

2013

Utica Strategic Plan

Resolution #2013-05

Adopted April 1, 2013



JEO CONSULTING GROUP INC

Introduction

As a comprehensive plan prepares a community for future growth and development; a community's strategic plan helps identify and prioritize the specific projects that will assist the Village to reach its ultimate destination. These projects do not happen overnight, nor are they accomplished by one person. Careful planning and consideration should be given to each. The Village should rely on staff, appointed officials, elected officials, community groups, and other organizations to help achieve these identified projects planned for the benefit of the entire community. The projects may include those necessary to maintain status quo, while others will be necessary or desired for continued community growth. The Utica Strategic Plan will identify projects within the community and expand upon the top four that were selected during the strategic planning workshop. The top four projects or goals of the community will include a list individual concerns, objectives, actions, timelines, responsible groups/agencies, potential resources, and measurable outputs for each goal.

The Utica Strategic Planning Process began with Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDD) identifying a number of potential projects within and around the Village of Utica. These projects, along with a brief description, were then included in a community wide survey to solicit community input of Utica residents.

The Community Surveys were collected and the results tallied by SENDD. The purpose of the survey was to 1) generate awareness of the many projects that the Village of Utica has on their plate and are in need of prioritization; 2) identify any other project that might be needed in Utica; and 3) to begin the project prioritization process.

On October 3, 2012 members of the Utica Village Board, Village staff, SENDD, and concerned members of the community held a strategic planning workshop to discuss and prioritize various projects in and around Utica. There were 47 stakeholders participating in the workshop. JEO Consulting Group, Inc. facilitated the workshop which followed an agenda geared to inform, educate and build consensus of the group. The group reviewed the results of the Community Survey as presented by SENDD staff and discussed additional identified projects. The goal of the strategic planning workshop was to establish consensus on civic betterment initiatives so the Village could formulate strategies and target local resources (both human and financial) to accomplish the goals. Another goal was to engage the community with committees to develop the top priorities in greater detail. This plan will be reviewed and referenced for ongoing consistency in future planning initiatives.

Based upon the workshop discussion, the top five (5) projects identified were:

- Civic Pride
- Noise from the Trains
- Business Development
- Potable Water
- City Administrator (Note: this project was dropped as a priority at the second workshop due to lack of consensus)

Those present were voluntarily divided into committees to discuss the topic in greater detail and provide the second workshop with greater definition of the concern, possible solutions, and a suggested priority. The committees then submitted their results and discussed their work at the second workshop on November 7, 2012.

The next step of the workshop prioritization process included a decision matrix assignment. Two judgments were necessary to complete the decision matrix: 1) the strategic issue's importance to the community; and, 2) how well Utica is doing to address that issue. A ranking of Excellent indicates that the community is doing an excellent job at addressing that particular strategic issue, while a vital ranking illustrates that particular strategic issue's importance to the community. The result of the Strategic Issues and Priority Setting Matrix exercise is summarized below and illustrated on the next page.

Special attention should be given to those projects that are "important," "very important," or "vital" to the Village of Utica. Issues in which the Village was given credit as doing a "very good job" with should be continued, while those ranking very important - but falling behind in performance - should be studied consistent with their overall importance to the community.

Based upon the Strategic Issues and Priority Setting Matrix and the identified timeframes, the Utica Strategic Planning Group developed the following Community Action Plan to strengthen the Utica community and improve the quality of life for the citizens of the Village. This Plan will empower Utica residents and businesses to look towards the future with confidence and resolve and boldly commit to undertaking the identified issues.

The final step in the prioritization process was to divide the strategic issues into short-term (defined as 1 - 3 years), mid-term (defined as 4 - 6 years), long-term (defined as 7 - 10+ years) and ongoing project development timeframes. The timeframe for priority projects include:

Short-Term

- Noise Reduction
- Civic Pride
- Water

Mid-Term

- Civic Pride

Long Term

- City Administrator

Ongoing

- Business Development

Utica, Nebraska Decision Matrix

Community Performance

Excellent					
Very Good					
Average					D
Below Average			A and E	B and C	
Poor					
	Of Little Importance	Of Some Importance	Important	Very Important	Vital

Community Importance

<p>Project Code <u>Strategic Issue</u></p> <p>A. <u>Noise</u></p> <p>C. <u>Business Development</u></p> <p>E. <u>City Administrator</u></p>	<p>Project Code <u>Strategic Issue</u></p> <p>B. <u>Civic Pride</u></p> <p>D. <u>Water</u></p> <p>F. _____</p>
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The City Administrator strategic issue was considered “Important” and was placed in the long-term project development timeframe. The Village Board members felt that in an era of tight municipal budgets limited local resources should be dedicated toward specific projects which will assist the Village in reaching its destination as it grows into a modern municipality. This item lacked consensus among the participants and should be reconsidered when the Village updates its Strategic plan in the future, or as funding permits.

For this reason, the Utica Community Action Plan has focused in on the four (4) priority goals of the Village. The plan lists individual concerns/needs, objectives, actions, timelines, responsible groups/agencies, potential resources, and measurable outputs for each goal. Although the following goals are numbered, it is realized that such goals may take on different forms, be consolidated with other goals/projects or be re-prioritized based upon unforeseen issues or opportunities. In such cases, this strategic plan shall be re-examined and adopted to provide proper guidance. At a minimum, the Village should conduct an annual review of the adopted Utica Strategic Plan to assure all goals, objectives and actions are kept current.

Goal #1: Reduce the noise-effects of ambient noise and contribution to community noise levels in the Village of Utica.

Concerns/Issues

- Need to manage noise within the community to attract new businesses
- Noise heard everywhere within the community
- Train noise a major concern
- Fire whistle and other point sources area also a concern

Objective #1: Identify the sources of ambient noises within the Village of Utica.

