



*City of Cokato First Impressions
Strategic Planning Meeting
Summary Report*

June 22, 2009



First Impressions Program for Community Assessment and Improvement Strategic Planning

The Cokato Economic Development Authority (EDA) participated in the First Impressions Program for Community Assessment and Improvement in the fall of 2008. Five representatives from the City of Arlington (ranging in age from 31 to 74) visited the City on October 2, 2008 and November 15, 2008, spending seven hours in the community

Participants completed forms providing their impression of:

- The city after a 5-minute drive through the community
- Entrances to the City
- Housing/Residential Areas
- Education, Health, Social and Emergency Services
- The Local Economy
- Government/Public Services
- Recreation, Faith, Culture and Heritage
- General Observations
- Information from Community Residents

As a follow-up to the report received as a result of the visits, the Cokato EDA hosted a First Impressions Town Hall Meeting, on June 22, 2009, in order to present the findings to the public and obtain input on how to use the information gained to develop a strategic economic development plan. Thirty-three (33) people participated in the meeting.

Positive First Impressions

The following positive impressions identified in the 2008 report were shared:

- Cokato's Educational System (K-12 and proximity to higher education options)
- Housing and Residential Areas – variety of housing options and well maintained home and yards.
- Public Recreational Facilities
- Culture and Heritage, specifically the museum, library and performing arts center
- Medical Facilities and Emergency Services including access to local dentists, chiropractors and optometrist.
- Public Infrastructure including the pocket park downtown
- Government/Public Services, specifically the city employees and city hall and meeting room downtown.
- Downtown Infrastructure including on and off-street parking, new ornamental lighting
- Retail offerings including the variety of merchandise downtown.
- Industrial Park noting the apparent pride in the appearance of the buildings and yards.

Impressions of Areas of Opportunity

The following opportunities or challenges which were noted as a part of the 2008 First Impressions Report were discussed:

- Vacant buildings downtown
- Opportunities for new businesses such as accountants, real estate, investment services, legal, appliance sales, dining and overnight lodging.
- The opportunity to tap into more customers with extended business owners.
- The northern entrance and old creamery at the corner of US TH 12 and Co. Rd 3
- Additional tenants for the industrial park
- Highway 12 commercial corridor
- New housing opportunities
- Downtown potential if there is the right spark

Lasting Impressions.

The participants in the 2008 First Impressions Program were asked, "What will you remember the most about this community six months from now, positive or negative?" The lasting impression reported was, "The struggling downtown and how wrong it is to chase the perceived value of the highway."

Using the information obtained from the First Impressions' summary report, participants in the June 22, 2009 Town Meeting were asked what lasting impression they would like visitors of Cokato to have in the future. Following are responses received:

- A friendly, warm community making an effort to grow and improve in all areas.
- Welcoming community with much to offer in business, arts and education
- A downtown growing with new business and residential buildings
- A warm, welcoming and vibrant community
- Generous, friendly
- For them to feel at home, enough to drive around the rest of the town and to think they may want to live here.
- A warm, welcoming town with opportunity – A reason to come back.

The lasting impression of Cokato as "warm", "welcoming" and a community with "opportunities" were repetitive themes noted.

Strategic Planning.

The thirty-three(33) participants in the Town Hall Meeting were asked to use the information gained from the 2008 visit, but also complete a self-evaluation of the five areas of opportunity or goals the community should address in the next one to three years. Participants worked in five groups to develop a list of fifteen (15) potential projects, which were prioritized with the top five projects identified as follows:

Goal #1: Enhance the US TH 12 commercial corridor, using the intersection of US 12/CR 3 and the former creamery as a focal point; and incorporating signage to tie the corridor to the downtown.

Goal #2: Continued development of the industrial park with business and job opportunities

Goal #3: Further utilization of Peterson Park

Goal #4: Expansion of the library and museum

Goal #5: (Re) Establishment of Cokato's Identity

Other goals identified included business recruitment, further communication of the EDA's role and goals, updating of the city's web site (in process at the time of the meeting), linking the trail system from parks to the downtown and US TH 12 trail system, development of a clean-up day, an arts movement, more community awareness and involvement and removal of old buildings in the downtown.



