

Destination Medical Center (DMC) Community Input Community Conversations Full Report

The community input process was organized by the community engagement team of the Economic Development Association (EDA) to have an authentic and inclusive method that is built off the engagement of others through iterative meetings and conversations. The community input process will be accomplished through three phases: 1. Framework Design and Inventory, 2. Community Input Collection, and 3. Planning and Public Feedback/Review. The process will gather community input around the eight core areas of focus within the DMC urban framework, understanding the intense timeline to develop the DMC development plan.

Community Input Process

Phase I: Framework Design and Inventory

To develop the process for gathering community input into Destination Medical Center's eight core focus areas, committees were formed to represent each focus area (listed below). Based upon previous community engagement input in the summer of 2013, segmenting conversations into each core focus area allows community members to feel most connected to the areas of DMC that interest them.

The DMC Community Input Process (CIP) planning team selected local experts to serve as the chairpersons for the committees, and these individuals worked hand-in-hand with the DMC CIP planning team to select eight to nine committee members who were knowledgeable and/or users in a focus area, which formed the CIP full committee of approximately 80 members. The representatives added different aspects to each focus area and contributed with fresh, thoughtful insights.

A "community conversations template" was created for the committees to use as a starting point for their discussions. The template asked each committee to:

- Identify what information has already been or is currently being collected that would contribute to DMC's knowledge on the committee's focus area.
- Identify what information is still needed from the public on this subject. (Committees were asked to narrow this down to 3 to 5 key topics within DMC scope.)
- Consider to whom DMC should speak in order to spread the word about the community conversations on that committee's focus area and how best to reach them.
- Suggest types/techniques/methods of engagement to be most effective within the community conversations setting, as well as possible venues, time frames, and potential barriers to participation.

Committees were given approximately one month to draft their suggestions for community input on their focus areas, as well as put together an inventory of information that already exists regarding their focus areas. Some met in person; others shared input primarily electronically. Committee members reported that the biggest challenge was to narrow their thoughts down to three to five key topics; there is a vast desire for community-wide topics.

After documenting the members' thoughts and recommendations, all eight committees met as one large group to share what they had developed and to receive feedback from one another, including insights on what might be missing and where there was "crossover" among the focus areas.

The information from the committees was compiled, and a framework was developed for the community conversations. This framework was then shared with the CIP full committee and with the DMC project manager and planners. Key topics/questions were scoped to the objectives of DMC, while

the full list of questions was shared with the CIP full committee to encourage their organizations and/or departments to continue and ask the larger community-wide questions.

Throughout the community-input process, thoughts, opinions, and feedback are being gathered on a wide range of subjects. Community input relevant to DMC, along with that collected from other stakeholders, planners, and resources, will be taken into consideration as DMC moves forward, but it may or may not be reflected in the final plan. Information will be shared with other groups and organizations so that it may be used in their planning efforts.

Community Input Process

Phase II: Community Input Collection

Community Conversations

The “Community Conversations” event was held on Thursday, June 12, 2014. The format was organized in response to feedback that eight separate days would be difficult to host given the public’s busy summer schedule. In addition, the value of the planners to be present and listen to the community members “talk” about the areas that are most important to them was helpful in their “Creative Analysis” phase. Although participants were not required to register, it is estimated that between 165 and 200 people participated during the two sessions held at the University of Minnesota Rochester. Each core area had its own room for the conversation, and participants sat in small groups of 6 to 10 people per table. The individual rooms for each topic allowed the participants to attend the area(s) most important to them.

Representatives from each of the DMC planning companies were in attendance, and planners kicked off and wrapped up each conversation. Volunteer facilitators guided the tables through the discussion, and a recorder captured the conversations on paper at each table.

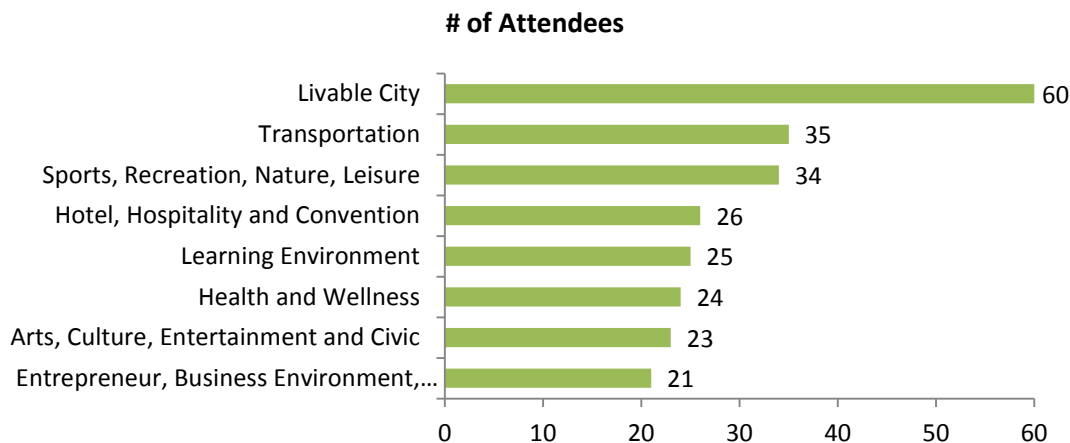
5:15–6:45 p.m.

- Livable City
- Learning Environment
- Sports, Recreation, Nature, and Leisure
- Hotel, Hospitality, and Convention

7:15–8:45 p.m.

- Transportation
- Health and Wellness
- Arts, Culture, Entertainment, and Civic
- Entrepreneur, Small Business, Commercial, Research, and Technology

The Livable City community conversation had the highest number of attendees at approximately 60. Transportation and Sports, Recreation, Nature, and Leisure each had about 34 to 35 attendees, while the other conversations had 21 to 26 participants.



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All ages were represented, spanning from 17 to 84 years, with the highest concentration in the 35–49 and 50–64 age ranges. Men and women were equally represented. Although there was some ethnic diversity among participants, it will be important to continue to gather feedback from members of Rochester’s minority and under-represented populations.

Most participants were from Rochester, but several surrounding communities were also represented, including Byron, Eyota, Kasson, Lake City, Lanesboro, Mantorville, Northfield, Oronoco, Peterson, Pine Island, Rollingstone, Spring Grove, Stewartville and Winona. There were also a few people from the Twin Cities metro area.

The input summarized on the following pages is reflective of those who participated in the community conversations and is not necessarily representative of the Rochester community as a whole.

Community Input Process

Phase III: Planning and Public Feedback and Review

The input from community vision boards, social media, the first public forum, and community conversations will inform the planners toward development of their initial conceptual ideas. This is the start of phase three, an iterative process where community members provide feedback and review how the DMC Development Plan is formed. There are three public forums dedicated to this phase, online questionnaires, presence of DMC ideas, and draft plans at public gathering spaces. Also included in this phase are a 60-day vetting process on the website and an approval from two public boards, Destination Medical Center Corporation, and the Rochester City Council.

Community Conversations Executive Summary

SNG Research Corporation is a local market-research firm that was contracted to synthesize and report back from the community conversations. Below are several themes that ran throughout all of the eight core areas during the community conversations:

- **Access is important, and there is a strong desire for better public mass transit—participants noted that this impacts how people live, work, heal, play, and learn downtown.**
 - Whether it be via buses, taxis, streetcars, trolleys, shuttles, a rail system of some kind, or a combination of all of these, participants want to be able to access the downtown Rochester area, the rest of the community, surrounding communities, and other large metro areas easily, affordably, and at all hours/days of the week.
 - Additionally, participants suggested that improved bicycle and pedestrian access and safety would not only make it easier to get to work, businesses, and activities, but it contributes to health and wellness, recreation, and leisure undertakings, allows incorporation of arts and culture, and makes the city more livable. It was even suggested that downtown be closed to vehicles and become more of a “greenway.”
- **Housing availability is a consideration for the downtown area to grow and thrive and to be able to attract and retain the talent necessary to build a sustainable business environment.**
 - It was suggested that all types of housing are needed downtown for families, singles, and seniors at all price points from low income to luxury.
 - Participants are more interested in owning a single-family home, townhome, or condo than in renting an apartment.
 - The feeling is that more people living downtown will lead to organic growth of arts and culture, health and wellness, recreation and leisure, etc.
- **Greenspace and activating the river is important.**
 - Participants feel that parks and trees and nature add quality of life and livability to the city by encouraging gathering and physical activity. In addition, green spaces could be used to calm traffic and introduce variety in transportation modes.
 - It was suggested by all eight core areas that the Zumbro River is an underutilized asset with much opportunity for enhancement and activation. Thoughts offered by the groups included creating a river walk that incorporates arts, culture, learning, recreation, commerce, etc.; making it navigable for canoes and kayaks in the summer and a place for skating in the winter; or adding a beach and a fishing pier.
- **Having more to see and do with more places and spaces for all cultures and generations to enjoy is critical in the eyes of participants.**
 - Participants feel that this is what adds vibrancy and encourages inclusiveness and engagement in a community and makes it more welcoming to residents and visitors alike.
 - Suggestions came from across all of the core areas. Examples include:
 - Arts, culture, entertainment, and civic—Make creative use of existing spaces. Examples include turning the Main Street Armory into a fully funded conservatory like the Landmark Center, creating a Nicollet Mall-like pedestrian mall, turning Central Park into a sculpture garden and adding a band shell at another park, moving the bell tower from the Civic Center back to the fire station downtown, moving surface parking lots underground to free up more above-ground space, and making better use of the fairgrounds.
 - Hotel, hospitality, and convention—Play space could be added downtown including checkers/chess tables, bocce ball facilities, croquet, shuffleboard, horseshoes, and bean bags areas in the summer, and curling or cross-country skiing in the winter.
 - Health and wellness—Create a sense of community through events, block parties, and neighborhood “nights out” to help strengthen relationships and the overall health of the

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community. Look for ways to build health and wellness activities into every program and ways to have entrepreneurs and businesses support local health efforts.

