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Envision 2030 public input sessions begin

- 'This is really a process about you and not just the city' By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

Starting today, Fort Dodge residents will have a chance to talk about the future of their city.

The upcoming focus group sessions, part of the city's Envision 2030 process, will give people an opportunity they shouldn't miss, according to the man overseeing the process.

"It's an opportunity to keep what you like and improve on things you would like to see improved on and prepare your future, your children's future or your grandchildren's future," said Roger Slater.

He's the president of The Slater Group, a Woodstock Ga., firm hired by the City Council to assist with its strategic plan and a broader vision for the community 20 years from now.

While his firm was hired by the city government, he said the process isn't about dry municipal topics.

"This is really a process about you and not just the city," Slater said Wednesday. "We have to realize that this is personal."

Slater said he wants to get as many people as possible involved.

The focus group sessions provide the first opportunity for the public to be part of the planning and visioning process.

While the sessions will have specific focuses, anyone can attend any of them.

Slater and his staff will make notes on everything presented during the sessions. At the conclusion of the meetings, they will review those ideas and look for trends. Then they'll use those trends to create what Slater calls a "word picture" of what the community should look like.

That word picture will be introduced later this winter. After it's been presented at another set of public meetings, Slater will revise it. A final recommendation is expected in late March or early April.

The process has its roots in the charter amendment approved by voters in March 2005. In addition to instituting the city manager system, that amendment requires the city to have a written five-year plan that lists priorities and measurable goals. Mayor Terry Lutz and the City Council decided to expand on that requirement by developing a 20-year vision for the community along with the five-year plan.

Lutz emphasized that people aren't restricted to attending specific sessions but are welcome to attend any of the open sessions to offer their input.

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