- Action Step #1:* Establish a Utica Noise Abatement and Control Committee.
- Action Step #2:* Identify the major contributors to noise pollution within the community.
- Action Step #3:* Track the frequency of these noise sources.
- Action Step #4:* Perform noise assessment to quantify the decibel levels of these noise sources.
- Action Step #5:* Compare the results to acceptable noise levels, per source, as outlined in the Noise Control Act of 1972, as amended by the Quiet Communities Act of 1978 and 24 CFR Part 51 Subpart B "Noise Abatement and Control."
- Action Step #6:* Record any violations to these standards

Timeline: 2013.

Objective #2: Identify strategies to reduce the ambient noise levels within the Village of Utica.

- Action Step #1:* Meet with officials of those businesses or agencies that contribute to community noise levels.
- Action Step #2:* Discuss mitigation options for noise abatement and control.
- Action Step #3:* Study the feasibility of installing structural and non-structural measures to reduce the noise effects of ambient noise and contribution to community noise levels within the community.
- Action Step #4:* Consider the effectiveness of sound walls adjacent to point sources, railroad quiet zones, closure of railroad crossings, proper landscaping, concentrating the time and duration of noise releases, and revisiting the Fire Department/Rescue Squad policy as it relates to sounding the Fire Whistle.
- Action Step #5:* Calculate the reduction in ambient noise levels for each mitigation measure.

Timeline: 2013.

Objective #3: Determine the need for public intervention in noise abatement.

- Action Step #1:* Consider the need for public intervention to reduce the noise-effects of ambient noise.
- Action Step #2:* Public intervention can include legal, financial, physical, and policy change measures. For example, the Village can enact more stringent noise ordinances, close lesser used railroad crossings, cost-share structural and non-structural noise abatement/control improvements, and/or sound the Fire Whistle during emergency situations only.

Action Step #3: Determine if intervention is required by state and/or federal regulatory agencies. Contact those agencies, as needed.

Timeline: 2013.

Objective #4: Implement noise abatement and control measures that will reduce the noise-effects of ambient noise.

Action Step #1: Implement measures that will effectively reduce ambient noise levels within the community.

Action Step #2: Perform ongoing noise assessments to quantify the overall effectiveness of noise abatement and control measures.

Action Step #3: Revise the Village's zoning ordinance/subdivision regulations to ensure that future development will not significantly contribute to the community's ambient noise levels.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Group/Agency

Utica Village Board, Utica Planning Commission, Utica Businesses, residents, Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, Nebraska Department of Roads, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

Potential Resources

Utica General Fund, Street Fund, Municipal Revenue Bonds, General Obligation Bonds, ReTree Nebraska Program, Local Option Sales Tax, Special Assessments, Tax increment Financing, Comprehensive Public Safety Program for Highway-Rail Grade Crossing, Railroad Transportation Safety District, and U.S.D.A. Rural Development.

Measurable Outputs

There are few environmental hazards as pervasive as noise pollution. Noise pollution is often defined as excessive, displeasing human, animal, or machine created environmental noise that disrupts the activity or balance of human or animal life. The source of most noise in urbanized areas is construction and transportation systems, including motor vehicle noise, aircraft noise, and rail noise. Poor urban planning may give rise to noise pollution, since side-by-side industrial and residential buildings can result in noise pollution in the residential areas. Such is the case of the legacy patterns of development in Utica, Nebraska.

But in addition to the environmental nuisance cause by noise pollution, there are studies that link noise pollution to physical health. According to the World Health Organization, high noise levels can contribute to cardiovascular effects in humans, a rise in blood pressure, and an increase in stress and vasoconstriction, and an increased incidence of coronary artery disease. In animals, noise can increase the risk of death by altering predator or prey detection and avoidance, interfere with reproduction and navigation, and contribute to permanent hearing loss.

In 1972, the United States Congress enacted the Noise Pollution and Abatement Act, better known as the Noise Control Act, to regulate noise pollution for the purpose of protecting public health, safety and ease. The Act led to the creation of the Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) to oversee implementation, as well as function as a division of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Noise Control Act is codified as 42 U.S.C. Sections. 4901 to 4918.

Unlike other types of environmental issues such as air and water pollution, noise or sound is transient or short-lived. Therefore, once you stop generating sound, the noise pollution problem is solved. The main objective behind noise pollution solutions is to absorb, contain and cancel the source of noise.

To make progress towards this end however, the Village must identify the source and severity of this noise pollution, and then determine whether it has the legal or financial means in order to affect this change.

According to the Noise Citizen Action Committee, the main noise pollution sources in Utica are:

- Truck traffic,
- Railroad operations,
- Industrial operations (point sources), and
- Fire Whistle.

Luckily for the Village, these sources are man-made, and man-made noise pollution can be controlled by reducing noise at source. For example, making a change in design and operation of machines, vibration control, by using sound absorbing materials, can reduce noise pollution. Likewise, noise pollution can also be reduced by prescribing noise limits for vehicular traffic, railroads, and planning industrial establishments to make them noise proof.

The Village should consider the following abatement measure to minimize the effects of noise pollution:

1. Proper community planning. Where possible, the Village should locate residential and other noise-sensitive developments as far away from noise source as possible.
2. Proper landscaping. Coniferous trees like Spruce, Pine and Fir can be planted around noise sources to provide some absorption of sound.
3. Sound walls. These walls have proven effective in reducing the sound caused by vehicular traffic and point sources.
4. Local Ordinances. Cities throughout the nation have enacted stringent ordinances for noise abatement and control.
5. Local Policies. The Village should consider sounding the Fire Whistle during emergency situations only.
6. Closing of Railroad Crossings. Although less convenient, reducing the number of railroad crossings will reduce the number of times trains must blow their whistle as they pass through the community.
7. Install quiet zones at railroad crossings. A quiet zone is a section of a rail line that contains one or more consecutive public crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded. The infrastructure for a quiet zone is very costly to install, therefore, the Village should consider undertaking a feasibility study prior to implementation. This mitigation may also require a separated grade crossing for Nebraska State Highway Link 80 F to be effective.
8. Work with local industry to reduce noise operation. Industries may be willing to relocate, soundproof facilities, or install sound walls to minimize noise generation.

