

# Town Outcomes

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# Bennet

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

Bennet has a lot of young families that are beginning to get involved in the business of the village. They are participating in town leadership and taking interest in and ownership of the village. Bennet's location on Highway 2 and just a few miles outside of Lincoln makes it an ideal location for those who would like a small town experience. Bennet has seen lots of new residents over the past ten years and now has 700 mail customers. There are active businesses in town, including a new factory to the north. Bennet does act as a bedroom community for Lincoln but there is opportunity for new service type businesses. Bennet has a nice, active park in the center of town which hosts a farmer's market during the season. Bennet has fire and emergency services in town provided by a group of dedicated volunteers.

There are many different community organizations active in Bennet, including the Bennet Area Community Foundation, Community Builders Association, American Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion, Girl Scouts, 4H, Baseball program, Elementary School Boosters, and churches with various circles.



**Bennet SOAR Session**

### *Opportunities:*

The village owns sufficient land in the area of the ball park and a new ball field is possible. They would like to promote and make more visible the existing city park. They would also like to have a nature centered park and a trails system. Bennet has less expensive housing than many locations. There is room surrounding Bennet for additional housing development. The town is attractive to many who grew up in small towns because of the atmosphere and the fact that they still have an elementary school in town. Bennet would very much like to retain that elementary school. There is a question about just where the village center is? There is the old village center one block west of the main street, but much of that area has been taken over by industrial uses. Bennet has an opportunity to capitalize on some small redevelopment projects and to envision what it might mean to bring that active center back. As it is now there is nowhere in town to take people to a restaurant, coffee, or shopping. There is an opportunity to take advantage of some of the history of Bennet and to celebrate that history. There are still many older residents in town that could share their memories and thoughts on what to preserve and emphasize. The community has begun this process with the addition of a mural celebrating the original fire station in town. With the aging of the Legion members there is an opportunity to reconsider what a community center might look like and what services it might provide.

### *Aspirations:*

Bennet would like to see a revival of the downtown area to include things like a coffee shop, restaurant, and some basic services. Village wide Wi-Fi and other information technology infrastructure could attract businesses back into the downtown area. A community center that could provide village offices, a small business incubator, wellness center and multi-purpose space would be welcome. Community activities such as a Harvest Festival and summer Saturday night movies in

the park are traditions that could be revived to involve more people and create a sense of community. Bennet would also like to be known as a healthy community with an active trails system and wellness center. They would like to make sure there is housing for all ages and income levels, perhaps through working with the housing authority. They would also like to see public schools return to the village.

*Results:*

Bennet believes a more robust Celebrate Bennet event calendar can be developed to increase a sense of community. The celebration of the history of Bennet can be used to develop a multi-generational sense of pride and investment to preserve and promote the community. Bennet also wants to use the space in the community to build a town center and gathering place for community events while also promoting health and wellness by creating trails, parks and a wellness center.

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

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The Bennet Team was not able to attend the Saturday event, so no Community Priorities were identified.

# Denton

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

Denton counts among its strengths several community organizations, including two active churches, an American Legion club, Historical Society, and Senior Diners group. Denton has a newsletter called “Town Talk” which is used to get news out to residents. It is close enough to Lincoln that some from the southwest neighborhoods frequent Denton businesses. Denton has infrastructure, including streets, lagoons, wells, sidewalks, parks, and a community center that are all in very good repair. This was all done with wisely used Keno money. Denton is small enough that it doesn’t take the City leaders long to respond to needs.



**Denton SOAR Session**

### *Opportunities:*

There is quite a bit of land in Denton that is open for development, both newly platted and older vacant lots. The infrastructure is already in place in those areas and they are ready to be built upon. Denton ball fields are also in good shape and could be used by neighboring communities. The Keno money the town gathers provides great opportunities for community improvements and programs, but these need to be planned for more carefully.

### *Aspirations:*

Denton would like to see more of the business owners actually living in the community. They would also like to see the population grow. This would have the added benefit of making the infrastructure operate more cost effectively. There are some challenges to growth in that the owners of surrounding property have not, to date, been cooperative. There are also some topographical challenges to bringing more area into the service limits. The Denton Historical Society is very active and they would like to have a physical presence in the form of a museum and office building in town.

### *Results:*

Denton feels this could result in a more stable operating budget for the town and would increase the number of residents that are actively engaged in the life of the village.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

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The Denton team identified two Community Priorities: Historical Society Building and Develop a clear vision for Denton to build momentum for successful projects.

