



Small Town Downtown Forums 2015 Summary Report

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In partnership with:



United States
Department of
Agriculture



University of Wisconsin-Extension



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October 8, 2015

About the Forums

Small towns have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities. These annual forums are intended to bring together those serving and working in and with communities of populations less than 1,500 to learn from each other through case studies and roundtable discussion groups. Everyone who cares about the future of small town Wisconsin is invited to attend these annual events. Communities are encouraged to share their accomplishments, ask questions about successes and challenges in other communities learn about new opportunities, and explore great ideas.

Who was Invited:

Community leaders, elected officials, volunteers, business leaders, educators, economic development professionals, planners and others interested in small town issues. A listing of participants at each of the four 2015 forums is presented in the exhibits of this report.

Locations of 2015 Forums:

Four geographically diverse sites were chosen as locations for the 2015 forums. County-based University of Wisconsin-Extension educators hosted these events and arranged for facilities and meeting support. The following map illustrates the selected locations:



Elroy
August 25, 2015
American Legion
UW-Extension host: Gary Kirking

Green Lake
August 26, 2015
Town Square
UW-Extension host: Jay Dampier

Mercer
September 8, 2015
Mercer Community Center
UW-Extension host: Will Andresen

Hammond
September 9, 2015
Foster Hall
UW-Extension host: Eric Biltonen

Agenda at Each Forum

Each of the forums followed the same sequential agenda. The events all began with a keynote that provided education on some key downtown development principles. These principles were then reinforced through case studies and roundtable discussions. The agenda follows:

- Opening Remarks
- Keynote: “Keys to Successful Small Town Downtown Revitalization”, Gary Becker, Vierbicher Associates and the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin
- Community Case Study
- Network with Resources
- Roundtable Discussion Groups
 - Leverage
 - Spatial Relationships
 - Collaboration
 - Community Health
 - Support Local
- Next Steps
- Wrap-up and Adjourn

Sponsors

- Wisconsin Rural Partners, in concert with:
- Wisconsin Downtown Action Council
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- University of Wisconsin - Extension
- United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

Planning Committee

- Gary Becker, Vierbicher Associates and the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin
- Dennis Deery, Wisconsin Rural Partners
- Anne Katz, Arts Wisconsin
- Laurie Lindquist, University of Wisconsin - Extension
- Darrin Wasniewski, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- Beth Weirick, Wisconsin Downtown Action Council
- Errin Welty, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- Carol Wetuski, USDA Rural Development
- Greg Wise, University of Wisconsin - Extension

Keynote Presentation - 5 Keys to Downtown Success

5 Keys to Downtown Success was presented by Gary Becker of Wisconsin based Vierbicher Associates and the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin, at each of the four forums. His presentation provided the structure for roundtable discussions that followed. Mr. Becker offered five selected recommendations as important examples. Mr. Becker provided ideas for action that communities can implement to make progress on developing a more vibrant downtown and community.

Successful small town downtowns focus on “Resilience,” not “Growth.” Resilience is more important because many rural counties are actually declining in population. Growth is simply not an issue in many places. Resilience focuses on maintaining vitality. It is a measure of the sustained ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand and recover from adverse situations. In addition to population decline, other challenges might include impacts of climate change, budget cuts and scarce funding, increasing poverty, and an aging population. While there are more than five keys to a successful small town downtown, the following must be in place to help communities respond to change.



Leverage

Leverage is defined as the power or ability to act or to influence people, events, decisions, etc. It is used in downtown development to pull together dispersed money, skills, knowledge, volunteers, grants and financing. In short, leverage can be used to balance assets and needs such as wellness, access, education, engagement, and self-sufficiency.

Various methods can be used to develop and maintain leverage:

- Inventory the community and its associations
- Establish networks, linkages and channels
- Keep the network activated
- Bring support together as needed

Often the University of Wisconsin-Extension or the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation can provide assisting in creating these relationships.

Example - The Potosi fire station project led to leveraging support for a brewery museum that now draws thousands each year.

Spatial Relationships

The second key deals with density, proximity, space and connections. It addresses how the proper distribution of land uses can benefit your community.

Various methods can be used to ensure effective spatial relationships:

- Comprehensive planning and zoning, tightly clustered and connected schools, trails, residences, employment
- Acquisition of vacant property
- Connect destinations within a community with both paths and good roads.

