



Small Town Downtown Forums

2016 Summary Report

Prepared by:
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In partnership with:



United States
Department of
Agriculture



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November 30, 2016

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 2016 forums is presented in the exhibits of this report.

Locations of 2016 Forums:

Four geographically diverse sites were chosen as locations for the 2016 forums. County-based University of Wisconsin-Extension educators and local leaders hosted events and arranged for facilities and meeting support. The following map illustrates the selected locations:

August 31, 2016—Phelps
September 7, 2016—La Farge
September 14, 2016—Eagle
September 20, 2016—Shell Lake

While the 2016 forums represent a joint effort of five partner organizations, this year's lead came from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) represented by:

- Errin Welty

Partner organization representatives included:

- Carol Wetuski, USDA Rural Development
- Bill Ryan, UW Extension
- Anne Katz, Arts Wisconsin and Wisconsin Downtown Action Council
- Rick Rolfsmeyer, Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP)



Agenda at Each Forum

Each of the forums followed a similar 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:

- 11:30 Registration Opens
- 12:00 - 12:30 Lunch and Networking
 - Sticky note activity – what are three things they would do with 100 volunteers for a day
 - Table activity - draw a picture/map of your ideal community
- 12:30 – 12:45 Welcome (introduce local guests & resource partners)
- 12:45-1:15 Keynote
 - Eagle - Norm Walzer – Northern Illinois University. Norm is with the Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois, and specializes in innovative local entrepreneurship programs and rural economic development. He has completed numerous research projects examining rural development trends and patterns and will discuss these findings and best practices with attendees.
 - Shell Lake: Matt Fluharty – The Art of the Rural. Matthew Fluharty is the Executive Director of Art of the Rural. He is the son of a fifth-generation Ohio Valley farming family and has resided across the midwest, northeast, and Ireland. Matthew holds a PhD in English and American Literature from Washington University in Saint Louis, where he wrote on the concept of “rural modernity” across transatlantic art and literature. He is currently researching, writing, and engaging in course design around the topics of land use, the vernacular, and the rural-urban diaspora.
 - La Farge: Organic Valley – what individual did you end up selecting?
 - Phelps – Chris, did you end up securing Wendy, Bob or Carl? I know we discussed all three.
- 1:15-1:45 Local Community Case Study/Project/Panel
- 1:45-2:15 Local Entrepreneurial Case Study/Project/Panel
- 2:30-4:15 Speed dating roundtable sessions (three 30-minute sessions, plus switching time). Have specific questions – 3 things to discuss (what have you done, what thing does your community need to improve in this area)
 - Entrepreneurialism/innovative businesses (USDA, Local ED, UWEX, WEDC)
 - Creative Economy (Arts Wisconsin, WDAC, Tourism)
 - Leadership Development (WRP, UWEX)
 - Local Policies & Regulatory Strategies (League, DNR, WHEDA)
 - Glass Half Full, OR What does Change Look Like Here? (WRP, UWEX)
- 4:15 Wrap up and Closing Comments

Partner Host Organizations

USDA Rural Development
www.rd.usda.gov/wi

UW Extension Center for Community & Economic Development
www.ced.ces.uwex.edu/downtown-revitaliztion/

Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC)
www.wisconsinowntown.org

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)
www.inwisconsin.com

Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP)
www.wirural.org

Resource Organizations

Arts Wisconsin
www.artswisconsin.org

League of Wisconsin Municipalities
www.lwm-info.org

Local Government Institute
www.localgovinstitute.org

Wisconsin Department of Tourism
www.travelwisconsin.com

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)
www.wheda.com

Wisconsin DNR
www.dnr.wi.gov

Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation
www.wwbic.com

Keynote Presentations

Compiled by Errin Welty and Anne Katz

The following is a summary of keynote and local case study presentations from the 2016 Small Town Forums held in August and September in Phelps, La Farge, Eagle and Shell Lake. The 2016 theme of the event was entrepreneurialism, and each site featured a unique keynote speaker and panel of local business or organization case studies highlighting the theme within the host community.

Phelps

Completed a community survey to help identify community priorities. One question asked was what year Phelps was at its peak (1967). A goal is to move that number closer to today in future surveys. Also asked community to identify their interests and hobbies to identify other areas to draw on (woodworking, agriculture and culinary arts were strong). The unanimous goal for downtown was to get rid of the 20-year vacant former grocery store and improve façade of other buildings downtown. Are now moving forward with a redevelopment on grocery store site (developer donated building, CDA created funding strategy, now looking for operators). Also redid facades of a few businesses. Keys to success included pulling in expertise from local/regional sources, building a coalition, and identifying creative financing.

Vilas County also runs several accelerator buildings and hosts a 10-week entrepreneur boot camp. 70 businesses have graduated so far. There is a scholarship for local residents to participate. Feel the county's role is not to create jobs but to educate, stimulate and facilitate opportunities within the communities. Katie Perenski, a boot camp graduate, presented about her experience with the program. For her, the \$500 cost of the program allowed her to stay in the community, and helped her grow a local client base for her laser engraving business. She is still home based, but has plans to grow into a permanent space in the future, and currently has had 4 consecutive profitable months.

La Farge

La Farge did a strategic plan a few years ago in conjunction with the Regional Planning Commission. Several key recommendations emerged from the plan that have been implemented. Including the formation of a dedicated revitalization entity (La Farge Area Progress Association), introduction of streetscape elements (banners, return of the holiday lighting, UW Capstone student project vision), marketing (brochure of local businesses), and recreation planning (to address impact of new park resulting from flood clearance). The community also joined connect communities to get additional support, and leveraged activity for funding assistance. They are also working toward a solar field array, an information kiosk downtown and have started a farmer's market. In addition, post-flood activities have included the purchase and demolition/relocation of 19 homes, creating a 15-acre park. They partnered

with an alumnus that develops disk golf courses and raised sponsorship to add disk golf, wrote grants to create an accessible fishing pier.

