

Creating Livable Communities

Final Report

Introduction

Economic development is a key issue for Wisconsin and many of its communities: Our young people are moving away, we are losing jobs to other states and public and private investment need to be strengthened. These and a number of related issues demand new solutions.

Traditional economic development approaches such as building industrial parks, constructing speculative buildings and recruiting businesses through various incentive packages are not working. A new approach, one that understands and responds to today's market forces, is needed.

In the new economy, more and more of the workforce select where they would like to live and then find a job that enables them to live there. This is especially true for new college graduates and the baby boom generation – two highly critical market segments. Therefore, the new, most effective economic development strategy is to create communities that are desirable places for people to live. The focus then shifts from traditional economic development strategies to a more comprehensive community development process.

Research shows that the workforce is looking for livable and walkable communities, where people can feel safe as they enjoy attractive neighborhoods, vibrant downtowns and popular gathering places. For Wisconsin to grow and prosper in this new era of choice, we must find ways to help communities understand these forces and to help them create communities, neighborhoods and places where people can flourish. Unfortunately, the current economic situation poses a major challenge for communities to make changes. Any new project must be strategic and accomplish multiple goals. While there is considerable literature on strategies for large communities (100,000+), few studies have been conducted on smaller municipalities which constitute the majority of Wisconsin communities. The intent of this project was to begin to fill this gap.

Project Implementation Plan - The project will entail three primary activities: 1) Secondary research in the form of a literature review; 2) Community inventory and mapping as part of a two-community case study; and 3) Public education on the results of the project.

Literature Review

This portion of the project was carried out by CLUE staff and participating students. We searched the internet and the UW library system for pertinent literature on livable communities. With that group of reports and articles, we sifted and winnowed in a deliberative process to identify the factors or criteria that make communities livable. We identified twelve factors through this process which we applied to our interview phase of this project (see Appendix A –

Desirable Community Amenities). Key surveys conducted by Next Generation Consulting and AARP help support the selection of our key factors. (see Appendix B – Preference Surveys)

On the UW-Marshfield/Wood County campus, we wanted to give the students a chance to pull relevant information from a literature review on their own. To accomplish this, each of the three students independently read the websites and journal articles found by the CLUE staff as well as those found on their own. At the end of the semester, each student was asked to make a list of positive living amenities based on her own research. The three students then sat down together and compiled a joint list (there was obviously a great deal of overlap among the three lists). As a final step, the students compared their list with the final list compiled by the CLUE staff. They checked off items that were on both lists, as well as items that were not on their list but appeared in a separate photo-taking activity. We found that they had developed a list that was very similar to that of the CLUE staff, showing evidence of learning proper literature review techniques.

Interviews

This portion of the project was carried out by CLUE staff. We conducted 16 interviews in both communities with seven in Marshfield and nine in Rice Lake as well as four focus groups in each of the two communities. In addition, we had the opportunity to hold two focus group sessions in Stevens Point. We interviewed human resource professionals in these two communities for the purpose of understanding workforce development issues, in particular both the recruitment and retention of employees. The focus groups were made up of members of each community’s economic development committee, area young professionals, active retirees, and members of the community involved in a broad range of civic activities. (See Appendix C – Interview Questions)

Findings identical for both communities include:

Positive Amenities	Challenges
Good place to raise a family	Lack of safe walking and biking infrastructure
Quality K-12 education	Absence of a network of walk/bike trails
Excellent health care/hospitals	Downtown has no social scene, no vibrancy
Safe community	Lack of “3 rd Place” restaurants/ethnic restaurants
Affordable housing	Few social options/places to hang out besides local bars, especially if you are single
Basic services are available including high speed internet and cell phone coverage	Hard to connect with people, find friends or people with similar interests especially if you did not grow up in the community or have family nearby
No/low commute time	Lack of diversity and world culture
Lower overall cost of living compared to the rest of the country	Close mindedness of people, reluctance to change or accept someone or idea if it is different
Close to “up north” and/or natural resources	Lack of job opportunities – for spouse or to move up the ladder
Technical College and 2-yr university provide extended learning opportunities; also provides art and culture	Absence of 4yr degree program or higher

activities	
Some big box retail and national brands	Lack of full range of national brand shopping Few boutique/unique shops