Increased interactions lead to increased property value, public health, lower cost of government services, increased capacity within community, and creativity and innovation.

Example – In Mazomanie, a park and residential path now connects the downtown to the school.

Collaboration

Collaboration is working with others to complete a project and to achieve shared goals. Collaboration on downtown projects could be local or regional, public-private sector, or private-private sector.

Various prerequisites are necessary for effective collaboration take place. These include: shared perception of need, collaborative leadership, trust, mutual benefit, and stakeholder support. Obstructions to collaboration can occur, often caused by turf issues, competition for growth, historic rivalry, perceived loss of identity, and threats to the status quo.

Various methods can be used to ensure effective collaboration:

- Meet with regional peers, major institutions, organizations, and competitors
- Have regular meetings and standing agenda
- Seek out common cause, share information, and find reasons to work together

Gays Mills - Moving downtown out of flood plain prompted a grocery and Cenex store to collaborate and join forces to open a single new "Marketplace."

Community Health

Supporting the physical, mental, social well-being of a community can be incorporated into downtown improvement plans. Examples could include:

Various methods can be used to encourage community wellness:

- Access to healthcare and fresh food downtown
- Multimodal linkages to all community destinations, including bicycling to downtown
- Provide the physical activity infrastructure of parks, recreation, programs, and clubs
- Make health a shared community value as demonstrated by downtown activities and events

Cross Plains – LIFE foundation operates to improve community health. It provides a wellness center, trails, and fitness classes. It empowers social support with various local programs.

Support local

Local initiatives can encourage spending energy and resources locally. They can involve businesses, non-profit organizations, volunteers, as well as community leaders.

Various methods can be used to support local businesses and community activities:

- Make community aware of local opportunities to buy or get involved
- Matchmaking programs that link volunteers and organizations or buyers and suppliers
- Stagger/combine local initiatives so not to not over-ask for participation
- Appreciate community leaders

Stevens Point – The Central Rivers Farmshed produces a farm atlas, donates food, organizes a farmer tribute dinner, and helps school kids raise money for their school organization.

Conclusion

Successful small town downtowns focus on “Resilience” by leveraging community assets and resources, attending to spatial relationships, collaborating with each other, encouraging activities to stay healthy, and supporting local businesses and community activities. Downtown districts, as a physical place, provide opportunities to employ all of these keys in an effort to make their community a better place to live.

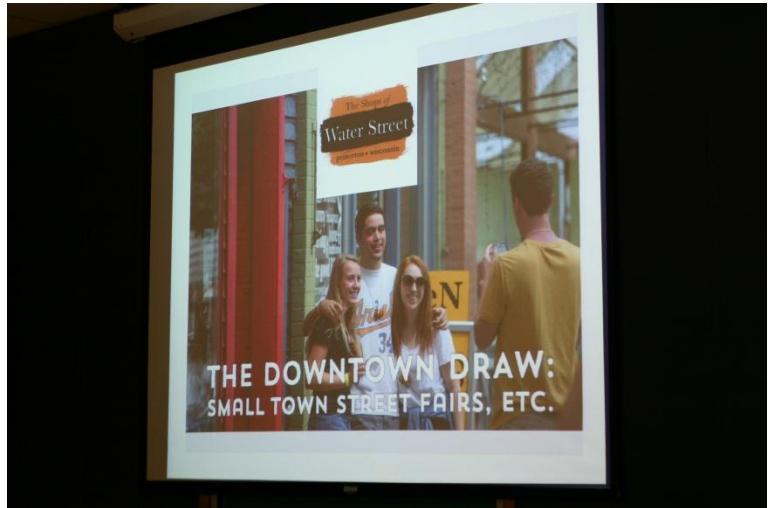
This section was written by Bill Ryan, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Center for Community and Economic Development.

Local Case Study Presentations

Following the 5 Keys to Downtown Success keynote presentation, each forum highlighted a local community's work in downtown revitalization.

Elroy

Elroy is implementing Downtown Revitalization Plan. One element is an effort to preserve and restore buildings through a façade investment program. The second is an effort to improve the community's gateways through the creation of a TID, developer agreements, and a WEDC-CDI grant.



Princeton (Green Lake Forum)

The Shops of Water Street is local effort to attract new customers, establish a specific destination, complement existing marketing efforts, create a consistent message, beautification, and assist/attract new businesses. The case study highlighted various innovative fairs and events to draw new customers to town.