Organic Valley Keynote – truly a group development initiative, designed to help farmers keep their land and earn a living in the face of subsidies and rising interest rates. At one point farmers had to cosign a loan for the entity to buy buildings to expand. They also sold preferred stock, known as ‘freedom from banks’ stock, which paid 6% per year. Since then they have used other forms of financing such as TIF and bonding, but it started out as a joint effort. To this day, they dedicate a portion of profits to the communities that they operate in (or farmers in). Their average member farm has 50 cows.



Medical Clinic Case Study – In 1983 the community was looking for a doctor to staff a fairly new clinic that had been home to a few recent graduates that had left after loan forgiveness. A committee of 8 recruited the doctor and his family to locate there. The community was poor, and there was lots of barter and non-payment, he did shifts at the ER in Viroqua to make money. However, the opportunity arose to provide services to the Amish – specifically, pregnancy and childbirth services to help them avoid the emergency room. They created a back room birthing space in the clinic, and birthed 1,500 babies in that room, charging \$650 per delivery. The relationship also allowed them to conduct research into hereditary Amish diseases. According to the doctor “these opportunities would never have been possible in a larger community”. After 25 years, Vernon medical partnered with them to build a larger clinic in the community, and allowed them to manage the birth center and genetic research lab.

Library – The library successfully raised funds to double the size of the facility through years of grant writing and fundraising – USDA grant, silent and noisy auctions, private donations, etc.

Eagle

Eagle is a village of 1800 people, with 3300 in the surrounding town. The two are very much jointly managed, with a joint fire department, library and recreation department. Issues include declining school enrollment, limited new development, and the fact that new residential development is only attracting seniors. With the opening of the new leather shop, they no longer have any downtown vacancies, although they do still struggle with the ability to address interspersed residential and commercial – no continuity. A community survey found that 100% of the residents wanted a grocery store, have had some leads, but things move slowly and nothing has panned out.

Norm Walzer Presentation notes:

There are multiple types of entrepreneurs:

- Aspiring: interested but haven't tried it yet
- Survival: supplement income or see few alternatives
- Lifestyle: pursue a lifestyle or want to remain in community
- Growth: want to build wealth
- Serial: make a career of starting businesses
- Social: create positive community impact – triple bottom line.

Entrepreneurs can come in all form, don't have to be downtown or in the business park, can be government or nonprofit.

Most likely groups to form entrepreneurs based on research (how can we target these groups?)

- Owners of small farms (under 250 acres) – growth/necessity
- Females 25-35 years – emerging/lifestyle
- Unemployed - necessity
- Newcomers (especially immigrants) – necessity/inspiring
- Pre-retirees – opportunity
- Retirees – opportunity/growth/social

In Wisconsin, the most significant factors pointing towards rural entrepreneurship are the presence of women aged 25-34, the availability of housing, and farmers with small acreages, as well as unemployment (cyclical). Increasing trend toward community supported enterprises, both for non-profit and social capital, or as part of a business model to engage customers.

See Norman's presentation handouts at the end of this section.

Local Case Study Presentations - Eagle

Craig Wegan, twistedforks.com: opening at 103 W Main Street in downtown Eagle.

Is the newest business opening in town? Started the business after leaving the military, looking for something to do that utilized his passion until he could go back to work at the foundry after a back injury. He started taking classes on leatherworking, and started the business in his basement in 2008. In 2013, he moved to Eagle and started working at the foundry. When the downtown building came available, he was one of four offers, and the owner agreed to lease it to him. He's currently working to scale production, design the space, etc. while continuing to work full time.

Brian – VP of Operations for Generac:

Generac is the largest employer in town – started in 1988 in the founder's basement. Has been focused on rural communities, building portable generators and growing in response to disaster response. They went public in 2011, and are now growing through acquisition of national and global companies in order to expand global reach and presence within sector. Brian moved to Wisconsin from Boston to return family to rural community, work for a company so focused on community. Generac has facilities in Eagle, Berlin, Jefferson, Whitewater in Wisconsin. Workforce is the biggest challenge they face right now – with unemployment down, they are having trouble meeting growth. Need to hire 70 people in this year to grow their 300-person Eagle facility, still 25 people short. Currently, the average employee travels 19 miles, looking to provide transportation options (partnered with other employers in Whitewater to run a bus). Also started a GPS education program to educate K-12 kids to get them skills needed to work in manufacturing.

Shell Lake

The Art of the Rural. Matthew Fluharty is the Executive Director of Art of the Rural. He is the son of a fifth-generation Ohio Valley farming family and has resided across the midwest, northeast, and Ireland. Matthew holds a PhD in English and American Literature from Washington University in Saint Louis, where he wrote on the concept of "rural modernity" across transatlantic art and literature. He is currently researching, writing, and engaging in course design around the topics of land use, the vernacular, and the rural-urban diaspora.



Norman Walzer presentation:

**Community Supported Ventures:
Opportunities for Community Development**

Norman Walzer
Senior Research Scholar, Center for Governmental Studies, RWJ

100-Edison Street, Town Center
Eagle, Wisconsin

September 24, 2015

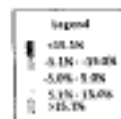
Financial support provided by RWJFORD in collaboration with UW Extension and RWJMS
State University

- ### Intended Outcomes of Session
- Learn new alternatives in financing ventures
 - Find resources and ways to preserve or advance agencies
 - Identify possible threatened local organizations or opportunities
 - See opportunities to organize and engage local groups
 - Participants share local experiences
 - Take home ideas for possible local projects

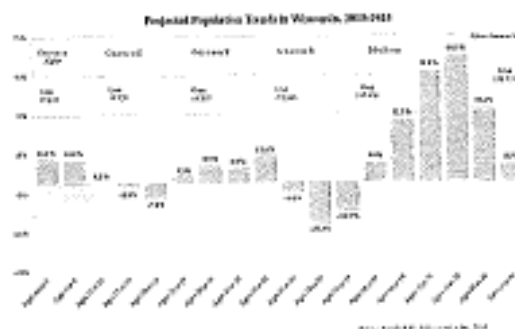
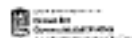


