

KICKING OFF THE TOMORROW PLAN

October 2011

SEPTEMBER'S PROJECT LAUNCH

EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY FOR GREATER DES MOINES

AROUND 300 PEOPLE GATHERED to take the first major step in planning for the future of the Greater Des Moines region. Coordinated by the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the September 13th launch of "The Tomorrow Plan" brought together leaders and stakeholders from around the region.

The Project Launch Open House, held at the State Historical Building, was designed as an interactive event. Attendees—including young professionals, county supervisors, area youth, long-time residents, local mayors and more—demonstrated how they already use the region's many resources, identified their priority issues, and shared their ideas for the future of the Greater Des Moines area.

WHY PLAN?

Greater Des Moines recently has been named the *Best Place for Young Professionals*, *Best Place to Raise a Family*, and among the *Best Mid-Sized Cities for Jobs*. These are just a few of many indicators that the region is healthy. At the same time, the area faces serious challenges with economic competitiveness, social equity, environmental resilience, and a tight fiscal environment. The question is how will the greater Des Moines region respond to these challenges to ensure the

long-term health and vitality of the region?

Enter The Tomorrow Plan. A consortium representing a broad swath of area communities and organizations has formed to engage the community in envisioning how the future of the greater Des Moines region might play out sustainably over the next forty years. The regional planning effort, named The Tomorrow Plan, is supported by a \$2 million federal grant from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and with nearly \$1.1 million from leveraged local funds.

The Tomorrow Plan is a 20-month planning project for a regional plan for sustainable development of Greater Des Moines. Its five phases of work are expected to culminate in February 2013 with an action plan for creating a more sustainable region. There will be a number of opportunities throughout the project for the public to provide input. The Tomorrow Plan builds on DART Forward 2035 and a number of other recent planning efforts. Creating a regional plan such as this is one of the core recommendations made by Capital Crossroads.

We invite you to add your voice: How will the future of the Greater Des Moines region play out over the next forty years? Provide your input and stay informed of future public discussions and more news on www.thetomorrowplan.com.



Above: At the Project Launch, community members viewed posters describing the project and participated in several interactive games.

“Des Moines is an easy place to live. It is safe, clean and friendly.”

“For me, quality of life includes clean air, clean water, natural areas, trails on land and water, protection of our natural resources including soil and native plants and animals.”

“All local governments should stop competing and realize we are all in this together.”

“At the core, I also believe that Iowans are folks with a lot of common sense, and common sense rules when it comes to sustainability.”

“I think attracting talent is more difficult for us than attracting businesses, and is really the key to getting more businesses here. Des Moines suffers from not seeming particularly exciting in the eyes of most of the country.”

These quotations are a sample of the feedback received from community members through questionnaires and the Project Launch Open House.

“Tomorrow I want to see...clean, vital culturally-astounding city/region with beautiful markers as a sense of place (gardens, great architecture, art everywhere) where we have licked poverty, job displacement, hunger & poor public health - and where all citizens are involved actively, maintaining & growing that vision.”

ADD YOUR VOICE. SHARE YOUR IDEAS AND TAKE THE SURVEY AT [THETOMORROWPLAN.COM](http://thetomorrowplan.com)

“I really love living in central Iowa, and I want the quality of life to be as good or better for my children and grandchildren”

FEEDBACK

“What if gas prices double or triple, or more (in 40 years this could certainly happen)? Utility prices are already rising, as are food prices.”

“One of the regions biggest weaknesses is lack of coordination, communication, planning and sharing among local government at all levels.”

“I would like to see the region make a bold, aggressive commitment to sustainability. ... I think we need leaders that are not only able to recognize but also foster synergistic relationships that form between public-private partnerships. Bottom line is that it’s going to take a collaborative effort between citizens, government officials, grass-roots organizations, and private business and industry.”

What does sustainability look like for Central Iowa?

AS PHASE 1, the Project Kickoff, comes to a close, and Phase 2, the development of the Baseline Scenario, moves forward towards the next public meeting in early 2012, the Tomorrow Team has made great progress.