### *Historical Society Building*

The Denton Historical Society is very active in the community, but currently has no permanent home. The Historical Society and Denton leaders can take advantage of the ability of a smaller community to take action quickly when a location has been determined. The excellent infrastructure in place will be helpful when that location is determined. There are also some vacant lots that could be considered for the location of the building. Denton could also take advantage of the Prairie Corridor project currently underway through the City of Lincoln and the Lower Platte South NRD efforts. There

may be an opportunity to link the two projects together to emphasize the history of small communities such as Denton in the development of the prairie. Denton hopes that by building a home for the Historical Society they might beautify the village and energize the community.

The Denton team had an idea for a Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper event to kick off the Historical Society building project. They would like to have a summer time, outdoor screening of the movie “My Antonia” on a vacant lot they have identified as a possible site for the building. This movie was filmed in part near Denton. This could be accompanied by other events and activities in a daylong event. The team would also like to work on fund-raising for the building, including grants, and an endowment for maintenance. They would like to seek out professional design assistance and cost estimates, preferably pro-bono services. They also need to check with the village and see what the requirements for the building would be. There is potential to work with other communities to see what has worked for them.

### *Develop a Clear Vision for Denton to Build Momentum for Successful Projects*

A process for visioning for Denton’s future is one of the first steps that should be taken. Denton is a nimble community with the ability to work quickly to make decisions. However, if there is no clear vision for direction for the village, these actions can sometimes lack focus and perhaps not take full advantage of opportunities. An updated comprehensive plan would give guidance for directing resources in the future. Denton can take care of its enviable infrastructure and can use that as a marketing tool in attracting businesses and residents. Denton should also spend some time considering how they might capitalize on the investments being made in the Prairie Corridor project and how they might capitalize on those. Denton would like for a visioning process to result in more active participation by citizens.

The Denton team feels it is important to foster new leadership in the community. Some activities to cultivate local leadership potential would be desirable. The Historical Society would be a strong partner in any visioning exercise. Visioning should lead to an updated comprehensive plan which would help to engage the citizens and could be used to prioritize funds and organize future activities. The Prairie Corridor project leaders should also be engaged during this process to make sure they know Denton is interested in participating in the planning stages.



**Denton Work Session**

# Firth

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

Firth is a peaceful and safe town which is clean and conservative. There are 2 vibrant restaurants in the downtown area that do good business. The infrastructure in town has been well maintained and is in good shape. There are two active churches and a great City park. Firth has a newly revitalized Community Association and new community leadership that they hope will do new and exciting things. Firth is an AG based community, reflected in the landscape surrounding them and in the businesses in town. Firth has a strong relationship with Norris Public Schools and sees opportunities in strengthening that relationship. There is an association in town that runs and programs the ball park and has a very active calendar of youth activities.



**Firth SOAR Session**

### *Opportunities:*

There is a lot of interest in trails and Firth has developed a trails plan. The privately owned lake on the east side of town provides for some lovely views when entering from that direction or looking east from some points in town. Even new residents have a strong sense of being part of the community which may mean there is an opportunity to get more people involved. Downtown is in pretty good shape but there is some opportunity for revitalization. There is a nice row of store fronts on the north side of the downtown intersection. Downtown is also immediately adjacent to the park which might provide opportunities for some public space integrating the businesses. The old fire barn has a wall that would provide space for a nice mural. The youth of the town could be more involved in civic operations and the town would like to activate them. Prairieland Dairy is nearby and has a desire to be active in the community.

### *Aspirations:*

Firth would like to have an entrance sign which would integrate town branding. They would also like for people who attend events at Norris to know that there are two good restaurants just a couple miles away. Economic development and integration of new businesses is a priority for the town. They would like to see more housing in the mid-sized and mid-range prices. High speed internet access in town would be welcome and could assist with economic development. Firth would like to develop stronger relationships with church, community and school organizations to leverage those partnerships. Firth also would like to have a community foundation.

### *Results:*

If Firth were to realize these aspirations they believe there would be an even stronger sense of community, making it a strong town filled with strong people. Kids may be able to stay in the community and will certainly love coming home to visit if they don't. Commuters would feel like they were coming home and that they really lived in the town. There would be a strong feeling of connections between people who live in the town.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

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The Firth team identified three Community Priorities: Community Sign, Trails, and Community Foundation.