- ### Overview of Presentation
- Background Issues
 - sluggish economy with slower growth in business starts in rural areas
 - Difficulties financing small enterprises in declining environment
 - Retirements without heirs to take over
 - Community Supported Enterprises
 - Ways to start, salvage, or preserve essential businesses that provide social capital
 - Definitions and scope of CSEs
 - Social Enterprises
 - Community Supported Organizations—public or private
 - Community Supported Businesses
 - Financing Approaches Used
 - Personal, equity, mortgage
 - Purchase of goods and services
 - Growing roles of intermediaries and crowdfunding platforms
 - Both private and public ventures

**% Change in Number of Businesses
Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa
2000-2015**



Source: National Establishment Time Series
<http://www.establishment.org>, 2015.



Types of Entrepreneurs

- **Aspiring**
 - interested but have not tried yet
- **Survival or necessity**
 - Supplement income or have few alternatives
- **Lifestyle**
 - Pursue a certain lifestyle or want to stay in community
- **Growth**
 - See opportunities to build wealth
- **Serial**
 - Make a career from creating or starting businesses
- **Social**
 - (double single bottom line: social, environmental, financial) with positive community impact



Who are Likely Entrepreneurs?

- Owners of small farms (<250 acres) Growth/necessity
- Females 25-35 years Emerging/Lifestyle
- Unemployed Necessity
- Newcomers (Immigrants-Latinos) Necessity/aspiring
- Pre-retirees Opportunity
- Retirees Opportunity/growth/social



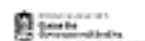
Determinants of 2004-2007 Business Starts Wisconsin Counties

Variable	Regression Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T-Value
(Constant)	-16.43		
Females Ages 25-34	1.46	0.563	5.128***
Unemployed	0.296	0.35	3.422***
Farmers With Small Homages	-0.13	-0.187	-3.181***
Unemployment	0.54	0.153	2.736***
Pre-Retirees	-0.107	-0.196	-1.48*
National Ancestry Scale	0.009	0.046	0.61
Immigrant Index	0.006	0.036	0.112
Correlations	-0.029	-0.141	-1.939*

Notes: 71 observations, Adj. R square = 0.680, F=20.431***, All VIFs below 2.58.
* Significant at 10%, ** Significant at 5%, *** Significant at 1%.

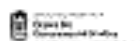
Name Two Potential Local Entrepreneurs? (5 minute audience discussion)

- Which type(s) of entrepreneurs are they?
- What kinds of businesses did they start?
 - Private businesses or organizations
 - Public agencies
- Did they succeed?
- What help did they need most to succeed?
- Can your agency help? How?



Why are CSEs Important?

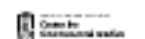
- Impact of recession and slow rural recovery in many rural areas
- Shifting markets given Internet stores and purchases
- Population projections for rural areas suggest further decreases
- Aging business owners and potential retirements
- Loss of population including young family members as future owners
- Need essential services and social capital for quality of life
- Inadequate access to private capital from traditional lenders
- Small businesses less likely to receive traditional incentives



Types of Community Supported Enterprises

Social Enterprises

- Aim to promote broad social purposes or goals
- Often not limited to a specific geographical location
- Typically launched by a "parent" nonprofit organization
- Usually involves a business venture or activity
- Can be any legal form—nonprofit, for profit, and hybrid
- Often has a social entrepreneur to launch and drive the approach
- Contributors have no expectation of ownership/financial return
- Investors typically not directly involved in management



Community Supported Businesses

- Subset of Community Supported Enterprises
- Aim to start, retain, or promote an essential business
- Are motivated by a social purpose in the community
- Can take almost any legal form—LLC, nonprofit, etc.
- Organized by community leaders to coordinate investment efforts
- Often facilitate local economic development
- May own physical property and contract for operations
- Investors may not expect a financial or in-service return (tax deduction)
- Often involve grocery stores, restaurants, and book stores



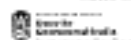
Hybrid Approaches

- Not strictly CSE—no social product motivation
- Public or private organizations
- Directly engage customers in designing products
- Form clubs that vote on product to be produced (breweries)
- CSA subscriptions in restaurants, grocery stores, book stores...
- May involve discounts based on participation
 - "Delayed" quantity discounts are common
- Mainly private marketing strategies



Recent Changes with Crowdfunding

- People with smaller equities can now engage in crowdfunding efforts
 - Federal Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) ACT in 2012
 - SEC rulings published and more lenient state statutes (2016)
 - Illinois statute (1/1/2016)—\$4 M with audit; min. \$5,000/investor/offering
- Residents pool investment for either equity or loans
- Statewide intermediaries help small businesses through platform process
 - Milk Money (in Vermont only)
 - Community Sourced Capital (Washington State—multiple states)
 - The Local Crowd (Wyoming—national)
- State agencies coordinate efforts for businesses
 - Match Oregon



Cow and Quince New Glarus, WI (pop. 2,172)

- Started in 2014 by member of Sell Sisters
- Located in 1930s historic building—former grocery store
- A market and restaurant buys from Wisconsin farms
- Focuses on sustainable foods to promote local growers
- Creative menu and local organic products
- Memberships for meals like a CSA arrangement
 - Various options for dinners, gifts, and special events
- Has processing kitchen and curing facility for local producers
- Specializes in unique local inputs such as ice cream, cheeses...
- Wants to promote sustainability and health lifestyle
- CSE that fits with other New Glarus approaches



Township Stores Bonaparte, IA (pop. 426)