- Sports, recreation, nature, and leisure—Offer more community events and activities, such as winter sports and opportunities for social connections (sledding, skating, snowshoeing); have a place for pickup basketball; offer an art, wine, or beer “crawl”; host open street festivals or public art forums that highlight interesting things about Rochester; attract more popular bands and performers for concerts.
 - Entrepreneur, business environment, commercial, research, and technology—In order to retain employees and keep talent here, participants suggested that Rochester have diverse arts, culture, food, and entertainment options. There is a sense among participants that Rochester is *multicultural*, but not *intercultural* and could do a better job of integrating the many cultures who frequent the area into all-community activities.
 - Learning environment—In addition to traditional schools/educational institutions, people visit various places in Rochester to learn, including the Rochester Public Library; lectures at Mayo Clinic; United Way professional-development seminars; Rochester Chamber programs and Leadership Greater Rochester; online classes; University of Minnesota Rochester Tuesday series “UMR Connects”; Learning is ForEver; community education; parks and nature centers such as Oxbow Park, Zollman Zoo, and Quarry Hill; service organizations such as Rotary, Lions, and the Jaycees; faith communities; cultural celebrations; coffee shops; art stores; and community organizations and events.
 - Livable city—Participants said that it would be more enjoyable to spend more time downtown if there were more destinations and activities year-round, 7 days a week, daytime and nighttime; intercultural; free or low-cost; “cool” or “hip”; not conservative but not drinking-focused; and with better communication about what is available (have an up-to-date calendar of what’s going on that is easily accessible in various formats/media).
- **There is agreement that learning opportunities such as post-secondary training, career training/ development/advancement, and personal growth and enrichment are a vital part of Rochester’s cultural fabric.**
 - Participants emphasized that post-secondary education and career training and development are essential for a vibrant culture, and a prepared workforce is necessary for economic development. People seek careers for a lifetime, not just one job, and they want to be able to grow in that career. However, the general feeling is that these types of learning opportunities are not currently a part of Rochester’s cultural fabric to the degree that they could be. Higher education is viewed as having a relatively small footprint in Rochester presently, and it was suggested that the current opportunities are piecemeal and limited, particularly for general education and for workforce development. (One participant commented that the rating would be higher if we look just at health education within our medical community.) Additionally, participants felt that people are not aware of what educational opportunities and training are available.

The following pages provide more detailed summaries of the conversations that took place among participants in each of the eight core focus areas.

Community Conversations on Arts, Culture, Entertainment, and Civic Activities

Introduction to topic: Arts and culture are key ingredients to creating vibrancy and life in a city. Rochester has a rich tradition of valuing the arts with its rich and diverse cultures, and the importance of civic engagement. As we plan for the next 20 years, what will our vibrant arts and cultural scene look like? How do we foster that vibrancy?

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES AND LANDSCAPE

Participants were first invited to think about to what degree arts, culture, entertainment, and civic activities “should be” a part of the fabric, or essence, of Rochester, as well as to what degree they felt arts, culture, entertainment, and civic activities “currently were” a part of the fabric of Rochester. Participants assigned a rating from 1 to 10, with 10 meaning “vital” and 0 meaning “not at all.” Then, they discussed their ratings.

- “Should be” ratings ranged from 8 to 10, with most being a “10.” Reasons for their ratings offered by participants included:
 - This is the soul of any city. It’s how you create community and quality of life, and it helps people thrive, helps people heal.
 - This is an economic driver contributing to all of the other core areas of focus.
- “Currently were” ratings were considerably lower, ranging from 2 to 10, with all but three participants giving ratings of a “5” or lower. Reasons for their ratings offered by participants included:
 - It’s not valued or supported. Venues are lacking. There’s no city/community strategy to finance the arts, and most are largely volunteer-run.
 - People leave Rochester for arts and culture. There isn’t enough to keep people here (or at least that’s the perception).
 - The arts community is fragmented and competitive.

Despite the fact that participants felt that Rochester needs vast improvements with regard to arts and culture becoming a part of the fabric of the city, there are places and events that have an arts and/or cultural feel or focus: Civic Theatre, Rochester Art Center, C4/Creative Salon, Mayo Clinic art and music, Historic Third Street, History Center, Words Players, Civic Music, Rochester Public Library, downtown churches, Assisi Heights, Plummer House, the corn watertower, Whiskey Bones, Boys and Girls Club, high schools, farmers market, Festival of Trees, Slatterly Park, Thursdays on First events, Down by the Riverside concerts, bench and geese projects, ArtiGras, movies on the Peace Plaza, and music on the patio.

That said, several felt there is too much isolation in Rochester’s arts and cultural scene. There are individual efforts, but there is no “glue.”

Recent arts, culture, entertainment, and civic activities that people participated in included a lot of theatre experiences, both locally and in other cities. Concerts are also popular activities—everything from orchestral and choral music to hip-hop outdoor music festivals. Other activities included ballet, opera, art centers, winery visits, comedy shows, movies, museums/history centers, nightclubs, Thursdays on First events, and farmers markets.

The types of events and activities that people attended recently were most likely to be located in Rochester but not by a huge margin—about a 60:40 split. People traveled to other cities like Minneapolis and St. Paul; Miami; Chicago; Winona and Zumbrota, Minnesota; and Des Moines, Iowa, for theatre, art centers, or exhibits; concerts (hip hop music/nightclubs, outdoor festivals, orchestras);

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opera; comedy shows; amusement parks; fishing/boating activities; and museums. Participants commented that the activities and events they attend elsewhere often aren't offered in Rochester, but nearly all reported that they would have stayed in Rochester for that experience had it been available (for example, a Doomtree concert, Shakespeare festival, Bill Maher live, Rock the Garden concert, opera performance, or the Minnesota Orchestra).

Ticket/Event prices ranged from free to \$150 per person, but \$25 to \$30 seemed most typical.

When asked what types of arts, culture, entertainment, or civic activities they would recommend to visitors from outside Rochester, the participants cited most often the Thursdays on First events, theatre (Civic Theatre/Rep Theatre), the Rochester Art Center, and local restaurants. Other recommendations included the Mayo art tour, farmers market, History Center, shopping at University Square, Mayowood, C4/Creative Salon, Riverside concert series, Plummer House, a tour of the Plummer Building and carillon, Barnes and Noble Chateau, trolley rides, a winery, local bars, the children's museum, Rochester Public Library, movies, golf at Soldiers Field, a Honkers baseball game, the symphony, biking, and the Peace Plaza. Some made recommendations for activities outside of Rochester, such as the Eagle Center in Wabasha, a visit to Lanesboro, going to the Mall of America, or taking in a Twins major league baseball game.