### *Community Sign*

The Community Sign would take advantage of existing Strengths of the town, such as the busy restaurants, active churches, the great park and the future splash pad. There is an Opportunity in that the village owns some property near the main entrance to the business district on the north side of E. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. This could be a good location for a sign that could direct people to the core area of the town. Firth also has an Opportunity to involve some of the local youth in design and perhaps even construction. The Aspiration of making residents feel more connected to the community would be served. The Community sign would be one of the results of a larger process to develop branding for the village, including logos and other promotional materials.

Firth should collaborate with the School district to involve students from FFA and FBLA programs as well as the art classes and skills USA program. Local architects, builders and contractors could be called upon to mentor the students through this process and make it a true learning experience for them. Donations could be solicited to help pay for the sign itself.

Team members for this effort should include:

- FACET
- Fire Department
- Village Board
- Business Community

There is an opportunity here to, as a parallel activity, engage businesses from town and the surrounding area, in a conversation about a possible business association. This association could be involved in marketing Firth and in projects to enliven the downtown area. A nice kick-off and engagement activity might be a “business after hours” club where business owners could come together and socialize and get to know one another.

Initial steps:

- Revisit the topic with the Fire Department and make contacts with the local architect and students in town.
- After a concept of the sign has been developed, reach out to the businesses and the Skills USA class.

### *Trails*

Firth is very interested in further developing the Trails Plan and perhaps even extending out to Norris at some point. Being a farming community, there are lots of large land owners and those with heavy equipment that might be able to assist with construction and maintenance of trails. The local youth are also a great Strength in harnessing volunteer assets. This might encourage young people to stay in Firth, make the community feel more connected, increase activity in the town and get people out where they can meet one another. A good trail system can also provide a sense of community pride and identity.

Firth would like to collaborate with the Great Plains Trails Network to get their experienced input on how to proceed. The Village Board, FACET and the landowners involved would also be essential partners. There is an opportunity to get the entire village involved in the project, as well as those who

live on surrounding acreages. Firth may also want to reach out to surrounding towns that have also identified trails as a community priority – such as Hickman and Panama. The NRD and the railroad may also play a part in planning.

Team members for this issue should include:

It may be a good idea for a group of interested citizens to create a group with the specific mission of addressing trail needs. This group could include cycling and running enthusiasts, land owners, engineers and designers, and other who are interested. It would be wise to have some representation from the village board or planning commission on the group, but regular contact with the village could serve the same purpose.



**Firth Work Session**

Initial steps:

- Contact Great Plains Trails Network and ask them to attend a village board meeting and share some of their experience.
- Public outreach to community to find interested parties for the team: Newsletter, website, mailings, Voice newspaper, social media. Once word is out, hold a town hall meeting to gather input and find those interested in participating.

*Resource team comments: Having the school within 2 miles of the village provides an opportunity to make a trail connection that could allow residents to travel the trails in order to attend school events, and perhaps even allow students to ride their bikes to school during good weather. The grade separated roadway over the western RR tracks has a fairly wide shoulder that could be used to cross that barrier. Bollards could be installed to further separate the trail from the roadway and provide some measure of safety, or at least comfort, for the riders. Utilizing private property along the tributary to the Middle Branch of the Big Nemaha River could provide a connection that might be agreeable to landowners, and would keep bicycles away from vehicle traffic. The easiest connection to make would bring the trail to the acreages on the west side of Firth. This would serve the dual purpose of making those homeowners feel more a part of the village.*

#### **Community Foundation:**

Firth would like to establish a community foundation in order to tap into the wealth of the surrounding area. The economic information provided by Don Macke showed that there is a huge Opportunity for community investment. Many of the families in the area have a long history and may be looking for an opportunity to leave a legacy. Firth would like to take advantage of the FACET group already in place. Perhaps the Community Foundation could be an offshoot of that group. The Village Board and the Nebraska Community Foundation will be important partners.

Initial Steps:

- Joint meeting of the village board and FACET
- Invite Greta Leach of Nebraska Community Foundation to that meeting so she can explain the process for establishing a foundation.
- Find a substantial donation to start the foundation.
- Explain to community that with NCF help the funds will be professionally managed.

# Hallam

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

Due to the past history of having a good portion of the town leveled by a tornado, Hallam actually has a number of ready-to-build lots in town, as well as commercial building sites available with services. Most of the property has been available for over ten years and so prices are quite reasonable. The town is in a geographically desirable location for households where the residents work in different towns as it is about equal distance between Lincoln and Beatrice and nearby Crete and Wilber as well. Hallam has two churches and an American Legion post, all of which are involved in community activities. The town itself does 3 fundraising activities per year. The park is well maintained and has newer facilities.

