
PROGRESS REPORT

This report shows the progress of the Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 Project from May of 2013 through September of 2015.



Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 is a movement based off an evolving plan created by the citizens of the Willmar Lakes Area after a lengthy consultation process with people from throughout the region via interviews, round table discussions, community chalkboards and surveys. The goal of this effort was to create a long range plan for building healthy communities where people wanted to live, work, do business and raise a family.

This resulted in a “roadmap” that identified 4 primary goals for our community through the year 2040. Over the past year, work on those first four goals spawned a fifth goal--Health and Wellness.

1. Attract and Retain Newcomers to the Willmar Lakes Area
2. Strengthen the Region’s Economic Diversity
3. Develop and Enable More “Things To Do”
4. Develop Next-Gen Leaders
5. Health and Wellness

The initial study that created the four goals was conducted in May of 2013 by a third party organization, Next Generation Consulting, who took input from citizens of the Willmar Lakes Area to determine what citizens wanted their communities to look like in the future. To move the resulting goals forward a steering committee was created and goal captains for each of the four (now five) goals were identified and a host of specific initiatives were launched to achieve those goals. Over the last year and a half, your neighbors, friends, and coworkers have been working hard to achieve these goals.

This progress report shows the outcomes of this work to date. It’s important to note that though many achievements are listed under one goal or another, many Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 Endorsed Projects have been addressed collectively with any number of goals working on the same project.

For more information on Vision 2040, updates on its initiatives, and information on getting involved, visit the Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 website at www.willmarlakesarea2040.com.

Keeping mind that this is a long term and evolving plan, the following pages are a snapshot of what has been achieved.

GOAL #1: ATTRACT AND RETAIN

Goal Captains: Abdullahi Olow and Linda Mathiasen

Volunteer Force: +60

Subgroup Team Leads: Andy Boersma, Dean Bouta, Tom Gilbertson and Naomi Mahler

This goal is focused on bringing in new folks and retaining the people and businesses we have here in the Willmar Lakes Area.

In order to achieve this, Goal #1 established specific areas on which to focus their energy.

- Expanding Broadband and WiFi
- Diversity and First Generation Immigrants
- Connect & Concierge
- Housing

They've been working hard to make this goal a reality. Here are a few of the things they've been doing:

- **Brain Gain for Rural MN**

Ben Winchester, a research fellow with the University of Minnesota Extension, shared information at an event in August of 2014. He discussed the changes in population of rural America and the migration of 30-49 year olds to small towns and their social and economic impact on rural Minnesota.

- **Cross-Cultural Conversation**

Over 175 people participated in a community conversation in January of 2015 lead by Reverend Ron Duty and Reverend Joseph Bocko in January focused on building skills for talking with others and building deeper listening skills across cultural and faith boundaries. The Cross-Cultural Conversation was held at the Willmar Middle School. The crowd included a broad range of people of different age groups and ethnicities.

- **Lunch-N-Learn Pilot with Three Willmar Young Adults from Somalia**

A lunch and learn was held in April of 2015 with the Vision 2040 Steering Committee and 3 Willmar young adults from Somalia to help educate community leaders about Somalian culture and history. It was a panel discussion held over the lunch hour including a brief presentation about contemporary history and the political situation of Somalia. Participants heard about what brought Somalian immigrants to the US and their current situation in Willmar.

There are plans to offer more panels like this to groups in the community.

- **An Evening of Stories**

An Evening of Stories was the kickoff event that welcomed the Green Card Voices exhibit as well as featured stories from local neighbors who live within the Willmar area. Speakers shared their stories of immigration, cultural backgrounds and the bonds shared between existing and new residents. It was a free event that was hosted at The Goodness Coffee House parking lot in downtown Willmar at the end of July 2015 with more than 130 attendees.