Goal #2: *Improve the civic pride within the Village of Utica.*

Concerns/Issues

- Improve communication among residents of Utica
- Improve the appearance of community parks
- Spruce up the downtown area
- Community clean-up day
- Highway signage

Objective #1: *Improve communication among the residents of Utica, Nebraska.*

- Action Step #1:* Gauge public interest and support for a community newsletter.
- Action Step #2:* Create a regular newsletter that details upcoming civic events and community news.
- Action Step #3:* Identify individuals and organizations that are willing to help assemble a monthly or quarterly newsletter, including but not limited to layout, writing articles, photography, etc.
- Action Step #4:* Consider selling advertisement space to offset the cost of the production.
- Action Step #5:* Identify locations throughout the community where newsletters could be made available to the general public.
- Action Step #6:* Prepare and distribute the newsletter.
- Action Step #7:* Post newsletter on the community's website.
- Action Step #8:* Periodically survey local readership to determine the newsletter's effectiveness.
- Action Step #9:* Notify the public about the Village's website.
- Action Step #10:* Utilize the Village's existing website to display times/dates of upcoming events and community news.
- Action Step #11:* Encourage the webmaster to regularly update the website and standardize the process for posting civic events and community news.
- Action Step #12:* Encourage residents/organizations to post civic information, including, but not limited to, times/dates of upcoming events and community news.
- Action Step #13:* Ensure accurate and timely information is posted on the website.

Timeline: 2013 - 2014.

Objective #2: *Improve the appearance of community parks.*

- Action Step #1:* Utilize the Utica Park and Recreational Board.
- Action Step #2:* Evaluate the existing conditions of all municipal parks.
- Action Step #3:* Determine the park's overall strengths and weaknesses.
- Action Step #4:* Identify potential opportunities and threats at each park.
- Action Step #5:* Hold a town hall meeting to discuss how residents use the municipal park system.
- Action Step #6:* Identify park improvements that will encourage maximum usage for civic, social and family, and general affairs.
- Action Step #7:* Prepare cost estimates for long-term park improvements.
- Action Step #8:* Identify the appropriate public agencies and/or civic organizations that will be responsible for undertaking park improvements.
- Action Step #9:* Consider the most appropriate resource (human and financial) to purchase or make improvements as the park.

- Action Step #10:* Conduct local fund-raising events.
- Action Step #11:* Pursue public/private monies to offset the park improvements.
- Action Step #12:* Implement park projects demanded by local residents.
- Action Step #13:* Continue to monitor park improvements which encourage activities where parents can be participants with their children.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #3: Improve the appearance and physical condition of the Utica Downtown Area.

- Action Step #1:* Establish a Utica Downtown Association and Selection Committee to coordinate the downtown revitalization project.
- Action Step #2:* Utilize the Planning Commission to review and inspect the physical condition and capacity of the downtown area, including, but not limited to, streets, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, grade changes, parking, surface drainage and underground utilities and refer the finding to the Village Engineer.
- Action Step #3:* Meet with business-owners to evaluate the future needs of the downtown area, including parking, public infrastructure, patron and delivery access, streetscaping, storefront façade improvements and ornamental street lighting.
- Action Step #4:* Identify potential programs/measures to incentivize downtown property-owners to renovate their building façades.
- Action Step #5:* Hold a working conference with downtown stakeholders to create a vision for the redevelopment of the downtown area. Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the downtown.
- Action Step #6:* Create concepts to redevelop the Highway 34/ Centennial Avenue downtown entrance.
- Action Step #7:* Consider hanging banners on the Utica Sign along Highway 34 and along Centennial Avenue.
- Action Step #8:* Develop opinion of costs for long-term capital improvements.
- Action Step #9:* Hold a town hall meeting to review the results of the Downtown study with Utica residents and business-owners.
- Action Step #10:* Evaluate downtown stakeholder’s willingness and financial capacity to support implementation of the Downtown study.
- Action Step #11:* Meet with the Village’s fiscal agent to determine the bonding debt capacity of community.
- Action Step #12:* Identify local, regional, state and federal resources for downtown improvements.
- Action Step #13:* Maximize the impact of downtown revitalization efforts by leveraging local monies with “outside” resources.
- Action Step #14:* Package all necessary financial resources.
- Action Step #15:* Enter into a service agreement with the Village Engineer to prepare plans and specifications for the Downtown Redevelopment Project.
- Action Step #16:* Implement downtown improvements.

Timeline: 2014- - 2017.

Objective #4: Improve the physical appearance of the community.