LOOKING FORWARD

Participants were invited to share their thoughts on three specific types of spaces and related programming:

- Cultural/Community Center
 - Overall
 - Accessibility is key for a cultural/community center.
 - It needs to be welcoming and purvey a sense of community with open and inclusive programming. It should be non-religious, inclusive of all cultures and also affordable.
 - Physical Space
 - It was suggested that it be downtown, possibly on the waterfront, with parking and bus access.
 - Performing space for cultural shows and celebrations (with a stage).
 - A State and Health approved kitchen.
 - Classroom space so learning can take place.
 - Large room space for activities.
 - Outdoor space.
 - Advanced technology (green/SMART).
 - It could include a children's area, but also space for 17- to 20-year-olds.
- Performing Arts Center
 - Overall
 - It was suggested to be accessible to all types of performing arts and a regional center with diverse programming all week long, including programs tied to all types of healing for visitors.
 - Some organizations could have permanent space, but other smaller groups could move in and out as well.
 - There could be shared resources and infrastructure for smaller, nonprofit groups—affordable space, insurance, ticketing, etc.
 - Physical Space

- A location near or attached to the Civic Center (but not part of the Civic Center) has appeal; even to extend out over the river.
 - A few participants suggested that a center such as this could be used to revitalize another part of town.
 - Have dining options inside or have restaurants nearby.
 - Spaces to rent out to produce revenue; rooftop gardens or a wine bar.
 - Flexible spaces with good acoustics.
 - Participants would like to see it have multiple spaces from a large 2,000-person-capacity room to 300–500 maximum capacity in other performance spaces, along with smaller, intimate areas.
 - Practice/Rehearsal space and office areas for various groups.
- Museum
 - Overall
 - There was agreement that it seems to make sense for Rochester to start with some sort of medical museum, as this is something that is unique to this community.
 - It could include a medical “hall of fame” and highlight pioneering research, military collaborations, early medical illustrations, etc. A component aimed for children to understand is also important.
 - Other suggestions for types of museums included veterans, history of southeastern Minnesota, natural history, Native American history, automotive history, IMAX theatre, the existing planetarium at Mayo High School, and an expanded children’s museum.
 - Physical Space
 - Participants suggested it could grow into a museum district within a close geographical area.
 - A museum district could also draw attention to regional museums and possibly even provide transportation to other museums in the area.
 - Participants wondered if the aesthetic for a museum would be driven by the community/city or by the designers, and emphasized that different facilities would have different requirements, and it will be important to be sensitive and empathetic to the community’s needs. An environmentally friendly space was also important.
 - New/Fresh exhibits as well as traveling exhibits.
 - Spaces to rent out to produce revenue.

Taking all of these types of spaces and venues into consideration, it was suggested that the city could offer an “arts and culture” pass for visitors and residents so that one price would allow admission into several activities. Another suggestion was that tax dollars could possibly be used to give Olmsted County residents a pass for a certain number of events/venues.

In order to get to where Rochester “should be,” participants suggested:

- Having a common place where people can connect.
- The importance for people and groups to work together to develop a vision and have confidence that they can trust in outside support from the city and from industry (beyond Mayo Clinic and IBM).
- The city has to want a performing arts center and/or an area of town that’s art-focused, funky, and cool before it can happen.
- Artists have to be able to afford to live and work here. They have to be able to earn a living, and they need spaces to work and share.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

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Participants were invited to go “outside the box” and think about non-traditional spaces that could be used downtown and programming that doesn’t currently exist. Some participants struggled a bit with this request because their perception was that “arts activities” were viewed as a “nice to have” rather than a “need to have,” so it was difficult for them to “think big” when they felt it would never get the funding needed to implement the big ideas. They are hopeful that there is a bright future for the arts in Rochester and, after warming up to the topic, had fun brainstorming big ideas.

Interestingly, some similar themes occurred at all of the tables. Suggestions included:

- Art could be incorporated at every physical elevation level—from sidewalks, bike paths, and the street level to the rooftops and upper areas of parking ramps. Public utilities and infrastructure could become art. Art could be further incorporated into the skyways. There could be pop-up performances and mobile art centers.
- Use the river; don’t hide it. Build a performing arts center over the river, or create a San Antonio-like river walk. Light it up. Float things on it.
- Make creative use of existing spaces. For example, turn the former Lourdes High School building into a performing arts center, or turn the Main Street Armory into a fully funded conservatory like the Landmark Center. Possibly create a Nicollet Mall-like pedestrian mall. Maybe turn Central Park into a sculpture garden and add a band shell at another park. Maybe the bell tower from the Civic Center could be moved back to the fire station downtown. If surface parking lots could be moved underground, it would free up more above-ground space. It may be possible to make better use of the fairgrounds.
- Rochester could become an international center for healing and become known for art and music therapy. This would potentially lead to being an international artist community.
- Participants feel it is important to think about accessibility and transportation. A “hub and spoke” model was suggested, with Rochester as the hub that links all of southeastern Minnesota and beyond. There could be an art bus that people could hop on and off as they do an art tour. Thinking even bigger—possibly incorporating trolleys or an aerial tram system, or offer high-speed rail so people can get to and from Rochester, Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, and the Twin Cities.
- Big civic parties/festivals/events to generate excitement—Participants were thinking about the Chicago Lollapalooza event or a giant BBQ or an urban bike race—things that are multicultural and multigenerational.
- Think about the seasons—Green spaces and places to hang out are great in the warm months, but there can also be places to go and activities to do in the winter. One table of participants even suggested a retractable roof for downtown. Ice skating and ice sculptures were mentioned, but so was a luge facility!
- Collaboration is important to make arts a priority. Between arts organizations as well as with the city, it was suggested that an arts fund be created as a way to ensure that dollars are allocated to the arts as future development takes place.

Community Conversations on Hotel, Hospitality, and Convention

Introduction to topic: Hospitality is an important industry for Rochester, second in size only to health care. How will Rochester best serve not only the patients coming here but visitors for leisure, learning, or business opportunities? What's needed to make this community a true Destination Medical Center? What changes are needed to make visitors from different countries and cultures feel welcome?

OTHER PLACES PARTICIPANTS VISITED

Participants started off thinking about the types of items they look for and like to do when they are visitors in other cities.

- People look for attractions and activities that are unique to that city, as well as original or historic areas of town.
- Restaurants are important, specifically local eateries (not “chain restaurants”), with easy access or within walking distance of where they are staying.
- Arts and cultural activities, like museums, concerts/festivals, parks, and libraries are venues that people seek.
- Shopping within walking distance, including places like bookstores, antique shops, and grocery stores.
- Sporting events are sought out, as well as recreational activities like golf or fishing.
- Waterparks/Water-related activities are also popular.
- Participants like activities that interest multigenerational families—interests for the kids as well as the grandparents.

Services and amenities that participants highly valued in places where they stayed included:

- Cleanliness of facilities with friendly, knowledgeable staff.
- Internet connectivity/Wi-Fi access.
- Good maps/wayfinding assistance.
- Access to easy transportation, including taxis and airport transfers.
 - Taxis, trolleys, buses, and rail were the most commonly mentioned modes of transportation that make it easy to get around when visiting a city. Shuttle services and prearranged shuttle tours are also easy to use. Good signage and maps are key for visitors. Often, people need a car if they're going to visit area sites or nearby cities or places like the ocean or mountains.
- People like to have variety and a range of pricing, both in the hotel choices and in the restaurants.
- One group stressed that coffee should be available downtown 24/7.

CURRENT VISITOR EXPERIENCE

When asked how Rochester compares in these areas and where there are gaps, responses tended to center around transportation and potential activities around town.

With regard to transportation:

- Participants cited slow taxi services (especially at the airport and hotels).
- A limited bus system that could run longer and more frequently and extend to more stops around Rochester, as well as more variety in public transportation options.
- Also, participants pointed out that the train stops in Winona and Minneapolis, but not in Rochester.
- Current transportation options on nights and weekends are perceived to be inadequate.

Suggestions for activities around town that would make Rochester more attractive for visitors included:

- A downtown movie theater.

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- A medical or science museum.
- An ice skating rink and a fitness center that is open to the general public.
- Places with ongoing family activities, not just special events.
- Participants also saw a need for more arts-related opportunities, such as a “dinner theatre” or a large venue that could host Broadway shows or large orchestras.
- Participants commented that the river is underutilized.

Other than for medical care, participants said that visitors come to Rochester for:

- Conventions (e.g., religious, government).
- Sporting events (particularly youth sports).
- Local events (for example, the Riverside concerts).
- Mall or movie theaters.

The types of services and amenities these visitors may be looking for when they are in town share some similar needs as community members:

- Food/Cuisine for all types of people, including international guests.
- Entertainment, such as a movie theater, music or performance venues, and community gathering places like the Peace Plaza. For example, there could be something like the Gonda piano (at Mayo Clinic) set up outside and accessible to all.
- Lodging that is comfortable, clean, relaxing, and connects to food/entertainment/activities.
- Unique shops, as well as places to buy the things they need, like a drug store or grocery store, or maybe a place to be able to rent winter outerwear like coats, hats, mittens, and gear like snowshoes.
- Transportation—taxis and shuttles, as well as parking for those who drive.

Participants felt that visitors may have trouble finding what they need because many places are closed on the weekends.

FUTURE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Types of visitors that Rochester could try to attract in the future included:

- International visitors coming to experience Minnesota.
- Medical convention attendees and medical tourism (packaging medical visits and places to stay and entertainment while in town).
- Mayo could be leveraged by allowing access to its buildings, particularly the history/museum, after hours or on weekends.
 - It was suggested that a 15-minute walking tour of Mayo could be offered all the time.

Participants had several ideas for services, amenities, or attractions that Rochester could offer to be competitive in attracting visitors, conventions, and events to this market.

- It is important to make visitors feel welcome and comfortable.
- Getting information about the city and ‘what’s going on’ into their hands is key.
 - Participants suggested that there be instant-information kiosks or booths with trained people who can provide visitors up-to-the-minute suggestions on dining, music, movies, and other entertainment, including what’s available, when, where, and how to get there. Something else that could be available at all times is a list of “20 things to do around downtown Rochester.”
- “Play space” could be added downtown, including checkers/chess tables, bocce ball facilities, croquet, shuffleboard, horseshoes, and bean bags areas in the summer, and curling or cross-country skiing in the winter.
- Sports facilities, such as the Honkers baseball stadium, could be added or upgraded and made more functional for multiple purposes.

