

Celebrating Hamilton County Successes Reviewing the 2010 Hamilton County Strategic Plan And Identifying Steps to Move Forward

Seven years after the 2010 Strategic Plan was published, community volunteers met in the spring of 2017 to celebrate the successful accomplishment of several established goals, hoping as well to help prioritize strategies and objectives for the next three years. The group concluded that the pace of change continues to accelerate, making the strategic planning process all the more relevant, as well perhaps a need to more consistently track progress and review priorities.

Participants on the 2017 review committee included Dave Long, Steve Jacobsen, Bobby Parks, Holly Herzberg, Tim Huls, Harlan Schafer, Scott Cerveny, David Olson, Scott Werner, Kurt Johnson, Margaret Williams, Barb Ernst, Doug Kittle, Kelby Roberts, Eric Leichty, Diane Keller, Jeanette Friesen, Michael Martin, Tammy Morris, Sarah Lyon, Diane Gowen, Meghan Vetter, Marlin Seeman, Sara Bailey, Ryan Wineteer, Julie Wasem, Keith Wasem. Facilitators were Charlotte Narjes and Marilyn Schlake, both with the University of Nebraska Extension.

Follow-up process –

At the conclusion of the two sessions, participants suggested that the update team meet each year to celebrate accomplishments and refresh commitments and communicate the results. As in the past, this volunteer group has no authority, thus responsibility is to keep the plan fresh and communicate to the public.

Prior to 2020 –

In order to prepare for a more thorough strategic planning initiative in 2020, it was also suggested that this group begin making preparation well before 2020 arrives. Lead organizers could begin by contacting all members of the 2017 update committee, as well as adding several more participants from throughout the county. It was also strongly recommended that a community survey be conducted, much like in 2010, to get some baseline input from as many as 400-600 local residents through a community survey of needs and priorities.

RECREATION

Accomplishments since 2010: New swimming pool; 4-field softball complex; tennis courts planned for 2017 construction; walking trails expanded; intramural sports at Aurora Fitness; Pioneer Trails Recreation debuts; inter-county transportation becoming

available.

Top priorities/opportunities for completion by 2020 from the 2010 plan:

1. Soccer fields

Possible activities to achieve success --

- a. There is a group invested in the process of wanting to build a soccer field.
- b. Determine where is the support for the next step

2. Trails

Possible activities to achieve success --

- a. Contact (Dark Island Trail Development) the organization which completed the trail between Central City and Marquette.
- b. Contact the Owner/Railroad of the stretch between Marquette and Aurora regarding outdoor recreation opportunities

3. Tennis courts

Possible activities to achieve success --

- a. Contact the organization to determine what percentage of the required funding has been achieved
- b. Help determine what is needed to complete the project?

4. County Arts & Entertainment

Possible activities to achieve success --

- a. Contact the NRD to determine if Pioneer Trails could be used for county events
- b. Find out who the person(s) to coordinate the program.
- c. Goal to get all county communities involvement

EDUCATION

Accomplishments since 2010: Dual credits available at Aurora, Hampton and Giltner campuses; Ag Academy created; internship program, Opportunities Exchange, growing; business/industry supporting education initiatives.

Top priorities/opportunities for completion by 2020 from the 2010 plan:

1. Career Academies

1. Agronomy Academy was started during the 2016-17 school year and is open to students in Aurora, Giltner and Hampton. The program currently includes students from Aurora and Giltner.
2. The school districts would like to continue expanding the Career Academies into the following areas:
 1. Health Academy
 2. Business Academy

3. Construction Academy
 4. Welding Academy
 5. Districts will continue to work together to provide opportunities for all Hamilton County residents.
2. Alternative Education Center
 1. Currently Aurora is the only school in the county that offers an Alternative Education program for students.
 2. Discussion on what a county alternative program would look like was discussed. Aurora's program is currently at maximum capacity.
 3. At this time it is merely a discussion topic and some great ideas were exchanged on how what the program would look like and offer at-risk students.
 3. College Academies
 1. Currently the majority of dual credit college classes that are taught at Aurora are taught by Aurora High School staff. Hampton and Giltner offer dual credit but the majority of classes are online. Discussed the possibility of opening up Aurora classes for the other schools. Currently this does not appear to be a viable option due to maximum enrollment in the Aurora classes.
 4. Adult Education
 1. Adult Education is an area that has the group feels may need to be explored and expanded. In the past Central Community College has offered Adult Education classes at a learning center located at Aurora High School. The program has not been active for several years.