Mercer

Mercer has been successful in developing its downtown area and trail system using grant funding from 11 sources. Downtown improvements have included façade improvements, community gardens, and a railroad beautification project. As a result, business activity has increased in the community.

Hammond

The Running of the Llamas is a community event which takes place on the second Saturday in September in Hammond, WI. Downtown Hammond hosts a day of llama-themed activities for all ages. The main event is an actual llama race along Main Street. It is highlighted in a community mural painted on the side of the village library. The event now draws thousands of people to this community. Most importantly, it serves as a catalyst to get people in the community involved in a fun activity.

This section was written by Bill Ryan, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Center for Community and Economic Development.

Selected Issues and Ideas From Roundtable Discussions

Following the local case study, participants were invited to participate in roundtable discussions related to the “Five Keys” that were presented in the keynote presentation. The roundtables were repeated for a second time allowing participants to attend two discussion groups.

Facilitators at each table provided a comfortable atmosphere for group discussion. These discussions related to how the “Five Keys” could be implemented in the participant’s home community.



While it was not possible to adequately capture all of the good ideas shared in the roundtables, it was possible to collect representative notes from facilitators at the four sites and create a “word cloud” for each of the five keys. A word cloud is an image made up of words captured in the notes in which the size of each word indicates its frequency. By reviewing these images, some of the major issues and ideas raised become apparent.

Leverage:

The word cloud highlights many of the assets in a community that provide ways to bridge the resource gap.



Spatial Relationships:

The word cloud highlights many of the physical amenities in a community that need to be considered in fostering a well-connected and quality environment.



Collaboration:

The word cloud highlights many of the ways to build an environment that enables people to effectively work together for common goals.



Community Health:

The word cloud highlights many of the amenities that make a community a healthy place to live for various segments of the population.



Support Local:

The word cloud highlights some concepts related to helping residents invest their energy and resources.



Evaluation of 2015 Forums

To evaluate what participants thought about these forums, participants were asked to fill out a survey, rating on a 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied) scale their satisfaction with various components of the forum. The surveys were collected at the end of the forums. The survey remained largely anonymous, although some participants identified themselves in order to be contacted after the forum.

Survey Limitations

The survey had its limitations. Participation among the sites was unequal despite a relatively similar attendance at all locations. Participation in Hammond and Mercer was low. In Hammond in particular, one person's views greatly influenced the evaluation totals. What's more, participation rates in Green Lake and Elroy were much higher. Thus, in the combined totals, Green Lake and Elroy accounted for over three-quarters of the participation, meaning the data in the combined total is heavily weighted toward those locations. Another problem with the surveys is that some participants gave scores to all the roundtables, despite the forums only providing time for participants to attend two of them. This means that many scores for roundtables were by participants who did not spend a full session at that roundtable.

Ratings

The findings, while varying considerably among the different locations, displayed some general trends. This is particularly true in the presentations. While clear majorities in all forums were satisfied with both the keynote and the local success story, the success story achieved higher satisfaction scores in all four locations. Overall, over 90% were either very satisfied or satisfied with both the keynote and the success story, but while only a 33% of respondents were very satisfied with the keynote, a slim majority was very satisfied with the success story. This suggests that the success story made a strong impact on the participants (perhaps due to the local connection), although both received broadly favorable opinions.

SMALL TOWN DOWNTOWN FORUMS						
September 8, 2015 - Mercer WI						
Your input into these forums is very important to us. We ask that you please take the time to complete the following survey. Information from this survey is used to make improvements to future forums.						
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	
Keynote: Keys to Successful Small Town Downtown	1	2	3	4	5	
Community Success Story: Mercer	1	2	3	4	5	
Roundtables:						
Leverage	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Spatial Relationships	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Community Health	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Local Support	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Resources	1	2	3	4	5	
Comments						
Suggestion for Future Roundtable Topics						
Please provide your contact information if you would like someone from the forums to follow up with you.						
Name	Email			Phone		