Action Planning.

Participants created a mission statement and, as time allowed, developed an action plan for the five identified goals. Following are the results of this planning effort. It is important to note, these action plans were developed within a limited timeframe and are intended to be used as a guideline to the EDA for a more thorough strategic planning exercise.

Goal #1: Enhance the US TH 12 commercial corridor, using the intersection of US 12/CR 3 and the former creamery as a focal point; and incorporating signage to tie the corridor to the downtown.

Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Remove the existing creamery building	Not identified	TBD
B. Develop attractive signage to link US TH 12 to the downtown	Not identified	TBD
C. Incorporate elements of the old creamery building into the design of a future building on the site	Not identified	TBD

Goal #2: Continued development of the industrial park with business and job opportunities.

Mission Statement: To recruit and enhance the industrial businesses in our community by utilizing the industrial park.

Project 1: Identify a key representative to “sell” the community.		
Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Create criteria for the position (position description)	EDA	September 2009
B. Select a person	EDA	October 2009

Project 2: Create an incentive package to entice industry to construct or move to Cokato		
Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Survey of current prospective businesses	Chamber of Commerce	September 2009
B. Sort the information and create packages	EDA and Chamber	November 2009
C. Approve incentives	City Council	January 2010

Project 3: Maintain positive communication between the community and the business		
Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Remain in constant contact with businesses	Chamber of Commerce	On-going
B. Annual outreach- letters/anything	EDA	Annual

Goal #3: Further utilization of Peterson Park

Project 1: Host community events in Peterson Park		
Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Provide music for the public	Local churches	TBD
B. Host a chili cook-off	Rotary Club	TBD
C. Games and hotdogs	Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts	TBD
D. Host an ice cream social	Lions Club	TBD
E. Dessert night	Chamber of Commerce	TBD

Goal #4: Expansion of the library and museum. It was noted there is currently a committee in place addressing this goal; therefore further development of an action plan did not take place.

Goal #5: (Re) Establishment of Cokato's Identity.

Steps	Suggested Responsible Party	Deadline
A. Research the history of Cokato and promote the heritage	Not identified	TBD
B. Identify ways to create and market and identify for Cokato, either through the arts or another niche	Not identified	TBD

Recommendation

It is recommended the EDA utilize the information obtained through the First Impressions Program for Community Assessment and Improvement in the fall of 2008 and the First Impressions Town Hall meeting in June 2009 to further develop a Strategic Plan for Economic Development with a specific action plans for each agreed upon goal. The action plans should contain goals and implementation steps which are feasible to accomplish in a one to three year timeframe. It is recommended volunteer organizations be contacted to assist with the implementation.

June 22, 2009 First Impressions Town Hall Strategic Planning Participants:

Mike Ackerman
 Mary Ackerman
 Butch Amundsen, City Council/EDA
 Peter Bortem
 Jeff Carlson
 Peggy Carlson, City of Cokato
 Kurt Dahlin, EDA
 Mark Dahlman, Cokato Fire Department
 Steve Dietman, EDA
 Gordy Erickson, City Council
 Dave Glesey
 Steve Hanson
 Mike Holmquist, Cokato Fire Department
 Bruce Johnson, Mayor
 Paulie Johnson, Dassel Cokato Enterprise Dispatch
 Tom Keaveny
 Dori Kimball, EDA
 Christopher Kleiman, Kraft Walser Law Office
 Don Levens, City Administrator
 Margaret Lundeen
 Ralph Lundeen
 Dean Mahlstedt, Pro Care Services Inc.
 Chuck Miller, Coldwell Bankers Realty
 Kristen Miller, Dassel-Cokato Enterprise Dispatch
 Wayne Murphy, City Council/EDA
 Brian Oestriech
 Shelia T. Rieke, GRRL Cokato Branch
 Jane Ryan, ISD 466 Early Childhood
 Jon Ryan, Lions
 Chris Schultz, EDA/Dassel-Cokato Enterprise Dispatch
 Carol Semke
 Vicky Stonelake
 Rory Wallace, Lundeen Interiors
 Facilitated by: Joanne Foust, Municipal Development Group, Inc.