CHAPTER 3 – FROM ISSUES TO OBJECTIVES, GOALS AND VISIONS

Following the focus group meetings, the planning team reconvened at Lincoln to summarize their findings and formulate Objectives and Goals as a prerequisite to design a draft vision.

Figures 20, 21, 22 and 23: Summarizing findings from focus group meetings

Summary of Issues

Summarizing the issues and listing them below set the state for formulating objectives.

1. Physical/Spatial Subsystem:

   - There is adequate available space in the Village of Panama for a community center
   - The optimal location was determined to be the location north of the café on the northeast corner of South Railway and Locust Street.
• The virtues of this location are:
  o Central location in the village
  o Proximity to downtown
  o Adequacy of space
  o Village ownership
  o Access to a prospective walking/bike trail
  o Relative closeness to residential neighborhoods
• The limitations of this location are:
  o the zoning of the area is not multi-family residential
  o A variance approval by the village board will be needed.
• The old school building was another choice for the community center.
• The virtues of this site were that:
  o There was an existing building
  o The site conforms to the zoning for the location of a community center.
• The limitation of this site was that:
  o The building was run down
  o The cost of renovation would be prohibitive
  o The location did not have sufficient off street parking needed for the community center.
• The current fire barn location is another location option with the added opportunity to combine the fire barn with the community center.
• The virtue of such a combined facility at this or any other location is the feasibility for cost sharing between the village board and the Firth Fire District
• The limitation of this location is
  o there is not enough space for a combined facility
  o there is no space for parking on the site
the current building has a faulty floor and relocation of the Fire Barn is inevitable.

2. Social/Demographic Subsystem:
   - The community has a population of 250 as per the 2000 US Census.
   - 74.2% of the population constitutes the labor force with 75% of the residents working fulltime.
   - The majority of the labor force works outside the community and commutes.
   - The population may be generally considered as homogeneous in its composition with virtually insignificant evidence of diversity.
   - The median age of the community is 36.8.
   - 97% of the housing units are occupied with 79.4% of such units being owner occupied.
   - The median home value in Panama is $87,700.
   - The median family income is $50,625 and there are no families in poverty in the community.
   - The homogeneous composition of the community, the size of the labor force, the median family income with virtually insignificant evidence of poverty may be considered as evidence of a socially and financially stable community.
   - Such a socially and financially stable community strengthens the prospects of the community’s capacity to build a community center for itself.
   - The property value in the community represents a strong property tax base and may be considered an additional strength and reinforcement to justify the financial capacity of the community to invest in a community center.
   - The bedroom community identity of Panama may be interpreted as a weakness because it implies the apparent absence of the bulk of the village population during working hours in a normal work week.
• The absence of village population during working hours also implies a consequential lack of demand for social and community activities during those times and weakens an argument for a full fledged community center in the village.

3. Economic / Financial Subsystem:

• Some citizens are experienced in fundraising and they can play a crucial role towards the realization of the community center.
• Construction and maintenance costs will determine the choice whether to have a stand alone community center or a fire barn facility which includes a large space for community activities.
• A regional community center shared with other communities was viewed as unfavorable.
• It is learned that the Firth Fire District is seriously considering the location of a new fire barn facility in Panama and that funding for this facility will be available.
• Partnering with the Firth Fire District offers an opportunity to the Village of Panama to jointly fund the fire barn with the Firth Fire district. By doing so, the village secures some leverage to incorporate their need for a community center and obtain a space for community activities.
• The community is more likely to support the Firth Fire District and their proposal to build a new fire barn in Panama if their need to incorporate a space for community activities can be integrated into that proposal.
• The space for the emergency shelter part of the Fire Barn complex is not likely to be used continuously. As such the residents of Panama have the opportunity to share the space and use it for community activities when it is not being used as an emergency shelter.
• The integrated proposal has the potential of subsidizing the cost to the community for building a community center as a stand alone facility.

• Funding will play a critical role in not only obtaining the capital costs for the community center but also for operating costs.