- Action Step #1:* Hold a town hall meeting to discuss the long-term community clean-up goals of the Village.
- Action Step #2:* Conduct a physical inventory of all public and private property within the community.
- Action Step #3:* Request a voluntary participation of property-owners to improve substandard lots.
- Action Step #4:* Send a notification letter requesting the voluntary assistance of property-owners in improving substandard lots. Request feedback.
- Action Step #5:* Identify properties which are substandard or pose an immediate public health or safety concern to local residents.
- Action Step #6:* Discuss the needs (both human and financial) of those owners with substandard properties.
- Action Step #7:* Identify individuals/civic organizations that are willing to donate time, labor and equipment to assist willing property-owners in the clean-up process.
- Action Step #8:* Continue the annual Utica Community Clean-up Day.
- Action Step #9:* Encourage property-owners to discard unwanted appliances, inoperable automobiles, machinery, hazardous materials and unsightly debris from their properties. Note: Seek cooperation and obtain permission from property owners before commencing.
- Action Step #10:* Upgrade maintenance on all Village property.
- Action Step #11:* Consider legal options available to the Utica Village Board to deal with non-responsive property-owners.
- Action Step #12:* Consult the Village Attorney as to possible enforcement of Nebraska Nuisance Statutes.
- Action Step #13:* Utilize the court system to gain compliance from homeowners to upgrade substandard properties.
- Action Step #14:* Establish an owner-occupied single family housing rehabilitation program and provide assistance to those eligible owners that keep their property free and clear of debris for the duration of the compliance period.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #5: Install Wayfinding signage to direct highway traffic/tourist to civic amenities and the Village of Utica.

- Action Step #1:* Develop a map showing location of various civic amenities and their relationship to one another.
- Action Step #2:* Contact the Nebraska Department of Roads and Seward County Highway Superintendent to obtain necessary permits to install Wayfinding signage along these routes.
- Action Step #3:* Install Wayfinding signs along U.S. Highway 34/ Centennial Avenue to educate visitors/travelers about the various goods and services found in Utica.

Timeline: 2014.

Objective #6: Improve the quality and appearance of the existing housing stock in Utica.

- Action Step #1:* Assess the need for housing rehabilitation within the Village of Utica.
- Action Step #2:* Conduct a Village-wide community attitude survey, soliciting information on individual housing conditions.
- Action Step #3:* Conduct a physical survey of existing housing conditions.
- Action Step #4:* Conduct a town hall meeting to gather public input on the need for a housing rehabilitation program.
- Action Step #5:* "Pre-market" a proposed Utica Housing Rehabilitation Program by accepting applications for housing rehabilitation assistance.
- Action Step #6:* Establish long-term community housing rehabilitation objectives.
- Action Step #7:* Formulate and officially adopt guidelines which will govern the fair and efficacious implementation of Utica Housing Rehabilitation Program. Include specific language that addresses the responsibilities of the homeowner during the compliance period.
- Action Step #8:* Identify local, regional, state and federal resources available for housing rehabilitation activities.
- Action Step #9:* Package and secure funding for housing rehabilitation activities.
- Action Step #10:* Structure resources to accommodate pay back potential of low- and moderate-income homeowners.
- Action Step #11:* Solicit participation from Utica homeowners for housing rehabilitation activities.
- Action Step #12:* Advertise the Utica Housing Rehabilitation Program.
- Action Step #13:* Conduct a Town Hall meeting to discuss eligibility requirements for participation in the Program.
- Action Step #14:* Accept applications from eligible homeowners; verify eligibility.
- Action Step #15:* Utilize SENDD to conduct Housing Quality Inspection.
- Action Step #16:* Utilize SENDD to inspect structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and energy efficiency of housing units.
- Action Step #17:* Utilize SENDD to determine housing deficiencies, utilizing Minimum Housing Quality Standards.
- Action Step #18:* Qualify unsafe conditions that exist on the property (e.g., inoperable automobiles, appliances, machinery, and unsightly debris). Inspect to ensure that conditions are alleviated prior to proceeding with work write-ups.
- Action Step #19:* Prepare plans and specifications (work write-ups) for housing repairs and advertise for housing contractors.
- Action Step #20:* Provide financial assistance to those homeowners who could not otherwise afford a conventional home improvement loan.
- Action Step #21:* Inspect rehabilitation work/property for compliance with specifications.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Group/Agency

Utica Village Board, Village Attorney, resident, business-owners, Seward County Economic Development, Southeast Nebraska Development, Blue Valley Community Action Agency, Seward County Highway Superintendent, Nebraska Department of Roads, Village Engineer, Civic Organizations, Centennial Public Schools.

Potential Resources

Local funds, private donations, Local Option Sales Tax, Tax Increment Financing, Special Assessment Districts, Private Foundations, Blue Valley Community Action Agency, Community Development Assistance Act, Community Development Block Grant – Downtown Revitalization Program, Community Development Block Grant – Housing Rehabilitation Program, Nebraska Energy Office – Dollars and Energy Savings Program, Nebraska Energy Office – Weatherization Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund, USDA Rural Development Programs – Community Facilities Programs, USDA Rural Development, Federal Home Loan Bank Joint Opportunities for Building Successes (JOBS) Program.

Measurable Outputs

The Village of Utica believes that civic pride is instrumental in portraying a positive "first impression" that Utica is an inviting place to visit, work, invest and live. Towards this end, the Village has identified six measures in an attempt to improve civic pride within the community. A discussion of these measures, each providing a means to attain an objective, follows.

- *Improve Civic Communication*

Communication is the first and most important ingredient in creating unity and strength in a well-rounded, safe and empowered community. Studies show that the free flow of local information creates a civic space that fosters social interaction which provides valuable information for community homes, schools and businesses.

The Village of Utica has expressed interest in increasing the public's awareness and understanding of civic affairs, and has selected the following means in which to deliver the information to local residents: a community newsletter and the community website.

When there's increased public awareness and understanding of community affairs, citizens are more likely to get involved, responsibilities are decentralized and the special talents and interests of contributing individuals/organizations are engaged. In addition, a well-informed public promotes:

- a greater understanding of other ideas and culture;
- the free flow of accurate information; reducing the negative impacts of civic rumors.
- trust among elected officials, community leaders and civic organizations.
- a greater understanding of our community's shared goals and vision;
- a readily available source of information on a community's wants and needs;
- consensus and understanding between residents and civic polices;
- well-publicized town hall meetings and local events;
- information on how to participate in community events and volunteer activities;
- access to findings and results of civic meetings in the community;
- frequent "word-of-mouth" communication; and
- residents communicating needs to local government.