- **Green Card Voices: Local Immigrant Exhibit**

Green Card Voices is an exhibit that was created from 57 immigrant stories that were recorded in 2013 and 2014 throughout Minnesota (35), New York (12) and San Francisco (10). These immigrants come from over 40 different countries as well as diverse walks of life. Each immigrant story was featured with a large color portrait, a biography, a quote and a QR code with a 5-minute first person video narrative that viewers could scan with an iPhone/iPad and watch. The exhibit was on display for the month of August 2015 at The Goodness Coffee House in downtown Willmar. An Evening of Stories was the kickoff event that welcomed the Green Card Voices exhibit.



- **Creation of the Interest Inventory Form to Connect New People in the Area To Groups & Resources**

The Interest Inventory Form was designed to help connect new people moving to the area to organizations, people and interests in the Willmar Lakes area. Through the interest form, newcomers will receive a personal connection via phone, text, email or in-person (per their preference). The group is currently working on making the public aware of the interest form's availability. Future plans include hosting a few gathering events throughout the year to bring all users of the Interest Inventory and Connect & Concierge together.

- **Hack2O**

Hack2O was held September 18th through 20th of 2015 and twenty-two people created four applications to benefit the community. Hack2O was hosted by WORKUP (a new co-working space in the community) and supported by Vision 2040 in conjunction with the Kandiyohi County EDC, Ridgewater College, Minnwest College and the Blandin Foundation. The purpose was to develop mobile apps to address community issues. The group chose to look at developing mobile apps to answer the following questions:



- How can I receive, save and store encrypted email in a way that keeps the contents private to the email provider?
- How can we develop a quick way for citizens to secure state permits to have fires?
- How can we better manage and monitor our local, free bike share program?
- How can we keep lakes clean by helping people identify, report and remove zebra mussels and other invasive species?

- **Kandiyohi County Housing Study**

A diverse group of housing professionals was gathered and they identified the need for an updated housing study. A housing study had not been completed since 2004. They worked to finance the study. Once the study was completed, the group distributed the housing study to interested private developers and attendees at the public forum. They are also working with the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County HRA to define possible Vision 2040 housing projects.

- **WiFi Hotspots**

Wifi hot spots were installed or will be installed at Willmar Public Schools, New London Spicer school buses, the United Way of West Central Minnesota GrowMobile, Central Community Transit (Kandiyohi and Renville transit) and at the Willmar Civic Center. These hotspots are a joint adventure using EDC, Blandin and Vision 2040 dollars. All Wifi grant partners have installed their Wifi hotspot routers and service as of November 2015.

- **Continued Work on Broadband Development**

The EDC broadband committee has led discussions with independent telco providers on their interest in providing fiber to end users in Kandiyohi County. There is interest from independents and they would utilize the State of MN Broadband grants to help with this project. The committee submitted an expression of interest survey to the State with information about the project's intent to provide fiber to every building in Kandiyohi County. Senator Amy Klobuchar visited the area and heard about the need for change in the FCC Universal Funds program to include different funding options and inclusion of independent telco providers.

GOAL #2: ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

Goal Captains: Joanna Schrupp and Leslie Valiant

Volunteer Force: 44

Economic Diversity focuses on strengthening economic opportunities throughout the region.

Goal #2 has one current sub-goal:

- Manufacturing

Other areas of focus for Economic Diversity are:

- Forming a "Learning and Earning" Task Force
- Creating new databases to track economic progress and job growth
- Expanding middle-skill and high-skill jobs
- Increasing opportunities for entrepreneurs

Here are a few of the things they've accomplished:

- **EDC Business Retention and Expansion Study**

A study was initiated by the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar EDC and the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce Grow MN! Team to accomplish the following objectives:

- Demonstrate support for local businesses
- Help solve immediate business concerns
- Increase local businesses' ability to compete in the global economy
- Establish and implement a strategic plan for economic development
- Build capacity to sustain growth and development

Sixty convention, retail, tourism and service industry businesses and 22 manufacturing businesses were interviewed.

There are a number of groups currently working on projects as a result of this study.