• Seed money, Loans, Grants, Donations, Property tax and Sales tax are potential sources for funding capital costs

• Property tax, Sales Tax, Rent for using the facility and private donations would be potential sources for funding operating costs.

• Sales of unused public property and/or other non profitable public enterprises owned and operated by the village could provide a substantial share of capital costs for the community center. Interest income would provide an assured source of money for operating costs.

• The proceeds of such sales would substantially reduce the individual costs to tax payers in the village and would be considered as an incentive to secure their support for the community center.

4. Behavioral/Values Group:

• It was quite evident from the focus group meetings that sufficient support exists for the community center.

• The primary justification for the community center was the pressing need for a place for youth and seniors and the need for a public space for large gatherings.

• Citizens strongly believed that the establishment of a community center would not only strengthen the sense of community in the village but would also serve as a motivating factor for businesses who may wish to locate in the village.

• Stakeholders believe that they need a community center of their own, comparable to those in neighboring communities.
• Stakeholders were not desirous of partnering with other neighboring communities to build a regional community center.
• Residents will support and attend all community activities that they sponsor and will ensure that the community center will be continuously utilized to justify its existence.

5. Decision Making and Communication Subsystem:
• Continuous interaction and communication between the village board and community residents is an important element in decision making.
• The community relies on notifications accompanying utility bills, the local newspapers, and interactions with neighbors to obtain information about their community.
• Information technology resources in the community are not very reliable and their use is inconsistent. Cell phones and the internet are not the most reliable for communication.
• Decision making by the village board could benefit considerably if it obtains more initial public input.
• This community support will likely grow with the completion of a community center within Panama.

Formulation of Goals for Consideration by Panama Stakeholders

The issues that emerged as the outcome of Needs Assessment provided the foundation for the planning team to visualize and formulate a draft vision for a community center.
Figures 24 and 25: Formulating Goals for the Community Center

Using brain storming techniques, the planning team visualized 5 groups of objectives which are schematically represented in Figure 26 below:

Figure 26 – Schematic diagram showing the organization of objectives

This organization became the launch pad for the next town hall meeting at Panama which took place on November 9th, 2006.
The Second Town Hall meeting at Panama on November 9th, 2006

The following narrative contains the content of this town hall presentation.

**Spatial Objectives**

The Spatial objectives that were identified by the team are shown in Figure 27.

![Spatial Objectives Diagram](image)

**Figure 27 – Spatial Objectives**

4 alternative sites were offered up as choices. Space needs envisioned the relocation of village offices to determine space needs which could be translated into a space planning layout by a licensed architect.

**Figure 28 – Explaining Spatial Objectives**
architect. Nebraska Community Development law empowers the village board to declare the selected site as blighted in the event that private land is identified. One final objective that was identified in the diagram above is the need to either conform to zoning regulations by locating the community center on land zoned for Multifamily Residential (RM Zone), OR obtain a variance for the selected site.

Social/ Demographic Objectives

Three objectives were identified under this category as shown in Figure 29.

**Figure 29: Social / Demographic Objectives**

The need for a meeting place was the primary objective identified in this category. Social Cohesion was considered as another essential objective because this community attribute

**Figure 30: Explaining Social / Demographic Objectives**
was considered as a critical prerequisite for securing community support for the center. Interaction with neighboring communities was also identified as a third objective to ensure that they would support the local community effort when Panama was establishing its community center.

**Economic / Financial Objectives**

Figure 31 illustrates the economic financial goals that were formulated for presentation to the community stakeholders.

![Figure 31: Economic / Financial Objectives](image)

The key objectives under this category identified the generation of Capital for constructing the community center and generating revenue for operating the center. Loans, Grants, Donations and Public funds were the funding sources.

**Figure 32: Explaining Economic / Financial Objectives**
sources for capital while Interest from seed capital, rent, some public funds and donations would be the sources for amortizing the loan repayment and operations. The Partnership with the Lincoln Community Foundation, creation of a Community Redevelopment Authority to leverage tax increment financing for the project. Public relations and marketing were key operational objectives that were also identified.