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- There is a strong sense that there could be more entertainment, arts, and cultural options—music, theatre, festivals, etc., especially on nights and weekends, and it is important that they be easy to access.
- Participants suggested making use of the river in Rochester and promoting other scenic areas in the region so visitors can experience Minnesota.
- Shuttles could be offered so people can get to points of interest.
- Participants saw the opportunity for performance space downtown, maybe even a band shell or amphitheater.
- They suggested that the Rochester Public Library could be expanded and a community center could offer cultural gatherings.
- Food offers a big role for visitors. It is important to offer food that appeals to all types of nationalities at a variety of price points.
 - It was suggested that there could be food trucks and/or an international food district.
- A focus on wellness is another opportunity. A spiritual retreat or spa focused on relaxation, revitalization, nutrition, etc. could be offered.

Participants feel that having these types of services and amenities available will not only appeal to visitors, but they will also aid in getting local residents downtown more often.

Community Conversations on Health and Wellness

Introduction to topic: Health and wellness are integral parts of our community. We have great bike trails, parks, and more! Over the next 20 years, how can Rochester become even better when it comes to health and wellness? What does that look like for every person, every day?

WHAT DOES HEALTH AND WELLNESS MEAN?

Participants started their conversation by discussing what comes to mind when they think about health and wellness, and it quickly became evident that the phrase “health and wellness” encompasses a variety of attributes:

- Access to health care.
- Taking responsibility for one’s own health and making healthy choices.
- Holistic health.
- Support systems.
- Environment that encourages healthy practices.
- Educational opportunities to learn healthy practices.
- Air and water quality.
- Quality of life.
- Balanced nutrition, good sources for food.
- Access to affordable fitness activities (indoors and outdoors).
- Prevention.
- Spiritual wellbeing.
- Mental health.
- Character development.
- Good sleep.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES AND LANDSCAPE

People integrate health and wellness into their lifestyles by:

- Getting regular exercise and trying to incorporate more physical activity into daily life by walking instead of driving or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Educating themselves about healthy options.
- Watching what they eat.
- Getting preventive/early detection care.
- Managing stress.
- Limiting screen time with TVs and mobile devices.
- Getting plenty of sleep.

When asked to rate how easy or difficult it is to integrate health and wellness into their lifestyles in Rochester, slightly more than half of participants gave ratings of “6” or lower on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 = extremely easy), indicating that it’s not necessarily that easy.

Those participants who gave low- to mid-score ratings included suggestions as to why:

- Busy lives sometimes prevent people from making healthy choices.
- Shopping and services aren’t located close to home, so they have to drive everywhere.
- Walking is difficult in the winter months.

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- They don't have transportation to get to a gym.
- That healthy food is more costly than unhealthy food.
- There is a cost involved for many health activities like sports leagues.
- There are not enough programs for people who are obese or who have chronic health issues like diabetes or asthma.
- There isn't a lot of green space downtown for activities.
- Health care may not be accessible if you're uninsured.
- Lack of diverse entertainment options impacts mental health.
- One participant said that it's easy if you have resources and a strong will to find what you want, but making the *healthy* choice is not always the *easy* choice.

Those who gave higher ratings cited:

- Access to walking trails and fitness facilities.
- Quality health care.
- Healthy food.
- Clean water.
- A good support system of family and friends and social activities.

Participants had mixed feelings as to whether the health and wellness movement is a fad or if it's here to stay, but there were high levels of agreement that it is very important to the growth of Rochester, both as an economic driver and for the well-being of the community.

- Rochester's greatest opportunities are tied to Mayo Clinic. Without health and wellness, our economy goes down the tubes.
- Do we want unhealthy people supporting our health care industry?
- Do we want to recruit employees to a sick place or a healthy place?
- A community is only as strong as its weakest link. The better our health, the better and more productive our community. This is the best return on investment. We can't only invest in roads and buildings. We must also invest in the health of our community members.

There were concerns about how to keep health and wellness at the forefront. For example, some felt that green spaces for activities may be eliminated unless leadership carefully plans to ensure they are included in developments. There are some trends that take away from health and wellness, particularly for young people, like cutting physical education classes in junior and high schools, or turning activities into competitions rather than events to be done for enjoyment.

Participants felt that integrating health and wellness into the fabric of the city will involve a grassroots, bottom-up effort as a community and as individuals.

- A focus on health can be everywhere with healthy options being easy and economical.
- Whether Mayo is located in Rochester or not, participants felt it was important to address major chronic illnesses such as diabetes prevention and management (although participants would like to see Mayo and the community working together).
- It is important to make sure that the city and businesses themselves, the "establishment", understands what the realities are so that disparities can be addressed. Good examples can be set. For instance, don't serve pie at a heart conference, encourage "stand-up" breaks at work, etc.
- Education and knowledge, as well as motivation and communication are critical. It is also important to ensure that fitness options don't get divided into the "haves" and "have nots."

- Participants suggested that creating a sense of community through events, block parties, neighborhood “nights out,” etc. will help strengthen relationships and the overall health of the community.
- The community can look for ways to build health and wellness activities into every program and ways to have entrepreneurs and businesses support local health efforts.
- Employers can offer flexible hours to make it easier to incorporate exercise during the workday.
- Work can be done with cultural and ethnic groups to identify and encourage healthy activities in their culture.

Participants felt that accessibility and inclusivity are key to ensuring health equity for all ages, genders, cultures, physical abilities, income levels, etc.

- There could be more links to resources and education so it is easy to find where to go. Possibly have a central source for health and wellness-related community resources, including physical activity, food support, housing, health insurance, etc.
- Additionally, information could be available at kiosks in the mall, at a community center, at a visitor center, and at the check-in desk at hotels so it’s easy to find.

Community Conversations on Transportation

Introduction to topic: As cities and technology evolve, people's movement and behaviors evolve as well. With a population increase occurring over the next 20 years, how do we move around the community as employees, guests, residents, and visitors? The efficient movement of people and goods is fundamental to southeastern Minnesota's economic health and quality of life: buses, air service, bicycles, walking, freight rail, and streets.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES & LANDSCAPE

Participants began with a discussion about the degree to which transportation and parking are taken into consideration when they are deciding where they are going to go and how they are going to get there for their everyday activities.

There was high agreement that transportation and parking are often considered;

- Most take their cars to get to their everyday activities and say that driving is easy in Rochester
- Participants think about traffic and the availability and cost of parking when deciding where they are going to go.
- Driving participants will often choose to go to a place (particularly for shopping) where parking is plentiful and free.
- As one participant said, "I'll pay to park for a special event but not to shop."

Many participants would prefer to walk, bike or hop on a bus rather than drive, but say they have to factor in safety, bike parking (as racks are often full) and timing.

- Bicyclists' and pedestrians' primary concerns have to do with being able to get where they need to go safely, with designated lanes, trails or sidewalks.

Those who would like to take the bus often choose not to because of the hub and spoke design that takes every bus downtown, or the bus schedule doesn't work with their schedule or bus stops are too far away to be feasible to get to.

- One participant said, "if I have to drive halfway to my destination to get to a bus stop, I might as well just drive all the way."
- People who take the bus to work downtown say they tend not to stay downtown after work because busing isn't available in the evening.

Most of the participants in the transportation community conversation (about two-thirds) do not live in downtown Rochester.

- In a typical week, the main reason they would go downtown is for work or work-related activities and they are by far most likely to get there by car.
- The other reasons participants go downtown on a weekly basis is for dining or for events/entertainment and, although they are more likely to bike for these types of visits than to work, there are still about twice as many using a car as there are using a bike (and four times as many using a car as walking).
- Participants are less likely to come downtown weekly for shopping or personal business, but those who do are again twice as likely to travel by car as by bike.
- Very few participants come downtown for weekly medical appointments.

Attitudes about the availability/quantity, affordability and ease of finding parking in downtown Rochester run the full gamut of the 10-point rating scale, although there were more ratings in the 8, 9 and 10 range (10=excellent) than in the 3, 2, 1, 0 range (0=poor).

- Average ratings were about a 7 for each parking-related attribute, although participants were more inclined to give ratings of 9 or 10 to affordability than to availability or easy to find.

Participants also rated the ease of getting into and out of downtown Rochester, as well as getting around downtown Rochester once they are there.

- There were high levels of agreement that it's easy to get into and out of downtown (average rating was '8' on the 0-10 scale, 10=extremely easy).
- The main challenge that came up was increased traffic levels at rush hour times.
- Getting in and out of downtown is viewed as more difficult for bicyclists, due to the timing of traffic lights, lack of bike lanes and inattentive drivers.
- And bus riders comment that it's easy to get into and out of downtown from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, but not on evenings or weekends.