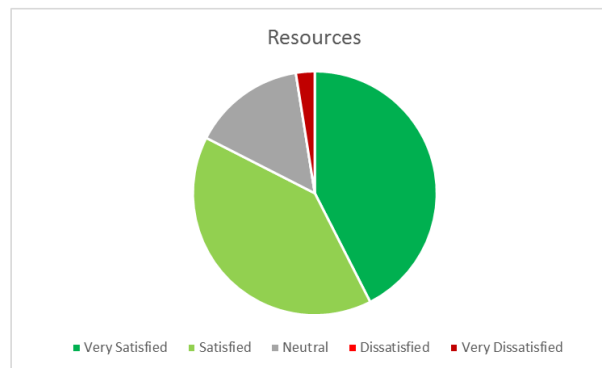
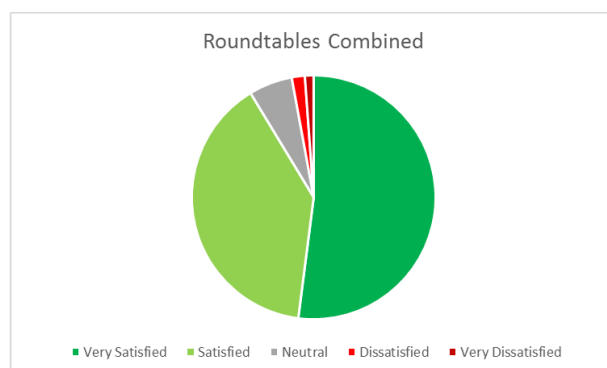
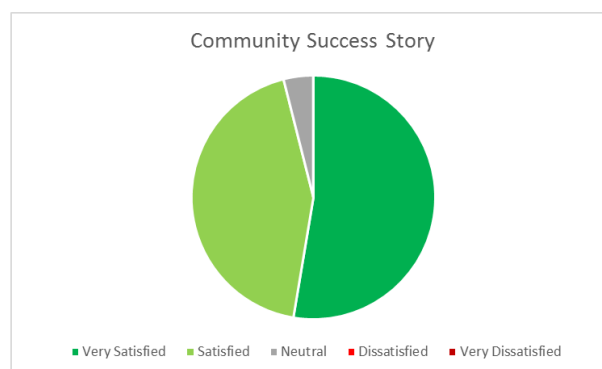
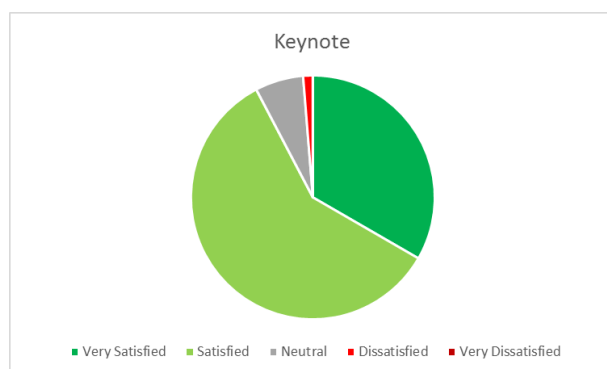
Scores for the roundtables were somewhat more difficult to measure because of the limited response participations in each category, but there were some key findings. One of these is in the participation rates of each event. Some events were considerably more popular than others, with over half of the population participating in the local support roundtable, while only a little more than a third attended the community health roundtable. The gap between participation rates was likely larger than what the numbers suggest however because these rates include the participants who claimed to have visited all five roundtables. Among the participants, the leverage roundtable, was one of the most well-liked, earning both the highest number of very satisfied ratings as well as being the only roundtable to obtain no neutral, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied ratings. The community health roundtable was well liked as over 60% of its participants were very satisfied. Overall, all roundtables were thought of positively, as a large majority in every roundtable were either satisfied or very satisfied.

Comments and Suggestions

Some participants provided open-ended comments and suggestions. The most common comments were general satisfaction comments such as “Thank you” and “Very helpful.” Many other positive comments were more specific, with people praising the forums for being informative and liking the roundtables, their facilitators, and the networking. One person also praised the forum as being much better than it was last year. Still, many participants had some frustrations, especially in regards to the roundtables. In Green Lake in particular, many people reported that it was difficult to hear what was happening in the roundtables. Similar opinions about the roundtable logistics were also expressed, like people saying the roundtables went too fast and had too many people. Many people also reported that the area of the meeting space was too small, especially in regards to crosstalk from the other conversations, and desired separate rooms for roundtables or alternate venue spaces. Many suggestions for future forums were also addressed. Some of the more popular ideas included a walk through town, information about local lunch options, and discussions involving attracting commerce, community fundraising and the use of volunteers.