Conclusion: Although Giltner did not have representation in the group, through previous experience we feel that all three county schools are willing to work together to provide the best education possible for all Hamilton County residents. There are obvious challenges, but the everyone is open to discuss ideas.

FAMILY/ YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Accomplishments since 2010: Attracting families often based on personal relationships; people reaching out to youth who grew up in the community through social media/data bases; community involvement a plus.

Top priorities/opportunities for completion by 2020 from the 2010 plan:

1. Youth/young adults return to Aurora

1. Advertise job opportunities so they know what is available for employment
2. Housing – they need to know if housing is available to suit their family
3. Activities for kids – K-6 especially – families want to know what might be available for their children to participate in

TO DO:

1. Graduates ‘like’ Aurora Facebook (FB) pages
 2. Graduating class set up private groups on FB or other app to keep in touch with each other, but also as a means for distributing above information as appropriate (through a class member)
 3. Capitalize on events that bring alums back to town – example: A’ROR’N Days
2. Coordinate website information for various groups and link to Aurora page

TO DO:

1. Identify a person to investigate this
2. Locate groups/organizations, including sports, who have individual webpages
3. Link to Aurora webpage (Note: this would be for the purpose of sharing information when people visit the website – not ‘managing’ any of the information there)

3. Social Media Sharing

1. Make use of personal connections to share information to a broader base
2. This needs to be not only on FB but other apps as well – where the young adults are!

CONDENSED VERSION:

Opportunity/Strategic Direction: Increase availability of information families and youth would like/need to know about Hamilton County (if considering staying or moving back)

Intent:

This would be a tool to bring alums/young families back to Hamilton Co.

To increase involvement in activities available in the county for all ages

Implementation:

Utilize alumni database to distribute information on job opportunities, housing, recreation

Promote opportunities in Hamilton Co at community events throughout the county where alums are present

Identify a person/group to investigate/find websites of organizations/sports to link to Aurora pages

Use social media sharing (FB and other apps) to spread the word about opportunities in Hamilton County

BUSINESS VITALITY

Accomplishments since 2010: Building codes are up to date in Aurora; more businesses are taking initiative on websites; countywide business directory established; "shop local" efforts expanding; retail committee growing stronger; "Ag friendly" brand viewed as an asset; hospital/health care an asset; emergency services available.

Top priorities/opportunities for completion by 2020 from the 2010 plan:

1. Identify venture capital opportunities to attract/support new businesses. (Pg. 4 of the 2010 plan)
2. Survey businesses to assess their business climate, current needs, forecasted needs and suggestions /input for the Chamber to support their efforts. (Strategy for #1 above I-80 Corridor area on page 5)
3. Assess current resources and future needs for the aging population in preparation of the new Westfield Quality Care project and to ensure Aurora can meet the needs of this segment of the community (businesses, social, wellness, products & services) (Pg. 7 & 8)

Areas of the 2010 plan that may need to be reframed or clarified in regard to level of completion, what the role of the AACD is or who is responsible for leading this effort:

It would be helpful to have more detail and who is responsible for leading this effort?
(Pg. 4 of the 2010 plan)

Reframe e-commerce to include more current business and social media platforms v.
eBay. (pg. 4)

Provide trade school student loans through foundations that could be forgiven
contingent upon returning to work in Hamilton County for a specified period of
time & apprenticeships. (pg. 5). What is the progress in this area? Who is working
on this? What is the role of the business community?

Not sure of the progress on the 3 action steps under “Capitalize on I-80 corridor.”
(pg. 5) Who is responsible for leading this effort?

Define AACD’s role in improving the infrastructure of roads and bridges for ag.
equipment (pg. 6 #3).

Should the goal of recruiting a food-quality grains processor be an economic develop
goal rather than business vitality? (pg. 6 #4)

Under plan for exit of agriculture’s baby-boomers it says to develop a Farmer’s
Forum to educate mature farmers and young farmers about estate planning (pg. 6
#5). Should this be done by the Hamilton Community Foundation or who would
be the appropriate entity(s) to carry this out?