**Behavior and Values Objectives**

Figure 33 illustrates the primary objectives under the category Behavior and Values.

![Diagram of Behavior and Values Objectives](image)

**Figure 33: Behavior /Values Objectives**

The continued maintenance of hope, dedication and commitment to the project and community solidarity represented the primary objectives that were essential to the successful launching of the

**Figure 34 – Explaining Behavior / Values Objectives**
community center initiative. Time, effort and resources of stakeholders would be the major investment that will have to be made in order to achieve results.

**Decision Making and Communications Objectives**

Figure 35 illustrates the objectives that need to be accomplished under the category of decision making and communication.

*Figure 35: Decision making and Communication Objectives*

The Village Board, the Community Foundation and the Planning Commission were the key players who would have prime responsibilities for the accomplishment of these objectives. The Village Board and the Planning Commission need to
create the Community redevelopment authority, authorize the declaration of blight and create the redevelopment plan for the site selected for the community center. Citizen input which needed to involve youth would have to be given key roles through the auspices of Advisory committees, a Community Center Board, and task forces responsible for events and activities planning. Continuous communication would play a key role in effective decision making.

The convergence of these 5 groups of objectives set the stage for the planning team to arrive at a comprehensive draft vision for the community center which was visualized and communicated to the Panama stakeholders using the schematic diagram in Figure 34.

**Draft Vision for the Community Center**

![Draft Vision for the Panama Community Center](image)

**Figure 37** – Draft Vision for the Panama Community Center
Seven interrelated elements that collectively constituted the vision for the Community Center were identified as displayed in Figure 37. These were:

1. A site and for the community center
2. A building for the community center
3. Funds to finance and operate the community center
4. Formal organization to oversee and manage the community center
5. Community activities to justify and sustain the community center
6. Volunteer teamwork to support the activities
7. Communication to build and strengthen the sense of community in Panama and influence decision making

The Panama Community Center was envisioned in this draft as a stand alone facility and independent of the fire barn. This concept was presented to the stakeholders because the previous town hall meeting had provided substantial credence to the observation made by the planning team that the first preference of stakeholders was to have an independent community center.

This stand alone facility would require the assignment or acquisition and dedication of land by the village for this purpose.
Funding was the main material factor that would be the decisive factor that would assure the Panama community that the community center would be established.

A formal organization that had a leadership and decision making role would be critical to undertake these responsibilities and manage the facility once it is established in the community.

This organization would require the services of a corps of volunteers from the community representing all groups to conduct the various activities that kept the community center active and lively.

Continuous communication among the stakeholders, organization, volunteer corps and decision makers would be the binding force that integrated the vision and rendered it workable.

**Community Response to the Draft Vision**

Contrary to the expectations of the planning team, the vision for a stand alone community center was met with considerable ambiguity and apprehension which alerted the planning team about certain critical concerns which challenged the credibility and viability of the vision and its prospects for acceptance, adoption and implementation.

The major concern of the community appeared to be regarding funding. It became very evident that stakeholders felt very threatened at the prospects of having to come up with all the resources required to
acquire property, construct a building, equip the building and manage it, on their own.

The representative from the Firth Fire District appeared to be quite concerned that a stand alone community center was being proposed. The apparent implication to such a vision being implemented suggested that community stakeholders would invest their resources exclusively on the community center and deprive the Fire District of any financial support. Without such financial support from Panama, there was little incentive for the Fire District to locate the new fire barn in the Village of Panama.

Both these apprehensions led the planning team to the conclusion that any attempt to promote a stand alone community center for Panama as was being proposed in the draft above would be detrimental to the best interest of the Panama community both in terms of their inability to finance such a facility on their own as well as the threat of losing the fire barn as well.