### *Opportunities:*

Hallam has a very large auditorium that stays busy with both community activities and private, rental functions. This could be used for more community programming. There are several commercially zoned sites in the central district which are ready for businesses and the town leaders are very business friendly. There is currently one newer business that is for sale at the main intersection. The restaurant, which has been in business for over 25 years is currently planning an expansion. There are 15 vacant residential lots in town available for purchase at a reasonable price. Hallam has an established annual event, Hallam Fest, which could provide opportunity for further activities.

### *Aspirations:*

Hallam would like to see all 15 of the available lots sold to young families. They would also like to see some opportunity for housing for older adults, perhaps near downtown so they could be near services and social centers. They would like to have an opportunity for community gardening and perhaps a farmer's market. In the future they would like to see some sort of grocery services in town. A green area where people could meet and sit would be nice, perhaps near the post office or community center. They would also like a lending library besides just the book mobile provided by Lincoln City Libraries. They would like to see some sort of downtown beautification project to bring some green back downtown and calm traffic. A trail around town for walking is part of the comprehensive plan and is a priority for the community.



**Hallam SOAR Session**

### *Results:*

Making the main street and downtown more attractive would help to attract new business and residents. It would increase civic pride and maybe get more people interested in participating in town projects. As the town grows there would hopefully be a more diverse population to keep the town going. This may also attract more development to town. There may even be a possibility to move forward with a local sales tax.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The Hallam Team developed four Community Priorities: Beautification of Main Street, Population growth – all lots full, Trails and green space, and Community involvement.

### *Beautification of Main Street*

Main Street is a continuation of 55H Spur, or West Hallam Road, and is the only entrance and exit from Hallam. As such, it is a straight shot through town which many travel at a higher than desired rate of speed. The speed limit has been lowered and electronic speed monitoring devices have been used in the past to try to slow traffic. A stop sign was installed at a central intersection. However, vehicles continue to speed through town. The down town area also has a barren feel, due in part to the empty lots, but also because of the wide expanse of paving for roadway, parking and sidewalks. A beautification project would build civic pride, may increase interest by new businesses and may inspire existing businesses to make improvements. Improvements could also increase visual interest along the route that would cause through traffic to slow. Bringing in the street edge by using bump-outs and street trees narrows the view and naturally slows traffic.

### *Population Growth – All Lots Full*

The Hallam team would like to promote the available lots in town to young families and others interested in living in a small community. This would capitalize on strengths such as the geographic desirability of the location, reasonable cost of living, infrastructure already in place, lower taxes, and other benefits. Hallam could use churches, banks, realtors, and neighborhoods to promote the available lots. They could prepare maps showing the locations of available land, and brochures promoting the town. This could result in a better tax base and could increase community involvement.



**Hallam Work Session**

### *Trails and Greenspace*

Hallam has public support for improved access to greenspace and parks and for development of a trail around the perimeter of the village. There is open space in the downtown area near the bank and post office or west of Moyer's garage. This is privately owned. There is publicly owned space adjacent to the Auditorium, but it is paved and would need to be rehabbed. There is a large space north of the elevator that is in private ownership but is vacant and in grass. Hallam would like to see the open space serve as a gathering place and public square. If there was sufficient size there could be a community garden component, and possibly farmer's market. The Hallam team would like to see a community input activity such as a "Chalk Talk" to get ideas from the community on what they would like to see. They could also use a tool such as Mind Mixer to get input. Eventually they would like to include checkers/chess boards, chalk boards and an update to the parking lot at the park.

*Resource team comments: There are a lot of ideas here that would benefit from some coordinated planning. The Resource Team would recommend undertaking a planning effort to develop a comprehensive Parks and Open Space Plan that could identify the proposed trail, greenspace/public square area in downtown, and improvements to the existing park.*

### *Community Involvement*

The Hallam team would like to increase community involvement by developing a method for dispersing information to the residents. They could take advantage of the community center as a central site for information distribution and display. They do have a fairly extensive email list of resident emails, but there are new people in town. They also have many young people in town who tend to be more social media savvy. Social Media provides an opportunity to get information out quickly and cheaply. A calendar of local events could be developed and displayed both on social media and in hard copy format at frequented sites, such as the post office, bank, restaurant, and community center. A countywide calendar on the County website would also share information among towns. Hallam's aspiration would be the establishment of a County-wide calendar, hosted on social media or the County website that would display all county community events. This could lead to economic development, increased awareness of and participation in community events, and possibly more volunteers even from other communities.

