

City of Ottumwa, Iowa

Strategic Planning Meeting

November 20, 2008

Summary Report



Facilitated by:
Jeff Schott
Institute of Public Affairs
University of Iowa

CITY OF OTTUMWA, IOWA

STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING

SUMMARY REPORT

NOVEMBER 20, 2008

Introduction

The City of Ottumwa requested the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) to provide facilitation services for development of a five – eight year strategic plan for the City of Ottumwa. The city established a broad-ranged citizens advisory committee to participate in this strategic planning process.

The committee held its first two meetings on September 15, and October 16, 2008. At the October 16 meeting, the committee identified Ottumwa’s core values and/or aspirations they believe the community should maintain and promote during the planning period. The committee then described their vision of the “ideal situation” in Ottumwa in the next five - eight years.

The vision statements were later grouped into the following categories/themes:

- Economic development/vitality
- Education/health
- Quality of life
- Downtown revitalization
- Government and Infrastructure
- Environmental
- Public Safety
- Housing
- Neighborhood Vitality
- Diversity Involvement

The committee identified specific issues, concerns, strengths, weaknesses, trends, opportunities, and threats expected to affect future Ottumwa services, policies, finances or operations.

Goals/Issues/Strategies

On November 20, work groups identified the following goals, issues/problems/concerns/opportunities, and preferred strategies for implementation for each category/theme, as follows:

Economic development/vitality

Goals:

Promote retention and expansion of existing businesses
Business attraction
Create positive image of Ottumwa – emphasize strengths
Foster entrepreneurship

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Transportation hub – airport, railroad, intersection of two major highways
Geographic location – centrally located to St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Minneapolis and Des Moines
Indian Hills Community College
ORHC
Outdoor recreational opportunities – parks, trails, hunting, fishing
Historic homes
Bridge View Center
Access to skilled workforce
Low cost of living
Limited housing and infrastructure
Weak self-image
Growing skilled workforce

Preferred Strategies:

Communication and branding
Success stories in newspaper and radio
Develop community-unified website with City, Chamber of Commerce, OEDC, etc.
Website marketing - positive
Manufacturers consortium
Coordinate with IHCC
Develop referral incentives
Market state financial incentives
Control legislative mandates
Market to former residents
Develop a small business program

Education/Health

Goals:

Stronger business/education/community connections for workforce development

Attract more health professionals

Increase specialized health care facilities to meet regional needs (example – heart catheter lab)

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Stronger business/education/community connections for workforce development

High drop-out rate

Increased drop-out rate in ethnic groups (new to community)

Multi-generational poverty

High number of at-risk students

Skilled/willing workforce shortage

Job Corps (opportunity)

Indian Hills Community College

Willing employers

Attract more health professionals

Lack of cultural entertainment to attract more health care professionals

Lack of spousal opportunities

Housing

Taxes

High poverty area

Bridgeview – improve cultural offerings

Quality of living

Job commute

Specialized health care facilities

Funding

Staffing

High need

Available land

Preferred Strategies:

Stronger business/education/community connections for workforce development

Implement early college academies to address workforce development

Attract more health professionals

Seek assistance from state and federal agencies to provide financial incentives to locate in economically distressed (rural) communities

Create a community-wide lobbying group – unified in requests to state and federal agencies

Specialized health care facilities

Develop committee to work on identifying/assessing specialized needs, fundraising, organization, recruitment

Quality of Life

Goals:

Unified sense of community

Create social and recreational opportunities for all people

Revitalize downtown

Provide quality health care

Promote economic development

Improve Ottumwa's image

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Unified Sense of Community

North vs. South/East vs. West

Youth involvement

Balanced opportunities for all

Recreation

Need for additional recreational facilities/opportunities

Senior citizen opportunities

Attracting developers

Low income housing

Health Care

Retaining doctors and professionals

Nursing homes

Staff experience

Downtown revitalization

Encourage business owners to reinvest

Buy local

Improve parking

Ottumwa's Image

Riverfront

Preferred Strategies:

Unified Sense of Community

Hold large recreational tournaments
Provide interactional programs for all ages
Establish neighborhood groups