	<u>Keynote</u>	<u>Success Story</u>	<u>Round Table Leverage</u>	<u>Round Table Spatial Relat.</u>	<u>Round Table Collab.</u>	<u>Round Table Com. Health</u>	<u>Round Table Local Support</u>	<u>Resources</u>
<u>Elroy (32 surveys)</u>								
Very Satisfied	13	18	12	6	8	11	7	9
Satisfied	17	11	4	6	6	3	8	9
Neutral	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	0
Dissatisfied	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	1	16	19	17	17	16	14
Total	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
<u>Green Lake (28 surveys)</u>								
Very Satisfied	7	11	5	3	7	3	9	2
Satisfied	20	15	8	5	5	2	4	4
Neutral	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	4
Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
N/A	0	1	15	20	16	21	13	17
Total	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
<u>Mercer (12 surveys)</u>								
Very Satisfied	4	9	3	3	2	4	4	5
Satisfied	6	3	2	0	1	0	2	1
Neutral	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Dissatisfied	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	0	7	7	7	7	6	4
Total	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
<u>Hammond (6 surveys)</u>								
Very Satisfied	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	1
Satisfied	3	4	2	3	3	2	2	2
Neutral	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	0	3	1	2	4	3	3
Total	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

	<u>Keynote</u>	<u>Success Story</u>	<u>Round Table Leverage</u>	<u>Round Table Spatial Relat.</u>	<u>Round Table Collab.</u>	<u>Round Table Com. Health</u>	<u>Round Table Local Support</u>	<u>Resources</u>
Combined Total (78 surveys)								
Very Satisfied	26	40	21	14	17	18	20	17
Satisfied	46	33	16	14	15	7	16	16
Neutral	5	3	0	1	3	3	3	6
Dissatisfied	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
N/A	0	2	41	47	42	49	38	38
Total	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	78
Combined Total (78 surveys)								
Very Satisfied	33%	51%	27%	18%	22%	23%	26%	22%
Satisfied	59%	42%	21%	18%	19%	9%	21%	21%
Neutral	6%	4%	0%	1%	4%	4%	4%	8%
Dissatisfied	1%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Very Dissatisfied	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
N/A	0%	3%	53%	60%	54%	63%	49%	49%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



Elroy Comments and Suggestions

- Unique perspective in group, but some of focus on more technical aspects overlooked.
- Very good, gathered many ideas for use in our community. Elroy is plan very interested in procedure plan.
- Very informative, should include members of service clubs + invitation to business owners.
- Keynote: not to read the material. Thanks!
- Very good.
- Giant conversations/not working. (leverage)
- Very informative what other communities were doing about same issues we are dealing with.
- All in all it was very informative.
- Very helpful, well worth my time, thank you.
- Could go 1-2 days.
- Really enjoyed the roundtable discussions.
- Very worthwhile – excellent turnout.
- Valuable discussions. Good to let folks know where the resources are.
- Very informative. Great turnout!
- Good sessions.
- Good networking.
- Funding sources.
- More in depth on community health + collaboration. Listings of where to go to get grant monies + other sources.
- Have an optional “walking town” before the program. Since all programs start @ 12:30, provide a list of local restaurants + have a get-to-know you table.
- Local lunch options – Employment considerations.
- Roger Brook series.
- Have a walk through community before meeting.
- What is the “role” or the “value of” small rural communities 15 yr in the future? How to identify assets of small communities that one can build on.
- Possibly further discussion on services and technology that would attract or keep people around.
- Motivating business owners and citizens.
- Encourage groups to bring enough people to cover all the roundtables. (spatial relationships, community health)
- Give the resource people a little more time to share examples.

Green Lake Comments and Suggestions

- Very good interaction at the Roundtables.
- Much better than last year. Took away good tools.
- The room was just a bit hard to hear in Roundtable. A little more spread out would be good.
- Gary put together a fantastic presentation that provided great keys to success w/real life examples. I thought it was good to follow up Gary’s presentation with Matt’s presentation to show a specific real life example of how these keys were implemented.
- Very difficult to hear – not only the presentations but especially the roundtables.