# Hickman

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### Strengths:

Hickman is fortunate to have a full time staff of skilled professionals and a strong government in place. They are a quickly growing community that has had the foresight to use a planning process for that growth. They have improved and maintained city services well and have good reliable infrastructure. They have also passed a local sales tax to provide money for economic development. Hickman has a downtown district with several active businesses, including a long-standing grocery store. Construction is underway on a new community center which will include city offices and event space. Hickman is also home to a successful live theater which puts on several productions per year. Hickman is in the highly desirable Norris School District and has two large State recreation areas nearby.



**Hickman SOAR Session**

### Opportunities:

Hickman would like to expand their community celebrations to engage more residents and increase a sense of community. The Hickman Hay Day celebration, Trick-or-Treat on the Trails, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks in the Park, Animal Run and Chile Feed, Community Garage Sales, Clean Up Day, and others are community events that provide opportunities to engage citizens. There are many people in town who express interest in participating in events and leadership, they just need to be engaged and committed to those activities. They would also like to find a way to engage more of the acreage residents and farming community surrounding the town. Hickman would like to take every opportunity to seek input from citizens.

*Resource team comments: Hickman's downtown has a lot of character and provides opportunity for enhancing streetscapes and public spaces. There are some empty spaces and Hickman should work to recruit businesses to fill those spaces. Businesses that would bring foot traffic and a street presence could really enliven downtown.*

### Aspirations:

Hickman would like to have a variety of recreation and entertainment options, including an aquatics center which could tie into the Norris Swim Team, a drive in movie theater, bigger parks with soccer fields and new tennis courts, and a trail system that links to the nearby State and NRD lakes. They would also like to maintain high aesthetic standards by regulating signage, landscaping near the transformer, and taking advantage of natural resources. Hickman would like to improve pedestrian access and safety on major roadways and possibly widen 68<sup>th</sup> Street and Hickman Road as they come into town and then pass through town. Hickman would like to continue residential growth to the north of town, including apartment growth, and to market both current and new businesses. Hickman would also like to reserve an area for a future industrial park so that those uses will be kept separate from residential uses and natural resources. The involvement of young people in events and the business of the city will be important for the future.

### Results:

As a result of Hickman’s work they expect to see increased quality of life with great recreation and entertainment options, opportunities for leisure activities and healthy active children. The economy of Hickman will thrive with a strong tax base and employment opportunities in town.

## **COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

The Hickman team identified two Community Priorities: Positive Government with Citizen Input, and Planned Growth with Aesthetic Results.

### *Positive Government with Citizen Input*

Hickman has a city council, mayor and staff that are all very approachable and understand the benefits of citizen input. They have done community surveys in the past that have given them some initial direction. Their Planning Commission is active and knowledgeable and has been involved in the updating of the Comprehensive Plan. The various community organizations in town would provide good opportunities for getting information out as well as for soliciting comments. Groups to contact include churches, Volunteer Fire Department, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kiwanis, Boy and Girl Scouts, Norris Public Schools organizations, Neighborhoods, Hickman Foundation, and others. Hickman would also like to work with Firth and Roca as well as Lancaster County. Other important partners and resources include Prairieland Dairy, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Voice newspaper, 2040 Countywide Trails Plan, Waverly Comprehensive Plan.

As a first step in the process, the team recommends a “Walk, Talk, and Eat Program”. This would be a series of event open to the public that would involve various elected and appointed officials, as well as City employees, spending some time walking around a specific area, talking to any interested parties, and then having a hot dog feed, pancake breakfast, snow cone, or other small treat with the group. For instance, the Planning Commission could walk around the downtown with business owners and others, talk about what design standards are and see what the feeling is about whether or not these are appropriate. It could also involve a stop at the village offices to look at some pictures of successful communities that have used design standards, or some drawings of what various buildings might look like if design standards were applied. Some examples of appropriate groups and topics are: Planning Commission, design standards, comprehensive plan and long range plan; Mayor, pop-up conversations; City Council, contact government agencies, pop-up conversations; Parks Director, trail system, parks development, Lighter Quicker Cheaper; Public Works, safety with roads and walkways, mayor conversations; City staff, survey for citizen input; Teams, recruit volunteers from previously listed teams for their input.



**Hickman Work Session**

### *Planned Growth with Aesthetic Results*

Hickman has in place a strong comprehensive plan, zoning and subdivision ordinances, and has the staff to apply them to application requests. The Planning Commission is well trained and understands the requirements and applies them consistently in their decisions. Hickman also has several community beautification projects and policies in place, such as a nice entry sign, park improvements near the south viaduct, several dilapidated houses that have been removed from their lots, and a public tree rebate plan. Most of the properties along the entry corridor and main streets are neat and well maintained.