Recreation

Establish a multi-purpose building for recreation center/new YMCA – develop partnerships, fundraising
Volunteer involvement/reimbursements

Health Care

Improve quality of life to retain staff
Create multi-use hospital facility
Establish “Ronald McDonald” type hospice/partnerships

Downtown

Survey community to get feedback
Encourage niche businesses
Establish partnerships with large corporations
Centralize recreational opportunities and make them a destination: shopping, entertainment, dining, music, theater, arts, culture

Ottumwa’s Image

Promote riverfront development/opportunities
Promotion/marketing – make Ottumwa shine
Use successful cities as models
‘Green’ initiatives
Adopt-a-Highway program
Maintain housing, businesses, neighborhoods

Downtown Revitalization

Goals:

Improve the visual landscape of Ottumwa’s business districts
Develop Ottumwa’s riverfronts

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Safety
Funding
Landlords
Apathy

Lighting
Informational signage
Inconsistency
Trains – platform
Market St. parking lot
Skateboard Park
Electrical sub-station
Flower planting
Main Street affiliation
Amtrak – late trains
Concerned citizens
Events/activities
Period lighting
Trash receptacles
Location – regional hub
Trail system
Jefferson Street blue lights
BVC
Beach
Small boutique businesses
Downtown housing
Economy River floods
Condition of buildings

Preferred Strategies:

Phase I – Establish public/private partnerships: City, private businesses, IHCC, OPI, ISU Extension, Chamber of Commerce, Wapello County Trails Council, Main Street, Arts Council, Historical Society, Preservation Commission, Burlington Northern, Water Works
Establish design standards – consistent signage, building facades, flowers, lighting
Establish “one-stop shop” for new business start-ups (housing ordinances)
Develop downtown housing
Traffic pattern – two-way traffic
Rear façade improvements
Informational signage
Trail heads
Public art
Hotel-motel tax as funding source

Government and Infrastructure

Goals:

Transportation/Streets/Bridges

Maintain and promote growth
Improve streets and transportation facilities
Prepare for expansion

Public Utilities

Assure that systems can meet capacity
Assure that systems can meet environmental quality demands

Public Buildings and Facilities

Create and improve the quality of public buildings in the most economical way

Equipment

Maintain and upgrade in the most cost-effective manner

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Transportation/Streets/Bridges

Years of deferred maintenance
Road Use Tax funding
Age of infrastructure
Signage/promotion
Capitalize on 4-lane highway and regional airport
Railroads including Amtrak

Public Utilities

Age of utilities
Funding of mandated requirements
Cooperation between City and Water/Hydro
Potential for growth
Shrinking tax base
Available funding from state and federal governments
Having plans in place

Public Buildings and Facilities

Maintenance and efficiency
Retrofit and upgrade
Think Green
Promote historical significance

Equipment

Realistic replacement strategy
Predictive and reliable maintenance plan
Green – hybrid autos
Co-generation

Preferred Strategies:

Transportation/Streets/Bridges

Establish pride of ownership at all entrances to the city
Increase tax base
Use of innovative sources of funding
Innovative procedures and equipment for reconstruction
Communicate progress to community

Public Utilities

Continue to seek federal funding for sewer separation
Continue use of coalitions to address mandates
Improve cooperation with other government entities and private industry
Increase tax base

Public Buildings and Facilities

Retrofit and upgrade to assure maintenance and efficiency of buildings and facilities
Investigate cost savings through use of high efficient HVAC, lighting and other techniques (think “green”)
Implement behavioral approach to saving energy
Signage and appearance
Seek funding for historical recognition

Equipment

Develop realistic replacement strategy
Develop predictive and reliable maintenance plan
Increase efficiency when replacing equipment
Apply new technology when and where available

Environmental

Goals:

Reduce waste/increase recycling
Reduce carbon dioxide emissions
Energy conservation
Reduce city costs
Tap into renewable energy initiatives

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Reduce waste/increase recycling

Landfill running out of space

Public and schools (including IHCC) not recycling to potential

Reduce carbon dioxide emissions

Community open burning

Tree planting

How do we measure/quantify reduction issues?

