

MAYOR'S VIBRANCY INITIATIVE

PROGRESS REPORT

October 1, 2015

Grand Forks has a variety of dynamic organizations, both public and private, that sponsor and support quality events and a rich cultural environment; however, this has largely been done in the absence of articulated community priorities or goals. Decision-making is often ad hoc and communication across the organizations involved is informal. A more strategic approach would allocate public- and private-sector resources more efficiently and with greater impact. To help define those strategies, three independent but integrated working groups – **Arts & Events, Downtown Development, UND/City Relations** – began organizing in early 2015. While this is the “Mayor’s Vibrancy Initiative,” it is led by private-sector individuals who are engaged, knowledgeable, and willing to lead a community conversation on their respective subjects. Each group determined its own membership, schedule and work plan. Each group will produce its own set of action steps, priorities, or recommendations. And each group operates independently but mindful of the interconnected nature of the collective goal: a more vibrant Grand Forks. Joint trips to Winnipeg and Ft. Collins reinforced that common cause with broadened perspectives, shared insights and renewed enthusiasm.

Commonalities:

- Private sector led – not just another City committee/plan
- Now is the time – Grand Forks has outgrown current modes/models
- Strategic and sustainable – maximize impact, minimize duplication

Process (simplified):

- Assemble group
- Build common knowledge base
- Develop and refine goals and priorities
- Recommend action steps

ARTS & EVENTS PROGRESS REPORT

Grand Forks enjoys a diverse array of art, events and venues oriented to residents and visitors. The Arts & Events Vibrancy Group began meeting in April 2015 to help define the community's vision for arts and events governance and to make recommendations to set a course for the future. Members include arts practitioners, event organizers, leaders of key organizations, and concerned citizens. The group recognized early on that its representation was not comprehensive and couldn't be. Each member has a particular background and affiliation, but members agreed they were there to represent the community's common interest. A key element of the group's work is to ensure there is proper communication between the group and the community, particularly those with a stake in the issue.

FIRST MEETING: April 10, 2015

CO-CHAIRS: Shawn Gaddie, AE2S
Julie Rygg, Grand Forks Convention & Visitors Bureau

MEMBERS: Dave Badman, Badman Designs
Nicole Derenne, UND Fine Arts
Matt Fischer, Probitas Promotions
Cassie Gerhardt, UND Student Affairs
Jeannie Mock, City Council
Emily Burkland Montgomery, Empire Art Center
Bill Palmiscno, Park District
Dyan Rey, Professional Artist
Matt Walkowiak, The Ground Round
Barry Wilfahrt, The Chamber

WORK PLAN

1. Vision and Outcomes

- a. **Develop priorities** for the arts community and event production **based upon the needs and wants of the community** to create a vision of what Grand Forks should be
- b. **Create a set of community-vetted criteria** for a successful arts community and set of events

2. Inventory and Analysis

- a. Assess the community **structure** of organizations and relationships producing arts and event
- b. Identify **roadblocks and constraints** inherent in the arts community and event production process

3. Set the Course

- a. **Develop recommendations** to enhance the future of the Grand Forks arts community and event production

A critical thread tying these issues together is the Special Events and Arts Regranting Programs funded by the City of Grand Forks. The current process for allocating funding is ripe for improvement. The group will evaluate those programs and make recommendations for needed changes.

OUTCOMES AND MESSAGES

Progress: Vision and Outcomes

- The community's funding for arts and events is an important priority that should continue.
- Public support for arts and events goes well beyond City grant programs, and includes funding, staff and facilities provided by the City, Park District, UND, School District, CVB.
- Grand Forks has significant events and arts programming for a community of its size.
- The local arts community is strong and a valued asset in Grand Forks, but there is room to improve the structure of coordination and the provision of resources.
- The facilities available to present arts and events in the community are a strength, yet there remains a lack of venues for showcasing and creating visual art.
- When making decisions, priority should be placed on improving the quality of life for local residents. A robust arts community and full events calendar geared to residents will attract visitors.
- Programs should be willing to fund new events and programs with promise and potential.
- Funded projects should provide concrete budgets to show the use of and need for funding.
- We should support venues offering a variety of music types/genres, as opposed to only those that are sure to be profitable.
- Funding should target niches of the community but there should be a broad array of niches. There is no such thing as an event "for everyone."
- Funding decisions should be made by an appointed committee of individuals with knowledge of the subject using defined criteria.
- The group is in favor of funding arts capacity in Grand Forks. Events and programs can't exist without operations. Capacity leads to programs. The group is in favor of a centralized, one-stop shop approach to arts governance.

Progress: Inventory and Analysis

The group inventoried the annual event calendar and analyzed the recent City funding history for arts and events. The key finding from the calendar is that it is robust. The key finding from analysis of past funding is the "culture of yes": nearly every request receives something.