- great job!
- This was a wonderful forum! I enjoyed learning about common problems in our WI small towns!
- Facilitators did well at monitoring with their groups and forwarding the discussions.
- Good ideas – long road ahead. Keep format like going. Sooner or later lightbulbs turn on.
- Separate the roundtables into nearby rooms if possible. It was difficult to hear within my groups. (leverage, community health)
- Was great to meet neighbors from other towns – especially as presenter! Was offered advice and suggestions.
- Nice little event!
- Cross over from other tables was a problem. Round table was hard to hear. Separate rooms would have been better.
- Great keys and great discussions!
- Town square was great unreadable to share the downtown story.
- Well done.
- Great networking.
- I wish there was a page in the folder that was recommended reading.
- Excellent roundtable leaders.
- The facilitators needed to keep the discussions on track better. I wish we would have had 3 roundtable breakout sessions. I would have liked a larger introduction of who was in the room before the networking break.
- Very informational.
- Recognize the “Resources” you have.
- Specific leveraging tactics and ways to utilize available funding seem to have the largest impact on these revitalization and redevelopment projects. Focus more specifically on how leverage and funds were actually used for successful projects.
- Attracting merchants – ours are gone.
- ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) - Robert McKnight, PhD, Northwestern U. Tools. Property Acquisition and Dev. By public entities
- Creating Entrepreneurial Communities – How communities can create their own favorable business climate.
- Creative fundraising – money raising.
- Dealing with empty storefronts and the difficult landowners who own them.
- More keys!
- Rural schools importance to the community.
- Utilizing volunteers and keeping them active. Identifying complementary businesses that coexist nicely, not necessarily collaborate.
- Keynote worked well with roundtables.
- Thank you to Green Lake for inviting us and showing off a great community asset. It’s enlightening to see to efforts of this community and its volunteer groups.
- Resources: Please print and send them out!
- Planned Giving: The Great Wealth Transfer
- We need to continue this dialogue about how to re-engage our community members.
- How to leverage volunteers!

- Thank you!!
- Roundtable- Talked too fast. Too much chatter. Do a pass out! Too interested in “getting through the information.” (collaboration, local support)


Mercer Comments and Suggestions

- WEDC help could be used.
- Overall very satisfied.
- Thank you!
- The networking was very helpful.
- A fantastic networking opportunity! People couldn’t stop talking. I learned from a variety of perspectives. Thanks for hosting in a location that demonstrated small town success.
- Bringing good info back to Land O’Lakes! We would love to host you next year.
- Collective impact, multigenerational engagement.

Hammond Comments and Suggestions

- Space was too small – this is the third year I have attended and there are better venues in the area – many would be free.
- The meeting space was extremely crowded + not having a bathroom handy is difficult.
- Great resource material.
- I didn’t know how this was going to work out. First ½ hour wasn’t connecting so well. By the end, I loved it, hope to attend whatever I can in the future. Very interesting sitting at a table w/others and learning what’s going on.