- **Boomtown USA Event**

Sixty seven community members attended the Boomtown USA event held in September 2015. The event featured Craig Lindvahl who shared the 7 ½ Steps to Big Success in Small Towns based on the book by Jack Schultz which included the following seven keys to small town viability:

- Key #1: Adopt a Can-Do Attitude
- Key #2: Shape Your Vision
- Key #3: Leverage Your Resources
- Key #4: Raise Up Strong Leaders
- Key #5: Encourage an Entrepreneurial Spirit
- Key #6: Maintain Local Control
- Key #7: Build Your Brand



Mr. Lindvahl also discussed how to engage millennials in the process and other tips based on his book *Things You Wish You Knew Yesterday: And Other Stuff You Need To Know Tomorrow*.

- **Inner City Leadership Tour to Fargo, West Fargo and Moorhead**

A group of 23 people from the Willmar Lakes Area spent two days visiting Fargo in October 2015 to learn from this successful community some tips on achieving our goals. They attended panels, explored the downtown, industrial park, housing and university sections of Fargo. They learned several takeaways that will help the Willmar area move our communities forward including these points of consideration:

- Willmar is a Regional Center, like Fargo, how do we start to act like one? What does that look like?



- Willmar and Kandiyohi County have many bright spots and we need to concentrate on our opportunities.
- How do we capitalize on our assets?

Other achievements:

- Hosted Robert Valdez, Director of WAMM who discussed WAMM training for entrepreneurs.
- Hosted Cathy Baumgartner, Central MN Jobs in Training Services who discussed how employers and the public can use their services to post jobs, find workers and create training.
- Hosted Julie Redepenning, Business Services in Central and Southwest MN from DEED who discussed her role as encouraging the creation and retention of high quality jobs through business growth.
- Hosted Dr. Douglas Allen, President of Ridgewater College and Sam Bowen, Dean of Customized Training at Ridgewater College who discussed the benefits of Ridgewater's training programs to fill gaps in skills.
- Continues to offer opportunities to attend programming like DEED's Workforce Seminar to continue education on workforce issues.

Moving forward, Goal #2 is looking to create an interest in manufacturing firms by developing manufacturing awareness in the month of October via schools, public and private entities. They will also be working collaboratively with Goal #4 to start 1 Million Cup and continue the Intercity Leadership Visits.

GOAL #3: THINGS TO DO

Goal Captains: Rachel Skretvedt

Things To Do works on creating more activities for the Willmar Lakes Area.

In order to accomplish this, Goal #3 set up the following focused efforts:

- Develop a culinary retail training program
- Support the downtown Willmar Plan
- Develop Robbins Island
- Create a Willmar Dog Park
- Other Things To Do

Here are a few things they've been accomplished:

- **Kandiyohi County Dog Park**
This group, comprised of passionate dog owners, organized, lead, fundraised and created the KC Dog Park! Building a dog park created something to do all year round for people of all ages. In conjunction with the City of Willmar, GVL Poly, Willmar Community Ed & Rec, Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 and a number of very generous donors, Willmar now has a no-fee dog park for everyone to use. The park welcomed its first visitors on August 7th, 2015 and held a grand opening on National Dog Day (August 26th, 2015)!



- **Movies in the Park**

Four family-friendly movies were shown to the public in 2014 and 5 in 2015 with free admission as well as popcorn and pop! They served a total of approximately 1500 community members over the course of the showings held at Robbins Island, the Dorothy Olson Aquatic Center, and the Willmar Civic Center.



- **City Parks Plan**

The Vision 2040 group worked to engage interested citizens with the Joint Powers Board overseeing the park system to create detailed plans for regional, city and neighborhood park improvements and redevelopment efforts for spaces like Rice Park, South Swansson Field and Robbins Island.

- **Downtown Willmar**

There have been a number of events facilitated by the Downtown Willmar group including the Beer Bash on Becker Avenue during Willmar Fests, Becker Market held each Thursday starting in June and running through September, the Holiday Parade, and the Bounty of the County Local Foods Dinner. There are also plans in the works for a Historic Walk downtown that includes a progressive dinner. The Willmar Downtown group also developed a plan for downtown Willmar and presented it to the City Council. These plans have since been put on hold.



