



Mukwonago Downtown Strategic Plan – Visioning Exercise

From page 113 of the Comprehensive Plan
– “The Village Should establish a Downtown Strategic Plan Committee, comprised by a cross section of Village Officials, the Chamber, central area business owners and property owners and other interested citizens. The Committee, over a short period of several months,

would identify strengths and weaknesses and set priorities. The suggestions for improvements could be that basis for setting the implementation actions. After completion of the Strategic Plan, it would be the responsibility of both the public and private sectors to work together toward implementation.”

This visioning exercise seeks to work within the framework outlined above to begin the process of exploring what makes our Downtown great and what we can do to make it even better using direct participation, collaboration, and a future-focused perspective to identify consensus-based opportunities.

Goal of the Visioning Exercise:

The goal of this exercise is to ask the Downtown Strategic Plan Steering Committee (DSPSC) and participating audience members “What kind of Downtown we should have?” and “What does Downtown mean to you as an individual and to the community?” The results of this exercise will be used to create a vision statement or a few statements that will guide the strategic planning efforts of the Downtown Strategic Planning Steering Committee.

The object is to collect as many ideas as possible--nothing is too small, too big, or too crazy for consideration. This technique has been used in real-life and across many villages, cities, and other agencies with great success.

Some people may wonder, “Why bother with visions of the future when today's problems seem overwhelming?” *Answer: Both problem solving and visioning are important and they are quite different approaches that should be used in combination.*

Visioning generates a common goal, hope, and encouragement. A vision offers a possibility for fundamental change and gives people a sense of control, gives a group something to move toward and generates creative thinking and passion.

With ***problem solving***, a group can become mired in technical details and political problems and may even disagree on how to define the problem. Problem solving, although useful, rarely results in any really fundamental change.

A problem is something negative to move away from, whereas a vision is something positive to move toward. Concurrently, by moving toward a vision, the group will be likely to encounter a number of problems to solve.

The Visioning Exercise:

- A. Break into two smaller groups to brainstorm what an ideal downtown would be like in 10 to 20 years. Encourage group members to be specific. As a guide, use categories to describe change in your community. Example categories are: people, housing, jobs/businesses, activities, transportation, amenities, environment, design, development and public involvement – among others.
- B. Ask, "What would your Downtown be like if you had the power to make it any way you wanted? Where should the boundary line for "downtown" be drawn? What is the opinion of the current state of the downtown and what is the vision for it? What land uses and services are expected to be found within our downtown? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our downtown? What are the historic structures in downtown that should be preserved? What are the brownfields or blighted properties in downtown? What area do individuals not feel safe as a pedestrian in downtown? What are the key destinations for visitors in downtown?"
- C. After about 10 to 15 minutes, return to the large group. **Ask one member (or designated speaker) from each group to make one positive, declarative one-sentence statement about how the community will be in the future.** Make the statement in the present tense. Examples: The downtown is full of thriving businesses and restaurants. We have many community events that draw in our residents and visitors alike. The cultural and historical significance of the area is preserved for future generations. People walk to and around our downtown for restaurants, retail, and relaxation.
- D. A recorder will write these statements so that all can see and that can be saved for revision later. Continue around the room, and then repeat the sequence with another member of each group. Continue until time is short or ideas are being repeated. Then ask if there are any other ideas.
- E. Ask group members to highlight some of the major differences between now and the future they have created. Most will initially focus on population size and demographic change, but also try to elicit changes in attitudes and values regarding the community or surrounding environment, in concepts of what constitutes "progress," and in standard of living and quality of life. Standard of living refers to *economic success and comfort*; quality of life refers to more intangible *satisfaction with life* in general.
- F. Spend time grouping elements of the vision into a few common themes. Find the areas of consensus and identify any areas of disagreement. **Focus on the areas of consensus.**
- G. Prioritization - Create a new sheet listing items that have strong support from either the entire class or a subgroup. Be careful to nurture ideas that may come from a minority perspective even though they may not initially gain the support of the entire group.

These themes will then be used to create a vision statement or a few statements that will guide the strategic planning efforts of the Downtown Strategic Planning Steering Committee.