- Started in 1986 when elderly couple retired and moved away
- 50 families @ \$2,000 raised \$100K to purchase/rehab 4 properties
- No expectation of guaranteed financial return
- Started Township Grocery plus hardware store to stabilize Main Street
- Continued for 30+ years while town declined in population & economically
- Competition from local producers marketing directly
- Collaborative spirit dwindled over time and new leaders did not emerge
- Local support has not continued in light of growing regional competition
- Tight margins due to high merchandise cost and competition
- Remains a stable force for an ailing downtown



Washburn Community Foods Washburn Illinois (pop. 1,145)

- Owner decided to close grocery store in 2000
- 16-member local committee sold about 500 shares @ \$50
 - local bank bought \$10,000 plus provided funds from a revolving loan fund
 - Raised \$210,000 to purchase the store
- Store became coop in 2006; memberships @ \$100 & 5% rebate on purchases
- Operated at loss even with volunteer help & pricing strategies
- Offered special services to elderly; partnered with local producers
- Was not profitable and in 2013 sold (at discount) to private owner
- Sold again in 2016 to private owner who currently operates store
- Town experiencing significant employment losses threatening markets



SuperValu

Toulon, IL (pop. 1,292)

- Grocery store closed in December 2006
- Stark County Ventures, LLC was started
- 50 residents pooled funds (\$80,000) to buy closed building
 - No promise of financial return
- Grocery opened with new operator in 2010 in same location
- Building burned in 2014
- Community meeting initially raised \$45,000, mostly @ \$500 shares
- 50 investors @ \$2,000+, a bank loan, & TIF combined raised total of \$300K
- Operator reopened as a second store (Wyoming) in March 2016
- SC Ventures, LLC, leases store and provides free coffee/meeting space, etc.





Shrewsbury Coop at Pierce's Store
(<https://www.piercesstorevt.com/>)
Shrewsbury, VT (pop. 2,221)

- General store closed by elderly owner in 1993
- Family request to preserve rural development and stores including Pierce's store
- Vermont Preservation Trust held RFP with one group responding
- Members contributed \$10 to \$25 each and raised \$125,000
- State grant provided \$167,382
- SBDC feasibility study said needed \$15/week spent by 325 people in 3 miles
- Created open Shrewsbury Coop (2003) and started operations
- Members get 2% discount on purchases but no dividend etc.
- Extensive involvement by residents in rehabbing, restocking, etc.
- Volunteers operate store with few paid staff. There had several managers
- Sells local crafts, produce, bakery, convenience items
- Holds community events (dinners) to build or retain social capital



Putney General Store
Putney, VT (pop. 2,702)

- Oldest continuous operating general store in Vermont
- Sold groceries and common items needed in community
- Major fire (1998) destroyed facade and interior
- Preserv. Trust, VT helped Putney Historic Society (CS) rehab & re-open
- Raised nearly \$600K from grants, donations
- Rehabbed rehabbed but arsonist burned to foundation in 2009
- PTV provided grant and help in raising necessary revenues
- PHS owns building and leases to operator including a pharmacy
- Stresses persistence and assistance from a state agency.

Common CSE Characteristics

- Socially-motivated to preserve quality of life and social capital
- Local champion(s) led the efforts and made strong case to public
- Involved loss of needed services or an opportunity to expand
- Possibility for financial return, but sometimes only tax deduction
- Widespread community support required
- Organization types—LLC, nonprofit organization, or cooperative
- Often promote locally-produced items—food, crafts...
- Must address all of the usual small business issues



Lessons Learned

- Local social capital and interests can be driving force
- Knowledgeable local leaders must take action
- Activity is important enough to motivate residents to invest
- State technical and financial assistance can be important
- Operator must be experienced and committed to effort
- Business must continue to build social capital
- Pre-sales can be important, but not essential, to success
- Need multiple cost-centers—bakery, sliced meats, crafts, etc.
- Must meet most or all issues facing small businesses



Are CSEs a Future for Rural Communities??



- Importance of social capital and quality of life to retaining residents
- Does a Co-op's or a Dollar General build social capital?
 - If it is community-owned?
 - Provides community services?
- Can private sector alone maintain projects to build social capital?
- What is the role of public agencies? Will residents invest in social capital?
- How can a community/economic development agency help?
- Is Vermont community store a reasonable model?
- What about your community?????



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CSE, or Potential CSE, in Your Community?

(Table Discussion—10 minutes)

Identify a CSE in your area.....

- What was the main motivation and how was the effort launched?
- Who were the principals and why did they emerge?
- Did the projects last? Did they succeed and by what measures?
- What community development principles were evident?
- Take aways for future use....



For Further Information....

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Change in Employment and Business Establishments 2009-2015

Employment for Geographic Area	Illinois			United States		
	2009	2010	2015	2009	2010	2015
All establishments	84%	11.3%	4.8%	9.1%	5.4%	8.7%
All employees	87%	10%	3.8%	9.8%	6.1%	4.6%
1-9 employees	11.5%	33.2%	11.5%	1.8%	1.8%	6.9%
10-49 employees	11%	40%	4.4%	1.6%	4.2%	2.7%
50-99 employees	1.4%	2.1%	4.3%	5.8%	1.4%	3.3%
100+ employees	4.4%	1.4%	6.8%	4.7%	1.7%	1.7%

Source: National Establishment Time Series, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/2015>

Selected Issues and Ideas from Roundtable Discussions

Compiled by Errin Welty and Anne Katz

The following is a summary of participant discussions from the roundtable portion of the 2016 Small Town Forums held in August and September in Phelps, La Farge, Eagle and Shell Lake. Discussion topics included Leadership, Entrepreneurialism, Creative Economy, What Does Change Look Like Here and Local Policies/Regulatory Strategies.

Leadership

- Boulder Junction Community Center created after two unsuccessful attempts – utilized public engagement to accomplish their goal.
- Invested in renderings and firm cost estimates. Added value-add features like library and meeting space. Set budget maximum and raised 10% in contributions (of \$2.1 million max). Final vote was 60% in favor.
- Hosted public hearings, engaged local leaders from a variety of walks of life to champion the project, received contributions from various civic organizations and focused on sustained publicity to demonstrate momentum.
- Ended up using naming rights for various aspects of the center (\$5,000 to \$1.5 million) including a 'name your lake' campaign which mapped which lake's residents contributed the most. High Fishtrap Lake contributed \$85,000.