Energy conservation

Rising energy costs

Homes and businesses not energy efficient

Tap into renewable energy initiatives

Find cost effective alternative energy sources

Funding sources

Preferred Strategies:

Reduce waste/increase recycling

Education (GOTV, students, PSA's, media attachments, etc.)

Develop ordinances to require recycling by all political subdivisions (Towers, IHCC, schools)

Sell waste – for example, palletize to use as alternative fuel

Reduce carbon dioxide emissions

Education (GOTV, students, PSA's, media attachments, etc.)

Ordinance to ban open burning

Promote public transportation (work with employers to offer bus passes as company benefits, promote car/van pooling)

Increase/promote downtown residency

Tree planting program

Energy conservation

Education (GOTV, students, PSA's, media attachments, etc.)

City to be pro-active on new energy-saving devices/products

Evaluate energy efficiency/waste of public lighting (Jefferson bridge, tennis/basketball courts, baseball fields, Bridgeview parking lights)

Tap into renewable energy initiatives

City to research cost effective alternative energy sources

City to research funding sources for alternative energy initiatives

Economic development – target “green” jobs

Exploit Ottumwa's wind capabilities

Public Safety

Goals:

Maintain drug task force
Secure additional/alternative sources of funding

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Substantial reductions in federal funding for drug task force
Under-funded public safety initiatives

Preferred Strategies:

Utilize local option sales tax for public safety funding at expiration of current initiatives
Increase tax base

Housing

Goals:

Affordable housing - \$120,000 – 175,000 range
Quality downtown rental housing
Preserve Ottumwa's existing housing stock

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Available land
Cost of ownership
Taxes
Subdivision development
Cost/financing of development
Infrastructure
Job Corps employees
Loss of economic development to other communities
Funding and attracting developer

Preferred Strategies:

Public/private partnerships
Leadership
Use of Tax Increment Financing
Use of targeted tax abatement
Park land
Town homes/condos

Housing rehabilitation program
Improve downtown accessibility with two-way traffic to enhance housing

Neighborhood Vitality

Goals:

Pride of ownership
Places to meet and play
Tidy yards/clean neighborhoods/curb appeal
Houses maintained
Graffiti eliminated
Ability to get to know neighbors
Livability
Code enforcement

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Pride of ownership

Absentee landlords
Lack of funds to maintain property
Large amount of older housing stock

Tidy yards/clean neighborhoods/curb appeal

Unpainted houses
Overgrown yards
Vacant lots
Junk and trash in yards

Places to meet and play

Few neighborhood parks
Few neighborhood meeting areas

Code enforcement

Need better codes
Need more enforcement officers

Preferred Strategies:

Pride of ownership

Develop Neighborhood Beautification awards
Use Neighborhood Watch
Education/meetings

Places to meet and play

Use schools/churches as neighborhood meeting places
Turn vacant lots into parks

Tidy yards/clean neighborhoods/curb appeal

Use landscaping/streetscaping
Improve nuisance codes

Maintain houses

Develop Paint-a-Thon program
Develop groups of volunteers to make repairs
Encourage donations for supplies

Graffiti Elimination

Use volunteers – make Ottumwa shine
Use adjudicated youth
Education

Get to Know Neighbors

Neighborhood Watch

Code enforcement

Update codes to address present day issues
Community Service Officer to enforce codes

Diversity Involvement

Goals:

Increase appreciation for differences
Eradicating prejudice
Promoting tolerance and acceptance
Improving communication among subgroups

- Racial
- Cultural
- Socio-economic status
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Religion

Issues/Problems/Concerns/Opportunities:

Preferred Strategies:

Billboards to promote information

Websites in multiple languages with important information
Promote events at Bridge View Center aimed at diverse crowds
Study circles
Use schools to promote communication
Provide opportunities for diverse groups to meet and socialize, such as sports and recreational facilities
Write “positive” letters for opinion page in newspaper
Hire bilingual and culturally competent persons to work in public services
Public service volunteer projects
Provide tax exemptions to promote diversity

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held on Thursday December 11, 2008, from 6:00 – 9:00 PM at the Bridge View Center.

Jeff Schott
Institute of Public Affairs
November 25, 2008