Ratings were slightly lower for the ease of getting around downtown once there (average rating was 7).

- Participants do not view downtown as particularly bicycle friendly – saying there are not enough separate bike paths or bike lanes and the bike lanes that are in place are not safe.
- They also feel that drivers are not bicycle-aware and that there is not adequate parking for bicycles.
- Downtown is not necessarily viewed as pedestrian-friendly either.
- Skyways make getting around easy and there is a desire for more skyways, but several mentioned that they can be confusing and that there could be better signage/wayfinding.
- The subways tend to be viewed as being more for Mayo staff than for the community or visitors.
- Drivers are also not pedestrian-aware.
- Walk signals are often too short.
- Snow piles can make winter walking difficult.
 - Participants mentioned that particularly challenging areas to walk in the winter include the area near the Civic Center, along 2nd Street, 4th Street around Broadway and 1st Avenue and through parking lots.

LOOKING FORWARD

Suggestions to make it safer/easier to get around downtown include:

- Synchronizing traffic lights.
- To have more benches so walkers can sit and rest if they need to.
- To have a bicycle/walker transit station (a place to shower and change clothes with bike lockers and fix-it stations).
- Good to have a place for skyway users to leave their coats.
- Have more retail/things to look at or do in the skyways.
- Have safer pedestrian crossings including bump-outs to keep corners accessible (even when it snows).
- To make Broadway Avenue pedestrian-only with greenspace and landscaping.

Participants feel that the current car-centric downtown is a concern for accessibility as the downtown area grows.

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- How will parking be accommodated without building lots of ramps and taking up green space?
- Will parking remain affordable?
- Surrounding neighborhoods are already challenged with downtown worker/visitor parking and participants feel that this will only get worse?
- They are concerned that streets will be more congested and less safe, particularly at rush hour times.
- Participants wonder where will the bike traffic go – bicyclists can't use the sidewalks and the streets aren't safe.
- Will there be more bus routes and more rider-friendly schedules?
- Participants also said that adding more buses bring other concerns such as bus congestion and pollution.
- They wonder how will Rochester accommodate being a 24/7 city?

Several alternatives to driving and parking in downtown Rochester were suggested:

- Closing downtown to vehicles, parking cars on the edges of downtown, and allowing pedestrians and bicycles only.
- Create an elevated rail transit system/monorail downtown.
- Light rail (including connections to area towns and the Twin Cities and other large metros).
- Trolleys or streetcars.
- Inner-city people-movers.
- Shared cars/shared bikes/bike rentals.
- Park-and-ride areas.
- Strong “inner loop” shuttle service to get around downtown.
- Connecting Saint Marys to the rest of downtown with fast, efficient transit.
- Expanded bus service in times of operation and route selection with a terminal indoors or underground for increased safety and comfort (and cleaner buses).
- Improving bike lanes and infrastructure (possibly making some streets bike-only or having bike greenways separated from cars).
- Lower cost taxis and an app to call taxis.
- Incentives for multiple riders in a car (cheaper parking, for example).
- Livable downtown with amenities so people don't need to have a car.
- Dreaming really big—teleportation.

When asked to offer one transportation-related improvement in or around downtown, what rises to the top:

- Need for improved mass transit.
- Utilizing buses, trains and/or trolleys or streetcars that operates 24/7 that is affordable, has conveniently located stops and is green.
- Furthermore, an accessibility design principle could be used in developing downtown (meaning that a system that is accessible to those in wheelchairs will be accessible for everyone), with “complete streets” everywhere.

Community Conversations on Sports, Recreation, Nature, and Leisure

Introduction to topic: Sports, recreation, nature, and leisure are main ways for people to move about and connect with other people in their community or with the outside world. What opportunities should be available for residents and visitors within or easily accessed from downtown? How do we take advantage of our four seasons of activities for fun and relaxation, enhancing better health and spiritual well-being?

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES & LANDSCAPE

Participants were invited first to think about to what degree sports, recreation, nature, and leisure “should be” a part of the fabric or essence of Rochester, as well as to what degree they feel sports, recreation, nature, and leisure “currently are” a part of the fabric of Rochester. Participants assigned a rating with “10” meaning “vital” and “0” meaning “not at all,” and then they discussed their ratings.

- There is high agreement that sports, recreation, nature, and leisure “should be” a vital part of the fabric of Rochester. More than half of “should be” ratings were “10,” and nearly all of the remaining were “8” or “9.”
 - Rochester is known for Mayo Clinic, which is a major health care center. It is important to promote health and wellness.
 - Sports, recreation, nature, and leisure are important to health, mental health, community identity, and quality of life.
 - These types of activities facilitate community member interaction and relationship building.
 - Sports, recreation, nature, and leisure draw in more tourism.
- “Currently are” ratings were considerably lower, ranging from “2” to “8” with most in the “4” to “6” range. Comments made by participants included:
 - Sports, recreation, nature, and leisure activities are not perceived to currently be a priority for planning or funding.
 - Lacking year-round options; we need more winter activities such as ice skating, curling, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing. Winter activities are happening in small towns but not in Rochester.
 - Growing retiree population needs more leisure activities.
 - Quality/Maintenance is sometimes poor—no “wow” factor.
 - The river is controlled and not very attractive.
 - Bike trails are meant for meandering, not really connected so not good for transportation.
 - Needs to be financially accessible; there aren’t enough low-cost/low-commitment activities.
 - People don’t use the facilities we have, such as Root River Park.
 - Awareness issues; we need marketing and a community “communications hub” so that people can better know what is available.
 - Difficult for visitors to get to current facilities if they don’t have a vehicle.

Participants do not really associate sports, recreation, nature, and leisure activities with downtown (although “leisure” was slightly more likely to be associated with downtown than the other areas). When asked to give a rating from 0 to 10, with 10 being activities that participants most associate with downtown and 0 being least likely. “Sports” received ratings of “3” to “5,” the “recreation” category was “2” to “6,” “nature” was “2” to “4,” and “leisure” received “5” to “7.” One table of participants noted that all of these areas would be rated “1” or “2” in the winter.

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The following information is a summary of what comes to mind when participants thought of each of these types of activities in association with downtown Rochester:

- Sports
 - Mayo Civic Center (as a spectator), particularly high school tournaments that take place there
 - Honkers games (as a spectator)
 - Soldiers Field—golf, soccer, tennis, swimming pool
 - Mayo Healthy Living Center (although it was noted that this is not an inclusive place)
 - Biking and walking paths
 - Marathon
 - Horseshoe pits
 - Central Park
- Recreation
 - Parks/Green spaces—Soldiers Field, Silver Lake, Central Park, playgrounds, and picnic areas
 - Events, like Thursdays on First, Riverside concerts, Rochesterfest, Winterfest, SocialIce, movies and other Peace Plaza activities, walks/runs
 - Bike trails and bike lanes
 - Rochester Public Library
 - Honkers games
- Nature
 - Trees/Boulevard trees
 - Birds (crows/geese)
 - Flower garden
 - Trails
 - Parks—Soldiers Field and Central Park (they questioned whether Silver Lake is considered “downtown”)
 - Farmers market
 - River (although it was noted that there’s not river access)
 - There is not enough green space downtown; participants would like to see more green infrastructure (green roofs, green corridors, etc.)
- Leisure
 - Events were mentioned most—Thursdays on First, concerts in the park/Riverside concerts, SocialIce, Rochesterfest, movies on the Peace Plaza
 - Restaurants/Bars/Dining/Outdoor patio seating (participants would like more outdoor seating)
 - Peace Plaza (“people watching”)
 - Shopping/Boutiques
 - Theatre/plays
 - Art Center
 - Civic music
 - Rochester Public Library
 - Parks
 - Sculptures

Participants agreed that Central Park, Mayo Park, and the river are all assets in downtown Rochester. The things they like about these areas are:

- The greenspaces (the mature trees, flowers) and the tranquility and peace that these places offer – a chance to get away from the concrete.
- More specifically, Central Park is liked for its accessibility to Charter House (retirement home) and the new proton (cancer treatment facility center) and its Arbor Day luncheon.

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- Mayo Park is noted for its entertainment and events like concerts and ArtiGras, picnic tables and benches, Med City Marathon, bike accessibility and river views.
- The river is appreciated for its ducks and geese, kayak, canoe rentals and trails.

Suggestions specific to each space included:

- Central Park
 - Small playground
 - More seating and shelter
 - Restaurant
 - Water feature
 - Art in the Park
 - Make it an iconic part of downtown—more connectivity between the park and downtown
- Mayo Park
 - Add an art/sculpture garden
 - Better views and more access to the river (piers)
 - It was noted that the park keeps getting smaller as the Civic Center gets bigger
- River
 - Needs more access, places to put in kayaks or canoes, and it needs to be more navigable
 - A pier
 - A beach
 - Fishing
 - Make all trails bikeable
 - Better water quality
 - Restaurants
 - More views throughout the community
 - Clean underpasses

Participants talked about their recent sports, recreation, nature and leisure activities (not including kids' sporting events):

- Most of their activities take place in Rochester; biking, running and walking/hiking were mentioned most often.
- Most of the activities were free/non-ticketed activities – such as tennis, volleyball, softball, fishing, cross country skiing/snowshoeing, kayaking/canoeing, archery, swimming and golfing.
- A few mentioned attending Honkers or Ice Hawks games.
- Participants also mentioned organized events like the Med City Marathon or the Polar Plunge.
- For leisure, Festival of Trees, going to the Library, taking a class, going out for drinks and attending Thursdays on First.