Special Events Program:

- Funding has been stable and is approx. \$125,000 per year (95% to grants, 5% for program administration)
- Funded 34 projects in 2015, up from 2011
- Only 54% of requested funding is awarded, but nearly 100% of applicants receive funds
- Same funds, more projects: average award is \$3,744, trending down
- 19 events received funding in each of the last 3 years; 8 received funding the past 5 years

Arts Regranting Program:

- Funding has been stable and is approx. \$125,000 per year (85% to grants, 15% to NoVAC for program administration)
- Funded 12 organizations in 2015, down from 2011
- 59% of requested funding is awarded, but nearly 100% of applicants receive funds
- Average grant is \$8,742, trending up

Stakeholder Input:

The group created an online questionnaire to collect input from arts practitioners and event organizers. It was sent to 39 recipients and received 28 responses, 6 of which were unidentifiable. Responses were roughly evenly split between event planners (nearly all were sports oriented) and artists. There was a clear differentiation between responses from sports/events groups and arts groups:

Issue	Response from Sports/Events Groups	Responses from Arts Groups
Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing/Advertising • Volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising • Marketing/Advertising
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry fees • Donations • Ticket Sales • Little mention of grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Grants • Public Grants • Donations • Ticket sales • Membership/dues
What do you need from community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend events • Nothing is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing/Advertising • Professional development • General awareness
What would you change about arts/event support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No changes needed • Indoor facilities for winter events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralize information, support, and scheduling • Integrate arts and business • More coordination, dialogue and promotion
Key Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly unanimous in listing GGFCVB as main partner • Various local government entities for logistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tended to list other arts groups • Local and state advocacy agencies • City

TAKEAWAYS FROM:

SPORTS/EVENTS RESPONSES:

- Sports and event groups are more self-sustaining and generate revenue from events and other internal sources -- they are less dependent on grants and fundraising. There is a hub and spoke structure with CVB at the center.
- Sports event groups view the current support structure positively.
- Initial questionnaire responses indicate no additional structure is needed for sports event groups.

ARTS RESPONSES:

- Arts groups are dependent on grants and fundraising; many are chasing the same dollars. The arts group structure is a network composed of strong and loose ties.
- Arts groups are not negative when evaluating support and coordination efforts, but are less positive than sports and events groups.
- Based upon initial responses, arts groups appear open centralized coordination, awareness building, and support. While there is some agreement about need, arts groups are generally unsure of the current support agencies and the path forward. More work is needed to evaluate and gauge support.

ON THE TABLE

EVENTS:

- Grand Forks is currently uncompetitive for major state high school athletic events. Organizers feel that facilities are not cost competitive. High school events hosted in Grand Forks offer an important recruiting tool for UND.
- There should be more events that embrace the winter climate.
- Communication about event scheduling is important, but events should not be afraid to compete if it is necessary.

ARTS:

- There should be funding support for arts organizational capacity.
- The arts community appears open to a restructuring of the governance system.
- Grand Forks artists could benefit from co-working space.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS:

- The current one-size-fits-all Special Events Program needs reinvigoration. The community should consider funding for “signature” community events such as 4th of July fireworks and Potato Bowl festivities separately from “start-up” and other competitive programs.
- Sports events organizers report strong ties to the CVB. Since these events are major drivers of hotel and restaurant spending, the community should explore aligning the special events funding process with ongoing CVB efforts.
- Funding criteria should be developed, and the process should define the level of authority for which each type of decision should be made.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS REPORT

Downtowns are an increasingly important part of any community's economic development and talent retention equation. The downtown experience reflects a city's personality and vitality -- for residents, visitors and business. Downtown Grand Forks continues to move in a positive direction, but a physical vision for its future has not been articulated since post-flood reconstruction. The Downtown Group's goals are to:

- **Communicate the value** and importance of downtown Grand Forks to its citizens
- Develop a **future vision** for what downtown should be
- Recommend **action steps** and policy changes we can begin to implement right now

The Downtown Vibrancy Group began meeting in March and agreed early on that their work is about defining "what makes Grand Forks better," not just what's best for downtown. This group must be future- and big-picture oriented. Its job is to help define a vision.

FIRST MEETING: March 4, 2015

CO-CHAIRS: Jim Galloway, JLG & Chamber BGEA Committee co-chair
Jonathan Holth, Toasted Frog & DDA Board President

MEMBERS: Eric Burin, UND History Dept.
Kevin Ritterman, Dakota Commercial & Development
Maureen Storstad, City Finance Dept.
Klaus Thiessen, EDC
Bret Weber, City Council
Brad Wehe, Altru Health System
Margaret Williams, UND School of Business & Public Admin.
Chris Wolf, Alerus

ONGOING WORK

- Developing a vision and set of criteria for the future of downtown Grand Forks
- Refining the geographic definition of downtown
- Creating an inventory of existing assets downtown
- Identifying underutilized or high-potential areas
- Creating a physical three-dimensional model of downtown buildings
- Evaluating peer cities
- Data analysis including fiscal return on investment of various land use types
- Assessing economic development funding in the community and opportunities for additional development capacity
- Discussing/defining effective organizational structures to drive downtown growth and investment

Current constraints to downtown development:

- Money
- Interest
- Downtown buy-in
- Collaboration
- Growth
- Not large enough, focus is lost
- Political
- Lack of outward communication
- Physical infrastructure

DOWNTOWN REPORT CARD

Group members asked themselves, “How is downtown doing?”