Preparing a monthly newsletter could provide valuable experience to Centennial Public School students interested in pursuing a career in journalism, business, English, marketing, political science or writing. The newsletter can be simple, or sophisticated (multiple pages, colored, pictures, etc.), but should be consistent (monthly or quarterly). Direct mailing (the cost of which can be offset by selling advertising space to local businesses, or via private donations) or placing copies at strategic locations throughout the community, most frequented by local residents (restaurant, post office, Village Clerk's office, grocery store, churches), are effective means in which to get the newsletter out to the general public.

Likewise, the Utica community website can provide vital, updated information to the public at a reasonable cost. The Webmaster must make the process of gathering civic information simple so residents can easily update the information with accurate dates, times and locations. This can be done by simply providing a telephone number, address, and standardizing the information requested by making it a fillable webpage.

- *Improve the Appearance of Community Parks*

It is clear that a high quality of life, in general, tops the list of attributes communities must strive for, in their efforts to both survive and prosper. The availability of quality housing, education and commerce must be in place to keep current residents from relocating, and to entice new families into a community. Parks and recreational amenities are no less important in satisfying a stable and growing population.

In an era where municipal budgets leave little room for non-essential services/facilities/ programs, it is vital that local residents outline their recreational priorities to provide direct guidance to local decision- makers. These efforts will ensure that limited local resources are supporting only those programs/ amenities that are demanded by residents.

The Utica Parks and Recreation Board or a professional planning firm can assist the Village in soliciting public input on strengths and weaknesses of the local park system, prioritization the recommended improvements (i.e., playground equipment, picnic shelters, picnic tables, barbeque grills, open space, tennis/basketball courts, etc.), park layout, and cost estimates. This professional consultation will ensure that the outdoor recreational interests of today's generations are met, so that the park will provide long-term service to the community.

- *Improve the Physical Appearance of the Downtown Area*

Utica residents recognize that the downtown area is the literal and symbolic heart of the community, and as such, it enjoys the distinction of being the center of the public arena. It is the place that defines the larger community - culturally, economically and politically. The physical setting of the downtown reveals the values and underpinnings of the local society (the opportunities and constraints therein) and serves as a measure of civic health and vitality.

Despite its importance - and high visibility – portions of the Utica downtown area need to be improved. Vacant buildings, broken sidewalks, damaged curbing, inadequate street illumination and industrial and train noise are perpetual obstacles for local businesses, visitors and patrons of the downtown area. Not only do these conditions pose a real safety concern – *especially for seniors and persons with physical mobility issues* – but they impair sound community growth and constitute an economic liability for the Village, in terms of maintenance and funding of public infrastructure repairs. It also precludes economic growth opportunities for the residents of the community.

It is through the implementation of downtown revitalization efforts that residents can expect to witness economic and civic progress. A thriving downtown builds a positive self-image for the community; creates job opportunities; attracts new industry and strengthens service and retail job markets; symbolizes a community's confidence, vitality and long-term viability; saves tax dollars; stabilizes and improves the area's tax base; protects the investments already made in downtown infrastructure, while attracting new private investments; preserves the community's historic resources; and enables property-owners to maintain commercial buildings and preserve an critical component of the community.

The Village of Utica should consider a wide array of initiative aimed at improving the physical appearance and long-term viability of the downtown area. Such activities should include:

- Reconstruction of downtown infrastructure systems (sidewalks, landscaping, ornamental lighting, etc.).
- Create a Marketing Plan that will result in the downtown becoming a visitor's destination.
- Foster niches markets that will lead to lasting economic activity.
- Recruit businesses which are consistent with the Downtown Marketing Plan
- Integrate trail/pedestrian way development into the overall downtown revitalization plan.
- Establish a loan pool to incentivize local business-owners to improve the physical condition, appearance and energy-efficiency of their downtown buildings.
- Invest in aesthetic improvements along the main entrances off of U.S. Highway 34/ Centennial Avenue.; the "featured street" that ushers traffic from these highly travelled corridors. Such investments may include: banners, wayfinding signage, community sign, landscaping, lighting, etc.
- Sponsor civic events/programs within the downtown area. Such events/programs may include: street dances, cultural celebrations, performing arts, concerts series, soap box derbies, bed-races, etc. These events/programs not only promote economic activity, but they reestablish the downtown as the center of civic life, fostering a sense of celebration and exploration.

- *Community Appearance*

Community clean-up events, proper landscaping, voluntary participation and enforcement of available state statutes are appropriate methods to improve the overall appearance of the community.

The Village of Utica should conduct an inventory of all public and private property to identify sites which pose a public health and safety concern. Every effort should be made to encourage voluntary compliance with community clean-up goals, but should realize that there are legal means to gain compliance from negligent property-owners in the removal of junk cars, inoperable appliances, tires, hazardous materials, and dilapidated housing units.

- *Install Wayfinding Signage*

Wayfinding signs help visitors and residents orient themselves in and navigate through a community. They can be designed for either vehicular or pedestrian viewpoints. Wayfinding signage can include destination, facilities and amenity names or icons sometimes accompanied by directional arrows, placed on-route or at an important decision-making point.

These signs also include arrival signs which indicate to road users or pedestrians that a destination has been reached. Collectively, the presence of coordinated, logistically-placed Wayfinding signage demonstrates a concern for the welfare of visitors, reflects the hospitality of a region, and aids in the definition of place and community.