Exhibit - Brochure

<h3>REGISTRATION FORM</h3> <p>Registration Fee is \$10.00 per person Space is limited so register early</p> <p>Please complete the following:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Community: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>City: _____ State _____ Zip _____</p> <p>Daytime phone: _____</p> <p>Email: _____</p> <p>I will attend at this location:</p> <p>_____ Elroy, Tuesday, August 25, 2015</p> <p>_____ Green Lake, Wednesday, August 26, 2015</p> <p>_____ Mercer, Tuesday, September 8, 2015</p> <p>_____ Hammond, Wednesday, September 9, 2015</p> <p>Register Online at: http://wisconsin.downtown.org/small-town-forum</p> <p>Or Mail Form and Check to: Milwaukee Downtown c/o Beth Weirick 600 East Wells Street Milwaukee, WI 53202 Make check payable to: Wisconsin Downtown Action Council</p>	<p>About the Small Town Downtown Forums</p> <p>Small towns have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities. These forums are intended to bring together those serving and working in and with communities of populations less than 1,500 to learn from each other through case studies, roundtables and discussion groups. Everyone who cares about the future of small town Wisconsin is invited to attend. Come to the forum nearest to you to brag about your town's accomplishments, ask questions about successes and challenges in other communities, learn about new opportunities, and share your great ideas.</p> <p>Who should attend?</p> <p>Community leaders, elected officials, volunteers, business leaders, educators, economic development professionals, planners and others interested in small town issues.</p> <p>Find information on the sponsors at:</p> <p>Wisconsin Downtown Action Council - www.wisconsin.downtown.org</p> <p>Wisconsin Rural Partners - www.wirural.org</p> <p>Wisconsin Economic Development Corp - www.inwisconsin.com</p> <p>University of Wisconsin - Extension - http://cced.ces.uwex.edu</p> <p>USDA www.rd.usda.gov/wi</p>	<h2>Small Town Downtown Forums</h2> <p><small>Case Studies and Discussions to Improve the Heart of Our Communities</small></p>  <p>Four Regional Workshops</p> <p>August 25, 2015—Elroy</p> <p>August 26, 2015—Green Lake</p> <p>September 8, 2015—Mercer</p> <p>September 9, 2015—Hammond</p> <p><i>Improving the vitality and economic health of our small communities</i></p>
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<h3>LOCATIONS</h3>  <p>Elroy August 25, 2015 American Legion 402 Franklin St, Elroy, WI</p> <p>Green Lake August 26, 2015 Town Square 492 Hill Street, Green Lake, WI</p> <p>Mercer September 8, 2015 Mercer Community Center 2648W Margaret St, Mercer, WI</p> <p>Hammond September 9, 2015 Foster Hall 865 Davis St, Hammond, WI</p>	<h3>AGENDA</h3> <p>12:30 pm—4:30pm</p> <p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Keynote: "Keys to Successful Small Town Downtown Revitalization", Gary Becker, Vierbicher</p> <p>Community Highlights/Case Study</p> <p>Resources Introduction</p> <p>Network with Resources / Break</p> <p>Roundtable Discussion Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leverage - Spatial Relationships - Collaboration - Community Health - Support Local <p>Repeat Roundtable sessions (see above list)</p> <p>Next Steps</p> <p>Wrap up and Adjourn</p> <p><i>Come early and explore the local community.</i></p>	<h3>PRESENTED BY:</h3>  <p>University of Wisconsin-Extension</p>  <p>WISCONSIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION</p>  <p>WISCONSIN RURAL PARTNERS</p>  <p>United States Department of Agriculture</p>  <p>WISCONSIN DOWNTOWN ACTION COUNCIL</p>
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Exhibit - Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Anne Katz | 608 255 8316 | akatz@artswisconsin.org

July 19, 2015

SMALL TOWN FORUMS COMING UP IN ELROY, GREEN LAKE, MERCER AND HAMMOND

*hosted by Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, Wisconsin Rural Partners, UW-Extension Center
for Community and Economic Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation,
and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development*

Wisconsin's small towns have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities. The 2015 Small Town Forums will bring together those serving and working in and with communities of populations fewer than 1,500, to learn from each other through case studies, roundtables and discussion groups.

People involved in business, government, education, and civic issues are invited to attend. The Forums will feature small town development good ideas and interesting case studies, presentations on successful strategies for rural community development, resource information, and roundtable discussions. The forums are about sharing ideas, learning and networking for people who care about the future of rural Wisconsin.

Each Forum takes place from 12:30-4:30 pm on the date listed. The registration fee is \$10. Go to www.wisconsin-downtown.org/small-town-forum to register.

Forum dates/places:

- **Tuesday, August 25 - Elroy** (Juneau County), at the American Legion Hall, 402 Franklin Street
- **Wednesday, August 26 - Green Lake** (Green Lake County), at the Green Lake Town Square, 492 Hill Street
- **Tuesday, September 8 - Mercer** (Iron County), at the Mercer Community Center, 2648W Margaret Street
- **Wednesday, September 9 - Hammond** (St. Croix County), at Foster Hall, 865 Davis Street

Who should attend? Community leaders, elected officials, volunteers, business leaders, educators, and local and regional economic development, civic, and planning.

The 2015 Small Town Forums are made possible through a coalition of statewide agencies and organizations involved in rural community development: Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, Wisconsin Rural Partners, UW-Extension Center for Community and Economic Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development.

Contact Anne Katz at Arts Wisconsin for information, 608 255 8316 | akatz@artswisconsin.org.



Exhibit - Sample Media Coverage



MERCER - Rural communities these days don't survive without adapting, and sometimes collaboration and dedication can make an area thrive. It's one reason economic workers in Mercer want to keep improving the region. For now, that means expanding the growing network of bike trails. Mercer Town Board Supervisor Bonnie Banaszak hopes to make it a regional strength.