What is leadership development?

- Right people in right positions, elected official succession/recruitment
- Bringing it all together to reach a common goal
- Community connections/communication
- Programs in school, encourage community service, engage community to address shared issues.

Strategies:

- Older residents have time and can be a resource
- Write clear position descriptions for boards and other positions. Be strategic about attracting cross-section of population for various organizations.
- Commit to/budget for hiring qualified staff.
- Need to keep working, don't give up if there are early failures.
- Include civics in high school – engage students with various aspects of community planning. Ask them for input in future visioning. Some schools require high school students to attend two public meetings, others have community service day at school.
- Tap other organizations – FFA, etc.
- Creation of community oriented businesses to foster connections (Burlington coffee house started by people relocating back to community, created energy).
- Physical improvements spur community participation, more investment.
- Create unique festivals that tie in to your brand. East Troy started a bluegrass fest, attracts folks from other states. People in Eagle rode horses to attend their event – horse country.
- Newcomers or returning residents often see opportunities more than longtime residents.
- People want experiences, opportunity for rural communities.

- UW Extension has a leadership development program in Washburn county. Partners with local businesses, scholarships available.
- Sawyer county has been a magnet for retirees, and is able to engage this audience.
- Some communities have been successful in attracting younger council/board members, or even have student representatives. (Washburn county has 3 students)
- Introduce students to community leaders, local employment opportunities, apprenticeship programs for business and civic.
- Highlight opportunities outside of fishing and hunting – broaden appeal.
- Forgive loans for living in rural areas – i.e. teachers.
- Need to create excitement, demonstrate passion.
- Market to alumni to return.

Challenges:

- Tough to be accepted as an outsider.
- Turf wars between organizations
- Leaders are critically important. Need to fight against past bias or negative attitudes from past.
- Need to transition from older generation while also maintaining history.
- Getting people to step up and take risks.
- Need to meet where people are available.
- How to make elected officials understand issues. Can't always get them to attend training, read materials.
- How to grow thick skin/not become jaded.
- Burnout
- Finding people to serve
- Fire departments – volunteer
- Parents and students are busy with sports/jobs
- Letting events with limited impact die.
- Businesses aren't owned locally as much – employees can't use work time to support community (fire dept, volunteer)
- Perceived lack of experience/knowledge to run for office among some segments of population, limits input.
- High student loan debt makes it hard to take lower paying jobs in rural areas.
- Lack of teachers.

Entrepreneurialism

Benefits:

- Helps retain residents with unique talents that might not have career ladder options locally.
- Helps grow jobs and economy when there is limited commercial space available.

Strategies:

- Need to teach it from a young age, make it accessible to everyone as a viable option. Invest and connect people to the community.
- Need to establish mentorship relationships – helps benefit base businesses while also growing new. Can also help existing businesses expand in same manner (adding new products, services)

- Incubators need to have services and assistance, not just offer cheap space. The services should continue after they graduate, and need to graduate firms out of space to free up new space.
- Entrepreneurialism offers an opportunity to think broadly about what the community needs – not just goods but also services (health, mental health, etc.)
- Forthcoming UWEX/WEDC study on uses for vacant storefronts will provide some examples of how-to for nontraditional retail uses.
- Telepharmacy or other regional providers of services.
- Create incubators or shared work spaces to consolidate overhead. Create spirit of support.
- Some businesses reported benefits in small communities; People are easier to reach (they read their mail), they treat services as valuable partners, not commodities, they tend to keep their appointments, pay their bills, are more dedicated to their health, listen to information from trusted advisors, and make decisions based on their preferences than just cost or insurance. This creates a better customer relationship.
- Think regionally, attract customers from surrounding region for critical audience.
- Attract businesses that complement unique assets of area (i.e. for eagle it is equestrian). Also tie-in events to these businesses (i.e. maybe there could be a rodeo).
- Riverwest neighborhood's dolphin pool event (a la sharktank) to provide \$10k to best business pitch.
- Clean up vacant/abandoned sites to make them move-in ready.
- Market what we have and be open to new ideas. Amenities to tie-in with assets (i.e. mountain biking, winter sports, paintball, agritourism). Connect assets to these (i.e. housing, restaurants and trailheads).

Challenges:

- Housing is a big problem for keeping/retaining workers, especially families.
- Succession planning for existing businesses. Potential rent-to-own for existing businesses.
- Lack of capital – businesses need to benefit twice as much as they think – often only get doors open, can't keep them that way during no-income period.
- Broadband and even cell service coverage are limiting.
- Making people aware of brownfields, address them, see them as opportunities.
- Convince community it is worth it to fix up blighted spaces.
- Sustaining energy for long-term projects, especially with short term council members.
- Need multifamily to attract workers, lodging to attract visitors, nobody wants these near them.
- Engage newer residents.
- Incentivize new businesses and investment. Make regional connections to resources.

Creative Economy

Strategies:

- Strong correlation between knowledge economy and self-employment. Promote and encourage entrepreneurship.
- Some schools can be a catalyst for growing creative economy both by educating kids and attracting families – i.e. Waldorf school in Viroqua.
- Also connection between creative economy and ag-tourism – ½ of farmers have second business. Local foods is also a current trend closely linked to the creative economy.
- Waunakee is a community that promotes self-employment, has lone eagles club to promote networking among this group.

- Change in need for instant information/access. DNR trying to digitize all records for this purpose. Discussion of virtual tours, etc, connecting history/culture and technology.
- Live/work places are critical – work on zoning, affordability.
- Be sensitive to perception of change.
- Technology is part of the discussion – connect to history, arts, culture. Virtual tours, visibility of arts/creativity.