General Comments and observations:

1. Even though it is the smaller of the two pilot communities, Rice Lake has three distinct advantages over Marshfield.
 - a. It is on a lake and surrounded by additional lakes and forests
 - b. It is located on a four-lane highway
 - c. It is a regional hub and competing against much smaller communities. Marshfield is one of four larger communities in its region and is competing against both Wausau and Stevens Point which are larger and have more amenities.
2. Everyone we spoke with came to their community because of a job offering not a specific amenity. However, when they had a choice between two or more offers, the items on our criteria list made a big difference.
3. While both communities should be proud of their assets, it was noted that many communities in Wisconsin would have what was on this list. This in a sense was the “norm” and a lack of any one of these amenities was what several young professionals called a “deal breaker”. The bigger question thus becomes whether young professionals will stay in the community. This was often determined by how important were the items listed in the challenges column.
4. The closest thing we could find for pre-selection based on location was to be closer to family or better access to natural resources and recreational opportunities.
5. Amenity preference is age-sector specific. (See appendix xx for comparison chart) Smaller communities will be challenged to support all of the different types to appeal to all ages. They may have to choose and/or become creative in developing places that meet more than one objective.
6. Decision-makers and economic development personnel (often all baby boomers) had a very different opinion of their communities than did young professionals. What the former were extolling were amenities that often appealed to people like themselves and not younger professionals. They often made statements that seemed to suggest a reluctance to change especially as it related to amenities the young professionals found desirable.
7. Both areas have quality health care and were attracting older retirees and the elderly. This age group had great concern about increased costs of anything – municipal services, food, store prices – and seemed reluctant to support improving local amenities that are attractive to young professionals.
8. The success or failure of the downtown was critical to the appeal of the community. The most negative comments for both communities were centered on the condition of the downtown. Interviewees wanted a place designed for people, not cars. They wanted a sense of vibrancy and energy which translated into success and a place to be. Only the

seniors wanted basic shopping to return to downtown. The rest were happy with the “big boxes” and national brand stores on the edge of town. Several young professionals indicated that the lack of these stores would have caused them to turn down the job offer. The role people saw for the downtown was that of a gathering place for socializing, eating and a location for unique and specialty shops, often containing higher-end merchandize. Amenities often mentioned were the presence of trees and flowers, unique hardscape, quality architecture, outdoor dining, unique and ethnic restaurants and green space for celebrations. The downtown should be unique and different from neighboring communities.

9. Based on all the comments made by interviewees from both communities, addressing the issues of increased facilities for walking and biking and creating a “sense of place” with special emphasis on the downtown would have the biggest impact on attracting knowledge-workers and new businesses.

Inventory and Mapping

This portion of the project was carried out by CLUE and project partners at UW – Marshfield and Barron County.

Based on the results of the literature review, we identified a subset of these criteria that could be mapped. Almost every article in the literature review emphasized the importance of infrastructure for safe walking and biking. This amenity became the base for all other data layers. The first analysis focused on the relationship between where people live (their “First Place”) and where they worked or went to school (their “Second Place”). Information was gathered on what was available and whether you could walk/bike between the two types of places. Downtowns, restaurants and places to socialize (“Third Places”) were also of critical importance as well as access to parks and natural resources. The second analysis looked at what was available for “Third Places”, where they were located and whether they could be reached by walking and biking. (See Appendix D -GIS Protocol)

Each partner worked with students to create maps of each community to identify the walkable and bikable parts of each community in relation to residential areas (first places), employment areas (second places), and social and cultural places (third places). Students also mapped first, second and third places. See appendix E - Student Maps. The number of Marshfield and Rice Lake students involved was 5 and x, respectively.