Community stakeholders however did appreciate the overall structure of the vision and the organization of objectives that had been presented and realized the magnitude and complexity of decisions and commitments that would be required if their dream for a community center was to come to fruition.
The need for reconstituting the Draft Vision

The planning team returned to Lincoln with a firm resolve of overcoming the apprehensions and anxieties that had been expressed at the November 9th. Town hall meeting. The team felt reassured from the community reaction to the structural organization of objectives that the planning effort had proceeded correctly and justifiably towards the achievement of the desired goal of a community center for Panama, as had been originally expressed as the main aspiration of the community. The team however, concluded that the end product that was promoted in the vision had certain unacceptable consequences which rendered the vision unworkable.

The team reevaluated the analysis that had been conducted in Phase 1 and concluded that the scope of community aspirations that had been interpreted, narrowed down and expressed as the only assessed of the village would have to be broadened to include the retention of the new fire barn in Panama in addition to the original need for a community center. By broadening the scope of the assessed need, the planning team realized that the challenge presented to them by the community could be transformed into an opportunity that could add value to the community while accomplishing the original goal for a community center. Translating this opportunity into an expanded vision with added value would enable the community to support with renewed hope and
optimism as opposed to fear, apprehension or doubt about its feasibility, economic viability and perceived community impact. This approach was consistent with the positive reinforcement principles of the Appreciative Inquiry technique that the planning team had been introduced to at the start of the planning process.

**The modified vision for Panama**

In its simplest form, the modified vision is best illustrated in Figure 35 below.

**Figure 38: Revised vision for Panama**

The revised vision consisted of 4 elements:

1. A Fire Barn with a Community Hall
2. Funding
3. Shared Governance

4. Community roles and responsibilities

**The Fire Barn and Community Hall complex**

This complex would consist of two elements:

a. A site for the integrated facility

b. A building located on the site

![Figure 39: The Fire barn and Community Hall complex](image)

**Funding**

Funding would be secured from two primary sources and integrated seamlessly to construct the Fire barn and Community Hall complex:

a. From the Firth Fire District (for the Fire Barn)

b. From community sources (for the Community Hall)

There were seven sources from where funding resources could be acquired by the Panama community. These are:

a. Loans

b. Grants
c. Property sales

d. Rental Income

e. Bonds

f. Seed capital

g. Property taxes

The initial outlay of resources acquired from selected sources would provide the capital required by the community to cost share the cost of the Fire Barn and Community Hall complex. Once the complex has been established, subsequent rounds of resource generation by the community from selected sources would provide the operating budget for the community hall as well as the resources for the amortization of any loans. This scheme is illustrated in Figure 37.

Figure 40: Funding
**Shared Governance**

Shared governance was envisioned as three essential elements

1. Leadership and decision making
2. Community Input
3. Implementation

Leadership and decision making represented the strategic and formal component of the shared governance organization. Community input represented the informal advisory component of shared governance that partners with the Leadership and decision makers to influence policy making in response to community expectations. Implementation represents the managerial component of the shared governance organization and could include staff and volunteers involved with implementing community center initiatives, programs and projects. Figure 38 illustrates the shared governance organization as envisioned.

*Figure 41: Shared Governance*
Community Roles and Responsibilities

There are three elements which collectively constitute community roles and responsibilities as illustrated in Figure 39. They are:

1. Activity planning and Implementation
2. Marketing and Public Relations
3. Fundraising

Figure 42: Community Roles and Responsibilities

The Methodology Adopted to Market the Modified Vision

The planning team adopted a methodology of interviewing key informants from Panama to assist them in finding alternative ways and means available to the community that could be creatively utilized to formulate a workable action plan for accomplishing the modified vision.
described above. Bill Bryant and Eric Johnson served in that capacity and met with the planning team at Lincoln on November 16th, 2006.

Figures 43 and 44 – Interviewing the key informants at Lincoln

Bryant and Johnson provided the planning team with several key strategies and ideas that could be considered for selection and adoption by the Panama community. They fielded questions that validated community concerns and provided some thoughtful insights to assist the planning team with ideas that they could incorporate into the action plan and make it more persuasive and palatable to the Panama community stakeholders. Several of these insights were adopted and incorporated into the Action Plan that is presented in Phase 3.