Community Wayfinding signage pertains specifically to signs that guide people to public-accessible areas such as recreational destinations, frequented government offices and commercial zones or neighborhood and districts. These sign may be utilized on private property for non-public access or public amenities should that entity choose to echo the community Wayfinding signage design. The Village's Wayfinding signage can enhance the visitor experience by improving ease of navigation around the community.

Visitors are likely to become more comfortable driving around an unfamiliar area when properly guided. When visitors can maneuver freely without the fear of getting lost they are more inclined to stay in the region longer and return to an area. Community Wayfinding signage also encourages visitors (and residents) to “discover” new sites and extend their stay.

- *Improve the quality and appearance of the local housing stock*
Utica's housing stock is its largest total physical investment. The Village's quality as a living environment is largely determined by the quality of its housing structures. Since most of the housing supply that will be present in the year 2020, is already standing today, conservation of the existing housing supply is very important to the vitality of the community. Consequently, the Village of Utica should consider establishing an owner-occupied, single family housing rehabilitation program. The investment of these resources will provide the financing to significantly improve living conditions of low and moderate-income homeowners of Utica; property-owners who could not otherwise afford a conventional home improvement loan. Strategically utilizing public/private resources will allow financial assistance to be provided to lower-income homeowners, at a rate which will accommodate their payback capacity. Proper drafting of Housing Rehabilitation Guidelines and enforcement of the program will incentivize these property-owners to keep their property clear of unwanted debris, inoperable appliances/machines/vehicles, furniture, and household waste.

Goal #3: Promote and encourage economic development within the Village of Utica.

Concerns/Issues

- Business recruitment and retention
- Storefront business space
- Types of Businesses Needed
- Downtown beautification

Objective #1: To encourage business transfer planning within existing businesses.

- Action Step #1:* Introduce local business-owners to the concept of business transfer planning (such as timetables, business valuation and talent recognition).
- Action Step #2:* Encourage local business-owners to register for, and attend the Business Transfer Seminars for southeast Nebraska, facilitated by the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC).
- Action Step #3:* Encourage local business owners to access the services of Seward County Economic Development Corporation to confidentially identify business transfer opportunities.
- Action Step #4:* Encourage local business owners to conduct an individual assessment of their current situation (when to retire, how to finance the transfer, etc.).
- Action Step #5:* Help business-owners create an Inner Circle of advisors (lawyers, financial planners, accountants, bankers and investors) to facilitate the business succession process.
- Action Step #6:* Educate young entrepreneurs about the investment opportunity of purchasing an existing business with an established market and client base.
- Action Step #7:* Coordinate local business-owners with young entrepreneurs to facilitate the business transfer process.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #2: To encourage patronization of local businesses.

- Action Step #1:* Inventory available businesses within the existing downtown area to gather information on products/services provided within the community.
- Action Step #2:* Utilize local media outlets to enlighten Utica residents as to the myriad of goods and services provided by local businesses.
- Action Step #3:* Foster a program that encourages residents to “Buy Utica First”.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Objective #3: Support small business development and entrepreneurial training.

- Action Step #1:* Survey the residents of Utica to determine community economic development leakages, patronage potential and interest in and concerns about starting a small business within the Village.
- Action Step #2:* Tabulate and analyze survey results.
- Action Step #3:* Consider the feasibility/possibility of addressing the concerns of potential small business concerns.

- Action Step #4:* Offer ongoing training and education to small business concerns/ entrepreneurs about accessing capital, preparing business plans, effectuate niche markets, expanding market share, foster economic clusters, or develop effective marketing strategies.
- Action Step #5:* Capitalize a small business revolving loan fund to provide seed monies for small and emerging businesses concerns.
- Action Step #6:* Consider the feasibility/interest in developing an incubator business location to help emerging growth companies survive and grow during the start-up period when they are most vulnerable.
- Action Step #7:* Seek the professional expertise of the Seward County Economic Development Corporation in fostering entrepreneurial training program.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Responsible Groups/Agencies

Utica residents, Centennial Public School System, Utica Business Owners, Area Financial Institutions, Seward County Economic Development Corporation, Southeast Nebraska Development District (SEND), Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP), Small Business Administration (SBA), USDA Rural Development, Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC), Nebraska Center for Entrepreneurship, Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), Nebraska Economic Development Corporation, and Federal Home Loan Bank – Joint Opportunities for Building Successes.

Potential Resources

Local Option Sales Tax, Centennial Public Schools, Seward Economic Development Corporation, Private monies, Southeast Nebraska Development District, GROW Nebraska™, Rural Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (REAP), Micro-enterprise loans, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – Economic Development Program, USDA Rural Development Programs, Small Business Administration, Nebraska Economic Development Corporation, Nebraska Business Development Center, Nebraska Center for Entrepreneurship, and Economic Development Programs.

Measurable Outputs

Community and government leaders across the country have come to the realization that they not only can, but also must initiate programs to enhance their local economy. Even with a booming economy and one of the lowest unemployment rates in modern history - on a statewide level, the long-term economic development goal of job creation and business retention still remains at the forefront for the Village of Utica.

The Village of Utica has identified the three proven measures aimed at promoting economic development within the community, specifically: 1. Business Succession Planning, 2. Entrepreneurial Development, and 3. Business Incubation. These objectives should be coordinates with Seward County Economic Development.

- *Business Succession Planning*
The first rule of economic development is keeping the business you already have within your community. Sustaining established family-owned businesses into the next generation is an important issue for rural Nebraska. Many businesses throughout Nebraska are family-owned, but statistics clearly show that few survive beyond the retirement of the current owner. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, only 30% of all family businesses succeed into the second generation, and of these, only 15% survive into the third generation. These alarming facts, combined with the realization that many new businesses fail within the first five years, demonstrate that losing established small businesses can severely impact economic stability.