# Panama

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

One of Panama's greatest strengths is their progressive Village Board. This board has demonstrated an ability to see the wider view while still being able to focus in on details. The board has initiated a newsletter and town hall meetings to keep the public informed and engaged. The board is also very supportive of local businesses. Panama is proud to have many locally owned and operated businesses. There is a lot going on in Panama, many projects are underway or being completely, particularly focused on young people and recreation. Panama's location adjacent to a paved roadway, but without a through street going through town, means there is a particularly low level of traffic which makes it more comfortable for children to walk and ride about town. Panama is also fortunate to have a strong local church that is growing.



**Panama SOAR Session**

### *Opportunities:*

A two story, brick building, a former public school, sits in the middle of Panama. This is a great opportunity for redevelopment, one which is currently being taken advantage of by a local family. There is discussion of making part of that building an open gymnasium area for the community. There is a large open grass area near the ball fields on the north side of town which provides an opportunity for additional playing fields. There are also some commercial buildings in the downtown that are for sale and provide opportunity for additional businesses.

### *Aspirations:*

Panama would like to see new and active businesses move into town. They would like to have a beautiful and active downtown with plenty of community activities. They would particularly like to see their new community center become a lively and exciting place that is used by the whole community. There are roads that need paving or repaving. Panama would like to have a splash pad for local children. A new entryway sign that defines the entrance to the business district would help those from out of town navigate.

### *Results:*

If Panama is able to achieve these aspirations they would see their property values rise, increasing the village income and ability to maintain and improve facilities. They would also see an improvement in the quality of life of those who live in Panama. Mostly, they would like to see children stay in Panama after graduating from school and return to Panama with their own children. Panama would like to maintain their progressive town board to continue current objectives and pursue new opportunities that will enable growth. It is also important to implement community events that will result in a higher quality of life.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The Panama team identified five Community Priorities: Maintain a progressive town board, Create a long term parks and recreation plan, Create plans for the area surrounding the Community Center, Undergo business district beautification project to increase active occupancy, and Address water infrastructure needs.

### *Progressive Town Board*

The town board has a “can do” attitude that has resulted in great strides over recent years. There is momentum to move forward on projects, increased involvement and collaboration in the town and they are able to reach agreement on issues. There is an opportunity to set the bar even higher. New skill sets would be useful on the board, and different perspectives will lead to even better results. There is an opportunity for the board to develop a process for businesses to obtain liquor licenses to increase their profitability. The team aspires to more active recruitment of board members. It will be important to identify the skills needed and then to look for those with the skills to recruit. Results will be continued action – not just talking but happening!

*Resource team comments: Don't forget to engage youth in the process. Increased involvement at a young age can lead to retention of youth, not to mention fresh ideas and energy.*

### *Create a Long Term Parks and Recreation Plan*

Panama is a very recreation focused community. There are currently spaces designated for future recreation improvements, such as improvements to the ball park, a new BMX track, possible soccer fields, etc... There is also new playground equipment that has been purchased and not yet installed. Panama has an opportunity to take advantage of other publicly owned land. The community has become more engaged in the planning process and there is an opportunity to involve them in the design and execution of projects. They would like to find some skilled individuals to help lead these projects and programs. Panama hopes that activities and programs will lead to more community involvement, as well as pride in the facilities, a sense of ownership and increased likelihood to care for those facilities. Ultimately, the hope is that increased community activity will lead to interest in increased business.



**Panama Work Session**

### *Create Plans for the Area Surrounding the Community Center*

Panama is in the process of constructing a new community center in the middle of downtown. They already have a start on the plans, as far as building location and design go. There is opportunity to look at moving a small playground to the Community Center site which would allow small children a place to play while events are taking place. There is also opportunity for Senior Center where older adults could gather for meals and socialization. The community center will also allow for income through event rentals. Panama would like to see the community center be a very active space with many community events and gatherings. They would like to develop some annual events that could become community traditions. They hope the results of this project will be a stronger community with more interpersonal interaction and enrichment.