Not sure of the progress that was made or what the status is of the action steps under
“Preserve Community Pride” (page 6)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(Pages 10-13 of 2010 plan)

Accomplishments since 2010: New restaurants have opened -- Cesar's, Pueblo Viejo,
Conlees, Don't Care Bar & Grill; Leadership Tomorrow going strong; jobs created at
hospital, Aurora Cooperative, Syngenta, other new businesses; marketing/tourism have
opportunities with new art walk, Pioneer Trails, splash pad; housing efforts helped fill
out Lincoln Creek, create new housing subdivisions; housing initiatives.

This group discussed many items related to economic development. Participants thought
the most impactful strategies to implement would be:

1. Leverage electronic media marketing
2. Re-evaluate how businesses are showcased and marketed (such as directories)
3. Re-evaluate committees of AACD to reflect needs of business leaders in a
rapidly changing business landscape.

Below are the suggested updates to this section of 2010 plan that reflect these priorities,

as well as some tweaks/deletions.

Recruitment of Restaurants

Updates to Purpose:

Specify that 2020 Strategic Planning Survey could include the listed “Questions for clarification...”

Add food trucks, pop-ups, and commercial kitchen for rent to “Out of Ordinary Solutions”

Updates to Action Steps:

Prepare relevant questions for Strategic Planning 2020 survey. Information could then be relayed to those contemplating a new restaurant.

Retain current restaurants by ensuring these are well represented on Google.

Community members can add reviews, pictures and business details about local establishments to Google listings.

Community Leadership

Updates to Purpose:

Under “Areas of Focus” add *Connecting Young Nebraskans* and *Nebraska LEAD* programs in addition to Leadership Tomorrow and Leadership NE.

Delete EDGE Classes as these are no longer available.

Updates to Action Steps:

Prioritize evaluation of chamber committees to ensure business leadership needs are being met, especially helping business leaders leverage digital marketing opportunities.

Include questions in 2020 Strategic Planning survey about perceived barriers to involvement at the community level.

Job Creation/Employment Opportunities

Updates to Action Steps

Explore ways Hamilton Co. could attract Home-based/Remote Businesses

Marketing & Tourism

Updates to Purpose:

Change to “Agri-Tourism/Eco-Tourism” and add Dark Island Trail and Pioneer Trails

Under Arts & Sciences add “Art Walk” and delete FamFest, L’Eglise Arts Center

Updates to Actions Steps

Prioritize brand/website development for Hamilton Co. and AACD. Make these

sites user-friendly and responsive to mobile so they showcase local businesses and local attractions.

Prioritize clear signs to county attractions that are currently not well marked (especially Pioneer Trails and Dark Island Trailhead). These signs could have a Hamilton Co. branding to promote cohesiveness throughout county.

Re-evaluate print directories and marketing materials. (How can Hamilton Co. use print-marketing in an innovate way?)

Identify resources (such as services through UNL) to assist local business and attractions with digital marketing.

Explore how Hamilton Co. can be a destination for I-80 travelers to charge electric cars.

Form a small committee to apply as a Tesla Destination. This is time sensitive as Tesla is installing some stations free of charge if the land is given to do so.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(Pages 14-17 of 2010 plan)

Accomplishments since 2010: Many new businesses along I-80 corridor; new Casey's anchors 14/34 intersection; infrastructure created for additional business growth; housing initiatives successful in Aurora, Giltner and Hampton; new housing subdivisions planned in Aurora's Streeter Subdivision; home-based businesses growing due to high-speed internet infrastructure; new bank in Giltner; new nursing home planned in Aurora; nuisance abatement process successful in Hampton, also being launched in Phillips and Marquette.

Top priorities/opportunities for completion by 2020 from the 2010 plan:

1. Affordable Housing – Critical to recruiting citizens/employees, businesses

Support, encourage people working to flip properties, creating more housing

Consider nuisance abatement process countywide, based on success in Hampton

Encourage city investment in infrastructure

2. I-80 corridor development

Expand Aurora's success to Hampton and Giltner exits

Attract Hall County businesses to lower tax levy county, Hamilton

3. High-tech infrastructure for next generation

Remain cutting edge with internet services

Recruiting businesses/employees

Include rural infrastructure for the internet reach