- **Culinary Development**

The Downtown Willmar group has also been making great progress on renovating a historic building at 313 Fourth Street SW in Willmar. The building was purchased from The Barn Theatre in 2014. The first tenant, Foxhole Brewhouse, is in place (2015). Renovation work is continuing to provide 3 incubator restaurants, common seating area, a Local Food Hub where local growers can bring their produce to be cleaned, sold, and/or preserved for winter sales. A key part of the HUB is the Big Kitchen where guest chefs will serve local food delights, as well as provide space for classes on food preparation and cooking skills. Downtown Willmar is growing a culinary expertise using locally-grown food and local entrepreneurs, with a terrific base of authentic ethnic foods.

The Downtown Willmar group is looking for volunteers to help move these, and other, projects forward. To help make these great projects succeed, contact Beverly Dougherty by email.

Moving forward, Steering Committee and Goal #3 participants have concluded that the goal is too broad and needs to refocus. Your thoughts and opinions matter and they are needed to help direct the next steps of Goal #3. Please join us at the next community meeting to voice your thoughts.

GOAL #4: NEXT-GEN LEADERS

Goal Captains: Melissa Sorenson *Volunteer Force: 36*

This group focused on developing the leaders in a variety of ways.

In order to achieve this goal, Goal Four focused their energy on the following projects.

- Launching a Boot Camp for Aspiring Leaders
- Utilizing the Region's Retirees and Elder Population
- Encouraging Latinos, East Africans, and members of neXt to serve
- Creating a Formal, Community Wide Mentoring Program

Here are a few of their accomplishments:

- **We/Lead**

We/Lead is a women's mentoring and leadership group that empowers all women to discover and maximize their unique talents, one leader at a time. We/Lead works to address current and emerging needs that are unique to women, develop leadership and executive skills, provide opportunities for coaching and mentoring, provide recognition and support and offer women an opportunity to learn and thrive in local networks.



Over 900 people attended their 8 events. Events included *A Woman Who Served Her Country - the Betty Strohfus Story*, *Life in the Hot Seat: Women in Politics and Local Government*, *Financial Questions for Women*, *The Courage to JUMP*, and others. View descriptions of the past events on their website here and watch for upcoming events on their Facebook page here.

The We/Lead group is managed by a steering committee that consists of the following volunteers:

Joanna Schrupp, MinnWest Technology Campus

Pat Solheid, Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc.

Kathy Schwantes, University of Minnesota Extension

Sara Carlson, Willmar Area Community Foundation

Theresa Hillis, Kandiyohi County YMCA

Shirley Carter, Rice Health Foundation

Renee Nolting, West Central Industries

- **Vision 2040: Leadership**

Vision 20/40: Leadership is a nine month, small group leadership program that brings individuals together from throughout the Willmar Lakes Area and Kandiyohi County to enhance their current leadership talents while engaging in conversations and learning to further develop their skills to improve our communities. Vision 20/40: Leadership welcomed its Inaugural Class of 2015 in January 2015 to become the fastest launched leadership program in the state of Minnesota. Currently Vision 20/40: Leadership is holding classes for its second cohort of 29 leaders. Through the partnership developed with University of Minnesota Extension, proven curriculum and world class leadership education is brought to participants in communities throughout Kandiyohi County. Topics discussed in the program include emotional intelligence, communication through conflict, group facilitation, visionary leadership, and working with diversity.

In 2016 Vision 20/40: Leadership is excited to launch an alumni program to meet the needs of its current alumni and plan for the needs of those to come in the future. Alumni events will be created for those who have participated in the program but also offer increased opportunities to connect with other leaders and community members throughout the area. These opportunities are in addition to those offered to Vision 20/40: Leadership from the University of Minnesota. Alumni of the Vision 20/40: Leadership are considered alumni of the University of Minnesota and have access to ongoing education through their various leadership programs.

To learn more about what is happening with Vision 20/40: Leadership follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vision2040leadership or contact Christy Kallevig, Program Coordinator at 320-429-0934.