Sports, recreation, nature and leisure activities that people leave Rochester to do are often:

- Water-related; boating/kayaking/canoeing, beaches, tubing, aquatic centers, water skiing and fishing
- Sporting events (professional sports)
- Zoos, amusement parks, fairs and festivals
- Snowmobiling/four-wheeling
- Curling
- Skiing (cross country and downhill)
- Camping
- Car racing
- Horseracing and gambling

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- Zip line
- Indoor roller-skating
- Theatre
- Wineries and concerts
- Going other places to get variety in running/walking/hiking/biking trails and restaurants

LOOKING FORWARD

Participants offered many suggestions for ways to enhance sports, recreation, nature, and leisure opportunities downtown. It was emphasized that when building or enhancing facilities, “cheap” shouldn’t be the bottom line. There could be more awareness and marketing of what is available. Participants also stressed that free activities make for a more inclusive community. There was considerable crossover in the suggestions with other core focus areas, such as “Arts, Culture, Entertainment, and Civic,” “Transportation,” and “Livable City.” Suggestions offered included:

- Expand/Enhance “greenspace,” natural areas and trail system
 - Connect trails through downtown
 - Green rooftops
 - Replace trees that are removed, enhance landscaping
 - Take advantage of the river/improve the water corridor/river walk
 - More gathering spaces
 - Maintain an 18-hole golf course
 - Have a “wow” factor urban park/add playgrounds/have a dog park
 - A place for radio-controlled toy planes/boats/cars
- More community activities and events
 - Winter sports and opportunities for social connection—sledding, skating, snowshoeing
 - Family and youth-related activities
 - Pickup basketball
 - Art “crawl”/wine crawl/beer crawl
 - Open street festivals
 - Public art
 - Highlight interesting things about our town
 - Attract higher profile musical artists and performers for concerts
- Transportation
 - Trolley
 - Shuttle bus to parks, ski trails, county fair, Oxbow Park, bike trails
 - Parking access/special deals if coming downtown for activities
 - Better bus system/public transportation
 - More bike lanes (and better driver awareness of bicycles)
 - Pedestrian corridor
- Facilities
 - Larger library
 - Public restrooms
 - Bicyclist shower/changing facilities and bike parking
 - Benches

Community Conversations on Entrepreneur, Business Environment, Commercial, Research, and Technology

Introduction to topic: Rochester is a “gold mine” of innovation to create jobs, develop startups, and expand businesses. What infrastructure or resources are needed to support growth of new and existing businesses? In this region, people are a fundamental asset. How do we support and keep great minds and ideas here?

CURRENT TRENDS

Participants started off their conversation by sharing what they saw as current trends and places that are leading the way in fostering entrepreneurship, small business, commercial research, and technology.

A variety of trends were mentioned that participants are seeing around the country in efforts to foster entrepreneurship and business:

- State-led/city-led funding initiatives
- Public/Private partnerships, such as Kansas University (KU) and private companies working together to develop KU businesses
- Venture capitalists
- “Angel investors”/angel network
- Peer-to-peer fundraising
- Kickstarter
- Entrepreneurial communities, such as incubators, accelerators, and research parks
- Small scale/grassroots, business-meet-business program to network and develop partnerships between similar products or like-minded individuals and bring businesses together

Places that are viewed by participants as being on the leading edge when it comes to fostering entrepreneurship, small business, commercial research, and technology included:

- Kansas City’s Sprint Accelerator and Kaufmann Foundation
- Boulder’s TechStars
- San Francisco’s Rock Health and LaunchPad
- San Diego
- Boston
- New York City
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES & LANDSCAPE

Participants discussed Rochester’s unique advantages that differentiate the local business environment from other places and how to leverage those attributes to promote and grow business in the community. They feel that Rochester:

- Enjoys an influx of diverse customers; entrepreneurs and businesses can work to identify the needs of incoming patients and visitors and provide the types of services and amenities they need, such as good food, entertainment and cultural opportunities, as well as high quality temporary housing.
- Participants cited that Rochester has the largest chamber of commerce in the state and the chamber does much to foster the business environment through events, groups (like the women and minority business owners group), training and networking.
- They feel that RAEDI (Rochester Area Economic Development, Inc.) and Mayo also have a good accelerator program; initiatives are going on now and have the support of the community.

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- What some participants suggested could still be made available is “wet lab” space and other space for growing a business, along with a mentor-driven accelerator program like Rock Health in San Francisco.
- Participants also talked about access to capital—creating a presence of investors (angels, venture capitalists, small business investors) and the ability to connect those investors with businesses.
- Rochester is the population center, not a suburb.
- Participants feel that there are educated/skilled people right here, but opportunities need to be provided for spouses so families want to stay.
- Participants talked about Rochester being a medical community with a focus on health and wellness throughout the city—food, water, air and physical activity such as bicycling and that this branding can be used in messaging for medical-related businesses, but beyond medical as well.
- Access to researchers and research is another unique advantage that Rochester has.

Participants were asked what could be done to foster research capabilities in Rochester. Participants’ suggestions were:

- People are allowed to work on non-Mayo research ideas on their own.
- Recruit and engage researchers to get their ideas and technology and then work to keep that talent here.
- The city has one primary business, Mayo Clinic, and participants discussed that, in order for small businesses to grow and thrive, Mayo might be more open-source rather than closed-source.
- Participants would like to see more Intellectual Property (IP) concepts let out if they can’t be used internally. Currently, the perception is that if Mayo views an idea as a conflict of interest, entrepreneurs aren’t allowed to do anything with it.
- Participants would like to look for ways to bridge the gap so that IP is kept here instead of going out of the area.
- Large businesses could be more willing to support the small businesses and foster entrepreneurship and virtual companies.
 - It was suggested that Rochester emulate start-up communities like Boulder or Kansas City and bring ideas to business partners to allow them to grow.
 - Other thoughts were to create networking opportunities—get people talking to each other
- Provide industry-specific assistance to entrepreneurs—legal, finance, etc. (like what Sprint does as a community partner providing skills to start-ups in Kansas City).
- Globalization is another way to foster research and generate new ideas for businesses—create partnerships with universities and businesses in other countries and utilize the international reach of Rochester’s people.
 - Tele-medicine/e-health was offered as an example of where this could be done.
- It was also suggested that there could be more effort to work with grad students at local and regional universities/business schools to connect entrepreneurs with technology and ideas and foster research.
 - Having more businesses host student interns might facilitate this.

Participants next talked about challenges that entrepreneurs/start-ups face in Rochester’s business environment.

- One challenged discussed was access to money—getting the financing to get a business going, and knowing where and how to get the resources an entrepreneur needs.
- Participants report that it is also difficult to find space for a small business—Mayo has a lot of space downtown, but not for retail spots, and many developers/ landlords don’t want to lease to small businesses—participants feel that they prefer bigger businesses in the locations that are available.

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- It can be challenging for smaller businesses to attract employees—people want to go to Mayo for the benefits and small businesses can't compete.
- One participant mentioned that immigration issues sometimes don't allow people to their job to start their own business.
- Participants would like to see more opportunities to facilitate conversations and connections.
 - Networking happens in places like coffee shops, but participants feel they're not open long enough.
- There is also a sense that community of Rochester is not always supportive of small, local businesses—sales don't generate as needed.

LOOKING FORWARD

Participants also talked about possible ways to mitigate some of the challenges entrepreneurs and small businesses face.

- One suggestion was to offer start-up business founder support services like legal advice, visas, health care and other benefits. There could be a “sprint model” with mentors (possibly Mayo employees) helping start-ups.
- There could also be more in-depth resources and assistance to entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- Participants would like to see one local place to go to get access to all the resources that are needed.
 - Another suggestion was that tax money could be used to help entrepreneurs.
 - There could also be more availability of affordable space and willingness to lease to small businesses.
 - Some specific ideas were that maybe Mayo Clinic Ventures could help biotech start-ups with office space and Bio AM could help with networking and HR resources, while DEED could be supportive at the State level.
- Participants again talked about the opportunity for more connections/ access to the student community— the feeling among participants is that there is currently not an organic/palpable presence of higher education students in the business community.
- Another suggestion was that there could be better public transit at all hours of the day and days of the week.
 - Buses or shuttles to get citizens, visitors and employees to and from businesses.
- Participants wonder if, to help diversify Rochester's business base, local businesses might be allowed to work with Mayo (massage therapists, home infusions, rehabilitation, sports medicine, for example); if Mayo and small businesses could have more of a give and take relationship and information could be shared with patients about other businesses in town that could support them.