### *Business District Beautification and Increased Active Occupancy*

There are currently 5 businesses in Panama, which proves business can exist and thrive in this community. There are available spaces for new businesses. The progressive town board is very pro-business, and the rest of the community would like to see more business as well. Panama has observed new businesses coming in to other towns, and feel that there is opportunity in Panama based on the availability of space as well as nice proximity to the highway and Lincoln. Panama would like to see vibrancy restored to the downtown area. They would also like to see some incentive developed to prompt business owners to improve existing businesses or start new ones. Overall results could be a nicer looking downtown, increased employment opportunities in town. In the long term more people would be interested in visiting Panama and possibly even relocating to the area.

#### *Address Water Infrastructure Needs*

Panama currently has two water sources and a newly renovated water tower, which are all paid off. The water system is the only utility income source. However, there is a need to do an upgrade to the full system, similar to what was done with the sewer system. Upgrading the water lines would also provide an opportunity to do some street upgrades and address some storm water run-off issues. There are some opportunities for grants to address water quality issues. Panama is concerned that people may choose to leave the village due to concerns over water quality. There is also some confusion in the town leadership because of actions (not sure what this bullet means?). Panama believes the results of improvements to the water supply could be a healthier, happier community which may be more willing to maintain the system once it is working well.

Panama sees some opportunities for collaborating with other towns on equipment. For instance, they would like to cost share on a projector that could be used for presentations and community movie nights. They would also like to get input from towns with experience in managing and programming the community center. Help with developing rental agreements and processes would be appreciated.

Panama sees businesses such as the Panama Locker as great resources and partners in events. They would also like to put in some work to identify local residents with particular skill sets to assist with projects.

# Waverly

## SOAR SESSION RESULTS

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### *Strengths:*

Waverly is fortunate to have the schools within the City limits. Children can walk to school and neighborhoods look at the school as a center. There are many community organizations such as the volunteer fire department, Kiwanis club, Chamber of Commerce, Community Foundation, Education Foundation. There are many established community events, such as an egg hunt, community breakfasts, Waverly Fest, Halloween parties, a car show, Christmas tree decorating festival, and Arbor Day celebration. Waverly has a very large park with mature trees and a ball park that is newly built. Waverly usually does not have difficulty finding people to serve on boards and run for office. The infrastructure in Waverly is well maintained and up to date. Being located near I-80 on the way to Omaha is convenient for families that have one worker based in Omaha.



**Waverly SOAR Session**

### *Opportunities:*

Waverly's young population provides opportunity for growth. The trail system Waverly has begun to develop could be linked into the City of Lincoln's Salt Creek and Steven's Creek trail system when those are developed fully. Waverly's parks offer opportunities for including entertainment in the band shell and sporting events at the new ball park. Waverly has good transportation systems with a nearby interstate interchange, major highway running through town, and a developing electric car system. Waverly is adjacent to the Camp Creek site which holds many events during the year, mostly focused on the rural heritage of Nebraska and agricultural development.

There is room for expansion around Waverly. There are also opportunities for expansion of some existing commercial and industrial districts. Consideration of gateways to the town needs to be taken in these expansion activities.

### *Aspirations:*

Waverly would like to see its population grow to about 10,000. They would like to be self-sufficient and contained with more complete services. They would like to retain young people but still make the city friendly to older residents. To accomplish this, additional housing that is affordable and accessible will be needed. So will an increased variety of jobs and services, including a one-stop shop for health care. Waverly would like to create a town center which would become the focus of community and civic activity. Those activities should include sports tournaments, Sr. centers and meeting places, farmer's markets, and an expanded Waverly Fest. Waverly would like to expand their recreational facilities to include a sports complex and indoor recreation center. New City offices and a fire station are also needed and should reflect civic pride. Waverly also wants to nurture their reputation as a green community. Transportation planning and projects should include a more "complete streets" type design with all forms of transportation being considered and included. In order to connect neighborhoods to schools and make walking to school a practical alternative, consideration should be given to pedestrian and bicycle connections, particularly across Highway 6.

Long term, Waverly wants to plan for the future development of the N 162<sup>nd</sup> Street and Interstate 80 interchange and what activities might surround it.

**Results:**

Waverly will be a hip, cool place to live and visit which will be attractive to residents and businesses.

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

The Waverly Team identified four Community Priorities: Connect the town through sidewalks and trails over a new viaduct, Create a town center, Create a community identity/image, Functional Event Area.

