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Industry, reputation issues aired at Envision 2030 session

More meetings planned today By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

Fort Dodge could have a future as a place where useful items are made without tainting the land, air and water.

That concept was one of a few big ideas that emerged Tuesday evening as another group of Fort Dodgers took their turn in the Envision 2030 process.

Speaking for one of a handful of discussion groups assembled in the Fort Dodge Senior High School library, Councilman Matt Bemrich introduced the idea of an “eco-industrial center.”

With the VeraSun Fort Dodge ethanol plant and the upcoming construction of the Tate & Lyle ethanol and starch plant, the community already has entered the field of environmentally friendly products.

The concept discussed Tuesday would go beyond biofuels to include recycling and making goods from recycled materials. Bemrich said that could be an economic niche that other communities aren't pursuing.

Making something positive out of the city's lingering reputation as “Little Chicago” was another unique idea generated Tuesday evening.

“I just think that history should be looked at,” said Matt Thelen, who's lived in the city for six months. “If there was Prohibition and rum-running going through here with connections to Chicago and other places, that's not a history that should be forgotten and buried.”

Perhaps, he said, someone could start a night club with a Little Chicago and Prohibition theme.

While looking to the future, the 14 people at the session also compiled a list of Fort Dodge attributes that should be preserved.

That list included:

- ? Small-town values
- ? Historic buildings
- ? The river front and other waterways
- ? The Oleson Park Bandshell

Several of those items turned up on lists created by other people at previous Envision 2030 sessions.

Recurring themes like that are what the staff of The Slater Group will look for when it reviews all the information gathered from the public sessions. That data will be used to create a vision for

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Fort Dodge 20 years into the future. It will also be used in creating a more specific five-year strategic plan for the city government.

The 20-year vision and five-year strategic plan are both to be unveiled in March or April.

The Slater Group, of Woodstock, Ga., is the firm hired by the City Council to oversee the vision and strategic planning process.

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