

Results of Firth Listening Sessions Reported at Town Hall Meeting

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The Firth Village Board invited all residents of the Firth community to attend a Town Hall meeting on July 13 at the Firth Community Center. This was the second Town Hall meeting in Firth's community visioning process.

At the first meeting held in March, residents learned what a visioning process is. Visioning is a process by which a community defines the future it wants. Also at the meeting, volunteers signed up for three committees: Logistics, Communications and Research.

Members of the Communication and Logistics committees organized and advertised the second Town Hall meeting. Volunteers provided child care and freshly baked cookies. Even though there was a tornado warning, nearly 22 people attended.

The main purpose of the meeting was to report to the community the results of the Firth Listening Sessions (see below). UNL Extension Educators Yelena Mitrofanova, Dennis Kahl and Phyllis Schoenholz



gave a PowerPoint presentation and handed out a report on their findings (a summary of the report was also translated into Spanish).

Following the report, attendees divided into three small discussion groups. The groups ranked and prioritized the five "themes" residents envisioned for Firth's future. They considered criteria such as cost and availability of funds, time, resident interest, etc.

Two discussion groups prioritized the themes:

- 1) Controlled/planned growth
- 2) Business development

- 3) Diverse people get involved in future planning
- 4) Opportunities for recreation and social/community engagement
- 5) Small town atmosphere

The third group prioritized the themes in a mission statement: Firth's Future Mission — Controlled growth and business development, while maintaining a "small town atmosphere," thus creating opportunities for recreation and social comfort by allowing all to become involved in "our" planning.

As the groups came back together for reporting, they came to the consensus the foundation or spirit of future planning should be centered around the "small town atmosphere" of friendly neighbors and a clean neat town.

At the end of the Town Hall meeting, participants formed a Citizens' Advisory Committee which can help the Firth Village Board plan for Firth's future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact UNL Extension Educator Phyllis Schoenholz at 768-7212 or Jill Hoeffer of the Citizens' Advisory Committee at 791-5013. The Listening Sessions' report and PowerPoint presentation is online at http://lanaster.unl.edu/community/community_Firth.shtml

Listening Sessions Gather Input from Firth Community

University of Nebraska—Lincoln Extension Educators Yelena Mitrofanova, Dennis Kahl and Phyllis Schoenholz facilitated Firth's community visioning process. A series of 11 Listening Sessions were held and April and May to gather community input.

Community volunteers committed a lot of time and energy to help make the Listening Sessions successful. Members of the Logistics and Communication committees scheduled, promoted and advertised the sessions, provided child care and refreshments, and found a Spanish translator.

To ensure representation of various opinions, listening sessions were held for different segments of the community:

- young parents
- farmers
- business owners
- fire department volunteers
- youth
- school staff
- senior citizens
- nursing home residents & employees
- Spanish-speaking residents

There were also two listening sessions held as open public meetings allowing anyone living in Firth to participate in the process. In all, nearly 140 community residents expressed their opinions about the future of Firth.

During the Listening Sessions, three questions were asked:

- 1) What are the major problems and challenges in your community?
- 2) What are the major strengths and assets of Firth?
- 3) What is your vision of Firth in 10–15 years?

The facilitators recorded, analyzed and compiled the answers into a report. They also identified major themes.



Major Issues & Problems

- **Safety/Stop Signs and Speed Enforcement** — Many intersections need stop signs and many major roads need speed bumps to slow traffic down; speeding on the community roads is a real concern for all residents.
- **Business District Development** — Lack of businesses located in the Firth area negatively effects the quality of life; people want to see businesses located in Firth such as a family-owned restaurant, a doctor's clinic, small grocery and professional services such as an accountant or a lawyer. Satellite businesses could be open two to three days a week to serve the community and Firth residents would not need to drive to Lincoln to meet basic needs.
- **Lack of Community Involvement and Community Spirit** — Firth is short of youth, volunteer and community activities; welcoming and accepting new residents as well as better communication between local officials and community residents will significantly enhance community spirit and community pride.
- **Lack of Planning and Visioning** — Without the defined vision and the concept of planned growth that should be incorporated into the community comprehensive plan,

the village has hectic development that could result in losing prime ag land to acreages plus there is not enough room for the village to grow.

- **No Diversity on the Village Board** — The village board composition does not reflect the diversity of the community population in terms of age, gender, education and socio-economic background; young people want to have the opportunity to be involved and influence a decision-making process.
- **Attractiveness of the Village** — Majority of people expressed concern over a large number of tires stored in open areas. Plus, the need for entrance signs to let people know they are in town.

Major Assets & Strengths

- **Great School System** — Norris public school is the biggest asset and attraction of the Firth community; people move and reside in the area because of the Norris school.
- **Small Town Atmosphere** — Firth is quite a close knit and caring community where people know each other and feel very safe and peaceful.
- **Maintenance of the Village** — A lot of people complimented the great job of the village board in keeping the village in such

good condition: paved roads, new playground equipment in the park, regular community clean-ups, etc.

- **People** — One of the most essential assets of Firth is people, who are hard-working, educated, intelligent, capable, caring, friendly, family-oriented and diverse in terms of age, gender, occupation, etc.
- **Natural Environment** — Firth has a lot of trees, lakes and parks and is surrounded by prime ag land.
- **Churches** — "We are all connected — one big family — no matter what the religion; we have three churches in the Firth area"

Vision of Firth's Future

Looking ahead in planning for the future of the Firth community, and from all of the comments and opinions extended during the Listening Sessions, the facilitators found five major "themes" incorporate what residents think are important and what the future should look like:

- 1) Small town atmosphere with sense of community
- 2) Diverse people get involved in future planning
- 3) Controlled/planned growth
- 4) Business development
- 5) Opportunities for recreation and social/community engagement