

Growing Stark County: Resident feedback helps shape development plan

Katherine Grandstrand | The Dickinson Press | Published September 29, 2012

After listening to residents of Belfield, Richardton and South Heart, community leaders have created a plan to develop and grow several industries and sectors throughout Stark County.

As part of Vision West ND, a planning program for the 19 oil- and gas-producing counties, the Stark County steering committee on Friday disseminated data collected during public meetings, from surveys and drawn from their own experience. The meeting was held at the Strom Center in Dickinson.

"It is a directive that has come down all the way from the governor's office that they want us to help figure out a plan, a statewide initiative for planning and zoning," North Dakota Commerce Department executive director John Schneider said.

The week was facilitated by Karalee Cox from Building Communities, a process to map public development. Vision West ND is a three-year program to help oil-impacted counties deal with growth.

The Stark County steering committee identified six areas: education, health care, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, downtown development, attracting government funding, and business retention and expansion.

For quality of life issues, the committee decided to focus on housing, safety (including emergency services), recreation, child care and community integration issues.

The issues were voted on by the committee. Education and infrastructure each received a 100 percent "accept" rating, which accepts the matter into the development plan.

The committee appointed community members, either members of the committee or those more qualified from outside the committee, to head up each section of the plan, both on the economic and life sides of the issue.

"If these people that are in the (high-unemployment areas) out here on the coasts moving in, what does that do?" said Peggy O'Brien, who represents the city of Belfield on the committee. "It just tells you that you need more housing, you need more infrastructure, you need more law enforcement. When you have more people, you have more needs."

Infrastructure was the biggest concern because without it, all other development is held back.

"The infrastructure that got put in in the '60s and '70s ... just (doesn't) cut it with today's needs for fire protection," said Craig Kubas, Kadrmas, Lee and Jackson office manager and Gladstone resident. "These are big, sophisticated developers coming up that, they all have great plans, but they do, they want these, they need these communities (to have) water and sewer."

Funding for infrastructure projects is one of the biggest identified challenges, Cox said.

"South Heart, they have all of their plans, they know exactly what they need, they've done a wonderful job," she said. "They just don't have the money to put it in."

With all the development and change, the committee wanted to make sure that the integrity and values of the community stay.

"We're still very accepting, despite some of the bad things that happened," Richardton Mayor Frank Kirschenheiter said. "We're still accepting. And God knows that if we've gone through what we have the last couple years and we're still that way, that's what we are."

The next Stark County Vision West ND meeting is 3 p.m. Jan. 8 at the Strom Center in Dickinson. To view the plan once complete, as well as other counties' plans, visit visionwestnd.com.

The meetings have taken place in western North Dakota counties since March. There are two of 19 counties left, Bottineau, which will be held at the end of October, and Williams, to be held at the beginning of November.