Challenges:

- Internet service is largest hurdle.
- Lack of understanding about what knowledge economy companies want or need – how to market?
- Harder to define success in this area, and to promote programs for it since it is such a varied set of programs/businesses/activities. Lack of support for this type of jobs relative to others – viewed as low-income or hobby type jobs, not growth areas.
- Limited information on how to get started with this topic among all groups. Many looking for ‘how to’ and ‘case studies’ on the topic.
- In tourist areas, this can be seasonal – how to survive the rest of the year.
- Not all communities have a large existing population – need to find these people and make them visible to attract others (mineral point, spring green have done this well).

What Does Change Look Like Here

Strategies:

- Potential to engage agriculture (and towns) to solve problems, provide services, etc. Food deserts discussed in context of connecting agriculture.
- Each community has unique assets, need to identify them and strategically pursue. Can’t do it all.
- Broken windows theory – identify and fix/mitigate your obvious weaknesses, demonstrate progress. Change can mean shining up what you have, not necessarily building new.
- Need to commit time to the planning – get all the ducks in a row so momentum can continue.
- Need to look into the future, leverage spending/grants (i.e. plan for future DOT Project, do others in conjunction).
- Pursue niche markets (disc golf tournaments, Kubb tournaments, silent sports).
- Can look to some things that were local icons in past that may be able to return (i.e. root beer stand)
- Promote work life balance in rural areas.
- Optimism vs. pessimism – litmus test for community and direction. Need to be shown other ways/points of view to get on board. Change minds one person at a time. Counter negativity with positive messages, success stories.
- Joseph Project from Ron Johnson’s office matches inner city workers with suburban employers to help solve workforce gap. Provides training, soft skills and transportation one person at a time. Sheboygan was pilot, looking for other partners.
- USDA helped Darien create new community center, also used WEDC grant – had deferred for so long to avoid taxes that had to act, but creation of CDA allowed for longer term financing and reduced costs. Also spurred adjacent historic district to encourage private investment.
- Municipalities/nonprofits need to lead by example. Change either happens to you or you drive it. If you don’t invest or try new things, nobody else will.
- People promote rural as family friendly, but often don’t truly have amenities to make them family friendly. Make it obvious what families/kids can do in your area. Use this to drive tourism as well.
- Find some quick wins to offset longer term challenges/setbacks.

Challenges:

- Residents are often resistant to change, especially when change is being advocated for by newer residents. Also economic/class driven.
- Housing availability for young people/families limited, especially in resort areas.
- People who live in resort communities often perceive amenities as 'for tourists' and do not participate, limiting economic viability.
- No nursing home in Vilas County. Impacting residents and also families with older parents.
- Inability to transition existing businesses – can't afford mortgage, inventory and overhead for new owners.
- Decreasing mobility requires more services close to home. Highlighting gaps. Groceries, hardware, medical care essential to social fabric and function.
- Fight against 'it has always been that way'
- Better partnerships with Amish.
- Change will be incremental until it has gotten critical mass. Be prepared to be patient.
- Bedroom communities are looking at housing stock, trying to accommodate young families and workers. Often means density to make affordable and provide needed amenities, but this is controversial. Oconomowoc has been successful in creating these types of nodes and providing housing/amenities in these areas.

Local Policies/Regulatory Strategies

Strategies:

- Village forming a public-private partnership to establish an institutional quality food processor to help connect local agriculture producers with institutional buyers in area (schools, hospitals).
- Value-add agriculture as an opportunity – aqua/hydroponics, potentially other crops in future.
- Downtown districts need to be 'quaint on top, business on the bottom' – need to appear prosperous/attract visitors but also accommodate businesses that can use the space, regardless of whether or not they are traditional storefront businesses.

Challenges:

- Demonstrating value of historic properties – often rehab cost is in excess of value, making it difficult to get loans on properties. Need to use gap financing, historic tax credits not always feasible.
- State/federal funds requiring job creation are not helpful for new startups with few employees, but those are the type of prospects most often present in small communities.
- Negative impact of smoking ban on appearance of communities – pushed loiterers outside for prolonged period, intimidates other visitors.
- Graduates may stay in region, but not always in home community. Often, leaders live in rural towns, not available to serve on village boards.
- Broadband is not widely available, limits types of business and even residents.
- Phosphorus regulations challenge for utilities.
- Adequate information on resources available, case studies and how to. Especially new problems like minority, poverty.
- Need more performance based strategies. Update older policies to adapt.
- Frequent changes to things like TIF make it hard for small communities to feel comfortable/stay on top of changes.

Evaluation of 2016 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. The results of the survey are the following two pages.

Survey Limitations

The survey had its limitations. Participation among the sites was relatively low compared to the attendance at each site of between 30 and 60.

Ratings

The great majority of scores indicate that participants were either very satisfied or satisfied with the event. The various keynote speakers and local case studies were rated especially high. However, some of the roundtable sessions achieved only neutral ratings.

SMALL TOWN DOWNTOWN FORUMS

August 31, 2016 - Phelps, 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	
Lunch and Networking	1	2	3	4	5	
Keynote: "The Story of Phelps"	1	2	3	4	5	
Community Case Study	1	2	3	4	5	
Entrepreneurial Case Study	1	2	3	4	5	
Roundtables:						
Entrepreneurialism / Innovative Business	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Creative Economy	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Leadership Development	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Local Policies & Regulatory Strategies	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Glass Half Full/What does Change Look Like?	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Resources	1	2	3	4	5	
Comments						
Suggestion for Future Forum and Roundtable Topics						
Please provide your contact information if you would like someone from the forums to follow up with you.						
Name	Email	Phone				

Comments and Suggestions

Some participants provided open-ended comments and suggestions. Many of the participants indicated that they learned a lot and that the event was great. Some of the comments were critical of the roundtable discussions suggesting that they often went off topic and the facilitator did not manage the discussion well.

For future forums, specific topics were recommended including housing, tourism, place-making and feel of main Street, transportation, and small-town economic development practices. When provocative topic that was offered asked "is there a future for small towns?"

