NDSCS athletic fields are available for non-college uses.
- 950 students live on the NDSCS campus. Goal in the next three years is to reach 1,200 students living on campus. 500 additional students do not live on campus. Overall, the college has 2,800 students including online and international students.
- The college is a major employer with 300 FT and 350 PT employees.
- The college focuses its enrollment goals on “heads in the beds” (residents) and “butts in the seats” (students).
- Circle of Nations has 130 students in grades 4-8 from 17 states and 25 tribes. The school has a staff of 125 including 36 residential staff living on campus 24/7.

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- The closest boarding school for high school students is in Flandreau, SD, which is where some Circle of Nations students move onto.
- A lot of staff at both the college and Circle of Nations schools are commuters to Wahpeton.
- There are so many tax-exempt properties in Wahpeton that it cuts into tax revenues for schools. For example, Cargill is tax-exempt until 2016.
- Student enrollment numbers are declining – down 400 students over the past ten years, which is approximately a 25% decline. Nonetheless, the school buildings do not really have empty rooms so they are still fully utilizing the school buildings' space.
- There has been a noticeable increase in mental health issues among students at NDSCS.
- Students in general, including high school and Circle of Nations, have lots more mental and physical health issues than in the past.
- Social media's impacts are enormous on young people's communication, resulting in less face-to-face communication and more bullying. This trend is true of all ages of students.
- In ND, there is projected to be a 30% decline in the number of high school graduates between 2010 and 2015.
- Circle of Nations school has removed two of its older dorms and built a new dorm. The school would also like to build a recreation center in the future and add athletic fields. Their students need "things to do".
- Central Elementary school building, which was built in the 1920s, will probably need to be replaced and possibly relocated.
- Traditionally, NDSCS students have come from smaller communities/schools, but that is changing. More kids in the state are moving from rural to urban high schools, which seems to be creating higher expectations of Wahpeton for college students. Today students from bigger cities/urban schools are moving to Wahpeton, which is a medium-sized city.
- High school students can take college courses at NDSCS, which is a benefit for education in Wahpeton.
- Suggested that a survey could be conducted with recent graduates of Wahpeton High School to find out about their impressions of the quality of their high school education.
- 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> graders can participate in a Tech Camp at the Richland County Votech Center, which is also a benefit for education in Wahpeton.
- Choice between private and public school options is an asset for attracting families.
- Is the quality of the city's schools good enough? Does it compete with other school districts' quality of education?
- Previous NDSCS Alumni/Foundation president was head of the Chamber of Commerce. Current Alumni/Foundation president is president of the Wahpeton Community Development Corporation (CDC).
- City's school system is an asset.

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Entertainment

In general, stakeholders expressed concerns that there is a lack of entertainment or “things to do” in Wahpeton, particularly for teenagers, young adults, and seniors.

- Wahpeton lacks entertainment.
- Wahpeton needs “things to do”.
- Are there enough things to do in Wahpeton for teenagers? Nothing for teenagers to do, so some hang out at Walmart.
- Wahpeton doesn’t have activities for young adults, particularly twenty-somethings.
- Wahpeton’s proximity to activities in Fargo and Lakes Area is an asset.
- Wahpeton should look at increasing its promotion of events and opportunities to adjacent communities such as through local newspapers.
- Senior activities and opportunities have not really been developed.
- There could be a potential increase in Senior Center use if it had a different name.
- College President suggested that a survey/assessment of NDSCS students be conducted to find out what they think the City could do better.
- Circle of Nations school would like to build a recreation center in the future and add athletic fields. Their students need “things to do”.
- Keep in mind that “night life” options for most college students today are non-alcoholic due to the minimum drinking age.
- People like new things to do but then they die out.

Tourism

Tourism opportunities were mentioned by some stakeholders, focused mainly on strategies for marketing the community.

- A tourism marketing opportunity may be to have a package deal on attractions in and around Wahpeton.
- Potential for marketing the community at trade shows, including Sioux Falls, Mason City, St. Cloud, Twin Cities, Lakes Area.
- Wahpeton has not really developed a marketing/branding plan to help promote the community.
- Potential for Wahpeton to increase its role as the launching point for hunters.
- Consideration should be given to educating local employees about the community.

**Public Utilities & Services**

If the community continues to pursue expansion of its industrial sector, there may be some constraints posed by utility capacities, costs, and environmental impacts.

- Electricity costs are essentially non-competitive, unlike most other inputs for industries.
- Minn-Dak and Cargill have tremendous water resource needs. Companies of this size have to be concerned about the large size of their facilities and environmental impacts. At a certain scale, environmental regulations are restrictive for expanding.
- Natural gas for residential and small business customers are not an issue. However, there are capacity limits for large industrial users. There is an ability to extend 20 miles from Hankinson; however, cost would be the burden of the

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company and/or community. It could involve approximately \$350,000 in investment and a 6-month process which would involve securing easements.

- Limited ability to meet natural gas needs may be a barrier for business recruitment.
- City should find a way to finance the needed infrastructure for new developments (residential, business and industrial) for five years or longer if necessary. Put a plan together for this type of future development and use it as a selling tool.
- The City should have a well thought out and phased plan for expansion, and a plan for financing those phases.
- Make the City services provided easier for the businesses and residents.
- City needs to do better job of marketing its successes and good services that it provides.
- Should lower taxes in Wahpeton.
- Collaboration with Breckenridge can be challenging due to the differences in state laws, finances and funding.

***Input from Joint EDC & CDC Listening Session***

***A. Control costs & taxes***

- *Public works & services campus to help consolidate and control costs – law enforcement, street & sewer*
- *Control spending and increased taxation (4)*
- *Public services – funding sources for public infrastructure – streets, water, sewer, etc.*

***B. Integration of services with Breckenridge***

***C. Water (2)***

- *Water – treatment, protection, availability*
- *Quality water is a must (5)*