Workforce is a major focus for all businesses.

- Participants feel that Rochester has a lot of talent, it's a matter of growing it and connecting with it.
 - Tapping into the local students at higher learning institutions may be one way of doing that.
 - International students, in particular, may be able to bring unique perspectives and collaborations.
 - It is important to keep the researchers, fellows and post-doctoral students in town and to encourage them to join or start small businesses.

- Educational institutions might do more to prepare students for business – some participants feel that students aren't prepared for the working world when it comes to the work ethic and level of commitment and caring that is needed, particularly in the hospitality industry.
- Another suggested workforce resource is the 'trailing spouse' of those who come here to take a job at Mayo, IBM or other employer.
 - The sentiment is that many of the necessary skills and talents are here, it's a matter of getting the word out and identifying them, then mentoring them and keeping them here.
 - An ongoing job board could be established to help connect employers with potential employees.
 - There could be a downtown job fair, or job fairs in the Twin Cities or Chicago promoting Rochester businesses.

Affordable housing also plays a part in retaining employees and keeping talent here, as does diverse arts, culture, food and entertainment.

- Participants feel that Rochester is multi-cultural, but it's not inter-cultural – it is important to integrate the many cultures into all community activities.
- It was suggested that there could be more diversity in community leadership – more representation by minorities and women, and encouragement and mentoring to get diverse people into these roles.
- There could also be assistance to help immigrants become established and integrated into the community.

Participants also discussed training and how it helps people to be able to grow and advance their careers

- Some business people need opportunities for training in accounting, technology and legal issues.
- Participants tend to look to partnerships with other groups to find the training they need, such as the Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) training offered through the Convention and Visitors Bureau.
 - Other groups mentioned include WIT women's group and MN.IT at a state level for IT training.
 - Participants suggest that economic drivers in the area are health and wellness and sustainable agriculture, but there isn't enough training available for these types of careers.
 - Participants also discussed a shortage of tradesmen and what training needs there may be in those areas.

Community Conversations on Learning Environment

Introduction to topic: A community that is always learning is always growing! Thinking beyond the traditional K–12 school experience, what college, workforce, personal improvement, enrichment, and entertainment opportunities exist or should exist for both residents and visitors of Rochester?

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES & LANDSCAPE

Participants were invited to think about education and learning other than at the K-12 level, such as post-secondary training, career training/development/advancement and personal growth and enrichment.

- There is very high agreement that these types of learning opportunities are vital and should be part of Rochester’s cultural fabric.
- When asked to assign a value between 0 and 10 to the degree to which these education opportunities ‘should be’ a part of the fabric of Rochester, nearly everyone gave a rating of ‘10.’
- When discussing their ratings, participants emphasized that post-secondary education and career training and development are essential for a vibrant culture and a prepared workforce is necessary for economic development.
- People seek careers for a lifetime, not just one job, and they want to be able to grow in that career. As one participant stated, “workforce is the essential element for the success of DMC.”

The general feeling is that these types of learning opportunities are not currently a part of Rochester’s cultural fabric to the degree that they should be:

- On the 0 to 10 scale (10 high rating or 0 a low rating), many would give Rochester a rating of 5 or 6.
- Higher education is viewed as having a relatively small footprint in Rochester presently.
- It was suggested that the current opportunities are piecemeal and limited, particularly for general education and for workforce development.
 - One participant commented that the rating would be higher for health education.
- People are not aware of what educational opportunities and training are available.

The types of learning activities that participants are most likely to have recently participated in include:

- Work-related lectures/seminars/conferences.
- Career training/development.
- Continuing education and personal growth and enrichment.

The location of the learning was fairly evenly split, with about half taking place in Rochester and half happening in other places, such as Winona, the Twin Cities, Madison, Phoenix and as far away as Germany.

In addition to traditional schools/educational institutions, people go to all sorts of places in Rochester to learn, such as:

- Rochester Public Library.
- Lectures at Mayo.
- United Way professional development.
- Chamber programs and Leadership Greater Rochester.
- Online.
- UMR Connects.
- Learning is ForEver.
- Community Education.

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- Parks and nature centers such as Oxbow and Quarry Hill.
- Service organizations such as Rotary, Lions or Jaycees.
- Faith communities.
- Cultural celebrations.
- Coffee shops.
- Art stores.
- Community organizations and events.

Types of learning opportunities that people would like to participate in but felt were not available in Rochester (or were not widely known to be available) included:

- Post BA/BS/Masters and Ph.D. programs that don't require travel to the Twin Cities.
- More four-year degree majors/liberal arts degrees.
- Leadership programs.
- Programs specific to the workforce and specialized needs.
- Better support and opportunities to address the achievement gap with students of color, with disabilities, etc.
- Intensive senior learning opportunities.
- High-quality early childhood training, especially in areas of poverty.
- Opportunities for seniors and children to learn together.
- Seminars with nationally recognized speakers.
- Free public lecture series—may just need better promotion of what is available.
- Learning opportunities to meet and interact with other types of people/break down “silos”.
- Celebrations of other cultures.
- Affordable and accessible learning opportunities for seniors (find state or community funding to support and market).

When thinking about post-secondary learning, career development and personal enrichment, participants are divided as to whether or not these types of learning are taking place in downtown Rochester.

- Those who say they are downtown tend to feel that they are for a limited segment—UMR students and Mayo employees, primarily.

LOOKING FORWARD

Discussion about what might be done to help get Rochester to where it “should be” with regard to these types of learning opportunities generated many suggestions:

- Higher education leaders could connect with the community, chamber, and DMC to better understand the needs; possibly do a “needs analysis” and let the data drive the development to build on existing programs. GRAUC (Greater Rochester Advocates of Universities and Colleges) would potentially help facilitate this.
- Partner with businesses to find out what is needed and develop the training.
- More majors could be available at the four-year higher education level/more diversity in the disciplines available.
- Connect education to Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and career opportunities.
- Make better use of the Workforce Development Initiative.
- Focus on both high-tech and blue-collar jobs (“Silicon cornfield”).

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- More professional-development opportunities could be available.
- Offer different modes of learning for all types of learners.
- Offer more experiential learning/paid internships/apprenticeships for students and for teachers at all levels.
- Opportunities for more global and international awareness and experiences.
- Better communication/have one point of reference to be able to find out about all of the types of education and programs that are available in Rochester.
- Have educational opportunities available at more times of the day and evening.
- Transportation is important—people have to be able to get to the educational facilities.
- Engage the senior population—have an elder hostel with enrichment opportunities for seniors to learn and connect and offer trade retraining for seniors, but also use elders as mentors in the workforce.
- Offer more literacy programs for adults.
- Opportunities for new residents/ immigrants.
- Education available and affordable at all income levels.
- More art and music options and access, possibly a music conservatory.
- Museums would add opportunities for learning.

When asked how post-secondary learning, career development and personal enrichment learning could be better integrated downtown, participants suggested:

- There could be more collaboration between educational institutions and partnerships with businesses to learn what is needed.
- Opportunities for shared space may be helpful and marketing and promotion to increase awareness of what is available.
- Helpful to have spaces/zones for learning.
- Transportation to be able to get there.
- More opportunities for informal learning and gathering spaces in the summer and in the winter (particularly, ‘green’ space in the winter).
- Participants also questioned whether these types of learning would need to be downtown.
 - Some saying that downtown tends to serve more niche interests and citing other barriers such as parking and transportation.

A big idea is the possibility of a community-wide, highly accessible learning-oriented venue.

- This may be unlike anything that exists today, but could be a place for people to meet, congregate and learn.
- This “learning commons” could incorporate efforts from higher education and other parties to create a new kind of learning environment.
- This type of endeavor would cross-over into all of the other core areas of focus.

Community Conversations on Livable City

Introduction to topic: The focus on city centers, and urban living, is becoming more prominent in the United States. These spaces and provide a sense of place that is inviting for people to live, work, play, learn, and heal. What elements will bring residents, patients, and visitors to Rochester? These defining elements might be the physical environment, buildings, or natural features, or the social and cultural environments that promote inclusivity, interaction, and belonging.

URBAN LIVING PERSPECTIVES

Participants began by talking about their experiences living in other urban areas. Participants have lived in a wide variety of urban areas, some mentioned are:

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Seattle | Washington DC |
| San Francisco | New York City |
| Atlanta | Dallas |
| Chicago | Los Angeles |
| Duluth | Chiang Mai |
| Minneapolis | St. Louis |
| London | Portland |
| Cape Town | Ann Arbor |
| Philadelphia | Ames |
| Nairobi | Phoenix |
| Tokyo | Hong Kong |

Perceptions of advantages and disadvantages living downtown/city center were discussed and in those cities compared to living in downtown Rochester.