2016 Small Town Downtown Forums Evaluation Ratings

	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Ave. Response</i>
Phelps						
Lunch and Networking			1	5	13	4.6
Keynote: "The Story of Phelps"			1	7	12	4.6
Community Case Study				9	11	4.6
Entrepreneurial Case Study		1	1	5	13	4.5
Roundtables:						
Entrepreneurialism/Innovative Business			1	2	3	4.3
Creative Economy			1	3	4	4.4
Leadership Development	1	1	1	5	4	3.8
Local Policies and Regulatory Strategies				2	3	4.6
Glass Half Full/What does Change Look Like?		1		1	7	4.6
Resources			1	1	4	4.5
Eagle						
Lunch and Networking				2	6	4.8
Keynote: "Community Supported Enterprises"				2	6	4.8
Community Case Study				1	7	4.9
Roundtables:						
Entrepreneurialism/Innovative Business				1	3	4.8
Creative Economy				1	3	4.8
Leadership Development			2			3.0
Local Policies and Regulatory Strategies						-
Glass Half Full/What does Change Look Like?				5	2	4.3
Resources				1	1	4.5
LaFarge						
Bus Tour			1	1	6	4.6
Lunch and Networking				5	14	4.7
Keynote: "Organic Valley"			2	4	14	4.6
Community Case Study			2	5	11	4.5
Roundtables:						
Entrepreneurialism/Innovative Business			1	5	1	4.0
Creative Economy		2	2	2	1	3.3
Leadership Development		1	1	5	1	3.8
Local Policies and Regulatory Strategies						-
Glass Half Full/What does Change Look Like?		1	1	4	1	3.7
Resources				2	1	4.3
Shell Lake						
Lunch and Networking			1	13	10	4.4
Keynote: "The Art of Rural"		1	5	8	9	4.1
Community Case Study				7	15	4.7
Roundtables:						
Entrepreneurialism/Innovative Business		1	2	9	4	4.0
Creative Economy	1		3	7	2	3.7
Leadership Development			2	7	1	3.9
Local Policies and Regulatory Strategies			2	3	3	4.1
Glass Half Full/What does Change Look Like?			1	9		3.9
Resources			2	3	1	3.8

2016 Small Town Downtown Forums, Open-Ended Comments

Phelps

Comments:

- Leadership was not about leadership. It was a good project story that may have been good for community people thinking about projects, but nothing new to me.
- Learned a tremendous amount.
- Appreciated all the supportive organization here. Thank you for hosting.
- Announce the topics being talked about in the above categories.
- Thanks for having us and supporting the arts!
- Worth the trip.
- The leadership development talk was excellent except it didn't focus as I expected.
- Emily W. and Carol W. excellent sources of information.
- Great event – glad I attended!
- Very interesting and fun to be part of. Great trip – bits to take back to share. Truly the continuation of what our great nation is built on! Please keep me on your email list.
- Need chairs with backs and a break for 10 minutes.

Suggestion for Future Forums and Roundtable Topics:

- Solving community housing problems.
- Recreational tourism.
- Transforming the look of your main street.
- Replace slide handouts with 1-page highlight sheet (in roundtable disc) – easy to share with towns when we go home; give 5-min warning to wrap up instead of cutting roundtable cold.
- Titles good, content needs to match and stay on topic.

Eagle

Comments:

- Love case studies
- I enjoyed this forum.
- Overall great event! More facilitated conversations and roundtables would be appreciated.

Suggestion for Future Forums and Roundtable Topics:

- Transportation.

LaFarge

Comments:

- Need facilitators of roundtables to have better questions in time to focus the discussion.
- Very nicely done! I appreciate the attention to detail!
- Well done.
- Great location!
- Very inspirational presenters!
- Great event, keep at it!

- Worthwhile but pricey for individuals with no sponsorship.
- By far my favorite forum.
- Bus tour was very good however it was hard to hear the presentation. Speaker or microphone would have added to the experience.
- Thank you! Very informative.
- Brad was very knowledgeable on the bus tour.
- Good job on event. Nice cross-section of attendees, topics.

Suggestion for Future Forums and Roundtable Topics:

- Basic step by step info on collaboration communication/change/response to surveys.
- Have roundtable questions prepared to start dialogue and stay on topic. Provide a contact resource for everyone so that we have each other's contact info.
- What is the future of small communities? Is there a future for small communities?

Shell Lake

Comments:

- Focus a little more on downtown development beautification. Justify local investment strategies.
- Excellent and useful discussions! Thanks very much for putting together.
- Good job!
- Some facilitators should talk less; acoustics were poor.
- I have attended 5 of these forums. The first 3 seemed to have more ideas surrounding revitalization of small downtowns. This year and last seemed to primarily focus on The Arts. Probably won't return if that continues.
- It seems the last couple years have been more "arts" discussion, which is fine, but shouldn't be the whole talk. Arts doesn't fit every community.
- Good program.
- Great speakers, enjoyed my time very much.
- Great.
- On community case study: "This was one of the best and most engaging presentations I have seen in a long time."
- On keynote: "Interesting. Needed more how to's."

Suggestion for Future Forums and Roundtable Topics:

- Preparing topics beforehand. Next participation won't be improving ideas about your community.
- All groups need to focus on mentorships and opportunities to expand the business base/industry/manufacturing and basic business reality checks. Consider regional group to promote mentorships that are available.
- Economic development geared to the small town and downtown – ideas to revitalize buildings, being in new business. Small things that can be done to improve life for residents. What follows the placemaking exercise? How to get the projects going especially with budget restraints on communities. How do we engage the younger people? How do we get volunteers?
- Remind people to put phones on silent or shut off. No texting. Very distracting.
- Placemaking.
- How about creating Chamber 63 – a regional business promotion organization for our area.