At the UW-Marshfield/Wood County, three students received BOT 299 (independent study) credit in the fall semester and two different students received ZOO 299 (independent study) credit in the spring semester. In addition, one of the students from the fall semester continued working in the spring semester without receiving credit. Most of the GIS mapping was done in the spring semester, although a great deal of mapping on paper was done in the fall semester.

The City of Marshfield has already compiled an extensive GIS database. Our first step was to meet with the appropriate personnel and receive a copy of the existing GIS data to work with. This was done mid-way through the fall semester. After the protocol for identifying first, second and third places was agreed upon, we started matching these attributes to the Marshfield database. While first and second places could easily be identified through various layers of the Marshfield GIS data, third places could not. Therefore, the main mapping activities in the fall semester involved identifying various types of third places in Marshfield and mapping their locations out on paper. Students divided up the responsibilities; types of third places mapped included churches, cultural places, parks, bars, restaurants and miscellaneous. This work carried over into the spring semester. Students also took photographs of many of these third places.

Neither the students nor the CLUE partner at UW-Marshfield/Wood County had any prior experience using GIS. Therefore, it was essential that we receive training. We received one training session in December, but it fell at a bad time (right before finals week) so the students participating in the fall semester were not able to practice and apply these skills to the Marshfield data. Most of the GIS work was done in the spring semester. A second training session was done in April; the trainer traveled to Marshfield from off-site, however, and students had difficulty using the software at later times. There were some software glitches and difficulties in reaching help over the phone. Eventually these bugs were ironed out, and the students were able to resume their work with the software. For any future use of this model, it is vital that the participating modelers either have prior knowledge of GIS, or an experienced GIS user must be located nearby to provide day-to-day help and troubleshooting.

In the spring semester, we accumulated all of the paper maps of third places that had been made and proceeded to create GIS datasets based on this data, along with the existing Marshfield GIS data. Our first step was to locate the first and second places in the Marshfield GIS data set. This was found in a Land Use layer, and the residential and industrial/educational categories were extracted and renamed first places and second places (Appendix E.1). The next step was to create new layers/data sets for the third places that were mapped on paper. Each category of third places was given its own data set and layer, so that they could be turned on and off during map creation. For example, one layer is called Third Places_Bars and Taverns, while another layer is called Third Places_Restaurants. Each layer was identified on the map with a separate color (Appendix E.2). Our last step was to document the accessibility of first, second and third places by evaluating the streets near them for walkability and bikeability. The street layers were extracted from the Marshfield GIS data set and saved into a new data set. We then used criteria based on speed limits, sidewalks, number of lanes, etc. to categorize each segment of each road as safe or unsafe for walking, and safe or unsafe for biking. By turning these layers off and on, we could evaluate how easily people could walk or bike from their residences (first places) to their places of employment (second places) (Appendix E3 and E.4), as well as how easily people could walk or bike to various third places (Appendix E.5).

Community Comparisons

This portion of the project was carried out by CLUE's partners at UW – Marshfield and Barron County. Each partner worked with students to identify communities similar to theirs and to examine both current community statistics and design.

The UW-Marshfield/Wood County students looked for other cities in Wisconsin that were similar to Marshfield in terms of population and amenities. They narrowed it down to three: Wisconsin Rapids (WR), Menomonie (Mnm) and Beaver Dam (BD). All three of these cities are slightly smaller than Marshfield (Msf) in terms of population, but are similar in terms of amenities.

Wisconsin Rapids lies within Wood County, as does Marshfield, but on the south end of the county. Its 2006 population estimate was 18,565, which is very close to Marshfield's 19,420. Menomonie is located in Dunn County, WI (northwestern part of the state). It had an estimated 2006 population of 15,730. Beaver Dam is located in Dodge County (south-central Wisconsin), and had an estimated 2006 population of 15,545. All of these towns are located within an agricultural surrounding.

