Development of Task Forces and Discussion Groups

At the beginning of the meeting, we asked the people who were in attendance to introduce themselves and explain the motivation for why they wanted to be a part of the night’s effort. Listening to the comments, several common themes emerged for Hastings. We called these themes “Big Issues.” The big issues identified were:

- Improve/maintain quality of life
- Population growth
- Economic development
- Communication/Engagement enhancement
- Community promotion

To address these big issues, we also identified six specific Task Forces or Discussion Groups. These task forces were:

1. Retail Development
2. Arts/Cultural Development
3. Education/Youth
4. Job Creation/Workforce Development
5. Family/Health/Elderly
6. Community Partnership/Cooperation

After describing these task forces, we asked the attendees to select one of the task forces and to participate in a small group activity. Each task force was asked to identify challenges and strengths and to define action strategies that addressed the topic of the task force. Following are the results from each of the task forces.
Retail Development

Challenges

Competing with Grand Island
Retail education
Low pay
More emphasis at HEDC (Hastings Economic Development Corporation) on retail
Downtown options to have different (longer) hours
Incentives for small businesses here are very small
Empty mall, bad psych.

Strengths

Active CRA/BID (Community Redevelopment Authority / Business Improvement District)
Historical Roots
   Places and companies
   Family businesses
Stable workforce—“Good people”, friendly, strong work ethic
Downtown and North Cimeron Plaza 95% full
Unique Shopping options—not Grand Island, and that’s OK
Diversity of goods

Action Strategies

Advertising-promotion
Sharing local/downtown happenings
Check with similar size communities to see tax incentives, supports provided small businesses
Included and encourage diversity—New entrepreneurs
Tap into colleges and their students--$ and creativity
Arts/Cultural Development

Challenges

Perception and lack of knowledge
No centralized information clearing and lack of communication
Low income population
Cost of productions
Affordable artistic space
Participation in HCUB calendar

Strengths

Quality and quantity
Perceptions from outside

Action strategies

All-inclusive calendar
Consolidate community calendars
ID central clearinghouse
Hastings app
Volunteer clearinghouse
Brickyard park
**Education/Youth**

**Challenges**
- Retention of young people
- Cost affordability
- Lack of arts and cultural education
- Legislation and school funding challenges
- Competitive salaries
- Poverty issues affect student well-being
- Alcohol and drug abuse (growing problem)
- Culturally diverse educators
- Community involvement for students
- Room for growth
- Addressing and serving students with ESL
- Educator recruitment
- Employee supply—tech, science, manufacturing
- Parental and community involvement
- Sustaining HC (Hastings College)

**Strengths**
- Three excellent PreK-12 offerings
- CCC (Central Community College), HC (Hastings College), ESU (Educational Service Unit) partnerships
- Education system is strong employer
- Good experiential ed offerings (organizations, nonprofits, collaborations)
- Strong community support for education
- Great teachers and administrators, staff, involved volunteers, boards
- Forward-thinking partnerships—leader!
- Strong veteran support
- Career development
- Parks and recreation, healthy YMCA and YWCA
Life-long learners
Prairie Loft, library, museum
Nebraska education system
Preschools and daycares
Schools are willing to listen and change

**PRIORITY: STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION**

**Resource needs:**
- Strong unicameral voice (provides 56% of funding)
- Strong community (provides 30% of funding)
- Business partners
- Community partners
- Career pathways
- Economic development
- PreK-16
**Job creation/Workforce development**

**Challenges**

- Pay (Need higher paying jobs)
- High underemployment / low unemployment
- Housing
- Attracting higher paying employers
- Lack of skilled labor

**Strengths**

- Good education / educated people
- Good quality of life
- Good parks and recreation
- Entrepreneurial opportunity (niche)

**Action strategies**

- Internships—partner business with colleges
- Work with colleges to give college credit for internships
- Expand/Strengthen CCC (Central Community College) business incubator program or explore other business incubator
- Involve HEDC (Hastings Economic Development Corporation) and CRA (Community Redevelopment Authority)
Family/Health/Elderly

Challenges

Addiction
Mental health
Uninsured
Crime against elderly
Affordable housing
Drawing medical and mental health professionals
Handicap inclusive
Poverty
Aging population

Strengths

Good Samaritan
Mary Lanning
Good schools
Head Start program
YMCA and YWCA
Lower cost of living

Action strategies

Loan forgiveness for medical and mental health professionals who commit to stay, also for teachers (Rural Initiative Program)
Community Participation/Collaboration

Challenges

- How to get involved
- Image (poor)
- Bad experiences with city council, leadership
- General disengagement
- Loss of (passion) 24-35 year olds (brain drain)

Strengths

- HYP (Hastings Young Professionals) group
- Medical industry
- CCC (Central Community College)/HC (Hastings College)/HPS (Hastings Public Schools), AC (Adams Central), StC (St. Cecilia’s)

Availability of involvement
- General openness and work ethic
- When community works together → great stuff happens
- Good communication with minority groups and agencies

Action strategies

- More community forums
- Work to include and engage minority populations
  (Need interpretations)
  At events and promoting them
  Build trust
- Partnerships between education and industry
- Develop a strategy regarding people’s frustration with permitting and codes
- Communication and education