Open-Ended Responses from Web-Survey (Anne Katz)

- Excellent opportunities to connect with individuals with similar interests, needs, ideas.
- Focus on community development more.
- It feels like the last couple of years have been weighted heavily to arts and downtown. While okay, arts do not fit everywhere. It would be nice to diversify to other issues.
- I'm not a novice in this work. There were no notable insights.
- It was good to hear the history of the Northwest Heritage Passage. I then visited the shop in Spooner that I didn't realize was there. I bought some items and talked to one of the artists. UW Extension deserves more recognition for being a catalyst and problem solver in getting many community and economic development projects successfully off the ground.



Exhibit - Brochure

REGISTRATION FORM

Registration Fee is \$20.00 per person,
Lunch is included in registration

Space is limited so register early
Register Online at:

<http://wisconsin.downtown.org/small-town-forum>

OR

Please complete the following:

Name: _____

Community: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone: _____

Email: _____

I will attend at this location:

_____ Phelps, Wednesday, August 31, 2016

_____ La Farge, Wednesday, September 7, 2016

_____ La Farge Bus Tour, 10:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

September 7, 2016 (\$5.00 Fee)

_____ Eagle, Wednesday, September 14, 2016

_____ Shell Lake, Tuesday, September 20, 2016

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

About the Small Town Downtown Forums

Small towns have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities. These forums are designed to bring together individuals interested in promoting, enhancing and preserving Wisconsin's small communities. Those individuals who live in, work in, or help shape communities with populations of 1,500 or fewer are invited to attend these sessions to learn from each other through case studies, roundtables and discussion groups. Come with examples of local success stories as well as challenges, and be prepared to share with and learn from the group.

Who should attend?

Community leaders, elected officials, volunteers, business leaders, educators, local and regional economic development, civic, and planning organizations.

Find information on the sponsors at:

Wisconsin Downtown Action Council -
www.wisconsin.downtown.org

Wisconsin Rural Partners -
www.wirural.org

Wisconsin Economic Development Corp -
www.inwisconsin.com

University of Wisconsin - Extension -
cced.ces.uwex.edu

United States Department of Agriculture
www.rd.usda.gov/wi

Small Town Downtown Forums



Four Regional Workshops

August 31, 2016—Phelps

September 7, 2016—La Farge

September 14, 2016—Eagle

September 20, 2016—Shell Lake

*Improving the vitality and economic
health of our small communities*

LOCATIONS



Phelps

August 31, 2016

Phelps K-12 School

4451 Old School Road, Phelps, WI

La Farge

September 7, 2016

La Farge Community Center

202 N State Street, La Farge, WI

Eagle

September 14, 2016

Municipal Building

820 E Main Street, Eagle, WI

Shell Lake

September 20, 2016

Shell Lake Arts Center

801 1st Street, Shell Lake, WI

AGENDA

12:00 pm—4:30pm

11:30 Registration

12:00—Lunch and Networking

12:30—Welcome and Introductions

12:45—Keynote Speaker

1:15—Community Case Study

1:45—Entrepreneurial Case Study

2:15—Break

2:30—4:15 Roundtable Sessions

- Entrepreneurism/Innovative Businesses
- Creative Economy
- Leadership Development
- Local Policies & Regulatory Strategies
- Glass Half Full OR What Does Change Look Like Here?

4:15 Wrap up and Closing Comments

**LaFarge will be hosting a bus tour from 10:00—11:30 a.m.;
Cost is \$5.00 per person.*

PRESENTED BY:



WISCONSIN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



United States
Department of
Agriculture



WISCONSIN
DOWNTOWN
ACTION COUNCIL

Exhibit - Sample Press Release

SMALL TOWN FORUM EVENT BEING HELD __ (local date) __ in __ (local community) __

Session provides local stakeholders with opportunity to network, share best practices and identify strategies for small town success.

Register at www.wisconsinowntown.org/small-town-forum

More than half of Wisconsin's municipalities are communities of fewer than 1,500 residents. Because of their small size, these municipalities have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities. Now in their sixth year, the Small Town Forums, allow representatives of these communities to come together, network, share best practices and identify strategies to address shared concerns. Business owners, elected officials, and concerned residents from the __ (insert region name) __ are invited to come together for the session on __ (date) __ at __ (location) __ to identify opportunities and strategies for enhancing and strengthening our local communities. In addition to speakers and networking opportunities, sessions will also include participation by representatives from many state and regional resource partners will be on hand to connect with attendees and provide guidance on specific concerns introduced during the sessions.

The forums are open to anyone interested in small towns, including those involved in business, government, education, civic and community development. The theme for this year's forums is entrepreneurship, and participants will learn specifically about strategies that local entrepreneurs and businesses have used to survive and thrive in small town Wisconsin. The forums are about sharing ideas, learning and networking for people who care about the future of rural Wisconsin. The __ (local site) __ will feature presentations by __ (identify local case studies) __, who will discuss ____.

Each Forum takes place from noon to 4:30 p.m. on the date listed. Registration at each site opens at 11:30 a.m. The registration fee is \$20 and includes lunch.

Visit www.wisconsinowntown.org/small-town-forum to register.

Forum dates and locations:

- **Wednesday, Aug. 31 – Phelps** (Vilas County), at the Phelps K-12 School, 4451 Old School Road
- **Wednesday, Sept. 7 – La Farge** (Vernon County), at the Community Center, 202 N State Street
- **Wednesday, Sept. 14 - Eagle** (Waukesha County), at the Municipal Building, 820 E Main Street
- **Tuesday, Sept. 20 – Shell Lake** (Washburn County), at Shell Lake Arts Center, 802 1st Street

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

The 2016 Small Town Forums are made possible through a coalition of statewide agencies and organizations involved in rural community development: Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, Wisconsin Rural Partners, UW-Extension Center for Community and Economic Development, and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development.

Contact **_Local contact_** at **_ (phone) _** or **_ (email) _** or Errin Welty at Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation 608.210.6832 or errin.welty@wedc.org for more information.