The school systems of these communities are similar with public and parochial school systems, one or two high schools, several public elementary schools (WR has 9, BD has 7, Msf has 5, Mnm has fewer, but the school district includes additional schools in nearby "suburbs"), one (Msf, Mnm, BD) or two (WR) middle schools, and a technical college (WR and Msf have branches of Mid-State, Mnm has a branch of Chippewa Valley Tech and BD has a branch of Moraine Park Tech). In addition, Marshfield has a branch of the UW-Colleges (UW-Marshfield/Wood County) and Menomonie has a 4-year UW campus (UW-Stout). BD has a College-Prep High School. The lack of a university campus may put BD and WR at a disadvantage over the other communities in the area of life-long learning. Menomonie, with its 4-yr campus, would score highest in this category.

All of these cities have similar major areas of employment (manufacturing, healthcare and transportation). They are each home to a major hospital and/or research clinic, and near a municipal airport. All of these cities have similar recreational possibilities (more than 10 city parks or recreation areas, a small zoo (WR and Msf), skate park, speedway and swimming pool), as well. WR has the additional draw of a river environment that bisects the town, and BD is located on Beaver Lake, one of the largest lakes in the state and MN is located on Lake Menomin – a widening of the Red Cedar River. Marshfield is lacking in water environments and may need to include other features in its design to compensate for this.

The communities are also similar in their dining, drinking and shopping environments. All feature a couple of fine-dining experiences (usually located inside of hotels), as well as a variety of family dining, diners, supper clubs and fast food. WR has a slightly more diverse ethnic food selection than Marshfield, as well as a bakery and ice cream parlor. Mnm boasts a chocolate shop. All communities also feature a variety of pubs and taverns, many of which feature food. Shopping consists of a mall or shopping center in each community, a variety of “big box” retailers, and a variety of smaller “specialty” stores in the downtown area.

All four cities have a major highway running through their downtown. This may cause issues with safe walking and biking. The highway will also impact the quality of the downtown environment and reduce its desirability as a “Third Place”. Special attention will need to be given to the design of this area. It will be important for each of these communities to create a unique “brand” or identity to help attract knowledge workers.

Transformational education

Students

Technology

Based on the what students indicated they knew about new communication technologies in the pre-project survey, this project exposed them to several different programs that could be used for project management, research and sharing data. Included were

- A project partner from UW Barron County created a wiki site for his class that included information used by the students for this project.
- A student created a wiki for other students in the class to upload photos, etc specific to this project
- Desire to Learn (D2L) was used for project management, pre and post participant surveys.
- Students and partners at the two-year campuses were introduced to ArcView, a GIS software package to create maps. The use of Geographic Information systems was one of the more important learning tools introduced to this set of students.

Concept of Livable Communities

Few students were familiar with the concept of “livable community” and issues related to economic development in small communities. Assisting with the literature review and then comparing what they had learned about their own community through the mapping process to similar communities, helped students better understand all of these issues.

Survey Development

We added a component to this research that involved students at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. In a regularly offered class the students conducted a survey of 1,569 randomly selected juniors and seniors at UWSP with a response rate of about 24% (380 responses). The findings of that survey can be found in Appendix F – UWSP Student Survey. Twenty students

were involved in creating the survey questionnaire, using survey software and learning how to use a statistical software package (SPSS). The students were broken into small and each group developed final reports on their findings. Students learned the basic components of conducting a survey in addition to learning about the primary components of community livability.

Communities

While the actual intent of the interviews and focus groups was to gather information, a side benefit was to introduce participants to the concept of “livable communities” and how this affected their ability to attract knowledge workers and new businesses. Several people experienced the proverbial “aha” moment during the sessions and began to brainstorm ideas for implementation. While this made completing the interviews more challenging, it was exciting to see the enthusiasm that was displayed. Unfortunately, it was also disheartening to find some community leaders still in denial regarding the transformation to a global economy and their reluctance to see the need for change.