Vision 2040 Leadership is managed by a group that consists of the following volunteers:

Audrey Nelson - Willmar City Council***

Betty Strehlow - Ridgewater College**

Charlene Stevens - City of Cottage Grove**

Chasity Ommodt - The Link*

Christy Kallevig - Leadership 2040 Coordinator**

Doug Reese - Kandiyohi County Commissioner**

Jeron Smith - Willmar Municipal Utilities*

Julie Asmus - Willmar**

Kathy Schwantes - U of M Extension**

Kelly O'Farrell - Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP*

Leo Martinez - Elite Insurance Agency**

Melissa Sorenson - Jennie-O Turkey Store***

Steve Gardner - Bennett Office Technologies**

Wayne Nelson - Willmar**

***Design Team & Inaugural Graduate

**Design Team

*Inaugural Class Graduate

Moving forward, Next-Gen Leaders is currently working toward hosting a non-profit fair for area leadership programs, compiling non-profit resources and a list local mentorship programs, as well as hosting quarterly community meetings on a variety of leadership topics. Goal Four : Next-Gen Leaders looking forward to work alongside groups like the KCEO program, SCORE, and neXt, and many more.

GOAL #5: HEALTH & WELLNESS

Goal Captains: Theresa Hillis

Volunteer Force: 20

Health and Wellness is a newly added goal. Goal Five is helping to create a community where people move naturally, eat wisely, live with purpose and connect with others.

Many of the people working to move this goal forward are from the Willmar ACHIEVE Healthy Communities Team.

Goal #5 currently has two sub-goals:

- Healthy Behavior Change for Kids, Families and Communities
- Business and Community Resource Network



Here are a few things they've accomplished:

- **ReYou grant for Chef Marshall and Willmar School Wearables**
The grant funded several visits from renowned Chef Marshall O'Brien who did community presentations on smart nutrition decisions families with tips, menus and recipes. The grant also funded a program that provided wearable technology and activities to encourage movement to 4th grade classrooms.
- **BMI Testing – 3 years of stats with 1st year of 3rd and 5th graders**
The group has been volunteering for three years to record and monitor BMI statistics of children in Willmar schools to provide a baseline and annual method to gauge how healthy the children in our local community are.
- **Bi-Annual Business Forums**
Lunch and learns provide opportunities for local business to learn about methods to keep their employees healthy.

- **Discussions with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota**

Earlier this year, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota approached members of the Vision 2040 Steering Committee and additional community stakeholders about collaborating on an initiative to improve the health of our community. A visioning process, beginning in November, will be used to identify priorities and determine alignment with the current Vision 2040 plan.

Other achievements:

- Community Health Assessment 2010
- School Wellness Committee Work
- Support of Safe Routes to School & Work

Moving forward, the Health & Wellness group is continuing their BMI testing in Willmar Schools and will be hosting a January Business Forum. Currently, the Health & Wellness goal is exploring an emerging collaboration with Blue Cross Blue Shield.

GET INVOLVED

The Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 plan is a community effort. We hope more citizens will get involved and help move our community forward.

To get involved, go to the Vision 2040 website. Under the “Contact” tab in the main menu, select “Get Involved” or just click [here](#). Fill out the form and select which goal you’re interested in getting involved with. The goal captain will get back to you!

Upcoming Meeting Dates and Locations

Goal #1: Attract & Retain

Attract & Retain meets regularly the third Friday of each month at 10:30am at the North American State Bank second floor Community Room.

Goal #2: Economic Diversity

Economic Diversity meets regularly the first Thursday of each month at 10:00am at the Willmar Fire Training Room.

Goal #3: Things to Do

Regular meetings are to be determined for Goal 3.

Goal #4: Next-Gen Leaders

Next-Gen Leaders meets regularly the fourth Wednesday of each month at 10:30am at the North American State Bank.

Goal #5: Health & Wellness

Health & Wellness meets monthly. Contact Theresa Hillis, Executive Director of Kandiyohi County Area Family YMCA for more information about dates and times.