On the community engagement side, the project website (www.thetomorrowplan.com) is live with news, information, and interactive features; the mid-September Project Launch drew people from around the region; and the first regional outreach series is taking place in late October. Input and ideas—such as the selected quotes here—are being collected and synthesized into a preliminary vision for the future of the region.

Behind the scenes, our team of experts has been collecting data on transportation, land use, housing, economics, education, ecology, hydrology, and wildlife issues. In addition, our team has held stakeholder interviews and

distributed questionnaires throughout the region. Some initial findings are summarized on the next page. These analyses are being used to develop a Baseline Scenario—what we call the “business as usual,” which is a projection of what Greater Des Moines will look like if growth, policy, and investment patterns stay the same. The Baseline Scenario will form the foundation for the alternative scenarios that will be explored during Phase 3.

Simultaneously, we are preparing a *Sustainability Scan* report of existing sustainability initiatives around the region. That information will be blended with other feedback, findings, and analysis into the *State of the Region* report. When complete, these documents will be available on the web.

Along the way, public engagement and stakeholder feedback remain an essential part of The Tomorrow Plan’s process. Stay tuned for the next public meeting in early 2012 and watch the website for ongoing updates.

UNDERSTANDING

VALUES

STRENGTHS
WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES
THREATS

EMERGING THEMES & ISSUES

ALIGNING TECHNICAL ANALYSIS WITH VALUES

PLANNING REGIONALLY requires bringing together quantitative and qualitative information in order to understand current issues and trends, values and expectations, and future priorities. The section below summarizes our preliminary findings from review of existing Des Moines area plans, data analysis, interviews, public feedback from the launch, and ongoing outreach conversations.

TRANSPORTATION

The transportation analysis touches on many issues of the built environment, including land use, travel times, quality of life, and equity. The region experiences minimal negative traffic conditions today, though there was a definite recognition that growth may change that in the future.

Two commonly expressed approaches to transportation included interest in completing the arterial system, and willingness among some groups to consider transit and alternative modes of transportation.

When asked in more depth about traffic, most people responded that their priority was to be able to travel anywhere in the region in 30 minutes, though the specific mode varied based on the individual and where they lived, worked, or went to school. While a large portion of attendees stated that their own mode today is, and in the future will be, to drive, there was also a sizable group who prefer to walk locally, and bike and ride the bus for longer distances, and would do so more often if more options were available.

LANDSCAPE & ECOLOGY

The landscape and ecology analysis considers issues related to the natural environment, open space, and river systems. Observations and comments from the launch include:

- Awareness of streams and stream bank erosion
- Curiosity about changes in the region's landscape, ecology, and wildlife from the 1800s to the present
- Upstream agricultural drainage into the Raccoon River
- Understanding that impervious surfaces increase urban runoff and contribute to stream bank erosion
- A number of streams in the region are a hybrid of rural and urban runoff conditions, although Walnut and Four-Mile Creeks are urban streams

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The socioeconomic analysis considers housing, employment, and social issues. Ongoing analysis will refine the employment projections and further develop a framework for strategic economic development planning,

- From 2000 through 2011, the total office space inventory of Greater Des Moines increased by 35%. Seventy percent of the increase occurred in the Western Suburbs resulting in more office space within the Western Suburbs than in the Des Moines CBD.
- West Des Moines has become a preferred office location due to more convenient, "free" on-site parking, ease of access, and a newer and broader amenity package (especially by the Jordan Creek Mall).
- Since 2000, the industrial space inventory has increased by about 14 percent; one third of that increase occurred in the Western Suburbs.
- In the near to medium term, new retail development will be limited, due to high vacancy rates and reduced rents in the existing inventory.
- Des Moines' share of the state's population has increased from 11.7% in 1960 to 18.4% in 2010, reflecting a pattern of urbanization.
- The first decade of this millennium has seen the regional housing supply increased by approximately 49,000 units at an annual rate of 2.4%.
- Growth in the supply of housing units has increased faster than the increase in population over the 50-year period from 1960 to 2010. The supply of housing stock exceeds the amount of occupied housing by 12 percent.

For more information, please contact the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization at 515.334.0075 or visit thetomorrowplan.com.