No one plans to fail, they just fail to plan. Even though this old adage of yesteryear attests to the importance of thinking ahead, national statistics indicate that a significant number of small business owners are aging and do not have an exit strategy in place. For some, the thought of giving up ownership and control of a business they have built over many years of hard work is too difficult to contemplate. Others are under the misconception that someone will appear at the door ready, willing and able to offer a fair price for the company when they want and/or need to sell their business. There are still others who are forced into selling/transferring their family-owned business because of circumstances beyond their control (e.g., health issues, age, death, bankruptcy). In any one of these situation, it is clear that transition will come.

One common thread of any successful business transition plan is that it requires time - oftentimes as much as two decades. During this transition period, the existing small business-owner must plan their estate, identify a successor(s), and allow the new buyer time to learn the business, build the equity needed to secure the financing, and perhaps create new economic enterprises within the business. Without this advance time, heirs and business successor may be vulnerable to considerable estate taxes and management upheaval; further contributing to the failure rate of generational business transfer.

Business succession planning is important because it helps retain businesses that, by default, may have otherwise closed due to retirement, or possibly be sold and relocated to another community. According to business succession planning experts, the ramifications of a poorly planned sale of a business can be multi-faceted and detrimental. In the event the business transition is not well managed, it can fail due to change in ownership or leadership. Purchase arrangements can create a large tax burden for the buyer, seller, or both; and if done poorly, the impact on the entire community can be emotionally and economically catastrophic. National statistics show that once an existing business closes, it is very difficult to reopen.

- *Entrepreneurial Development*

Entrepreneurship is the starting point, the foundation and the backbone of economies at every level. In fact, the origins of most large companies can be traced, directly or indirectly, to one or more entrepreneurial founders.

Promoting entrepreneurial development however, is a relatively new and increasingly popular approach to economic development for rural communities. The approach has gained favor because it builds on the skills and talent already existing within the community.

Entrepreneurs are at the heart of the American economy because they drive innovation. Small businesses are established on the premise that they can do a better job of creating new products and services, change the competitiveness of the market, institute new and dynamic ways of doing business, reduce economic leakages within the local economy and connect the community to the larger global market. Creating value through innovation is a common theme that penetrates nearly every accepted definition of entrepreneurship.

The value of American entrepreneurship cannot be overstated. According to the Office of Advocacy, Small Business Administration entrepreneurial businesses:

- are typically owned and operated by individuals with higher education levels. Over two-third of all present-day college students intend to become entrepreneurs.
- represents 99.7% of all employers;
- employ half of all private sector employees;
- pay 44.3% of the total U.S. private payroll;
- generate 70% of net new jobs annually over the last decade;

- created more than 50% of non-farm private gross domestic product (GDP);
- produce 13 to 14 times more patents per employee than large patenting firms.
- are employers of 39% of high tech workers (such as scientists, engineers and computer workers);
- are 53% home-based and 3% franchises; and
- made up 97% of all identified exporters and produced 29% of known export value.

These staggering statistics prove that entrepreneurial development can serve as a powerful engine for economic development in rural areas. Besides the tangible benefits, small business are known to be more environmentally-friendly than large employers, have the unique ability to blend into the existing business climate, and radiate a quaint charm that attracts people to a community's Main Street.

Effective entrepreneurial development requires a thorough understanding of obstacles faced by rural entrepreneurs. With the odds stacked squarely against them, small business concerns need cooperation from public and private stakeholders in devising intervention strategies that will enhance their chances of success. Common barriers faced by rural entrepreneurs include:

- isolation from markets, service providers and other entrepreneurs.
- limited opportunities for mentoring and networking.
- absence of clusters to support networking.
- lack of capital and other support infrastructure.
- local culture that does not support entrepreneurship.

Creating support strategies that intentionally focus on the needs of rural entrepreneurs can provide small businesses and would be entrepreneurs with the intellectual resources essential to starting a business on solid footing, thereby maximize their chances for a higher degree of success.

- *Business Incubators*

Business incubators are a good path to capital from angel investors, state governments, economic-development coalitions and other investors. They house several businesses under one roof or in a campus setting, and offer resident companies reduced rents, shared services and, in many instances, formal or informal access financing.

Business incubators are programs designed to support the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services, developed and orchestrated by incubator management and offered both in the incubator and through its network of contacts. Incubators vary in the way they deliver their services, in their organizational structure, and in the types of clients they serve. They help emerging growth companies survive and grow during the start-up period when they are most vulnerable.

Successful completion of a business incubation program increases the likelihood that a startup company will stay in business for the long term: older studies found 87% of incubator graduates stayed in business, in contrast to 44% of all firms.

Goal #4: Improve the municipal water system within the Village of Utica.

Concerns/Issues

- Water has an unpleasant appearance, smell and taste due to high levels of Iron and Manganese in isolated instances
- Well 89-1 is out of service, leaving the Village with only one production well
- The Village's well is rated for 500 gallons per minute
- Lack of production has resulted in mandatory water restrictions during summer months
- Portions of the water distribution mains are nearly a century old
- Older, cast iron pipes need to be replaced
- Water pressure is an issue/concern for many residents throughout the community although recent reviews have identified some of the problems are associated with individual services lines.
- Cost of water

Objective #1: Evaluate the physical capacity of the existing municipal water system and determine the feasibility of long-term capital improvements.