Marketing Committee

The Marketing committee is looking for a few good marketers to join the team. They meet regularly the third Tuesday of each month at 3:30pm at the West Central Tribune.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is open to the public and meets regularly the second Tuesday of each month at 10am at the Willmar Area Community Foundation Community Room. Find Steering Committee minutes and upcoming meetings here on the Vision 2040 website.

Upcoming meetings can be found on the Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 website.

FUNDING

There were a number of entities that contributed funding in 2013. This funding was the seed money for Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040. Those who contributed in the first round of funding were as follows:

- Kandiyohi County (\$5,000)
- City of Willmar (\$5,000)
- Willmar Public Schools (\$5,000)
- Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce (\$5,000)
- Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc. (\$5,000)
- Willmar Area Community Foundation (\$5,000)
- Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (\$2,500)
- Willmar Municipal Utilities (\$2,500)



In 2014, these entities continued to support the movement:

- Willmar Area Community Foundation (\$20,000)
- Kandiyohi County (\$5,000)
- City of Willmar (\$5,000)
- Willmar Public Schools (\$5,000)
- Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc. (\$5,000)
- Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (\$2,500)
- Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce (\$2,500)
- Willmar Municipal Utilities (\$2,500)
- Spicer EDA (\$1,000)
- New London Spicer Schools (\$1,000)
- Community Christian School (\$500)

In 2015, to date, these entities are the financial stakeholders supporting the Vision 2040 initiative:

- Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc. (\$5,000)
- Willmar Public Schools (\$5,000)
- Kandiyohi County (\$5,000)
- Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (\$2,500)
- Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce (\$2,500)
- Willmar Municipal Utilities (\$2,500)
- Spicer EDA (\$1,000)
- New London Spicer Schools (\$1,000)
- Community Christian School (\$500)

- City of Pennock (\$500)
- Willmar Area Community Foundation (\$5,000)
- City of Willmar (\$5,000)

In addition to these funding partners, there have been many in-kind donations to assist in covering expenses for events as well as organizations like MinnWest Technology Campus who designed and built the chalk boards to field public comments for the initial study. Vision 2040 has also received grants from the Blandin Foundation.

Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 has also worked with a number of generous local media partners. These partners have supported with in-kind contributions.

Media partners include:

- West Central Tribune
- Lakeland Broadcasting
- WRAC
- KDJS-AM/K95.3/KRVY-FM

Fiscal Host

United Way of West Central Minnesota is the Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 fiscal host.

STRUCTURE

Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 is a movement based off an evolving plan created by the citizens of the Willmar Lakes Area. This plan is overseen by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee consists of the following people:

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| Abdullahi Olow, Heartland Community Action Agency | Linda Mathiasen, LMD Marketing |
| Brad Hanson, Willmar Ambulance Service | Marvin Calvin, City of Willmar |
| Bruce DeBlieck, MN DOT | Melissa Sorenson, Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc. |
| Carol Laumer, Rice Home Medical | Pablo Obregon, PACT 4 Families |
| Clark Vollan, Lake Region Bank | Pat Solheid, Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc. |
| Douglas Allen, Ridgewater College | Rachel Skretvedt, citizen |
| Harlan Madsen, Kandiyohi County | Randy Czarnetzki, Hardware Hank |
| James Miller, United Way of West Central Minnesota | Renee Nolting, West Central Industries |
| Jay Halliday, Nova-Tech Engineering | Sara Carlson, Willmar Area Community Foundation |
| Jeff Holm, Willmar Public Schools | Steve Ammermann, West Central Tribune |
| Joanna Schrupp, MinnWest Technology Campus | Steve Renquist, Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission |
| Justin Mattern, eTap Marketing | Terry Tone, citizen |
| Kellie Prentice, Rice Memorial Hospital | Theresa Hillis, Kandiyohi County Area Family YMCA |

Ken Warner, Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce

Tracy Bade, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

Larry Kleindl, Kandiyohi County

Wendy Ulferts, Rice Memorial Hospital

Leslie Valiant, Spicer Economic Development Authority

Wes Hompe, Willmar Municipal Utilities

Zack Mahboub, West Central Interpreting Service

To promote transparency and encourage others to get involved, all meeting minutes from the Steering Committee are available on the Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 website.