The participating communities have asked that we postpone the public presentation of our findings until the fall when more citizens may be available to attend meetings. Participants will be surveyed at that time regarding their understanding of these concepts and possible community responses. However, the City of Marshfield did conduct a strategic planning process for elected officials and department heads focusing on economic development this spring and preliminary findings of this study were presented and helped frame discussions for that process.

Additional presentations on project findings were made to citizens of Stevens Point, at the Northern District CNRED In-service meeting and at the International Conference on Livable Communities in Santa Fe, NM. Project partners have been asked to give a presentation at the League of Wisconsin Municipalities Chief Executive’s Workshop in August and the Upper Midwest Planning Conference sponsored by the American Planning Association in September. Continuing Education is currently looking at how the project results can be included in several of their programs.

Educational materials

Our ability to provide educational programming to community leaders has been greatly enhanced as a result of this research project. The combination of primary and secondary research, along with an applied community engagement and mapping effort, has provided our team with a greater understanding of how making communities more livable will enhance economic development efforts. The literature review strongly supported this link. However, it was unclear whether this would also be true in small Wisconsin communities. The team felt that it would be critical that the literature was tested in applicable communities in Wisconsin before developing educational programs and resources.

The public engagement process that was initiated in the two case study communities was designed to enhance the local capacity to understand the importance of land use and non-motorized transportation decision-making and economic development. Local leaders, students and the public are now better informed regarding this important relationship. The use of a mapping process in each of the communities helped to illustrate possible land use and transportation improvements that would enhance their economic development efforts. As a result of this transformational educational effort, the community has an enhanced capacity to address their economic development challenges even after the term of the research project has expired.

Community Change – Future Action

To date, the city of Marshfield has incorporated the findings from this project into their strategic plan for economic development. Two key elements items include include expansion of their biking network and a pilot project in their downtown. Actual implementation will depend on financing. It is expected that additional projects will be identified after the public presentation this fall. However, the education provided to local officials and the public throughout this process has enhanced the capacity of the community to address their economic development challenges by transforming their communities to be more attractive as a place to live and work.

The research findings and applied community engagement process was not just shared locally. The findings were presented at a Northern District CNRED in-service entitled “Cool and Active Communities and Downtowns” to ten CNRED educators and two local economic development officials. As a part of this in-service, a “Cool Communities Walking Tour” template tool was created and utilized to assist community leaders evaluate the livability and walkability of their communities as a part of an economic development effort. (See Appendix G - Walking Tour Template) CNRED educators were selected as a perfect audience, as they can bring these transformational education and capacity building processes and resources to their own communities. It is anticipated that additional in-services will be held in other districts throughout the state.

The findings were also shared with two CNRED program area teams: the Downtown Vitality and Community Placemaking Team and the Community and Economic Development Preparedness Team. The findings from this project will likely be incorporated into educational programs and/or resources developed by these two teams.

As a result of the research process, case studies and outreach efforts, the knowledge and resources gained will enable the University to assist similar small- and medium-sized communities across the state to improve their local economies.

Linda Stoll from CLUE presented a talk on livable communities in Stevens Point in January 2008. Many of the participants at that talk also were involved in other activities related to livability. While there is no direct causation, the eco-municipality effort has included various walking and biking goals within the overall plan.

Will Andresen and Linda Stoll presented at a meeting of UW Extension's Northern District. About 12 county CNRED educators listened to and took part in a discussion about livable communities and the factors that contribute to livability. The discussion centered on practical policies and actions that communities can create and the role of extension to educate both local government officials and the general public about community livability.

Appendices

- A – Desirable Community Amenities
- B – Preference Surveys
- C – Interview Questions
- D – GIS Protocol
- E – Student Maps
- F – UWSP Student Survey
- G – Walking Tour Template