FUNCTIONS

Doing Best	Doing Well	Focus Area
Government and social services	Dining Office space Entertainment Housing	Shopping Higher education

QUALITIES

Doing Best	Doing Well	Focus Area
Safety and cleanliness	Welcoming Walkability Character	Parking perception Transit

KEY VISION AND MESSAGES

- We value growth in Grand Forks.
- Residential development should continue to be a focus because it is the foundation for commercial development.
- Downtown is an important part of the community’s identity but it has not reached critical mass.
- Downtown should be multifunctional and should target a broad cross section of local residents.
- The needs of local residents should take priority over tourism when making decisions about downtown.
- Downtown should offer various niche activities, but those niches should be broad and varying.
- History is critical to downtown’s identity, but we should not hesitate to build the new things the community needs. We should be open to new design ideas.
- Downtown real estate provides a much higher value per acre than sprawling, suburban-style development. The fiscal value of downtown complements its intrinsic value to the community.
- UND, its students and faculty are important to the success of downtown. Downtown and amenities downtown positively impact UND as well.
- We should be who we are, and focus on what we do well and have realistic potential to do well.
- This effort is about making our region more attractive and a great place to live, which means this is an economic development issue. This work is important for Grand Forks talent policy.

PRIORITIES

These criteria provide a framework for making decisions about what we value for future downtown development. Top tier elements include:

- Creates community identity and character
- Creates places to live
- Creates places to gather and do business
- Increases density
- Benefits local citizens
- Increases multi-functionality
- Walkability
- Fuels community growth and development
- Benefits high school students, university students, young professionals

ON THE TABLE

Meetings of the Downtown Group have generated discussion on several topics for potential action:

- Give Town Square a facelift and features upgrade.
- Study the idea of expanding economic development to include site acquisition for high-end business services and other knowledge-intensive businesses. Economic development would continue to include industrial park land but could also include space for primary-sector knowledge industries.
- Implement a “little changes” program where the community makes a series of small investments in citizen-led projects to improve downtown (such as \$200 each). The program could be progressive, with “finalists” progressing towards larger grants. Include a peer-to-peer element where participants learn from each other.
- Consider a rapid transportation link between downtown and the UND campus, to potentially be expanded elsewhere.
- Continue to lay groundwork for a future UND presence downtown.
- Downtown could greatly benefit from flexible co-working spaces for entrepreneurs and knowledge workers downtown. A co-working space fits with a strategy to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem to stimulate new Grand Forks-grown primary sector companies.
- What is the proper amount of and use of park space downtown? Should parklets be implemented? Should downtown parks be redeveloped?
- How do we communicate the potential for underutilized spaces downtown?
- What is the long term future of the Corporate Center?
- Do we have enough development capacity to be successful? What is the public’s role? What structure fits best in Grand Forks?

UND/CITY RELATIONS GROUP

UND is a big part of Grand Forks' identity with very significant economic, cultural and community impacts. The UND/City Relations Group began meeting in May to develop specific proposals to strengthen connections between student and non-student residents, the academic and business communities, and "Town and Gown" leaders. The goal: make Grand Forks a great university town, not just a town with a great university in it. The group was just getting underway when President Kelley announced his retirement. UND's leadership transition complicated their work – timing was against it – and the co-chairs suspended in early September. This "pause" recognizes the value of individual members' time and commitment, and encourages them to pursue the group's goal independently until such time as another UND/City Relations effort convenes.

FIRST MEETING: May 7, 2015

CO-CHAIRS: Mike Jacobs, Grand Forks Herald (retired)
Debbie Storrs, UND Dean of Arts & Sciences

MEMBERS: Steve Burian, AE2S
Phil Gisi, Edgewood Vista
Sadie Gardner, Sadie's Couture Floral & Event Styling
Pete Haga, City of Grand Forks
Peter Johnson, UND University Relations
Joseph Kalka, UND student
Matthew Kopp, UND Student Body President
Taylor Nelson, UND Student Body Vice President
Nuri Oncel, UND Physics Dept.
Carrie Sandstrom, UND student
Crystal Schneider, City Council
Cheryl Swanson, Alerus Center
Anne Temte, Northland Community & Technical College

SUSPENDED: September 2015

WORK TO DATE

- Looked at "great" university towns and their culture
- Reviewed on-campus and campus-edge development issues and policies
- Discussed options for a "welcome student" event
- Reviewed the Brailsford & Dunlavey Vibrancy District Vision report
- Established a symbol subcommittee to develop high-visibility markers, flags, sponsored graffiti, etc. to communicate a university-town identity for Grand Forks.