- Action Step #1:* Engage the Village Engineer to conduct a Water System Preliminary Engineering Report and Utility Mapping Plan.
- Action Step #2:* Evaluate of the Village's municipal water system in terms of physical condition, capacity, security, vulnerability, efficiencies and inefficiencies, and reliability.
- Action Step #3:* Identify deficiencies within the existing municipal water system.
- Action Step #4:* Establish population projections to estimate the projected future water needs of Utica.
- Action Step #5:* Outline recommended water system upgrades, offer other feasible alternatives to correct deficient conditions, and provide an opinion of costs for recommended upgrades.
- Action Step #6:* Select the most appropriate alternative for long-term water system upgrades.
- Action Step #7:* Consider the impact the selected alternative will have on long-term water rates.
- Action Step #8:* Prepare a Preliminary Engineering Report in accordance with the criteria set forth in NDEQ Title 131, Ch. 4.004, and the most recent guidelines for Preliminary Engineering Reports as outlined by the Nebraska Water and Waste Water Advisory Committee.
- Action Step #9:* Partner with regulatory agencies/stakeholders to monitor the aquifer and promote best management practices for water conservation.

Timeline: January – July, 2013.

Objective #2: Determine the Village's fiscal capacity the Village to finance water system upgrades.

- Action Step #1:* Meet with the Village's fiscal agent to determine the long-term debt capacity of the Village.
- Action Step #2:* Identify local, state and federal resources for water system upgrades.
- Action Step #3:* Prepare and submit the Community Needs Survey for inclusion into the State's Intended Use Plan.
- Action Step #4:* Maximize project impact by leveraging local funds with outside resources.
- Action Step #5:* Adjust user rates to make the water system financially self-supportive.

Action Step #6: Secure appropriate financing to make long-term improvements to the municipal water system at a rate that is affordable to the average Utica households.

Timeline: July – December, 2013.

Objective #3: Secure plans, specifications and cost estimates for long-term water system improvements.

Action Step #1: Enter into a professional services agreement with the Village Engineer.

Action Step #2: Prepare plans and specification for water system improvements, pursuant to the Preliminary Engineering Report.

Action Step #3: Obtain all necessary permits from regulatory agencies.

Timeline: 2014.

Objective #4: Construct long-term water system improvements.

Action Step #1: Coordinate water distribution replacements with other subterranean utility improvements.

Action Step #2: Bid phase to include advertising, letting and contract award to lowest responsible/responsive bidder.

Action Step #3: Undertake construction related activities.

Timeline: Ongoing

Objective #5: Long-range operation and maintenance of the Utica municipal water system.

Action Step #1: Develop a long-range Capital Improvements Plan for the water system to ensure that future improvements follow a planned schedule of capital expenditures, rather than suddenly calling upon taxpayers to finance large-scale water system upgrades all at once.

Action Step #2: Conduct annual water user rate studies to ensure self-sufficient operation of the municipal water system.

Action Step #3: Conduct annual review of operating procedures to make sure that the water system is properly maintained and operating efficiently.

Timeline: 2015-2016.

Responsible Group/Agency

Utica Village Board, Utica Water System Users, Utica Village Engineer, Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, and neighboring communities.

Potential Resources

Utica Water Fund, Increased Water Usage Fee, U.S.D.A. Rural Development, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Systems Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, and Municipal Revenue/General Obligation Bonds.

Measurable Outputs

Most inhabitants of a modern industrialized Village are unaware of the costly and complex infrastructure systems – operating almost exclusively underground – that support public health, safety, general welfare, aesthetic and environmental quality of life in the community. In this way, public infrastructure, such as municipal water and wastewater systems should be viewed as essential components to community living, rather than mere luxuries.

Because most public infrastructure systems are located "out-of-sight," they are oftentimes taken for granted. Simple aging can downgrade the physical condition of the system and an increasing population base can exceed the design capacity of the service, consequently quality and functional capacity of these utility systems are usually diminished overtime.

The necessity of eventually enhancing or replacing all public infrastructure systems within a community remains a mammoth commitment and economic challenge for most local governments. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's 2003 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (released in 2005), our nation's 54,000 drinking-water systems need to invest \$276.8 billion over the next 20 years in order to continue to provide clean and safe drinking water to their consumers. This staggering funding deficit includes the cost to replace aging facilities that are near the end of their useful life and to comply with existing and future federal water regulations, but does not account for any growth in the per household demand for drinking-water by 2023.

Water infrastructure needs for Nebraska's smaller systems (defined as systems serving less than 10,000 people) are not exempt. According to EPA's 2003 Assessment, Nebraska small water systems have a current funding deficit of \$635.7 million; \$360.5 million of that amount has been identified as current infrastructure needs (new facilities or deficiencies in existing facilities identified by the State or system for which water systems would begin construction as soon as possible to avoid a threat to public health), while the balance (\$275.3 million) has been identified for future infrastructure needs (infrastructure deficiencies that a system expects to address in the next 20 years due to predictable deterioration of facilities. Future infrastructure needs do not include current infrastructure needs. Examples are storage facility and treatment plant replacement where the facility currently performs adequately, but will reach the end of its useful life in the next 20 years. Infrastructure needs to accommodate future growth are not included in the Needs Survey).

If by chance this financial gap is somehow bridged, simply throwing public monies at the situation will not solve the problem. In addition to initial capital construction costs, local governments must do a better job at addressing their long-term operational needs via "holistic" infrastructure planning, better asset management, innovative technologies and greater efficiencies.

This dire situation is certainly evident within the Village of Utica; a community which owns and operates a small, aging water system. Potential solutions include:

- Flush the distribution system regularly, particularly as aesthetic concerns and unpleasant odors intensify.
- Continue with the installation of a new production well and consider blending the water sources.
- Continue to monitor the aquifer and promote public education on water conservation and best management practices.
- Replace older cast iron mains within the distribution system with larger diameter PVC pipe.
- Review and adjust water user rates periodically to ensure self-sustainability of the water system.
- Address residents' complaints by inspecting the property to determine the cause and offer solutions