"We all want to be interconnected, not [just] via car," Banaszak said. "We have so many resources to share, that this is going to be a possibility via bike path because that's the wave of the future." It's a project town leaders believe will attract the tourist of the future. However, it's not always easy finding local support.

"You do so very carefully and let them know that want to savor the unique Northwoods character, but for us, not to grow would be our demise," Banaszak said. Collaboration and diversification were two themes from a small town forum in Mercer Tuesday.

It's the third forum held in Wisconsin this year. USDA Rural Development State Director for Wisconsin Stan Gruszynski believes small communities need to keep diversifying their job market. "When you are a community that has relied on a single industry, for years and years, and now you have to look at diversifying your economy and moving your focus forward, it can be a daunting challenge, but there is support and there is help for doing that, both in the private sector and for the public sector," Gruszynski said.

State, local, and federal workers were all part of the discussions. The goal of the forum was to help open up more channels to get projects and ideas done. "Taking some state dollars, some federal dollars, and reinvesting in these rural communities will pay in the long run. Why? Because that's where America gets its food and its fiber. That's where we get clean air from," Gruszynski said.

The forums highlight small towns that have had success on certain projects. The next Small Town Forum is scheduled for Wednesday in Hammond in St. Croix County.

Small/rural town success depends on 'resilience, not growth'

By Tony Daley

Resilience not growth was the message given at the August 26 Small Town Downtown Forum held last Wednesday in Green Lake's Town Square.

People looking for answers on how to revitalize small/rural municipalities got a chance to hear about "five keys to small town success: leverage, spatial relationships, collaboration, community health, and local support."

A "small town/downtown forums" Q & A sheet listed categories for checking satisfaction levels covering basics on incentivizing small town/downtown resilience.

Last Wednesday's mini-summit drew County elected officials, staff, and agency partners.

It was one of several forums across the state displaying a platform for achieving community advantages.

Attending members included those from the City of Princeton, which has shown impact with "Shops of Water Street" initiatives.

Keynote speaker Gary Becker, Executive Director of the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin and a principal of the Vierbicher marketing group, alluded to trends affecting small/rural towns such as increasing population migration to metropolitan centers.

Reasons for rural exodus are complex and varied but include budget constraints, limited services, and problems attracting business investment.

Solutions are going to be tough to conceive and implement into competitive programs.

One solution voiced at last week's forum was the need for more collaboration.

Building networks of mutual cooperation is one tactic supporting small/rural towns.



GREEN LAKE REPORTER PHOTO

THE AUGUST 26 Small Town Downtown Forum convenes stakeholders committed to planning for the future of small town/rural Wisconsin. Pictured are (L-R) Matt Trotter, Shops of Water Street member; Greg Wise, Community Development Specialist/University of Wisconsin Extension [UWEX]; Jay Dampier, Community Development Educator, UWEX/Green Lake County; Rick Rolfsmeyer, Executive Director of Wisconsin Rural Partners; Gary Becker, Local Government Institute Executive Director; and Anne Katz, Executive Director, Arts Wisconsin.

Getting past some "obstacles to collaboration" is going to need committed partnership among stakeholders, Becker indicated.

"Old ways" that reduced collaboration, such as turf protection, competition for growth, and historic rivalry, need to be replaced by regional peer unity and partnerships that embrace businesses, organizations, and companies.

A sensible approach can identify "common causes" that lead to sharing information and resources.

In response to the global trend of the digital age, small towns must become more "boundary-less."

Several of Becker's points included the following:

- Focus on resilience before growth;
- Leverage assets and resources;
- Pay attention to spatial relationships;
- Stay physically, mentally,

and socially healthy;

- Support local businesses, schools, initiatives, and farmers.

A major take-away from last Wednesday's Small Town Downtown Forum was "collaborate, collaborate, collaborate!"

The question now for Green Lake and other rural/small communities is the same one facing many big corporations: how can principals turn strategy into excellence, practically advancing actions based on new ideas?

The "keys" for success might be out there, jingling on a chain; however, the keys still need to be grabbed, and follow-through is necessary.

Stakeholders in government, education, civic policy, and business must therefore cooperatively identify resources and network as coalitions concerned about tackling the competitive challenges in the future of small/rural communities.

Exhibit - Participants

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Notes