**Connect the Town Through Sidewalks and Trails Over a New Viaduct.**

Highway 6 runs diagonally through Waverly, separating the older town center from newer commercial development and residents from schools, parks and one another. To add to this challenge, a busy railroad parallels Highway 6. There is one viaduct on the west side of town that provides a connection, primarily to the middle school and high school, however this does not include safe pedestrian and bicycle connection. The Waverly team would like to see a viaduct that better connects pedestrian and bicycle activity. They would also like to see general improvements throughout the city to make moving around on foot or by bike easier and safer. This will allow children to walk or bike to school safely, increase healthy activity in town, connecting neighborhoods and creating a feeling of one community. Waverly would like to see a pedestrian and bicycle connection over the railroad and highway. The Environmental Protection Agency should be contacted as a potential source of funding.



**Waverly SOAR Session**

Important partnerships would be the County Engineer, Railroad Transportation Safety District, the City Council, State Safe Routes to School program, Aspen neighborhood families, and the schools.

*Resource team comments: It appears the existing viaduct may be too narrow to retrofit, but that could be looked into. It may be that if the lanes were shifted to one side and bollards were used to separate traffic, a pedestrian bicycle lane on one side may be possible. A second viaduct for vehicle and pedestrian bicycle traffic may be challenging to fit into the existing city footprint, but should definitely be considered and planned for as the city expands to the east. Something to consider is a pedestrian and bicycle only viaduct in a more central location, perhaps near Heywood Drive or North 141st street. This would be a good alignment to bring people in to the future town center and the two major parks. It is also central and would give good access to schools. It is almost certain that any viaduct placed in the existing city will require the acquisition of some private property, although a pedestrian and bicycle only crossing could utilize a spiral ramp to minimize the area. Waverly might also consider reviewing the Complete Streets program*

**Create a Community Identity/Image**

Waverly would like to initiate a process to develop a community identity or “brand”. This brand would capitalize on the healthy living goals Waverly has and highlight their parks, sports, schools, active living and other green strengths. There is an opportunity to develop a brand and vision that could be

used in all sorts of marketing, signage, and to create community pride and identity. The team would like to involve the full community in this effort and could use techniques such as town hall meetings, open houses, contests online and in person, surveys, social media, etc... to engage people in the process. The brand could be incorporated into signage, documents, welcome signs, logos on city employee uniforms, stationary, websites, etc... Engaging the creative community, art classes, and young people in the process could take advantage of existing talent and increase community involvement and buy-in.

Important partners include the full community in the form of town halls and contests, the schools and young people, the UNL School of Business and Entrepreneurship programs and the creative community.

### *Create a Town Center*

Because of the rail and highway corridors that divide the town, along with the grain elevators adjacent to the old downtown and the strip development that has taken place in the newer parts of town, Waverly has developed without a distinct central business district or square. It is difficult for those from out of town to locate the “downtown” which can be a bit disorienting. The Waverly team would like to identify and appropriate town center and begin to work toward fully developing this central gathering place. The existing strip mall, which has been identified by the owner as due for an update, is on the south side of the highway and is partially visible from the highway. It is also adjacent to the more mature park and has good connectivity to existing neighborhoods. There are opportunities to add programming such as outdoor dining, festivals and performances, farmer’s markets, craft fairs, and other events. The adjacent businesses could participate and benefit in these events by providing coffee carts, booths, wine and cheese tastings, etc... If an attractive outdoor space is created this could become a welcoming place for people to come and hang out and “do their thing”. A reconfiguration and “greening” of the parking lot could create a flexible attractive place that serves as parking most of the time and can flex to provide event space. Connections via sidewalks and trails to the nearby park could expand events to include athletic competitions, larger performances, and larger shows such as car shows. Park area could also be used to provide additional parking for larger events. This could eventually free up Wayne Park for other uses and activate Lawson Park.

Important partners to engage are the mall owner and business owners in the mall and in the surrounding area, the City leaders, the Nebraska Main Street program, Local residents, and the UNL Rural Futures Initiative and College of Architecture.

### *Functional Event Area*

This priority is related to the Town Center above, but focuses more on Wayne Park to the east. The concept is to repurpose parts of the park into more multi-purpose space. The ball fields in the park have largely been replaced by the new facility in the northern part of town. Repurposing the ball field space could allow for events such as craft fairs and farmer’s markets, community garage sales, car shows, concerts, and other types of recreational activity. There are unused areas available in the park that could also be used. Wayne Park is also close to the existing mall and could be better connecting via trails and sidewalks. If properly planned this could provide for an active area for business and entertainment.

Important partners are the high school band, farmers market organizers, artist, kids, garden club (master gardeners), Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Schools, Theater groups, dance studio, vendors (cupcakes, wine, grocery store, food trucks), tennis and basketball enthusiasts.