Advantages

- A primary advantage to other urban areas that participants cited is that they have higher population densities, which brings more services to an area
- Everything that is needed is within walkable distance
- Career opportunities
- Restaurants
- Grocery stores
- Schools
- Retail
- Strategic greenspace
- Bars/nightlife
- Recreation/ entertainment for all ages
- Access to arts and culture, museums, etc.
- Places being more vibrant and having more of a big city feel with high rises, aesthetically pleasing architecture, street life and people out and about at night with restaurants and bars open 24 hours
- Also mentioned was diversity of housing and having affordable housing available to buy, not just rent
- Many larger cities have a more integrated bike culture, but more importantly, mass transit is a big advantage other urban areas have
 - Transportation always available for everyone, not just employees

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Disadvantages

- More crowded and noisy
- Parking challenges
- Often less greenspace
- Focusing on young singles rather than families
- Feeling less safe
- Being divided into districts
 - Having concentrations of poverty or having great core areas but blight around the edges

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES & LANDSCAPE

Discussion about what is the “soul” of Rochester (the identity factors) brought out two main themes:

- 1) The caring and hospitality of Rochester’s people (big town, but with a small-town feel).
- 2) The medical community, specifically Mayo Clinic.

Other aspects of the community that participants feel make up Rochester’s ‘soul’ or identity includes:

- The businesses other than Mayo Clinic (such as IBM and local small businesses).
- Thursdays on First (both as an activity that draws people together in Rochester, but that also supports and promotes businesses).
- Farmers Market.
- Rochesterfest.
- Civic Theatre.
- Playgrounds.
- Honkers.
- International Festival.
- Rochester’s neighborhoods.
- Reasonable cost of living.
- Availability of senior housing.

Some of the identifying factors showed another side of Rochester.

- People mentioned that there is no downtown activity after 5:00 p.m.
- Rochester is risk averse.
- There’s a feeling of the haves and have-nots.
- It is diverse and international, but not really connected.

There were mixed feelings as to whether downtown is the ‘soul’ of Rochester, and whether it should or can be.

- The overarching sentiment among participants is that downtown has many small businesses and there are also events and gathering places like the Library, but it’s the people, the neighbors and neighborhoods of Rochester that make up the soul.
- It’s hard for downtown to feel like the soul without affordable housing available for residents.

About one-fifth of the participants currently live in downtown Rochester, and participants were more likely to live in the core downtown area than in neighborhoods that border downtown.

- The one thing that all of them particularly like about living downtown is being able to walk to work, restaurants, events, the Library, the government center, etc.

- Other things they like include the diverse shops in old buildings, unique older homes, active neighbors, and fun events, activities and music.

Most of the participants (about 40) do not currently live downtown and they are divided on the idea of living downtown.

- When asked to rate their interest in living in the core downtown area, five gave ratings of '10-extremely interested' and five gave ratings of '0-not at all interested' and most of the remainder were evenly split between ratings of 7, 8, 9 and 1, 2, 3.

Aspects of living in the core downtown area that are appealing to those who don't currently live there are:

- Walkability and being close to work.
- Shopping, dining, etc.
- Being part of the downtown 'life' – the action, vibrancy and the fun events and the sense of engagement/connectivity/community that goes along with it.

Reasons that people would not want to live downtown are:

- They like where they live now.
- They want a yard.
- Lack of housing.
- Limited space for families.
- Not dog-friendly.
- Lack of public transportation (they would still need a car).
- Parking issues.
- Lack of basic services.

Nearly two-thirds of participants would prefer to own their home if they were moving downtown (vs. rent).

- There is a slight preference for single-family townhomes or multi-family apartments or condos compared to stand alone single family homes.
- Street level or mid-rise are preferable to high-rise buildings.

LOOKING FORWARD

In order for downtown to feel more like the soul of Rochester, participants suggest that there could be:

- More community spaces/gathering places 365 days a year.
- More reasons for people to want to be downtown (more to do, more gathering spaces, more arts and cultural attractions).
- Downtown could be easier to access.
- More of a feeling that it's open to all and not a 'locked-up' mentality.
- There could also be more focus on growing diverse and innovative small businesses.
 - It is important that Mayo, as the primary economic engine, be supportive of other 'engines.'
- Growing education is also part of making downtown the soul of the city.

One finding from previous research has been that Rochester is diverse, but not inclusive. Participants discussed what it would take to make the core downtown area feel like a neighborhood where there's an inclusive sense of place.

- More people living downtown with quality, affordable housing for residents to rent and own comes up most often as what would make downtown feel more like an inclusive neighborhood.
- The transient nature of some Rochester residents can make it difficult to feel inclusive; having people living downtown from one generation to the next could make a difference.
- It is important to have places for all types of people and families to live downtown.
- Having good job opportunities downtown is another factor, including more small local businesses and minority- owned businesses.
- It was suggested that there could be an integrated, mixed use development plan including housing, restaurants, retail and other business.
- It was suggest that maybe something could be added to the zoning code that every new building have retail on the street level.

Additionally, participants feel that there is an opportunity for more affordable, inclusive gathering places downtown.

- The Library was held up as an example of an organization that is getting it right – they work on making it a convenient, accessible, inclusive space that is open to everyone in the community.
- C4/Creative Salon and Civic Theatre were also cited as examples of energetic/passionate people who didn't have a lot of money, but still created inclusive spaces.
- Other suggestions include turning the former Chateau Theater into a public space.
- Having a permanent downtown Farmers Market and bringing international festivals downtown.
- Services that people use every day could be more available (grocery stores, for example).
- Public transportation connecting all of Rochester's neighborhoods.
- It is important to think about facilities for children and families in the planning and it was suggested that efforts might be made to change perceptions of the schools that are the closest to downtown.

Participants agree that you can't force inclusiveness, but you can bring in attractive features that draw more people downtown so that they network, mingle and participate, and that financial subsidies or incentives could be incorporated to encourage the development of such events and attractions.

- To support and encourage diversity and inclusivity in downtown, it was suggested that political leaders promote policies to this end, and that there could be more representation of Rochester's many cultures in political positions and in staff positions with organizations that are associated with downtown.
- Also suggested was the possibility of more outreach into the various ethnic, religious and socio-economic communities to determine what is keeping them from coming downtown now, beyond just saying 'you are welcome here.' As one participant stated, there should be more strategic 'doing,' not just strategic planning.

Participants currently living downtown would change a few things about living downtown to make it a better place to live include:

- Including having housing they could own.
- More efficient transportation to other areas of town and other cities.
- Better snow removal.
- Ensuring access during construction.
- Better synchronizing traffic lights.
- Enforcement of bicycle rules.
- More greenspace.
- More basic amenities and services.
- An elementary school.

- More activities/entertainment/gathering places, such as museums, movie theaters and coffee shops
- Feeling that the ‘powers that be’ pay as much attention to the needs of the residents as the developers.

Below are the types of answers all participants provided when asked to complete the sentence, “I would live downtown or near downtown if...”

- I could find an affordable condominium.
- I could live in or above a historic building.
- I could have a nice yard.
- My job was near downtown.
- There was better parking, affordable groceries and more entertainment.
- I had transportation 24 hours a day to move around the city any day of the week.
- It was livelier, vibrant, and conducive to living my everyday life.
- I was younger, there were lots of restaurants and cool places to go and if it were inexpensive.
- I could leave my car parked.
- There was more affordable living and more entertainment and shops.
- There was more culture and activities at all times during the week.
- I could find a house or apartment large enough for two adults, two teenagers and two grade-schoolers with schools and places for kids in the core.
- There was a more robust transportation network around the city and to Minneapolis and other parts of SE MN.
- My work was centered there and my family could thrive.
- There were many more greenspaces, a mix of housing and more family friendliness.
- I needed nursing care.

Participants shared their top ideas for what would make it more enjoyable to spend more time downtown, even if they aren’t interested in living there.

- More destinations and activities year-round, 7 days a week, daytime and nighttime; multi-cultural, free or low cost, cool, not conservative but not drinking-focused; and communication about what is available (have an up-to-date calendar of what’s going on). Suggestions included:
 - Community center or performing arts center (former Chateau building)
 - Ice rink
 - Museums
 - Parks, greenspace, nature
 - Music halls
 - Ice cream
 - Playground
 - Movie theater
 - Late night coffee shop
 - Indoor farmer’s market
 - Brew pub/craft brewing
- Get rid of the perception that downtown is only for patients
- More street level retail
- Emphasize and actualize the river and make it navigable
- Get rid of surface parking lots and put up mixed-use buildings – build new ‘warehouses’ like are found in other cities and restore available historic buildings
- More pedestrian-friendly and bicycle-friendly areas/greenways; close off sections of downtown to motor vehicles and make beautiful, green areas with retail, dining, entertainment, culture
- Smarter parking (credit card meters) and bicycle parking

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- Affordable places to live and have a business – provide tax or other incentives for landlords/ developers
- Have basic services – groceries, hardware, dry goods, drug store
- Free wi-fi
- More skyways
- Build/improve schools
- Solve transportation issues